



TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION
Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa

**Submission of the Tertiary Education Union (TEU) Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa
(Waiāriki Institute of Technology and Bay of Plenty Polytechnic branches)**

On the proposal to merge

Bay of Plenty Polytechnic and Waiāriki Institute of Technology

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Increasing collaboration between Bay of Plenty Polytechnic and Waiāriki Institute of Technology (single stage business case)

Introduction

The Tertiary Education Union (TEU) Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa (Waiāriki Institute of Technology and Bay of Plenty Polytechnic branches) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the consultation about the proposed merger of Bay of Plenty Polytechnic and Waiāriki Institute of Technology.

The TEU represents academic staff at both institutions, and academic/allied staff across the sector – in universities, institutes of technology/polytechnics, wānanga, REAP and private training providers. Members have a strong professional commitment to their respective institutions, to their distinctive cultures and to the quality of teaching, learning and research each offers. They also have many years of knowledge and experience of each institution and how they operate. This submission is informed by their advice and their first-hand knowledge of the implications of the proposed merger between the two institutions.

Recommendations

1. Work with local iwi and hapū across the region to develop a plan for mutual engagement throughout the merger process. This process needs to include a means of iwi/hapū voicing dissenting views and taking a leadership role in any future merger discussions.
2. Foster a culture of inclusiveness and transparency for the merger discussions by distributing the full business plan and evidence of consultation with iwi/hapū to unions, staff, students and community stakeholders.¹
3. Provide time for unions, staff, students and community stakeholders to analyse the full business plan and raise questions or issues with the chief executives of each institution.
4. Agree an internal communication plan with staff and students that ensures those directly affected by the proposed merger have clear information and are able to raise issues, ideas or concerns throughout the process.

¹ Note that a full business plan was provided to unions and stakeholders at the outset of the consultation on the proposed merger between Aoraki Polytechnic and CPIT.

The proposed merger in context

Before responding to the executive summary of the business case in detail, it is important to put this proposed merger into context within the tertiary education sector. Whilst we recognise that this particular merger does not have a strong financial imperative, the whole ITP sector has suffered to a greater or lesser degree from a reduction in funding over the past few years. Added to this, many regions have struggled to maintain sustainable businesses, services and industries for their local communities and our broader society under government policy decisions that prioritise urban development and major industries.

Reducing funding in the ITP sector has pushed several of our regional polytechnics to the brink of financial collapse, not because of poor decision-making or inefficient use of resources, but because they have been forced to do more with less for a sustained period of time. Any 'fat' that might have existed in this sector is long gone; our regional polytechnics are now down to the bone. It is to the credit of both Waiāriki Institute of Technology and Bay of Plenty Polytechnic that they have managed to maintain financial reserves in this environment.

The consultation process so far

The executive summary of the business case for the merger provides an overview of the direction the two institutions believe is most appropriate for their regions.² However without the full business case being made available to staff and other interested groups, it is difficult to make a full and informed response to this stage of the consultation. TEU members at both institutions have also noted that presenting the fourth option as a fait accompli undermines the authenticity of the consultation, and leaves many wondering to what extent their contributions will actually be considered.

An additional concern with the consultation process is how iwi and hapū within the region have been involved in discussions so far. We recognise that each institution's council has iwi and/or Māori representatives or advisors, however other than the open letter to staff, students, iwi and stakeholders that formally announced the beginning of consultation, and an initial hui with iwi, we are not aware of formal processes undertaken by the institutions to work with iwi/hapū. If this has not occurred, it would be very concerning, especially given the work undertaken and priorities identified in both the Bay of Plenty Tertiary Intentions Strategy 2014-19, consultation undertaken with Māori stakeholders to inform the TIS and that a merger would require the new entity to work with several different iwi.³

² The region covered by the two institutions includes Tauranga city, the town of Rotorua, Western Bay of Plenty district, Kawerau district, Rotorua district, Ōpotiki district, Whakatāne district and Taupo district. The region also includes several different iwi.

³ Hudson, M and Diamond, C. July 2014. *Māori Economic Development Strategy: He Mauri Ohooho – Report to the Bay of Plenty Tertiary Intentions Plan*.
<http://www.bayofconnections.com/downloads/Appendix%209.%20Maori%20Consultation%20report%20for%20BOP%20TIS.pdf.pdf>

Starting discussions on a merger without ensuring local iwi and hapū are involved as full partners at the outset undermines relationships forged over many years and risks the Tiriti partnership relationship at each institution.

If the merger goes ahead, what are the core values or principles that must be retained?

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and biculturalism provides the framework

The implementation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi into the daily practices and decisions of a newly merged institution should be central to the formation of the entity. A framework should be developed that shows how the institution will form and sustain relationships with iwi/hapū and how social, economic, cultural and environmental priorities for iwi/hapū/whānau Māori will be integrated into programme planning and services.

