

Attractiveness of the Academic Profession in New Zealand

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This paper describes the NZ University system and the issues it currently faces and deploys CAP (and other) data to indicate how these issues impinge on the experiences of individual staff members. NZ has experienced all the array of pressures and developments that have occurred around the world (sometimes taking these innovations and changes to the extreme made possible by a small and considerably centralised system): however, the survey evidence suggests that most NZ academics remain in reasonable 'heart' about the NZ university system.

(1) The NZ University System: some background context

New Zealand's university system began early in the colony's history with the first university established some 140 years ago (1870): a mere 30 years after British settlement began. (The Maori had a form of higher education, particularly for *tohunga*, although this was strictly oral).

The legal framework under which NZ universities operate is laid out under the (much quoted) Section 162 of the Education Act (1989) in which a university is defined as having the following characteristics:

- ❖ They are primarily concerned with more advanced learning, the principal aim being to develop intellectual independence;
- ❖ Their research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge;
- ❖ They meet international standards of research and teaching;
- ❖ They are a repository of knowledge and expertise; and
- ❖ They accept a role as critic and conscience of society.

All NZ Universities are state-owned and operated (albeit at a distance: the State appoints some University Council members) with the mainstream universities being flanked by 3 Maori *wananga*, 19 polytechnics, a few theological colleges, some branches of overseas universities (including some Australian universities) and a widespread array of private providers.

There is a complex set of Organisations which are involved with the tertiary education and research sectors in NZ.

- At the centre is the Tertiary Education Commission which is a Crown Entity rather than a government department, with both policy-making and funding responsibilities. Its establishment in 2003 brought together the responsibilities and activities of a

transitional TEC, Skill New Zealand and Tertiary Resourcing from the Ministry of Education: it was the first time that planning work for all tertiary education provision, funding and research were brought together under one umbrella. The TEC has independent statutory powers related to planning and approval of Government funding for individual tertiary education organisations. The TEC operates within strategic and policy frameworks set by the Government under Part 13A of the Education Act 1989. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the TEC is a Crown Agent which must give effect to Government policy when directed by the Minister for Tertiary Education.

- Also retaining a role at the centre (and presumably providing alternative/contestable policy advice) is the Ministry of Education (Tertiary Div.) although its purview of the tertiary sector is light. A particular contribution made is through analysis of relevant data by its Research Division and the oversight provided by its International Students Division.

- The NZ Vice Chancellors Committee is a small but powerful unit which attempts to provide a ‘provider-based’ approach, which included an annual survey of graduands. (“As a statutory entity, the NZVCC has overall responsibility for the quality of university programmes and acts as the interface between universities and the government”).

- The Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) considers academic matters across the university system. These include inter-university course approval and moderation procedures, advice and comment on academic developments, the encouragement of the coherent and balanced development of curricula and the facilitation of cross-crediting between qualifications. For the non-university component of the tertiary sector this function is performed by the [New Zealand Qualifications Authority](#) (which also covers other levels of education),

- NZ Universities Academic Audit Unit (this provides quality assurance: especially in relation to managerial processes)
- Ako Aotearoa (The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence: this supports teaching excellence through grants for the development of curriculum)
- Tertiary Education Union (TEU) is very recently formed from an amalgamation of University academic Staff, Polytechnic academic staff and other union representation (although not including students)
- Royal Society of NZ (especially through administering the ‘blue skies’ Marsden Fund) represents science institutions and scientists
- Foundation for Research, Science and Technology is the major general funding agency, with an applied/ innovation focus
- NZ University Students Union (NZUSA) allies the various specific student unions and advocates for the sector.

Other relevant bodies (according to the TEC website) include the [Ministry of Research, Science and Technology](#), the [Foundation for Research, Science and Technology](#), the [Ministry of Economic Development](#), the [Department of Labour](#) and

the [Ministry of Social Development](#) and a range of private, education sector and industry representative groups.

The government's planning for the tertiary sector is contained in a range of documents – particularly the [Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12](#).

Government's priorities for tertiary education are:

- a high-trust and high-quality tertiary funding environment
- all students leaving the education system with worthwhile qualifications
- an appropriately trained and competent workforce.

Some 175,000 students (c130,000 ftes: with some 20,000 academic staff: see Table 1) attend 8 universities which range in size from under 3,000 to 10 times that size. To some extent the system is quite homogenous, although clearly the Universities of Canterbury (with its Engineering school) and Otago (with its Engineering School) Auckland (with both) are the top universities (but vie with each other from time to time on particular dimensions of performance. Elements of various waves of university innovations can be found dotted here and there within the system (e.g. Redbrick, Agricultural universities, Greenfield, ex-polytechnic).

