TEU Perceptions and Expectations of NZIST:

A Briefing for Stephen Town as the Inaugural Chief Executive of the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology

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TEU | TE HAUTŪ KAHURANGI
TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION

Introduction

This is a long time overdue. The definition of insanity describes the way things are currently run (survey respondent 226)

This briefing is based on a recent short survey of the Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) membership to gauge their response to the current intended changes throughout the ITP sector. As a benchmark, the TEU has used a foundation document, *The State of the Public Tertiary Education Sector Survey, 2018* (Sedgwick and Proctor-Thomson 2019), which clearly outlines fundamental principles that the TEU membership holds as both a guide to the behaviour of the membership and as productive guiding principles for organisational behaviour throughout the sector. Here, the document has been employed as a baseline to judge responses to the survey, both aspirational and concerning the current situation.

The first two questions in the survey (see below) tried to gauge how the membership feels about the creation of NZIST and, more fundamentally, how the membership feels about shifting from the competitive model – that which has been the overarching model in the sector, used to control funding, intra- and inter-organisational performance and behaviour – to a collaborative model which is to inform all aspects of the sector's performance and governance.

It has to be said at the outset that these questions have been answered by staff who have experienced almost 30 years of changing systemic, institutional, and sector pressures across successive governments. Even the surveys of working conditions in the sector stretch back to 1994, but as noted in our 2019 survey, the results have largely been ignored by government and institutions despite deteriorating conditions across the ITP sector. Staff are well aware of relentless restructuring, change, redundancies, and closures, let alone the changes which they have individually experienced as staff in the sector. All these changes have invariably been imposed, top-down changes, and it is only when one discusses proximal changes in departments or units that there is some semblance of consultation or involvement.

The present briefing includes several recommendations pertaining to issues of *co-design, transparency and autonomy, staff and student wellbeing and workloads,* and *staff empowerment,* each of which the TEU considers to be vital to the ongoing success of NZIST and the reforms to the vocational education sector.

TEU members on the creation of NZIST

The first question we asked members was:

1. **Please provide three words that best describe how you feel about the creation of NZIST**

There were 308 responses to Q.1[1] – within that, 218 (71%) of the responses were coded as either 'positive' (47%) or 'mostly positive' (53%) about the creation of NZIST. The 'mostly positive' responses usually contained at least two positive descriptive words and one or two that invariably expressed, among other things, 'worry,' 'uncertainty,' 'fatigue,' 'caution,' 'unease,' 'nervousness,' 'apprehension,' or 'stress.' Those who were 'positive' were totally supportive in the sense that they gave the impression that they were keen to move on with the changes and used words such as 'excited,' 'positive,' 'empowered,' 'pleased,' 'challenging,' and 'hopeful'; some respondents also indicated what they saw as potential for: 'equity,' 'collaboration,' 'innovation,' and a 'time for democratic thinking.' Some also thought the process was too 'slow'!

There was also the sense that they were open to the challenge of participating in the change after years of exclusion; this was less the case for the 'mostly positive' responses. Here, there was the air of "we will wait and see," consistent with their prior experience of change. Words like 'nervous,' 'uncertain,' 'anxious,' 'wary,' 'curious,' and 'apprehensive' reflect experience as recipients of someone else's imposed decisions in the past – not as genuine participants. Part of this sentiment undoubtedly comes when staff try to anticipate what is coming based on past experience:

> *There will be rationalisation, so some will win, and others will lose. Going to be an uncomfortable few years and we will lose good people if life becomes too uncertain. Not that I'm a good person, but I am looking for other opportunities now.*

> *Excited about moving to a stronger, more efficient organisation that supports the vocational/educational needs of Aotearoa; however, very sceptical about who the selection of the national, regional, and local management/ governance bodies are that will oversee the new institution and whether or not they will acknowledge and value the voice of those at the "coal face" moving forward.*

The more extreme version of this was the 28% negatively disposed to the changes as a whole. They either can't see there are problems in the sector or distrust the motive for change, interpreting it as a largely political

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project for control or financial austerity. They see the changes as un-democratically 'bulldozing' their input while creating a centralised system; a system which is wasting money and creating a bureaucracy which will obstruct what they interpret as an innovative system. A telling confirmation of their position comes when respondents were asked later in the survey to state what they thought "empower staff and students" – as legislated in the NZIST Charter – meant:

> *CEO/Business speak; weasel words. It means nothing intrinsically. Needs to be better defined but, realistically, current management will not give up decision-making power to the common worker or to customers.*

> *Nice in theory but already not working in practice. NZIST is already being captured by a pretentious bureaucratic elite. Evidence = document "WDC Design Process – Expressions of Interest."*

Others are 'curious' but say they are disconnected, frustrated, annoyed, or confused – all of which suggests they have no intention of getting involved.