The learner in context

For staff at both institutions, tertiary education provision which acknowledges the importance of the learner in context is crucial. TEU members have noted the importance of keeping programmes or extending provision so that a broad range of options are available for students in their local communities. TEU members also noted that similar programmes at each institution reflect the specific requirements of their local communities and businesses, even if broad course content is similar. There is concern about how decisions will be made where each current institution offers the same course or programme, and a strong view that retaining very localised delivery is crucial if the merger progresses.

Many students at the two institutions value face-to-face learning and interactions, so online or blended learning options must complement kanohi kitea learning, not replace it. This is especially important for students who are new to formal study or who need additional support (for example, international students with English as a second language). Therefore, whilst TEU members support extending provision to areas not currently provided for, this must not simply be as on-line programmes, but must recognise the importance and value of site-based learning.

There is also a strong socio-economic rationale for ensuring local provision, with many students in the catchment areas of Waiāriki Institute of Technology and Bay of Plenty Polytechnic unable to travel long distances for their study. For example, many students attending both institutions are young parents so local provision to meet their needs is vital.

Support for learners is crucial to their success. Pastoral care and other student support services are an important part of creating an environment that encourages student success. TEU members at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic noted for example the benefits of very high-quality individualised support given to automotive students at their institution. Waiāriki Institute of Technology TEU members also talked about the importance of the institution's bicultural framework for supporting students and their whānau.

Relationships with communities

Both institutions work with their local businesses, service providers and industries to ensure the education and training opportunities they provide fit well with their development plans.

The *Bay of Plenty Tertiary Intentions Strategy 2014-19* emphasised the importance of these connections, both across the region, but also closer to home, where each institution has detailed knowledge of what is needed for the local community. Both institutions have developed programmes in response to identified need at a local level; in some instances these programmes are unique to the institution or central to their course offerings. For example, Waiāriki Institute of Technology has programmes and modes of delivery that are designed for and work well for its local communities, being bicultural in their approach, infused with tikanga, and reflecting a student population that is 60% Maori.

TEU members' views on the proposed merger

TEU members attended face-to-face meetings and participated in a short online survey to share their thoughts about the proposed merger.

Possible advantages or opportunities

TEU members were able to identify a number of advantages or opportunities that a merger of the two institutions might bring. Themes that emerged included:

- a. reducing competition for students and resources across the region;
- b. expanded course opportunities for students and the possibility of better stair-casing to further qualifications (such as the University of Waikato);
- c. extending provision to areas currently not well served (isolated communities, smaller communities) and thus growing student enrolments;
- d. enhanced teaching, learning and support systems by drawing on a broader range of expertise;
- e. benefits for staff in terms of interacting with others in their profession, field, discipline or subject and being able to draw on the knowledge and expertise of others; and
- f. a strengthened strategic position for a new institution within the sector – the new entity may be better able to contribute to regional and national development goals for tertiary education and vocational education and training.

Possible disadvantages and risks

TEU members noted the difficulty of responding to the proposed merger because limited information has been provided. Responses reflected this, and themes that emerged included:

- a. concerns about how iwi and hapū have been engaged in the process so far, and what this signals for moving ahead as a truly bicultural organisation;
- b. how two distinctly different institutional cultures will/can be integrated. Waiāriki Institute of Technology members had particular concerns about how the strong bicultural framework of their institution might be preserved and enhanced;
- c. how a new entity would distribute reserves accumulated by each institution. For example, Waiāriki Institute of Technology has been saving for a much-needed building programme – would this money be retained for that campus?

- d. staff workload – as with any proposed merger, members have raised concerns about the sheer volume of work required to work through such a process. How has this been factored into the costings for the proposed merger? A number of academic staff at both institutions are currently involved in work for the Targeted Review of Qualifications (TROQ) so the additional work that a merger might require is of concern;
- e. employment security and how changes to roles will be managed. TEU members were particularly concerned about changes that could take place in support services and administration and where courses were duplicated. Feedback indicated that members felt a merger of this magnitude could only be achieved with at least the current number of administrative and support staff, and probably would require additional appointments, at least through a transition phase. Where courses were duplicated (as we noted above) they nonetheless have distinct features reflecting the needs of the local community, and this would need to be recognised.

Other issues

Consideration of all the options

TEU members remain confused about how the decision to merge being the best option was reached. The fourth option presented in the executive summary for the business case provides a rationale for why this option was chosen, but little is said about the other possibilities. TEU members are of the view that a crucial part of the consultation process has been missed (where options are presented and discussed), leaving many with the sense that the whole consultation process is simply an exercise in tokenism.

