

TACKLING SYSTEMIC RACISM IN ACADEMIC PROMOTION PROCESSES

Situation Report

*Reremoana Theodore**

Joanna Kidman[†]

Sereana Naepi[‡]

Jesse Kokaua[§]

Tara McAllister^{||}

Abstract

In this situation report, we discuss ways to address current promotional processes that discriminate against Māori and Pacific academics in New Zealand universities. This report follows on from a paper that we published in 2020 showing that Māori and Pacific academics, compared with non-Māori non-Pacific male academics, were significantly less likely to be promoted to the professoriate (associate professor, professor) and earn less, over a 15-year period. These gaps are not explained by research performance (measured by Performance Based Research Fund scores), age or field (e.g., science). We found that current promotion processes will not close the gap and that system-wide change is required. This report identifies ways to tackle this issue in existing promotion processes.

Keywords

Māori, Pacific, academics, promotion, universities, racism

In this situation report, we discuss ways to address current promotional processes that discriminate against Māori and Pacific academics in New Zealand universities. In 2020, we published a study showing that Māori and Pacific academics, compared with non-Māori non-Pacific male

academics, were significantly less likely to be promoted to the professoriate (associate professor, professor) and earn less, over a 15-year period (McAllister, Kokaua, et al., 2020) even if research performance (measured by Performance Based Research Fund scores), age or field (e.g.,

* Ngāpuhi, Te Arawa. Senior Research Fellow/Co-director at the National Centre for Lifecourse Research, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. Email: moana.theodore@otago.ac.nz

† Ngāti Maniapoto. Professor of Māori Education, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.

‡ Natasiri, Fiji. Lecturer of Sociology and Criminology, School of Social Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.

§ Ngāti Arerā, Rarotonga. Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Pacific Health, Va'a O Tautai, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

|| Te Aitanga a Māhaki. Research Fellow, Te Pūnaha Matatini/School of Biological Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.

science) are taken into account. Our findings counter notions that promotions are purely based on merit. Non-Māori non-Pacific men have more than twice the odds of promotion to the professoriate than Māori and Pacific women, and our findings suggested that these inequities will persist or increase over time. That is, current promotion processes will not close the gap and system-wide change is required. The 2020 paper was a world first because we quantified institutional racism in promotions and related earnings at all universities within a single country. This present report identifies ways to tackle this issue in existing promotion processes.

In general, there are three types of academic activity that are peer assessed for promotion purposes: research, teaching and service. For promotions to the professoriate, there must also be evidence of academic leadership and international reputation. How are promotion applications assessed? Of the eight New Zealand universities, the University of Auckland (2018) and the University of Otago (2020) provide promotional information, including guidelines, on the internet versus other universities that put promotional information on their staff intranet, meaning that only staff are able to view promotional information. The University of Canterbury (n.d.) provides information on promotions on the internet but not their full guidelines. In general, promotion applications need to include a personal statement outlining evidence as to why a promotion is being sought and a curriculum vitae; evidence of the quality and impact of one's research, for example, an h-index and citations; evidence of teaching, assessment and curriculum development; evidence of service to the university and community; a head of department (HOD) assessment statement; and, for promotions to the professoriate, referees. Processes may vary across universities. For example, at the University of Otago, divisional promotion committees make decisions on promotions for applicants below the level of the professoriate. For those applying above that, the divisional committees make recommendations to the staffing advisory committee, who make recommendations to the vice-chancellor to approve or decline promotions. The university also has observers, including equal employment opportunities observers, who report back to the committees with commentary and suggestions.

Despite promotions focusing on three types of activity, previous studies have found that applicants with more peer-reviewed publications are more likely to be promoted and earn more (Baker, 2010; Nakhaie, 2007). If research quantity versus

quality is prioritised, this creates disparities. From the start of their academic careers, men publish more than women, and are more likely to be the first or last author on papers (Larivière et al., 2013; Symonds et al., 2006). Overseas research has found that ethnic minority and marginalised early career researchers have similar numbers of lead-author papers as their peers, but fewer co-authored papers (Wanelik et al., 2020).

How are publication rates assessed by promotion panels? Assessment varies across disciplines and institutions. The University of Auckland (n.d.) provides guidelines on publication rates. For example, an associate professor (natural sciences) is described as typically having published 45 peer-reviewed journal articles/book chapters/creative works or equivalent. Māori and Pacific scholars, however, often prioritise and disseminate findings to the communities within which they undertake their research. This work takes extra time and commitment and differs from the near singular focus of publishing in high-impact international journals. Processes that reward short-term research and high volumes of outputs versus long-term inquiry and collaboration have been identified as a point of frustration for Māori academics (Kidman et al., 2015). Moreover, Māori and Pacific academics may choose to publish in domestic, open-access versus international journals because their target audiences are both academic and non-academic. Racism in peer-reviewed journal processes may also affect the likelihood of Māori and Pacific academics getting published. A recent international study of more than 26,000 psychological science articles published over a 45-year period found that few articles focused on racial inequality; most journals were edited, in the words of the authors, by white editors; and most articles that did focus on race-based issues were written by white authors (Roberts et al., 2020).

