

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

Submission of

**Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education  
Union**

to the

**Ministry of Education**

on the

**Consultation on Draft Tertiary Education  
Strategy Monitoring Framework**

4 September 2026

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## Introduction

Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the *Consultation on the draft Tertiary Education Strategy Monitoring Framework*.

The TEU is the largest union and professional association representing 11,000 academic and general/allied staff in the tertiary education sector (in universities, institutes of technology/polytechnics, wānanga, private training establishments, and rural education activities programmes).

### 1. Do you have any comments on the proposed indicators for the TES monitoring framework?

Our central concern is that the framework, as drafted, measures the tertiary education system almost entirely in terms of what can be priced: completion, earnings, and commercialisable research. None of its five priorities, and no standalone indicator within them, captures kaupapa Māori, humanities and social science contribution, academic freedom, or the sector's broader social and community impact, including its contribution to New Zealand's Sustainable Development Goal commitments.

The sections below outline how each of these could be built into the framework using data the sector and Ministry largely already hold, and closes with a summary table mapping specific proposed additions onto the existing indicator structure.

#### *Kaupapa Māori, not just Te Tiriti as a disaggregation variable*

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is currently addressed only by using ethnicity as a disaggregation variable inside indicators built around completion, earnings and enrolment (1.1, 1.2, 2.1). That is not the same as a kaupapa Māori indicator. Kaupapa Māori research and provision is a distinct approach grounded in Māori-determined priorities, values, and measures of success, not a subset of mainstream data broken out by ethnicity.

We **recommend** a dedicated indicator, developed with wānanga, Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga and iwi education authorities, tracking resourcing per EFTS for kaupapa Māori and Māori-medium provision against the system average, the share of government research funding reaching Māori-led and kaupapa Māori-informed research, and Māori decision-making authority, not just representation, on TEO councils, research funding panels and curriculum bodies.

The Marsden Fund's December 2024 decision to disband its humanities and social sciences panels shows why this distinction matters in practice. Māori investigators made up thirteen percent of Marsden-funded researchers in 2024, a share that commentators noted would fall to around 5.5 percent once humanities and social sciences funding was removed, because those two panels carried a disproportionate share of Māori-led

research. A monitoring framework that cannot register that kind of impact is not measuring the system Māori learners, kaimahi and communities actually experience.

#### *Humanities and social science research investment*

The commercialisation focus of indicators 2.4–2.6 is not a neutral design choice; it reflects, and will entrench, a funding pattern already underway. New Zealand's total research and development expenditure sits at roughly 1.5 percent of GDP against an OECD average of around 2.6 percent, already among the lower rates in the OECD. Within that low base, the December 2024 decision to disband the Marsden Fund's humanities and social sciences panels removed the discipline group's only baseline government research fund; roughly a fifth of university researchers work in the humanities and social sciences, and they now have no dedicated blue-skies funding source at all.

This is unusual among comparable systems: funders such as the Australian Research Council, the European Research Council, Canada's federal research councils and the UK's Leverhulme Trust all continue to fund humanities and social science research alongside the sciences.

A monitoring framework that measures research success only through commercialisation revenue and citation counts will make this funding pattern look like the natural order of things, rather than a recent and internationally unusual policy choice.

We **recommend** an indicator tracking government research investment by broad field of research, already collected through the Stats NZ R&D Survey, reported against OECD comparators, so Ministers and the public can see the scale of the gap and track any further narrowing over time.

#### *Social and community impact, defined broadly*

"Collaboration" is currently defined narrowly as concurrent enrolment at two or more TEOs and journal co-authorship (4.1, 4.2).]

We **recommend** a community and iwi partnership indicator counting formal partnership agreements that involve genuine shared design and decision-making, not simply consultation, drawing on partnership reporting TEOs already provide as part of investment plans and accreditation. This would give visibility to the relational, workload-heavy work our members do with communities, employers and iwi that keeps the tertiary system connected to the people it serves.

#### *An annual academic freedom survey*

We **recommend** the Ministry commit to an annual, independently administered academic freedom survey across the tertiary sector, covering staff and postgraduate researchers' perceived freedom to research, publish, teach and speak on matters of public interest without institutional or political interference, and their confidence in the critic-and-conscience protections set out in section 268(2) of the Education and Training Act 2020.

