Blind Faith:
Deconstructing Unitec 2015-2017

Report to the Tertiary Education Union

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2008-2018 Unitec's executive leadership team drove a series of increasingly rigorous structural changes that affected every aspect of the institution. The period 2014 onwards was the most intense, with a strong focus on teaching for workplace employability.

To investigate the restructuring, the TEU commissioned a research project, which consisted of 21 confidential, in-depth interviews with current and former staff members, and drew on analysis of relevant documents publicly available at Unitec.

"It's been a total failure, nothing good came out of it."

The executive leadership team made changes that led to redundancies and the replacement of many staff with casual, part-time appointments from industry, and centralisation of administration services. The executive leadership team reconstructed faculties and departments into "networks" and "pathways." It abolished programme committees, then demanded new programmes and curriculum, with a focus on generic rather than discipline-specific content. In particular, it mounted "The Common Semester," an online course for first-year students, introduced in 2014. As part of Unitec programmes, it strongly supported Mind Lab, which focuses on "21st century pedagogy," digital and online learning, with funding from Next Generation.

In general, the executive leadership team strongly promoted online delivery and learning. It created open-plan areas, reduced workspace and teaching space, resulting in hot-desking and competition for office areas and classrooms. It contracted out student services, including enrolment, to an overseas company, Concentrix. It sold off a large part of the Mt. Albert campus to Government.

The executive leadershp team largely disestablished units focused on Māori and Pasifika, incorporating services into "mainstream" structures, referred to by some as "whitestreaming."

In widespread action across Unitec, staff objected strongly, vocally and in writing, to most of the restructuring. They record that the executive leadership team ignored their commentaries.

Staff report that the restructuring affected students badly. They note that students faced significant difficulties in enrolment. The Common Semester was a road-block, since online delivery for vulnerable first-year students was greatly daunting, especially as many lack computer resources at home. Staff record that students' lives outside Unitec were often very challenged.

Overwhelmingly, staff participants consider that the executive leadership team had a committed and pre-determined agenda for sweeping change that was impervious to any resistance or critical commentary: "It was a done deal before it happened." Participants concluded that the executive leadership team was determined to embed a structure of projected future learning in a whirlwind of change. They commented that while the executive leadership team failed to provide any convincing rationale for its initiative, it adhered rigidly to its concentration on new models of delivery.

"There's a naïve, besotted, uncritical belief in new models of teaching and learning – a naïve adoption of 'future focus.'"

Beyond drawing attention to the "public relations" language of the executive leadership team documents and presentations, staff especially objected that the leadership team resolutely refused to listen to staff responses. Different units and individuals made lengthy and detailed analyses of executive leadership team proposals, which were consistently ignored. At the same time, staff warned of the dangers in many executive leadership team moves, including new enrolment practices, The Common Semester, the loss of programme committees. Such predictions were accurate.

In 2016, NZQA demoted Unitec from Category 1 to Category 2.

This project concludes that the executive leadership team redefined the concept and purpose of the institution, narrowly constraining its function to training for business and employment. It is the case that a polytechnic is by practice oriented to occupation and vocational preparation. However, the staff in the study emphasised their own commitment to providing an education for their students, which they contrasted with the executive leadership team's wholesale conversion of the institution to a limited focus on work-training in every significant aspect of its restructuring.

As a result of the restructuring, Unitec lost experienced staff, institutional knowledge, students, space to work in and reputation. The changes caused real hardship to staff and students. The executive leadershp team's actions, corporate and hierarchical, consisted of institutional coercion. It was un-academic, anti-democratic, and a denial of age-old tertiary education culture.

The project concludes that the redefinition of Unitec created great institutional damage; that it proceeded by means of coercion, fear and dishonesty; and that the leadership was highly destructive.

The project argues that the reforms are a serious warning to the tertiary sector, including other tertiary education institutions, Government, the TEC. The impact of the reforms also pose a strong warning against adopting neoliberal practices in such institutions.

However, now is also an opportunity to rebuild the Institution in an enlightened and progressive way, constructing a democratic and collegial culture of high trust; honesty; a focus on the public interest; respect for staff and students; a progressive tertiary culture; and service. Reform should create a new progressive power-sharing institution.

Several participants in the study pointed out that by the end of 2017, an entirely new executive leadership team had taken over, potentially indicating more enlightened and receptive leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a representative **task-force** to reinvent Unitec, charged with:

- Reviewing **major restructuring** of the last decade
- **Reinstating Māori and Pasifika** presence and provision
- Convening a **public meeting** to review the restructuring
- Reviewing the nature and function of **Academic Board**
- Considering return of **previous structures** and re-hiring experienced **former staff**
- Getting extra **funding** to recreate the institution
- Reviewing **Council** membership and communication
- Proposing an elected **Composite Board** made up of the executive leadership team, elected staff and students to provide institution leadership

Processes across the institution

- Create institutional structures that **share power** among staff and the executive leadership team in place of management's burgeoning assumpti**on of power**
- Recognise the **potential and actual contribution of all staff in institutional structures**
- Insist on **elected representatives** throughout institutional structures
- Set up accountable and transparent procedures for **staff and management appointments**
- Establish elected **rotating chairs** to lead departments, with a coordinating role
- Strengthen **local units and departments**, to counter the centralising of the restructuring

Preface

It is important to note in the following report that numbers of participants distinguished carefully between
> (1) the main body of stringent changes and restructuring 2015-2016, and
> (2) an improvement and change in conditions and processes in 2017

To these participants, 2017 marked a partial retreat from the drastic changes of the previous two years. The participants noted a difference between the executive leadership team that initially drove the restructuring and the team in office by 2017. By the end of 2017, all the executive leadership team involved in the period 2015-16 had left Unitec, including Chief Executive Rick Ede.

In early July 2018 the Minister of Education, Chris Hipkins, began the process to appoint a commissioner to Unitec to replace the council. Unitec was facing $50 million in losses for 2018 and 2019.

Acknowledgements

THE PROJECT

Carrington Technical Institute, founded in 1976, became Carrington Polytechnic in 1987, then Unitec Institute of Technology in 1994. Its website claims "more than 20,000 students studying over 150 work-oriented programmes." According to Education Counts, 2016 enrolments were almost 14,500, while equivalent full-time students (EFTS) totalled 8,770.

In recent years, Unitec staff and outside observers identified widespread dissatisfaction and unease at the institution's restructuring, 2015-2017. In response, the TEU commissioned the current report on developments in the institution. The report draws on relevant documents publicly available in Unitec and confidential interviews with over 20 members of the TEU. It also draws on submissions from 150 Unitec staff to the TEU's second State of the Sector survey. The research offered an opportunity to investigate a significant development in the ITP sector, which tends to get less critical scrutiny than the university sector and the compulsory education sector.

The research investigates the changes made during the restructuring, the processes adopted, and the effects across the institution. A major part of the study consisted of 21 confidential, in-depth, two-hour interviews with current and previous staff (13 women and 6 men, including two follow-up interviews). Participants' time at Unitec varied from a few years to many years. All had enough experience of Unitec and/or other tertiary employment to take into account alternatives to the restructuring of 2015-17.

In agreement with the New Zealand Ethics Committee, the project adopted a firm ethics protocol, with strict controls over anonymity, confidentiality and procedure, to ensure that participants were in no way vulnerable to management disciplining. To announce the study, the TEU sent out blanket invitations to its members to take part, after which contact was made and maintained through phones and post. In protective moves, contact between project and staff avoided Unitec communication systems, used pseudonyms for participants throughout, excluded email connection, and conducted interviews in secure locations off-campus, using note-taking in place of voice recording. Participants did not know who other participants were. Note-takers signed confidentiality agreements. Data were secured behind passwords and encryption. While the project adopted strong measures to protect participants, the project itself was conducted quite openly through public announcements.

In the interviews, participants both reported and analysed the restructuring, giving their own commentary on developments. The reporting below therefore reflects both information-giving and evaluation from their experiences at Unitec, since the commentary was a product of the experience and reflection of very engaged staff, mostly with long track-records in Unitec and/or other tertiary education. The project was an opportunity for staff to speak up, especially in a context in which they felt they had been systematically ignored. The text below therefore quotes participants' words in the midst of general statements and conclusions.

The report also draws on qualitative responses to a 2016 survey commissioned by the TEU and official reports at Unitec.

The method included analysis of themes and key ideas in interviews and documents, interpreted through a framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; 2010).

OVERVIEW: CHANGES OF SUBSTANCE

Major changes included:

- **Staff**: reducing and removing large numbers of administrative and academic staff; replacing resident staff with casual and itinerant appointments
- **Institution units and structure**: reconstituting faculties and departments into "networks" and "pathways"
- **Programmes – structure and functioning:** reconstructing academic programmes and curriculum; abolishing programme committees
- **Working conditions**: reducing and reconfiguring staff space, including storage, resources and hot-desking
- **Instruction**: redirecting teaching, especially to promote online delivery
- **Student services**: centralising and outsourcing student provision, advising and enrolment, e.g., to Concentrix
- **Land**: reducing and selling real estate, specifically a large percentage of the Mt Albert campus

Potential consequences

It can be predicted that moves such as the above would create follow-on effects on the functioning of the institution. The following is a set of hypotheses, an exercise in answering an obvious question: What would be the likely outcomes of the restructuring? It is the question that many staff also posed before the restructuring took place.

Terminating staff: The loss of staff through redundancy, casualising and outsourcing would mean loss of teachers, creating gaps that have to be filled in some way. The redundancies of academic staff could cause a loss of scholarly and professional capacity that would need to be recreated at speed. Replacement staff would need to be prepared and equipped to take over from previous incumbents.

The loss of administrative staff (e.g. allied staff advisors) could mean a loss of local, specialised, programme-specific knowledge and immediate pressure to replace people and structures with workable systems. Institutional knowledge would be at risk.

Reconstructing units such as faculties and departments: Realigning disciplinary focus would have implications for the people and the subject-matter of faculties and departments (as previously existed) and for the new "pathways," and "networks" that were to be imposed. There could be effects on working conditions and work relations, on curriculum, on programme structure and decisions. The new units that house staff would need resources for their reconstructing. Meanwhile, staff would be living with impermanence, uncertainty, and pressure – the constant need to reconstruct in haste.

Reconstructing programmes: the demand to construct new programmes in place of previously existing programmes could create distinct pressures. "The Common Semester" (TCS), for instance, would require creation of a curriculum in its own right, while posing issues of whether or to what extent previous discipline-specific programmes might be incorporated into the new TCS. The process of universalising programmes would pose an immediate challenge to make new programmes relevant and useful to students, while creating constraints and demands similar to those entailed in reconstructing units.

Altering working conditions: changing the staff conditions of work, e.g., through reducing space and storage, along with requiring hot-desking, could mean a loss of numerous items, such as academic and teaching resources, access to professional

practice, privacy, confidentiality, research space and opportunity, pastoral care.

Prioritising online teaching: the move to substantially move away from face-to-face teaching implies distancing of students and less direct contact than previously experienced, thereby posing teaching and learning challenges for staff and students.

Outsourcing services: contracting out services such as enrolment could suggest a loss of expertise (institutional knowledge) and an urgent need to train new staff while establishing suitable substitute procedures.

