

## Degree apprenticeships and the role of Universities

### Introduction

This submission encourages the University Advisory Group (UAG) to consider how to ensure that the university sector in New Zealand is best placed to take advantage of innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

We consider that the potential for degree-level apprenticeships in New Zealand provides a valuable lens through which the UAG can consider the role and shape of the university sector.

### Background

Degree-level apprenticeships involve people in employment undertaking a full-time programme of study leading to an undergraduate 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.

#### 1. What should be the primary functions of universities for a contemporary world?

The primary functions of universities should include a focus on providing high-quality education that integrates academic learning with practical training, including options for 'on-job' learning.

This dual approach ensures students gain both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, preparing them for employment upon graduation. This dual approach is currently a feature of many aspects of university education but could be made a more explicit feature of the system.

#### 2. What should be the long-term shape of the university sector in New Zealand so that it meets these primary roles?

The shape and organisational form of the university sector should be determined by the outcomes sought from the sector. Using degree-level apprenticeships as a lens suggests that the following outcomes are desirable ones that need to be taken into account in any future design:

- Learners who can obtain highly portable qualifications, combine theoretical and practical learning, enhance employment and career benefits, gain a degree while working, and have lower direct (fees and living costs) and opportunity costs (avoided

debt and lower earnings). This creates new routes into higher-level work, upskills the workforce, and addresses skill shortages.

- Employers who gain greater influence over the education system, addressing concerns about the employability of new graduates<sup>1</sup>, widening their potential talent pool and attracting better-skilled employees, enhancing the performance of employees, promoting innovative thinking in the workforce, upskilling staff and enabling recruitment from the existing workforce, aiding recruitment and filling skills gaps and motivating and retaining existing staff.
- Universities that will gain access new markets for learners, enriching the overall curriculum, building connections and networks with employers, providing networks and opportunities for research, creating a strategic platform to develop innovative programmes, and through the 'creative disruption' of existing models of teaching and learning.
- Society as a whole, in terms of the potential to support social mobility, address skills needs, lift productivity and incomes, and boost regional economies.

3. What are the barriers (excluding fiscal) that limit the universities from operating efficiently and effectively for the benefit of New Zealand?

We encourage the UAG to consider whether the current legislative and regulatory framework under which universities operate is conducive to innovative teaching and learning approaches, such as degree-level apprenticeships.

A salient example is the Education and Training Act requirement that advanced programmes of learning are taught mainly by people engaged in research.

This requirement has been interpreted in a way that limits the ability of some expert practitioners in industry to participate in undergraduate and postgraduate education, even where they may have expert mastery and deep understanding of relevant fields of practice and inquiry, including at the cutting edge of practice.

4. Can the eight universities function better as a holistic system to meet New Zealand's needs? If so, how to establish a more differentiated yet cooperative sector?

Not addressed

5. How research-intensive do New Zealand universities have to be? Do they need to be research intensive in all subjects?

We have noted in our response to question three that the requirements in the Education and Training Act may tend to encourage an undue emphasis on research relative to teaching and learning. It is likely that meaningful expansion of degree-level apprenticeships may require a more flexible approach and accordingly different expectations relating to research and research intensity for some, particularly vocational, subjects.

6. What is the appropriate mix of offerings in teaching, research, and knowledge transfer across the system to meet economic, environmental, and social challenges?

Not addressed.

7. What are the most appropriate approaches to ensure excellence in teaching, research, knowledge transfer and community engagement?

We encourage the UAG to consider whether the current incentives in the system encourage universities to maximise their opportunities to engage with industry and the community and vice versa. We suggest that the UAG consider whether meaningful support for a distinctive portfolio of degree-level apprenticeships across the sector might lend itself to much deeper partnerships with industry and the community, with attendant benefits for research, knowledge transfer and community engagement.

8. How to ensure universities play their role in advancing all segments of New Zealand society without compromising on the goals of excellence?

Universities have a key role to play in providing flexible and responsive pathways to people who may not have had the opportunity to transition directly from secondary school or lack the resources or opportunity to pursue on campus study.

Degree-level apprenticeships offer on-job training at an undergraduate level, and increase opportunities for 'non-traditional' learners to access high-quality university education.

Increasing the number and diversity of people who benefit from tertiary education is essential if we are to meet the human capital demands of the economy and address workforce shortages.

9. What is the appropriate size for the domestic student body in the New Zealand universities?

International experience suggests considerable scope for increasing the number of domestic students by offering opportunities for advanced learning to people in employment.

The most mature market internationally for degree-level apprenticeships is in England. In 2022/23, there were 71,590 enrolments, which accounted for 21 per cent of all apprenticeships in that country<sup>ii</sup>.

While not directly comparable, there were 200,000 enrolments in New Zealand in vocational education and training programmes leading to qualifications at level three or higher in 2022<sup>iii</sup>.

Furthermore, half of all tertiary education students are in paid employment already<sup>iv</sup>, mostly in retail and hospitality roles that are presumably unrelated to their programme of study<sup>v</sup>, and Ministry of Education data indicates that the number of part-time learners was 157,110 in 2022<sup>vi</sup>, up 9.7 per cent from the 143,185 recorded in 2017.

10. How well are universities performing in the role as critics and consciences of society?

Not addressed.

11. How well are the universities complying with the requirements in the Education and Training Act 2020 with regards to the Treaty/Te Tiriti?

Not addressed.

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<sup>i</sup> Rowe, A. D., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2017). Developing graduate employability skills and attributes: Curriculum enhancement through work-integrated learning.

<sup>ii</sup> Sources: 2015/16 to 2017/18 data: Department for Education, Permanent data table 'Subjects and levels - detailed series' from 'Apprenticeships and traineeships', UK Government. Retrieved on 21 February 2024: URL: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/6682fd2a-fe26-4af9-c71e-08dc2e333b3f>

2018/19 to 2022/23 data: Department for Education, Permanent data table, Subjects - Starts, Enrolments by Age, Sex, Ethnicity, LLDD, SSA, Detailed level, STEM' from 'Apprenticeships', UK Government. Retrieved on 21 February 2024: URL: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/704ff79a-0f21-4184-c71d-08dc2e333b3f>"

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/excel\\_doc/0003/193539/1-Participation-in-Vocational-Education-and-Training-programmes-2013-2022.xlsx](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/excel_doc/0003/193539/1-Participation-in-Vocational-Education-and-Training-programmes-2013-2022.xlsx)

<sup>iv</sup> Pham, L. 2021. Working while studying: Young New Zealand domestic students. Ministry of Education. URL: [Working while studying: Young New Zealand domestic students | Education Counts](#)

<sup>v</sup> Ministry of Education. 2021. Briefing Note: Students working while studying. New Zealand Government. URL: [2.-1271442-Students-working-while-studying\\_Redacted.pdf](#) (education.govt.nz)

<sup>vi</sup> Ministry of Education. 2023. Provider-based enrolments (2022). New Zealand Government.