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# Submission to the University Advisory Group – Phase 1

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Universities form part of the larger ‘ecosystem’ that enables Aotearoa New Zealand to flourish and are major contributors to our prosperity and wellbeing. The Society envisages a future in which:

- ✓ Our universities produce well-rounded graduates equipped with the skills and attributes necessary to underpin a vibrant democracy and advanced economy
- ✓ Our universities enable this with teaching and research at the leading edge of global knowledge and practice, ensuring graduates possess the skills to meet local and international workforce requirements
- ✓ The skills and capability of university faculties, staff, and students are recognised, nurtured, prioritised, and enabled to flourish
- ✓ The quality of our universities’ world-leading research and education attracts overseas institutions to collaborate and partner for mutual advantage
- ✓ Māori are actively involved across the university sector, share the benefits of research and education, including the potential inherent in mātauranga Māori, and universities honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- ✓ Our universities and other sources of tertiary education are accessible to our diverse communities
- ✓ Universities are a trusted source of research evidence and expertise that supports decision-making and fosters understanding of complex societal issues
- ✓ Freedom in science and scholarly activity are enabled and safeguarded, and responsible evidence-based public engagement and debate is encouraged.

## Royal Society Te Apārangi: our role in the university sector

Royal Society Te Apārangi is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, established with the statutory objective of advancing and promoting science, technology, and the humanities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Society is well connected with the university sector through our membership and networks, include eminent scientists, scholars, educators, teachers, leaders, and research professionals from a wide range of disciplines. We manage investments on the Government's behalf through the prestigious Marsden Fund and a range of fellowships and scholarships, and we provide expert advice on important matters to the Government and wider community. We advance education in science and technology through programmes to support students and teachers, and we celebrate excellence in research and education with prizes and medals.

The Society appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the future of universities in Aotearoa New Zealand, noting that the views of our members and stakeholders are many and varied. In this light, we have encouraged individual members and groups to make their own submissions.

### Responses to questions

New Zealand universities compare favourably against international benchmarks. Our universities have world-leading human capability and know-how in many areas of research and education that are essential to the country's wealth and wellbeing.

1. Universities strengthen our society, advance knowledge, help preserve cultural heritage, and develop a skilled workforce that can contribute to productivity and wellbeing.

- As public institutions, universities provide **general education** to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to contribute to society and participate in a thriving democracy. Universities also offer **advanced education** for graduate and research students to advance their knowledge and acquire specialised skills for future careers that contribute to economic growth and the wellbeing of New Zealanders.
- Universities ensure that New Zealand stays at the leading edge of global knowledge by facilitating cutting-edge **research and scholarly activity** across a range of disciplines. This includes curiosity-driven research for the creation of new knowledge, technical skills and practices, and innovative products to service industry and economic growth. This kind of scholarly activity produces knowledge which generates wide-ranging benefits for the public good.
- Universities can be places in which **Māori can fulfill their aspirations** for scholarship, education and research. Universities provide opportunities for Māori experts and research practitioners to grow, develop, and share their knowledge and mātauranga Māori for the benefit of all.
- Universities, and their faculties and students, have the freedom to act as **critics and conscience of society**, while recognising their responsibilities to do this in a way that builds and maintains trust in science and research.

To be effective, universities need to be well connected to government, to Māori leaders and communities, to the private sector and industry, and to New Zealand's diverse communities.

2. In the long term, New Zealand universities should be:

- Properly funded: There are good reasons to invest in universities and tertiary education, including

positive economic returns on this investment.<sup>1</sup> The university sector needs to be sustainably resourced, with diverse and complementary institutions that offer internationally recognised education and research. Funding has not kept pace with costs, and universities have been struggling to undertake their primary roles, which needs to be addressed for the sustainability of the sector in the long term.

- Agile and resilient: Universities are innovative and have proven their agility (e.g., by pivoting to online teaching during the early phases of the Covid-19 pandemic), but in the long term, universities must become more resilient to shocks such as fluctuating income from student fees.
- Collaborative and efficient: The existing competitive environment features non-productive competition for students and funding. Universities will need to work together to develop a balance between collaboration and specialisation. For example, a university with strong expertise in a particular area could collaborate with other institutions to fill gaps in course offerings or research training, enabling students to learn directly from the best scholars in the country.
- Equitable and connected: Universities need to be deeply connected with mana whenua and communities to co-develop research and teaching, and to empower mātauranga Māori. This extends to relationships with wānanga and their special role across and within the higher education system. Universities must be incentivised to improve transitions for students between different stages of education – from schools into universities, from other education providers such as wānanga, institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs) into universities, between universities, and from university courses into teaching, research, or other sectors.