TEU members on the transition from a competitive to a collaborative funding model

The second question asked respondents to reflect on the major shift from the neoliberal free market competitive agenda of the past:

2. **Please provide three words that best describe how you feel about the transition from a competitive model to a collaborative model under a single entity**

Of the 312 respondents, 75% were either 'positive' or 'mostly positive' to the shift from the competitive model to one that is collaborative. This question produced a larger percentage (52%) of 'positive' responses and a proportionately smaller percentage (23%) who were 'mostly positive.' The support was expressed through words like 'excited,' 'overdue,' 'promising,' 'optimistic,' 'requiring trust,' and 'happy,' and the reticence with words like: 'concerned,' 'unsure,' 'worried,' 'vulnerable,' 'suspicious,' 'cautious,' 'exhausting,' 'challenging,' and 'sceptical.' There was concern that there would still be competition with other providers for "bums on seats."

Twenty-five percent were negatively disposed to the change, preferring the current institutional identity and arguing competition produces self-control and better-

quality education. Again, expense, excessive bureaucracy, centralised political control, and inefficiency appeared to justify their position.[2]

Further concerns

In the next set of questions, respondents were asked to give a weighting on a continuum from 1 ('not concerned') to 5 ('highly concerned') to sixteen issues expressed and articulated to TEU over the preceding months. The concerns cover a range of issues from the 'vision for NZIST,' 'funding,' 'enrolments,' 'competition with PTEs,' to 'management decisions,' 'work,' and 'workload issues.' Only 13 issues attracted a response with the responses on the continuum ranging from 2.3 to 3.3. The issue that registered most concern was 'staff voice' (3.5). The closest other concerns were 'funding' (3.3), 'changes to jobs and roles' (3.3), and 'current management decisions' (3.2).

Co-design: consultation and staff voice

The issue of 'staff voice' produced a lot of the trepidation expressed about the changes; a point explicit in comments attached to the 'issues' questions. Staff clearly worry about 'lack of consultation,' 'inclusion,' and 'collaboration' – will there be real 'support for staff development and wellbeing'?

> *NZIST is a good idea in theory but is now being captured by pretentious and egotistical bureaucratic elite who are failing with the details.*

There is concern over who will decide on the debate over 'teaching delivery,' 'methods,' and the future content articulated as a debate between the need for a focus on vocational 'readiness' or, alternatively, an 'academic' focus. Can there be a mix, or will the former ITO/industry-driven focus prevail?

Clearly there is unease and indecision in the reaction to changes. And an underlying theme emerges: Do we respond as we have done for the last 30 years – i.e. "it's going to be done to us; it'll happen anyway, and we just hope it works" – or:

> *This is a change like no other change. Time will tell.*

> *Unsure if they fully understand the ramification if they get it wrong.*

> *Interested to see how it's all going come together on a national scale.*

Alternatively, should TEU members demand to know

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2 There was some nuance in this situation though with only 57% of the negative responses to Q.2 matched with a similar response in Q.1.

what is to happen to us? TEU members must be included and involved in decisions about all the changes that affect them and the variety of students they work with.

> … All [the changes] hold fantastic potential if done with adequate staff expertise and voice input of student voice.

> If staff and TEU are involved in decision-making at all levels of the process and act with clear intent to fulfil the visions, then RoVE provides some amazing opportunities in relation to the access to higher education/training and to improve quality and ultimately poverty in NZ…

Recommendation
Co-design

NZIST must:

i. commit to processes of genuine collaborative co-design that integrate the perspectives, interests, and expertise of all stakeholders – staff, students, iwi, and community;

ii. include two TEU members, one each from a metropolitan and rural region, on all working groups;

iii. ensure academic freedom, as outlined in section 222E of the Education (Vocational Education and Training Reform) Amendment Act 2020 is enacted in all working groups

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A national network of provision: centralisation *and* autonomy?

On a positive note, the idea that there would be a national alignment of standards and qualifications allowing students to move to other institutions without cost is clearly important to staff. However, this is nearly always couched in the expression of concern over lack of available detail about the changes and concerns about future leadership. In other words, what is the possibility for a democratic future?

When respondents were asked to give a weighting for a number of factors that supposedly 'excited members about NZIST,' using a continuum from 1 ('worried') to 5 ('very excited'), only 4 aspects equalled or exceeded 3. These were, 'sharing materials nationally,' 'possibility of research across regions/nationally,' 'collaboration prospects,' and 'attempts to ensure consistency of provision.' A clear support for this can be seen in the following:

> Very excited to be able to share teaching and learning ideas across the country with my peers. EVERYONE, regardless of where they live in Aotearoa, is entitled to the best education we can give them, so when we share our areas of excellence, EVERYONE benefits!