The report that follows unpacks each of these changes and using staff comments illustrates the extent of the impact this had on student, teaching and learning, and communites.

DECLINE AND FALL: THIRTY YEARS OF CHANGE

"[I]in line with the prevailing global agenda," say Strauss and Hunter (2017), in the introduction to a study on NZ polytechnics, "Aotearoa New Zealand has turned away from traditional concepts of higher education toward a doctrine of education for economic benefit in a continuing ideological climate of individual responsibility, privatisation, competition and performance-based accountability."

Tertiary education has been widely reconstituted around the world in the last three to four decades. While many studies focusing on tertiary education deal with universities, they have strong implications for other institutions in the sector, including polytechnics, which exhibit many of the characteristics described here.

While a polytechnic is by practice oriented to occupation and vocational preparation, the way it is described in the Education Act, Section 162(4)(b)(ii), is closely similar to the description for universities:

> a polytechnic is characterised by a wide diversity of continuing education, including vocational training, that contributes to the maintenance, advancement, and dissemination of knowledge and expertise and promotes community learning, and by research, particularly applied

and technological research, that aids development.

The research into tertiary education includes an in-depth project that traces a significant shift in power dynamics. In an extensive study of the stories that adult literacy educators tell about student success, Sandlin and Clark (2009) look at the influence of dominant political ideologies on education over a period of almost 30 years. They identify a shift from focusing on a social "safety net" to one of "individual responsibility," in which learners have to basically fend for themselves. Their thesis is important for tracing the influence of political narratives across a society, including the process of normalising or mainstreaming neoliberalism, which has driven corporate influences throughout New Zealand since the 1980s and into tertiary institutions.

On the New Zealand scene, Tarling and Malcolm (2007) outline an extensive current and historical analysis of corporatising change in the management of universities over recent decades. Their detailed description reveals one of three distinctive trends in NZ tertiary institutions in recent years: control and intervention. They show how government has consistently sought to shape and direct the institutions through legislation and other means. They cite a study of NZ institutions by Don Savage

of CAUT (Canadian Association of University Teachers), describing a "war" in which Treasury and the Ministry of Education were "the enemies of universities, obsessed with the desire to control and micro-manage" (p. 180).

In this endeavour, NZ's five-yearly Tertiary Education Strategies reinforce and promote policies of governments of each era. The wording of the TES 2014-2019 captures the utilitarian outlook of Government of the time. Under Economic Outcomes, the first of its three outcomes, the document says:

> This strategy focuses in particular on the economic benefits that result from tertiary education, and therefore on employment, higher incomes and better access to skilled employees for business as critical outcomes of tertiary education. (p. 7)

Under "Priority One: Delivering skills for industry", it specifies the connection between tertiary education and industry:

> The priority is to ensure that the skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs. (p. 10a)

and charts a role for industry to intervene in education:

> We also need more explicit co-operation between industry and TEOs about the types of skills that are most needed, and how best to develop them. TEOs need to create opportunities for industry involvement in *planning and delivering education*, (p. 10b) (emphasis added)

It is worth noting that during the National-led Government of 2008-2017, the Minister of Tertiary Education restructured both polytechnic and university councils, reducing membership (e.g., of staff and students) and increasing the ratio of ministerial appointments to other members. In this period, Zepke (2012) questions the state of academic freedom in higher education as a result of institutional changes.

In 2016, the Minister of Tertiary Education made a significant and bold claim for the merits of a concept sometimes labelled "learning for earning" ("Income premiums for study options revealed," Steven Joyce, 30 March). Joyce identified specific subjects:

> The highest earning qualifications include health-related fields, engineering and information technology. This underlines the importance of encouraging more students to study science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects at school and in tertiary education.

The strategy worked, according to the *NZ Herald* ("Students switch to health," 22 Jan 2018, A7). "Student numbers are soaring in health, engineering and information technology (IT)," reports Simon Collins. He identifies the National government goal of "delivering skills for industry," and goes on to chart the role of the TEC:

> Through investment plans negotiated with each tertiary institution, the Tertiary Education Commission has gradually steered more funding into "STEM" subjects.

Meanwhile, in the original 2016 media release, Minister Joyce undermined the arts:

> At the diploma level, there were a few subject areas where earnings were lower than the national median. Those subject choices include performing arts where graduates earn 20 per cent less than the median wage and visual arts and crafts which has earnings five per cent below the median.

At the same time, the Minister put the benefit squarely in terms of individual benefit:

> The release of this information will help students and their families to make smart decisions about what to study which will set them up for a prosperous future. . . .this information will help [students] to see where their passion may lead them in terms of future income.

In the current period, there is also significant tightening of management control within the tertiary institutions, as Strauss and Hunter (2017) demonstrate in their study of polytechnics. In an

intensive qualitative project, Strauss and Hunter recognise growing distrust between teaching staff and management, disturbing changes to institutional policy, and a range of threats to staff, teaching and students.

The second trend is a bracketing of **skills and the economy,** again evidenced strongly in the *Tertiary Education Strategies*, by which successive governments claim the economy as a major purpose for tertiary education. In this connection, Roberts (2005) holds that liberal arts and humanities are being reduced to skills:

> Qualities of character, modes of conduct and scholarly dispositions are reduced to sets of skills. Thus, we find reference to 'skills' for active citizenship, aesthetic 'skills', multicultural and ethics 'skills', interpersonal and intrapersonal 'skills' and humanities 'skills' (p. 46)

"It is clear, however," concludes Roberts, "that 'knowledge' has been conceived largely in instrumentalist terms as a means for national economic advancement" (p. 50).

The third trend is a focus on tertiary education to serve the needs of **business and industry.** The Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 notes that Government wants "providers and industry training organisations to be more responsive to the demands of both students and industry" (p. 15).

In concrete terms, the above trends are part of decisive state restructuring of the tertiary sector. In successive moves, government has introduced student fees; promoted "massification" (greatly increasing student numbers); enforced competition for funding institutions, including strong support for PTEs, thereby making enrolments unstable across the sector; insisted on heavy management demands for accountability; and forcefully pressed institutions to seek international students. (As a case in point, Unitec's income from international students rose from $21,826,000 in 2012 to $34,111,000 in 2016.)

Outcomes of these moves include aggressive reform of institutions; pervasive requirements for reporting and accountability in research, work load and

student numbers; and heavy demands on untried services such as accommodating international students. All of these developments have posed distinct problems for tertiary institutions. It is not surprising that looking broadly at tertiary education, Jesson (2010) singles out precarious work in the sector and argues to reclaim the historical concept of the university as a community of scholars and students.

Taking into account social context and influence, Shore (2008) brings an anthropological frame to government intervention and variable funding of the university. He argues that the institution has been redefined as "a transnational business corporation operating in a competitive 'global knowledge economy'" (p. 1). Shore opens his address to an Auckland audience with a summary of changes that characterise present-day universities:

> In pursuit of that neoliberal vision, successive governments have introduced new methods of funding and new systems of management designed to make universities more economical, accountable, flexible and more responsive both to industry and to government itself. We have also witnessed the rise of a new regime of measurement and monitoring, 'quality assurance', 'performance management' and 'international benchmarking' that is quite unprecedented in history. (p 1)

He concludes by noting "the extraordinary degree of government intervention in university research," with "a new trend towards increasing discipline and surveillance of universities." He points to concepts of managerialism and the rise of 'audit culture' (p 9) in analysing universities.

Three features characterise these developments in tertiary education. First, they are nearly all subject to the pervasive and far-reaching influence of current market ideology or neoliberalism (Chomsky, 1999; Harvey, 2005; McChesney, 1999; Nobbs, 2014). Hence, Roberts (2005) comments on "the further marketisation of tertiary education, with a continuing emphasis on competition, student choice, systems of governance and accountability modelled on the corporate world" (p. 43). Second, they involve

widespread change in tertiary institutions, with a narrowing orientation to business interests. And third, they have implications for the role of tertiary institutions in national life.

UNITEC: SITE OF CONSTANT RESTRUCTURING

Unitec has gone through a series of restructurings over the last two decades. In the early 2000s, CE John Webster reconstituted faculty structures, based on his analysis of "silos" that he considered were a hindrance to Unitec performance. There followed a "fiscally-driven" revision and downsizing in 2005, resulting in redundancies. In 2007, Unitec's executive leadership team conducted a searching review of institution functioning under the title, "Fast Forward." Key objectives included:

- Alignment with Government's TES and STEP and the TEC Investment Guidance
- Alignment with market community need and potential growth areas
- The development of strong discipline areas

In the midst of extensive restructuring in 2009, the academic staff representative on Council detailed growing concerns around the executive leadership team's procedures. The staff representative reported that staff felt "they were not being listened to by management," and she listed a wide range of staff responses, resulting in a mixed picture:

- The last two years have been a series of amateur and destructive changes during a rudderless leadership.
- First hand acknowledgement of senior management responding to and listening to concerns . . . allowing time for staff to address concerns and implementation issues.
- Extreme lengths . . . taken to ensure good change process management
- Fake consultation provided but our views not taken into account.
- staff . . . disrespected, mistrusted

- input and ideas . . . not valued
- being treated as we are the enemy.
- been treated with disdain, my research and teaching denigrated repeatedly.
- staff being stacked into offices
- The lack of concern or care for staff is staggering
- Working conditions dramatically deteriorating

Unitec staff comments from TEU's State of the Sector project looked back over the last decade:

> During a faculty review in 2011, the faculty asked for feedback but refused to implement any of the recommendations in the feedback from lecturers. The trend is the same ever since. The organisation conducted surveys but nothing substantial changed. Just little lip service about improving staff moral. (TEU State of the Sector Survey 2016, Qu 11)

Most notably, in Nov 2013, the executive leadership team disestablished 50 positions in Design and Visual Arts, replacing them with part-time appointments from the field, in a tilt towards training for industry. Part of the plan was for Department management staff to generate $20-30,000 per year from industry.

The sweeping change in 2013 became a forerunner to yet more radical changes 2015 onwards, which the executive leadership team labelled the "Transformation."

Statement of intent

In *Sector Alignment: Proposal for Change,* 2015, circulated to institution staff, Unitec's executive leadership team outlined the scope of the drastic revision envisaged.

Sector Alignment declared that the institution suffered from silos, with rigid and inflexible systems. To counter the claimed situation, it called for advances as an education provider and business that would include reconceptualising education delivery, improving relevance and value for employers and industry, and promoting contemporary, flexible learning, drawing on online teaching. The proposal envisaged a networked structure with seamless information flows to external communities and stakeholders; new, strong stakeholder partnerships; future-focused and viable academic construction (p. 21).

Bidding to be "a world leader in contemporary applied learning," Chief Executive Rick Ede announced "a change from traditional, hierarchical and structure-dominated models to a collaborative, customer-driven, networked model." As a sign of things to come, Ede warned that the proposals were *"not up for debate,"* then pointedly claimed they were confidential to staff and their representatives. He expected staff to exercise "a duty of care to take all *reasonable steps to prevent the disclosure of [the] document"* (emphasis added) (pp. 4-5).

