



24 March 2020

Tēnā koe

I write to advise you of the most pressing concerns our members have about the current COVID-19 crisis and its potential impact on their lives, on students, on their children and their whanau.

In our decision-making we are being guided by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education as to risks to staff and students in educational institutions.

We are seeking your assurance on a number of critical areas. We want to work with you to ensure:

- the health and wellbeing of staff and students, including reasonable workloads;
- that any measures in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are temporary;
- that there is stability in employment at this time; and,
- that we establish a coordinated response across the tertiary education sector

We will deal with each of these areas in turn.

Ensuring health and wellbeing

We have advised members that they have a right – and indeed an obligation – to take practicable steps to ensure their own health and safety at work, bearing in mind steps already taken by their employer. Members are asked to advise their employer without delay if they believe that they or members of their whanau have any additional vulnerability to COVID-19. Members are also asked to advise their employer of any steps they deem necessary to comply with their obligation to stay safe at work (whether or not they have any additional pre-existing risk factors).

We have advised members to ensure their workload – as well as their work environment remains healthy and safe during this crisis. That means, for example, that those who do not already have online components to their courses record or live stream lectures, tutorials, or other teaching moments, rather than re-writing courses from face-to-face to on-line delivery modes.

It's a great time to join the TEU

teu@teu.ac.nz | 04 801 5098 | 178 Willis St, Te Aro, Wellington 6011

With regard to administrative and support staff, in particular IT staff who will be required to support significant shifts in delivery, we seek your assurance that there will be additional staff hired if needed to ensure reasonable workloads.

We commend and support the move by institutions who have suspended teaching this week (23-27 March), or for longer periods, to enable teams to prepare and plan. Requiring a move to even basic online delivery without preparation time is unwarranted and unreasonable.

The additional needs of those who must care for children, those over 70 (over 60 for Māori and Pasifika) and those with pre-existing medical conditions must be recognised. Staff must be allowed to work flexibly and expectations about their level of output must be adjusted as appropriate.

Increasingly, staff will require additional support from their employer with regard to the conditions they face in working from home and in additional costs they incur in such work.

Any measures put in place are temporary

Members are concerned to prevent any temporary measures becoming permanent without changes having been reviewed or consulted on properly with staff. In particular, staff already feel that some employers are wanting to use this extraordinary situation to rush through changes that alter the business and operational models of our tertiary education institutions.

As a result we ask you to suspend ALL change processes during the height of this pandemic. We will be especially vigilant with regard to change processes in this period. We don't believe that the requirements of adequate consultation can be met with regard to any permanent change under current circumstances. Temporary changes themselves should be consulted on to the maximum extent possible under current working conditions.

Ensuring there is stability in employment at this time

The jobs of fixed term, casual, and hourly paid staff must be protected and steps taken to ensure their income continues. Average pay in the last month needs to be used as the way to determine pay over the next four weeks. Students are particularly vulnerable to job loss in the coming months and we ask you to continue with the normal employment of students who work for the university for at least the period of acute crisis.

We do not support the use of annual leave to cover this time – we support MBIE's guidance that this be special paid leave ('COVID-19 leave' or 'pandemic leave').

We note advice from TEC, communicated to institutions around 8 March, that normal expectations for financial performance do not apply under these unusual circumstances. As noted above, we believe that any restructuring proposals, especially those involving job loss, and including those prompted by COVID-19, must be suspended for the period of the crisis.

We expect that reserves will be used to maintain business as usual as far as possible in this regard.

A coordinated response across the tertiary education sector

Overall, we continue to believe that a consistent and coordinated sector-wide approach to the challenges presented by COVID-19 is needed and that this should be developed with input from all relevant parties.

We have written again to the Tertiary Education Commission asking them to facilitate such an approach and we would appreciate any support you are able to give to this proposal.

In particular, we ask you to support the appeal to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to organise an online conversation involving University Vice-Chancellors, Polytechnic and Wānanga Chief Executives (and/or their representatives), staff union and student union representatives, together with relevant government officials.

A meeting of this kind would review possible responses, including financial support from TEC and other possible co-operative and coordinated actions. It would also provide staff and students in institutions, including potential students, with some assurance that the issue is being dealt with in a considered, consistent and coordinated fashion. We attach our letter to TEC Chief Executive Tim Fowler requesting this meeting for your information.

We are regularly communicating with members directly and this letter and other messages may be seen by going [on our website](#).

Tū kotahi, tū kaha, tātou, tātou e – we look forward to working in unity with you during these very challenging times.

Nāku noa, nā



Michael Gilchrist
National President