

# Interim Review of the New Zealand Universities Enhancement Theme: Access, Outcomes and Opportunity for Māori Students and for Pasifika Students

Thematic Analysis of Steering Group Feedback

May 2019



Nā āheitanga ā-mātauranga,  
ko angitū ā-ākonga  
Building educational capability  
for learner success

Ako  
AOTEAROA

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## 1. Introduction

### *Background*

As part of their sixth cycle of academic audit, the New Zealand universities are undertaking an 'Enhancement Theme' to collectively address an issue important to individual universities and of national significance. The Enhancement Theme topic is "Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students".

The New Zealand universities have drawn on the experiences of the Scottish universities' higher education institutes in developing and planning the Enhancement Theme. Enhancement Themes are an established component of quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland. It is the first time that the New Zealand universities have undertaken an Enhancement Theme activity. This activity commenced in July 2017 and will conclude at the end of 2019.

A Steering Group of 15 members oversees Enhancement Theme activities and progress. The Steering Group comprises the Director, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Assistant Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor from each university (Academic, Māori and/or Pasifika), and Māori and Pasifika student representation. The Academic Quality Agency (AQA) provides secretariat support.

In December 2018, the AQA commissioned Ako Aotearoa to undertake an interim review of the Enhancement Theme approach at the mid-point of Enhancement Theme activities. Primarily the review has involved interviews with Enhancement Theme Steering Group members and with a key focus on the establishment and initial progress of the Enhancement Theme approach (the focus of this report). It is intended that findings from the interim review can be used for improvements for the latter period of the enhancement theme. Further information about the Enhancement Theme is given in Appendix 1.

## 2. Review approach

In January and February 2019, two experienced interviewers for Ako Aotearoa completed semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 of the 15 Steering Group representatives (scheduling challenges prevented one interview).<sup>1</sup> Interviews were by 'zoom'<sup>2</sup>, telephone, and one was face-to-face.

The 14 interviews enabled engagement with each university represented on the Steering Group and included Māori, Pasifika and student representation.

The key interview question areas were identified together by the Executive Director of AQA and the Director of Ako Aotearoa. The Steering Group representatives interviewed (the participants) received the interview questions in advance of the interview (see Appendix 2). All zoom interviews and some phone interviews were recorded and transcribed.

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<sup>1</sup> Fleur Chauvel and Dr Mei Winitana completed the interviews and thematic analysis.

<sup>2</sup> A 'zoom' meeting is an on-line meeting application, which has the additional functionality of recording both the visual and audio discussion.

The interviewers held an analysis session together at the conclusion of the interviews to share key emerging findings and to identify common and specific themes from across the 14 interviews. They report the summary of the thematic analysis and interview findings below.

The external reviewers were chosen for their sector and system knowledge, including Māori, Pacific Peoples and international experiences. They were asked to consider the thematic analysis completed by the interviewers and to provide comment based on their sector and system experience. See Appendix 3 for the review team membership.

### **3. Overview of interview findings**

First and foremost, all participants value the collaboration, collegiality and sharing the Enhancement Theme has facilitated at a senior and diverse representative level. This is notable and valued in contrast to the typical status quo of a competitive university sector. It is an important and positive platform for the Enhancement Theme work.

A common benefit of the collaboration and sharing has been for universities to take stock of their own individual initiatives and in some cases, to improve self-evaluation and review.

Most participants in discussing sharing and collaboration reflected that the competitive nature of the university sector does not typically encourage this approach. While all participants value the collaboration and sharing that has taken place, some are of the firm view that the competitive nature of the university sector, of which government funding structures are a key contributor, has limited full and frank sharing of the details of initiatives that have worked, and those that have not. They consider that there has not yet been the hard and challenging conversations deemed necessary to determine the right actions to go forward.

Processes of establishment, planning, relationship and trust building, and sharing, have occupied the focus of the first year of the Enhancement Theme. This has been important and necessarily taken time.

Due to the short timeframe for the Enhancement Theme, there is common concern that there is just one year left, and no specific actions identified and in progress. Challenges identified and areas for focus going forward stem from this concern, as does a sense of urgency around the need for full and frank conversations and action to occur.

### **4. Appropriateness and usefulness of the enhancement theme approach**

The Enhancement Theme is the first time the eight universities have focussed on this issue, although other sector wide matters, such as masters' degree definitions have been discussed in other forums such as Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP). It is, however, the first time they come together at this senior and diverse representative level to share experiences and initiatives and to collaborate on these national Enhancement Theme priorities.

The Enhancement Theme approach is highly valued by participants and positively recognised for the following dimensions:

- the sharing and collaboration that has taken place at a senior-level
- the diverse Steering Group representation that includes Māori, Pasifika and student voice
- the inclusive approach of the Steering Group
- being a lever to push for action
- AQA's organisation and support
- the 2018 symposium and sharing of intelligence.

#### *Sharing and collaboration at a senior-level*

Participants frequently referred to an entrenched competitive university sector and value that the Enhancement Theme has, for the first time, brought together senior leaders at a Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and Director level, to share and collaborate on this significant quality issue.

*“The discussions (regular meetings) both internal at the university and the discussions at UNZ have been very valuable, honest, open, and collaborative, which is often a challenge across the universities because we are all competing for the same students.”*

The Enhancement Theme has provided the basis for all eight universities to come together to facilitate a collaborative and specific focus on Māori and Pasifika. There is a shared commitment to the Enhancement Theme.