After listing the prospect of flexible learning spaces, core support services with digital support and "a blended learning-working environment," the proposal moved to a crisis scenario. It included falling enrolment and income, claims of outdated educational delivery, real estate with seismic risks, inappropriate infrastructure and procedures. The document suggested that technology was disrupting traditional approaches to education, while three sectors (governments, students and employers) looked for preparation for the world of work and employability (pp. 6-7).

In response, the document proposed "technology-enabled learning and teaching" that would align with industry. The move would require new spaces through a change model in three stages, *Relook, Rethink, Redesign.* In the discourse adopted, this "continuous improvement cycle" would involve new flexible programme frameworks, contemporary teaching and learning models, co-located and embedded services and processes, and changes to relations with industry, employers and stakeholders. Such developments were part of a "transformation strategy" (pp. 7-8), in which a central challenge was to address 21ˢᵗ century learners in the interests of employers and other stakeholders (p. 11).

The language of a summary table in *Sector Alignment* illustrates the orientation to workforce stakeholders:

> Facilitate an outside-in approach to what Unitec does to enhance the value of outcomes for key stakeholders including learners
>
> Enable wise stewardship of resources including targeted investment in innovation that meets stakeholder needs
>
> Authentic customer-centricity will be evidenced in job descriptions and in our behaviour (p. 38)

In its orientation to industry, executive leadership team statements seem to be in line with information in the Unitec Environmental Scan 2016, which reports government outlook within a frame of "target investment" quoted above:

> 3) Industry: The government wants to see the tertiary sector work more closely with industry (broadly defined). It wants to see industry-led research, industry involvement in the development of qualifications, and a better match between graduate skills and industry needs (p. 12)

Executive leadership team agenda and effects

Participants had blunt comments to make of the apparent agenda of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). In doing so, they distinguished between the ELT on the one hand and the category of general managers and Heads of Pathways and Practice on the other.

Two key inter-related questions arise regarding management's agenda in the restructuring.

- What was the management frame for the restructuring?
- What was the process of restructuring?

In participants' discussions, the frame or outlook often became evident in the process of restructuring, just as the process adopted consistently highlighted the executive leadership team's viewpoint.

On the executive leadership team frame

"...change from root to fruit"

"they just threw everything out"

There was strong consensus across participants that the restructuring was a pre-determined, executive leadership team-driven agenda, of sweeping proportions. Staff noted the drastic and all-encompassing decisions imposed, the distorting PR language used to sell the changes, and the executive leadership team's refusal to take considered staff responses into account.

A response to the 2016 Sector Survey noted:

It feels like decisions are made then we are told what they are, no questions. Many of the decisions and attitudes are also highly unrealistic re education. It seems like the people in charge actually do not know what

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM PRESENTATION

A sample of the executive leadership team's approach to promoting its agenda is seen in a power-point presentation on health education. Early on it introduces the theme of preparation for work:

Are we preparing a health and social practice workforce able to meet the challenges of today and into the future?

followed by a challenge that might also be read as an imminent threat:

if not . . . . are we all ready and willing to face, and make, the changes needed?

It moves on to a crisis scenario:

Current graduates . . . are not equipped to enter the complex, interdisciplinary and technology-rich world of practice

leading to a critique of education for the health sector:

- Lack flexibility – highly prescribed and regulated programmes
- Owned and protected scopes of practice
- Produce highly skilled uni-discipline practitioners

with pointed remarks that would seem to comment negatively on staff:

- Often distanced from realities of practice
- Staff often out of touch

It headlines, "Radical change needed," and asks:

but do we care enough to be courageous about making the radical changes needed to ensure a workforce fit-for-purpose into the future.

education means, how it works, or what we do. In consistently articulate analyses during interviews, staff gave scathing reviews of the executive leadership team's role. "There's a naïve, besotted, uncritical belief in new models of teaching and learning," said one participant, "a naïve adoption of 'future focus'." Staff felt the changes threw the institution into total disarray: "a radical change into No-Man's Land." Participants drew sharp attention to the decision to discard previous structures and practices, which individuals referred to as "clearing the decks," "slash and burn," and "wilful self-destruction." There was a pervasive disbelief in how misguided the executive leadership team had become over a period of about eight years: "the monkeys running the zoo," said one participant.

Another 2016 Sector Survey response reinforces the critique:

> Change is being imposed, effectively no opportunity to influence change such as property strategy, move to more on line teaching, reduction in teaching hrs per class but expectation to teach more hrs per week.

Also of concern was the momentum of restructuring, which participants describe as a relentless onslaught – "a bulldozer," "sledge-hammer" approach, and "a forced march with a policy of shooting stragglers." Participants recall constantly opening their computers to find yet more announcements of new initiatives while in the midst of other changes in different sectors, each move posing debatable decisions.

"It's been a total failure," said one participant, "nothing good came out of it." In keeping with other participants' views, the staff member commented that a lot of administrative staff had had "a terrible time" coping with the demands of the changes and that the academics at Unitec were treated badly – "people didn't matter." This analysis explored the executive leadership team's attitude to staff in terms that echoed through the interviews: "The mind-set from the top [is that] academic staff are obstructive and don't want change."

Staff suggested various reasons for the executive leadership team's actions, not all mutually-exclusive. Responses from participants and from the 2016 Sector Survey reveal both the complexities of the situation and staff willingness to reflect seriously on the institution. Some participants thought the changes might be "fiscally-driven," namely that the institution was running into debt and the executive leadership team had decided to take radical action to maintain a balanced budget. A different view was that it was simply top-down management control, which one participant called "regime change." A third thought it was "a new way to get ahead of every other institution."

A voice in favour of the restructuring spoke of the problem of "fluctuating students," for which the institution needed a temporary workforce. This view held that staff needed to buy in to the restructuring, in order to serve the interests of the external, industry customer: "Unitec had to transform." A few other participants suggested there was need for some reform.

In the same vein, an entry in the 2016 Sector Survey offered a measured response:

> We are in the middle of a period of change which I see as potentially beneficial to students depending on the quality of the implementation.

A second entry grapples with impending threats:

> Management has been terrible. Latest restructuring and new middle managers may well have their hands tied by budgetary constraints, they admit they had no idea how bad things are so here's hoping they have some success. Funding will get worse as enrolments drop due to both economic changes and difficulties with new enrolment system. The emperor and his new clothes would be a good metaphor to apply to Senior leadership team.

A further, commonly stated interpretation of motivation, which one person linked to Ayn Rand, was that the executive leadership team agenda was driven by a neoliberal framework, possibly with a

view to eventually privatising the institution. Some thought it was a move to get out of the business of education and into education as business. Others, going further, believed there was a strong wish for Unitec to get out of education altogether and into real estate. Several interpreted that there was insistent (National) government pressure behind the changes, and speculated that the then Minister of Tertiary Education, Steven Joyce, was closely involved.

In any case, in participants' views, the executive leadership team provided no convincing explanation or rationale for the restructuring, in the flow of documents and presentations. It used terms like "21st century learning," "future proofing education," "real-world learning," and in a reference to selling Unitec real estate, "unshackling the property anchor." But that language to the participants was wholly inadequate for the wholesale re-making of the institution. Drawing on their own academic backgrounds and preparation, they looked for a substantial argument to defend the radical changes taking place, and found it lacking.

The executive leadership team had no idea what they were doing.

On the executive leadership team process

> There was no response except that it was our fault for not coping with the change – they just put in stress and change workshops

Participants found the process of the restructuring appalling. They describe the discourse of executive leadership team documents and presentations as opaque and misleading. Management language was variously described as "spin," "platitudinous, sloppy, incoherent," "patronising," "condescending." "It was not collegial," said one participant, "we felt spoken *to,* not *with* . . . they were speaking at us." "Documents were written by PR," said one participant. "They must have passed it by Deloitte," it was "business speak," said others. Perhaps more gently, one described the discourse as "coming from LaLa land, almost propaganda."

In a rather perverse turn regarding executive

leadership team discourse, one participant spoke of "the rhetoric of '*complex conversations*.'" But, the tutor commented, "we *don't* talk. They say we should have 'conversations,' but we *don't*."

Staff comment that various undertakings by the executive leadership team were worthless, that they didn't follow up on urgent issues that needed attention, that senior management "increased the teaching and took away the resources."

Above all, however, they state that the executive leadership team did not listen to staff, despite inviting commentary. "It was the fakest consultation I've ever been involved with," said a participant in deliberately chosen words. Staff and separate units (departments) went to great lengths to respond to executive leadership team initiatives, presenting critical analyses that drew on their institutional knowledge, their academic and teaching careers. They report that the executive leadership team systematically ignored staff responses, reinforcing participants' conclusion that the restructuring was rigorously pre-determined. "It was "a done deal" before it happened, said one participant. "[Staff] contributed," said one observer, "and didn't feel that their answers were heard." Another summed it up as,

> "No input was allowed."

There was no consultation. It all came from above. Similarly, the 2016 Sector Survey reported deep dissatisfaction with process:

> Unitec is going through a period of rapid and radical restructure - it is a neoliberal take-over. We did provide extensive, intelligent and thoughtful feedback to their proposal which they ignored 98% of. Changes are not based on evidence or experience, but fiscal.

> Basically, the voice of staff is roundly ignored. There is only the opportunity to influence anything where the executive leadership team is the least interested - namely in the areas of direct hands-on teaching and learning

> "consulting' has come to have a new meaning

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM RESPONSE TO STAFF

Management documents indicate the nature of responses to staff submissions

> Apart from [a minor change,] there are no other material changes to what was outlined in the Proposal for Change. (Student Services Blueprint, 2015, p. 7)

Responding to 103 submissions of staff feedback, the Blueprint displays a pattern of dismissing arguments. For instance, staff had commented on the CE's statement that the major decision was "not up for debate." The document gives an instant defence, citing Council support:

> Unitec's strategy has been signalled for some time through initiatives such as Kickstart, and is supported by Council. . . . Strategy and vision were therefore not up for consultation (p. 9).

On the speed of transformation:

> First, analysis of global trends makes it clear that disruptions are already with us and are increasing their impact (p. 9)

On criticism that leadership had not managed change well, the text gives staff a lesson on the proper perspective to adopt:

> Change is difficult, and it is important not to equate disruption and stress with poor management (p. 9).

On the danger of losing face-to-face contact with students through outsourcing:

> At no point has this been, nor will it be, part of what is proposed at any phase (p. 10).

> - we are asked to attend meetings, we are asked to give opinions & feedback then we are totally ignored

The executive leadership team characterised staff resistance as an inability to deal with change, and accordingly scheduled change-management workshops to address the issue.

In the same vein, participants report that the executive leadership team launched an orchestrated campaign to convince staff of the agenda, with at best, token feedback to staff. Participants talked of a "management roadshow," to sell their programme. When challenged in meetings to defend the decisions announced, an Executive Dean replied, "Don't worry we've got it all mapped," when clearly this was not the case. Similarly, staff were told, "We've incorporated your ideas," when the evidence pointed to the opposite.

As part of this process, staff reported a high level of bullying. Staff report arbitrary denying of certain teaching roles. Meetings with the executive leadership team readily became hostile, senior management dismissed staff concerns out of hand, or refused to engage. "They shut down any ideas," said a participant in a commonly-heard refrain. "They were incredibly dismissive of any staff input." Participants report that their workspace swiftly became toxic, with low levels of trust: "you weren't sure where decisions were made," "people didn't matter," "you didn't know who you could trust."

