



10 July 2018

Hon. Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
Molesworth Street
Wellington

Tēnā koe e te Minita,

Your announcement last week about the future of Unitec was difficult for us. It was the culmination of four years during which we have struggled under the weight of poor decisions made by the Council and former Executive Leadership Team.

Every day we come to work we know we are making a difference to the lives of the people we teach and, in doing so, that we are helping to shape the future of Aotearoa New Zealand. To see our place of work discussed in the media as requiring Ministerial intervention was challenging for us all.

Nevertheless, we welcome your support and thank you for taking the bold decision to propose the appointment of a Commissioner and the provision of additional public funds to guide our institution through a difficult period.

This must have been a difficult decision for you, not least because of the delicate political balance you must maintain in coalition with other parties. Further, we acknowledge that persuading the public why our collective funds are best spent on keeping an important institution like Unitec going is not easy.

We know there will be challenges ahead, but we would like to take the opportunity today to share with you our thoughts on why you made the right decision – and why our colleagues and students are deserving of your support.

One thing we share in common with you, our colleagues and our students is a commitment to quality education. We are proud of what we do here at Unitec to give our students the best possible opportunity to succeed during their time here. What we teach also equips students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the workplace, in their communities and in broader society. It is this teaching at Unitec, as elsewhere, that provides a foundation for everything your government wants to achieve.

For this quality teaching to continue delivering what we need as a nation, the deficit thinking models that have dominated past management approaches at Unitec must be eliminated. We

play such an important role supporting students to fulfil their potential, so there is no use focusing in on their weakness. Far better would be to focus on their strengths – and what they can achieve for themselves, their whānau, their communities and New Zealand.

Putting an end to deficit thinking in education also requires that Unitec become a safe space and safe place for all staff and students. Regrettably there are areas that are currently rife with bullying. Should you decide to appoint a commissioner, we urge you to ask them to look into these matters and the impact they are having on the ability of students and staff to do the best they can.

During a week in which you may decide to appoint a commissioner to oversee operations at Unitec, we met as a team to discuss what we value about working here. When you were presented with the situation facing Unitec, you may have had a moment of wondering to yourself why, if things are so bad, do the staff here keep going. Here are just some of the reasons our colleagues shared about why they come to work each day wanting to do the best possible job they can:

“I enjoy working with postgraduate students and research active staff who produce quality assured research outcomes in computer science.”

“I like working with students from diverse backgrounds.”

“I am proud of the support and guidance (as well as knowledge) that we provide our students from diverse backgrounds who graduate as qualified nurses to provide quality care to New Zealanders. They are highly thought of and valued by our clinical colleagues and patients.”

“In my job, I help refugees to get into jobs and careers and sometimes even housing - the biggest single refugee-background communities in New Zealand are right here in our communities.”

“I am proud of my Level 2 graduates entering Unitec and other tertiary institutions mainstream programmes and doing well. I am also proud about refereed research outputs which have a positive impact on teaching and curriculum design.”

“Our BTECE our Diverse Learners Course uses art as an assessment. This allows our priority learners – Māori and Pasifika students - to excel.”

“One great thing here is our whanaungatanga - positive relationship-building - and our commitment to reducing social inequalities.”

“We work very effectively with Māori and Pasifika students, even though we currently have high staff:student ratios.”

“I feel pleased to be able to give students one-to-one and small group time and space to enable their maths academic development. I can give them the



opportunity to build their own understanding and skill level from their own learning level and learning styles. One size does not fit all."

"Today I was working with students on their thesis writing. They told me how much more confident they are feeling about their research (focussed on improving digital learning in low decile primary schools)."

"I provide pastoral care support for Bridging Education students through a pastoral care spreadsheet for each programme, updated regularly so that students are supported in a timely and suitable way to meet their academic and personal needs, through a caring, empathetic, and non-judgemental system."

You will see from this small selection of comments that what motivates us is a desire to make a difference to people's lives. We thank you for your commitment to ensuring future generations can continue to access life-changing learning opportunities at Unitec. Through the challenges that lie ahead, we urge you to work with us. Having maintained quality learning opportunities despite everything that has happened to Unitec in recent years, we are the real experts – and we are essential to the institution's future.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Dr. Sandra Grey
On behalf of the TEU team at Unitec