Of recognised importance is that this is the first time that a group of senior Pasifika leaders has been formed at this level to come together from each of the eight universities to share and collaborate in this way on this matter of national importance.

#### *Diverse representation*

The Steering Group representation is valued for its diversity. This has enabled Māori and Pasifika at a senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and Director level, and at a student level, to be around the table talking and debating with non-Māori and Pasifika representatives.

*“It has allowed Māori and Pasifika around the table to talk to and debate with our peers at the DVCA level. We do this on a quarterly basis. It makes it always in the forefront. Makes sure that this is a priority.”*

This is the first time that Māori and Pasifika student voice has been at the centre of academic audit conversations at this level.

*“The student voice aspect. This is the first time they’ve had students as part of the audit process. This is a totally different game. What’s great about it is that there is a Māori voice and a Pasifika voice. Having a diverse perspective on things is definitely working. This is not just from the student level, but also the management level. The Māori and Pasifika voices give other members a reality check: student voice and a diverse perspective.”*

This diverse representation is valued for the 'reality check' that it is providing.

The student representatives appreciate the support received from AQA and the Steering Group and their attentiveness.

#### *Steering Group facilitation*

Participants value the way in which the Steering Group has been run, and particularly the inclusive approach facilitated by the Convenor and the way in which student voice is valued. Everybody has a voice and is heard. The meetings are never rushed. A comfortable 'whanau-like' environment is facilitated and that encourages contribution.

#### *A lever to push for action*

The Enhancement Theme approach is recognised as providing a source of support for pushing the importance of its focus and related activity at an individual university level, including with senior leadership. The fact that this has been mandated as a quality academic issue, and as a part of academic audit, gives more sway and teeth to push for action, and to access additional resources for Māori and Pasifika at an individual university level.

*"It's been so positive so far because it has enabled us to do this deep dive into work we had already commenced and identified as a priority. It's enabled us to do even more in the area, and it's given us the backing nationally to do that."*

#### *AQA organisation and support*

Executive Director Sheelagh Matear is recognised for the leadership and strong organisation and support provided to the Steering Group.

#### *Symposium and sharing of intelligence*

The 2018 symposium is recognised as a useful forum for the eight universities to come together to share their initiatives and to discuss what has worked and not worked for Māori and Pasifika learners.

*"We were sharing our experiences rather than trying to safeguard information for ourselves. We could talk about what we did well."*

The cross-university sharing that occurred through that forum is valued. The symposium enabled learning, reflection and discussion, as well as the opportunity for issues to be raised. The sharing of different initiatives and activities gave a point of reference for individual universities to reflect on their own activities and initiatives.

*"The symposium was the first time that all eight universities have come together in this way. Together we shared our activities. It was useful to our own benchmarks. It helped to track how and what we are doing alongside our peers. If we didn't have the Enhancement Theme we wouldn't have done this. It's been very impactful for us. It provided intelligence on what has worked and not worked."*

*"We are being brave enough to say that some of the things we have been doing haven't been working. It's hard to take initiatives away, no one wants to look*



*like the bad person taking things away, but if they're not working, then you need to try something else and use that budget better. Being able to share some of the highs and lows, some of the challenges, has been a great thing for me."*

However, whereas some identify and consider that the sharing that has taken place has been open, honest and informative, equally, others consider that the sharing has been at a high level and has not included the full sharing of key initiatives known to have contributed to success for some universities. Also gaps and weaknesses have not been fully shared (see section 5).

*"We need to get past the show and tell and be honest about what we are doing. Be honest about our warts and all."*

Possibly participants' diversity of perspective reflects the different places at which individual universities are at in their work to address access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori and/or Pasifika students. For example, the different stages universities are at with operationalising Māori and Pasifika strategies, and their initiatives, may influence the extent to which they share their learnings, or take and utilise learning from others. Different levels of willingness to collaborate are also attributed to the culture shaped by individual university leadership. It is noted too that those on the Enhancement Theme Steering Group speak from different levels of their university; those on a senior leadership team may have a different view to those who report thought to a senior leadership team member, for example.

Notwithstanding, the sharing of experiences, initiatives and intelligence is supporting individual universities to reflect on their own work and self-evaluation and to share learnings and intelligence within their own institutions.

## **5. What has changed at an individual university level?**

Two participants specifically identify key changes at an individual university level due to, and within the first eighteen months of, the Enhancement Theme. As a result of the sharing of information about initiatives that have and have not worked:

- One university has refocused its outreach to extend beyond a core focus on engaging students at secondary schools to going into Pasifika communities and places where it is able to reach parents and influencers. That university has also now separated its Māori and Pasifika student support groups.
- Another university has reviewed its external funding and sourced additional funding to support its work. That university has also added to its Pasifika spaces and senior leadership. For that university, the Enhancement Theme has been a catalyst for closely focusing on data collection and analysis.

Mostly, participants refer to the specific Māori and Pasifika strategies and numerous initiatives that their individual universities already had in place prior to the commencement of the Enhancement Theme. As such, their focus remains on these initiatives, and they do not attribute the Enhancement Theme to having changed activities.

Some of these participants consider that the Enhancement Theme itself is unlikely to result in significant change at an individual university level given commitment to, and investment in, strategies and initiatives already well established. A small number of participants question the overlap and / or fit of the Enhancement Theme work at the national level given the work well underway at the individual institution level.

In addition, it was observed that substantial change would not be seen within the short two-three timeframe of the Enhancement Theme.

