

THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

Summary of Student and Staff feedback on the Draft Whakamana Tangata Student Services Strategy

September 2019

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Consultation process

All staff and students were invited to provide feedback on the Draft Whakamana Tangata Student Services Strategy. Additionally, the following groups/units were specifically prompted through communications, to highlight the opportunity to provide feedback:

- SLT members (noting this includes all DVCs and PVCs)
- Student Consultative Group
- AUSA
- NTM
- AUPISA
- PGSA
- Chinese Students Association
- Students with disabilities (via Equity Office SDS)
- Equity COI
- Student networks (Rainbow & Tuākana)
- Academic Services
- Campus Life
- Libraries and Learning Services
- All faculties and Institutes
- International Office
- Strategic Engagement
- Comms and Marketing
- Office of the Vice Chancellor
- Digital Strategy and Architecture
- Connect
- All individuals involved in the consultation process

The consultation process was promoted through student and staff facing channels including internet, intranet, Facebook, faculty based marketing and comms, faculty and service division based meetings, open meetings, digital signage, and direct emails to service divisions, faculties, student associations, groups and clubs.

Staff and students were asked what they liked about the strategy, if there were any gaps, and if there were any areas that were unclear or did not make sense.

70 submissions were received from staff and 23 from students. Submissions included feedback from individuals and groups. For the staff submissions 72%

(50) were from professional staff, 21% (15) were from academic staff, and 5 (7%) were from groups combining both academic and professional staff (refer figure 1 below).

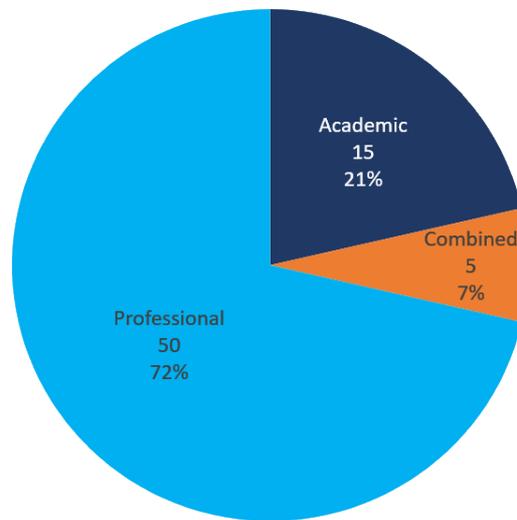


Figure 1: Number of Staff Responses by Respondent Type

The submissions were subsequently themed according to the topic of the feedback. The graph below shows the count of respondents, by theme, who gave feedback. Where feedback from a respondent covered multiple topics, it was included in more than one theme.

