

Submission on the Student Services Function Review
Prepared by the Te Hautū Kahurangi / Tertiary Education Union

The proposed Student Services Function Review ('the proposal') offers solutions to four identified problems within student services. Members agree that these issues have been correctly identified and need addressing. They also support the aim for a student focused, holistic approach to student academic services. However, some considerable gaps in the proposal have been identified that need to be addressed to solve these problems and meet these aims. This submission is intended to be read in conjunction with submissions from members. Recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive.

Comments on Proposal as a Whole

The first problem the proposal intends to resolve is that currently, 'student services are not fit-for-purpose, and resources are poorly aligned to achieve the strategic priorities of Taumata Teitei and the outcomes of Whakamana Tangata.' The document does specifically mention certain Taumata Teitei priorities, for example 'ensuring academic leaders are supported to realise research-informed, transdisciplinary education.' However, members note very significant gaps in the proposal which mean overall it is not well aligned with other key priorities in Taumata Teitei or the outcomes of Whakamana Tangata. We will list these according to the priorities and strategic initiatives listed in the former document.

Priority: Accessible, equitable lifelong higher education opportunities (includes the strategic initiative of improved retention and progression for Māori and Pacific Students)

- There is little mention of how the proposal will contribute to this strategic initiative, despite the proposed roles playing a large part in contributing to said accessibility.
- Many of the Faculties Student Academic Support teams and the Schools Partnership Office have roles focussed on Māori and Pacific Students, either formally through title or portfolio, or informally through responsibilities. The proposal removes these roles. The loss of these roles, even if only temporarily, will create a support gap for current Māori and Pasifika students and prospective students.
- Students want to see and speak to a person like them, who will understand their cultural background and norms, and reinforce that the University is a place for them. Having the applicable cultural background is extremely important when dealing with values that aren't shared with wider Pākehā culture. There is no provision for this in the proposal.
- There is high value in the relationships between staff in Māori and Pacific focussed roles and students, prospective students, and the wider community; these relationships tend not to be structured around information sharing, being more focused on shared community. Moving

staff from these roles into generalist positions would undermine these relationships, or worse, sever them. This would undermine the progress the University has made in the areas of Māori and Pacific student and staff inclusion. There is no provision for maintaining these relationships in the proposal.

- Many staff report being sought out by students, staff, and others because they are Māori or Pasifika, particularly if this is indicated in their role title or portfolio. People know that roles with these indicators will be held by people with culturally specific knowledge or awareness. The loss of these indicators in Student Academic Services roles would mean staff with these indicators in Student Engagement are likely to be approached instead, even if these staff are not best placed to support the issues raised. This will also increase the latter roles' workload.
- Outcomes 1,4 and 5 of Whakamana Tangata specifically speak to Māori and Pacific student achievement and experience. The proposal is silent on these, being solely focussed on achieving outcome 2 and 6 without regard for how students' experiences and interactions are culturally framed.
- The proposal also does not state how the experience of students with disabilities, language barriers and other equity needs will be accommodated or impacted.

Priority: Building a high-performing, diverse, inclusive, and equitable community

- The current approach of listing some roles/ portfolios/responsibilities as specifically Māori or Pacific focused is not an ideal approach but does ensure that there are staff within units who have the cultural background that relevant students and the wider community can relate to. The proposal drops this diversity and inclusivity measure with only the mention of a future undetermined measure to replace it. This risks the loss of the diversity the University currently has; unconscious bias in role assignment and hiring could easily lead to teams that are not diverse or inclusive.
- Some staff who do this work described the high value they place on working with Māori/ Pasifika students and the ability to give back to their communities through their work. The removal of these aspects from the proposed roles made them question whether the University was the right place for them. A loss of staff with the mix of cultural and institutional knowledge for this reason would be a great loss to the institution.

Priority: Strengthen and deepen our relationship to tangata whenua.

- The lack of collaboration with Māori in the proposal makes it unclear how the proposed significant changes to the student experience are responsive to the commitment to Te Tiriti.