Notwithstanding the comments above, the cross-university sharing is commonly recognised as enabling universities to take stock of what they are doing through reflecting on the activities underway at other institutions. Potentially this has raised or changed consciousness. Some participants indicate that the sharing of intelligence led their universities to review the effectiveness of multiple initiatives and strengthen evaluation and self-review.

*“It’s given us an opportunity to pause and take stock on what we do now for Māori and Pasifika students, and other universities are probably doing that too. We’re doing lots of things, but are all of them working?”*

*“Because of the Enhancement Theme we’ve relooked at our own reporting. Reviewed our initiatives and seen gaps. We have done this, this, and this, but what about these gaps. We looked at what others are doing and brought this back.”*

Comment was received about the Steering Group structure being replicated within each university. What this looks like and the impact of this may be a relevant area for focus to unpack going forward, including because of the challenge identified with effecting change at an individual university level (see section 5).

## **6. Aspects to improve, issues and challenges**

A common concern is the pace of progress within the first year and a half of the Enhancement Theme, given a lack of agreement and direction on tangible next steps and with the Enhancement Theme having just one-year left to run.

*No identified priorities, actions and initiatives – still at the conversation stage*

Participants expect that by now, there should have been agreed areas for priority and initiatives to scale up based on full information about what has worked and not worked across the different universities. However, this has not yet happened.

*“Too little time spent on getting to the brass tacks and being straight up about what works and what we all should stop doing. We’ve spent a long time talking and not doing. We only have two years. But we are yet to have those honest conversations.”*

There is uncertainty about how there will be movement from the conversations and sharing, and looking at data, to the identification and implementation of priorities and initiatives at a national and systemic level within the remaining timeframe. There is also concern regarding how to maintain the momentum at the end of the formal Enhancement Theme period.



Others who do not share this concern are focused on their own Māori and Pasifika strategies, actions and initiatives underway and did not discuss the need to agree and identify national and regional priorities and collaborations. A couple of participants want to push on to completion and measurement and to move on to the next Enhancement Theme.

Possibly these different perspectives reflect different levels of expectation and commitment, and may also be influenced by the stage and progress individual universities are at in their work in this area.

#### *Hard conversations still to be had*

Some participants concerned with progress consider that conversations have not been as bold, brave and direct as they need to be. There has not been full and open sharing about different initiatives across the sector and their impact. Progress concerns are attributed to conversations needing to be more open and honest.

#### *Need to overcome impact of engrained culture of competition*

A key challenge, attributed to limiting the pace of progress and the ability to have open and honest conversations, is an inherently competitive sector that is impacting the extent of sharing and willingness to advance collaborative working relationships. This is considered an ingrained product of government policy and funding and the need to compete for individual learners.

*“The spirit and culture of competition is so engrained in our universities in this country it is challenging to work across the sector.”*

One participant described this ultimately as patch protection and as a product of a competitive government funding model. However, without the hard and honest conversations and freedom to talk openly, including about the different circumstances in which initiatives work and do not work, it is considered that progress to the Enhancement Theme will be thwarted.

*“We need to make visible successful strategies. As well as those that are not. Because we are all spinning our wheels and we are all doing stuff that is probably not as productive as we like to think it is but we are doing it out of custom and habit...”*

One participant indicated that while individual universities were willing to share information about initiatives they had implemented, this was at a high level, with specifics held back about reasons for the success of specific initiatives for example.

*“but when it comes to actually stepping forward and saying look, we’ve got this fantastic programme that we’re running and if you were to replicate this or looking to cherry-pick the best ideas out of this programme and implement it, we’d be prepared to share our collateral with you, that kind of thing, I haven’t seen that. I have to say [at my university] we’ve got some programmes here that are very very successful and I haven’t done that. I haven’t got in there and shared it because we have a degree of investment in it. We consider we’ve got some IP bound up in this. Until such time as we feel that we are in a position to franchise the model then we want to hold onto it. We are happy to share ‘this*

*is what it's about'. But in terms of the next layer down I just don't see we've kind of crossed that bridge yet... I know one university that has extraordinary success with Pasifika students for example, and they're doing something well obviously in terms of a particular pedagogy or culturally appropriate way of engaging. I'm really curious to know what are they doing that's actually delivering that. Now the representative from that university has not been forthcoming with that information...something's being held back."*

Another participant discussed a reluctance to disclose initiatives that had not worked to avoid exposing a lack of success.

In the same vein, engrained competitiveness and different cultures of collaboration and competitiveness within individual universities, was a key reason identified for the time that it has taken representatives from the eight universities to come together in this way and for traction to be gained.

As such, a small number of participants refer to it being necessary for the Vice-Chancellors of each university to be specifically and actively engaged in Enhancement Theme conversations. This reflects that the extent of collaboration is impacted by whether a culture of competitiveness or collaboration is being led and driven at the most senior level and the extent of support for cross-university collaboration. Therefore, going forward, they believe that there is an urgent need for competition to be put aside, and this to be driven by university leadership. It is necessary for the hard conversations to take place and agreed priorities and actions to be determined.

#### *Embedding change at all levels of a university*

Some participants identified the challenge of reaching all levels within a university to communicate and filter information from the national Steering Group level. It is challenging to move beyond the focus on the Enhancement Theme at a strategic level to effect change and get buy-in at the individual universities.

This is a challenge that participants thought could benefit from shared discussion to creatively and collaboratively problem solve given the importance that change happens at a whole of university level, and because of the sheer nature of this challenge.

#### *Student voice and representation*

There is recognition that the strength of Pasifika student voice and input is variable at the individual university level. This is considered a core challenge for ongoing consideration and work.