Again, however, in the remaining 5 areas excitement is tinged with hesitance and doubt:

> I'd like to feel more excited about any of this, but too many times I've seen great policy ideas on paper fail to translate into meaningful outcomes for those most affected. So, I'm at best reserved about it all, and, at worst, cynically waiting for evidence that the necessary good will come from this.

In other cases, notions of standardising provision are translated into the imposition of 'total uniformity,' and a denial of autonomy and the ignoring of the variety of needs represented by differing populations in institutions and regions:

> Each region's demographics and students have different needs – concern that total uniformity may provide less opportunities for different groups – especially those with disabilities. Who determines what is 'best'?

> … The Hawke's Bay has such a different market to Auckland – how is this to be managed in a way that students up the East Coast do not become affected due to a centralisation process that is potentially inflexible?

The prevalent understanding is that 'autonomy' and 'centralisation' are in opposition:

> The lack of autonomy amidst this drive to centralisation is a concern and may homogenise education to the detriment of students and educational professionals.

The crux of this is whether centralisation and standardisation will obviate what institutions have already achieved. Examples from the non-tertiary sector should make it clear that this is not the necessary outcome. These examples, as the following quote notes, are important, and it is only good leadership that will preserve democratic centralism.

> Teacher autonomy, local identity, and being able to cater to our specific demographic will remain important.

Recommendation
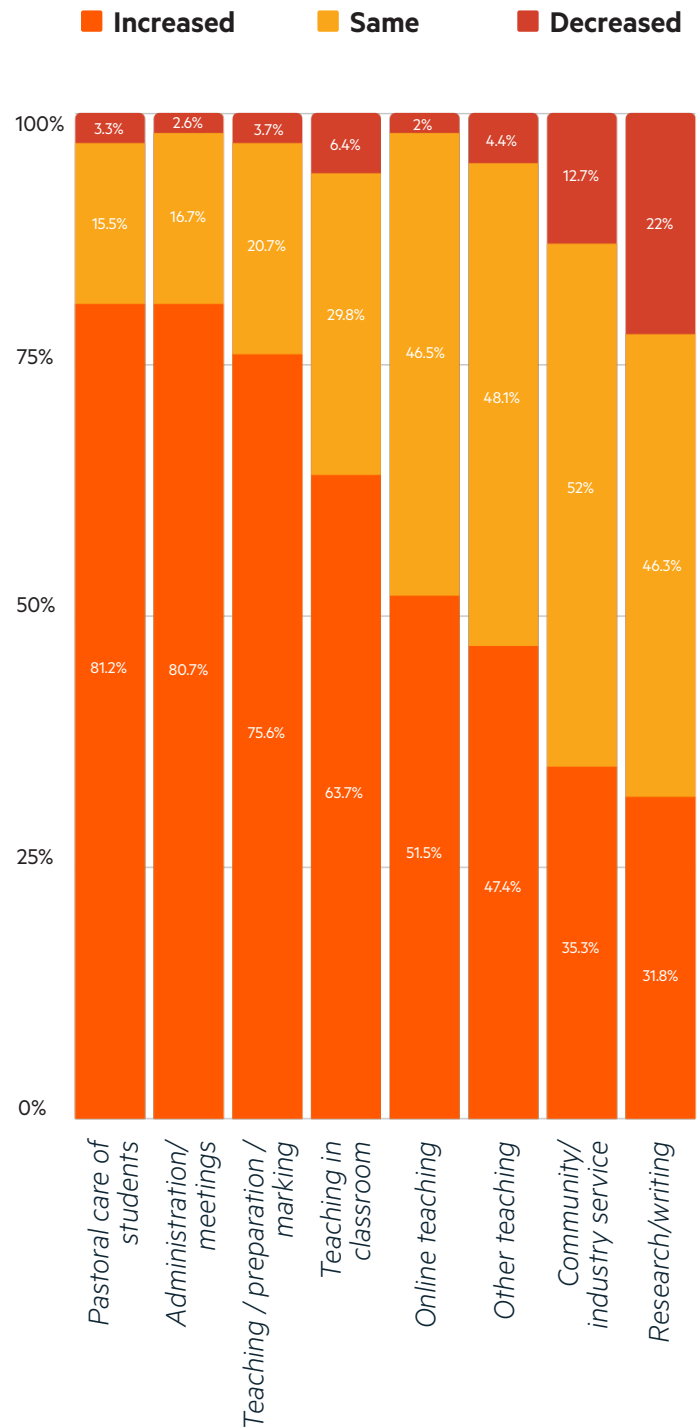### *Transparency and autonomy*

NZIST must:

i. operate based on principles of openness, transparency, and high trust;

ii. maintain an ongoing, productive relationship with the TEU;

iii. involve staff as issues arise so they can proactively contribute to the definition and resolution of problems that inevitably impact upon them;

iv. provide, where consultation is not applicable, comprehensive explanations pertaining to the rationale underpinning decisions;

v. allow staff to operate autonomously in their respective areas of expertise

Workloads

Switching from examining how staff respond to the current changes, respondents were asked about their reflections on the change over the last three years in their workloads, working conditions now, and their capacity to influence aspects of their work environment. The responses are useful because they highlight conditions that can – and must – be changed, which are now reflected in a number of former staff surveys, but importantly, remain as a dysfunctional aspect of the sector which has not been rectified.

