

Sixteen exciting and rewarding years at Wintec are coming to an end.

Sadly, the last three years have been extremely difficult and at times very unpleasant.

They have involved dealing with false allegations, the associated media coverage, multiple investigations of the same historic matters, and significant legal costs defending my reputation.

As I shift focus to my retirement, I would like to share some final words:

The independent report by Queen's Counsel Simon Mount, the third such inquiry commissioned by the Wintec Council, has now been completed and a synopsis publicly released and attached to this email.

The QC found only one complaint to be established on the balance of probabilities.

Regarding that complaint, he stated that I should have better managed and dealt with a conflict of interest in relation to employment matters. I acknowledge and understand the reasons for this finding, a historic matter which was actually previously addressed.

There is a further finding where Wintec as an organisation did not adequately respond to a serious complaint.

Mr Mount QC acknowledged the success of Wintec under my leadership, particularly in terms of its financial performance, building programme and internationalisation. I am glad he identified that Wintec has made significant progress in the years since those in question.

Many of the more than 20 people the QC interviewed over a period of 17 weeks described me as "an approachable leader who sought to foster a culture of innovation, rigorous debate and personal development".

I would like to sincerely thank those who made these generous comments to the QC during a very challenging time for me.

While I am disappointed to end my 27-year New Zealand public service career in these circumstances, and cannot quantify the impact of this ordeal on my personal health and that of my family, Lynnette and I have both been uplifted by those who sent messages of support.

Over the past 16 years as Wintec CE, I have worked hard on transforming the organisation from one struggling and under Government watch to one of the highest performing technical institutes in the country.

As CE, I always had high expectations of staff.

One of the many challenges facing any CE is managing under-performing individuals or those who are not aligned with the organisation or team. Sometimes hard truths and decisions are required for the good of the organisation. Striking the balance between processes and controls, and agility, progress and results can be an area fraught with danger.

The other matter is the inquiry by Audit New Zealand. I have been unable to engage meaningfully in this process due to my ill-health, but I understand there are some procedural areas which have not previously been identified in annual audits that may require further iterative improvement.

I am pleased – but not surprised – no evidence was found of wrongdoing.

Just to be clear; Wintec was audited for each of the 16 years I have been CE. At no time has any issue of inappropriate or unauthorised spending by myself been raised with me, and at no time have I ever made inappropriate or unauthorised use of public funds.

At all times, my expenses were submitted to the council chair, clarified where necessary, and approved. Similarly, all overseas trips and expenses were authorised as appropriate costs associated with Wintec's change programme.

Over the years, the team and I have worked hard towards meeting Wintec's objectives - moving to a more business-oriented and financially sustainable organisation, while improving student outcomes and undertaking a significant facilities development programme.

This naturally meant that systems and processes were progressively developed as we moved away from antiquated operating models. In some circumstances they were replaced entirely, being historic policies or legacy systems no longer fit for purpose. In respect of our internationalisation programme, many systems were developed from scratch and subject to ongoing review, having not previously been required.

Throughout the time dealing with these allegations, there has appeared to be a general lack of appreciation of the ongoing transformational changes undertaken by Wintec over this period, the results, and the cost, effort and logistical

complexities involved in establishing new export markets and doing business around the world, particularly in non-English speaking countries.

You do not perform the role of CE for long before realising that there will always be operational, procedural and cultural shortcomings within any organisation, and yet, you must move forward. In fact, it is the role to incrementally address these exact things in response to changing landscapes and priorities. Wintec is now in a far better position in all these regards than 16 years ago and the successes speak for themselves.

When the Government of the day capped student numbers some years back, all institutes were encouraged to sell 'Education New Zealand'. Wintec did that and very successfully, going from minimal export revenue to \$23 million last year.

In an environment where the performance and solvency of the TEI sector is in question, Wintec stands as a shining example of the possibilities for New Zealand tertiary education both at home and around the world.

This took significant time and effort on the part of many people, along with a dual focus on the requirements of students and employers. I'm proud of what we have achieved together and contributed to Waikato and Hamilton.

To all the staff and supporters with whom I have worked, thank you once again.

To all the students who have studied at Wintec over the past 16 years, and into the future, I wish you all the best in achieving your goals, and hope your time at the institute serves you well.

I now retire from the CE role as I approach 70, knowing that I have made a positive contribution, along with my team and the support of my family, in making Wintec one of New Zealand's outstanding tertiary education institutes.

Mark Flowers