While the place of student voice in the Enhancement Theme process is strongly valued, there is some criticism of the process used by universities to identify student representatives as a result of a lack of engagement with existing student representative bodies.

The interviewers note the views of two participants who named two senior Māori representatives from one university that they thought should have been interviewed but who were not members of the Enhancement Theme Steering Group.

### *Meaningful data collation, analysis and interrogation*

While the focus on data analytics has been revealing, useful and important, some concern was raised about the meaningfulness of data if separate from the people and their stories and if data systems were not used or not capable of being used to surface patterns and trends needing attention, and to track students across their full university life-cycle.

## **7. Specific differences for Māori and for Pasifika students to be considered**

In response to a question about whether there are specific differences for Māori students and for Pasifika students that need to be considered in the way that the Enhancement Theme is working, the following were identified:

- Clarifying the definition of 'Pasifika' to be clear whether this is referring to just domestic students or includes regional Pasifika international students.
- Ensuring individual universities understand that Māori students are not homogenous and the importance of recognising different backgrounds and needs (e.g. varying levels of language, tribal connections and whakapapa knowledge, being located away from tribal roots).
- Individual universities recognising that Pasifika students are not homogenous and focusing on the different needs of their specific 'Pasifika' cohorts.

## **8. Priorities and specific areas for improvement going forward**

Areas for focus and priority going forward stem from the desire for the Enhancement Theme work to maintain momentum and achieve impact, and to maintain, further and strengthen the collaborative work that has been facilitated by the Enhancement Theme approach. Two core interrelated priorities are commonly identified, and which have been highlighted above:

1. The need for the hard conversations to be had.
2. Specific priorities, direction and actions to be agreed.

### *A need for the hard conversations to be had*

There is a common view that more challenging, honest, 'unguarded' conversations need to be had including unravelling and being blunt about progress to date, looking at what has and has not worked for individual universities, and discussing difficult and challenging topics. This is considered necessary to enable true understanding and progress to be made.

*"if we were to spend a meeting actually just looking at the data from every organisation around the table so we were really clear about where there are healthy rates of completion and success then we can hone in 'okay so what are you doing that's really helping that?' and conversely for those organisations where there's quite marked difference between non-Māori, non-Pasifika students and those cohorts, 'what are the kind of issues that you've unpacked and how are you addressing those?'... but we've not really drilled down to that level of detail..."*

*“There is a deeper underpinning of this project around the need to decolonise knowledge. We haven’t discussed this in the Steering Group so much yet, nor [within our own university]. The politics of what it means to work in a still driven-by-white-values institution – where universities have historically come from – and how you unravel that to value different kinds of knowledge, that sits at the heart of success for Māori and Pasifika learners, but it’s hard to get some of that. Where there still exists racism in universities – those are not easy things to change, the way people think, the way people understand, the creation of knowledge. People need to have the hard, challenging discussions. Those are some of the challenges all universities face right now. It’s not going to change in one or two years – it’s a much broader and deeper project of decolonising knowledge. This Enhancement Theme is giving us a place to start, a crack for us to go in there and work with some of these ideas. One of the things that needs to happen alongside the initiatives is we must work on staff development, to help our staff shift their thinking around some of this. It’s harder to get at that stuff but it needs to happen.”*

One participant surfaced an issue of students feeling uncomfortable in their classes because they are Māori and how they were engaged differently by Māori and non-Māori staff (whether consciously or unconsciously). Potentially this is another of the ‘hard conversation’ areas for further exploration and consideration.

#### *Agree priorities, direction and actions*

Participants consider that there needs to be concrete and specific direction and priorities agreed to guide action going forward and to achieve traction within the short remaining timeframe of one year. Possibly, this reflects a need to ensure clear and consistent expectations and clearly understood objectives going into the final period of the Enhancement Theme.

More detailed suggestions were for:

- The agreement of a small number of specific areas that all universities should focus their attention based on evidence of what has worked, as well as areas where universities should no longer focus their efforts.

*“We could agree national principles to guide what works and doesn’t and what all should and should not be focused on. There should be a common set of areas that we agree work and don’t work. Identify the top five things that work in key theme areas and five that don’t. Have a core set of foundational principles to guide what each university should be doing and what each university should stop. Make it tangible.”*

- The identification of a specific initiative or small number of initiatives that all the universities could agree to collaborate on together, or for the trialling of a specific approach or approaches as a sector – and the need to take specific proposals out to the community to test.

*“We have not talked about opportunities nationally to collaborate to maximise and optimise resources. What about pan sector initiatives? Something like MAI’s Māori doctoral students...”*

- The need to keep pushing messages about important areas of focus for all universities known to work for Māori and Pasifika, and which may still not be a focus for all universities (for example, outreach to Pasifika families and communities).

These suggestions do not derive from an expectation that all universities should be doing the same thing, but rather the potential value and traction from collaboration based on evidenced-based good practice.

#### *Specific areas for priority focus individually identified*

Different participants suggested specific areas that they considered a priority focus going forward:

- Vice-Chancellor involvement to drive collaboration and change.
- Collaborative sharing about effectively driving change at all levels of a university.
- Outreach:
  - The need for universities to engage and reach Pasifika families and communities in places where they are present, rather than just focusing primarily on secondary school.
  - Career pathways programmes beginning at pre-school, tracking through primary, and into secondary school.
  - Reflections on whether universities have done enough to reach and engage Māori through iwi organisations.
- Student voice:
  - Ensuring the momentum of student voice is not lost at the individual university working-group level.
  - Support building the representation of Pasifika student voice at the individual university level. Support and encourage Pasifika students to be involved.
- Secondary school connectivity:
  - Increase connectivity and interface with the secondary school sector, particularly given new students’ lack of preparedness for university study, including at an academic and financial literacy and self-management level.
  - What is the impact for access if a predominant focus of student recruitment is from high decile schools?
- Successful year one retention.
- More Māori and Pasifika staff and improved recognition (e.g. appointments and pay).
- Staff development opportunities related to decolonising knowledge.



