Tertiary education is widely recognised as making a critical contribution to New Zealand’s economic and social goals. Tertiary education passes on and develops the skills needed in the workforce and it gives people the opportunity to build careers. It also contributes to social cohesion and creates much of the country’s knowledge and innovation.

The New Zealand tertiary education system is designed to work around three main elements:

- quality assurance
- steering the system – using investment plans to align the work of tertiary education organisations and the government’s strategic goals for tertiary education, and
- the provision of government funding.

Government’s goals for tertiary education are set out in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-15. The strategy also includes the tertiary education priorities for the next three to five years. The strategy lists four national goals:

- provide New Zealanders of all backgrounds with opportunities to gain world-class skills and knowledge
- raise the skills and knowledge of the current and future workforce to meet labour market demand and social needs
- produce high-quality research to build on New Zealand’s knowledge base, respond to the needs of the economy and address environmental and social challenges, and
- enable Māori to enjoy education success as Māori.

The strategy identifies seven priorities:

- increasing the number of young people (those aged under 25 years) achieving qualifications at level 4 and above, particularly degrees
- increasing the number of Māori students enjoying success at higher qualification levels
- increasing the number of Pasifika students enjoying success at higher qualification levels
- increasing the number of young people moving successfully from school into tertiary education
- improving the literacy, language and numeracy of students in level 1 to 3 qualifications
- improving the educational and financial performance of providers, and
- strengthening research outcomes.

The tertiary education strategy also contains a number of expectations of providers and students. For each type of tertiary education provider, the strategy lists three core roles and a number of expectations.

2010 YEAR

In January 2010 the Tertiary Education Commission commenced the implementation of ministerial appointments to polytechnic councils as required by the Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Act. The polytechnics also made their council appointments.

Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Act 2009

The Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Bill passed into legislation on 17 December 2009. The legislation enables the implementation of new governance arrangements for institutes of technology and polytechnics. These arrangements aim to improve the capability and effectiveness of polytechnic councils and to allow the government to respond more quickly if polytechnics experience educational or financial performance risks.

Tertiary education in New Zealand

Tertiary education includes all post-school education:

- foundation education, such as adult literacy and education for those with low-level qualifications who are looking for employment
- certificates and diplomas
- bachelors degrees
- industry training, including Modern Apprenticeships
- adult and community education and other non-formal adult education, and
- postgraduate qualifications, many of them requiring students to conduct substantial original research.

Tertiary education also includes tertiary programmes delivered in secondary schools such as Gateway and the Secondary-Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR).
Web link to more information on the tertiary education system

A fuller description of New Zealand’s tertiary education system is provided on the webpage of Profile & Trends: New Zealand’s tertiary education sector. Use the link www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/profile-and-trends. Refer to this site for information on:

- New Zealand’s tertiary education system
- tertiary education organisations:
  - New Zealand’s public tertiary education institutions
    - universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics, and wānanga
  - private training establishments
  - government training establishments, and
  - workplace-based learning.
- the Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-15, released in December 2009, incorporating the tertiary education priorities for the next three to five years
- the legislation relating to tertiary education
- the government agencies responsible for tertiary education – the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Career Services Rapuara, the Ministry of Social Development, Inland Revenue Te Tari Taake, and the Department of Labour, and
- how the tertiary education system works:
  - quality assurance
  - investment and funding decisions
  - provision of government funding, and
  - monitoring of the performance of tertiary education organisations and of the sector as a whole.

Monitoring New Zealand’s tertiary education strategy

The Ministry of Education is responsible for monitoring the progress of the tertiary education sector towards the goals of the Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-15. The strategy sets out short- and medium-term indicators for measuring progress.

The purpose of monitoring the strategy is to provide ongoing timely information to Ministers and government agencies on the progress of the tertiary education system against the strategy. Monitoring will help to make sense of the extent to which the intended changes are happening and to what degree. Monitoring reports are also useful in informing broader public debate about the direction of the tertiary education system.

The 2010 monitoring report will be published later in the year. It will provide an overview of the tertiary education sector in relation to the vision and priorities of the strategy. It will be supported by a set of cross-strategy indicators, providing a detailed view of the overall health of the tertiary education system.

For a copy of the report Tertiary education strategy monitoring 2010 go to: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tes.