The lack of trust is evident in responses to the 2016 Sector Survey:

> I wasn't included in the decision making process when the programme I am teaching was disestablished. The new programme was written by a manager, not a lecturer. I again wasn't included,

> New Head of Dept initiated staff briefings in a lecture theatre which replaced the collaborative discussion and decision making model used previously. Staff felt the lack of voice, so a forum was set up so

CONFRONTATION AT WAITAKERE

Numbers of participants reported a highly confrontational meeting with an Executive Dean and management employees at the Waitakere campus in August 2016. The Dean announced that there had been a business decision to close a major building (Building 500), resulting in squeezing staff into smaller space and creating hot-desking.

Over the course of a heated hour, staff pushed the Dean to describe the decision process, raised objections about hot-desking, challenged the assertion that the shrinking had worked on the Mt Albert campus, and asked for evidence that hot-desking and online learning resulted in good educational outcomes. The Dean said, "We've contacted other places [institutions]," but offered no academic evidence. In reply, a staff member reported searching for relevant academic research evidence and finding it lacking.

In an indication of the tone of the meeting, another member objected, "You're calling us colleagues, but you're not treating us as colleagues. We don't recognise you as colleagues."

The next day the Dean announced a decision to pause the process.

staff could at any time write their thoughts on current issues and share ideas on them. After some time it was shown to the Head who was not even a member of this forum, so in fact the voice staff thought they were having was an unheeded one. Staff voice on multiple occasions has indicated a particular direction of action in contrast to the direction the executive leadership team subsequently decided to implement.

And in one challenging procedure, staff reported being invited on the Friday of a week to respond to executive leadership team documents intended for a Council meeting scheduled for the following Monday.

It was particularly galling to staff that predictions they made to the executive leadership team about the outcomes of restructuring did indeed happen. They warned that outsourcing the enrolment system would result in a drop in numbers, that online delivery of *The Common Semester* would create deep problems for first-year students, that removing the programme committees would make course delivery problematic.

All these warnings were accurate:
- enrolment tanked
- TCS has been dropped
- some programme committees have returned

under different names

A response to the 2016 Sector Survey summed up a range of disturbing factors:

> Massive restructures. fake consultations with almost universal staff opposition to changes ignored by Senior leadership. Constant change based on whim not research the forced introduction of teaching approaches that create lower success and retention. Replacement of academics with managers with no tertiary experience

In the face of constant reversals, however, staff noted no acknowledgment or self-criticism from the executive leadership team: "if you embark on a programme that does not succeed, it's not the staff that needs to apologise, it's the leadership that needs to apologise. We never heard one apology from senior leaders."

As participants describe, the Unitec senior leadership team embarked on a wholesale project of redefining the institution. The management team reinforced previous developments, putting into effect an escalating series of overlapping and interrelated moves involving drastic changes to a range of areas. These included: changing the institution as a whole; its infrastructure; the concept and nature of faculties, departments and programmes; staff deployment and status; teaching and learning; enrolment; and student services. The executive leadership team adopted a whole new discourse in the process, as commented on throughout this report. The realignment represented a dramatic revisioning of the institution's orientation, in particular emphasising the perceived needs of business and industry, prioritising preparation for work and employability – "education for business," as one participant put it. The term, "employment," resounded like a leitmotif throughout the management documents.

There was fairly strong consensus of opinion amongst participants in response to the restructuring. To some small extent, however, staff did differ on whether there was need for reform. While most thought it was unnecessary, a few saw areas where change could be useful, as stated most strongly in the following comment: "Unitec *had* to transform for the external, industry, customer point of view. . . . We need to *always* transform."

According to staff, the period was marked by an unbending executive leadership team agenda, an inflexible approach to process, and notably unresponsive consultation, as reported in the 2016 Sector Survey cited above:

> Our feedback was dismissed, the merger of departments went ahead despite opposition, and even our feedback regarding the name of the new department was ignored. We have been forced to line up with the new pathways approach, even though it doesn't fit our students.

Interviewees report severe constraints as a result on their working conditions, referring to the redefining of structures, staff, content and space.

Redefining structures

Networks, Pathways and Practice
In the cumulative cycle of change that enveloped staff at this time, management replaced traditional faculties and departments with eight **Networks** aligned with "major industry (employment) sectors" of the economy (*Sector Alignment,* p. 24). Networks included Health and Community, Environmental and Animal Science, Engineering, Construction and Infrastructure, Business and Enterprise, High Technology.

Within the Networks, existing departments were restructured into different combinations known as **Pathways and Practice**. (The list of Pathways consists of Architecture, Bridging Education, Building Construction and Services, Business Practice, Community Development, Computer Science, Creative Industries, Engineering, Environmental and Animal Sciences, Health Care, Language Studies, Postgraduate, Social Practice, Vehicle Systems and Material.)

The forced move to constructing Networks and Pathways meant intensified work overload for staff. In the midst of contending with other major changes detailed below, staff were obliged to promote integration, work relations and academic alignments in the new units.

Participants, however, were unconvinced of the move to Networks and Pathways ("a completely unnecessary part of the restructure" as one staff member put it), and one of many developments that lacked a rationale: "The ideas behind Pathways were never explored." Meanwhile, the principle of working across disciplines was in any case already part of regular practice, according to staff: "We were collaborating across half a dozen departments and not listened to."

Some participants held that both management and

staff found it difficult to define clearly what Pathways and Networks stood for. One participant recalled the Chief Executive advising staff to avoid a term like "Pathway" outside Unitec and just use "department."

Programme Committees
Equally disturbing to participants was a decision to abolish **programme committees**. To staff, these committees were a necessary medium for maintaining programmes. They were the forum for planning, structuring and revising programmes in the light of previous years' experience, monitoring progress, moderating assessment. "It was a nice opportunity for staff to reflect on their courses," said one participant. "Committees are more than the stamping of grades."

But in the transition away from programme committees, the insights of group meetings of engaged tutors were lost, while the relevant decision-making processes then devolved to a single Head of Pathway and Practice, the replacement for Head of Department. Successive participants lamented the loss of programme committees, pointing out that in some cases, equivalent substitutes were quietly reintroduced under different titles, either informally by teaching staff or by managers, in order to bridge the difficulties created by dropping the previous structure. Given the valued role of programme committees, the decision to abolish was mystifying to staff: "I don't know why they did this," was a participant's comment echoed by others.

Redefining staff

The above moves describe institutional impacts on staff. They were accompanied by direct steps to reassign staff in sweeping ways, including abrupt changes to contract employment, consisting of:

- shedding permanent staff - voluntary and involuntary redundancies
- contracting in: hiring "industry" employees on casual contracts
- centralising administrative staff
- contracting out: centralising and outsourcing enrolment

Shedding permanent staff: "the great redundancy"

In participants' accounts, the restructuring created large numbers of redundancies, which senior leadership team documents addressed by listing a mixture of attrition, firing and possible rehiring through new openings. In the process, the Chief Executive circulated all staff with invitations to take voluntary severance.

Some participants describe a drive to move out older staff, presumed to be resistant to change and/or technology, pushing them, in one participant's words, to "go into semi-retirement and grow carrots." "There was no willingness to acknowledge what staff already knew," said another. According to staff, the senior leadership team saw staff as "mired in the past," so they put aside tutors with twenty years' experience, replacing them with younger people.

(While many staff left, some were replaced with new continuing appointments and in many cases, with casual, temporary appointees from industry. Summary figures for the period 2015-2017 therefore don't necessarily reflect the actual number of "permanent" staff who departed.)

The outcome was predictably lopsided. Some units ignored the invitation to leave. Others opted in some numbers to go, creating large unequal gaps in teaching resources. Unitec thereby lost experienced teachers, teaching ability, academic and professional scholarship, connections with industry and institutional knowledge. "Those [departing] people can't be replaced by like people," commented one participant. "The institutional knowledge they took out was enormous." It became common knowledge around the institution, for example, that Nursing could no longer provide valid practicums, partly because it had lost professionals with contacts in the health sector.

As part of the context of redundancies, participants referred to the senior leadership team's concept of "the Living Job," which seemed to be a way of forcing staff to live part-time or portfolio lives – i.e. holding several jobs at once.

The team at the Pacific Centre was reduced from 12 to 3, by one account, which meant the unit couldn't deliver. In some cases, contracts were only renewed for three months, and staff were invited to reapply

for their own positions, in an atmosphere of fear and panic.

"They sacked some great people and put in change people," said one of the participants, signalling a major shift in employment practice for teaching staff.

Contracting in: Hiring "industry" employees on casual contracts
In place of current staff, the senior leadership team brought in employees from industry, as part of an overall policy to employ casual staff on a large scale. In this step, the senior leadership team was consistent with government's wish for the tertiary sector to work closely with industry, as reported in the *Environmental Scan 2016* and signalled in successive Tertiary Education Strategies. One of the three core roles for polytechnics in the 2010-15 Strategy, for instance, is "to deliver vocational education that provides skills for employment" pp.17-18.

Staff commented on the hiring of casuals. "Teaching is very different from doing," said one participant. "They had industry teachers who couldn't fulfil their side of the bargain. . . . Industry teachers don't know how to teach," claimed this staff member.

Another participant expanded on the topic:

> Students get poorer teaching. Industry teachers just walk out, don't even mark exams because they're too busy at work. One industry teacher, on the first day of course, was seconded by their work to work elsewhere, so couldn't teach, just didn't show up. There is no control over the industry teachers. They're a law unto themselves. Students have lost assignments, wrong grades are given.

Participants' continuing analysis of industry teachers drew pointed contrast with professional, academic education:

> We should give students skills to solve unknown problems, a teaching philosophy of the whole field, not just operational skills, which is what the industry teachers do. Industry teachers focus on the immediate

needs, the shortcuts.
The commentary went on to label the utilitarian nature of industry teaching:

> They're creating "cogs for industry." This benefits short term business needs, it's business centred. This is not holistic knowledge.

The upshot for regular staff is having to make up for lost teaching: "In the second year, the teacher has to cover the basics that should have been covered in the first year." Staff point to a central problem in industry hiring: "There is no robust system to ensure industry teachers are good. Students are getting tuition from a teacher whose main priority is not Unitec."

There was an ironic outcome from the ongoing replacements of regular staff. Some remaining academic staff were brought back into previous roles they had been excluded from:

> the situation around making decisions has improved in some areas, based on the fact that as staff resign, combined with the fact our managers and programs leaders don't know the program, I am called on more often to have involvement in how things are taught, not what, only how. Recently for the first time in 10 years, I was asked to talk to external moderators, but was schooled to NOT AIR DIRTY laundry,
> (from Sector Survey, 2016)

Meanwhile, teaching also relies on a category of administrators who sustain programmes and courses.

Centralising administrative staff
Over decades, Unitec had developed a support structure for programmes which located allied staff within the units and departments that delivered courses. The non-teaching allied staff had a high degree of localised, institutional knowledge about the programmes and courses. They knew the units very well, ensured essential record-keeping and continuity, and provided close communication among the unit, students and teaching staff.

