



RESPONSE to the Auckland Council

DRAFT AUCKLAND PLAN

and

DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Paper 049/11

Prepared on behalf of COMET trustees, October 2011

Whakatauki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.
Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.
I te otinga
me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.
Ā tana wā,
me titiro hoki
ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven by one strand alone.
Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers
will such a tapestry be completed.
With its completion
let us look at the good that comes from it
and, in time
we should also look
at those stitches which have been dropped,
because they also have a message.

- Kūkupa Tirikatene

About COMET

COMET is a Legacy Council Controlled Organisation (Trust CCO) under the Local Government Act 2002. COMET became a CCO of the Auckland Council on 1 November 2010. The Trust has an agreement with the Council to deliver analysis and advocacy for education; the Trust also provides co-ordination and facilitation of projects that make a difference to education outcomes in the city.

Executive Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Auckland Plan and the Draft Economic Development Strategy.

We would like the opportunity to present our submission and receive questions at an oral hearing.

There are a number of key directions in the Plan which have potential to bring about real and positive change in education and skills in our city. For this reason, **we strongly endorse:**

- The focus on children and young people, and the commitment to put them first in all decision-making
- The focus on education and skills and specifically on literacy, numeracy and language as a proven, effective means to lift both social and economic development
- The recognition that economic and social outcomes are interlinked, leading to a “triple bottom line” for Council budgeting and decision-making
- The identification of the Southern Initiative for more intensive investment in order to realize its potential. Focused investment in the Southern Initiative could also be used to develop and evaluate effective change models that can then be made available to other areas
- The partnership approach between local and central government, which provides an opportunity to coordinate investment, and to ensure that government expenditure takes into account local needs and community voice
- The plan to develop education plans at local board level, to engage the community in reflecting on education and skills in their area, and to support connected, transformational change to meet the needs of the local community
- The target to have 50% of Aucklanders speaking more than one language by 2040. This will require active support for language maintenance (among Māori, Pasifika and other migrant groups) and language acquisition (for other Aucklanders), plus visible support from leaders to raise awareness of the value of language learning and preservation
- The presence of clear targets for education and skills outcomes, to give focus to collaborative efforts and enable ongoing tracking and evaluation

We suggest some minor changes to the targets relating to education and skills, in order to make the measurements more valid and in order to align more closely with the evidence linking educational outcomes with aspects of wellbeing. Our **suggested targets** are:

- All families have access to formal or informal early learning that fits their needs and aspirations
- By 2020, all homes in decile 1 and 2 areas have some kind of early learning provision within 750 metres (stroller distance), and every decile 1 and 2 school in the Auckland region has some kind of early learning provision onsite

- All children are reading, writing and doing mathematics at the expected levels by the time they leave primary school
- By 2030, all school leavers will have at least Level 2 NCEA or equivalent
- By 2040, all young adults complete a post-school qualification within 5 years of leaving school.

We also have some suggestions on **how the directions in the draft Plan might be realized**. These include:

- Setting up an education and skills advisory group to have input to Council on education matters, and to track progress towards the identified targets
- Supporting coordination across organizations and educational sectors, for example focusing on articulation of qualifications, transition of students and community engagement initiatives
- Requiring all Council projects to consider children and families, with full child impact assessments for major projects
- Supporting actions that enable parents and families to support their children through family-focused learning such as parenting education and financial literacy courses
- Committing to long-term, sustained action that continues beyond immediate political conditions, as a necessary condition for significant change, especially in areas such as the Southern Initiative where barriers to change have built up over decades
- Ensuring all Council-funded projects are based on sound evidence of effectiveness, that process and outcomes are tracked to inform project improvement, and that evidence from particularly effective projects is shared and used to inform others working in similar fields
- Recognising the essential place of digital literacy skills in supporting employability and economic development. In addition to skill development, digital literacy also requires access, for example through computers in libraries and other public places, and through provision of high-speed broadband
- Creating innovations hubs to encourage exchange of skills and ideas among businesses in emerging and creative fields
- Including consideration of education and learning in spatial planning, for example by providing space for early childhood provision (formal and informal) and for adult learning in Council buildings, and by ensuring transport routes are planned to facilitate access to educational facilities.

Putting children and young people first

We strongly endorse the Plan's emphasis on children and young people, as the number one transformational shift and as a key priority within the Auckland's People section. Children and young people are not only our future; they are also an important and growing part of our present. Evidence shows that the first three years of life are key to ensuring children have the social, emotional, language and learning foundations that equip them for success and contribution throughout life¹. It also shows that quality support for children and young people of all ages through their families, communities and the formal education system makes a significant difference to life outcomes².

To give effect to the strategic direction of putting children and young people first, we suggest that all Council-funded projects be required to consider children and families in their planning, and that all major new initiatives be required to undertake and act on a formal **Child Impact Assessment**. Such impact assessments should include processes for hearing the voice of children and young people themselves, rather than only hearing from parents or from people who work with young people.

As the Plan recognizes, one of the most effective ways to support children and young people is to provide families with the skills and resources (social and economic) that help them succeed in their role of supporting their children. This means “**thinking family**” in planning and decisions. By advocating for programmes that support parents as first educators, Council can help break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and so gain long-term value for the city. Council is also in a position to support family learning in practical ways, such as positioning libraries, parks and reserves near where people live, planning transport routes to enable families to access services (including ECEs and schools), and allocating space in Council buildings for family-focused services such as parenting classes, adult and community education, playgroups, Plunket and other social services.

Targets related to education and skills

We applaud the inclusion of clear, evidence-informed targets in the Auckland Plan to focus action on education and skills. The broad outline of the targets is supported by evidence showing a link between specific educational outcomes and long-term economic and social wellbeing.

Specifically, there is considerable evidence that when children and young people have access to quality early learning support for at least 24 months prior to school, they are more successful in their subsequent formal education³. There is also very good evidence that young people who leave school with a qualification are less likely to be unemployed, and more likely to earn higher wages or

¹ Infometrics Ltd (2011). 1000 days to get it right for every child: The effectiveness of public investment in New Zealand Children. http://www.everychildcounts.org.nz/_wp-content/uploads/2011/08/ECCInfometricsInvestmentinchildrenAug11.pdf

² Patterson, L. (2011). Tracks to adulthood – post-school experiences of 21 year olds: the quantitative component of competent learners @ 20. <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/2567/tracks-to-adulthood>

³ Wylie, C., Ferral, H., Hodgen, E. and Thompson, J. (2006). Contributions of early childhood education to age-14 performance. <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/2567/5979>

salaries than those who do not gain a school-level qualification, and that these benefits are even greater for young people who gain a post-school qualification⁴.

We suggest some minor changes to the targets in the draft Plan in order to make the measurements more valid and to align them more closely to the evidence about factors that contribute to social and economic wellbeing. The changes will also make the targets easier to track and provide more valuable information for decision-making and system improvements.

The table below shows the education-related targets as they appear in the Plan, our suggested version of the target, and the rationale for our suggested change.

Target as shown in the Draft Plan	Suggested target	Reasons for suggested change
By 2017, all preschool children demonstrate at the B4 (before school check) that they have strong family or whānau attachments and have the foundation for success in school and life	All families have access to formal or informal early learning that fits their needs and aspirations	The B4 school check is designed to pick up health issues, not attachment or learning readiness. By targeting access rather than participation, we support parents to decide on the best early learning for their child, whether at home, in parent-led informal ECE or in formal ECEs. There is evidence that local, small scale and cost-effective programmes such as supported playgroups can have a significant impact on both children's achievement and parent abilities as first teachers. ⁵
By 2020, increase the number of early childhood facilities in Southwest and West Auckland (the areas of highest need) by 100 (10 per year)	By 2020, all homes in decile 1 and 2 areas have some kind of early learning provision within 750 metres (stroller distance), and every decile 1 and 2 school in the Auckland region has some kind of early learning provision onsite	The goal of 100 new ECEs would be prohibitively expensive and let may not be sufficient to provide for current demand plus population growth. New centres do not guarantee improved access to families who currently are unable to access ECE or those who find formal centres do not meet their needs. The suggested goal allows for informal and home-based learning as well as formal ECE, and focuses on ensuring availability for all families, especially those without access to transport.
(no targets at present between ECE and the end of compulsory schooling)	All children are reading, writing and doing mathematics at the expected levels by the time they leave primary school.	It is important to have a target between ECE and school leaving so that any issues that could prevent achieving the wider goals are picked up earlier, and so that primary schools can feel engaged and able to contribute to the goals of the Plan.

⁴ Earle, D. (2009b). *Skills, qualifications and wages - an analysis from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/42260

⁵ Widdowson, D. and Dixon, R. (2010). Final report for the evaluation of the Parent Mentoring project in Manukau. Uniservices: Auckland.

By 2030, all school leavers will be achieving NCEA Level 2	By 2030, all school leavers will have at least Level 2 NCEA or equivalent	Level 2 NCEA is a minimum desirable qualification. Young people who want to go on to university need at least University Entrance, which has specific requirements that are greater than NCEA Level 2. Adding “or equivalent” also allows for those young people who gain alternative qualifications under the Baccaalaureate or Cambridge systems.
By 2040, all young adults will complete a post-secondary qualification	By 2040, all young adults complete a post-school qualification within 5 years of leaving school.	The original goal was not clear enough to allow accurate measurement. By adding a timeframe, it becomes possible to measure the proportion of young people meeting the goal in any one cohort. The short timeframe also maximizes the probability that young people will have gone directly from school to tertiary, which is a predictor of more positive long-term outcomes.

Lifting education

We welcome the Plan’s emphasis on education as a means to ensure wellbeing for individuals and for our city as a whole. Education and learning increase employability, and have also been shown to support social wellbeing through improved health outcomes, increased engagement in the community and more stable family relationships⁶. Learning is not just for young people. It continues to provide value throughout life, enabling people to gain skills so they can move into higher-paid or more stable employment, and supporting wellbeing and social engagement.

Currently, Auckland education has many strengths. The vast majority of our young people leave school with recognized qualifications, go on to further learning at one of the many excellent tertiary institutes in our city, and take their skills into productive employment. However around 20% of young people are not achieving at the levels we would like, and certain groups (Māori, Pasifika and children from low socio-economic areas) are over-represented in this under-served group. This indicates system issues that need to be addressed if Auckland is to reach its social and economic potential.

Sustained, coordinated action from many organizations and individuals will be needed in order to achieve Council’s educational targets. This sustained change will require **long-term commitment** from all educational sectors, and from government, Council and the community as a whole, across subsequent electoral periods at both local and national government levels.

One mechanism that could contribute to such long-term commitment would be to ask people to sign and act on an **educational charter or accord** for education in Auckland. COMET and Cognition Institute are currently working with a kaitiaki group that emerged from the May 2011

⁶ Scott, D. (2010). Social and economic indicators of education.
http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/78889/1.-summary

Auckland Education Summit, to develop such a charter/accord, called **Whakakotahitanga Te Ara**. Te Ara aims to generate ground-up (rather than top-down), coordinated action to lift educational achievement in Auckland. Council can contribute to this by expressing support for Te Ara, and by committing to regularly track the key educational targets in the Auckland Plan and report back on them to all those who sign up to Te Ara. This will provide long-term direction and coordination to sector efforts, and will demonstrate alignment between Te Ara and the Auckland Plan and council directions.

Auckland Council could support the coordination, transfer and scaling up of education initiatives already identified as effective in the city. The Auckland Education Summit called for the city to rapidly grow models that have been shown to make a significant difference for students.

Another mechanism to bring about and sustain change over time would be to appoint a **Council education advisory group** representing the key educational sectors and interest groups, to work alongside Council's education CCO to track progress towards Council's educational targets, receive information about actions arising from Te Ara, and provide advice on ways that Council could support ongoing improvement. Some members of the existing kaitiaki group that have created Te Ara could be included in this advisory group for continuity.

It is also important that some action on education be contextualized to the specific needs in different parts of the city. We therefore welcome the Economic Development Strategy's suggested action to support **local board education plans**.

We also strongly endorse the Plan's **focus on literacy, numeracy and language** as key skills to support ongoing learning and productivity. Currently the very high number of adult Aucklanders with low literacy and numeracy limits our city's economic potential and also the life chances of many individuals and families⁷. Changing this situation will require concerted action over a long period, focusing on two main areas. The first area of focus is to reduce the numbers of young people entering adulthood with low literacy, through focused support for schools and low-level tertiary courses. The second is to support adults to increase their skills through more coordinated formal and informal learning opportunities in workplaces and in the community; and through more intensive support for immigrants to develop English language and English literacy skills. Council can advocate for change in both areas, and can also provide coordination so educational provision is more coherent within and between sectors.

We welcome the Plan's call for Auckland to become more actively bilingual, and the goal that 50% of Aucklanders will speak more than one language. Language is central to communication and learning, and is also key to culture and identity. Being fully fluent in more than one language has benefits for intercultural communication, and has also been shown to support further language learning and more flexible thinking⁸.

As the world's largest Pacific city, Auckland also has a duty to support the maintenance of Pacific languages, many of which are endangered. However, without active support, most migrant communities lose their home language within a few generations of arrival, retaining at best only greetings or ceremonial vocabulary. Council can **support language maintenance** by providing

⁷ Sutton, A and Vester, B (2010). Unlocking Auckland's potential: Adult literacy and numeracy skills in the new Auckland. COMET: Auckland.

⁸ Thomas, W. and Collier, V. (1997). Two languages are better than one. *Educational Leadership*, 55 (4), 23-26.

visible recognition of the value of language preservation, and by advocating for greater language support in schools and in adult education provision, especially for Pacific languages.

Supporting Early Childhood Education:

The Plan recognises the particular value of quality learning in the pre-school years. This can happen in formal early childhood services, informal and parent-led early learning venues (such as playgroups) or in the home. Data from the Competent Children study shows that children who receive quality early childhood education are more likely to succeed in schooling, and that these benefits are detectable right through into the teenage years⁹. However, families in many areas of Auckland do not have access to early childhood education that fits their needs and aspirations.

Across Auckland¹⁰, 92.4% of children have attended some form of ECE by the time they enter school. However, this figure is only 84.6% for Māori children, and only 82.8% for Pasifika. ECE participation also varies geographically, from 82.1% in Manurewa to 100% in Waiheke. These variable rates reflect significant access issues for some population groups and local board areas.

Council can contribute to ensuring that families have access to early learning services that meet their needs, especially through working with the Ministry of Education to identify and address priority areas for investment, and through removing barriers (such as lengthy consent processes and lack of land) that can make it difficult to establish ECEs in areas of greatest need.

Through our work with the Manukau ECE Taskforce, the MOE-Council Manukau Implementation Team, and through our links with ECE networks in Waitakere and Tamaki, we have identified a number of actions that Council could take which would remove significant barriers to ECE access. These actions are:

- Setting up a **regional strategic ECE group** which would include representatives from the South, Waitakere, Tamaki, Ministry of Education, Council, COMET, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Te Puni Kokiri and Ministry of Health. The goal of the group would be to use evidence to prioritise effort, to inform long-term planning for ECE provision, and to create short-term solutions for urgent issues. This strategic regional group would link with the existing local ECE groups in Manukau, Waitakere and Tamaki, and would encourage the formation of ECE groups in other areas.
- Identifying a **dedicated Council staff member** in each area to work with ECEs on consenting, to link with the Ministry of Education, identify gaps and plan provision. These roles would work along similar lines to Council's involvement in the Manukau ECE Implementation Team.
- **Reducing consenting time** so new ECEs can be established more quickly than the current 2 years, for example by seeing all ECEs as "top customers" for the consenting process, so they have dedicated support and fast-track decision-making.

⁹ Hodgen, E. (2007). Early childhood education and young adult competencies at age 16.

<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/2567/11776>

¹⁰ ECE Participation data is for the 2010 year and is provided by the Ministry of Education. The data is taken from school enrolment surveys, which ask parents whether the child has attended any form of ECE.

- More consistency in **making green space available** for ECEs. A number of ECEs have been built on Council parks over recent years, and this is an effective way to attract people to parks and also provide ECEs within established residential areas where other land is hard to find. However recently there has been some reluctance to approve further ECEs on parks. If there was a policy allocating a certain maximum proportion of parks for buildings such as ECEs, this would create more clarity and consistency for ECE providers and for local boards.
- More opportunity to **use Council brown space** for early learning, including formal ECEs, playgroups and other models. Where Council leases buildings to ECE centres, longer leases would make it easier for providers to access MOE funding for needed upgrades. For playgroups, Council could consider offering space in Council buildings at a consistent, low cost, recognising the very lean funding models on which playgroups operate, and the value they provide for children and families.
- Adopting a goal to ensure all homes in low socio-economic areas have an **ECE programme within 750 metres**, i.e. “stroller distance”, so families who don’t have transport can still access ECE. Having this as a long-term goal would help MOE, Council and others to prioritise funding and efforts.
- **Trialling the use of re-locatables** or other low-cost structures on existing (eg school, park, church) sites to provide ECE for small numbers of 3 and 4-year-olds in high-priority, low-provision neighbourhoods. By keeping construction costs low and avoiding the need to purchase land, our investigations indicate it would be possible to make ECE available in a much shorter timeframe than is needed to establish larger, purpose-built ECEs. This model could be trialled within the Southern Initiative, focusing on pockets with extremely low ECE participation. Once the model was refined, it could then be extended to other high-priority areas.
- The possibility of fitting out a bus as a **mobile playgroup**, to reach identified pockets of very low provision, and to attract families who are not willing to come to ECE until they see the value of it. This intervention could be trialled in the Southern Initiative, evaluated and if successful, used as a model for other areas.