### *Look to other sectors and international jurisdictions*

One other area for improvement raised was the potential value of the Steering Group looking to other sectors and international jurisdictions where success had been achieved in the Enhancement Theme area. One example was the Industry Training sector where one industry training organisation was known to have success in reaching Pasifika communities. The potential power of cross-sector collaboration was also surfaced.

## **9. Summary of interview findings**

Steering Group representatives value the fact of the Enhancement Theme and that it is the first-time collaboration about access, outcomes, and opportunities for Māori and Pasifika learners has occurred across the eight universities in this way. The sharing and intelligence is useful and beneficial.

There is concern at the short time that the Enhancement Theme has left to go and the absence of any specific priorities and actions in place to date. Some are concerned that there has not been full information shared about what has worked and not worked for different universities and that there are difficult conversations that are yet to be had. There is a need to overcome competition and a view that university leaders need to drive collaboration and change. A further challenge is how to embed change across all levels of a university.

In the first 12-18 months of the Enhancement Theme, two universities have made changes to their initiatives to address access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students as a result of the Enhancement Theme approach. For most, the collaboration and sharing has resulted in universities taking stock of their own individual initiatives and in some cases, to improve self-evaluation and review.

## **10. External reviewer comments**

*Dr Margaret Southwick*

### **On the EH Steering Group and improvements for the latter period of the EH:**

The significance of the buy-in from this level of Leadership / Management within the sector ought not to be understated. Nothing will change for Māori / Pacific without this level of commitment. That being said, the second stage of this project should get from this group concrete, measurable changes for the whole sector.

### **On challenges for the EH**

Much is made in this report about the inter-institutional culture of competitiveness. That can become a motivating factor if an institution chose to make excellent outcomes for Māori and Pacific students, and opportunities for Māori and Pacific academics something to aspire to and be proud of.

It does seem to me that most Institutions are stuck in remediating deficit approaches rather than transformative approaches. I would also argue that



interdepartmental/ discipline competitiveness within institutions are as much a barrier as inter-institutional competition.

This is often a challenge for people engaging with Māori and Pacific approaches. It is my experience if you build strong relationships the “work” will proceed quickly. If you don’t build the relationships- nothing worthwhile can be achieved.

I do sympathise with those who have expressed some degree of frustration. The project does provide a platform for these views to be voiced. I do not think it is a failure of the project necessarily.

### **On strengthening quality enhancement initiatives, particularly commitment to cross-institution collaboration**

I guess I go back to first principles and ask myself, what would motivate institutions to want to work together more collaboratively?

I would suggest that “working with the willing” is a good starting point. If you wait for everyone to come on board nothing will be achieved.

Getting people to move beyond cycling conversations that simply rehearse the problem(s) is challenging, but when you can find the key to doing this great progress can be achieved.

There are three major groups involved here 1) Senior Management –starting at the VC level, 2) Teaching/ Academic Staff 3) Students – past, present & future and the activities /motivations will be different at each level.

Level 1. Senior Staff. At institutional level. Of particular concern for all is the question of falling student numbers related to our demographics. Comparing the age structure of Māori/Pacific populations against Non-Māori, Non-Pacific populations and what that picture looks like over the next 10-15 years, ought to be a concern. An honest audit of current data on Enrolments, Completions and Success for the populations of interest in this Project should be motivation enough to begin thinking of Institutional strategies. It seems to me that continuing to point the finger at the Secondary Schools for not delivering sufficiently well enough prepared students will not do. Setting stretch targets to change these results required through all Departments, Schools, and Disciplines within Institutions is a culture shifter. Particularly in the current political climate where addressing inequality has become acceptable practice again, I think the Institutions could make a very strong case to government for targeted funding to resource the support needed to achieve ambitious targets.

Level 2. Teaching/Academic Staff. Build rewards for the champions. We have a tendency to overburden and burn out the best and ignore those who stand on the side lines. I would also support the suggestion in the report for HR employing practices to be scrutinized and challenged.

Level 3. Māori and Pacific students who provide mentoring support also need to be rewarded beyond mere altruism, for example letters of support for Scholarship applications and Scholarships.

The Interim Review makes some quite high and macro-level recommendations based on recurring themes raised consistently, it appears, by the general consensus of informants to the study by Chauvel and Winitana. In addition, however, the section on individually identified strategies/suggestions should not be discounted as there are some real tangible and sensible ideas amongst them that are worthy of a closer look and consideration at the micro level.

*Dr Joseph S Te Rito*

### **The findings and outcomes**

It was disappointing to read the commonly occurring theme of how universities appear unwilling to share good (and not so good) practice amongst themselves under the competitive funding model. The Enhancement Theme has helped bring together senior leaders from institutions (as the movers and shakers in institutions); senior Pasifika leaders; and strengthened the inclusion of the student voice.

