**Sam Snell – Ōritetanga Learner Success Conference, August 2019**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[APPLAUSE]

Kia ora koutou and greetings to all. We were all brought here today through involvement in the tertiary sector and a shared commitment to help, realise its full potential in the growth of individuals and communities. And as such, I would like to acknowledge all those that are here today and those that wanted to be but could not make it. I'd especially like to acknowledge those from Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau who are around in the room somewhere.

My experience in arriving at tertiary education was slightly off the beaten track. Having initially enrolled after high school, I soon dropped out and spent the remainder of the decade working and traveling. Returning to university was an interesting experience. And I came to jump at every opportunity that was available. This soon led me in the direction of student politics, where I find myself today.

In my role at the Students' Association, I've had the pleasure of interaction with people broadly across the tertiary sector, from students and academics, to reporters and Government nomenclature. All of these people, us people, tātou katoa, bring with us our own experiences, stories and expectations. Some choose to get down with the nitty and gritty pedagogical undertakings of learning, whilst others shoot through their Bachelor’s and into the workforce as soon as possible.

My own journey has led me into the area of pastoral care, and through this the methodology of policy decision-making. To start off this undertaking, I would like to express my gratitude and acknowledge those teachers and kaiako who impart their knowledge upon our students. These people teach us more than just the syllabus, they often look out for students and maintain the environment for learning that we had today, and create the pathways for learner accomplishments, as demonstrated by some of the previous speakers today.

Through this, they are a key element in providing a positive learning environment. Pastoral care has proven to be a very tumultuous area to navigate, with frustrations arriving from simple yet seemingly perpetual problems; troubling decision-making; and on the brighter side, a huge number of people dedicated to supporting students on their journey to academic accomplishment. Whilst the majority of work happens on the ground, or the face-to-face level, nearly all of the issues will entail central government policies to a greater or lesser extent. Whether this be for the annual funding for universities or regarding the rental market, there are always problems and more often than not solutions.

Now as lunch break slowly creeps up on us-- or perhaps we've already passed that-- I'll attempt to be succinct and outline a few key areas in which I see movement, problems, and more importantly solutions. For this, I will use the Compulsory Student Services levy as a bit of a case study. The Compulsory Student Services Fee, or CSSF, is the fee that all students pay, providing the levy is collected by the institution, and which is used by tertiary organisations to fund services, including pastoral care.

Though the Ministerial directive lays out the rules for how this money is spent, my own experience has been one in which this expenditure has been made on quite a very selective reading of the directive. Unfortunately for me and the general student body, this has not at all entailed a joint decision-making process, as stated in the directive. Rather a consultation process is engaged in which the large decisions have often already been made. And the questions allow for very little room for movement.

For me, this is troubling, both in the indifference towards those who are affected being the student body, and also this sort of callous dismissal and disregard for a genuine consultation process. I think this has in part shed some sort of under-- light on some underlying logic, which sadly does not put the interests of students first or even second.

Over the last decade, we have seen an increased emphasis and take-up of consultation processes in the realm of decision-making and policy direction setting. The benefits of a robust consultation process are broad and have been demonstrated and shown to lead to better outcomes from those affected. People are able to have their views, experiences, and needs reflected in the policies that affect them. Additionally, such a process adheres and embodies the democratic values we so much cherish hearing in Aotearoa.

Though to build on this, I see joint decision-making processes as the next logical step up from the traditional consultation process. From my own experiences with the consultation processes, I've seen that they often fall into the trap of having certain topics ruled out from critique and input. And additionally, the input the kōrero had, often faces a degree of censorship or selectivity from those whom are tasked with the collection of the information. This then leads to frustration, disenfranchisement, and feelings that their voices have been ignored and rightly so.

And as such, if we are to avoid these frustrations and truly see the benefits as we hope to realise from consultation processes, a degree of decision-making power needs to be placed in the hands of those who are affected by future and current policies. It would be naive of me to think that such a large shift would be seamless or painless. And to that I would add, if us in the sector aren't prepared to change or are open to change, we need to realise a key principle of good leadership is knowing when to move on.

To sort of summarise and conclude, I would state that decision-making can't ever function effectively whilst alienating those whom are affected and ignoring their voices through the process. Though it is an uncomfortable act to have to consider that one's own work may be exacerbating problems, it is essential that we all critically reflect on our own actions and find ways of keeping ourselves accountable to those whom our decisions and of work affects.

In the future, I look forward to a pathway which we all take together, which works towards the best outcomes of all people and truly leaves no one behind. Now, this wouldn't be a speech without ending with a slight proverb. So I'll borrow one off a friend. Kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui. Let's eat.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]