

Cultural Celebration Award Winner: Unitec Institute of Technology



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545452/e11cfdcc61>

With close to 20,000 students and a diverse workforce of around 1000 across three campuses, Unitec Institute of Technology has implemented a ground-breaking programme called Courageous Conversations About Race (CCAR).

The programme is aimed at creating an environment that strives for racial equity and a culturally responsive learning environment, and to provide a protocol to have a conversation about race and culture.

Unitec does not have a neutral stance on diversity and equitable inclusion. The organisation's strategy, Towards Inclusive Excellence, in essence says that to achieve excellence there must be a truly inclusive and equitable working and learning environment.

"We believe that racial equity is key to the success of Unitec - its workforce, students, and the communities and industries it serves - and that CCAR is a tool that will contribute to Unitec achieving cultural responsiveness," says Unitec's Manager, Equity & Diversity Sonya Collie.

That involves learning how to engage with others on their terms and understanding how people of different racial backgrounds understand and interact with each other. The CCAR protocol provides a way to have healthy and productive conversations about race.

This ground-breaking protocol provides a set of tools that utilises four agreements to guide how to have conversations about race, and six conditions which provide a road map for a conversation. In addition, the protocol includes a compass to navigate where and how to enter conversations with others and techniques of mindful inquiry in order to engage, sustain and deepen inter- and intra-racial dialogue.

"Courageous Conversation is about getting back to our humanity by taking a very personal journey to remove the distortion of race that is a social and political construction in our lives," says Dr Matthew Farry, Director, Institute for Courageous Conversation About Race at Unitec (iCCAR at Unitec).

The decision to develop the CCAR initiative was made in 2013 and, in 2014, Unitec brought Glenn E. Singleton (author of CCAR and president of Pacific Educational Group) to Aotearoa New Zealand for two visits to run workshops and develop the CCAR Leaders Group (a group of Diversity Champions led by Dr Farry from teams across Unitec).

In early 2015, the Pacific Educational Group (PEG) and Unitec decided to establish an institute for courageous conversations about race at Unitec, creating a hub from where this work can be led within Unitec and across the South Pacific. This would enable productive and meaningful conversations about race and culture in both personal and professional lives throughout the region in order to build capacity for inclusive and equitable leadership.

"The Institute is about moving beyond a 'diversity and inclusion' model to next generation equity leadership, so that our workforce is able to harness the benefits of ever increasing ethnic and racial diversity. We believe that Unitec's workforce is leading the tertiary sector in talking about race," says Dr Farry.

The implementation of CCAR at Unitec has provided the workforce with opportunities to engage in conversations about race and thereby look at ways to address racialised educational achievement gaps. These opportunities to engage have included 15 workshops, 10 Knowledge Cafes, an open invitation to be part of the champions' network and sessions covering topics including an introduction to the CCAR protocol, culturally responsive pedagogies, and becoming a CCAR champion.

Unitec executive leadership has consistently and visibly supported the implementation and growth of CCAR, most significantly approving the establishment of iCCAR at Unitec. iCCAR was launched on Race Relations Day, 21 March 2016.

Dr Rick Ede, Unitec chief executive said, "As well as providing an equitable experience for all of our students, we want to ensure our graduates have the cultural competencies they need to be successful in increasingly diverse workplaces.

"We also have a role to play in helping our communities and industries adapt. The Institute will provide a space for our key partners to come together and engage in courageous conversation with themselves, each other, and their future employees," he says.

For Unitec to stay relevant and a leader in the tertiary sector, the organisation is committed to be aligned and responsive to the changing face of Auckland. CCAR plays an important role in consciously starting and continuing conversations about race and culture.

"Unitec is changing in many ways to be more responsive to the "real world". We are changing our teaching and learning practices to better reflect what both students and their

eventual employers want. This includes an increased focus on real-world learning, the development of 'soft' skills like teamwork and communication, and being cultural responsive and competent graduates," says Sonya Collie.

Unitec staff and students alike have seen many benefits from the CCAR protocol and the work done by Dr Matthew Farry, earned him the International Racial Equity Leadership Award at the National Summit for CCAR in 2014.

The establishment of iCCAR at Unitec has resulted in stronger relationships with industry and tertiary partners. These relationships are crucial to Unitec's standing as an industry-connected tertiary education provider.