It may be worthy of noting, that there could be greater proactive intervention by the funders, the TEC, who after all: set the goals for tertiary education and fund it; know full well that the educational disparities between Māori/Pasifika as against the wider population are still huge; and, well know who the poor performing institutions are in terms of Māori and Pasifika engagement and success/non-success.

In terms of priorities and areas for specific improvement that are mentioned in the Interim Review, the two core priorities identified are practical and sensible: the need for the hard conversations to be had; and the need to urgently set priorities, direction and actions especially as the current three-year timeframe is almost up, and yet we still have major disparities facing us.

Meanwhile, it was pleasing to see the differentiation being made between Māori and Pasifika students. While both are seriously disadvantaged, Māori are tangata whenua for whom Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a living document and their view of the world is different to that of Pasifika. The 'problems and solutions' for each group may be similar but not necessarily identical.

Finally, matters that do not come through as strongly as I thought they would in the interim review include: the need to provide PLD for staff in order to modify behaviour and practice, especially in the areas of cultural capability, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi; and the need for a professional standards framework and training for the university sector. Perhaps this level of action will occur once active leadership involvement occurs within and between universities.

The findings in this Interim Review of the Enhancement Theme relating to Māori and Pasifika students are clear. Things need to be set, led and promoted from

the senior level of universities as this is where the resources are allocated and distributed, and in turn enable any initiatives to proceed and be successful further down the chain. Furthermore, this needs to be a collaborative, solutions-based approach between the eight universities. Perhaps a national summit of all eight universities needs to take place to formulate an overarching plan to overcome this huge hurdle facing sustained Māori and Pasifika learner success at tertiary level.

*Dr Ailsa Crum*

### **The findings and outcomes**

If this really was the first time all eight NZ universities had come together to discuss and collaborate, against a culture of competition, then the progress outlined is pretty positive for a single year in. When the enhancement-led approach began in the Scottish sector, there was quite a lot of scepticism about whether matters institutions raised in an 'enhancement' space might be used in a review/audit context. Culture change is not a quick process – the fact that all respondents value the opportunity for collaboration is a substantial positive and a good basis on which to move into the next phase.

To what extent is there agreement on the aims and ambitions for the Theme? Is this set down anywhere? I note the comments in the evaluation report about the need for specific actions sometimes imply there is one way to tackle widening access or inclusion but, just because an initiative works in one university, doesn't mean it will work in another. Initiatives need to be a good fit for institutional (staff and student) context. The symposium report seems to acknowledge this kind of approach, e.g., page 10 of that report says 'Each university will determine for itself how it could use the experience and report from the Symposium.'

To what extent are all universities committed to the Theme? Is the call for more vice chancellor engagement really about a need to confirm or affirm their commitment and support for the Theme, which other members of staff and students could then progress? Similarly, to what extent are staff and students engaged in Theme activity outside the steering group? In the Scottish system, we have found it useful for each institution to create its own plan of work for the Theme and then to report on progress at the end of each year. We also have sector-level activity involving different groupings of staff and students – we still have progress to make as well but getting that permeation beyond vice principals (learning and teaching) and student sabbatical officers was quite tricky in the early years. I'm very conscious we've had 16 years of Enhancement Themes and, while I like to think we have much to be very proud of, we're still working on it.

I am not surprised that the sharing you have experienced has been relatively high level – sharing detailed initiatives requires a lot of trust and I see the specific issues raised around potential loss of IP in a competitive system. Getting institutions to share at all in a short space of time is a bit of a triumph

and, again, a very positive base to begin building on. The report indicates that, in addition to the high-level sharing, the Theme has prompted individual institutions to evaluate their own activities – this again provides a useful base. I wonder if it would be possible to begin a move towards more detailed sharing of practice by encouraging universities to share the outcomes of their self-evaluation. They could pick the extent of detail...ideally select some who would be willing to share more detail and hope this provides a catalyst for others.

The challenge of encouraging institutions to identify any correlation between changes they make and the Theme is very familiar to me. If two of your eight universities are willing to do this after a year, that's quite good. While the others might be more resistant to recognising any change in their practice, the fact that the Theme has prompted them to evaluate their activities is useful nonetheless.

Is the 'lack of agreement and direction on tangible next steps' (page 5) a deficit in the Theme, i.e. did the Theme aim to achieve this but hasn't? Or does this suggest there is greater ambition to make progress than might have been anticipated initially? What did the steering group hope to achieve at the outset? Defining what you want to achieve from a big culture change project like this is incredibly difficult. There will often be associated positives that are tricky to attribute directly to the Theme work, yet those are so important in order to make more tangible progress later. There can also be a lag between sector-level activity and institutional discussions occurring and action taking place.

The report talks about different perspectives and levels of expectation (bottom of page 5) which is an important point which it could be useful to draw out so the steering group can work on helping the sector to have more of a shared understanding of the Theme, its ambitions for the Theme and what the sector, collectively, might hope to achieve within and then beyond the life of the current Theme. It would be important to do this if it is still intended to consider progress of the Theme once the audits begin – what will universities be expected to have done in relation to the Theme?

Some of the comments relating to the sense of competition in the sector are quite revealing and also imply a lack of shared understanding about the role of an enhancement theme in helping the whole sector to improve – one important benefit of an enhancement theme approach is that a sector (and the institutions within it) can achieve more by working together than it would if institutions only worked individually. Some of the comments tend to imply there is only one 'right' way of doing things which can be lifted off a shelf and passed around. While there might be principles that are useful for all universities to consider, it is unlikely that one size will fit all. I wonder if it would help to deliver an injection in the form of a research project, drawing on learning from other sectors (as is suggested in the report) or learning from universities in other countries. This could serve to emphasise that the 'answers' aren't only

about sharing practice within the NZ universities as though there were a fixed pool of good practice than could be diminished by passing it around.

