

## Summary of University Enhancement Theme Initiatives

### Introduction

As part of the sixth cycle of academic audit for New Zealand universities, universities are undertaking an 'enhancement theme'.

*An enhancement theme is a topic of national significance and important to all universities, that all universities will work on in a common time period. Universities will not all be expected to do the same thing or take the same approach to the theme, but they are expected to be working on the theme topic, sharing good practice and providing constructive peer review of developments and plans.<sup>1</sup>*

The New Zealand universities have drawn on the experiences of the Scottish universities and higher education institutes in developing and planning their enhancement theme. Enhancement themes are a well-established component of quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

The topic for the New Zealand universities' enhancement theme is "Access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students". Within this overarching topic, universities have developed plans for how they will address the enhancement theme. This paper provides a summary of university enhancement theme plans. Other enhancement theme resources and materials are available on the AQA website.

### Summary of initiatives

As anticipated, universities have different emphases and initiatives for their individual enhancement theme plans. There are also some points of commonality and these are outlined first. The enhancement theme plans and initiatives can then be broadly grouped into those concerned with access and transition and those oriented towards retention and outcomes.

#### Commonalities

All university enhancement theme plans and initiatives are framed by university strategies and all provide indicators that will be used to gauge success. Universities are examining the contribution that learning analytics can make. The majority of universities have specified an internal steering group and include (or intend to include) students as members of those steering groups.

#### Access and transition initiatives.

Most universities have included at least one access and transition initiative in their enhancement theme plan. The initiatives cover:

- Pathway and transition programmes in universities including discipline-specific programmes and specific transitions support programmes;
- Recruitment and admissions in terms of awareness, outreach and support and whether processes are facilitative or impeding;

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<sup>1</sup> Enhancement Themes – Answers to Questions.

<http://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/Enhancement%20Themes%20Answers%20to%20Questions%20MASTER.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/en/home>

- Advice for students using both digital advice and Māori and Pasifika advisors.

Pathway and transition programmes are the most commonly indicated by universities. Universities are also considering how digital tools can assist students in planning their study. Several of the access and transition initiatives include engagement with schools.

### Retention

All universities have indicated they will pursue retention and outcomes-oriented initiatives. They include:

- Student life-cycle related initiatives with points of focus on first year and second year students.
- Student engagement and partnership initiatives. These include student contribution to decision-making and student voice.
- Curriculum, teaching and learning, teaching development and teaching space initiatives to support Mātauranga Māori, bi-cultural competence and confidence, and employability. Fostering te reo Māori is also included in this group of initiatives but is only explicitly referred to by two universities.
- Support initiatives including mentoring and student learning communities.
- Other initiatives involving communities and other partners.

Use of data, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives are again seen across retention and outcomes initiatives.

### **Discussion and next steps**

The number and diversity of initiatives addressing “Access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students” across New Zealand universities is not a new realization. Recent work by Te Kāhui Amokura has identified over 300 existing initiatives. An issue that arises from both these compilations of initiatives is that the sheer number of initiatives poses challenges for evaluation and scaling of more effective initiatives. Scaling and systemic impact will be important for the audit phase of Cycle 6, where evidence of the embeddedness of practice will be considered by universities in their self-reviews and by audit panels.

The balance of initiatives is towards retention and outcomes. This may reflect realities of what universities can influence and expect to see changes in over the timeframe of the audit cycle. Other work by UniversitiesNZ assesses the scale and impact of ‘pipeline’ factors contributing to access to university.

The initiatives summarised in this paper will contribute to improving access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students. However, enhancement theme initiatives do not exist in isolation and it is important to maintain connection with other workstreams, in particular those of Te Kāhui Amokura and the Komiti Pasifika.

One of the objectives of the enhancement theme is to share and disseminate good practice. An enhancement theme symposium will be held in Wellington on 31 October, 2018. The initiatives summarised in this paper have been used to develop the programme for the symposium.