Comparable instruments already exist internationally, including the V-Dem Academic Freedom Index and the monitoring work of Scholars at Risk, and could inform survey design. Administration should sit with an independent body, not individual TEOs, so staff can respond honestly without fear that answers will be traced back to them by their own institution, and the survey should be repeated annually so the framework can track trends rather than a single snapshot.

#### *The limits of an employer satisfaction survey*

Regarding indicator 2.2, we note that an employer satisfaction survey, however well designed, has structural limits that should be stated plainly in the framework rather than left implicit.

Employer surveys tend to have low and uneven response rates across industries and firm sizes, and to weight visible technical and job-ready skills more heavily than critical thinking, ethical judgement and communication, capacities graduates and employers themselves often rate highly in open-ended feedback but that a structured satisfaction instrument is poorly placed to capture. An employer survey also cannot register outcomes for graduates who are self-employed, working in the informal or community sector, undertaking further study, or contributing through unpaid and caregiving work.

We **recommend** 2.2 be reframed as one input into a triangulated skills-relevance measure that also draws on graduate destination and alumni surveys, professional body assessments where they exist, and qualitative case studies, rather than being reported, now or later, as a stand-alone proxy for whether the system is producing the right skills.

### **2. Do you think the proposed indicators appropriately measure progress against the TES priorities?**

No, not as currently drafted, and the gap is not incidental. Each of the additions above responds to part of the Strategy's own stated ambition, the relevance and impact of tertiary education, that the current indicator set does not touch. Left as drafted, the framework will report faithfully on completion, earnings and commercialised research while remaining silent on kaupapa Māori, humanities and social science contribution, academic freedom, and the sector's broader social and community impact.

Given that the Ministry states this framework will inform TEC funding decisions and TEO investment plans, that silence has consequences: it will reward institutions for narrowing toward what is counted, at real cost to disciplines, partnerships and freedoms the framework simply does not see.

### **3. Are there existing data sources or measures that we have overlooked, that could serve as the basis for additional indicators (particularly in the Economic Impact and Innovation, and Integration and Collaboration priorities)?**

#### *Economic Impact and Innovation*

Government research funding by broad field of research, already collected through the Stats NZ R&D Survey, could ground the humanities and social science investment indicator recommended above, reported against OECD comparators. Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga and Health Research Council Māori and Pacific funding rounds would let a kaupapa Māori research indicator be built largely without new data collection. TEC research degree completion data by discipline, and existing collective agreement provisions that already log community service and public engagement as part of academic workload allocation, could ground a public-scholarship measure without new individual reporting.

#### *Integration and Collaboration*

TEC's Reform of Vocational Education partnership reporting, Workforce Development Council industry agreements, and the iwi/Māori education strategies TEOs already lodge as part of their investment plans would let this priority capture community, industry and iwi collaboration. TEOs' existing Times Higher Education Impact Rankings submissions, where a number of institutions already report annually, would let the SDG-alignment indicator be built largely from data several TEOs already produce.

#### **4. Are there any existing qualitative information that is suitable for supplementing quantitative information on earnings and employment?**

Graduate and alumni surveys already run by several TEOs capture civic participation, community contribution and job quality alongside income. Community and iwi partner feedback, already collected as part of accreditation and Tiriti-partnership reporting in several institutions, could supplement earnings data with a measure of relational and social value a wage figure cannot show.

An annual academic freedom survey, reported at aggregate sector level to protect respondent anonymity, would supply exactly the kind of qualitative, staff-reported information the framework currently lacks anywhere, and would double as a direct qualitative complement to indicator 2.2: staff perceptions of institutional pressure toward "employable" disciplines sit alongside employer satisfaction data as two halves of the same picture.

#### **5. What do you consider there to be the gaps in system performance information that are the highest priority for addressing?**

- No indicator of academic freedom or the critic-and-conscience function, despite it being a statutory characteristic of universities under s268(2) of the Education and Training Act 2020 – addressed by an annual, independently administered sector survey.
- Te Tiriti treated only as a disaggregation variable, not as a kaupapa Māori indicator – addressed by a dedicated indicator on resourcing, research investment and

decision-making authority, developed with Māori educational and research leadership.

