People & Culture Position Paper

He aha te mea nui o te aō. He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata
What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people.

Introduction

The activities of teaching, research, and innovation are essential to fulfilling the mission of the University as an internationally respected and distinctive place of higher learning. Through this work we seek to identify, consider and respond to a number of pressing questions and identify new opportunities that will drive our People and Culture strategy. We want to excel as a University in ways which advance knowledge and add significant value to New Zealand, Australasia and the Pacific region, and to our future social, environmental and economic development as a country.

The University's success relies on the wellbeing, engagement and calibre of its people who are vital to enabling and delivering core activities. Recruiting, retaining and developing a significantly more diverse and capable workforce remains a central challenge to fulfilling our mission. This paper proposes questions that stimulate open ended kōrero across the University with the aim to create a vibrant culture where all our people feel a sense of belonging to our academic enterprise, can flourish and grow, and are enabled to perform to the highest level.

Areas of Strategic Focus

Belonging: Our identity and place in the world

A key part of our distinctiveness as a university is our location in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. We acknowledge that Māori are tangata whenua and embrace what this entails as responsible citizens. Te Aō Māori, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Te Reo Māori are vital to our identity and our culture as a University. The University of Auckland aims to be a place where Te Reo Māori can flourish, where the language is used by everyone, everywhere, every day. Similarly where mātauranga Māori is valued, fostered, protected and used responsibly. We also recognise that we live in one of the most diverse cities in the world and the largest Polynesian capital in the world. As such we have the basis for an identity that builds upon the manaakitanga extended by tangata whenua to others, including our Pacific communities and other migrant communities. A strong and inclusive university builds upon the diverse needs and strengths of its members to better help us achieve our mission and to respond to the challenges of the future. Responding to this diversity and championing equity also defines our unique contribution as a scholarly community, thereby using diversity as a basis for strength and not division.

Challenge questions
- What should we do to enhance our inclusiveness and build a University community where all our people feel highly connected and valued?
- What steps do we need to take to ensure we are creating a place where everyone (staff and students) feels respected and valued for all that they contribute to our university?
- How do we ensure the University is a safe, healthy, inclusive and equitable place to work?
- How might the university strengthen our culture and people practices to support our aspirations to better connect with tangata whenua, iwi and Māori entities, along with our Pacific neighbours and communities?

Our people experience

The experience all our people have, while working with the University, must deliver on their needs and expectations. Our staff survey results demonstrate that our staff are engaged and highly committed to the purpose and values of the University, and appreciate the teamwork and collegiality within their Departments. Our staff have also indicated areas we could improve – they are seeking an environment where they are better supported in their careers, where a spirit of collegiality is fostered across disciplinary areas, where administrative systems are efficient and fit for purpose, and where there is authentic involvement in our strategic direction and ongoing activities.

- What are the strengths we have that are important to preserve as we shape our strategy?
- What new and rewarding experiences do we want of working here?
- How do we further build trust, engagement and commitment to the University?
- How do we support our employees in gaining the flexibility and healthy life balance they would like, while also delivering an outstanding student experience?
- How does the University build stronger career paths for all our staff?

Reflecting our students and communities

The University aims to ensure that our people understand and respond to the changing needs and expectations of all our students. Accordingly, we must consider how at all levels and in all Departments of the University we become increasingly responsive to students in how we work and make decisions. We face intense competition for domestic students and an uncertain international student policy setting, so if we are to meet our communities' changing needs and expectations, then flexibility, personalization of programmes and a vibrant digital and on-campus experience will be critical to our work.

Challenge questions
- How do we make explicit and support our goals to increase Māori and Pacific staff capacity and capability so that we better reflect and respond to our current and future student communities?
- How might the University build stronger career pathways for Maori and Pacific undergraduate and graduate students through to Professor or University leadership roles, and how might this support us to better reflect and respond to our communities?
- What new structures, capabilities and ways of working are required to ensure our students are at the heart of our decision-making and delivery at the University? How do we become increasingly flexible in our response to students?

Developing new capabilities/roles to support our research and education aspirations

Our academic staff must remain at the forefront of their disciplines, and also be able to work across disciplines in a manner that enables specialised and systemic transdisciplinary knowledge to be developed and applied for the benefit of society. An increased emphasis on research collaborations beyond traditional boundaries indicates that the University will be expected to operate in interdisciplinary groups and centres with education and research links across our Faculties and LSRIs, with the majority of the University's academic staff contributing to these. They will also be required to support the development of markedly different skillsets in response to the changing nature of work. This, as well as the impact of technology and environmental and social attitudinal changes, will flex our staff, grow our knowledge and challenge us in how we best achieve this strategy.

New and proven approaches to education will be required with an increased range of modes, tools, pedagogies and approaches for teaching evident. We will continue to rapidly evolve as education is facilitated though emerging digital technologies. New domain expertise and new capabilities are expected to be required.

Challenge questions
- How might the role of the future academic change and what new roles (such as industry appointments, joint appointments, pracademics) might be created to ensure we enable this?
- How might we structure ourselves and build a culture that supports transdisciplinary work?
- With whom do we most need to cement new relationships and how do we ensure we have the staff capabilities and capacity to do this?
- How could we draw on the knowledge, skills and experience of an international workforce?
- Does belonging to the University of Auckland require physical presence in Aotearoa New Zealand and how would we create a sense of belonging?
- What is the unique Employment Brand which showcases our distinctiveness and enables us to attract top talent? What is our story and how do we tell it?
- What new reward, recognition and incentivisation approaches need to be considered?
- What workforce strategies should the University pursue to build these new capabilities and ways of working?

Leadership

The University needs to ensure we are well positioned to capitalise on emerging opportunities for innovation and growth as we respond to disruption in both the sector and global economy. Our ability to adapt to change will be increasingly important as the environment becomes even more dynamic. Importantly, University leaders must therefore be able to strategically adapt in order to succeed in a complex world, with the capacity to innovate and inspire so as to achieve our collective mission.

Challenge questions
- What should we expect of our leaders in the future, particularly as we continue the practice of distributed and collegial leadership?
- How do we best identify and reward the qualities we seek in our leaders?
- What new ways of leading and working are required to increase flexibility, agility and pace in the way we operate?

Reshaping the University workforce

Transforming our organisation requires the University to consider the shape, size and composition of our workforce to meet future demands. The University aims to ensure we have created a fit for purpose operating model that is flexible and cost effective, and supports our need to grow investment in our research infrastructure, learning and teaching improvements, new digital technologies and campus infrastructure. Forward-looking organisations are also asking what tomorrow's workplace will look like, recognising the need to respond to rapid advances in technology - the convergence of artificial intelligence, robotic process automation, machine learning and cognitive platforms (the fourth industrial revolution). Such revolutions may require the University to explore the advancing integration of humans and machines in the workplace.

Challenge questions
- Is an approach required to re-skill employees with 'old' skill sets?
- How do we balance the academic aspirations with the requirement to be a financially sustainable institution?
- What social and attitudinal changes relating to ethnicity, gender identity and sexuality, disabilities and socio-economic disparities will be necessary to ensure our workforce is aligned with an increasingly diverse population?
- How should the University respond to the 'atomisation' of jobs – the division of labour between bots and employees as AI takes on repetitive, low-value job functions along with increasingly cognitive tasks such as diagnosis or application approvals?
- What new roles would be required in the near future to support these new technologies and changed attitudes?