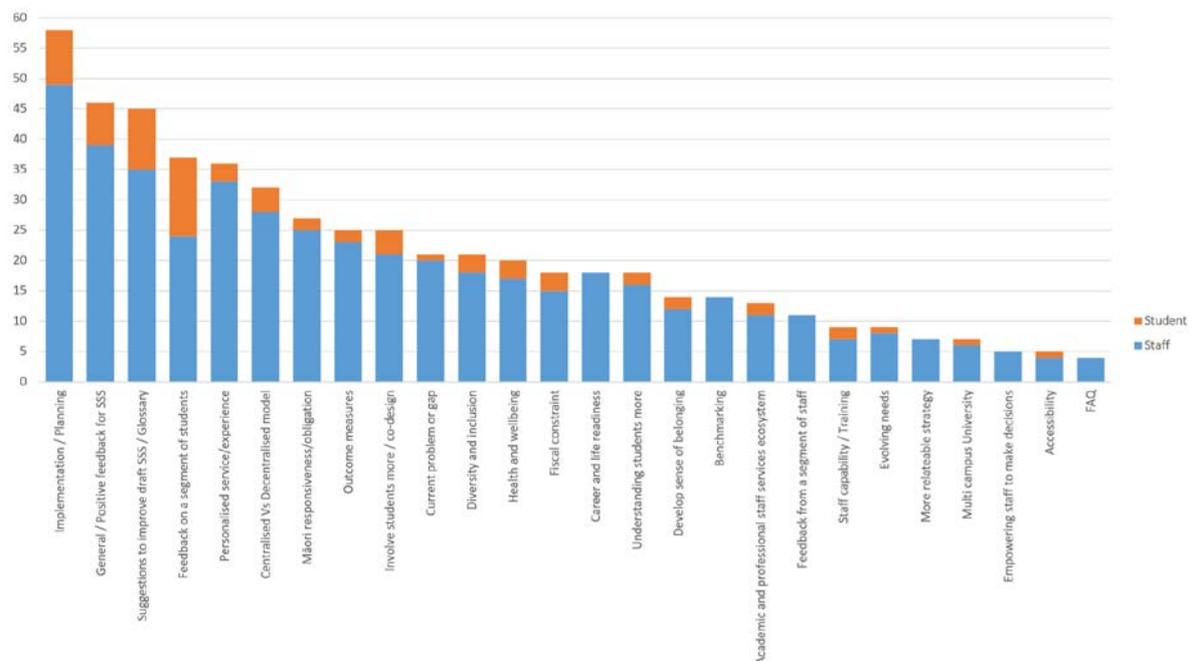


Figure 2: Count of themed response by respondent type (staff or student)

The themes have been useful in facilitating summaries of the feedback.

Note: Not all themes are reported separately where themes, or specific comments, overlapped.

Comments on the feedback

Despite the promotional activity, the number of submissions from students is relatively low. Students reported low awareness of the consultation process, even where they had attended information sessions. The student feedback received has come from both student groups/associations and individuals. A disproportionate number of the individual submissions came from students who identified as neurodiverse with specific learning disabilities.

In general, student feedback tended to relate to immediate and personal needs and how services and the strategy directly impacted on them.

Staff feedback came from both academic and professional staff, and individuals located within faculties and service divisions.

General feedback on the draft strategy

Focus of the strategy

The intent of the strategy and its student centric focus was widely applauded, and the 6 outcome areas were supported. The feedback from staff on the commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and how this has been embedded in the strategy was very positive. Similarly, the recognition of New Zealand as a Pacific Nation and the focus on Pacific students was commended. The focus on enhancing the mana of students and the recognition of the diversity of students was seen very favourably.

Accessibility of the strategy

A number of respondents called for the strategy to be more accessible; “leaner and tighter” with more visuals/graphics. For some, the draft was considered too long, and it was hard to see clarity of purpose. To others the scope was not thought to be clear and it was not clear to some people what the priorities were. It was commented that “if everything is a priority then nothing is”.

Some statements were considered too broad and sweeping and open to interpretation and that more context was needed in places. For example, the draft strategy cites fragmented or siloed services and fiscal challenges but for some respondents there was not sufficient detail provided about these issues. There were suggestions made for improving the consistency of language and terms used, as well as including a more extensive glossary with definitions of terms.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

Amendments to clarify points raised: Throughout the strategy changes have been made to clarify those areas that were not clear on review.

Strategy to be more visual: Pictures and graphics will be added throughout the strategy.

Independent editorial review: An independent editor has been contracted to proof and edit the Strategy.

Glossary: A glossary of terms has been added to provide definitions in the context of the strategy.

Making the strategy more accessible: A Summary of the Strategy and a 'Strategy-on-a-page' will be created following strategy approval.

Relationship to other strategies and initiatives

The relationship of the Whakamana Tangata Student Services Strategy to other University strategies was unclear to some respondents. Also, some were unclear on where student services ended, and teaching and learning began. Associated with this uncertainty was the important role academic staff play in providing support to students.

Other respondents felt the draft strategy did not adequately reflect the work that had already been done or was underway within the University.

Creation and implementation

Some respondents perceived an inadequacy of consultation during the development of the draft strategy and others questioned the relevancy of the Russell Group as a point of comparison. UniForum data was considered a more appropriate benchmark.

Others noted that because the strategy did not incorporate a prioritised action plan or an implementation focus they struggled to provide feedback; i.e. they found it hard to comment without having an outline of what was specifically going to change.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

UniForum data is part of the benchmarking: The G08 universities have been added to the Russell Group comparisons. The aim is to learn from a wide range of examples.

Feedback on an action plan as part of the Strategy: An action plan is not included as part of the Strategy. This is intentional and will be addressed as part of a separate programme of work.

