



FEEDBACK on the Draft Tertiary Education Strategy 2014-2019

Paper 072/13

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, 15 November 2013

Whakatauāki

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 Auckland

COMET Auckland, Te Hononga Akoranga (Community Education Trust Auckland) is a charitable trust and Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) of Auckland Council. COMET Auckland was formed in July 2012 from the former City of Manukau Education Trust, to enable support and coordination of education and skills across Auckland. The Trust aims to advance education for Auckland through linking knowledge, needs, advocacy and initiatives, especially in areas of high education need.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 - 2019.

Over-arching comments

There are a number of very positive directions indicated in the draft strategy. In particular, we welcome the move to a greater focus on employment outcomes as a key driver for tertiary education planning and delivery; the push for greater connections between education and business; and the inclusion of indicators for success against every priority area.

However we see a number of gaps in the draft. Firstly, the draft strategy almost entirely ignores the very significant role of geography in determining needs, opportunities and effective solutions. The most obvious example of this is Auckland, which represents one-third of NZ's population but is by no means typical. Auckland is growing where most other areas are static or shrinking; has a much more youthful population; is home to the largest proportions of Pasifika and migrant communities; and has concentrated areas of both socio-economic extremes.

All this means that Auckland's needs are very different from those of other areas, and that solutions need to be tailored to those different needs. This is almost impossible when the current Tertiary Education Strategy ignores geography, and when planning and funding mechanisms deal with organisations as entities independent of the location of delivery. Auckland Council and the Auckland Policy Office are engaged in skills planning for the region, recognising the specific needs of Auckland. We suggest that this planning be more fully reflected in the Tertiary Education Strategy.

Secondly, the draft strategy makes international comparisons between NZ's tertiary results and the OECD average, rather than the top range of OECD countries. New Zealand consistently measures in the top few countries on international measures of reading, mathematics and science achievement at age 15. We need to ask why our tertiary measures are not at a similar level, and we need to continue to focus on participation, retention and completion until we reach that level. As a nation we can no longer rely on primary produce. Since we have comparatively little mineral wealth, and are too far from major markets to rely on manufacturing, we will need to gain much of our productivity growth from knowledge-based industries, especially IT and the arts. To compete internationally, we therefore need to move our tertiary system towards the top of the OECD rankings.

Thirdly, while the focus on pathways to employment is very valuable, the implied view of employment as wage and salary-based work for an existing employer is too narrow. To get the productivity gains our nation requires, we will need more young people to build innovation and entrepreneurial skills so they can establish their own business or compete on the world stage as contractors. This will mean a re-thinking of tertiary education, building more creative thinking and weaving just-in-time learning alongside scaffolded business development.

Fourthly, the language and strategies around students who do not pass their courses seem blaming and unhelpful. Rather than removing student loans, more effort should be put into pre-enrollment advice, at every stage of study, to ensure students do not get into debt for courses they do not yet have the prior learning to succeed in, or that do not fit their interests and directions.

Proposed long-term and strategic priorities

We agree with the four proposed long-term focus areas, and especially welcome the continued focus on improving outcomes for all, and on supporting business and innovation through better links between industry and TEOs. Both these areas will need policy support and resourcing.

We also support the two strategic priorities for 2014-19. The increased focus on outcomes is an important way to ensure tertiary qualifications deliver the knowledge and skills learners and society need. This needs to be more than just getting students into employment; rather, it needs to include measures of the stability and productivity of that employment, and also the wider social cohesion outcomes that tertiary study needs to contribute to.

The focus on Māori educational success, recognising obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, is also a crucial priority. We suggest that in addition to working to improve Māori achievement, strengthen Te Reo Māori and support mātauranga Māori research, the strategy should also support development of the skills that specific iwi identify as part of their economic development plans.

Priority 1: Delivering skills for industry

We agree that continued effort is needed to improve the match between labour market needs and the skills the tertiary system produces. This needs to include industry-specific skills such as engineering, construction or law, and more generic employability skills that are

needed for all workplaces. In order to deliver better skills matching, TEOs will need better labour market forecasts, which ideally should be developed collaboratively between government, employers and TEOs. This process would need to be suitably resourced, but would ensure much better targeting of tertiary funding.

The current Treaty settlement round presents an opportunity in Auckland to work with local iwi around their training development needs to support governance and management, and to provide the specific skills identified in their economic development plans. This will require leadership from TEC to support tailoring of provision and connections between iwi and TEOs.

Generic employability skills are largely ignored in tertiary programmes but they are essential if learners' industry-specific skills are to be translated into stable employment for the individual and productivity for the employer. We have recently completed a collaborative exploration of young people's and employers' views on employability in Auckland, with the Chamber of Commerce and Auckland Council¹. A forum of employers, educators, community organisations and local and national government met recently to consider the report and identify actions to address youth employability. We have yet to fully analyse the discussion notes but the themes that stand out so far are the need for a youth employability framework with resourced leadership to coordinate and scale existing and new supports; the need for greater two-way engagement between industry and schools/education; and the need for better guidance for parents on how to support their children's employability skills. We would welcome a conversation about how the Tertiary Education Strategy could support these directions.