When respondents were asked about the changes in aspects of their workload over the last three years their responses were as follows:

Has your workload in the following areas changed in the last three years?

■ **Increased**　　■ **Same**　　■ **Decreased**

	Increased	Same	Decreased
Pastoral care of students	81.2%	15.5%	3.3%
Administration / meetings	80.7%	16.7%	2.6%
Teaching / preparation / marking	75.6%	20.7%	3.7%
Teaching in classroom	63.7%	29.8%	6.4%
Online teaching	51.5%	46.5%	2%
Other teaching	47.4%	48.1%	4.4%
Community / industry service	35.3%	52%	12.7%
Research/writing	31.8%	46.3%	22%

Clearly, a majority of staff (63.7 to over 80%) have seen their workload increase in the areas of teaching, preparation, and marking, but also in administration (80.7%) – also called 'compliance' by respondents – and, in particular, pastoral care. The complaint is that workload allocation is not a 'transparent' issue. Increases in teaching and associated activities are experienced by substantially more staff in 2020 than were noted in 2019.[3]

[3] Teaching in 2019 had increased over 3 years for 41% of the sample: 'other teaching' for 38%; 'teaching preparation and marking' for 54%; and 'administrative meetings' for 69% of respondents (Sedgwick and Proctor-Thomson 2019, 17). N.B. the 2019 survey aggregated both University and ITP academic staff, whereas the current research surveyed only ITP staff.

Pastoral care

In 2019, 59% of academic staff said they had inadequate time for pastoral care; in this survey, over 81% of staff noted an increased need for pastoral care in addition to their normal duties. A number of respondents clearly laid out the parameters of why pastoral care was needed and, additionally, the variety of reasons for increasing workload demands:

Mental health issues, poor levels of literacy and numeracy skills, and socio-economic hardships have all increased markedly within the student cohort over the past five years. These issues create an environment of learning that is also different – more pastoral care, excusing of absence and difficulty with content, behavioural changes to both staff and peers. Placing students into vocational or industry experience requires more care and attention to the alignment and capabilities.

We are finding that there is an increase in students with mental health issues/learning difficulties or disabilities coming through. These students require a huge increase in levels of pastoral care from tutors. In the Supported Learning sector, decreased funding has resulted in big increases in class sizes and reduced staffing, which puts strain on the quality of teaching able to be delivered. Another issue is the increased loading on tutors of administration tasks. Increasingly, we are being expected to perform a myriad of tasks such as rewriting programmes and programme documentation, scanning and storing evidence from assessments, providing reports etc., etc., which were not in our original job description. For example: originally, a student would complete a paper assessment, it would be marked and then placed in a physical file and results would be given to an administrator. Nowadays, any assessments completed need to be scanned and emailed by the tutor to themselves (requiring a minimum of a 5-minute trip per assessment to a photocopier/scanner in the main building). This then needs to be picked up from the email system and filed into a digital portfolio, the folders of which need to have been set up by the tutor beforehand. What was a job of a few minutes has morphed into one of up to 30 mins per assessment per student. Similarly, keeping an attendance roll:

originally, it was a paper-based roll which took a few seconds to complete. Now, as a tutor, we have to spend time setting up our rolls/ assessments in a computer-based platform, log into this platform each day and detail a student's attendance, reasons for non-attendance, head-count etc., so this job has gone from a few minutes to at least 30 mins each day. The time allowance for these tasks has not kept pace with the increased workload.

Student pastoral care at Polytechnic level has increased due to the nature of the student applying to study. I have had to cope with students harming themselves, for instance, which can take a lot of time away from other students and teaching time. A one-off is always manageable, but increased occasions of these types of issues eventually impacts heavily on a tutor's time with no understanding or help from management. You will lose teaching staff if a centralised policy of having more student assistance on each campus is not implemented.

The workloads have included administrative and pastoral care which has gone above what can be managed alongside teaching delivery. There is no balance, but an expectation to pass students with little support for the teaching teams.

I feel that more and more administrative tasks are being placed on academic staff, and I spend a LOT of time carrying these out. I work 60 hours a week most weeks and get paid for 37.5. This has to change. If I didn't do these extra hours our students would not get the pastoral care they need, and I would turn up to classes with no materials prepped. A lot of this extra time is taken up by admin tasks or meetings.

