

**TEU****TE HAUTŪ KAHURANGI**
TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION

Letter to all Vice Chancellors and Chief Executives of Tertiary Education Institutions in Aotearoa

Tēnā koutou,

As you all know, the 2026 General Election is now only a few weeks away. I am sure you will agree that electing a government that values and invests in tertiary education is of critical importance to our sector, our communities, and our future.

One of the most important ways we contribute to a healthy democracy is by ensuring that candidates and political parties hear directly from staff, students, and the wider public about the issues that matter to them. Tertiary institutions have a long and proud tradition of fostering informed debate, critical thinking, and civic participation.

Many institutions are already hosting election debates, candidate forums, and other events that encourage democratic engagement and support voter participation. As the critic and conscience of society, this role is both appropriate and essential.

However, it has come to our attention that some tertiary institutions are actively preventing staff and students from engaging with the election process by restricting access for political candidates and parties to campus spaces.

We believe such restrictions are inconsistent with the principles of academic freedom and with the role of tertiary institutions as places where ideas can be openly tested, debated, and challenged. Universities, polytechnics, wānanga, and other tertiary providers should be spaces that encourage robust democratic discussion, not inhibit it.

We strongly encourage all tertiary institutions to engage positively with the 2026 General Election and to support staff and students to do the same. Facilitating candidate visits, debates, forums, and other democratic activities helps strengthen civic participation and enriches the educational environment.

It is also important to note that tertiary institutions are explicitly excluded from the definition of State services under the Public Service Act 2020. The statutory requirements of political neutrality that apply to the public service do not apply to tertiary institutions. The Public Service Commission's explanation of the public sector structure makes this clear: [How the public sector is organised](#).

At a time when democratic participation is more important than ever, tertiary institutions should be leading and enabling robust political engagement, not limiting it.

Ngā mihi,

Amy Ross, National Secretary, Tertiary Education Union