Some specific actions that could build youth employability include:

- Young people could be encouraged to develop a career portfolio based on their subjects, strengths, skills and extra-curricular activities. This portfolio, or passport, would go with them from school to tertiary and employment, as a record of the skills they were building. Focused time spent on this as part of the curriculum and regular reviews with a mentor would provide a real future focus.
- Secondary and foundation tertiary programmes need to provide opportunities for young people to build employability skills- e.g. problem solving, communication skills, team work, self-management skills. This includes opportunities to gain work experience- voluntary, school based or paid. These skills are also relevant for higher-

¹ Sutton, A., Tuatagaloa, P. and Johnson, S. (2013). Enhancing youth employability to support economic growth in Auckland: a discussion document. COMET Auckland. Available from: <http://www.cometauckland.org.nz/wawcs0160402/latest-news.html>

level tertiary students. A greater focus on authentic learning experiences in real workplaces, or at least through work-like learning and assessments (eg writing business plans rather than essays) would help learners build communication and critical thinking skills that are more easily transferrable to employment.

- Employability skills also need to explicitly incorporate digital and financial literacy and a full, clean driver licence, which is often a prerequisite for being short listed for a job. Currently these skill sets are not necessarily systematically developed and young people are not shown their relevance for employment during their secondary schools, so they need to be acquired during foundation tertiary. In addition, driver licence training and completion are expensive and beyond the means of many students and there is no system to assist.
- Work experience needs to be better aligned to students' intended pathways. For students with limited work experience, work experience has to be more than once a term or twice a year.

Priority 2: Getting at-risk young people into a career

We welcome the inclusion of this priority in the draft strategy. The expansion of the age of eligibility for youth guarantee has been a positive step and it is good to see recognition in this draft strategy that more needs to be done for NEETS, especially the 20-24 age group.

More than other learners, at risk young people need to be seen in the context of their lives, families and communities. The draft strategy needs to include greater recognition that the most effective interventions for at-risk young people are those that engage family members alongside educators in supporting the young person's learning and employment goals.

Particular attention needs to be paid to supporting young people in the transition from school/tertiary to work, including mentoring in the first few months of work for at-risk students. At present too many young people fall through the cracks because of a disconnect between the supports available pre and post school leaving, or between supports in tertiary and in work.

Priority 3: Boosting achievement of Māori and Pasifika

The increases in participation levels for Māori and for Pasifika learners in recent years are encouraging but these are far too small for real celebration, especially when completion rates remain low. We therefore agree that different thinking, new approaches and targeted

funding is required if Māori and Pasifika achievement is to be raised and this requires agencies to collaborate in different ways.

We support the inclusion of this priority, but would like to see separate priorities for Māori and for Pasifika, recognising the very significant legal, cultural and historical differences between these groups.

Priority 3A: Boosting achievement of Māori

The figures for participation and completion for Māori, while increasing, are still of serious concern. More work needs to be done to find out why Māori students are less likely to complete their courses, so that the root causes can be addressed in a more targeted way.

A possible strategy could be to offer incentives for providers that successfully increase Māori participation and completion. This would need to be done carefully to avoid unwanted side-effects such as exclusion of more challenging students, but if implemented with care it could encourage an increased focus on success for Māori learners.

More effort needs to be made to provide seamless pathways for Māori learners, especially in the transitions from school to tertiary study and from lower-level to higher-level tertiary study. This will require much greater collaboration and co-operation between institutions from different sectors. For example, courses need to be articulated so learning at one level provides all the necessary preparation for success at the next level, and so this preparation is recognised in intake requirements. There is also scope for dual models where a PTE/ITP and university/polytechnic partner to develop and deliver integrated learning best suited to the learner.

Any efforts to increase Māori participation will need to include whānau and iwi. It is not enough to communicate with school students and other potential learners as mentioned in the strategy; parents, wider whānau and communities need to be involved because they are part of study decisions and are an essential support to learners during their course. Strategies also need to recognise that many young Māori are parents, so need to fit study alongside parenting. Another factor to consider is transport. Many Māori live in rural areas without easy access to a TEO. Even in urban areas of Auckland, the largest concentrations of Māori communities are in areas with difficult transport links which mean transport to the nearest TEO can be prohibitive for students on a benefit.

We welcome the draft strategy's recognition of the importance of culturally responsive provision for Māori students, the importance of supporting Te Reo and Tikanga Māori and of

the potential to build on learners' language and cultural strengths. We suggest that support for Te Reo Māori needs to include local support for Reo a Iwi, recognising the value of each tribe's unique dialect. This may need to be done through resourcing and connections with each Mana Whenua iwi.