Outcomes measures

A number of respondents would like more detail about how the strategy will be governed and its success measured, including timeframes. It was considered important by many respondents that a diverse group be involved in the development of measures including Māori and Pacific, equity groups, faculties and a range representing the diversity of students. It was also considered important to have a feedback loop so the relevancy of the strategy is maintained and it supports real change in the organisation.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

Clarity on the outcome measures:

- Further work has been done to develop outcome measures that will demonstrate changes and progress against the Strategy.
- The frequency of reporting will be determined during the next steps and planning stage following the Strategy.

Responsiveness to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The focus on the importance of Māori and our place in the Pacific was viewed as a real strength in the strategy. While there were comments this either went too far or not far enough, these comments were the minority. The majority of feedback stressed the need to partner with Māori and also Pacific people in a real way and make it clear how this would work in practice.

Māori words, phrases and references

There was a lot of feedback from respondents on the correct use of, and different interpretations of, Māori words, phrases and references; it was recommended that Te Pou Rahui, Runanga be consulted accordingly.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

Clarity on the Maori words, phrases and references:

- We worked closely with Te Ope Kaikokiri (Kaiārahi Community of Practice) and the Deputy PVC Māori in the development of the strategy and will continue to partner with this group in this space.
- The Runanga reviewed the document and provided feedback.

Building cultural competency

Some respondents noted that cultural competence is important for “in class” experiences as well as student services. Recommendations were made for development and training in order to build the cultural competency of staff and students.

Examples of other suggestions were:

- Include Māori and Pacific content in courses, especially stage 1
- Demonstrate commitment through signage
- Provide spaces which support open community type work
- Consider “cultural competency” requirements for staff and students, in a similar way students engage with Academic Integrity requirements
- Research Māori and Pacific student academic success.

Respondents cautioned against a 'one size fits all' approach and noted the importance of relationships – technology alone is not enough.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

One size fits all approach is not adequate:

This has been addressed in the Strategy updates and is understood and recognized that we need a balance between humanity and technology.

Diversity and inclusion

Fully appreciating the diversity

The importance of recognising the wide and diverse range of students was a common theme in both staff and student submissions. "Students" are not a homogenous group and respondents recommended any consideration of meeting student needs needed to take this diversity into account. One staff member wrote "Catering to the diverse needs of students is not the same as catering to the needs of diverse students". It was reinforced repeatedly by both staff and students that ethnicity is important but should not dominate as the primary lens through which to consider diversity.

Examples of the different dimensions cited include:

- Undergraduate
- Graduate / Post graduate / Doctoral
- Students not on main campus and / or working remotely
- Students with disabilities
- Learning disabilities / neurodiverse
- Socio-economic
- Refugee backgrounds
- International students
- Māori
- Pacific
- New students
- 2nd year undergraduate students
- English as second language
- RoNZ students (Rest of New Zealand)

- First in Family
- Part-time students
- LGBTQI / Rainbow students
- Students on academic standing (at-risk and restricted)
- School leavers
- Mature students
- Transferring students
- Religion / faith / spirituality
- Family status / responsibilities
- Students in accommodation

Even within these dimensions there are important variations. An example given by one staff member was “in the doctoral programmes, over 50% of our candidates are from outside New Zealand, from 101 different countries”. Many specific groups identified as not being included or addressed strongly enough in the strategy, they reported this led to them feeling ignored or not feeling valued.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

Diversity and inclusion:

- Will be addressed through planning and implementation. With the premise of being ‘safe, inclusive and equitable’ for all students.
- Recognising that students are not a homogenous group has been captured in the Strategy and the points around this have been strengthened.

Access to support and services

Respondents indicated it was necessary to consider specific barriers to services, support and infrastructure that exist for different groups. One example given was the University rule that a number of school leaver scholarships are tied to a place in University accommodation. It was recommended University rules like this be reviewed to identify unintended consequences for students and improve support for a diverse and inclusive environment. Several respondents believed reviewing University services, infrastructure, rules and regulations needed to be an ongoing exercise as the student population and their needs continues to evolve.