The traditional academic workload model of 40% research, 40% teaching and 20% service does not recognise the high level of teaching and service that many academics undertake. This model does not correspond with the unrecognised and undervalued workloads of Māori and Pacific academics, including academic and pastoral care of Māori and Pacific students; educating and providing advice/consultation to university staff on Māori and Pacific issues; and service to the wider community, including maintaining relationships, responsibilities and commitments to whānau, hapū, iwi or other Māori- or Pacific-centred organisations (Hall, 2014; Kidman et al., 2015; Naepi, 2019). Further, research with Māori and Pacific

women has found that they experience excess labour, such as emotional labour, often dictated by gender norms (e.g., Naepi, 2020).

As well as gender issues in the New Zealand situation, formal educational institutions provide a working environment dominated by non-Māori. Māori women have to contend with being female as well as Māori, because New Zealand universities are dominated by white males, and theirs are the norms against which Māori women are measured. (Neale & Özkanli, 2010, p. 549)

The over-representation of Pākehā males and the privileging and centring of Pākehā knowledge systems and values in universities also affect informal promotion processes. Heads of departments and university leaders encourage or discourage potential applicants from applying for promotions. Heads of departments are also required to compare an applicant's performance with the performance of others in the department (University of Otago, 2020). Often being the sole Māori or Pacific scholar in a department (McAllister, Naepi et al., 2020) makes this comparison problematic, given the differences in the nature and focus of Māori and Pacific work, as described previously.

A related issue is the lack of Māori and Pacific members on promotion committees. Māori and Pacific academics are best at peer-reviewing the work of Māori and Pacific scholars. The University of Otago (2020) guidelines state that if an applicant's work is undertaken in a Māori research environment then it is up to the applicant (within the page limits) to explain the conventions of those environments and how they affect the output and significance of their work. This leaves the onus on the applicant to translate and communicate wider ontological differences that shape practices. Of concern, online promotion information for applicants undertaking Pacific research is almost non-existent. The University of Auckland more generally states that promotion processes are monitored for equity, fairness and consistency of process, although how these processes are monitored is not clear in the guidelines. The university's academic standards also mention valuing equity and the university's commitment to Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (University of Auckland, n.d.). What is not clear, however, is how universities ensure Māori and Pacific academic excellence is determined and assessed.

Finally, understanding the motivations of Māori and Pacific staff is critical to supporting

their academic development and success. Hall (2014) found that a key academic goal for Māori is "to be Māori academics with integrity". Pacific academics have echoed this goal and noted that it is their community engagement and service that motivates them within academia (Naepi, 2021). For Māori and Pacific academics, this includes uplifting and preserving Māori and Pacific knowledge and tackling racism.

Solutions

Discrimination in academic promotion and remuneration processes are part of the wider systemic issue of racism within New Zealand universities. In September 2020, Māori professors from around the country signed an open letter calling for a nationwide review of universities to address systemic and casual racism and to examine how universities fulfil their obligations articulated in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and New Zealand legislation (Gabel, 2020), and as a separate issue, how they fulfil their obligations to Pacific communities. This review should include tackling racism in promotional processes.

There are a number of actions that universities can take immediately to tackle systemic racism in promotional processes. The list below is not exhaustive but based on research described previously:

- Actively monitor inequities in the promotion, retention and recruitment of Māori and Pacific academics and set clear targets to redress them.
- Acknowledge and reward work focused on national issues and allow for more national referees versus privileging international work and referees.
- Focus less on the quantity of published papers.
- Place less emphasis on first- or last-author papers, high-impact journals that are not accessible to Māori or Pacific communities, or being the principal investigator on research grants.
- Place more emphasis on rewarding academics that support others to succeed through co-authorships and collaborative grants that include students, early career researchers, and community members.
- Place more emphasis on teaching and service to the community and New Zealand.
- Ensure senior academic leaders (not just HODs) support Māori and Pacific candidates to apply for promotions, including statements of support.
- Have promotions criteria designed at the national level by Māori and Pacific scholars and applied to all universities.

- Arrange for paid Māori and Pacific senior academic reviewers from other universities to observe and evaluate promotion committees, and address concerns raised prior to promotions being signed off.
- Include Māori and Pacific academics in all promotion committees and provide anti-racism training for all promotion committee members.
- Link national funding to the proportion of Māori and Pacific academics within universities, including the professoriate.