When I first came here my school had about 21 full-time teaching staff, and everyone got one semester off a year to do course development/update work and research work. Now for the same area, we have 6 full-time staff and the majority of our time is spent fixing up, and having to supply, additional materials, explanations, and apologies to students regarding substandard assessments and learning materials written by external contractors (real cowboy stuff).

Rationalisation of staff to address financial

deficits at this institution have reduced academic teaching staff. There has been an increase in casual contracted staff who come… do the contract… leave, this then impacts on admin, meeting and pastoral care of students, so considerable increase in class teaching, prep, pastoral care and academic support directly impacting staff workloads… there is no leeway at all in the system. In addition to this Student Support Services have been cut in relation to health, pastoral care, and academic support – the number of students requiring support has not decreased and in order to offer support to students – staff are spending significant amount of time providing this support which is not acknowledged by management at all, impacting on prep time… so more done at home. This also impacts on research outputs when staff are required to do research… when… how??? Or would management just like us to keep a roll out mattress under our desk in order to fulfil these requirements… because that is the only way this can happen. This is of increasing concern because of many staff it is a requirement of their professional organisation – e.g. Nursing Council of NZ and is also in contracts of employment. This is likely to be an emerging issue over 2020.

We have had 14 different managers, three office moves and one city move in three years. Each time there are new systems and processes to adhere to. We are teaching under one institution, but we are situated on another therefore paperwork trails are often lost and computer systems are messy and don't align very well. We have lost exceptional staff with massive intellectual property and experience.

Unfortunately, our relationship and engagement with our community has dropped, especially with regards to our high schools and secondary learning institutions. Staffing has been reduced considerably and workloads have increased almost 3-fold and there has been little to no marketing of courses, resulting in the closure of courses that are vital to our community in south AKL. Very frustrating!

Admin for Programme Coordinators has increased out of all proportion to meet TEC, NZQA requirements. This is having a knock-on effect on teaching and prep time, industry

engagement, and development.

We are bullied to do research and community work in our own time (or else we will be side-lined and demeaned) but not supported to do this work with any infrastructure (such as time allocation). Teaching has virtually no value which is silly because it is skilled and fabulous teaching that makes the difference to learners and the industries in reality. Too many people feathering their own nests and egos doing research (often of limited importance) for the sake of their careers rather than the public good of educating. These two things need to be in balance – not in competition.

The counterproductive process of reducing staff, employing contract staff, and increasing pressure to undertake administrative responsibilities, teaching preparation, pastoral care, and academic and student support – in a situation where a number of the latter services have been cut back – does not work. Pitting expectations of staff career advancement against attention they might want to give to support good teaching is not viable.

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Recommendation
Wellbeing and workloads

NZIST must:

i. conduct an initial survey in order to 'take the pulse' of student and staff wellbeing throughout the vocational education sector;

ii. commit to working with the TEU in order to understand the resources required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and students relative to the ongoing implications of COVID-19, including the workload issues implicated in the move to Alert Level 1;

iii. support staff and students through the comprehensive restoration of pastoral, administrative, and marketing support in institutions, with the conscious aim of allowing academic and general staff to work on the development and improvement of academic offerings, on relationships with key stakeholders, and on building the 'new world' of NZIST.

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Decreases in research and teaching

When one examines the survey responses regarding whether there has been an increase or decrease in the area of 'other teaching,' community/industry service, and research and writing workload, there is a notable

decrease in research and writing, obviously restricted by teaching contact hours and administrative demands. As one respondent noted:

> To avoid decreasing time spent doing research or in the community, time spent on these activities has to be done after hours to compensate for the increase in administrative tasks, which should often be done by other departments (e.g. marketing our course to attract students). This affects our work/life balance.

> Much more teaching time is required, along with a considerable increase in administration for which no support is provided. Thus, less research despite being told we must do it – the only time to do research is in our own time.
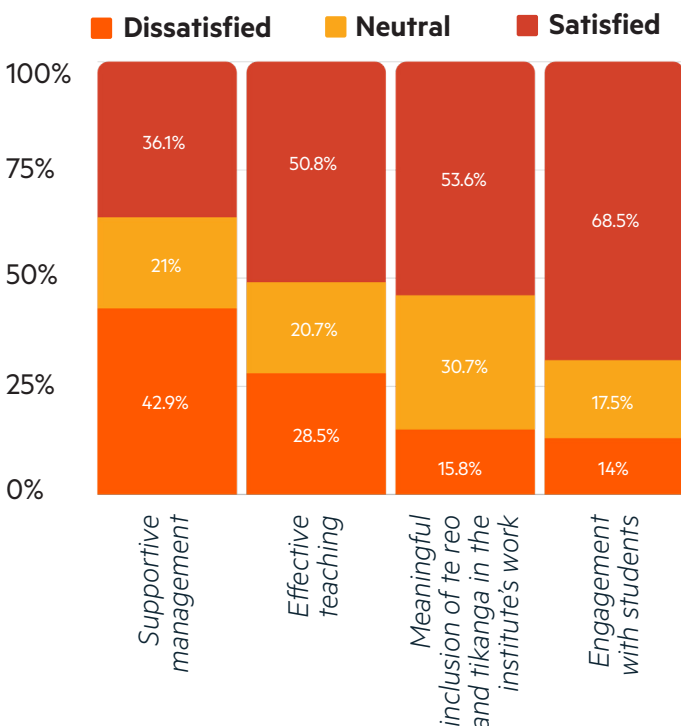
> The compliance and admin are not increasing our functionality. The managers all try to generate additional work to make themselves look good during their evaluations, instead of supporting tutors and free them from the growing compliance…

