1. Summary of key information

Equity Office Review
'Creating an inclusive teaching and learning environment for students with impairments'

What did we want to find out?
The review project was carried out by the Equity Office in 2009 to identify student and staff perceptions of current practices and structures that support inclusive teaching and learning for students with impairments within The University of Auckland.

Why this project is important?
Approximately one in five New Zealanders lives with a disability and there has been a significant increase in the number of students with impairments participating in tertiary education. Impairments include: head injury, medical conditions, mental health conditions, mobility/physical, speech, learning (e.g. dyslexia), Deaf, hearing, blind, vision.

International and national initiatives highlight the importance of providing an inclusive teaching and learning environment in educational settings. New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). The implementation of this includes a responsibility to revise legislation including the Education Amendment Act. Other national initiatives have included the provision of guidelines and supplementary funding to assist tertiary education institutions support students with impairments.

Government expectations about the kind of support tertiary education institutions should offer students with impairments are set out in Kia Ōrite: Achieving Equity, The New Zealand Code of Practice for an Inclusive Education Environment for Students with Impairments, published by The Tertiary Education Council (TEC) and the Ministry of Education in 2004). In 2008 this document was linked to equity funding.

What is an inclusive teaching and learning environment?
An inclusive teaching and learning environment is one which identifies and removes barriers in all areas of campus life. A general principle is that in making proactive system-wide changes, all students and staff can benefit and fewer students with impairments will need to make individual requests for support.

What did we find out through the review process?
Generally the University is doing well in working towards creating an inclusive teaching and learning environment. There were many commendations in the review report citing examples of positive initiatives. These include:
  – The development of relevant policies;
  – Provision of general and specialist support services for students with impairments;
  – Willingness of staff respondents to enhance their knowledge and expertise to develop a more inclusive teaching and learning environment for students with impairments;
  – Staff endeavors to balance the need for students with impairments to access support services, with respect for their privacy.

Some gaps/areas for improvement were also identified. These include:
  – Currently some students are not aware that they may qualify for support and/or of the range of support services available to them;
  – While staff are generally supportive when they are aware of specific student's requirements, the implementation of further inclusive practices

Given that many types of impairment are not visible, the importance of disclosure was a key issue raised by staff and students who want to ensure that students with impairments access the support they need. However, the findings highlight the complexities of disclosure and identified reasons why some students are reluctant to disclose. These include:

- Not wanting to be seen as a burden;
- Not wanting to be singled out (stigmatised);
- Concern about having to continually disclose impairments (e.g. with each lecturer/tutor as well as support services;
- Having assumptions made about what support will be required (e.g. stereotypical attitudes);
- Complexity related to multiple impairments and/or changing conditions (e.g. with medical conditions).

A critical difference towards students with impairments being successful and continuing with their studies was the support and encouragement provided by staff.

Next steps
A project plan has been developed to implement the review recommendations. Discussions are currently being held with key staff to ensure specific objectives and timeframes are agreed.

Specific areas to be addressed include:
- Ensuring that as many students as possible are aware of the range of support services that are available and how these can be accessed;
- Enhancing the provision of general and specialist support structures for students with impairments;
- Provision of further information and training/awareness raising opportunities to enable staff to further support inclusive teaching and learning practices;
- Developing specific initiatives to support Maori and Pacific students with impairments;
- Developing guidelines for staff and students regarding disclosure of information on impairments and disabilities.

To access further information
The review report has been separated for ease, into four sections: Commendations and Recommendations; Review Report; Student and staff interview results and Staff survey results. These PDF's can be downloaded from the Equity Office website from Friday 19th March 2010, or by contacting Disability Services.

The Equity Office appreciates the contributions of the many students and staff to the review.

Hei konā mai

Trudie McNaughton,
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity