

Uni bus just the ticket

BY MIKE BAIN

STUDYING at university is a step closer for North King Country students thanks to a new initiative kick-started by Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna.

From February a bus will travel daily from Te Kuiti and Otorohanga to the University of Waikato in Hamilton making tertiary education a reality for more local students.

Aware of the high costs students face with accommodation and travel to attend university, Mr Hanna approached Waikato University's vice-chancellor Professor Neil Quigley to find a solution.

The bus service means students will not incur the costs of travel and accommodation - up to \$310 per week in the university's halls of residence.

The service, which will be mostly funded by the university, will be trialled for the 2016 academic year.

A similar transport service is already operating successfully in the South Waikato from Tokoroa and Putaruru townships.

Mr Hanna is very pleased the university has opted to support local students.

"I am really excited that the cost of accommodation has been removed for local kids and this also gives families the opportunity to support students in their own environment."

Although costs are yet to be confirmed, he says the university has agreed to subsidise the cost of the bus with students paying a minimal amount.

It will leave Te Kuiti at 7.30am each day returning at 5pm. Students from the Otorohanga district will be collected en route.

Wi-fi will be available to students while they travel.

Twenty students from North King

Country schools have already applied to the Hamilton university for 2016.

Mr Hanna says there may well be other students who have not yet enrolled because of the barriers of cost and accessibility.

"Hopefully this daily transport solution will be an added incentive for those who are still keen to progress their tertiary education," he says.

"Considerable savings can be gained for young people by not having the high costs of flatting or halls of residence accommodation."

The bus is also available to adult students.

SCHOOLS' SUPPORT

Mr Hanna has met with representatives from Te Kuiti High School, Otorohanga College, Piopio College, Te Wharekura o Maniapoto and Number 12 youth centre who all have given their support.

Te Kuiti High School principal Bruce Stephens says the service will remove barriers for his school's graduate students and help them gain easier access to higher education.

"The concept encourages the retention of students in secondary education which will benefit them and our community."

Piopio College principal Julie Radice is thrilled with the opportunity the proposed service gives young people to attend university while staying at home, which she says will save them money and encourage others to attend.

Otorohanga College principal Timoti Harris has also applauded the initiative.

"Not every student is confident enough to leave home at a young age and move from rural to city life, so this service is very positive for them.



ALL ABOARD: Te Kuiti High School principal Bruce Stephens says the proposed bus service to the University of Waikato next year will remove some of the barriers for local students to access higher education.

"I applaud the University of Waikato for realising that tertiary students in this area are disadvantaged by the lack of transport to city-based universities.

"This bus offers the potential to encourage more of our young people to embark on study without having to give up home and support networks to do so."

TIME TO APPLY

As the university is still accepting applications for 2016, Mr Hanna is urging students interested in studying in Hamilton to contact their school

principals or him at the Waitomo District Council by December 9.

"The more students that enrol, will ensure the proposed bus service goes ahead," he says.

Mr Quigley says there may be some financial assistance available to eligible students to help with their pathway to the university.

The university has also indicated it will explore the feasibility of offering local scholarships through North King Country schools in 2016.

"Scholarships will support students' aspirations for higher learning and this is something we will explore next year," says Mr Quigley.

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