



# RESEARCH BRIEF

June 2024 | Publication: 2 | ISBN 978-1-0670195-1-8 | DOI: 10.15663/h34.56011

## Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi through Addressing Racism in Universities

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### Executive summary

The WERO team conducted two studies on university documents to identify how universities articulate their commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and address inequities for Māori within tertiary education. The first study, which is a case study of a university's Treaty Statement, highlighted the university's limitations in empowering Māori to exercise tino rangatiratanga within various decision-making structures. The second study, which scrutinises Māori representation across strategic documents of all universities, revealed that universities reify whiteness by selectively interpreting Te Tiriti articles, pursuing targeted Māori recruitment, portraying Māori as reliant on the Crown for success, commodifying mātauranga Māori, and evading discussions about settler colonialism and racial equity.

Drawing from our findings and constitutional transformation documents such as Matike Mai (2016), we proffer three recommendations to enable universities to more effectively uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi:

1. Universities must clearly define the operation of settler colonialism and racism in each institution so that sustainable anti-racist initiatives can be identified.
2. Each university must grow relational spheres where Māori are empowered to make collective decisions with the Crown representatives in the university.
3. Universities must invest in a Māori-led independent body to develop and deliver a Te Tiriti-centric programme that decolonises university processes.

## Introduction

The WERO project 'Diversity Policies, Privilege and Structural Advantage' examines how university policies speak to intentions to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi across the institution in response to public allegations of racism. In this research brief, we present findings from two analyses that examined how university policies that purport to address inequities for Māori fall short of their stated intentions and, in doing so, maintain the status quo. We identify that operations of racism within universities are ongoing and propose recommendations to better align actions with intention to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.

## Context

Our analysis is timely given the increased calls for universities in Aotearoa to reflect on their settler-colonial foundation, and its role in undermining tino rangatiratanga Māori (self-determination) and thereby further entrenching educational inequities between Māori and other population groups (Human Rights Commission, 2022). In recent years, highly public accusations have been made against two universities, both claiming pervasive racism and its impact on Māori staff and students. In 2020, six academic staff members of the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies (FMIS) at the University of Waikato lodged claims of longstanding and pervasive structural and systemic racism embedded within the university (Smith & Jones, 2021). Two years later, a Kaupapa Māori research group made reports of systemic racism occurring at the School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences, at the University of Otago (Trump, 2022). Other tertiary institutions also faced reports of racism. For example, there was a mass resignation of Māori staff at Unitec in 2021 due to existence of institutional racism (RNZ, 2021). Independent reviews into the claims of these respective universities noted that each has embodied western traditions and cultures that systemically privilege individuals whose practices align with these norms. Previous studies have shown that common issues for Māori within the tertiary education sector include racial discrimination, underrepresentation of Māori academics, racialised academic pathways that systematically disadvantage Māori, monocultural university spaces at the expense of connectedness

to te ao Māori (Māori worldview), excessive cultural labour of Māori staff, and racialised barriers for Māori students to complete a university qualification or achieve what they wish to achieve academically (McAllister et al., 2019; Pihama et al., 2019).

Even though universities officially endorse commitments to addressing systemic and interpersonal racism, often through equity and diversity policies and frameworks and Māori advancement plans, ongoing and well-documented evidence demonstrate that little has fundamentally changed to improve material conditions for Māori in universities. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is enshrined within the Education Training Act 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2021), which sets out a role for the education sector to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by actively promoting and protecting Tiriti rights, and to developing education settings in a way that reflects Māori-Crown relationships. In recent years, giving effect to Te Tiriti has seen some universities rebranding their institutions as Tiriti-led (e.g., Massey University and University of Otago), creating specific Te Tiriti policies (e.g., Te Aronui – Auckland University of Technology Te Tiriti Framework and Victoria University of Wellington Te Tiriti Statute), or acknowledging Te Tiriti within broader university strategic frameworks and education plans. As universities embark on the path to become anti-racist institutions, which includes embracing Te Tiriti as a foundational framework, it is crucial to interrogate the intentions, responses, and solutions to achieve this goal.

## Method

Two studies were carried out on university policies to investigate how universities honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and their stated intention to address systemic racism at the interpersonal and institutional levels. First, we undertook a Critical Tiriti analysis (Rae et al., 2022) of the English version of the University of Waikato Treaty Statement (2022) as a case study to determine how universities articulated their Tiriti commitments. Second, we examined the representation of Māori within strategic documents from all New Zealand universities. The aim was to understand how Māori as tangata whenua are racialised and subordinated to uphold Pākehā (white) dominance within universities.