- No measure of humanities and social science research investment, at a time when the discipline group has just lost its only baseline government fund and New Zealand's overall R&D spend already trails the OECD average – addressed by a research-investment-by-field indicator reported against OECD comparators.
- No measure of social and community impact broadly defined – addressed by a community and iwi partnership indicator built on existing partnership reporting.
- No measure of the sector's contribution to New Zealand's Sustainable Development Goal commitments – addressed by an SDG-alignment indicator drawing on TEOs' existing Impact Rankings reporting.
- Indicator 2.2 risks becoming a stand-alone proxy for skills relevance despite well-documented structural limits of employer surveys – addressed by reframing it as one input among several.

#### **6. Are there ways to improve the framework while maintaining the principle of minimising compliance and administrative burden?**

Yes. Most of the additions above draw on data TEOs, the Ministry and TEC already hold or already report elsewhere: the R&D Survey, TEC research degree completions, existing partnership and investment-plan reporting, and TEOs' own Impact Rankings submissions.

TEU would oppose any new indicator that shifts additional individual reporting labour onto already-stretched academic and general staff. The one genuinely new instrument recommended here, the academic freedom survey, should be centrally funded and independently administered at sector level, not run by individual TEOs, both to protect respondent anonymity and to avoid creating thirty separate compliance exercises where one national survey would do.

#### **7. Do you have any other comments on the draft Tertiary Education Strategy Monitoring Framework?**

A monitoring framework built entirely around completion, earnings and commercialised research will inevitably become the justification for cutting everything it doesn't count.

The Marsden Fund's December 2024 decision to defund humanities and social sciences research entirely is not a hypothetical risk here; it is what happens when a system stops measuring, and therefore stops valuing, contribution it cannot price, and it landed hardest on Māori-led research in the process.

TEU **recommends** that kaupapa Māori, humanities and social science contribution, academic freedom, and social and community impact broadly defined, including alignment with New Zealand's Sustainable Development Goal commitments, be given

indicators of equal standing to completion and earnings in the next iteration of this framework, not treated as qualitative colour around a set of numbers that will do the actual work of managing the system.

## 8. Summary: Proposed additions to the framework

The table below maps each recommendation above onto the framework's existing structure, using indicative numbering consistent with the current indicators.

| Proposed indicator                                        | Priority area                              | What it would measure                                                                                                             | Data source                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.3 Kaupapa Māori and Māori-medium pathway success        | Achievement                                | Completion and progression measured against Māori-determined success criteria, not NZQCF completion alone                         | Wānanga and Māori-medium provider data, developed with Māori educational leadership |
| 2.7 Humanities and social science research investment     | Economic Impact and Innovation             | Government research funding by broad field of research, reported against OECD comparators                                         | Stats NZ R&D Survey                                                                 |
| 2.2 (revised) Employer and graduate-outcome triangulation | Economic Impact and Innovation             | Skills relevance drawn from multiple sources, not an employer survey alone                                                        | Employer survey + graduate destination/alumni surveys + professional body data      |
| 3.3 Kaupapa Māori-designed access and participation       | Access and Participation                   | Access pathways designed and defined by Māori communities, not only regional/mode-of-study counts                                 | Wānanga and iwi education strategies already lodged with TEC                        |
| 4.3 Community and iwi partnership                         | Integration and Collaboration              | Formal partnership agreements involving genuine shared design and decision-making                                                 | TEO investment plans and existing partnership reporting                             |
| 4.4 SDG-aligned contribution                              | Integration and Collaboration              | Research and teaching contribution mapped against relevant Sustainable Development Goals                                          | TEOs' existing Times Higher Education Impact Rankings submissions                   |
| New: Academic freedom and critic-and-conscience indicator | Proposed as a cross-cutting sixth priority | Staff and postgraduate researcher perceptions of freedom to research, publish, teach and speak; confidence in s268(2) protections | New annual, independently administered sector survey                                |