The corollary to the above is the response to a question on the level of stress where the average stress on the scale of 1 to 10 (0 = no stress; 10 = completely stressed) is 6.3 – comparable to the level of the whole sample in 2019.

Institutional conditions and support

The next question asked respondents to evaluate the provision of conditions at their institution in 4 areas:

How satisfied are you that your institution provides the conditions for the following?

Clearly, 'supportive management' is important, and in the 2019 survey results it was the fourth highest value shared by staff amongst the ITPs and Wānanga (Sedgwick and Proctor-Thomson 2019, 11). In this survey it is reinforced in the section where respondents were asked to describe 'the optimal working environment' in three words. In one case it was more than three words, but it does encapsulate a shared sentiment that work, and work relations, could be very different and much more conducive to the task at hand – i.e. teaching and learning:

> Have managers and leaders that I trust and respect for their wisdom, knowledge of education and aspiration for their staff and students.

There was a lot of importance attached to leaders and managers, who were 'competent,' 'decent,' 'supportive,' and 'good,' who would genuinely listen to their staff and respect what they had to contribute. As one respondent noted:

> I have concerns with the selection pool of managers and people in charge. If this new way to work is to be effective, it will need new leaders outside the current selection pool dedicated to the cause. Current experiences have proven to be for personal gain which demoralises staff and students, making a mockery of our industry.

The remaining three areas of work – 'effective teaching,' 'meaningful inclusion of Te Reo and tikanga,' and 'engagement with students' – indicate greater levels of satisfaction amongst respondents with their institutions, but previous work in the sector would suggest that these areas of activity were as much due to the initiatives of staff rather than the work of institutions and in spite of the dominant culture.

Recommendation
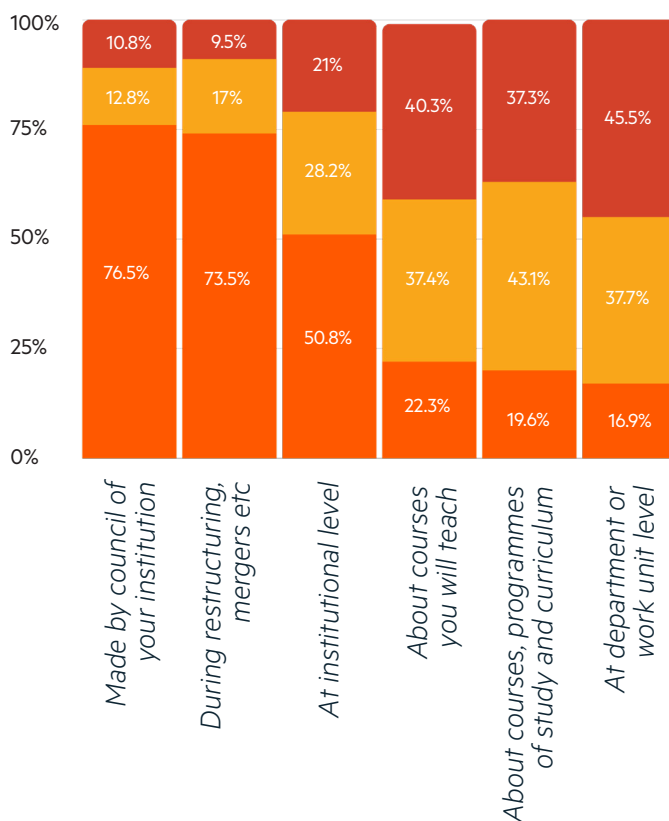### *Empowerment*

NZIST must honour its Charter by:

i. devising a vision statement that explicitly recognises Te Tiriti o Waitangi;

ii. provide practical ways for staff to be empowered in their day-to-day work;

iii. implement a system of induction for managers – current and new – which is designed to ensure they understand and enact the principles outlined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the NZIST Charter, RoVE legislation, and the Tertiary Education Strategy

Workplace democracy

A final area canvassed in this survey tackles an issue which lies at the historic core of staff unease and dissatisfaction and also remains as a benchmark by which many now will judge their attitude and support of current proposed changes. As already noted, embedded scepticism is fuelled by any continuation of the exclusion of staff as knowledgeable participants in the organisation of the new education and training structure. In short, the questions gauge the level of democracy staff feel exists in the current system:

How satisfactory are opportunities in your institution to influence decisions...