# Results

## Study 1: A Critical Tiriti Analysis of the University of Waikato Treaty Statement

We employed a Critical Tiriti analysis that was developed based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi articles to assess the degree of alignment of the Treaty Statement with Te Tiriti (see Table 1).

Overall, the University of Waikato Treaty Statement was found to have poor engagement with Te Tiriti articles outlined in Table 1. The Treaty Statement centres the university as the sole powerholder that decides the parameters for engagement with preferred Māori entities, and the university is positioned as responsible for establishing and maintaining governance and management structures for all staff and students. Māori influences

are restricted to the controlling of tikanga and taonga Māori that ought to be consistent with the management and policies established by the university. The Statement falls short of considering tino rangatiratanga Māori in the broader decision-making processes (e.g., planning of the university's strategic goals) that affect Māori. The Statement largely focuses on portraying the university as a good Treaty partner that supports the inclusion of Māori; however, these initiatives are not equivalent to efforts in decolonising the institution. The Critical Tiriti Analysis serves as a preliminary tool to identify how a policy can better align with authoritative interpretations of Te Tiriti. These findings will need to be complemented with a broader discussion centred on the establishment of anti-racist policies within universities, as well as the pursuit of decolonisation efforts (Azarmandi & Tolbert, 2023).

Te Tiriti articles	Te Tiriti indicators	Analysis
Preamble	Māori are lead or equal partners	Conversations around Māori authority and influences at the university are limited to the exercise of tikanga Māori, te reo Māori and taonga Māori that aligns with the law, with management and policies established by the University.
Kāwanatanga	Equitable Māori leadership in setting priorities, resourcing, implementation and evaluation	No discussion was found to explain the practical steps being taken to ensure equitable Māori representation at different organisational levels.
Tino rangatiratanga	Evidence of inclusion of Māori values influencing and holding authority	The prioritisation of economic and neoliberal-driven imperatives suggests that tikanga Māori will take a backseat in informing academic governance and practice.
Ōritetanga	Māori exercising their equitable citizenship	There is no explicit address of the issue of equitable Māori representation within different decision-making structures.
Wairuatanga	Acknowledge wairuatanga, rongoā, and tikanga	The term 'wairua' is seldom mentioned or translated in the English version.

Table 1. Critical Tiriti Analysis of the University of Waikato Treaty Statement against indicators.

## Study 2: A Critical Race Analysis of Māori Representation in University Strategic Documents

The second study identified five predominant discourses within university strategic documents that reify Pākehā norms through a racial hierarchy (see Table 2).

Our analysis uncovers the window-dressing nature of strategic documents that function to obscure the persistent problem of racism whilst permitting universities to portray themselves as institutions that are committed to promoting equality and inclusion for Māori.

Discourse	Definition	Explanation
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Selective usage and interpretation of Te Tiriti articles through the introduction of different te ao Māori values	None of the strategic documents have utilised the languages specified in Te Tiriti o Waitangi articles: kāwanatanga (governorship), tino rangatiratanga (Māori self-determination), mana ōrite (equality and equity) and wairua (spirituality). The resistance by universities to affirm Māori sovereignty and autonomy in turn limits the ability for Māori to define Indigenous spaces and exert influence within universities. Instead, universities adopt a partnership approach that seeks to constrain Māori as one of many stakeholders in decision-making processes.
Access	Targeted recruitment of 'high-achieving' Māori and the expectation to achieve a critical mass of Māori students and staff without transforming Pākehā-centric environments	Most strategic documents portray universities as institutions that are welcoming to Māori and committed to increasing the number of Māori graduates. However, universities fail to acknowledge the existence of institutional racism that may explicitly and implicitly anticipate Māori to 'fit in' and conform to assimilationist goals in a relatively unchanged university environment.
Disadvantage	Deficit-framing of Māori as reliant on university initiatives to achieve success	Māori students are portrayed through a deficit framing as a group who faces difficulties in obtaining entrance to and achieving success in universities. Universities commonly frame themselves as a 'saviour' through measures focusing on increasing Māori representation in student and staff cohorts and expanding support services to 'help Māori'.
Marketplace	Commodification of taonga Māori to boost revenues and ranking	Mātauranga Māori is regarded as a commodity that can be traded in exchange for boosting universities' reputations as diverse and inclusive institutions.
Democracy	Everyone deserves equal opportunity and has a civic responsibility to conserve the value of 'equality'	Universities employ pragmatic and euphemistic terms of inclusion such as diversity, equality, multiculturalism, and democracy as the precursor to a just educational environment. The claim of being accepting of cultural diversity, however, is an attempt to skirt around race that depicts the universities' reluctance to explicitly commit to racial equity.