Māori culture is a national treasure and one of New Zealand's unique advantages on the world stage. There is potential to significantly boost productivity and export earnings through better support for Māori language and culture, particularly through the performance and visual arts.

Another opportunity to consider is the prevalence of iwi education plans and economic development plans. By building stronger links with local iwi and tailoring provision to their identified priority areas, the TEC and individual TEOs can contribute more effectively to Māori development.

Priority 3B: Boosting achievement of Pasifika

A group of highly skilled Pasifika educators worked with the TEC recently to develop a tertiary Pasifika framework. It is disturbing to see no mention of this work, or reflection of its recommendations, in the draft strategy.

It is also concerning that the strategy does not mention the potential of building on Pasifika students' language and cultural strengths in their learning, or in building their employability and productivity. Greater attention to this aspect would increase participation and achievement, and also support productivity opportunities arising from greater use of Pacific culture in the arts.

We note that the strategy mentions the very high proportion of Pasifika who live in the Auckland region, yet the strategy does not offer any plans to address this. Any effective strategy for Pasifika education will need to have a specific and targeted focus on Auckland and address the particular challenges and opportunities here. We suggest that such a strategy should be developed in collaboration with RAISE Pasifika.

The current system focuses on learners as individuals. If we are to make real progress in achievement for Pasifika, fanau focused approaches are necessary. "Thinking Family" is more than just looking for young Pasifika who are the first to go to university. It means looking for opportunities for intergenerational literacy learning – and supporting the cross-agency collaboration required to make this possible. Thinking family 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.² 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 modelling from their parents and extended family.

Priority 4: Improving adult literacy and numeracy

The number and intensity of courses for adult literacy and numeracy needs to be increased if this strategy is to support increased productivity. The last ALL survey showed 420,000 Aucklanders with low literacy, at a level that is likely to limit their ability to gain secure, well-paid employment; yet there are only around 5,000 places in literacy support courses per year in the region. Given the numbers of young people still leaving school each year without qualifications, and the numbers of immigrants arriving in Auckland with low English literacy, this level of support is far too small to make a difference in the overall adult literacy levels in Auckland.

The current focus on embedded literacy, short-course workplace literacy and small numbers of "intensive" literacy courses is not providing the level of support many learners with very low literacy require. There needs to be greater flexibility to provide longer intensive literacy courses for those who need them, and increased workplace provision that goes beyond the immediate needs of the job. The extent to which literacy and numeracy are being successfully supported through embedded literacy within vocational programme is not currently known. This needs to be evaluated before any long-term decisions can be made on continuing this policy.

Another concern is the targeting of level 1 and 2 funding only to students who do not yet have a level 2 qualification. For many second-chance learners, it takes more than one or two low-level courses (especially if these are relatively short) before they have the skills and confidence to study at level 3 or above.

We suggest that the impact of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool be evaluated to identify whether it is being used to inform changes in teaching and learning. Experience from the schoolong system is that teachers do not automatically use assessment

² Lochrie, M. (2004). *Family learning: building all our futures*. Leicester: NIACE.

Thomas, M. (2009). *Think Community. An exploration of the links between intergenerational practice and informal adult learning*. Leicester: NIACE.

information in this way. Additional professional development may be required to help tutors use the information from the assessment effectively to inform next steps for the individual student and to reflect on and improve their teaching practice. It is also possible that the assessment itself may need to be modified or re-thought in order to ensure it fits the context of adult literacy learning and that it provides the type of information most useful for learners and teachers to use to improve learning.

Priority 5: Strengthening research-based institutions

We welcome the draft strategy's recognition of the potential of TEOs to contribute to innovation, for example through research partnerships. There is potential to also encourage more young people to build research skills, especially in the sciences. The recent initiative to increase engineering places through targeted funding could usefully be extended to other science and technology courses where there is demand for skills, to ensure an ongoing supply of research and innovation skills for priority industries.

Priority 6: Growing international linkages

We do not have any comments on this section.

Delivering the strategy

We suggest that the delivery plan should include greater focus on careers advice (for students, their families and communities) to enable better study decisions.

We would also like to see development of an employability framework to identify the employability skills most needed, how these will be built by schools, youth training organisations and TEOs; and how they will be further developed by employers and through in-work training.

Thirdly we would like to see a national languages strategy developed, with support for Te Reo Māori at its centre, including recognition of the value of the other languages migrants bring to our nation, and of the value of language learning generally, for social and economic development.

We suggest that the roles of the different sectors be adjusted to include the role of PTEs in actively engaging priority learners and in supporting progression to higher level

qualifications; and the role of community education providers in building confidence and in preparing people for work and/or further study.

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

Contact for communications:

Susan Warren, COMET Auckland Chief Executive

www.cometauckland.org.nz

Email susan.warren@cometauckland.org.nz

Ph 09 307 2101; Fax 09 379 5053; Mobile 021 757 048.

COMET Auckland, PO Box 3430, Shortland Street, Auckland 1140.