A staff member who was enthusiastic about Unitec's

practice over the years described the situation:

> They *knew* about Unitec, student needs, research and the work needed to get into courses. Students applying got into the correct courses.

The restructuring disestablished the existing structure by removing many local allied staff and centralising services that were then staffed by new employees. One participant recalls resulting dilemmas for instructors:

> In the past year they have halved the admin as departments merge. I go in, there's no one to do admin stuff, e.g. to meet graduation requirements. This is a dilemma: do I do it so it's done, or not do it, and therefore disadvantage students?

Others commented that new centralised staff had great difficulty in carrying out their tasks and giving accurate information. "Lack of administrative help makes it harder. You send students to Student Central for help but they don't know anything." The result was that students couldn't get reliable information or directions on basic procedures for surviving in the institution. Meantime, the few remaining admin staff in departments were severely cut back in numbers and time: "Everyone has about .2 of a load," said a participant, "which leads to things falling through the cracks. Things stop happening."

At the same time, by participants' accounts, room allocation became clumsy and inflexible. Use of space seemed arbitrary and inappropriate for different teaching purposes, bookings became delayed and very difficult to change, all of which inhibited effective teaching and learning.

In a related move, management removed enrolment from existing admin staff and centralised the process in an overseas company, Concentrix.

Contracting out: Centralising and outsourcing enrolment
An announcement of the move to Concentrix appeared in *Student Services Blueprint: Outcome Document 2015,* in which the Chief Executive argued

that technology is both a problem:

> The reality is that rapid advancements in technology require us to make a step change right now.

and a solution:

> The proposed new model will move us to a much more converged, proactive and customer-centric approach, focused on outstanding service that is strongly technology and data enabled (p. 3).

Defending the decision, the CE claimed that outsourcing would free academic staff:

> Our core business is teaching and learning, and partnering with Concentrix will allow us to focus on what we do best while ensuring our students get the best customer service (p. 3).

When it placed enrolment functions with Concentrix, the senior leadership team brought in a new procedure, effectively creating two parallel systems, which participants described as dauntingly dysfunctional. Enrolment employees were either students or new to Unitec, lacking both specific knowledge of institution units and institutional knowledge in general. The enrolment process was seen as clumsy and complicated. Participants recalled trying to do mock enrolments in order to experience the student's task from the inside. Reportedly they encountered numerous obstacles and described giving up after about 45 minutes.

Participants list two outcomes: first, "enrolments dropped like a stone." And second, from a different perspective, staff didn't get to vet applicants as previously. In earlier times, staff would draw on their professional academic and teaching knowledge of study demands and student track-records, to recommend or decline candidates. But in the new regime, numbers of "unsuitable" applicants were admitted, creating increasingly complicated challenges for counselling students.

The above situation also posed the awkward question

of students' rights to equitable services, highlighted in one participant's comment that the lack of necessary knowledge in Concentrix had two effects: some students couldn't get enrolled; and other students got enrolled in the wrong courses.

The move to Concentrix also centralised phone contact, resulting in narrowing support. "*All* calls go through [Concentrix]," reported one participant:

> They can be helpful and friendly if the call stays on script. But if you go off script, they're no help. They're all on 6 month, 1 year contracts. When they move on, you lose the staff knowledge.

There was a further twist in communication problems.

> What was *really dumb* was when they took away the telephone operators. Now you phone, there's no person to speak to. If you don't know the extension, you can't get hold of anyone.

Redefining content

The Common Semester
Of immediate interest to staff was their teaching, especially the content and delivery of the programmes they taught on. One major change, questioned by many participants, was "The Common Semester," previously trialled by the Auckland University of Technology and reportedly failed. The Common Semester (TCS) replaced subject-specific introductory courses in areas like Social Practice and Nursing with generic content that was assumed to be of general relevance to all students and programmes. TCS was a showcase both of management drive and challenging process. The previously-existing courses introduced students to their particular disciplines and vocations, whereas TCS was general in content, lacking in specific focus relevant to chosen programmes of study.

Staff responses in 2016 included:

> The introduction of the common semester has been a disaster for students and. because

so many were failing, a disaster for our programme.

> Student learning has been dramatically affected by the common semester with much lower success and retention rates (particularly for Māori and Pacific Island students) and a very low Net Promoter Index overall for that programme.
> (TEU State of the Sector Survey, 2016, Q. 13)

For students, there was an immediate disconnect upon entering Unitec, exacerbated, in the view of participants, by the knowledge that many first-year students are second-chance, vulnerable learners, with limited learning resources. Staff pointed out that such students often have low incomes, difficult family and living conditions, a history of hardship or failure in prior education, and few resources at home. Many have to compete with other household members for computers. So while hand-held smart phones are useful for some aspects of study, one participant commented, "you can't write an assignment on them."

Regardless, TCS insisted on online delivery, so new students were obliged to study with a minimum of face-to-face contact with tutors. As a result, many students struggled, failed and dropped out, a situation that tutors claimed would be avoidable in their previous programmes. In the teaching programmes built up over decades, their typical practice called for close contact with students, careful monitoring, tailored teaching and pastoral support as necessary. A participant reporting disillusionment with TCS, recalled staff feeling disheartened at the educational level of students coming through the course. Overall, TCS undermined years of best practice, in the view of participants.

Also undermined were previous discipline-focused qualifications, such as the Bachelor of Design. It was well recognised, according to a participant, but was replaced with a more general Bachelor of Applied Practice. "Now the student numbers are well down," commented the interviewee.

Overall, participants held that the conditions of teaching and learning embodied in The Common

Semester contributed significantly to difficulties imposed on students.

Instituting TCS was part of significant curriculum change that would have needed approval by the Academic Board. Several interrelated questions arise at this point: how the Board is structured; what pressures were brought to bear on its members; what discussion and critique took place on items like TCS and the use of Mind Lab.

While participants had little to say about Academic Board, there was considerable concern about Mind Lab, which many students and school teachers were channelled into.

MIND LAB

The website description outlines the concept:

> The Mind Lab by Unitec is a unique education collaboration between a public education provider and a specialist education lab dedicated to enhancing digital literacy capability and the implementation of contemporary practice in the teaching profession. (themindlab.com)

Mind Lab provides a series of free courses for trained teachers to upskill themselves "in 21st century pedagogy," emphasising digital and online learning, with funding from Next Generation.

A participant held that Mind Lab is highly regarded, in the context that "people are looking to Unitec for innovative change in programme restructuring." However, some participants, who had looked closely into Mind Lab, were highly sceptical of its worth. It was described as evangelical, with "zero academic rigour," "a cult of the chosen." Tutors in subsequent Unitec courses report being dismayed at the lack of academic and professional preparation of Mind Lab graduates.

One critic said simply, "Students have been sold a lie," namely the idea that they could go from the Mind Lab to a masters programme. Part of the critique was that students in Mind Lab had worked on texts and content such as TED talks and blogs, which did not prepare them for the academic rigour of postgraduate study, nor for external markers. "Assignments are pitiful," said one participant, "they're embarrassing, mainly presentations via PowerPoint."

A further criticism was that a public promotion for Mind Lab said it was aiming for 30-40% profit. "Mind Lab is a commercial product to deliver revenue," summed up one participant. While staff recognise that Mind Lab caters particularly for teachers, it was also claimed that the Lab offers "fun games and short courses for wealthy, middle-class white children, sent on courses by their parents in holidays."

Redefining space

For the participants, the restructuring created interacting and compounding pressures that complicated and drained their work lives. This was notable in a variety of work spaces, including classrooms; offices; open plan quarters; teaching procedures; professional preparation, all of which had serious impacts on staff and students. These developments took place in the context of fewer buildings. An *Operations Update* late in 2017 reported that the institution had reduced buildings by 64 in the period, 2015-2017.

Classrooms

> It's hot-classrooms. They have no idea of what it means to be a teacher.

Classroom settings can have significant effects on the kind of teaching and interaction possible. Participants describe being allocated unsuitable class space for their particular discipline or task. They also note multiple-hour classes split in the middle and requiring a trek across campus to a different location. There would then be corresponding loss of momentum and concentration, undermining focus and effect, impeding sound teaching and learning. Both teachers and students were inconvenienced.

> We were told the change would provide flexibility for staff, but we're told by the timetablers that there is none. We're all over the place, all the time.

Offices

> Management said we'll do it first, and they didn't like it either.

The senior leadership team insisted on reducing office space, possibly as part of the move to casualise staff by bringing in industry employees for short deployments. Professional Unitec teaching staff thereby lost offices and space to hold and store necessary academic and pedagogic materials, consult with other staff, meet and tutor students. There was therefore *hot-desking* ("very unproductive") and *hot-officing* taking place, making time spent on campus problematic, unsettling and ineffective.

Hot-desking is insulting for teachers. It's *dehumanising.* You get a locker, and you put your name on it in chalk. It's small, and for books.

Similarly comments found in the 2016 State of the Sector Survey spoke of the issues of the new spaces:

> Hot desking is widespread and this creates anxiety, conflict and frustration (having to readjust your work space everyday and not have an environment conducive to creativity).

> Teaching staff are being moved to hot desks, which ignores the fact that they need a stable place from which to plan lessons and meet students;

Changes to office space were part of a wider context of moves to open plan.

Open plan space
Part of the hot-desking taking place came about through creating very large open plan workspaces, such as Te Puna, the new Library and living commons or student hub. "Students love it, but not staff," said one participant. "They are disastrous to work in," said another:

> They're noisy. There is no confidentiality for anyone now, especially students. I'm furious about this. Staff have lost out – there's no private space to work. They can't meet – staff and students – in a confidential way.

When private consultations occur, said a third participant, other staff leave the space, as their way of accommodating the parties concerned.

Open plan was also a feature of a new trades building, which participants describe as "not fit for purpose." Tutors comment on the difficulties of trying to teach in competition with other classes in the midst of loud noise in nearby space. They also point out that it can be dangerous, because trades employ a variety of heavy, hard and sharp equipment.

Meanwhile, staff drew attention to the waste that

resulted from shrinking the office space. Apparently large amounts of office equipment such as desks became surplus to requirements and were summarily trashed. Staff pointed out that even new equipment was thrown out, because it didn't fit the new premises and would have been uneconomic to trade away on a cost-recovery basis.

Online teaching
A related move was the growing pressure to teach online ("They're planning to reduce the on-campus courses from over 100 to less than 20"). Online teaching in place of face-to-face classroom teaching means highly individualised instruction and interaction. One effect is loss of the cumulative, collective engagement and input of class learning. "Face-to-face is where the magic happens," said one participant. Another effect is heavily increased workload for staff conducting online instruction. "The workload increased exponentially," said a participant.

Overwhelmingly, however, staff related online teaching to The Common Semester, which required first-year entering students to complete their first semester through online instruction, which staff believe is totally inappropriate. One commented:

> All research says in the first six months to year, students need to build relationships with other students, teachers, and the institution and industry they go into.

Meanwhile, staff recall that the senior leadership team not only assumed that any tutors over 40 would be incapable of teaching online, but also disregarded previous teaching practice, which drew on a wide range of electronic resources and blended learning. Staff constantly reiterated that in principle, they supported a place for online teaching, but insisted on using it appropriately, with pedagogic reasoning that drew on their tertiary teaching experience.