Staff and student development and increasing awareness of the many facets of diversity was identified as being important in the feedback. It was recommended increased use of data and analytics should inform decision making, supported by breaking down silos of knowledge about students (e.g. held by different service areas) so that a more holistic view can be formed.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

Understanding of barriers to access:

- The intent of the University is to use data to better inform decisions and services for students and staff.
- It has been clarified in the Strategy that there will be a two-prong approach to empower staff to both:
 1. Challenge the rules
 2. Make decisions.

Developing a sense of belonging

Most respondents agreed with the Strategy, that developing a sense of belonging at the University was important.

It was noted that the meaning of this concept of belonging could be different to different groups of students.

Both staff and student respondents suggested that local relationships with academic and professional staff, were likely important for a sense of belonging due to the role faculties and disciplines played as sources of identity for students.

A number of respondents believed this had implications for service delivery channels i.e. providing services to students where students feel they belong and empowering these services to deliver the full suite of requests from students. This advice conflicted with the research referenced in the strategy whereby students indicated a strong preference for routine services to be delivered online in a user-friendly manner but for higher level advisory services to be delivered face to face by a staff member appropriately authorised to resolve issues and

queries. These preferences will need to be further tested to ensure student-centred delivery is implemented.

In addition, it was stated that it was important students see themselves represented in the staff (both academic and professional) at the University. People thought the University needs to employ diverse staff to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

It has been acknowledged that a 'one size fits all' approach is not adequate. This has been clarified and strengthened in the Strategy.

Personalised service/experience

Personalisation vs consistency

One of the core principles of the Whakamana Tangata Student Services Strategy is delivering services that are student centric and personalised. Another focus in the strategy is ensuring a consistent student experience across the organisation.

For many respondents these two concepts appeared to be contradictory. This was exemplified through statements such as "Consistency is not an end in itself. There should be consistency of service, but students have different needs, so providing a 'one size fits all' service may not meet all students' needs."

Face-to-face vs Digital

A common topic raised by respondents was the perceived importance of face-to-face interactions in providing a responsive and personalised service to students. Some respondents claimed that Māori and Pacific students prefer face to face interaction ("as do most people") and they did not believe efforts to reduce face-to-face interactions was student centric. An example comment from a student was "Good service involves being given the right people to talk to / engage with to resolve issues". Some staff also raised equity concerns (economic, technology skill level) with having a technology focus to student services.

Other comments on increased use of technology to deliver services included: ensuring quality of information given to students, not just quantity; and better coordinating communication with students, so they don't receive the same message from multiple channels.

Centralised vs Decentralised model

Several respondents said they believed there was a "strong, unstated but evident, desire within the Strategy to centralise services and transactional matters". This was a cause for concern for some who considered that centralised student services are undesirable and contradicted the idea of personalised service. Respondents made comments such as: "Recognise the value of local communities in the student experience and faculty-based relationships to support students. Localised knowledge creates domain expertise and the potential for quality relationships with staff. Some of the services are highly contextualised in nature."

Numerous examples were given of services that needed to be decentralised in order to provide the quality specialised support students expect.

These included:

- Academic advisors: several respondents believed these need to be embedded in departments in order to understand the complexities and nuances of the programmes they were advising on. Even embedding this service at a faculty level was considered to be a mistake in some cases. E.g.
 - Degrees that are less prescribed (eg BA) require more specific tailored advice
 - Professional programmes, where advisory staff need a good knowledge of the requirements of registration bodies, which are beyond the requirements of the University's regulations.
- Careers advisors: People thought these roles needed to be industry, and therefore discipline, specific
- Faculty specific orientation
- Student mentoring: Some respondents said specific mentoring programmes did not suit a centralised model due to the unique challenges and specific priorities of different faculties

Other respondents noted there needs to be a place for human interaction and relationships with familiar staff.

Another consideration raised by respondents was the physically dispersed nature of the University. A few students said if the strategy is truly student focused then the services should be placed where the students are, as opposed to expecting students to proactively go to where the services are delivered.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

The importance of careful consideration of when to centralise services and when not to has been strengthened in the Strategy. A one size fits all model does not apply and the University should provide choice to students based on their needs. The service delivery model will be developed to support choice and will be considered when it comes to implementation planning.