The timeframe for the proposed merger

The executive summary notes that if the merger goes ahead, it will be given effect from 1st January 2016, although at this time there will be little or no change in delivery for the two merging institutions. The executive summary further notes that a period of transition of 2-3 years would see full implementation of the merger.

TEU members have commented that while the time period identified for the transition phase is probably realistic, of concern is the speed at which the pre-merger phase is being undertaken. The number of unanswered questions that TEU members have is probably equal to that which students, other union members, other staff, community groups, iwi/hapū and businesses have. Given that neither institution is facing financial challenges, it is unclear to us why this important investigative phase needs to be so rushed.

Cost savings

Should the merger go ahead, it is likely that there will be changes to some systems, processes and programmes. However the executive summary draws the somewhat erroneous conclusion that there may be cost-savings as a result of this (page 4). We think this is unlikely, as a more complex organisation will require greater support, even if systems and processes are streamlined. We think it would be more realistic to expect costs to remain much the same or perhaps increase. It is heartening to note that the intention is to redirect any savings into improving provision across the region.

Communication/visibility of chief executives

Should the proposed merger go ahead, TEU members have emphasised the importance of having visible and approachable senior management, particularly chief executives. This stage of the consultation process has already raised some concerns about communication, with members in satellite campuses being particularly concerned about feeling left out of the process. TEU members at Waiāriki Institute of Technology also noted that it is not enough for a chief executive to have an 'open door' policy; rather they need to be seen in all parts of the institution, making time to get to know and talk with staff. Members at this institution felt that this would help staff to feel engaged with the process, whatever the outcome, and would go some way to alleviating feelings of disillusionment that have arisen as a result of recent restructurings and redundancies.

A sense that communication so far has not been as transparent as it could be, and that the consultation is merely 'window dressing' has been repeatedly raised by TEU members at both institutions. This is magnified by conflicting messages such as what has been shared with Bay of Plenty Polytechnic members - that merger discussions are in an 'investigative' stage - when clearly a number of important decisions have already been made behind closed doors (such as the decision to merge in the first instance).

An associated issue sitting in the realm of communication has also been noted by members – some have reported a degree of 'fishing' by some managers to assess whether staff would be prepared to work in another location or a changed role. At this stage of the merger discussions, such comments are unhelpful and unsettling for staff.

TEI collaborative hub

Questions arose during the TEU's consultation with members about the tertiary education collaborative hub proposed for Tauranga, specifically how this would be dealt with if the merger proceeds.

How decisions regarding qualifications and services will be made

Overall TEU members are concerned about how decisions regarding mix of qualifications and location of programmes will be made. Also of concern is decision-making regarding the range of services that will be provided, especially as a priority identified in the executive summary of the business plan was expansion of provision for the region.

Possible impacts on post-graduate programmes offered by the two institutions

Some concerns have been raised about how post-graduate programmes currently offered by the ITPs would fare in a new entity, particularly given the closer relationship sought with the University of Waikato.

Location of main campus and senior management

Wherever the main campus for the new entity is located, an important principle is that strong and visible senior management leadership be retained at each main site. Such an approach would ensure important local relationships could be maintained, connections with staff and students to decision-making would be easier, and deeper understanding of local priorities would be maintained.

Employment conditions and collective agreements

We note that if the merger goes ahead, the two institutions have indicated that staff will be transferred on existing terms and conditions, but that as the new institution continues “...its CEO and senior management team will ensure that the structures and roles are developed and aligned to achieve these plans and commitments.”⁴

All TEU members at both institutions are covered by collective agreements that have been negotiated in good faith with the current employers. The TEU will be seeking to ensure that the current collective agreements are recognised by the new entity by including both institutions as employer parties to both collective agreements. This will mean that our members’ terms and conditions will continue past any proposed merger date . This will also enable the parties to discuss the long-term approach for the collective agreements, providing stability for members during a transitional period.

Further, the TEU is seeking a commitment from both institutions for the TEU to be involved in processes and/or committees about all matters relating to the employment of staff in the proposed new entity, as the representative of all TEU members and the union party for both TEU Waiāriki Institute of Technology and TEU Bay of Plenty Polytechnic collective agreements. We would want to see this commitment formally agreed and the process to occur after the council makes its decision whether or not to proceed to the next phase of the merger consultation.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly TEU members have some concerns about the proposed merger; in part these concerns arise from incomplete information being available at this stage of the consultation process, and some inconsistencies in communication processes. TEU members think these issues can be easily and effectively resolved, so that other more complex and challenging issues can be considered by all those who have an interest in the future of Bay of Plenty Polytechnic and Waiāriki Institute of Technology.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this stage of the proposed merger discussions.

⁴ BoPP/Waiāriki councils. July 2015 “Open letter to staff, students, iwi and stakeholders” page 2.