> We do flipped anyway, we're teachers. It's what we do. "Read this tonight, we'll talk tomorrow." Technology is there, I've no problem with blended. But not at the expense of face to face. Moodle, etc. online you only get superficial discussions. Face to face is the place to express yourself, question,

especially if you're not middle class, articulate, with language skills. "Critic and conscience of society" – face to face is where it happens, not on a forum.

Overall, staff were very sensitive to the limitations of online teaching. "You only get bits and pieces of the theory," said one participant. "No shift of theory into their own experience."

Professional preparation
During the period of constant restructuring, regular Unitec staff found it extremely difficult to continue scholarly and professional lives, as they attended to the complications outlined above ("hard to find the time to keep up to date with the knowledge and incorporate it into teaching"). Time became compressed and rationed, faced with the mass of tasks caused by the restructuring. Research became harder to carry out, professional development became a luxury, academic renewal was a challenge – despite staff wanting to engage as serious tertiary professionals.

Māori and Pasifika

"The effect on Māori has been shocking."

"The students that are most affected by the restructure are Māori," said one participant. One explained it as "whitestreaming," by which focused Māori and Pasifika social services are incorporated into "the mainstream." The result is less support for both groups. Maia, a unit dedicated to Māori, has been closed, many of its staff let go, and current staff are the core resource running the marae. "Maia was a place," said a participant, "students could go there at 8am, have breakfast, talk to staff, have a strong sense of manaakitanga. It made them feel at home. It was replaced with a few Māori staff scattered around."

"Māori have lost their voice and their presence."

The team in the Pacific Centre was reduced from 12 to 3, with contracts renewed for only three months and staff invited to reapply for their positions. Amongst staff therefore, "there is a feeling of fear and panic," said one participant. And for students, "there is no one central place for Māori and Pasifika," said another.

"We need visibility of Māori and Pasifika values."

Reference to diminished visibility is also found in the State of the Sector Survey:

> Once Māori had a participating voice at Unitec, it was worked hard for. It is now relegated to the point of non-existence. Roles for a Māori academic dimension are given to pakeha with little or no respect, knowledge or skill. The Kaikaranga for Unitec is a Sri Lankan, this for me and other Māori staff is an absolute desecration and insult. Reference to Māori pakeha Treaty of Waitangi has been taken away from Unitec documents and Māori are considered to be no more than the other migrants to this country.

Effects on students

Staff were intensely concerned about the effect of restructuring on students. They report going to great lengths to protect students from harmful processes and dangers to their learning. Some tried to draw a line between the direction of the senior leadership team and their own instruction: they carried on teaching and giving support, while referring as little as possible to the changes going on ("We're really good at hiding this from students"). But there was inevitably spill-over on to students: "If tutors are affected (too many students, teachers under stress, workload), then students feel some of this." Others discussed the restructuring with students, partly because the students themselves raised the topic. In other words, there was pressing interaction between staff, students and restructuring.

Participants were very aware of the difficulties students faced, sometimes pointing out the extra load caused to staff:

> They've had to deal with crazy enrolments etc. They go to Student Central for help and staff there don't know what's needed. So here I am, having to check students' work because staff at Central don't know if a student's documentation is correct. It creates huge pressures, worries, stress on students – it must impact on the quality of student work – as well as taking lots of [teaching] time.

Staff describe the environment for students as very stressful. "Students see what's going on," said a participant, because learners recognise a disconnect between expectation and conditions facing them on campus. One set of conditions was The Common Semester, in which teachers surveyed students for their opinion of the course. "The feedback was very poor, very negative," reported one tutor, "and this showed in poor success / retention stats."

Participants were very sensitive to students' lives beyond Unitec. One summary comment was echoed

throughout interviews: "The student cohort, because of hardship, is *very* stretched. . . . you find out: homelessness, prostitution, hardship, dependents." "Look at the price of rents in West Auckland," said another, "a student can't afford to be a student." Interviews pointed out that students were incurring debt, yet at the same time were being encouraged to take courses that they didn't want to do.

Effects seen in Unitec's enrolments and income

Restructuring had its effect on staff and student numbers.[1] From 2012 to 2016, staff complement fell from 455 to 371. Administrative staff fell from 352 to 292. (Such figures mask the actual process of the many staff departures, followed by replacements and substitutions, not all of which would be full-time.)

The restructuring had profound effects on staff morale. Staff satisfaction scores plummeted in the period studied, with "Detractors" rising from over 50% to over 60%, 2014-2016. Unitec's Annual Report for 2016 records staff satisfaction with the senior

leadership team at 25% (p. 53). In the period, 2012-2016, "Promoters" fell from about 15% to ca 10%. The "Net Promoter Score" at this time fell from -40 to around -55.(The Net Promoter Score measures the extent to which staff would recommend Unitec as a place of employment.) After several years of these depressing responses, the senior leadership team suspended staff satisfaction surveys.

Enrolment figures tell their own story. In brief, in the period, 2015-2017, there was a 20% overall decline, with a 23% decline in domestic students. Tracing a longer time-span of 2010-2017, domestic EFTS fell steadily from a high of around 9,000 to less than 7,000. Figures for students under 20 in the same period fell from around 2,000 to under 1,500.

In graphic form, the Design School restructuring referred to at the start of this report shows a dramatic plunge of 63% in Bachelor degree enrolments from the time of the restructuring, and 74% in Certificate enrolments:

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1. The figures presented in this section are drawn from a TEU presentation to council. Sources: Education Counts (www.educationcounts.govt.nz); Loo 2018a, 2018b, quoted with permission)

EFTS in BDVA, CDVA, and BCE
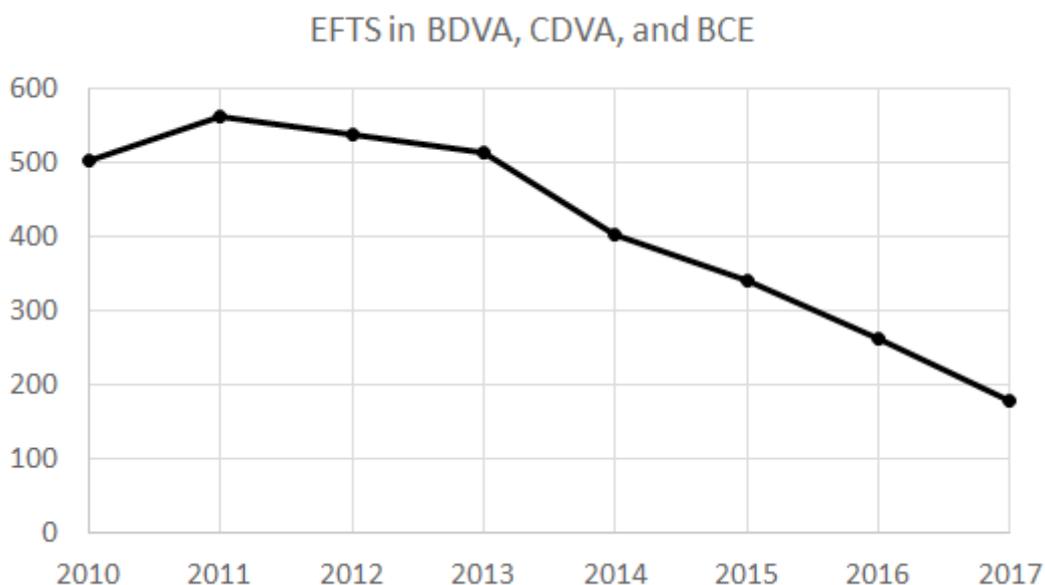
But more significant in total numbers is the overall decline in enrolment across the institution:

All domestic EFTS
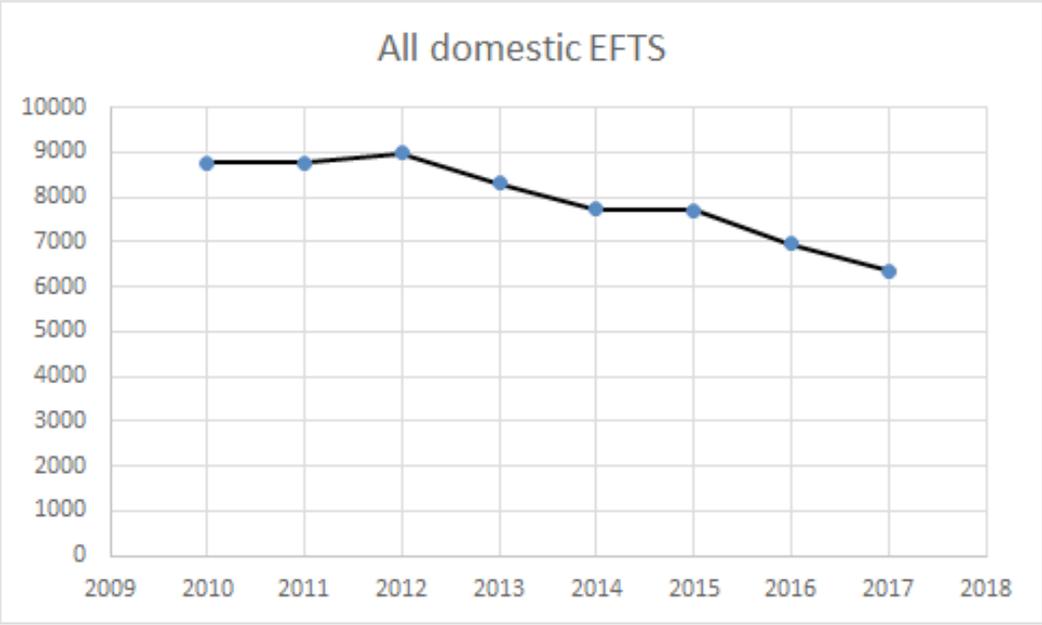
An obvious comparison is with the Metro group of ITPs, which shows Unitec performing poorly against other similar institutions in total enrolments, domestic and international:
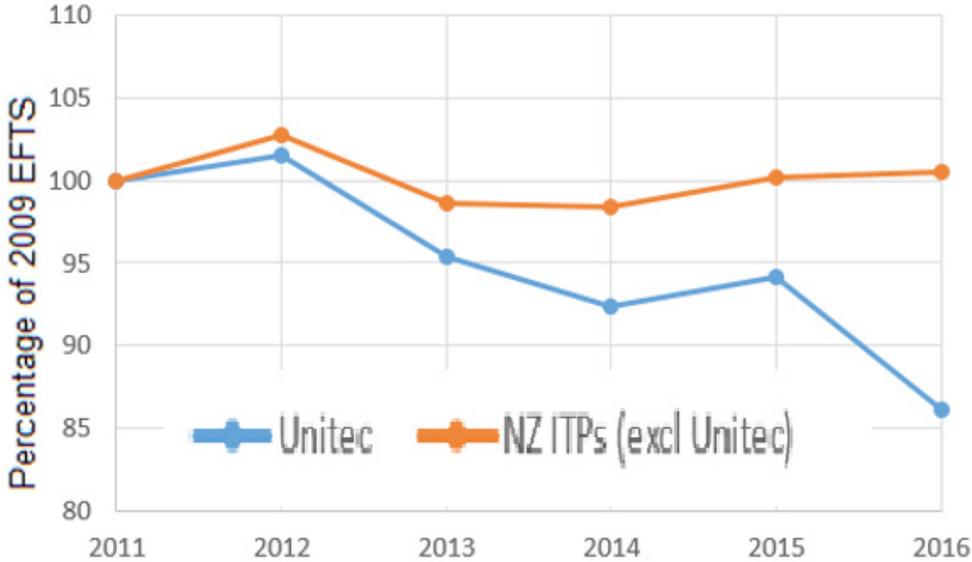
Decline in enrolment means a loss in revenue. From 2011 to 2016, enrolments fell from a high of 10,340 to 8,770, resulting in a drop of $46.7m in income.

