

KŌKIRI KI TE PAE PADDLING OUR WAKA FORWARD



When I started as Vice-Chancellor in January, I set three priorities. The first was listening to and seeking to understand and support our staff, enlivening our campuses, and resolving administrative pain points to make everyone's lives easier and enable them to focus on our core mission. The second was addressing our financial sustainability and the third having clarity on our distinctiveness and unique value proposition.

In an ideal world, I would have had more time to focus on the first priority before tackling the second. However, soon after starting in the job of Vice-Chancellor, it became apparent that our enrolment figures this year had further worsened a situation that had been developing for a number of years. It became an imperative to quickly find ways to address the forecast deficit of \$33m this year and ensure our financial sustainability in the longer term.

There were no easy options for returning to financial sustainability. The programme of work we undertook to reduce our costs and ensure we could first survive and then ultimately thrive in the future impacted everyone in our community. It was difficult, painful and required many tough choices and compromises. Thanks to the hard work undertaken by our community, we completed the programme of work and made the required savings.

While financial discipline will continue to be needed, as a result of the work we have done we are able to return to normal business in 2024 and refocus on the other two priorities of supporting our staff and advancing our distinctiveness.

Supporting our staff is more important than ever given increased pressures resulting from sustained change over a number of years. We are focused on creating time, space, and clarity for our work. In particular, we want to reduce unnecessary work, increase our ability to focus on what is important, and to align individual incentives with our common purpose.

Leveraging our distinctiveness will be core to the exciting work to refresh our strategic plan and set a clear focus on the future. Conversations on this in 2023 have highlighted a desire to harness the many opportunities in Wellington and further afield for the University to contribute, to connect our ecosystems to integrate education and employment for our students, and to facilitate relevant debate and investigation on important issues for Aotearoa New Zealand.

My confidence that we will achieve these goals is based on the many people I have met at Te Herenga Waka who are here because they want to make a difference, people who believe in the capabilities of the next generation, people who go the extra mile to support each other in really challenging circumstances. In stark contrast to the misguided accusations that universities are increasingly corporate, faceless, top-down institutions these are the people who make us great.

This strength in our community combined with support from, and partnership with, Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association and the Tertiary Education Union has been incredibly valuable this year and we look forward to continuing to work with both groups to build a strong future for our University.

Thank you to both John Allen, our Chancellor, and the University Council as a whole for their governance, leadership and support this year. Thank you to our students, alumni, partners and supporters and, importantly, thank you to my colleagues on Te Hiwa and my colleagues throughout the institution. This is a wonderful University to be part of.

Professor Nic Smith
Vice-Chancellor