■ **No influence**　　■ **Some influence**　　■ **Moderate to strong influence**

The point is made graphically – and starkly – that staff have been excluded from two forums of key decision-makers and from structural decisions that drastically affect their lives. From comments about what the statement "empower staff and students" in the NZIST Charter means to respondents, we can gauge the expectations for the future; clearly, these expectations relate to current leadership and management:[4]

> Students and staff have knowledge and authority to make decisions about their lives.

> NZIST will provide the tools to empower staff and students. Communication between the Board, staff and students will be transparent,

honest and regular so that staff are well informed. Constructive feedback from staff, students and other stakeholders will be listened to and heard.

That both staff and students have equal opportunity and adequate authority to voice their views and to be part of the decision-making process.

That management is supportive to the everyday work of the people who interact with students on a daily basis; that all employees at the institution are aware that they are only there because of the students; that staff, especially tutors are valued and consulted, and properly communicated with.

Actually being heard and opinions considered. Not just meetings so management can say they consulted but took no notice.

Listening and respecting staff & students, getting ideas from those directly impacted/effected by change (i.e. not implementing changes from the top down), including staff and student voices at all levels of decision making.

If you are going to use these words, don't leave them in the charter - LIVE IT, BREATH IT, APPLY IT, and ensure you are EMPOWERING staff by LISTENING, LEARNING, AND WORKING TOGETHER to create a better learning environment for our students who are from our communities!

Staff and students being able to have agency over their learning and working environments and ultimately over their lives. Staff and students subjective and collective wellbeing must be at the heart of every decision that is made, and we must have structures in place to support this mission.

Their suggestions and lived experience are listened to when planning and used to modify delivery so students receive the best possible learning. Staff are considered integral to the organisation.

Having student and staff voices heard by allowing representation from each group on council/decision making levels. Re-jigging the funding so that instead of a 'bums on seats' approach, we are funded to produce quality teaching and learning experiences. Facilitating

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[4] The excess of quotes (20) (which by no means exhausts their frequency) is intentional and illustrates that the sentiment is equally spread throughout the comments.

the ability of tutors to attend training. At present, it is nigh on impossible to get relief staff to enable the freeing up of a tutor for professional development purposes/peer observations etc.

For staff this will mean having freedom to determine how we teach material. It will also mean we will not feel undue pressure to pass students who are not meeting academic requirements. It will also mean that we have a voice that is listened to by management...

Allowing teaching staff to effectively manage, set learning environments, and teach the students in the way that meets the needs of the teacher and the students. How you get there doesn't matter so much as getting the students to become better at learning.

Value staff expertise and student experience. NZIST needs to make space for staff expertise and student experience to contribute to the education we participate in. Managers need to reframe their role as a role of serving the interests of teaching and learning rather than serving the interests of their CE, Council and TEC – no person at those three levels participate in teaching and learning, are part of an education relationship or have current expertise in teaching and learning. Many people at these levels have never been involved in working in areas of teaching and learning.

Having a "voice" and representation all levels of the institution. Being valued... currently Human Resource is just that... power... computers... desks... chairs and the human resource... so not valued at all. Having policy, procedures, processes in place that ensure students and staff are empowered... this needs to be a transparent process that is built on mutual respect, value and facilitates open communication... a safe environment free of coercion.

I will be empowered when management listen (talking but not being heard is not useful). Structure needs clear progression steps for academic staff. Empowered by way of supported study and research. Empowered staff equates to empowered students. Staff are empowered when they are valued practically not merely rhetorically. 'Practically' includes

such things as reasonable workspace governed by needs of the role (not the rules of facilities departments). Students are empowered when they are accommodated in buildings that are suited to the needs of their programmes – thus sending a message that the career path they have selected is a worthwhile one.

We, the people, are the taonga, not the buildings we sit in. It is time the mana of ALL the people, including the students, contribute to a collaborative, current, innovative and thriving culture of vocational education. The top-down management style is archaic. We need more shared decision-making that is not tokenistic. We teach current evidence-based best practice about shared voice, equitable opportunities, and safe spaces for all, but we don't role model it.

It means that they are committed to hearing and valuing the voice of staff and students, and ensuring that the word "consultation" means honouring the feedback given and not just "cherry picking" from feedback what aligns with what their (management) agenda is.

