Email to staff, 24 Oct 2019

The Special Working Group on the response to and prevention of discrimination at the University of Auckland (SWG) has prepared the following report on its work and achievements over the past five months. It covers a number of important issues for the University.

Stuart N. McCutcheon
Vice-Chancellor

Report to the University community on the outcomes of the Special Working Group on the response to and prevention of discrimination at the University of Auckland

The Special Working Group on the response to and prevention of discrimination at the University of Auckland (SWG) was convened in June 2019 to progress a range of issues relating to the University’s commitment to building a safe, inclusive and equitable community for all.

It was one of several recommendations put forward by AUSA in its report, The Path to Change, which came out of the Zero Tolerance? Hui inviting students to speak about their experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination held at Tane-nui-a-rangi, Waipapa Marae at the beginning of May. The Hui was an opportunity for students to discuss their concerns about bullying, harassment and discrimination on campus, and what they felt the University could and should be doing to ensure a safe, equitable and inclusive environment for all students and staff.

The Path to Change report contained the stories and experiences of students who had faced discrimination at the University and identified key areas where the University needed to improve to make its community safe, inclusive and equitable. The identified areas for improvement were in regards to the University’s current policy framework, its training for staff and students, the suitability of its complaints/investigation system and its role in educating the public about Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Path to Change report also recognised that real progress on these issues could be achieved only through partnership and collaborative decision-making between students and the University leadership.

As a result, the SWG was convened with equal representation from staff and students, and its regular meetings have been co-chaired by George Barton, President of AUSA and the Vice-Chancellor, Stuart McCutcheon.

Achievements

In the five months since the first SWG meeting, significant developments have been made in the following areas:

1. Development of a Code of Conduct

   The Hui identified the need for staff and students to have guidance and support on how to create and maintain spaces that prevented bullying, harassment and discrimination. The SWG has played a leading role in the development of a University Code of Conduct setting out the behavioural expectations of all members of the University community towards one another (i.e. staff, students, visitors, contractors) to create and maintain safe, inclusive and equitable environments for all. In particular, the Code of Conduct will empower staff to appropriately respond to and address actions and behaviours that make others feel unsafe and unwelcome, and to do so in an educative and rehabilitative way. The Code of Conduct will be going to University Council for its approval so that it can be in place from the start of 2020.
2. Training on how to prevent and respond to bullying, harassment, discrimination and harmful sexual behaviour

The Hui also identified the need for individual staff and students to be appropriately trained on how to prevent and respond to bullying, harassment, discrimination and harmful sexual behaviours. As a result, the SWG has overseen the engagement of external expertise on how to effectively train staff and students in these areas. This includes online training modules for all staff and eventually all students to complete (similar to how Academic Integrity currently works) and for frontline staff, first responders (e.g. Security, Staff Service Centre, Group Services Staff) and student leaders (i.e. Club and Association Executives) to receive face-to-face training so that teaching, learning and research spaces and student-run events and activities are safe, inclusive and equitable for all.

3. Development of Campus Care | Te Papa Manaaki

The Hui identified that some students found the process of making a complaint and seeking help and support from the University in an instance of bullying, harassment or discrimination to be difficult and confusing. As a result, a new service has been developed to provide improved support for students on a range of health, wellbeing and conduct matters including bullying, harassment and discrimination as well as harmful sexual behaviour. Campus Care | Te Papa Manaaki is an early intervention service specifically for health, wellbeing and conduct matters. It will use a case management approach to support students to get the support they need more quickly, and assist them to navigate and access the full range of services available without having to navigate these different support channels themselves. Campus Care will be developed in 2020 with the aim of being rolled out across the University in the future.

4. Education about Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Finally, the Hui identified that the University needed to take a leading role in educating students and the general public about Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its place in New Zealand history. As a result, the University is going to begin work on an NZQA-recognised micro-credential on Te Tiriti o Waitangi which all students, staff and members of the public should be able to take to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of Te Tiriti. This work will be led by Dr Te Kawehau Hoskins from Te Puna Wānanga, Faculty of Education and Social Work and be available for enrolment in Semester Two, 2020.

These developments will significantly enhance the ability of the University to provide a safe, inclusive and equitable environment for all its members and we are grateful to all those who have contributed to this important process.

George Barton
Stuart McCutcheon
Co-Chairs SWG