27 September 2022

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education
Parliament

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Kia ora Mr Hipkins

Recently TEU commissioned a financial analysis of all eight universities over the period from 2008 to 2021. This analysis has shown a significant and deliberate policy shift to disinvest in staff personnel costs as a percentage of total operating expenses over this 13-year period.

This personnel disinvestment by university management has led to higher student:staff ratios, widespread use of fixed term and casualised forms of employment, problems recruiting general/professional staff, higher churn of staff, higher workloads, and the significant increase in the use of teaching fellows/graduate teaching assistants with the corresponding move away and degradation from research-based teaching. Together these factors pose a major risk for the university sector in Aotearoa, as it is impacting on the quality of academic and support service, and the scope of programmes that universities across NZ can provide.

The issues above have now been further advanced by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which has placed additional workload and stress on university staff. Over the last 2½ years, staff across the sector have worked extremely hard to meet the teaching, research and learning needs of students and our universities, but they cannot continue to sustain the accumulated workload pressures they are currently facing.

TEU has attempted to address these issues with the vice chancellors by seeking time at the vice chancellors meeting to discuss what is a sector wide problem (letter attached) but we have been unsuccessful (letter 2 attached).

We now seek an urgent meeting between the chancellors, TEU, and the Minister of Education to canvas a tripartite response to the impact this deliberate disinvestment in staffing and the risk it poses to all universities and their ability to deliver the educated workforce Aotearoa will need for the future. We also believe a tripartite meeting is the way to strategise how we can
ensure staff conditions of work are of a standard which ensures high-quality conditions of learning. It is only together that we can find the best way forward.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Grey
Te Pou Ahurei | National Secretary