

The **New Zealand Union of Students' Associations** presents their...

## 2020 Policy Document

The New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) exists to fight for a barrier free education for all people in Aotearoa New Zealand. As Treaty partners, our work is guided by Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We are an influential and inclusive national voice for students that has the following values at our core. We are a non-partisan organisation that aims to work with the government of the day and all political parties to advance our vision.

- **Kotahitanga:** We are stronger together. We are a collective voice based on collaborations and partnership, while recognising that students are experts of their own lived experience, we act in solidarity with them.
- **Whanaungatanga:** We are family. We behave as a family and acknowledge that we are all connected by our whakapapa of student representation.
- **Manaakitanga:** We care for others. We are supportive, take an intersectional approach, and seek to make visible and address the various privileges and oppressions, to build a movement that is more just, inclusive and coherent.
- **Rangatiratanga:** We are leaders. We take our place as leaders of the student movement, and strive to be representative, democratic and to speak authoritatively when we are mandated to do so.

### Our landscape

The tertiary environment continues to change rapidly. New Zealand has seen a significant increase in the number of domestic and international tertiary students over the past few decades. There is no such thing as the 'average student' – students are diverse in ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, and hopes and aspirations, and are learning in different spaces and timeframes across the country.

The Reform of Vocational Education is transforming the vocational learner experience, with the full effects of this transformational shift in the tertiary landscape not to be felt for a few years. Meanwhile, students nationally are increasingly being treated as a number and not a name through the steady 'privatisation' of tertiary education organisations (TEOs – universities, polytechnics and wānanga), who are prioritising budgets and profits over educational aspirations and student needs.

Over the past decade there has been a reduction in student voice nationwide as a result of Voluntary Student Membership, alongside a recalibration of association priorities, focusing more heavily on service provision. The cost of living as a student continues to climb, and discussion around the Governments' fees free policy intensifies.

Student experiences with mental health are worsening and becoming more apparent, the national discussion on sexual violence prevention on our campuses continues, and young people are beginning to stand up and demand climate action from their institutions and the government.

This Policy Document seeks to funnel our strategic direction and members' views into a clear and cohesive document that states our position on key policy arguments. Each policy has been scrutinized by all member associations.

This Policy Document is intentionally not all encompassing.

NZUSA recognises Te Mana Ākonga, Tauria Pasifika, and the New Zealand International Students' Association as the respective groups responsible for representing and being experts of Māori, Pasifika, and International students.

As the views of NZUSA generally align with those of Te Mana Ākonga, Tauria Pasifika, and the New Zealand International Students' Association, we recommend further discussion with them on topics beyond the scope of this document. NZUSA also recommends further consultation with other on campus groups, such as those representing women, the rainbow community, and disabled students.

### **Role of Tertiary Education**

We support a barrier free education for all. Education should be considered a right, not a privilege, for members of society. We recognize that tertiary education plays a major role as a critic and conscience of society through cultivating critical thinking, collaboration and communication. We also acknowledge the vital role that vocational education and training plays in benefiting society.

Financial barriers, in particular, should not be a deterrent to studying. We believe that tertiary education should be free.

### **Cost of Living**

We acknowledge that the student experience, as it stands, is extremely costly. Staggering average rent prices, cost of transport, exploitation by employers, and having to prioritise low-paying jobs over study have all become a part of the 'student norm'. We believe that education should be accessible and equitable for all students, to recognise the realities of student living and learning.

We also acknowledge the effects that accumulating student debt has on students in the long-term. This constrains decisions around working or living overseas or not, whether to have families or not, and whether to take out a mortgage on a house or invest in a business opportunity.

When pursuing employment, internship, and volunteer opportunities, we believe all students should work within environments that are safe, where they are valued, and where they are free from exploitation and discrimination.

We believe that all domestic students should have access to a Universal Education Income / Te Rourou Matanui-Wānanga (Universal Student Allowance). We believe that this should be universal in access, but not universal in amount given that particular students (i.e. students with dependents, disabled students) require more to live on each week. We believe that the weekly amount should be set at a liveable amount for students.

### **Student Accommodation**

We support students living in halls of residence and colleges being covered under the same protections given to tenants under the Residential Tenancies Act. We also support robust resourcing of all hall and college staff in the form of fair pay, safe working conditions, and comprehensive training to deal with the challenges of being caregivers for students of all ages, levels of study, and backgrounds.

We believe that students in halls of residence or colleges should be eligible for the student accommodation benefit, given the high cost of accommodation for these students.

### **Student Voice**

We believe that students' wellbeing, success, and holistic student experience should be at the heart of TEOs decision-making. To achieve this, students need to be partners in all decision-making processes relating to their experiences, and Māori student voice in particular should be amplified in these discussions.

Student organisations play a crucial role in holding tertiary institutes to account and in empowering students. We believe that institutions and the Government should play a lead role in enabling and supporting student organisations to be independent and effective, including independent Māori student organisations.

We recognise and acknowledge that the working conditions of staff at TEOs directly impact the success and wellbeing of students, and we support the aims of the Tertiary Education Union in developing a tertiary workplace culture that supports and benefits staff.