Table 1: Composition (2007)

University	Students (EFTS)	StaffFTE)
Auckland	30,100	4,300
Auckland University of Technology	16,400	1,800
Waikato	9,700	1,500
Massey	19,400	2,800
Victoria	17,100	2,000
Canterbury	14,600	1,700
Lincoln	2,700	600
Otago	18,300	3,500
Total	128,300	18,200
Numbers	c175,000	c20,000

Source: NZVCC

NZ Universities have a combined total income of some \$NZ2.5 billion (2007) sourced from:

- 45% government grants
- c28% student fees and
- c28% other sources (principally research contracts and trading income).

Nearly 60% of expenditure is on staff salaries and related costs. Broadly, staff are divided fairly evenly between academics and support staff.

In relation to the NZ research system more generally (see Table 2) universities provide some one third of the research effort (as measured by funds) and host some 37% of NZ researchers (about 2/3rds if student researchers are included: although their share of research technicians is only about 20%).

Table 2: Research in NZ: Funds

Sector	\$M (2006)	Percent
Business	763.3	41.8
Government	469.4	25.7
Universities	592.9	32.5
Total	1.825.6	100.0

(2) University System History

University colleges were part of a federal University of NZ until c1960. The Colonial University colleges were small, strongly liked to Britain and focused on part-time and evening classes for small numbers of middle class students mainly orientated towards professional education. This system gradually morphed over the last half-century into a fairly Standard 'low-pressure' University dominated by teaching interests (but with a research strand: with sabbaticals always taken overseas and usually in the UK) in which large classes were taught through a lecture/tutorial system.

The NZ economy, welfare system and indeed society more generally underwent major structural 'reform' during the 1980s and 1990s with the university sector arguably being the last arena to be attended to. Highly ambitious schemes to 'marketise' the university sector were floated but with a fairly high level of resistance many of the more extreme moves were headed off. Nevertheless NZ universities have experienced most of the reform moves which have afflicted universities world-wide (especially from 1990 on)

- Marketisation of Tertiary Sector: government funding as a proportion of revenue has steadily declined and the formerly highly regulated tertiary sector

more generally thrown wide open to a wide range of competition, although some of universities have been sequestered from some of this – a major area of competition thought being the offering to bachelor's degrees (and a few postgraduate qualifications) from polytechnics and even some private providers.

- Student loans: a major shift has been to place the burden of the costs of acquiring a university education much more solidly on the shoulders of the student (and his/her family): appropriately to a large extent in that the student derives the personal benefit of the future flow of income and a high extent of off-shore brain drain (which goes back many decades) deprives NZ of many of the collective benefits of social investment in higher education.
- International student market: a major source of funding has been international students thus exposing the sector to the risks and opportunities of the worldwide market (NZ can compete sometimes in terms of costs)
- Increased but also Competitive Research funding - particularly with the pulling back of the 'research component' of University bulk funding into a fund which was then allocated on a quality-measured basis: Emulating the longer established UK RAE a – but largely personalised - local scheme the PBRF was implemented from 2003 on in 6 yearly blocs (although another round was done for the 3 years 2003-2006). All research-active staff are graded in terms of the quality of the research output together with peer esteem and contributions to the research environment and research funding allocated (in bulk) to universities on that basis.
- Formalisation of Teaching systems has gradually continued as part of a build up of an increasingly invasive 'audit culture' which supposedly/purportedly/ aims to put more power in the hands of students and other clients and make the profession more accountable. There is a cascade of different forms of evaluation of staff and teaching, together with paper-trails of the requisite documentation and justification of what is taught and how.
- Managerialism has largely displaced any intellectual authority that was formerly wrought by the Professoriate (e.g. Executive Deans, other executive and administrative staff and more generally an audit culture)
- With technology development, emphases on innovation and the general development of a knowledge society/ economy Massification (esp. at Postgraduate levels) has proceeded apace with tertiary attendance of recent cohorts being considerably raised.
- Distancing from Pre-degree teaching has occurred more recently under the spur of the TEC which wishes to more clearly separate out university level (and research informed) teaching from other teaching: at the cost of disturbing some vital flow-throughs of students who need extra assistance to make it into tertiary education.
- Maori issues: as part of general government policy particular efforts are made to involve representatives from appropriate iwi and Maori more generally
- De-Discipline and de-departmentalisation. Following 'Anglo' university system precedents many universities have reorganised formerly discipline-centered departments into larger sized units (at one stage this was targeted at about the 25 size level) in order to achieve economies of scale in terms of administrative support. The intellectual consequences of this have yet to be traced or made evident, but it is possible that multidisciplinary work and

teaching is encouraged although more traditional disciplines may have suffered some loss of autonomy.

