



NZUSA



Briefing for the
Incoming Minister
for Tertiary
Education

December 2023





L-R: Ellen Dixon (National President at NZUSA); Sean Prenter (President at NDSA); Tangihaere Gardiner (National Vice-President at NZUSA)

Welcome to the Incoming Minister.

Tēnā koutou,

The New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) welcomes the incoming Minister and looks forward to establishing a positive working relationship, on the behalf of the 400,000 tertiary students of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Students' associations across the motu have been battling with a constant array of crises. From the pandemic period impacting the global education crisis, exacerbating the housing crisis, mental health crisis, and culminating as the cost of living crisis, the impact has been massive. Cyclone Gabrielle at the beginning of the year, changes in Government responsibilities, teacher strikes from early childhood to secondary education, and reports of massive sector deficits leading to huge tertiary layoffs suggest a gloomy future ahead.

Yet we have hope. We welcome building a constructive relationship with the Minister to support solutions for students, and invite continued engagement in our *No More Excuses!* campaign and members' other initiatives to "Save Tertiary Education".

This brief is presented in three parts. The first is a breakdown of NZUSA specifically, in terms of our composition and history. The second is an overview of our current campaigning, with specific interventions from Te Mana Ākonga and local association Presidents. The third is the collective asks we are working towards this coming year.

We look forward to working with the Minister to champion students in 2024, especially with the upcoming Higher Education Funding Review.

ELLEN DIXON
NATIONAL PRESIDENT



Part One

About Us.

Our Council.

NZUSA is overseen by our National Council which comprises of **10 Member associations and 12 representative groups**, in addition to the National President and National Vice-President (also known as **the National Office**).

All Council Members are Presidents of local students' associations or student councils at universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics.* They hold the National Office to account and set our working trajectory in accordance with the NZUSA Constitution.

Two National Partners' Tumuaki or Presidents sit on the National Council as independent bodies who input into the direction of NZUSA, who are **Te Mana Ākonga** and the **National Disabled Students' Association**.

NZUSA also consults with all Non-Member associations, unions and councils on all relevant campaigns, political decisions, organisational decisions, and appointments to external boards and committees.

The current leadership of our Council includes the following Members:

*Te Mana Ākonga
National Disabled Students' Association*

*Lincoln University Students' Association
Otago University Students' Association
Student Association at Nelson Marlborough
Institute of Technology
Student Connection
Te Tira Ahu Pae Māori
Te Tira Ahu Pae Pasifika
Te Tira Ahu Pae General/Distance
Unitec Student Council
Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association
Younited*

*NZUSA also holds an agreement to aid student voice in a PTE



Our History.

NZUSA formed in 1929. Our initial members were Auckland, Victoria, Canterbury and Otago, and to begin with we were known as the New Zealand National Union of Students (NZNUS). In 1935, the name was changed to NZUSA.

NZNUS' initial concerns were debating, sport, internal affairs, travel and foreign affairs. Running competitions such as the Joynt Scroll (debating) and the Bledisloe Medal (oratory) consumed a significant amount of time. At that stage there was no National Office, and the members of the NZNUS Executive were dispersed around Aotearoa New Zealand on their respective campuses.

NZUSA established a National Office in Wellington and expanded its activities. For example, in the 1950s, student health services at universities were poorly developed and a matter of concern for students. NZUSA was instrumental in ensuring students received better health care while studying.

In the 1960s, NZUSA became more active in wider social issues. During this period NZUSA delegates opposed the war in Vietnam and the operations of New Zealand Security Service. NZUSA also advocated for homosexual law reform and fought against racism in immigration policy.

In the first fifty years, NZUSA had been active and influential in student bursaries, quality of teaching, entrance standards, university funding and student support policies. However with the introduction of user pays education in the late '80s and early '90s NZUSA became focused on fees, loans and allowances.

In 2006, NZUSA changed its name from the New Zealand University Students' Association to the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations to better reflect its membership.

The 2010s saw another round of anti-war protests against Iraq. The *Voluntary Student Membership (Freedom of Association) Bill* was also introduced by the ACT party, and successfully passed influencing students' association membership.

