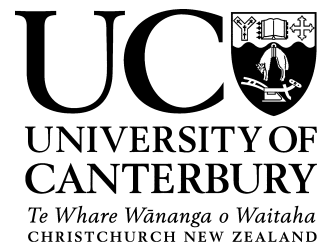


Te Kakau a Māui Scholarship



Rationale for the Te Kakau a Māui Scholarship

Participation in higher education is essential for the development of young adults' skills so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the social and economic wellbeing of their families and communities and be fully engaged national and global citizens. Longitudinal economic and social data tell us that higher-educational attainment leads to higher-quality of life, in terms of better health outcomes, higher life-time earnings, and stronger social and civic engagement. However, student profiles, academic aptitudes, and educational trajectories that a young adult takes can be highly diverse and sensitive to wider social forces, and family needs. Students are increasingly likely to defer higher education, take a gap year or alternate employment with periods of study. High in-demand employment opportunities and booming economies have compelled students to defer education in favour of earning in the workplace, particularly when they are needed to provide financial support for their family, or when funding for further studies is limited. Some countries have progressively adapted their tertiary-level programmes, especially in response to the pandemic, to ensure more access and flexibility to suit a wide range of students' needs, skills and learning aspirations to address the growing needs of a rapidly diversifying population.

Aotearoa New Zealand Context

Aotearoa New Zealand has been identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a high quality, low equity educational system, and that translates to all levels of education including the tertiary sector (Hood, 2018). Though international assessments show Aotearoa New Zealand consistently performing above the average, the disaggregated data tell a different story. There has been a persistent inequity in the learning outcomes for Māori and Pacific, who fall among the lowest performing in OECD countries. And most recently, a report from UNICEF (2019) showed Aotearoa New Zealand was 33 of 38 OECD countries for educational equity and noted that the socio-economic gap was getting more pronounced, having a further effect on education outcome.

Recognising this challenge, the Ministry of Education and the nation's schools have been grappling with inequity and its disproportionate impact on Māori, Pacific, students who experience learning needs, and those whose families experience economic challenges. In the commitment to addressing this national challenge, schools have been diligent in crafting innovative practices, strengthening their curriculum and working closely with whānau and communities to support and strengthen educational engagement, attainment and aspirations. And recent national data from 2020 show that such efforts are beginning to make a difference in secondary school attainment, as the gap between attainment of NCEA level 3 or UE standards from high and low decile schools closed by 3.9 percentage points (Ministry of Education, 2021). Moreover, while there remains considerable variation among schools within and across deciles, the data also show that some schools in the lowest deciles have a greater proportion of students attaining NCEA Level 3 or UE standards than some higher decile schools.

Research has demonstrated the need for enabling and protecting the access of traditionally underserved groups to higher education, and thus greater attention needs to be focused on ensuring that able students from low decile schools – particularly Māori and Pacific students – increase their level of participation (Strathdee & Engler, 2012). We know from this research there is a nationwide pattern of students from low decile schools being less likely than their high decile peers to progress to university, even when they attain the same or higher level of achievement. Students from lower decile schools generally feel the need to attain significantly higher academic outcomes before having the same propensity to apply for higher education. 'This means that a student from lower-decile school needs to achieve very highly—be in the top 5% of all students—to have the same likelihood of progressing on to bachelor-level study as an average student from a higher-decile school' (Strathdee & Engler, 2012, p. 506). Moreover, analysis of school leaver data has indicated that lower-achieving students from low-decile schools often performed better in their first year of tertiary study than similarly achieving students from high-decile schools (Engler, 2010). This data highlights that school achievement scores may underestimate the ability of students who attend low-decile schools. Such research suggests that when academic success at school is used as the main or sole selection criteria for tertiary study it creates even more disadvantage for some minority groups, and 'potentially deprives the universities of some of their better-performing students' (Engler, p 3). There is a parallel to this with regard to securing scholarships. As reported in public media in 2018, students from high decile schools 'received four times the level of entry-level scholarships at those in low decile' (Johnston, 2018). Lack of financial support for students from low-decile schools was found by the Starpath Project to be one of the most significant constraints for students in seeking tertiary study (Webber, et al. 2018). Secondary students from low socioeconomic families in this study viewed tertiary study as prohibitively expensive, and too often beyond their means.

The project outcomes highlighted that access to financial scholarships significantly influenced student's decisions about whether to consider university attendance at all, as well as which university to select.

We know that Māori, Pacific, first-in-family students, and students from low-socioeconomic circumstances are over-represented in low-decile schools. Therefore, there is a greater imperative to ensure more students from lower-decile schools, who are academically resilient, have increased encouragement and support to access university education.

Why Te Kakau a Māui scholarships to Decile 1-7 schools?

An equitable education system is one where all students, regardless of their ethnicity or socioeconomic status, can succeed and this reality is yet to materialise in Aotearoa New Zealand. While the country's education system performs well overall, large equity gaps still remain for Māori, Pacific and low socio-economic status students. Therefore, in keeping with UC's Strategic Vision, we are joining our school and community partners in addressing the equity gap by widening the door to access to tertiary education.

Over the last five years, the proportion of UE holders enrolling in UC is gradually increasing from all over Aotearoa New Zealand including South Island and Canterbury region. However, this is not reflected the same way for students from lower-decile schools entering UC, despite the increase in UE holders.

Schools that are currently identified as Decile 1-7 have higher number of Māori and Pacific students, and students from low socioeconomic circumstances, as well as from some recent migrant or refugee families. Thus, part of addressing education inequity is about strengthening opportunities for these students. Yet, our own UC data shows that few students from these schools apply to UC. Moreover, our current UC scholarships are disproportionately secured by students from schools designated as deciles 8 to 10. This profile of first-time entrants into tertiary education informs us regarding equity in access to university across a range of programmes and fields of study. By trialling this new scholarship alongside our kete of other scholarships, we are seeking to inspire more students and their whānau to see university as a pathway toward their aspirations by minimizing the financial constraint.

Ensuring positive transition experiences to university study and creating welcoming and supportive learning and social environments is crucial for all our students. In line with the UC Tangata tū, Tangata ora and Ngā Uara | Our Values, the Kia Angitu initiative is establishing this enabling support system, in line with national and global research-informed practice. Our approach focuses on creating inclusive, culturally affirming learning experiences, providing comprehensive academic advising and support, and providing guidance on learning and career pathways. We are engaged in making learning environments more culturally inclusive, providing a sense of belonging and validating the learner's own cultural knowledge and experiences, and harnessing these strengths to support learning and teaching. (Webber, et al., 2018; Mayeda, et al., 2022).

Why South Island?

For several years, our scholarship designed to encourage students from Auckland and Wellington regions to come to Canterbury has been one of the most successful in its conversation power. More students from the North Island have been choosing UC. During the 150th anniversary cycle and our desire to demonstrate our support and positive impact in our community and region, a local focus is appropriate. Discussions with our Senior Leadership Team and other stakeholders established that our region should not be limited to Canterbury, but rather extended throughout the South Island.

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Amo Matua | Executive Dean

Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education

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