Nevertheless, during this period, the number of managers earning $100,000 + rose from 46 in 2012 to 74 in 2016. Salaries for this bracket rose from $6.45m to ca $12.4m. From 2015-2016 alone, costs for total salaries for managers on $100,000 + rose $3.1m. Managers on salaries over $200,000 rose from 1 in 2012 to 15 in 2016. Costs for this bracket rose from $325,000 in 2012 to about $4.25m in 2016.

In mid-2018, Unitec posted a deficit of $31m for 2017. Radio New Zealand reported on 1 June,

> The institution had expected to make a deficit last year due to major building works, but the 2017 annual report said enrolments fell by about 660 full-time students or 7 percent to 8842 contributing to a result that was about $10 million worse than expected.

Restructuring at Unitec had its roots in 2008, with the appointment of Dr. Rick Ede as Chief Executive. The research study focuses particularly on the period of major overt change 2015-2017.

Two general conclusions need stating immediately.

The reforms are a serious warning to the tertiary sector, including other tertiary education institutions, government, and the Tertiary Education Commision, all of which constantly seek to promote various of the changes outlined above. There is related warning about accepting neoliberalism as a model for constructing tertiary institutions.

Summary conclusions from participants' viewpoint

The nature and rationale of Unitec's restructuring
Unitec's restructuring was an all-encompassing tidal wave of change. It involved a set of overlapping and interrelated factors, with cumulative effect. It was thoroughly executive leadership team-driven through a tightly developed ideological agenda,

derived without taking seriously the expertise and advice of staff.

The senior leadership team totally revised central structures of the institution, including academic units and functioning, teaching and learning, staff appointments, administration, student services, the "hosting" of delivery that became outsourced in various ways.

The restructuring lacked rationale. When staff directly asked for the basis of the changes, one Executive Dean said that the senior leadership team had "talked to other institutions." But the leadership team offered no serious evidence or argument beyond rather hopeful PR slogans like "future change," "real world learning," "future-proofing education" and "21st century learning."

Nevertheless, the senior leadership team strongly pushed online electronic delivery in teaching and enrolment, appealing to "technology" as a means of operating. For instance, in response to submissions asking for the rationale behind outsourcing enrolment, in the face of possible loss of institutional

CHANGE IN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM FOCUS?

Several staff went out of their way to distinguish the management drivers of the period 2015-2017 from completely new senior management personnel who gradually took over during 2017.

A signal of changed outlook may be evident in a *Decision Document*, circulated to staff in October 2017. In a report on Concentrix, the document acknowledges:

> The cost of the changes has been significant in terms of institutional knowledge impact, operating cost, customer experience, and revenue.

It goes on to recognise "a number of fundamentals . . . . found wanting," including:

- Poor quality data being entered and maintained in core systems
- Lack of documented processes, non-standard process, process inefficiency
- Gaps and hand-offs between activities
- Inconsistent downstream or upstream standards, processes and procedures

knowledge, a document replied:

> benefits . . . include a knowledge management system which will ensure consistency of information being shared, the ability to increase trained staffing resources quickly to meet demand, the ability to leverage a global continuous improvement programme and sophisticated technology platforms (Student Services Blueprint, 2015, p. 58).

Unfortunately, the ensuing evidence did not support the senior leadership team's confidence.

The process of restructuring was an onslaught of shock and awe, similar to the roll-out of Rogernomics in the 1980s. The procedure was thoroughly top-down, consistently ignoring staff responses and contributions. Participants noted the contradiction between the senior leadership team's invitation to contribute responses and the failure to engage with staff, despite statements like p. 4 in *Sector Alignment:* "your feedback on the specific projects like the Sector Alignment is vital to ensuring we get these changes right." The discourse and communication practice of the senior leadership team was misleading, the management frame was intense, unenlightening and exclusionary.

Effects of the Restructuring
The effects of the restructuring were profound and far-reaching. Unitec lost experienced academic staff teachers, knowledgeable and skilled administrators, institutional knowledge, necessary work space and teaching space. During this period, it shed students in quite dramatic numbers. Staff unequivocally describe first-year students really struggling with The Common Semester and the narrowing focus of online learning.

Unitec suffered a severe blow to its reputation. At this time, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority

dropped the institution from Category 1 to Category 2. Participants reported schools declining to recommend Unitec for study, professions losing faith in Unitec's standards and performance, parents deciding that family members should avoid Unitec, and some potential applicants for staff appointments going elsewhere.

Participants describe the replacement steps as counter-productive. They saw little advantage in the revised institutional structures of "networks" and "pathways," in outsourcing services, hot-desking, hot classrooms, forced use of open space. In most such cases, they saw these moves as destructive and undermining. In the view of participants, the changes often created greatly increased workloads for regular staff, who were constantly pressed to make up for deficiencies in enrolment, advising, teaching and administration, brought about by the changes in personnel and procedure.

In particular, participants objected strongly to the departure of experienced staff, followed by replacements with casualised, often unreliable industry appointees, most of whom were thoroughly unfamiliar with the requirements of teaching, marking and assessing. Participants defended rigorous academic practice and decision-making, the need to offer students comprehensive education in disciplines, theory and critical thinking, to provide a frame for practical action and industry links. They pointed out that the regular staff were qualified academically and professionally in scholarship and teaching, having built up extensive track records over years of tertiary engagement. They contrasted that profile with the paucity of industry employees, who they characterised as lacking in preparation, orientation and commitment to tertiary education. The participants' concept of an appointment to Unitec represented serious commitment to tertiary education, extending much beyond delivery in classrooms. But the industry appointees, naturally enough, were primarily committed to their industry employment.

Institutional damage

Unitec's restructuring represented the rule of ideology over reason. It was fundamentally flawed, a misconceived attempt to reduce tertiary education to industry training for employability, resulting in a colossal failure. In essence, the senior leadership team rewrote the concept of the institution, turning its purpose into a training ground for business and employment. It therefore redefined teaching staff as presenters of industry-oriented work information, putting reliance on casual, external, part-time appointees "from the field." Causing great damage to the institution and its reputation, the restructuring was a disservice and an insult to tertiary education, staff, students and the public.

There were three significant institutional outcomes:
1) a dumbing-down of education by reducing instruction to preparation for work.
2) disrespect for the academic and professional status of staff by sidelining academic staff, terminating appointments and hiring temporary, casual industry employees to deliver teaching.
3) undermining the fundamentals of tertiary education, including scholarship, inquiry, learning, critical thinking, enlightened pedagogy.

Several of the participants saw a neoliberal approach to education in Unitec's restructuring. They had reason to do so, considering the nature of the restructuring and the pressing context of New Zealand education. Considering "the further marketisation of tertiary education" in the late 1990s to early 2000s, Roberts (2005) notes "systems of governance and accountability modelled on the corporate world," and comments on their history and resilience: "key elements of the neoliberal reform program instituted in the years 1984-99 remain in place" (p. 43).

Unitec has systematically corporatised over the last decade, through a number of distinct moves: developing an increasingly corporate structure;

instituting hierarchical management control and decision-making; promoting lean and mean staff appointment policies, insisting that staff are easily dispensable; contracting out to external private companies; casualising staff; adopting a utilitarian, business-oriented model of skills-based learning for work.

Unitec's restructuring bears a striking resemblance to the tenor of an ITES Conference, hosted by Steven Joyce, then Minister of Tertiary Education in 2014. (ITES: Innovation in Tertiary Education Delivery Summit, 5-6 June.) In particular, Unitec's moves carry strong echoes of a conference presentation by former Vice-Chancellor, Jim Barber, "Seven strategies for success in the digital age." To summarise, Barber suggested institutions:

- Internationalise online markets and course-offerings
- Refresh teaching methods
- Divest infrastructure
- Embrace demand-driven education
- Pursue mergers and acquisitions on an international scale
- Create a more efficient academic workforce
- Promote an organisational culture of innovation and risk

It is illuminating to compare some of Steven Joyce's language with that of the Unitec senior leadership team. In a media release on changes to tertiary councils, ("Reforms of university and wānanga governance to proceed", Feb 2014), Minister Joyce says:

> The reforms will modernise councils so they can more easily meet the needs of a rapidly-changing employment market, adapt to the new challenges from changing technology in teaching and learning, and operate more effectively in an increasingly competitive international university environment.

In *Sector Alignment,* Aug 2015, former Unitec Chief Executive Rick Ede said:

At the core of our transformation is a commitment to providing world-class, technology-enabled learning and teaching opportunities that are aligned with industry, ensuring our graduates have the skills, capabilities and attitudes required to meet the changing needs of the workplace. (p. 7)

In its botched attempt to privatise services by contracting out to external companies, Unitec's track-record was parallel to other striking outsourcing failures in New Zealand such as Novopay (teacher payrolls), Serco (prison management) and Compass (hospital catering).

Coercion, fear and dishonesty

Staff reported a culture of bullying of individuals and groups by the senior leadership team during the restructuring, consistent with the team's overall conception of the changes. Its decision-making was stringently top-down, and its process was consciously insensitive and dismissive of staff. It was not the case that there was occasional oppressive behaviour on the part of a few key senior leadership team members. It was that the entire regime of the restructuring was a form of institutional coercion, rendering Unitec an unsafe workplace.

At the same time, participants reported an almost paradoxical atmosphere on campus. Many staff contributed written and oral critiques of the senior leadership team's plans. But some were also greatly restrained because they feared the consequences of going public. Such concerns raise questions about the official entitlement for staff to speak out, as discussed immediately below.

Unitec's *Code of Conduct* refers explicitly to academic freedom: "Unitec recognises and protects the concept and practice of academic freedom." The Collective Agreement (2016-2018) (3.5.1) recognises Section 161 of the Education Act (the Act), which refers to the right "to state controversial or unpopular opinions." The *Code of Conduct* goes on to discuss academic freedom in terms that echo the concept of "critic and conscience" in the Act: "Within the ambit of academic freedom lies the traditional role of academics in making informed comment on societal mores and practice, and in challenging held

beliefs, policies and structures." The Act further states that tertiary institutions need to "permit public scrutiny," and act in accordance with "the need for accountability by institutions."

Even so, there is an obvious problem that a management has the right to disestablish positions, thereby obviating clauses on academic freedom. What's more, none of the provisions for speaking out were seen to lessen the "toxic" atmosphere that staff reported, especially as they were aware that a staff member might well be terminated, not for exercising academic freedom, but for entirely other given reasons.