The 2020s saw active work to combat the pandemic, with the return of mass marches following lockdowns with focus on the sustainability of higher education.





Our Students' Associations.

There are approximately 400,000 students in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many universities and ITPs across the country have a students' association, union or council, who collectively represent over 350,000 students.

Student unionism is a long-standing tradition in Aotearoa, with the first association forming in 1890 at the University of Otago. Associations at the universities of Auckland, Canterbury and Victoria soon followed. The majority of students' associations at institutes of technology and polytechnics emerged in the 1960s from technical colleges. In 2021, a total of 48 students' associations, unions, councils or clubs on campuses were recorded as being politically active at a local or national level in response to COVID-19.

Student unionism or students' associations are democratically organised bodies that can be found in many tertiary institutions. At the local level, each union, association or council focuses on building social, organisational and service-based activities on their campus. They have a democratically-elected representative body of students as an Executive, Board or a Council, and typically have a non-elected administrative body of staff or an appointed Secretariat. Students can become members, join meetings, committees and boards, run as a representative, and form clubs under the association. They can also use students' association services which may include: advocacy, foodbanks, accommodation, cafes and bars, events etc. Most associations are independent organisations under the *Incorporated Societies Act* and the *Charities Act*.

Students' associations have played a significant role in a number of social movements in Aotearoa New Zealand across the years. This has included the Māori Renaissance (1970s-2000s), the feminist movement (1970s-1990s), the gay rights movement (1970s-2000s), the anti-nuclear movement (1980s-1990s), the anti-war movement (1970s-80s; 2010s), protests against South African apartheid (1981-1994), and climate change (2019-). The student movement of Aotearoa is proudly known to have contributed the most political leaders outside of a political party to date.

The *Voluntary Student Membership (Freedom of Association) Bill (VSM)* was passed in 2011, moving universal student membership (automatic membership) of a student to voluntary (by chosen affiliation). Students' associations are now primarily funded through Service Levy Agreements from their institutions. VSM significantly impacted students' associations' ability to provide crucial services to students.

Tuia ki te Papa e takoto nei,
Tuia ki te Rangi e tū nei,
Tuia ki ngā muka tangata,
E rere kau ana ki a koe e te Minita,

This briefing that follows is collectively from NZUSA, Te Mana Ākonga and our respective members made up of ākonga from across the motu to the incoming Minister of Tertiary Education. It seeks to outline the key focuses of students' associations and the student movement for 2024 and beyond.

We hope that this briefing will inform you of the key issues facing the 400,000 members of the student community across the country. We look forward to working with you over the coming years to support a world class tertiary sector that champions student voice and the student experience.

COVID-19 and the recovery period has had a significant impact on students, and more broadly the tertiary sector. The pandemic highlighted some of the major struggles student face during their studies. We hope that your Government will work to address these as we highlight them below.

This year NZUSA campaigned on our No More Excuses! platform, which had 3 key policy areas.

These are:
Realise Te Tiriti o Waitangi
A Debt-Free Future
Working in Partnership

The policy areas form the basis of the focus of the student movement for 2024 and beyond.

We hope that this briefing will provide you with valuable insight into the student sphere.



Written by Ellen Dixon, National President of NZUSA & Quintin Jane, President of Otago University Students' Association

Saving Tertiary Education.



The tertiary sector is in crisis, with protests led by students and staff from across the country. In March 2023, Te Pūkenga reported a \$63m deficit that continued to climb. The next month the University of Otago announced a \$60m deficit. Victoria University of Wellington announced a \$33m deficit, following a \$25m deficit in 2022. Massey University announced a \$91m deficit. Auckland University of Technology had already undergone mass layoffs in 2022.

NZUSA and local associations have supported by proxy the emergence of self-organising student groups, joining them in protest of the following staff cuts. Students' associations were concerned about the impacts that these redundancies would have on teaching quality, and postgraduate students' research capability.