On student voice – we have quite a lot of material and activity around responding to the student voice that might be helpful to share. Our work is not related to the same student groups but there are some generic challenges around hearing and responding to the needs of student groups with a variety of characteristics. I also wonder about the extent to which NZ could learn from other countries who might have carried out work on first nations populations either around student voice or in thinking about pedagogies and curriculum content (decolonising etc). For example, have Canadian universities carried out work on this, or African universities or has there been work of this sort in Norway and/or Finland?

In the ‘hard conversations’ section, some of the detail being requested in the quotes is quite a hard level of detail to achieve at such an early stage of the Theme. While it’s good to be ambitious for the Theme, it’s difficult to encourage institutions to move from a position of competition to sharing fine grain detail about their challenges in a sensitive area. If these are shared ambitions, how might they most likely be achieved? Perhaps by encouraging universities to share the learning from their various activities rather than the pros and cons of the activities themselves?

## **11. Recommendations and Closing Remarks**

Ako Aotearoa appreciates the willingness of the Steering Group members to engage in open and constructive conversations. The Enhancement Theme has achieved buy-in from leadership and management and this is significant and essential to support change for Māori and Pacific. Reviewers indicate that the progress made in a year provides a very positive base to build on, both between and within institutions.

Reviewer recommendations include the following:

- Avoid deficit approaches, focus on transformative approaches
- Identify what would motivate institutions to work collaboratively
- The ‘problems and solutions’ for Māori and Pacific learners may be similar but not necessarily identical.
- The fact all respondents valued the opportunity for collaboration is a substantial positive and a good basis on which to move into the next phase.

Future opportunities recommended include the following next steps:

- Focus on identifying concrete, measurable changes for the whole sector in the second stage.
- Inter-institutional/inter-departmental culture of competitiveness could value attainment of excellent outcomes for Māori and Pacific students.
- Work with the willing, including senior management, teaching/academic staff and students.
- Provide professional learning and development for staff, especially in the areas of cultural capability, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi under a New Zealand context professional standards framework.
- Each institution could create its own plan of work for the Enhancement Theme and year-end report on progress (per the Scottish system).



- Consider establishing a research project or drawing on learning from other sectors or learning from universities in other countries.

The New Zealand Universities have, with valuable support from the Academic Quality Agency made promising progress under the inaugural Enhancement Theme on “Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students”.

For the next stage of development universities are encouraged to continue to develop their own plans and report annually on progress. Further support from Vice Chancellors would be of huge value to strengthen collaboration and to assist with setting and attaining challenging goals under the Enhancement Theme. One or two projects that learn from other sectors and international examples could help with establishing further Enhancement Theme goals, priorities, and actions for improving outcomes for Māori and for Pacific learners.

Ako Aotearoa wishes to acknowledge the expert contributions of interviewers Fleur Chauvel and Dr Mei Winitana and the external reviewers Dr Margaret Southwick, Dr Ailsa Crum and Dr Joe Te Rito.



## Appendix 1: The Enhancement Theme Objectives

The Enhancement Theme Framework <sup>3</sup> sets out the following objectives of the Enhancement Theme:

1. Improve our understanding of how to close the gaps and improve access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori learners and for Pasifika learners.
2. Engage New Zealand universities and other relevant parts of the education sector in using what we have learnt.
3. Embed Māori, Pasifika and student perspectives into the engagement theme work.
4. Be explicit and transparent about how NZ universities are working together to progress parity in access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori learners and for Pasifika learners.
5. Show how our work effects change in progressing parity of access, outcomes and achievement for Māori learners and for Pasifika learners.

Collaboration and sharing good practice is central to the Enhancement Theme approach. The Enhancement Theme does not expect the universities to do the same thing or take the same approach to the theme. Rather, the expectation is that they will work on the theme topic (in a way that fits with their own priorities and ethos), sharing good practice and providing constructive peer review of developments and plans.<sup>4</sup>

The overarching purpose of the Enhancement Theme Steering Group is to oversee and guide the enhancement theme activities. The Steering Group is to establish objectives, maintain progress, receive reports on and comment on the work of the enhancement theme and make recommendations based on this work.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/Enhancement Theme Frameworks FINAL.PDF](https://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/Enhancement%20Theme%20Frameworks%20FINAL.PDF)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/Enhancement Themes Answers to Questions MASTER.pdf](https://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/Enhancement%20Themes%20Answers%20to%20Questions%20MASTER.pdf)

## Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

### AQA Enhancement Theme Interview Schedule (max. 60 minute interview)

Introductions: Reason for the interview and how information will be used	
Questions ( <i>allow approx. 5 mins /question</i> )	Response
1. What has your experience of the enhancement theme been so far?	
2. Is the way in which the enhancement theme is working appropriate?	
3. Is the way in which the enhancement theme is working useful? What is useful?	
4. Are there ways in which it could work better? What would these be?	
5. Has the enhancement theme contributed to any changes in how your university is addressing access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students. What and how?	
6. Is the enhancement theme likely to contribute to progress in addressing access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students?	
7. What are your priorities for any change in how the Theme operates for the remaining period of the theme?	
8. Are there differences for Māori students that need to be considered for the remaining period of the theme? Are there differences for Pasifika students that also need to be considered?	
9. What challenges and opportunities do you think the enhancement theme needs to address in the remaining period of the theme?	
10. Any other comments?	