Is there any area untrammelled by change?

(3) Occupational Prestige

It is likely that the prestige of academics has fallen over time, thus reducing their attractiveness. I have endeavoured to explore this through examining available prestige scores, although I have found the exercise difficult. (In particular splitting the occupation into university v other tertiary teaching professionals can yield different results as does separately dealing with Professors as opposed to lecturers). These include:

- Davis (1974) which is a 7-point prestige scale which gives professors a score of 1 but lecturers only a 2.
- NZSEI (1991, 1996) 78 (on a scale between 20 and 90)
- In its regular annual surveys UMR (e.g. 2009) have asked about where each on a list of some 12 occupations sits for "Occupational Respect": Teachers are regularly 3rd.

(4) NZ CAP study

Thanks are especially due to the international team for allowing a small-scale and late NZ participation. And the Australian team for hosting this very timely conference. Funding was secured from my Faculty contestable fund, ethics permission sought and the questionnaire put on the AUT website-survey facility. Three waves of email addresses were canvassed: one at the end of November 2008, another in late/mid 2009: and a final round in late 2009: 1421 were invited in round 1 and in round two there were 794: overall 2215: the final round went again to all of these. 208 responses were obtained: a response rate of c10%. The 95% confidence intervals are +/- 6.5 %. One good point about the ready availability of PBRF data is that it provides a published 'census' of university staff and some of their key characteristics (cf. Crothers, 2006). (NB: census data relies on self-supplied occupation and may not therefore be accurate. Examination of sample against this population revealed a good representativeness: there is something of a bias towards senior staff and (perhaps relatedly) males: probably since they are more likely to have contemporaneously a viable email addresses.

(5) Background Social Characteristics of NZ Academics

As in other jurisdictions, NZ's age-structure (Table 3) is 'old' with a major replacement issue likely to arise over the forthcoming decade (TEC have already developed a report on this. (Table 3 also indicates how representative the small sample appears to be on this social dimension.)

Table 3: Ages

	Sample	Population
-24		.1
-34	7.3	11.8
-44	23.7	28.4
-54	31.1	31.3
-64	31.1	24.6
65+	6.8	3.8

In the sample (Table 4) a little over a third of the staff are 'native' NZers by birth: with as many as 1 5th. being British with smaller contingents from USA, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and the rest of the world (including Germany, Sweden and several developing countries). This strikes me as a very high proportion. The nonNZ staff component of the system is clearly reduced even further by a steady attrition of NZ sourced degrees as Masters or PHD qualifications are gained (Table 5).

Table 4: Birth Country

Australia	3.4
British	21.7
Canada	2.9
New Zealand	42.5
USA	4.3

Table 5: NZ: nonNZ

Degree	Bach	Masters	PhD
Y	56.5	42.5	37.7
N	42.9	33.8	42.0
NA	1.0	8.4	20.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

(6) Views of NZ Academics re Attractiveness Aspects

NZ academics are mildly optimistic about their profession (Table 6), with a slight majority disagreeing with the view that this is a poor time (perhaps the question is too restrictive about the very particular time environment in which the survey was undertaken) for someone to become an academic and for a more resounding agreement that they would pursue an academic profession given an opportunity situation. The respondents agree with those questioned in several surveys a decade before that there is a high level of stress in their job, but on the whole seem comfortable with the teaching and research components of their job.

Table 6: B5: Views on Knowledge Production/Diffusion

	2	3	4	Strongly disagree
This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field	14.2%	15.7%	18.8%	34.0%
If I had it to do over again, I would not become an academic	5.6%	7.1%	14.3%	19.9%
My job is a source of considerable personal strain	14.1%	27.3%	22.7%	24.2%
Teaching and research are hardly compatible with each other	6.1%	13.6%	17.7%	26.8%
				35.9%

Views about the current situation are undoubtedly somewhat shaped by past experiences (Table 7) with very few respondents seeing conditions as improving although with an overall tendency for a perception that things had only slightly deteriorated.