Table 2: Discourses of Māori racialisation in university strategic documents.

# Implications and Recommendations

Our findings provide a call to action for universities to move beyond referencing Te Tiriti as a buzzword or marketing tool, and to instead ensure that they actively address racism against Māori. Here, we outline three key recommendations for universities to meet Te Tiriti aspirations. These recommendations were informed by constitutional transformation models outlined in Matike Mai Aotearoa (2016), three principles for eliminating racism (truth, reconciliation, and justice) highlighted in the Maranga Mai! Report (Human Rights Commission, 2022), the University of Waikato Taskforce report (Smith & Jones, 2021), and numerous scholars' work in decolonising universities (Mutu, 2021; Smith & Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2022).

## 1. Define Racism and Settler Colonialism

The Maranga Mai! Report's three principles for eliminating racism provide a basis for our recommendation to universities to, first of all, define racism and settler colonialism as they operate in tertiary education. **Truth** requires universities to acknowledge the history of settler colonialism and institutional racism within the tertiary education sector. Universities cannot effectively eradicate racism without first having a comprehensive understanding of its operation and ramifications. The intentions of statements and policies to address systemic racism in university systems and to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi have to be examined within the context of exposing the foundations of white supremacy embedded in university structures. Seeking truth requires universities to listen to the evidence and testimony from Māori, although it is not solely the task for Māori to prove the existence of racism. Universities have a particular responsibility not only to actively identify sites of racism at universities, but to demonstrate leadership in combating racism through a process of **reconciliation** that builds a respectful relationship with Māori teaching, learning and working at universities as well as mana whenua from each locality (hapū and iwi). **Justice** demands actions to halt and reverse racism against Māori. Relevant examples of university-wide Tiriti-based anti-racism initiatives that have been implemented are the Kaiārahi Tiriti project at Massey University and Te Aurei programme at the University of Waikato. Sustainable anti-racist initiatives necessitate political will, meaningful partnership, trust-building,

accountability, transparency, the appropriate investment of resources, and ensuring Māori lead all stages of the process.

## 2. Growing Relational Spheres in Universities

Matike Mai Aotearoa (2016) defines the relational sphere as a joint deliberative body that allows partnership between tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga spheres so that Māori are adequately empowered to make collective decisions. As universities identify their roles in honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, opportunities should be expanded for Māori (including Deputy Vice-Chancellor Māori Office, Faculty of Māori, and other Māori staff and student leaders) to exercise authority within a tino rangatiratanga sphere that is properly resourced. A relational sphere must be developed based on equal power sharing and agreed values with reassurance that Māori perspectives and interests will not be subordinated. Where consensus cannot be achieved, a tikanga-based resolution framework to resolve any conflicts would be in place. All staff should be directed to attend training on Te Tiriti o Waitangi that will serve as a requirement to apply for salary increment or promotion. This criterion ensures all staff have a common understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural foundation and can contribute to decolonisation efforts within universities.

## 3. Identify a Model of Decolonisation

Moana Jackson reminded us: "Is the present system actually just for Māori and consistent with Te Tiriti for Māori? Clearly, it's not. Therefore, it's incumbent on us to work towards transformation." Committing to constitutional transformation entails the need to design a Te Tiriti-centric programme of work with an evaluation framework in each university. Such a programme must clearly articulate transformational goals (e.g., significantly grow the Māori workforce, normalise te reo Māori and Māori values, ensure that mātauranga Māori has a place to flourish, and that Māori expertise is recognised and rewarded). It must also clearly identify the roles of all that possess the levers for change. Several key elements are crucial to consider when developing and implementing a change management strategy: 1) preparing the ground (raising awareness about a desirable future institution); 2) resourcing for change (prioritise resources to establish a Māori-led independent body to develop and deliver transformational

goals); 3) building support (identify effective engagement approaches for staff and students to build and sustain momentum); and 4) mobilising leaders (building a coalition for change across Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Division and Faculty Directors and other people managers).

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## **Acknowledgement**

We express gratitude to Donna Cormack, Francis L. Collins and Otilie Stolte for reviewing the brief.

WERO is funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. The research programme is hosted by the University of Waikato with support from the following institutions: University of Auckland, Victoria University Wellington, Otago University, Motu Economic and Public Policy, University of Toronto, University of Washington.

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