Destructive leadership

Conditions at Unitec find an echo in Strauss and Hunter (2017), researching New Zealand polytechnics, who conclude in part:

> The widespread estrangement between management and tutoring staff derives from several sources, often resulting in a lack of trust and a breakdown in communication. Foundation tutors felt that they were the target of adverse policies that affected not only their job security but also the resourcing required to teach foundation cohorts. There was great unease that they were unable to address their concerns, that criticism of management policies might have adverse effects on their employment conditions or even result in teaching contracts not being renewed.

In a set of significant failures, the Unitec senior leadership team acted in a distinctly un-academic way, declining to provide a sound rationale for its sweeping change of direction. It was anti-democratic, refusing to engage a knowledgeable, experienced staff in the process, choking off collaboration and sharing of knowledge. It was thereby the antithesis of centuries-old tertiary education practice, which demands critical, informed and reflective inquiry.

The process of restructuring involved highly dishonest communication. The language of senior leadership team communiqués and documents was blatantly misleading, overblown and distorting. In

any institutional redress, communication needs careful attention to insist on honesty, openness and plain language. Communication is an important component of any analysis of Academic Board and Council, considered below.

The research recognises that the structure of the senior leadership team has become increasingly hierarchical and controlling over at least the last decade, with the senior leadership team and the Chief Executive exercising intensifying power. Similar situations are also noted in other tertiary education institutions in New Zealand and elsewhere (Rinne, Jauhiainen and Kankaanpää, 2014; St Clair and Belzer, 2007; Strauss and Hunter, 2017).

In this context, there is an unsettling realisation about the drivers of the restructuring. The senior leadership team in the period studied was as small as seven people. Of that group, it was suggested in interviews, it seemed that an inner circle of three spearheaded the changes. If accurate, a tiny group of powerful managers was responsible for a devastating transition. It would follow then that there are awkward questions to consider about a sliver of the institutional structure exercising questionable power over the rest of the institution.

Academic Board: One structure must attract careful scrutiny. Changes to curriculum for far-reaching moves like introducing The Common Semester, generic degrees (Bachelor of Applied Practice), and Mind Lab would presumably need to go through Academic Board. The fact that participants knew little about its functioning suggests that the Board wasn't an immediate forum for debating or challenging propositions that staff resisted. It could be informative to inquire how it is composed, how it is led, how it functions, and in particular, how independent it is of management pressure. Beyond these questions, there is always the issue of what reporting takes place as a result of Board business. A relevant warning about academic boards comes from Australian experience:

> The academic board tends to become 'not an exercise of collegial decision-making or a venue to raise concerns but merely a formality to ensure proposals are passed through correct procedural avenues'

(Malcolm and Tarling, 2007, p. 64)

Council: Similarly, the role of Council must be questioned. Participants reported receiving no information from Council on the restructuring. For the record, Council is charged with governance, while the senior leadership team is responsible for running the institution. Further, in 2010, the National-led Government restructured polytechnic councils. It reduced membership to 8, of whom 4 were Ministerial appointments, from whom the Minister appointed the Chair and Deputy Chair. The four Ministerial appointees could then co-opt a fifth member. There were no staff or student representatives.

In the absence of communication from either Council or from the senior leadership team about Council's view on the restructuring, various scenarios arise, some of which participants suggested, including: that Council must have supported the changes, because they gave no sign otherwise; or, that the Chief Executive (Council's employee) had conducted a PR process to persuade Council of the merits of the restructuring; alternatively, that Council derived an agenda from Government and drove the restructuring.

In light of the above kind of critique, participants recorded that senior management appointees seemed to have impunity from their actions, with freedom to leave Unitec and move on to top positions in other tertiary institutions. This commentary argued that Government should exercise a duty of care, hold senior management to account, and block subsequent high appointments, considering the damage caused to the entire institution.

There is an irony about damage to Unitec's reputation. Unitec's Disciplinary Policy and Procedures includes a clause on "serious misconduct," warranting dismissal for disrepute. It cites behaviour that:

- seriously threatens the well-being of Unitec
- is likely to bring the staff member or Unitec into disrepute

Some would argue that it was the senior leadership

team itself that threatened Unitec's well-being and brought the institution into disrepute.

The restructuring marks a clear case of authoritarian management behaviour, constituting an assault on the rights of staff and students, and an unwarranted rewriting of the mandate of tertiary education. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the issue was just one of bullying or aggressive senior leadership team personnel, even though that applies. The driving problem was false consciousness: a powerful and mistaken belief in an ideology of tertiary instruction for business.

At the same time, now is also an opportunity to rebuild the institution in an enlightened and progressive way, for which it is hoped the principles and recommendations below may help in the process. The institution is however, in an awkward situation, squeezed between the lasting residue of the previous senior leadership team and apparent changed direction of the current leadership team. While the institution has taken back enrolment from Concentrix, the effects of the restructuring are still very much in evidence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unitec's restructuring has been profound and damaging. The recommendations below recognise a need to try to undo the damage and to rebuild the institution in a principled way, bearing in mind that the last decade has been marked by increasing hierarchical management direction and an intensifying focus on serving the interests of business.

PROPOSED PRINCIPLES

Some basic principles should guide the process. They could include at least the following:

Democracy: construct a genuine democratic, collegial culture and structure for decision-making -- academic, pedagogical, professional, administrative – removing the corporate, hierarchical structure that propelled the restructuring

Public interest focus: create an institution that builds strength for the nation and its populace

Trust: build a high-trust environment that involves strong commitment to staff with faith that it will carry out the mandate of Unitec and contribute positively to the future direction of the institution

Honesty: insist on honesty and transparency in management-staff relations, including communications

Respect: build a culture that insists on mutual respect for individuals and groups within the institution, embedding principles of fairness, justice and equity

Tertiary education mandate: rebuild an academic and professional tertiary culture that prioritises the construction of knowledge, ethical conduct, academic freedom, inquiry and critical thinking, teaching, social justice

Service: rebuild a culture of service to students and community

Reform could take two different paths.
One would be to improve and humanise the existing structure and nature of Unitec, which is basically a management-controlled entity. The other, preferred option, would be to create a new progressive power-sharing institution in which management and staff share decision-making.

Processes

Create institutional structures that **share power** among staff and management, countering management's burgeoning assumption of power. The interpretation here is that the management got Unitec into a mess – the institution must get it out.

Insist on **elected representatives** throughout institution structures, including in the composition and procedure of **committees** (e.g., Programme Committees), **councils** (e.g,. Faculty Councils) and **board** (e.g., Academic Board). Establish elected chairs in place of management appointees. The weakness of management-appointed chairs &/or executive is that they then control the agenda, the process and the reporting.

Recognise the **potential and actual contribution of all staff,** across the range of employees, both in academic and professional domains, and in place of stacking committees with "senior" academics, professors and senior administrators

In **staff and management appointments**, set up accountable and transparent procedures, with staff and student representatives, plus open meetings for short-listed candidates to meet relevant parts of the institution.

In **department leadership**, reconstitute Heads of Department as rotating, elected Chairs, whose task is to coordinate department activities, carry out departmental decisions and represent the department interests. The coordinating role can be supported by a department committee consisting of elected representatives of the unit, which reports to the full membership of the department.

Strengthen local **units and departments,** to counter the centralising of the restructuring

Listen to the staff. The project proposes that the **institution as a whole,** management especially, listen to the staff, consistent with the proposal above to share power across the institution.

Actions

Create a task-force to reinvent Unitec: led by staff; consisting of elected academic and allied staff, given necessary release time; with management representatives; to make proposals for the institution as a whole to decide on. The task force would promote the following actions:

- Review major restructuring of the last decade, with a view to reassessing

- Reinstate Māori and Pasifika presence and provision, consistent with the Treaty and agreement with Ngati Whatua and the Kotahitanga agreement

- Call on management and Council to review the restructuring in a public meeting convened by staff

- Review Academic Board in the light of the above principles, making it relevant, transparent, informative and accountable to staff and students

- Seriously consider reinstating previous structures and re-hiring experienced previous staff, in the context of the proposal above to reinvent Unitec

- Get extra funding to recreate the institution

- Review Council: Given the silence from Council on restructuring, there is a strong case for
  (1) rebuilding Council's membership (Government responsibility)
  (2) insisting on appropriate communication with the institution

  On membership, the project supports returning Council to its pre-2009 categories, including up to 2 representatives each for

staff and students; plus representatives from Unitec's community, from industry, and from tertiary institutions. Further, Council electing Chair and Deputy Chair.

On communication, Council would exercise a valuable role by making regular monthly information bulletins to the institution. One problem is that Council has previously adopted only a brief open session of about 15-20 minutes at the start of its monthly meetings, then gone into committee, claiming that no information from that section can become public. It should not be impossible to find ways of editing information for public distribution.

- Consider an elected Composite Board made up of management, elected staff and students to provide institutional leadership

Power-sharing / Equity Institution: A power-sharing institution would involve elected staff and students in decision-making structures throughout the institution. The academic reporting line would continue to function as currently.

In a strong form of power-sharing, an elected Composite Board [or Senate] made up of management, elected staff and students would provide institutional leadership and make final decisions on the nature and structure of the institution. It would be the task of management to institute decisions.
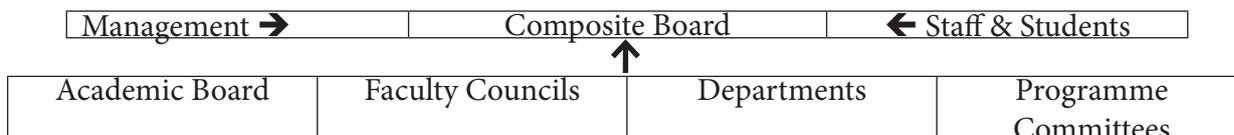
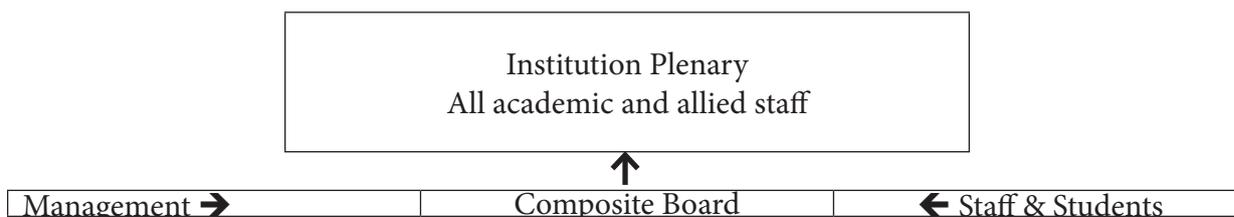In diagram form, the academic reporting line would consist of:

Academic Board
↑
Faculty Councils
↑
Departments
↑
Programme Committees

The Composite Board would be detached from the academic reporting line, to avoid unnecessary debate, reporting and ratification:

Management →	Composite Board	← Staff & Students

At the same time, the previously named structures would be free to contribute to the deliberations of the Composite Board:

Management →	Composite Board		← Staff & Students
	↑		
Academic Board	Faculty Councils	Departments	Programme Committees

In a very inclusive conception, decision-making could look like this:

Institution Plenary All academic and allied staff
↑

Management →	Composite Board	← Staff & Students

The process could be departments coordinating with relevant committees and reporting to faculty councils which report to the Institution Plenary, which makes final academic and institutional [operational] decisions for management to institute.

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