An open letter calling for urgent financial support for the tertiary sector was penned by VUWSA and OUSA, with support from the respective branches of the Tertiary Education Union and NZUSA. The letter was released and supported by an open letter from the Vice-Chancellors of the University of Otago and Victoria University of Wellington. The letter garnered over 6,000 signatures from students, academics, politicians across the political spectrum, concerned alumni, public figures and members of the public.

Additional events have been staged including an open letter and protest outside of the Tertiary Education Commission, protest outside of the Hon. Grant Robertson's Wellington Office, and other initiatives.

Students' associations were pleased to see the recognition of the funding challenges our institutions faced, through the announcement of \$128m in additional funding for tertiary institutions in 2024 and 2025. This announcement aided the preservation of some jobs across the country, and provided much more certainty to students about the future of their degrees and courses. The additional announcement of the Higher Education Funding Review has promised to ensure that tertiary institutions are being adequately and sustainably funded.

This will continue to be a focus of NZUSA and local students' associations in 2024, with particular attention on the Higher Education Fund Review at the Ministry of Education, which NZUSA wants to see the Coalition Government uphold.



No More Excuses! Campaign.

In July 2023, NZUSA held a cocktail evening welcoming the beginning of the *No More Excuses!* campaign, signaling our collective political response to the General Elections 2023.

The event was attended by political parties, civil society organisations, tertiary sector leaders, and most importantly, students.

The campaign was collective put together by students' associations who held events across the country, focusing on three key areas:

1. Realise Te Tiriti o Waitangi Championed by TMĀ

The need to give dignity back to tairua Māori and Māori staff at tertiary institutions by honouring Te Tiriti!

2. A Debt-Free Future Championed by OUSA and VUWSA

Student debt is currently at \$16 billion NZD and with the cost of living crisis many students are

falling into poverty, which needs to change!

3. Working in Partnership Championed by AUSA

Student voice policy has existed for many decades yet it is not embedded in tertiary education across Aotearoa. Students' associations are only in legislation for VSM, yet have no other identity. This needs to change!

These topics will remain the focus for NZUSA and local associations for 2024, with the additional area:

4. Student Exploitation in the Workplace

Student apprenticeships, placements, internships and fixed-term postgraduate work have one thing in common: they all endorse low-wage work or no-wage work among tertiary students. This needs to be addressed to avoid normalising the gig economy and endorsing underpaying workers.

The campaign can be viewed online at:
www.nomoreexcuses.online





Written by Rosa Hibbert-Schooner, Tumuaiki of Te Mana Ākonga

Realise Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Tā Apirana Ngata was the first Māori graduate across any institute and one of the founder rangatira of our kaupapa. He has been a beacon of activism and promoter of decolonial practice to reform colonial systems in to those in which Te Tiriti envisioned, sovereign and tikanga led ways of living.

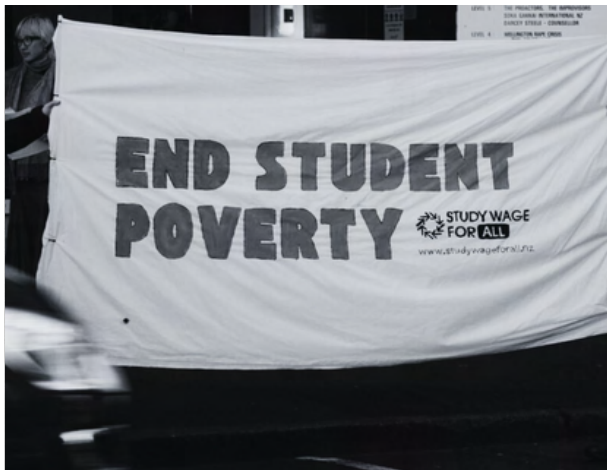
Te Tiriti o Waitangi has both historically and is currently a way in which universities can be held to account for serving the interests individually and collectively for Tangata Whenua. We know that Māori ākonga are disproportionately represented in rates of retention, achievement and experience, you can see this in the strategies such as Ka Hikitia, Manu Kōkiri report done by Te Taumata Aronui and NZQA results.