Lifting skills

We applaud the number of targets and actions in the Plan that relate to growing skills in the city. By building the skills of people who already live in Auckland (rather than only focusing on bringing in needed skills), we can increase employment and productivity while also reducing the social impacts of underemployment.

The most significant barrier to employment for the majority of adults currently unemployed or underemployed is poor literacy, affecting nearly half a million Aucklanders¹¹. In its broadest sense, literacy is more than the ability to read and write. **Key literacies for employment include document literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and digital literacy.** Many adults need support in several of these literacies to equip them to move into further training and/or more stable

¹¹ Sutton, A and Vester, B (2010). Unlocking Auckland’s potential: Adult literacy and numeracy skills in the new Auckland. COMET: Auckland.

employment. Literacy for adults requires a response over and above what the government provides through formal education. Council can play an important role in advocating for coherent literacy provision on a scale sufficient to meet Auckland's current and future needs.

In the case of digital literacy, skill development needs to be supported by **increased access to computers and to the internet**, for example through making more computers available at libraries, community houses and other public places, and by creating internet hot spots around council facilities in low socio-economic areas so families can access information.

Another way to support increased employment is to **build career awareness and employability skills**. Career education needs to start young (ideally in intermediate school, before young people begin to make subject choices) and continue throughout life, recognizing that most adults change career several times during their working life. Young people also need opportunities to build employability skills (such as punctuality, reliability and working with others) through work experience, part-time work while studying and cadetship opportunities. Council can support this by making work experience and cadetships available within Council departments, and by providing coordination for youth employability programmes in the city.

Southern Initiative

We welcome the Plan's identification of the Southern Initiative area for more focused attention and investment. Our work in the Southern Initiative area over the past 12 years confirms the picture painted by the data of an area whose potential is not currently being realized. As the home of the majority of Auckland's Pasifika residents and as a first foothold for new migrants, the South-West is likely to continue to bring to the city its strengths of ethnic and language diversity, and a young, rapidly growing population. For the same reasons, the area is also likely to continue to need more intensive social service support over a long period, to assist each new wave of immigrants to successfully settle and find ways to engage with and contribute to Auckland society.

The entrenched nature of the social issues in the Southern Initiative area, along with the highly transient population, mean that change can only come from **long-term investment**. Achieving this will require continued commitment from each subsequent council and from successive governments. One way to increase the chances of long-term commitment would be to put in place **systems for regularly tracking social and economic outcomes** in the Southern Initiative area, reporting them publicly, and reflecting on gains and setbacks to inform the next phase of development.

Social issues in areas of high deprivation are generally highly complex, with multiple, interrelated causes. Such complex issues cannot be solved through simple interventions that focus on only one cause at a time; rather, they need **coherent action that addresses a number of root causes at once**. In particular, interventions need to recognize that people are not isolated individuals, but members of families and communities.

Thinking family in any intervention and **including learning** can help bring more sustained change because adult and family learning empowers families to work more effectively with their community, and builds their skills and capacity to look beyond the immediate and to become more self-sufficient as a family in the longer term. Parents are motivated to make changes that improve the lives of their children, and children benefit from both short-term changes in the family's situation and from longer-term role modeling from their parents and extended family.

One possible side-benefit of the Southern Initiative is the potential to use it to **trial delivery models** that can then be contextualized for other areas with pockets of similar demographics. This benefit will only be realized if all new models trialed in the Southern Initiative are accompanied by robust evaluations which are then used to refine and improve the interventions for effectiveness and cost efficiency.

This submission has been assembled by the staff and trustees of COMET based on our own knowledge and experience, and on extensive discussions with education stakeholders.

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