## **Appendix 3: Review Team Members**

### **Helen Lomax – Director | Tumuaki, Ako Aotearoa, Project Lead**

Helen (Te Aitanga-ā-Māhaki) is Director of Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. Ako Aotearoa hosts New Zealand's Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards and Helen has been a panellist for these awards. Helen was also a member of the international judging panel for the inaugural Global Teaching Excellence Awards 2017, and again in 2018 hosted by Advance HE, formerly the Higher Education Academy, for the United Kingdom. As Deputy Director Sector Services, Helen led service innovation for Ako Aotearoa nationally and internationally, and was involved in international quality peer review benchmarking with universities and institutes from New Zealand, Australia and Pacific countries including Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. For the Tertiary Education Commission, Helen led projects for priority groups, literacy and numeracy gains and funding for centres of research excellence, both as Acting Manager TES Priorities and Implementation, and as Principal Advisor Māori. As an independent consultant, Helen completed tertiary sector research and programme evaluation, and management support and business improvement for a wide range of sectors and organisations.

### **Dr Joseph (Joe) Te Rito – Deputy Director Māori | Kaihautū Mātauranga Māori, Ako Aotearoa, Review Panel Member**

Joe hails from the Rongomaiwahine and Ngāti Kahungunu tribes of the Hawke's Bay region. He is part of the governance group on this project. Joe led the establishment and delivery of te reo and tikanga Māori certificate and degree programmes at EIT (Eastern Institute of Technology) for 17 years, and 30 years later he still heads the tribal radio station, Radio Kahungunu which started there as a bilingual student radio station. Joe completed his PhD at the University of Auckland under Professor Ranginui Walker, in the area of politics and culture in Aotearoa. While there he worked for Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga (NZ's Māori Centre for Research Excellence) for eleven years mainly as Knowledge Exchange Manager. He has been Deputy Director, Māori / Kaihautū Mātauranga Māori for Ako Aotearoa for the last three years where he has led the Māori and Pacific team in the development of Māori and Pacific cultural capability online modules for tertiary educators; and a professional standards framework, Tapatoru, designed for foundation level educators.

### **Fleur Chauvel – Independent Research & Evaluation Consultant**

Fleur has worked as a research and evaluation consultant for the last twelve years. She has provided research and evaluation services, including as a lead external evaluator for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority since 2010 undertaking external evaluation and review of tertiary education organisations' educational performance and capability in self-assessment. Since 2013 Fleur has also conducted reconsiderations of contested external evaluation and review outcomes. For Ako Aotearoa, Fleur completed a synthesis report on overall impact of Ako Aotearoa projects, and the value and impact of co-funded projects. Fleur completed key literature reviews for the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC): "Doing Better for Māori in Tertiary Settings" and "Doing Better for Pasifika in Tertiary Settings" to contribute to informing better educational performance for Māori and Pasifika learners; (2012–2014). Fleur also examined professional development practices related to Māori and Pasifika learners in the tertiary education sector for the TEC (2015). Fleur is of Tahitian, French and Scottish descent, and was born and raised in Gisborne.

### **Dr Mei Winitana – Kaiwhakahaere Māori / Māori Manager Ako Aotearoa, Research & Evaluation Consultant**

Of Ngai Tūhoe, Ngāti Ruapani ki Waikaremoana, Te Ati Awa ki Waiwhetu descent, Mei is Kaiwhakahaere Māori / Māori Manager for Ako Aotearoa. As Kaiwhakahaere Māori at Ako Aotearoa, Mei works collaboratively with staff to enhance the Māori work streams across all strategic areas and facilitating professional learning and development programmes. She was part of the team that developed the 'Māori Cultural Capability Pathway' for tertiary educators; a resource located on the Pathways Awarua website. Mei was previously co-lecturer and supervisor of students in post-graduate studies programmes in Whare Wānanga. As an education consultant, she has experience in programme evaluation, programme design, and workshop facilitation. Mei's doctoral research provides insights into Māori women's identity at home here in Aotearoa NZ and in Australia. Her research interests include Māori education, Mana Wahine Māori, Indigenous teaching and learning methodologies, and iwi development.

### **Emeritus Dean, Dr Margaret Southwick, Review Panel Member**

Dr Margaret Southwick is Emeritus Dean of Whitireia Community Polytechnic. Margaret has worked as a Senior Lecturer, Head of School and Dean in the nursing departments at various tertiary institutions in New Zealand. Margaret led a national action research project exploring successful teaching pedagogy for Pacific students that was a collaboration of Whitireia Community Polytechnic, Unitec Institute of Technology and Massey University. She serves on various advisory committees and her governance experience will be a valuable contribution to the Review panel. She was previously Chair of the Nursing Council and was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for contributions to Pacific Communities in 2009.

### **Dr Ailsa Crum, Head of Quality and Enhancement (QAA) Scotland, Review Panel Member**

Ailsa Crum is Head of Quality & Enhancement at QAA Scotland having worked with QAA since 1998, first as Assistant Director and later as Head of Reviews. Her current role involves designing and implementing the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) method and leading a suite of enhancement activity (including the Enhancement Themes and Focus On projects) in close association with the Scottish university sector and its students. She is experienced in national strategy and policy design and delivery, engaging Government, multi-agencies and students in creation, implementation and communication. She has a range of sector engagements including with the Scottish Funding Council, Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland (sparqs), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Ailsa's links outside the UK include: the European Quality Audit Network, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the University of Limerick.