For years institutes have created Māori enhancement, development, recruitment, retention and achievement strategies to better enable Māori to be welcomed into a tertiary environment that both represents their culture and wants us to achieve. Programs such as MAPAS ki Otago, Takere at UC, Tuākana/Teina models across the country are just some examples of what work is being done to break the barriers for access that is still the very real and harsh reality of being angata Whenua in a colonial nation.

The vision of Te Mana Ākonga is to see a decolonised education sector that can deliver to the diverse needs and intersectional identities of ākonga. We know that strategies are not enough to ever meet the true barrier, the colonial system itself. This is supported by the *No More Excuses!* policy area in embedding Te Tiriti within all tertiary institutes. What we need to see is an education system, specifically tertiary, that is committed to right the wrongs of the colonial histories of this country. The coalition policies and commitments put out by your Government may endanger the visions of ākonga wish to be realised. The discourse provided by policies presented are further adding to the colonialism that perpetually targets Tangata Whenua and as we have learnt from history will affect Māori ākonga negatively.

What we want to emphasise through *No More Excuses!* is putting responsibility and shared accountability between institutes, Government and Crown on what actualising and embedding Te Tiriti look like in the tertiary sector. We have started to see models of co-governance, iwi partnerships and Māori ākonga representation that are growing successfully and what we are asking for is recognition of this and a continued venture to support such models. We do not believe starting over or ridding institutes of these models will do anything for the progression of the tertiary sector. Indigenous models of research, academia, teaching and mentoring have brought immense improvement for all learners regardless of ethnicity and we believe any step to prevent this progression is an active step backward into the colonial past.

We would like you to consider the recommendations made by the Manu Kōkiri report, by Matike Mai, by us as ākonga and work with us in accordance with Whiria ngā rau to continue to reach toward these goals of a decolonised and reformed education system that serves Tangata Whenua and diverse learners.



Written by Jessica Ye, President of Victoria University of Wellington

A Debt-Free Future.

Free Tertiary Education

Student associations ardently support free tertiary education and the first-year free policy as a crucial step towards a barrier-free education system. However, we are concerned about the Government's proposed shift from a first-year to a final-year free system. This change will disincentivise prospective students from figuring out if study is for them, given the financial burden if they choose not to continue. The first-year free policy was a move toward recognising education as a public good. We believe in the importance of strengthening, not weakening this policy to create accessibility and public benefits.

Study Wage for All

A universal Study Wage for All, recalculated annually, is essential for enabling students to live with dignity and focus on their studies. Study unaffordability adversely affects student success, well-being, and access to higher education, with broader implications for institutions, workforce diversity, social cohesion, and economic equality. This campaign has been led by VUWSA on behalf of students' associations across the motu, but it has also been a longstanding campaign of the student movement since the 1990s.

To address this, we propose a debt-free allowance for all students without means-testing, addressing the current inadequacies where only 12% receive the full entitlement

Two-thirds of students cannot afford basic necessities and are twice as likely to struggle compared to the rest of the working population. Financial struggles contribute to a decline in university retention rates, to the detriment of the nation's future skilled workforce and societal well-being.

The unjust state of student allowances perpetuates income inequality, limiting social mobility and exacerbating existing inequities. A transformative funding model review with student allowances in scope, is crucial to consider questions of fairer access to higher education, and how we can prevent wealth from dictating a student's success.

Lack of Postgraduate Student Allowance and Unpaid Placements

Critical issues in the current student allowance scheme include the absence of a postgraduate student allowance and challenges associated with unpaid placements. Postgraduate students face exploitation risks without adequate financial support, hindering participation, particularly of poorer students, in vital research and innovation. Additionally, unpaid placements in professions like nursing and social work lead to significant dropout rates (1/3 of nursing and over 40% of social work students), contributing to chronic and severe workforce shortages and impacting patient care. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms, including a postgraduate student allowance.

Accessible tertiary education and addressing challenges in student welfare is crucial for shaping a prosperous and equitable future for Aotearoa New Zealand.