3. Non-fiscal barriers for New Zealand universities include:

- Retention of the faculty and students: A thriving university sector that delivers positive sustainable growth and prosperity for Aotearoa New Zealand is a long-term endeavour and needs to offer sufficient certainty for the high-performing people and organisations working within it, especially if we want to attract and retain the world's best minds.
- Career pathways: Emerging researchers are particularly exposed to funding and employment precarity and need a supportive structure to help them develop their careers. The Tāwhia te Mana Research Fellowships and their predecessor programmes are an example of successful support that celebrates excellence and provides career certainty to the best emerging researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Non-productive competition: Historically, universities have competed for students, staff and funding of both their core activities and research. The Centres of Research Excellence have been exemplary, demonstrating what can be achieved by strategic collaborative research structures.

4. At least some coordination or collaboration will be necessary for our university system to thrive and meet the education and research expectations of our society. Universities would benefit from clear differentiation based on areas of strength, with each institution having a distinctive mission and focus. This needs to be balanced by system-level coordination, guided by a shared long-term vision, and active collaboration for teaching, research, and infrastructure, to ensure investment is used most efficiently. This could include shared courses, and more efficient credit transfer processes, or teaching and research mobility between institutions (including wānanga, ITPs, CRIs, and the private sector). At a system level, we also need to ensure we are maintaining a core base of expertise across all disciplines.

5. All universities in New Zealand have pockets of world-leading research excellence, which we need to foster and grow. Research-active scholars provide world-class innovative tertiary education, which we need if we want to compete for and retain the best students and staff.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD Education GPS. Public returns.

<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41762&filter=all> [Accessed 24 May 24]

6. Teaching, research, and knowledge-transfer all form vital parts of our universities. We need research-active scholars for teaching, and we need research and education programmes that connect with and meet the needs of partners in industry, government, and communities. Our universities need to offer accessible pathways for graduate and research students to gain industry experience, for industry professionals to undertake research training, and for the commercialisation of research.

7. Approaches for ensuring excellence in teaching, research, knowledge-transfer, and community engagement need to be efficient and equitable; they need to recognise and incentivise a broad range of achievements and outputs beyond traditional bibliometric measures, while minimising administrative burden. For example, the Marsden Fund follows excellent, best-practice processes, and is trusted and valued by the research community. Grants from the Marsden Fund support excellence in research, provide opportunities for new researchers and ideas to enter the university sector, and are particularly important in supporting research-led teaching across a wide range of disciplines.

8. To drive inclusion and equity, universities need to be accessible to learners from all backgrounds, by prioritising access and inclusion for under-served communities. Representation is important, and universities need to employ skilled, diverse professionals who have an understanding of their communities, and who are able to make an impactful contribution to society. Targeted investment may be needed to lift participation and achievement among currently under-represented groups, including Māori and Pacific communities. We envisage an equitable and co-designed university sector that recognises Te Tiriti, empowers Māori leadership, values mātauranga Māori as a knowledge system unique to Aotearoa New Zealand and celebrates excellence.

9. Our domestic student body needs to grow with our increasing population and need for advanced skills and specialisation. Universities need to be readily accessible for all students who want to seek higher education and who meet the minimum requirements for the degrees of their choosing.

- University programmes need to be aligned with workforce requirements. Are we training sufficient medical professionals; meeting the needs for our education workforce; and producing graduates with the right skills for entrepreneurship or the high-value technology sector? This alignment will enable graduates to access rewarding careers, compete in domestic and international labour markets, and contribute to the prosperity, wellbeing, and cohesiveness of society.
- Beyond vocational training, universities provide graduates with the skills to find and analyse information, formulate clear arguments, reflect on our past, and celebrate our vibrant culture. For a thriving society and economy, it is important that universities nurture humanities and the arts (e.g., to ensure that the country maintains capability in foreign languages as part of national security considerations).

10. Universities enable free and responsible scholarly activity and need to promote and safeguard the practice of enquiry across all disciplines and knowledge systems.<sup>2</sup>

- Universities need to ensure the safety of staff and students when they speak out about their areas of expertise, and to value public engagement, thought-leadership, and policy contributions in academic career structures.
- To advance science and scholarly activity as a public good, research quality and integrity needs to be maintained, and research findings need to be accessible to the public.

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<sup>2</sup> ISC (2021) A contemporary perspective on the free and responsible practice of science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. <https://council.science/publications/a-contemporary-perspective-free-and-responsible-practice-of-science/> [Accessed 24 May 2024]

## Appendix

Science System Advisory Group Submission:

<https://www.royalsociety.org.nz/what-we-do/our-expert-advice/our-responses/submission-to-the-science-system-advisory-groups-phase-1-consultation/>