The document states in the Overview of the proposed Faculties Structure that "supporting Māori student participation and achievement and Pacific student participation and achievement is also integral to the Model," but then says this will be "advised at a later stage". If it were truly an integral part of the model the proposal would include this key work. This statement is also concerning as:

- There is no clear time commitment to when this work will be done
- There is no discussion of how this aspect will be integrated with the rest of the structure if the latter goes live.
- A structure that is created with the above priorities at its centre will be systemically different from a structure that slots these priorities in later

- The above approach makes these priorities feel secondary to the centred priorities
- It also suggests that Māori staff are responsible for ensuring University structures realise Te Tiriti, rather than the University community as a whole.

The approval of the proposal without addressing the above concerns would be a lost opportunity to realise Taumata Teitei. Members also do not want to see the introduction of a model that does not measure up to the University's Vision and results in a further review in 4 years.

Recommendations for the proposal if accepted:

- That the involvement of the PVC Māori and Pacific be prioritised, and that they give full feedback on the proposal, informed by their respective communities, before implementation.
- That the proposal be responsive to the above feedback.
- That particular care is taken that the prioritised cultural training be done early and thoroughly, with ongoing support in this area throughout the transition period.
- That if the proposal is accepted without requirements to specify roles as requiring Māori and Pacific knowledge, a directive be issued to ensure teams retain the needed Māori and Pacific knowledge, particularly in student facing roles.

The proposal's aim of 'delivering student services that are operationally excellent in both performance and efficiency' could only be met if the FTE in key roles is adequate. Members felt that understaffing and high turnover, particularly in the student contact and support centre and several faculty students' centres, contributed significantly to the failures of the current model and that with enough staff the current structure could meet student needs. We do not want a new structure that replicates these issues. Of particular concern:

- The proposed structures for Faculties and Academic Services were noted as requiring the operation of 100% FTE at all times to meet effective response times. There is not enough slack in the FTE allocated to each team in the proposed structure to allow for normal variations in staff availability (e.g., annual leave, sick leave, training, empty roles, professional development etc.)
- Several key processes and duties have not been captured in the current proposed new roles; the addition of this work to the proposed FTE would overload and or reduce the performance and efficiency of these roles.
- There has been a significant loss of casual staff since early 2020 in the areas in-scope for the proposal, which has considerably impacted staff workloads. The FTE of this casual workforce is not captured in this document and does not appear to be replaced.

Recommendations for the proposal if accepted:

- That thorough role mapping be done for the disestablished roles, and this mapping be used to identify where processes will fit, with role FTE being adjusted accordingly.
- That the loss of casual FTE be calculated and that this be put back into the proposed FTE establishment.

Proposed Structural Changes

Faculties

The proposal removes a lot of support for academics in sub-leadership roles and the processes they manage. Academic staff are expected to learn how to manage these processes autonomously, however, this will only be efficient if current processes are significantly simplified and made much more user-friendly. Academic staff have repeatedly reported dissatisfaction with their workloads, particularly with administrative tasks, in the Universities staff survey and elsewhere. The proposal risks exacerbating this.

Recommendations for the proposal if accepted:

- That sub-leadership academic support be mapped and allocated before transition.
- That staff support for these positions be maintained until academic staff report reasonable ease of use of any proposed self-service systems. This may require an increase in FTE.

Academic Services (Student and Academic Services)

The role responsibilities and process for handling applicants who potentially fall under the targeted admissions schemes are not identified in the proposal. Identification of potential applicants to this scheme is resource intensive, as applicants often do not identify themselves as falling under a targeted equity group.

Recommendations for the proposal if accepted:

- That current methods for identifying potential applications be mapped and this work be specified in the new roles and factored into FTE.
- That all admissions staff be trained to identify and respectfully handle potential targeted admissions applicants.

Te Tumu Herenga | Libraries and Learning Services (Student Hubs)

While the need for one-stop-shops for students to receive holistic advice is appreciated, there were several points where the proposal may undermine its goal of 'student-centric mana-enhancing service delivery.'

- The hubs are structured around generalist positions rather than having a multiplicity of specialists. Queries need to be answerable within the hubs as much as possible to avoid replicating current query triage problems.
- Removal of the faculty student centres could create a new staff silo, with staff at the student hubs not having up-to-date knowledge of faculty changes and vice versa.
- Physical queue management could become unworkable particularly during busy periods at the beginning of semester one and two.
- The effect of extended opening hours on staff wellbeing.

Recommendations for the proposal if accepted:

- That Team Leaders, and Senior Client Services/Hub Assistants in the General Library/KEIC area, be tasked with holding knowledge of specific faculties and maintaining strong relationships with staff in those Faculties.