Written by Ellen Dixon, National President of NZUSA & Tangihaere Gardiner, National Vice-President of NZUSA

Working In Partnership.

Whiriā Ngā Rau is a policy tool created by Te Mana Ākonga, the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations, Taura Pasifika and the National Disabled Students' Association, with the Ministry of Education. It was released in 2021 by the Ministry of Education and currently informs the Academic Quality Agency's auditing process on student voice, and Te Pūkenga's Operations Manual.

It is based on four rau:

- *Whakapakari (Strengthening Students' Voices)*
- *Whakawhanaungatanga (Building Connection With Each Other)*
- *Akoranga (Learning With and from Each Other)*
- *Mahitahi (Working Together)*

Universities Partnership

Universities can adopt Whiriā Ngā Rau as a model to advise their engagement on committees, boards and councils, when working with student unions or associations, and even in aiding in general student consultation.

Student voice is now a key focus of the Code of Pastoral Care with Universities New Zealand appointing the Committee on University Student Pastoral Care in 2021 and now developing reporting processes for

diverse areas from accommodation to healthcare. Yet most associations do not feel they have embedded student partnership because service provision now doubles-up between provider and association, impacting Student Levy Agreements. There are inconsistencies on University Councils concerning association access to representation, requiring better partnerships to be developed.

Te Pūkenga Partnership

With Te Pūkenga being dissolved, Whiriā Ngā Rau is even more relevant. Te Pūkenga needed genuine, independent student partnership, with ITPs and ITOs in need of this to progress at all. Having students involved in the construction and implementation of ITPs and ITOs at every point ensures that we are managing the transition away from Te Pūkenga in the near future.

The core value of Te Pūkenga of 'learner at the centre' needs to remain during this transition, as we need to focus on having those students in the room when we're deciding how the future of university alternatives within tertiary education will work. Without the students being included in the room we are losing out a key stakeholder at a time of complex transition. We must ensure that both employers and employees are involved in the maintenance and development of ITPs and ITOs after Te Pūkenga.

With 240,000 students, there is a responsibility to embed the voice of taura in ITPs and ITO to ensure learner voice is truly held at the centre and that quality education and mobility are upheld. We can help with this if the values of Whiriā Ngā Rau are integrated properly during this transitions.





Part Three

Our Aims.



Our aims for 2024 continue on from our work in 2023, and include some of the following points:

1) Amend the Education & Training Act to include 2 University Council seats

We want to see one seat for taurira Maori and a general student seat

2) Amend the Education & Training Act Section 4(d)

Amending Section 4(d) of the Act to not simply say “honour” Te Tiriti, but “give effect to”

3) Implement a Study Wage for All

Find ways to alleviate the cost of living crisis and student debt through provision of financial pathways

4) Reinstate the Postgraduate Allowance and Relevant Bursaries

Provide financial pathways to incentivise research and essential jobs such as nursing, teaching, building etc.

5) Investigate Pathways To Alleviate Student Debt

Investigate ways of debt management including debt forgiveness, and provide budgeting education in schools

6) Implement Whiriā Ngā Rau in Education Policy and Planning

Build Whiriā Ngā Rau into Government education policy and practice in areas such as YAGs and other student-related bodies

7) Give ITP Students’ Associations Their Independence Back

Address Te Pūkenga’s merger and the impact their financial and governance decisions are having on ITP students

8) Do Not Endorse Gig-Work or Unpaid Placements or Internships

Monitor companies endorsing gig-work from young people (particularly international students) and unpaid work in placements and internships at tertiary providers and with private and public organisations

9) Provide Workplace Protections for Apprentices and Work-Based Learners

Provide relevant employment protections to apprentices and work-based learners who are dependent on completion of hours to obtain their degrees

10) Commit to the Higher Education Funding Review

Ensure the Review happens, it is essential!