Inequities in promotion processes are a problem that universities can and need to fix. If they do not fix them, Māori and Pacific scholars will not become leaders within universities and the vicious cycle through which Pākehā practices, values and norms are prioritised and rewarded will continue to occur. Alternatively, universities can value and reward Māori and Pacific academic excellence, which will, in turn, support a more vibrant and equitable Aotearoa.

Acknowledgements

Reremoana Theodore was supported by a Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) Māori Emerging Leader Fellowship [grant number 18/644]. Jesse Kokaua was supported by an HRC Sir Thomas Davis Te Patu Kite Rangi Ariki Research Fellowship [grant number 20/115].

Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
hapū	subtribe that shares a common ancestor
iwi	tribal kin group
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
Pākehā	New Zealanders of European descent
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document
whānau	family; nuclear/extended family

References

- Baker, M. (2010). Career confidence and gendered expectations of academic promotion. *Journal of Sociology*, 46(3), 317–334. <https://doi.org/brg7m5>
- Gabel, J. (2020, September 24). Professors call out racism as a “major issue” at universities. *NZ Herald*. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12367493
- Hall, M. (2014). *Rethinking Māori academic development in New Zealand universities* thesis, Victoria University of Wellington]. ResearchArchive. <http://hdl.handle.net/10063/3317>
- Kidman, J., Chu, S., Fernandez, S., & Abella, I. (2015). *Māori scholars and the university* (Report No. 13RF01). Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga. <http://www.maramatanga.co.nz/sites/default/files/project-reports/Kidman%20Chu%20Fernandez%20Abella-%20Maori%20Scholars%20Final%20report%202015.pdf>
- Larivière, V., Ni, C., Gingras, Y., Cronin, B., & Sugimoto, C. R. (2013). Bibliometrics: Global gender disparities in science. *Nature*, 504(7479), 211–213.
- McAllister, T. G., Kokaua, J., Naepi, S., Kidman, J., & Theodore, R. (2020). Glass ceilings in New Zealand universities: Inequities in Māori and Pacific promotions or earnings. *MAI Journal*, 9(3), 272–285. <https://doi.org/gq97>
- McAllister, T. G., Naepi, S., Wilson, E., Hikuroa, D., & Walker, L. A. (2020). Under-represented and overlooked: Māori and Pasifika scientists in Aotearoa New Zealand's universities and crown-research institutes. *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/gg6w75>
- Naepi, S. (2019). Why isn't my professor Pasifika? *MAI Journal*, 8(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/dh2v>
- Naepi, S. (2020). “I didn't come to play”: Pasifika women in the academy. In T. Moeke-Pickering, S. Cote-Meek, & A. Pegoraro (Eds.), *Critical reflections and politics on advancing women in the academy* (pp. 52–69). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Naepi, S. (2021). Pacific women's experiences working in universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 40(1), 63–74. <https://doi.org/gq98>
- Nakhaie, M. (2007). Universalism, ascription and academic rank: Canadian professors, 1987–2000. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 44(3), 361–386. <https://doi.org/brfpp8>
- Neale, J., & Özkanli, O. (2010). Organisational barriers for women in senior management: A comparison of Turkish and New Zealand universities. *Gender and Education*, 22(5), 547–563. <https://doi.org/fk4h6h>
- Roberts, S. O., Bareket-Shavit, C., Dollins, F. A., Goldie, P. D., & Mortenson, E. (2020). Racial inequality in psychological research: Trends of the past and recommendations for the future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(6), 1295–1309. <https://doi.org/gg35rg>
- Symonds, M. R. E., Gemmell, N. J., Braisher, T. L., Gorringer, K. L., & Elgar, M. A. (2006). Gender differences in publication output: Towards an unbiased metric of research performance. *PLOS ONE*, 1(1), Article e127. <https://doi.org/bt4zft>
- University of Auckland. (n.d.). *Academic standards for research fellows, senior research fellows, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors and professors*. <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/central/about/the-university/how-the-university-works/policy-and-administration/Human%20Resources/Academic%20Standards%20for%20Research%20Fellows%20Senior%20Research%20Fellows%20>

- Lecturers%20Senior%20Lecturers%20Associate%20Professors%20and%20Professors.pdf
- University of Auckland. (2018). *Academic promotion policy and procedures*. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/the-university/how-university-works/policy-and-administration/human-resources1/academic-processes-and-standards/academic-promotions/promotion-policy-and-procedure-.html>
- University of Canterbury. (n.d.). *Academic promotion*. <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/about/hr/academic-promotion/>
- University of Otago. (2020). Academic staff promotions. <https://www.otago.ac.nz/humanresources/otago636676.pdf>
- Wanelik, K. M., Griffin, J. S., Head, M. L., Ingleby, F. C., & Lewis, Z. (2020). Breaking barriers? Ethnicity and socioeconomic background impact on early career progression in the fields of ecology and evolution. *Ecology and Evolution*, 10(14), 6870–6880. <https://doi.org/gq99>