TE TIRITI O WAITANGI

Introduction

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document and provides the framework for partnership between tangata whenua and the Crown. For the tertiary education sector, Te Tiriti o Waitangi affirms the Crown's duty of kāwanatanga (governance), guarantees Māori tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), and ensures rights and opportunities for all – obligations which must be actively upheld in governance, funding, curriculum, and institutional practice.[1]

Consistent with Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union's (TEU) Equity Policy, this policy recognises the intersecting inequities experienced by women, Māori, Pacific, disabled persons, queer, migrant, and other marginalised kaimahi (staff) and ākonga (students). A Te Tiriti o Waitangi-honouring tertiary sector must address these inequities within the framework of tino rangatiratanga and genuine partnership.

Whare — Our aspiration

We aspire to a tertiary education sector that fully honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a living covenant and constitutional foundation. In this vision, tino rangatiratanga is respected and realised through meaningful mana whenua leadership, co-governance, and co-design at every level of the sector. Mātauranga Māori is valued as a foundational source of knowledge, alongside tikanga Māori, shaping teaching, research, and institutional practice.

Our vision is one where tertiary institutions uphold their responsibility and accountability as partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These institutions are places of belonging and equity, committed to ensuring all ākonga and kaimahi are allowed to thrive with dignity, cultural safety, and have fair opportunities through embedded practice. Institutional marae play a vital role in this vision, providing spaces of belonging, learning, and cultural expression that embody Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership within the sector. As a taonga under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, te reo me tikanga Māori must be protected and promoted across teaching, research, and institutional activities, affirming their place as a living mātauranga of Aotearoa New Zealand. The sector also embraces kaitiakitanga (guardianship), acknowledging responsibilities to our taiao (environment) and mokopuna (future generations) by embedding sustainability and intergenerational justice into its mission.

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[1] Within the context of TEU policies, 'tertiary education sector' is the umbrella term used to infer the following sub-sectors: polytechnic; PRRISM (private; REAP; research institutes; statutory; miscellaneous); university; and Wānanga.

Pou — Why this policy is needed

Past governments have failed to uphold their responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Furthermore, the current coalition government has signalled an intention to narrow or weaken Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments, including through the proposed Treaty Principles Bill and the Regulatory Standards Bill. These efforts risk reducing the Crown's obligations to minimal terms and undermine mechanisms that protect mana whenua tino rangatiratanga, sovereignty, and equity in tertiary education. Simultaneously, funding cuts to Māori initiatives threaten to reverse progress towards greater participation and success for ākonga and kaimahi.

While many tertiary institutions have established Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based policies and initiatives, they remain uneven in their effectiveness and vulnerable to political change. Kaimahi Māori continue to be under-represented and often carry disproportionate cultural and pastoral workloads, while non-kaimahi Māori have uneven access to the support needed to build cultural capability, including a robust understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its implications for the workplace. Institutional marae, where established, provide vital spaces of belonging and cultural integrity, yet their availability across the sector remains inconsistent, limiting their role as visible expressions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership. Similarly, te reo Māori, though recognised as a taonga and as an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand, is still not adequately supported in teaching, research, or institutional culture. Without clear union advocacy and strong institutional accountability, Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations risk being treated as symbolic rather than transformative.

This policy provides TEU with the clarity and direction needed to respond to this context. It outlines how the union will defend and advance Te Tiriti o Waitangi within the tertiary sector, while complementing and cross-referencing other TEU policies on equity, democracy, and decent work.

Waka — Our actions

To achieve our aspirations, TEU will implement a range of the following actions.

Advocacy

- Oppose legislative and policy changes that undermine Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.
- Promote Te Tiriti o Waitangi-aligned approaches in all government submissions and policy processes, ensuring Māori tino rangatiratanga and equity remain central.
- Advocate for sustained, targeted funding for Māori ākonga and kaimahi.

Campaigning

- Coordinate campaigns with mana whenua and allied organisations to defend and strengthen Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations across the sector.

Organising

- Support members to challenge institutional failures to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, through collective bargaining and workplace advocacy.
- Build member capability with accessible training and resources on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, mātauranga Māori, tikanga Māori, and te reo Māori linked to practical workplace contexts.

Partnership

- Encourage tertiary institutions to establish formal, well-resourced partnerships with iwi, hapū, and Māori organisations.
- Promote co-governance and co-design arrangements that embed Māori voices in institutional decision-making.
- Support kaupapa Māori (Māori approaches) institutions such as wānanga (Māori tertiary institutions), ensuring they are adequately funded and respected as Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners.
- Work with tertiary institutions to ensure ongoing comprehensive cultural capability training for all non-kaimahi Māori.
- Encourage tertiary institutions to establish institutional marae as spaces of belonging and by promoting tikanga Māori and te reo Māori as a living language across teaching, research, and daily practice.

Policy sign-off and ownership details

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Revision history

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