When to centralise and the use of blended models

Several respondents noted that the balance of centralised / decentralised services needed to be carefully considered. As stated by one staff member "Centralise where it makes sense and things are really transactional and don't centralise when this isn't true. Or hub and spoke it to different degrees". Some people thought it was key to understand which activities were truly transactional and provide no additional value by being decentralised and having localised knowledge.

One staff member said, "a student-centred approach calls for the provision of both face-to-face and online/blended learning initiatives, but above all, the possibility of student choice".

A recurring theme in the feedback was that when centralisation is not desirable, or the best option for students, staff should be empowered to provide the full range of services locally. There was support from some respondents for creating local "one-stop shops that operate as centres of expertise and excellence".

Fiscal constraints

Both staff and students raised questions about the University's ability to deliver on the strategy given fiscal constraints. There was concern raised that the people currently providing services to students would be put under even more pressure. Prioritisation of student services was recommended to ensure they did not become lost against the backdrop of large expenditure in other areas. Related to this was the suggestion of recognising that when "higher touch" services are required, efficiencies and cost should not be primary drivers. For example some students require more resources and support in order to succeed.

Other feedback

Improving student communication and engagement with the student voice

A number of submissions from students and staff indicated the desire for a better student services governance model and improved communications channels with students. It was expressed by respondents there needs to be deliberate effort to achieve earlier, broader, and more frequent quality engagement with students in major initiatives and projects, and this involvement needed to represent the diversity of students.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

It is acknowledged student communication and engagement is important. New initiatives are in progress to assist and support this, E.g.: engagement forums being established by Academic Services and Campus Life.

Health and wellbeing

It was recommended by some respondents that the growing demand for health and wellbeing services for students be reflected throughout the strategy. It was also suggested that as well as looking at providing support services to help with health and wellbeing, the University looks at which aspects of its operation cause stress and anxiety for students. When providing health and wellbeing services to students some respondents noted it was important to recognise different approaches for different groups.

Career and life readiness

Staff appreciated the wider perspective on student success included in the draft strategy. It was considered important by a number of respondents to put as much priority on success after graduation as transitioning into University, and having a focus on transferable skills, not just academic achievement. This included working with students to develop self-awareness (an understanding of their personality, skills, interests and strengths) and clarifying career aspirations. Some feedback suggested mandatory classes to prepare students

to learn basic work-life skills as well as mandatory internships organised by each Faculty.

Some students said that it was good to hear from a range of people, not just the high achievers, about what they're doing and how they got there.

Perceived problems or gaps in current student services

A number of respondents reinforced earlier feedback on perceived problems or gaps in current student services that had informed the draft strategy, commenting upon:

- Inconsistent advice given to students
- Staff capacity and capability to be able to deliver a high quality experience
- Need for a consistent framework for training staff providing services to students (it was suggested the framework should include building staff capability around equity groups and students in distress but not necessarily at risk)
- Better integrated systems supporting student services
- Simplified academic rules and regulations
- Resource constraints and the sheer volume of students causing problems re providing service
- Too many touchpoints for students

Involvement in implementation / planning

Many of the comments and feedback received did not relate to the strategy itself, but rather to factors related to implementation. There were many questions about the implications of the strategy and recommendations for how to deliver on it. The details of these recommendations are not included in this summary of the feedback on the strategy, but they will be considered during the implementation planning phase to follow.

There was a strong desire expressed by both students and staff for students to be involved in implementation and implementation planning. A number of respondents felt the engagement should represent the diversity of students as outlined earlier in this document.

It was suggested new student networks/committees/groups should be established to provide input to, and feedback on, decisions. Existing student bodies should also be utilised. Some people believed governance of the implementation of the strategy should have equal representation from Service Divisions, Faculties and Students.

Some respondents suggested it would be easier to get student feedback on concrete proposals, rather than an overarching strategy. To get better engagement with students, some respondents recommended providing more clarity on specific reforms/initiatives which will likely result from the strategy.

Updates to the strategy following feedback

The intent is to involve students; the following has been added to "Our eight design principles":

We must partner with students to address their consistent feedback raised in surveys and workshops and take a co-design approach for changes and improvements aimed at providing them with a better experience.



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