Table 7: B7: Changes since started your career

	2	3	4	Very much deteriorated
Working conditions in higher education	2.5%	17.2%	31.3%	33.8%
				15.2%

Working conditions in research institutes

1.8% 16.2% 51.4% 22.5% 8.1%

Some of the strains being experienced are specified in Table 8: these include dealing with student deficiencies, and higher proportions of international students and a variety of other factual statements about support for teaching skill development, emphasising practical knowledge and skills and international perspectives, incorporating ethical concerns and warning of plagiarism. The respondents seem unconcerned about deleterious effects on the teaching/research nexus or the integrity of their grading system.

Table 8: Views...

	2	3	4	Strongly disagree	
You spend more time than you would like teaching basic skills due to student deficiencies	23.5%	32.8%	20.8%	16.9%	6.0%
You are encouraged to improve your instructional skills in response to teaching evaluations	12.6%	45.6%	24.8%	11.5%	5.5%
At your institution there are adequate training courses for enhancing teaching quality	18.7%	41.2%	28.0%	9.3%	2.7%
Practically oriented knowledge and skills are emphasized in your teaching	30.8%	44.5%	15.4%	8.8%	.5%
In your courses you emphasize international perspectives or content	33.9%	35.0%	20.8%	7.7%	2.7%
You incorporate discussions of values and ethics into your course content	25.8%	39.6%	13.2%	18.7%	2.7%
You inform students of the implications of cheating or plagiarism in your courses	50.3%	30.1%	11.5%	5.5%	2.7%
Grades in your courses strictly reflect levels of student achievement	41.0%	41.5%	13.1%	1.6%	2.7%
Since you started teaching, the number of international students has increased	35.4%	28.7%	23.8%	8.3%	3.9%
Currently most of your students are international	11.2%	15.6%	17.3%	32.4%	23.5%
Your research activities reinforce your teaching	41.3%	36.4%	13.6%	7.1%	1.6%

The support structures in NZ universities (Table 9) are reported as providing a solid platform for academic work across many of the core areas of work (libraries, secretaries, offices, teaching technology, computer facilities, although starting to decline for classrooms, & telecommunication equipment), modest levels of ‘support staff’ and low satisfaction with some areas of research activity (albs and research equipment are disciplinary specific) as is research funding (to a certain extent).

Table 9: B3: To what extent is your work supported as this institution (% Excellent)

Evaluation of Classrooms	22.1%
Technology for teaching	24.9%
Laboratories	4.5%
Research equipment and instruments	8.6%
Computer facilities	21.1%
Library facilities and services	39.4%
Your office space	33.8%
Telecommunications (Internet, networks, and telephones)	18.0%
Secretarial Support	33.0%
Teaching support staff	14.5%
Research support staff	11.9%
Research funding	7.8%

My final table (10) explores the extent to which the attractiveness of the profession is marred by difficulties in the general work situation in relation to ‘control over work’. The table reports somewhat dismal results that suggest a high degree of authoritarianism (together with demand for performance) and lack of collegiality (let alone training for managerial/administrative duties. (This table also supports the results of Table 9 that there is only a modest level of support staff support.)

Table 10: E4: At My Institution there is... Strongly agree %

A strong emphasis on the institution's mission	21.3%
Good communication between management and academics	11.8%
A top-down management style	32.3%
Collegiality in decision-making processes	3.9%
A strong performance orientation	47.4%
A cumbersome administrative process	36.8%
A supportive attitude of administrative staff towards teaching activities	12.3%
A supportive attitude of administrative staff towards research activities	10.3%
Professional development for administrative/management duties for individual faculty	8.9%

(7) Conclusion:

NZ Universities have probably faced a steadily worsening environment and market situation, although spiced up with some opening opportunities compared to the past, and seem to have retained a reasonable level of operational stability and integrity. Even so the survey data pinpoint several areas of stress which are likely to lead to unnecessary underperformance.

Views and experiences are not necessarily shared across the full spectrum of university staff. Although the sample size precludes much multi-variate analysis, subsequent work will explore this aspect. In the discourses on universities there are two main perspectives:

- Managerial (especially 'reform') views
- Anti-managerial critiques.

I am pleased to obtain empirical data which serves to assess the extent to which the managerial views have proved to be successful in practise and to modify the shrill essentialism of those who see academics as captive creatures 'constructed' by the discourses of the policy frames they work within.

Reference:

Mapping the Social Sciences: Characteristics of New Zealand academic research outputs.
Building Research Capacity in the Social Sciences (BRCSS), Occasional Paper Series
No. 3. Auckland: 2006, 22 pp.