- The triage system between the Student Hubs and the Faculties is thoroughly developed before implementation.
- That line management be carefully considered in advance of implementation
- That reasonable expectations of staff after hours be made clear to students.

Proposed Positions

The TEU was pleased to see that overall, the banding of the proposed positions does not represent an overall 'downgrading' of student academic support roles and shows improvement on the overall distribution of bands. However, there are two roles that were seen as noticeably too low given the duties of the roles.

Faculties - Programme Coordinator

The band of 'D' for this role is too low for the essential qualifications and experience required to successfully carry out the duties required – notably, these requirements are higher than current in-scope roles banded E. In addition:

- Many of the specific faculty queries referred from the hub will relate to these roles' operational activities, and as such they will bear a high level of responsibility for these queries.
- This is of particular concern as this role was identified as being the 'natural fit' for a high number of currently unidentified responsibilities and duties within the faculties.
- The Programme Coordinator roles was noted as one with particularly low EFTS for the workload, particularly given the unidentified duties above.

Academic Services – Student Records Coordinator

The band of 'C' for this role is too low for the essential qualifications and experience required to successfully carry out the duties. In addition:

- this role carries responsibility to ensure documents meet certain legal requirements, particularly those required by Public Records Act 2005 and the Privacy Act. The role description currently reads as an entry level position without recognition of this.
- The above, coupled with the significant reduction of FTE of these roles, makes this role particularly unattractive and means there is a very high risk of high turnover and knowledge loss.

Recommendations for the proposal if accepted:

- That the bands of the above positions be revised upwards.
- That particular attention is paid to staff submissions on these roles.

Proposed redeployment/ recruitment process and selection criteria

The TEU is pleased to see the employer is implementing CV and interview sessions for any disestablished and impacted fixed term staff if the proposal goes ahead. This is an excellent initiative, and we encourage the University to roll this out on a wider basis to professional staff in future. We also recommend the following:

- Where staff have been hired on fixed terms due to the upcoming review prior to permanent staff being hired into the same positions, these staff be either confirmed into their current roles or given the same treatment and options of a permanent staff member if a restructure

goes ahead. Given that these staff have all been in these roles since at least 2019 and that the work that they are doing would continue in the proposed structure across different roles, the TEU believes it is fair and reasonable for their employment to be treated as continuous.

- That the relationship between job descriptions and the individuals who fill them is clarified to all staff at the beginning of the EOI process and during the CV and interview sessions. Feedback from members on proposed job descriptions shows a lot of confusion amongst staff at all levels on the relationship between the proposed position description and people's individual qualifications and experience.
- That HR and higher management actively encourage staff to move into higher banded positions, to ensure the maximum number of roles can be filled by current staff. Given the comparison of destabilised/ending fixed terms to new positions, we expect all current staff to have a position in a new structure if they so desire.
- That casual staff who are losing their roles through this process be given preference for any suitable positions that remain unfilled after the first round of expressions of interest.

Applications for the Associate Director roles having been closed before the proposal has led to concern that these roles have been filled without recognition of the degree of change that could occur between now and implementation. The Union's expectation is that the people in these roles will respect any changes to the proposal and adjust their management of these areas accordingly.

Proposed Transition Considerations and Approach

The TEU strongly recommends that if the proposal is adopted a delayed and slow transition to the new structure be followed for the following reasons:

- Professional Staff are currently still mentally stretched from dealing with the ramifications of Covid-19, and as a result are much more likely to experience unmanageable levels of stress if they need to transfer to a new structure quickly.
- Academic Staff are likewise stretched and have the same stress risk; additionally, confusion and delay on administrative tasks takes time away from their key academic duties.
- Students are also still dealing with the effects of Covid, and further disruption is likely to negatively impact them more strongly than usual.

The TEU also recommends that careful role mapping be done for all positions, to ensure knowledge retention and ensure key duties and processes do not remain unassigned – a key stressor for a range of staff in previous restructures. Most staff are not familiar with how to map roles, so a system would need to be developed that they could follow. Given that a number of these systems are process driven, we suggest role mapping that follows a yearly cycle. If the proposal is confirmed, we recommend this be done before the EOI process is initiated, so people can get a better understanding of the roles they are considering.