Involvement of academics in decision making can considerably slow change, however 'responsive' models introduced without consultation often results in increased workloads with academics scrambling to fill gaps in the system that could have been foreseen if discussed.

We need to be student and staff centred (these are one and the same thing) not administration or management centred. This is where tertiary education has gone down the wrong path – bring us back! The corporatisation of education has to stop. It is not business it is a social good and a public right.

Real opportunities need to be given to both staff and students to make decisions and provide feedback. Ideas should be proactively sought – there has been a culture of top down directives and I would like to see that changed. Employers have too much weight in decision making – other stakeholders should have equal influence.

The situation improves slightly at the level of the institution, but quite markedly at the level of departments, programmes, curriculum, and courses. It is clear, from comments already quoted, however, that

success or democracy at these levels is entirely due to good leadership and staff commitment. It should also be noted that the 17-22% that feel excluded with regard to 'courses you will teach,' 'courses, programmes of study, and curriculum,' and 'department or work unit level' is quite likely reflected in those who are unsupportive of currently proposed changes.

And finally, several very telling quotes which, if anything, directs one to the scepticism expressed about reform in the New Zealand system:

> *The Charter only mentions staff in this paragraph, I would have liked to see more in the Charter about how NZIST, one of the largest employers in NZ, is intending to care, empower, and manage employees. Empowerment for me is job stability, opportunities to learn and progress, good terms and conditions, adequate resources and funding, and a learner centred environment.*

> *Hei aha te mea nui o te ao, what is the most important thing in the world He tangata, he tangata, he tangata It is people, it is people, it is people.*

> *We need to work on broken relationships that have devalued staff, demoralised and turned knowledgeable staff away from tertiary education. Many staff at our institute have left due to very poor management practices and an ineffective human resource team.*

Optimal working environments

The last question in the survey asked respondents to pick three words which "describe the optimal working environment for you." An examination of the words used quickly revealed four clusters:[5]

1. a set of words generally emphasising the importance of collaboration: *collaborative; co-operation; collegial (collegiality); supportive; supported; team and team work; positive relationships; unity; shared; staff helping each other; group energy; inclusive; face-to-face; caring (caring staff); congenial; appreciation for what people do; supportive of teaching; inclusive and supportive*

2. another cluster centred on management and emphasised the need for good leadership: *good leaders; decent management; supportive management; no hierarchy; flat management; self-management; listened to; shared management; support from above; competent management; free*

of non-serving administrivia; collaboration and real respect from management; respect; respectful; management listens; trusted to do my job well; no micro management; leadership over management*

3. a third cluster emphasised the need for democracy: *democratic; being heard; valued; empowered; listened to; trust; high trust; respected and appreciated; self-reliant with clear reporting pathways; staff voice; student voice; agency; good communication; go to work and feel welcomed; have a voice; transparency*

4. a fourth cluster centred on resources and pay: *well resourced; resources; good pay and conditions; more funding; not to have to do slave labour (hours of unpaid work); fair compensation; compensated; fair evaluation; good money; job security; equipment that works; tools to help us do our jobs effectively; investment; small class sizes; remuneration which reflects qualifications and skills*

This collection of terms by no means exhausts the words used to describe an "optimal working environment," nor do any terms used sit outside a reasonable expectation of a work environment in education.

For those that wrote more than 'three words,' we offer the last say for the work environment they want to have:

> *An environment in which I have room to use my full capability for the development of education.*

> *Managers and leaders that I trust and respect for their wisdom, knowledge of education and aspiration for their staff and students.*

> *[An environment where] student's needs are listened to; [where there is] mutual co-operation and respect at all levels [and] one where lower level staff with ideas for improving processes are listened to and valued.*

Conclusion

This survey report has outlined the variety of perceptions and expectations held by the TEU membership working throughout the vocational education sector regarding recent reforms to the sector and the formation of NZIST. TEU members are ready to take up the challenge of ensuring the reforms lead to a vocational education system that improves the learning and working conditions of students and staff, thereby also improving the learning outcomes of ākonga.

However, the views expressed throughout the survey report also indicate a number of issues which need to be addressed if NZIST is to operate in a way which

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[5] Fifteen of the 312 respondents did not complete this question.

is conducive to the above aims being realised. In particular, this report includes several recommendations pertaining to *co-design, transparency and autonomy, staff and student wellbeing and workloads,* and *staff empowerment* which the TEU considers as factors vital to the provision of quality vocational education. As the inaugural Chief Executive of NZIST, we urge you to consider, prioritise, and implement these recommendations as the reforms continue to come into effect.

References

Sedgwick, Charles, and Sarah B. Proctor-Thomson. 2019. *The State of the Public Tertiary Education Sector Survey, 2018.* Wellington: Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union