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

We believe that student consultation should be practised as an equitable engagement of opportunity. We believe that TEOs should engage in intentional, meaningful, extensive consultation with students and

student groups who are a part of or represent a marginalised community, including (but not limited to) Māori, Pasifika, rainbow, disability, low socioeconomic, and international student communities.

NZUSA has several relationships with independent representative bodies who represent some of these tertiary communities. We respect and support their autonomy and self-determination, and believe that it is in our best interests to allow them to define their goals in achieving equity for those they represent.

**Māori Students:** We acknowledge Te Mana Ākonga as our Treaty partners, who are the representative voice for all tertiary students in New Zealand of Māori descent.

**International Students:** We acknowledge the New Zealand International Student Association (NZISA) as the representative voice for all international tertiary students in New Zealand.

**Pasifika Students:** We acknowledge Taura Pasifika as the representative voice for all tertiary students in New Zealand who descend from Polynesia, Melanesia and/or Micronesia.

**Rainbow Students:** There is no independent national voice for rainbow students in New Zealand, and so NZUSA strives to listen to and represent their needs. We believe that all rainbow students have the right to study free from discrimination and violence. We support tertiary institutes using students' preferred pronouns and an increase in the availability of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus.

**Students with Disabilities:** There is no independent national voice for disabled students in New Zealand, and so NZUSA strives to listen to and represent their needs. We follow the social model of disability in thinking about and responding to disability, and urge government to do the same. We believe that all TEOs must be accessible for those with physical and mental disabilities, both visible and invisible. We believe that tertiary campuses should proactively accommodate the physical and technical requirements of students living with disabilities in the physical environment and in their pedagogy.

**Students with refugee backgrounds:** NZUSA recognises the unique struggles that students from refugee backgrounds face in Aotearoa. We strive to work with refugee support organisations to ensure that these students are being listened to and that their needs are being met.

## Mental Health

We acknowledge that New Zealand is experiencing an epidemic of poor mental health. For students, there are a range of factors that affect students' mental wellbeing, including but not limited to isolation, loneliness, financial stress, academic pressure, discrimination, and distress around employment prospects.

We support and acknowledge all types of mental health distress, both short-term and long-term.

We believe that mental health support should be free, accessible and culturally appropriate, and should not only conform to a Pākehā model of delivery.

### **Menstruation**

We acknowledge that the high cost of menstrual products creates an unfair financial barrier to many students for whom they are a necessity. We strongly support measures to reduce this financial burden, such as the provision of free or cost-reduced menstrual products by TEOs.

We support the funding of sanitary products in all state and state-integrated schools, and believe that this should be rolled out to TEOs as well.

### **Sexual Misconduct**

We strongly believe that sexual misconduct, sexual violence, and any sexually harmful behaviour have no place in New Zealand. We stand in solidarity with survivors and hold an expectation that TEOs should share our stance and pursue meaningful action towards eliminating these practices. All sexual violence prevention, support and advocacy initiatives need to be culturally appropriate and in line with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

All TEOs should be held accountable by an external independent body overseeing the reporting and disclosure process of sexually harmful behaviours. All TEOs should have a standardised, standalone policy addressing the reporting, response and prevention of sexually harmful behaviours.

We believe that:

- All TEOs should have a centre for sexual violence support and prevention.
- All tertiary staff should undergo mandatory training on how to deal with disclosures of sexual harm.
- All tertiary students should undergo mandatory consent education.
- All secondary schools should have robust and consistent gender, sexuality, sex, and consent education.

### **Environment and Climate Change**

Tertiary Education Organisations should be at the forefront of progressive environmental change, reflective of their role of educating the next generation. NZUSA supports strong political and social action from government and all areas of society to respond to the current climate crisis, in both curbing rising temperatures and building resilience against the consequences that are unavoidable.

### **Secondary School Leavers**

NZUSA believes that secondary school leavers should be supported with the tools and career advice to transition into the next stage of their lives, whether it is further study, employment, or another path. This is important for helping them fulfil their goals and sense of purpose in life, and should centre the learner, not the desires of adults in their lives.

NZUSA also supports the introduction of Te Tiriti-guided non-partisan civics education programmes in all secondary schools across Aotearoa, so that students can enter adulthood having an understanding of how our country works and how they can participate as an active citizen.

### **Living Wage**

NZUSA is a member organisation of the Living Wage Movement Aotearoa. We believe that everyone in New Zealand should be paid at least a Living Wage. In support of this, NZUSA commits itself to paying all of its elected representatives (and staff) at least a Living Wage.

### **Drug Law Reform**

NZUSA supports a harm reduction and evidenced-based approach to drug law reform. NZUSA believes that cannabis should be legalised, and will actively campaign to support a yes vote in the referendum on the Cannabis Control Bill.

NZUSA also supports the legalisation of illicit drug testing at festivals and events, including Orientation Week events and parties on tertiary campuses.

### **Covid-19 Border Management**

NZUSA believes that New Zealanders studying overseas should be exempt from the managed isolated fee if they return to New Zealand, irrespective of the time that they spend in New Zealand. We believe that the cost of managed isolation is a barrier for students, studying abroad, to return to New Zealand.