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A Debt-Free Future

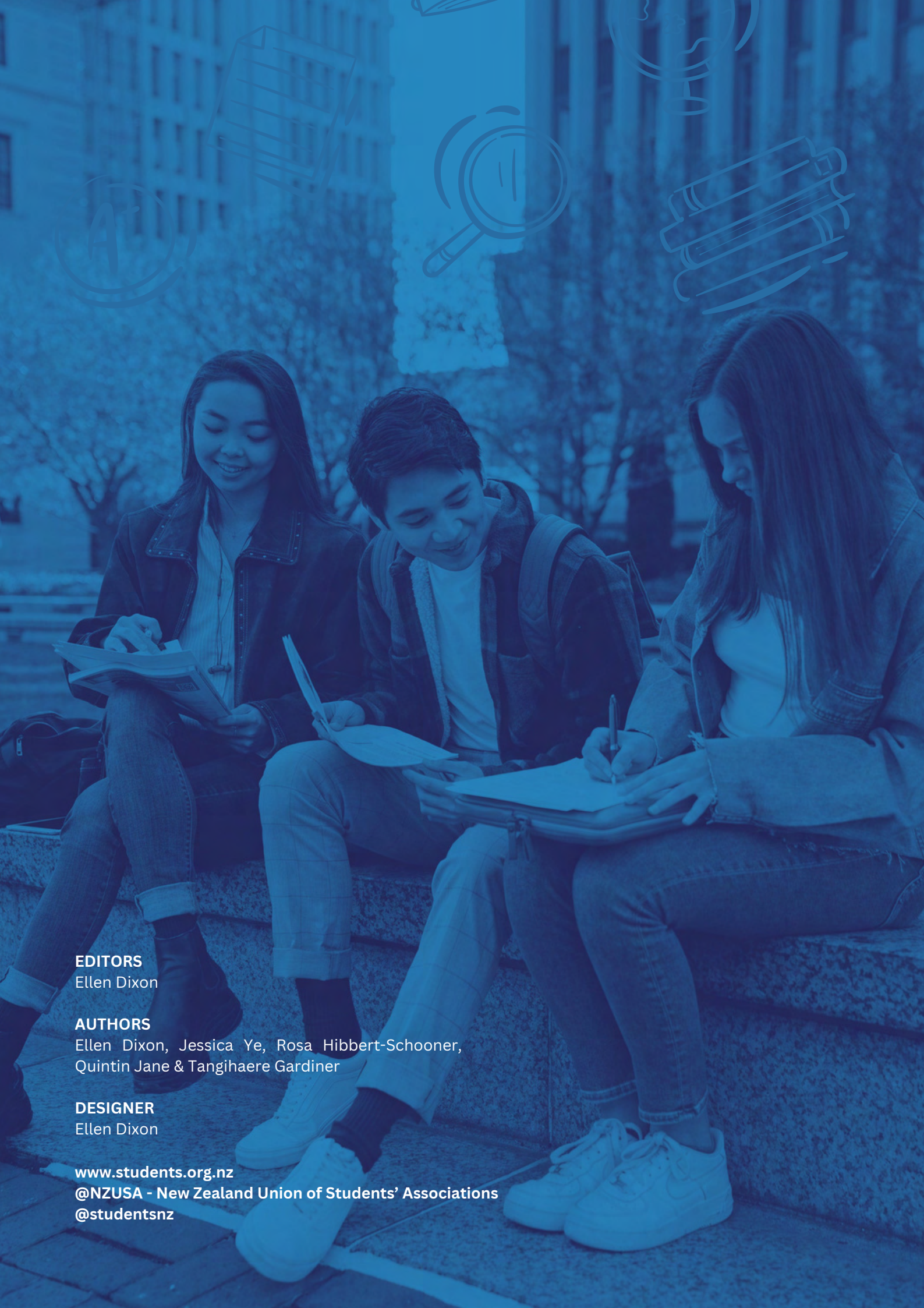
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Our Aims

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EDITORS

Ellen Dixon

AUTHORS

Ellen Dixon, Jessica Ye, Rosa Hibbert-Schooner,
Quintin Jane & Tangihaere Gardiner

DESIGNER

Ellen Dixon

www.students.org.nz

@NZUSA - New Zealand Union of Students' Associations

@studentsnz