

Event backgrounder: Meeting with the Commissioner of WelTec and Whitireia

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education
From:	Gillian Dudgeon, Deputy Chief Executive – Delivery, Tertiary Education Commission
Date:	12 June 2019
Reference:	E-19-00690

Purpose

1. You are meeting with Dr Neil Barns, Commissioner of Whitireia Community Polytechnic (Whitireia) and Wellington Institute of Technology (WelTec) on Wednesday 19 June 2019 at 4.45pm. Michael Gilchrist, President of the Tertiary Education Union (TEU), and James Ranstead, President of the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations and a member of the Commissioner's advisory committee, will also be in attendance. Michael Gilchrist is attending the meeting as an alternate to Sharn Riggs, TEU National Secretary, who is a member of the Commissioner's advisory committee but is unavailable for the meeting. Biographies are attached in Appendix One.
2. We have recently provided you with a comprehensive update on Whitireia and WelTec (AM-19-00749 refers). That aide-memoire provided you with an overview of Whitireia and WelTec's recent performance, progress on its change programme, financial projections, and the possible need for Crown support. As such, this event backgrounder only provides a short summary of the key topics we understand the Commissioner wants to raise with you. It also suggests some questions you may like to ask the Commissioner.
3. We recommend that you proactively release this aide-memoire with some information withheld as it contains free and frank expression of opinions.

Key topics for the meeting

4. The Commissioner has indicated that he would like to discuss the following with you at the meeting:
 - Provide an update on the change programme and the effect that this is having on staff and students;
 - Provide an update on Whitireia and WelTec's financial situation and the potential need for Crown support;
 - The development of Whitireia and WelTec's 2020 programme portfolio in preparation for the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) and the further impact this will have on staff;

- How Whitireia and WelTec can transition to RoVE, including his desire that Whitireia and WelTec integrate into the proposed New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology (NZIST) as soon as possible;

Key questions you may wish to ask

5. Below are some suggested questions you may wish to ask the Commissioner, as well as James Ranstead and Michael Gilchrist, at the meeting:
- What are your views of Whitireia and WelTec and their ability to return to financial sustainability? How do you believe the change programme is progressing?
 - What do you see as the key risks to delivering a break-even financial result in 2020?
 - How is the change programme being received by students, staff and the wider community? How are staff and students being supported?
 - What has been the response to the TEU's petition that was presented to the Chief Executive on 13 May requesting greater staff and union involvement in decision making, a greater strategic plan and vision, flatter structures of decision making, and leaders being more accessible?
 - Following announcements on RoVE, what do you see as the key priorities for Whitireia and WelTec over the next year?
 - I understand that you are keen Whitireia and WelTec integrate into the proposed NZIST as soon as possible – do you have any ideas on what that would entail?
 - How do you feel the advisory committee is performing? As Commissioner, are you getting the support you need through the committee?
 - What are your views on the Chief Executive's position?



Gillian Dudgeon

Deputy Chief Executive – Delivery
Tertiary Education Commission

12 June 2018

Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education

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Appendix One – Biographies

Dr Neil Barns – Commissioner

Dr Neil Barns has extensive experience in the tertiary education sector, recently as Interim Chief Executive of Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology and previously as the Chief Executive of Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology and of Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology.

As a consultant, Dr Barns has worked with tertiary institutions and central government agencies on a range of international education projects. He is currently Commissioner of Whitireia and WelTec; Independent Advisor to Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki; and on the Council of Otago Polytechnic.



James Ranstead

James Ranstead is the 2019 National President of the New Zealand Union of Students' Association (NZUSA).

He is a recent graduate of Lincoln University. During his study he spent two years on the Lincoln University Student Association, one year as a General Representative and the other as President. James has a Bachelor of Science (Conservation & Ecology) and while he was studying was a Summer Research Student at the Australian National University and an Intern at Kessels Ecology. In addition to being a member of the Commissioner's advisory committee, James has been engaged by WelTec/Whitireia to provide advocacy for students.



In late 2018, James received a Rhodes scholarship, which will allow him to carry out post-graduate study at Oxford University.

Michael Gilchrist

In late 2018, TEU members elected Michael Gilchrist as National President for two years. He took up the role in January 2019.

After graduating from Otago University, Michael became involved in the Wellington Hotel Workers Union, holding the roles of treasurer and vice-president. While working as a postie, he was the founding chairperson of the Postal Workers Union of Aotearoa. He went on to become national secretary of the Trade Union Federation. He has also worked with the Association of Staff in Tertiary Education (ASTE) and ten years as an organiser for the Association of University Staff of New Zealand (AUS) until he took up a scholarship to do a PhD.



Michael currently works at Victoria University of Wellington as a Head Tutor in Philosophy and is completing his PhD thesis.