

**Name:** Katherine Hall

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# **Degree apprenticeships and the role of Universities**

## Introduction

This submission builds on our response to phase one of the University Advisory Group (UAG) consultation process that encouraged the UAG to use degree-level apprenticeships in New Zealand as a lens through which to consider the role and shape of the university sector.

We have focused on a subset of the questions posed by the UAG where these relate most specifically to the potential role that degree-level apprenticeships may play.

## Background

The tertiary education system in New Zealand operates in a siloed manner with little overlap and connection between academic and vocational learning. There is little understanding of how the strengths of both these 'worlds' can be combined for the benefit of students, employers, iwi and other members of universities' communities.

Degree-level apprenticeships involve people in employment undertaking a full-time programme of study leading to an undergraduate or higher degree that embodies on-job and off-job education and training delivered in tandem.

Degree-level apprenticeships offer a way to provide people in employment with affordable advanced education and training opportunities that accommodate their life, work and social commitments.

They also mean that learners can gain a deep understanding of the underlying principles and mechanisms that govern the relevant discipline area and offer a way for industry to ensure skills gained are relevant and fit for purpose for current workplace need and are accessed in the workplace faster than traditional degree delivery.

The way that teaching, research and knowledge transfer are organised primarily serves the interests of the subset of learners who transition directly from secondary school and internal institutional drivers that tend to prioritise lecture-based on-campus delivery.

These arrangements often mean that people who do not experience a smooth transition to tertiary education or are not well-served by the secondary school system cannot access high-quality university education.

Currently, if people cannot start a degree by the time they reach their early 20s, then their chance of doing so falls by around 80 per cent in their 30s and 96 per cent once they are over the age of 40 years with the burden of this missed opportunity borne most heavily by people drawn from low socioeconomic background among whom Māori and Pacific are overrepresented<sup>i</sup>. Even among current university students, around half are in some form of paid employment, mainly in areas unrelated to their programmes<sup>ii</sup>.

Accordingly, there is a strong case that university education and the internal and external systems that support universities must be retooled to drive much greater levels of work-integrated learning, providing a stronger voice for employers and give more opportunities to groups poorly served by the current arrangements.

### Quality assurance

*This section responds to questions 1-4 of the Phase Two consultation.*

The quality assurance system needs to give more weight to the role that work-integrated learning can play by providing clear pathways for the development and recognition of apprenticeship-type programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

A majority of the programmes delivered by universities lead to specific vocations. Accordingly, the system should allow industry bodies to set the standards that graduates of university programmes must meet through degree-level apprenticeships, requiring universities to design their programmes around these requirements, including options for learners to complete the bulk of their learning ‘on the job’ and expanding the use of capstone or ‘end point’ assessments to give graduates and employers confidence in the quality and relevance of the programmes they have pursued.

The development of apprenticeship standards could be coordinated through industry or professional bodies or integrated into the role of Workforce Development Councils (or equivalent future organisations with a standard-setting role<sup>iii</sup>).

These apprenticeship standards would be a key input into programme approval and quality assurance decisions for university programmes, particularly those with a significant work-integrated element.

### Qualifications

*This section responds to questions 5-6 of the Phase Two consultation.*

The paucity of fully work-integrated undergraduate and postgraduate degree options means that the system is failing to meet the needs of:

- Students who cannot afford campus-based options or for whom the secondary school system has failed to prepare well for university study.
- People who have obtained skills, knowledge and competencies in the workplace or other settings that can be recognised by universities through practices like recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competency.
- Employers who need graduates who are ‘work ready’ (as well as obtaining the broader education that university education offers) or need a more comprehensive range of development opportunities for existing staff.

- Iwi and other communities which are constrained in their ability to realise their people's economic and social aspirations by a system that caters to the needs of non-Māori, non-Pacific peoples.
- Regions that lack access to high-quality university education because of the absence of campus-based options.

We have outlined how the arrangements for approval and quality control of qualifications could be improved in our response to questions 1-4, specifically by providing a more substantial role for employers and leveraging existing national bodies experienced in setting industry-led standards.

### The range of disciplines

*This section responds to questions 7-11 of the Phase Two consultation.*

The market share of universities in around twenty-two predominantly provincial and rural, territorial local authorities is negligible. Among most of these, little or no provision is offered at the degree level or higher<sup>iv</sup>.

Research indicates that the lack of opportunities for degree-level study in regional New Zealand is a significant factor in the internal migration of young people in particular<sup>v</sup> and likely impacts the economic development and resilience of those communities.

Most education and training outside the main centres is delivered in a work-integrated mode, such as the apprenticeship and industry training arranged by the Work-Based Learning subsidiary of Te Pūkenga.

New Zealand universities could readily adapt and apply these models to better meet the needs of students, employers, iwi and other members of universities' communities by offering a wider range of education and training opportunities in regional New Zealand.

### Policy settings

We acknowledge, however, that universities need support across policy, quality assurance, regulatory and funding settings to extend their progress in incorporating work experience and work-simulated learning opportunities into the programmes they deliver<sup>vi</sup>.

This support needs to include:

- a clear policy direction that enables the broader adoption of work-integrated learning, including degree-level apprenticeships,
- strategic communications led by government that promote these options to learners,

- transitional funding to enable universities to retool to develop and employ apprenticeship models of teaching and learning and make full use of the expertise of practitioner-educators and
- flexibility in interpreting and applying the requirement that programmes of advanced learning are taught mainly by people engaged in research<sup>vii</sup>.

### Other sections

We have chosen not to address the remaining questions posed as part of the consultation.

### END NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> MoE. 2023. Education Indicator. Education and Learning Outcomes. Ministry of Education. New Zealand Government

<sup>ii</sup> Pham, L. 2021. Working while studying: Young New Zealand domestic students. Ministry of Education. New Zealand Government.

<sup>iii</sup> MoE. 2024. Redesign of the vocational education and training system: Proposals for public consultation. Ministry of Education. New Zealand Government.

<sup>iv</sup> Mischewski, B. 2020. Understanding vocational education provision in the Canterbury region, a report for Ara Institute of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

<sup>v</sup> Portia, G. 2022. Travel to tertiary: An analysis of how far school leavers travelled for tertiary study. Ministry of Education. New Zealand Government.

<sup>vi</sup> UNZ. 2015. Producing employable graduates – initiatives by New Zealand’s universities. Universities New Zealand

<sup>vii</sup> Education and Training Act 2020, s. 454 (3)(a).