

Celebrating ten years of excellence in tertiary teaching

Media Release

Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards

Pioneering work to reverse low rates of achievement among Māori and Pacific learners wins science educator supreme teaching excellence award

The Prime Minister, Rt Hon John Key, has awarded leading biological scientist, Professor Michael Walker (Te Whakatōhea) from The University of Auckland, with this year's Prime Minister's *Supreme Award* for tertiary teaching excellence.

The prestigious award was the highlight at the Tertiary Teaching Excellence Award ceremony, which celebrated twelve of New Zealand's finest tertiary teachers - as recognised by their organisations, colleagues and learners alike. The event was jointly hosted at Parliament by the Minister for Tertiary Education, Hon Steven Joyce, and Allan Peachey MP, Chairperson of the Education and Science Committee

The awards are managed and administered by Ako Aotearoa – The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. They aim to recognise and celebrate excellence in tertiary teaching; providing an opportunity for teachers to share with others the good practice that has proven to benefit their learners. Ako Aotearoa Senior Māori Development Manager, Ngahiwi Apanui said, "Professor Walker's pioneering work to reverse patterns of under-achievement among Maori and Pacific Island students has transformed the lives of thousands of students. He is a rare educator, whose impact goes beyond the university campus - benefiting whānau and the community at large."

Professor Walker, from the School of Biological Sciences at The University of Auckland, is of Te Whakatōhea descent and continues a whānau legacy of academic excellence.

He established the Tuākana Programme more than 20 years ago to improve retention rates for Māori and Pacific science students, particularly in their first academic year.

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The innovative programme has been so successful that it has been rolled out across all university faculties. The sustained support, vision and hard work Michael has provided to the students, their whānau, hapū and iwi, is acknowledged as a key contributor in the elevation of successful outcomes for these students.

A steady stream of Māori and Pacific students now leave the university with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Many bridge the transition to PhD study and go on to join the university teaching staff. One such former student of the programme attests to being the first in her family to consider tertiary education, and now all her first cousins are enrolled. She comments that “...*this shift epitomises the vision and goals of Prof. Walker and of Tuākana, of using success to breed success.*”

He is described as a rare breed that easily bridges the cultural divide. A colleague attests, “*he has led a quiet revolution – teaching Māori about science and scientists about Māori*” – bringing Māori worldviews and perspectives, tikanga, and te reo, into his research and teaching. He helps his non-Māori learners connect with the world of Māori and assists all learners in linking course content to their future lives and the wider society.

Professor Walker also received one of two “sustained excellence in teaching in a kaupapa Māori context” awards worth \$20,000. As Supreme Awardee, he received an additional \$10,000.

Sandra Lee Morrison (Te Arawa, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngati Rārua), who is a senior lecturer/associate dean at the School of Māori and Pacific Development, The University of Waikato, was the other recipient of the kaupapa Māori category award.

In addition, ten other top teachers received awards under the “sustained excellence in tertiary teaching” category, worth \$20,000 each. The recipients are:

- **Peter Bilous**
Senior Lecturer and Programme Manager, Avalanche Safety and Snowsport Instruction
Otago Polytechnic
- **Professor Kevin Gould**
School of Biological Sciences
Victoria University of Wellington

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- **Dr Mary Fitzpatrick**
Senior Lecturer, Department of Marketing
The University of Waikato
- **Associate Professor Jon Harding**
School of Biological Sciences
University of Canterbury
- **Rena Heap**
Senior Tutor, School of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education
The University of Auckland
- **Professor Robin Kearns**
School of Environment
The University of Auckland
- **Dr Ross McDonald**
Senior Lecturer, Department of Management and International Business
The University of Auckland
- **Dr Ksenija Napan**
Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Practice
Unitec Institute of Technology
- **Professor Leoni Schmidt**
Academic leader, Dunedin School of Art
Otago Polytechnic
- **Tony Zaharic**
Senior Teaching Fellow, Department of Biochemistry
University of Otago

Emeritus Professor Noeline Alcorn, Chair of the Tertiary Teaching Awards Committee says, “This year’s winners of tertiary teaching awards all care passionately about making a difference to students, by passing on a passion for their subject or the natural world, and by developing skills, understandings and dispositions that help students succeed not just in class but in the wider world of work, family and society.”

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards. To date there have been 132 award recipients.

For more information please visit www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz



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