



SUBMISSION to Auckland Council on the Long Term Plan 2015 - 2025

Paper 078/15

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, 10 March, 2015

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. Our role is to support education and skills across Auckland, contributing to the relevant social and economic goals in the Auckland Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Long Term Plan 2015-25. We would welcome the opportunity to speak to this submission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the Long Term Plan, proposed funding cuts for COMET Auckland:

- Put 43% of COMET Auckland's annual funding of \$580,000 at risk
- Will severely compromise the quality of service we provide to Aucklanders
- Will force us to immediately end our involvement in approximately half of our work
- Could threaten our existence altogether.

Reducing the budget would limit Council's ability to meet its statutory obligation to influence the education and skills outcomes that are crucial to Auckland's long term social and economic wellbeing.

We are asking for:

Our existing budget to be maintained – at the equivalent of ½ kilometre of new road

This will allow us to continue to:

- Make numerous unique and valuable contributions to the Auckland Plan
- Advocate for education systems change and improvement across Auckland
- Have the resources to continue to drive systems change to make education and skills more effective and equitable across Auckland.

This submission also details:

- The significance of COMET Auckland, its role and what it achieves
- Why Council should continue to fund COMET Auckland:
 - How COMET Auckland's work directly impacts on the Auckland Plan
 - How COMET's Auckland's role is different to those of the Ministry of Education and ATEED
 - Why COMET Auckland is needed
 - Why it would not be simpler to combine COMET Auckland and ATEED
 - The independent feedback COMET Auckland has had on the value of its role

1. Auckland Council's 10 Year Plan (2015-2025) budget materially affects COMET Auckland:

In the latest 10 year plan, Auckland Council has proposed budget reductions that put COMET Auckland at risk of losing 43% of our budget: \$260,000.

COMET Auckland is one of the leanest Council Controlled Organisations, with a small team of 5.4 people and total annual Council funding of \$580,000. However, it is a team that makes a big impact to the city's current and future potential.

This proposed cut, which is small by city standards but significant to COMET Auckland, will severely limit Council's ability to deliver on the education and skills outcomes in the Auckland Plan - and thus on the future of Auckland as the world's most liveable city. It:

- **Will severely compromise the quality of service COMET Auckland provides to Aucklanders, and**
- **Could threaten our existence altogether.**

2. What COMET Auckland recommends:

We are asking for our existing budget to be maintained, to allow us to continue advocating for education systems change and improvement across Auckland.

Retaining our current funding would cost the equivalent of paving just half a kilometre of road per year.

Our current funding level has developed over time in consultation between Council, COMET Auckland and our stakeholders on the work that is most important for us to do and what that costs.

We ask Council to continue what you yourselves set up our CCO to do. In passing the resolution to establish COMET Auckland, you approved our trust deed with objects of the trust to “undertake actions, programmes and initiatives that support and promote education and improve educational outcomes for persons living in Auckland, with a special focus on the areas of greatest need”.

The level of reduction in our funding would severely limit our ability to do this.

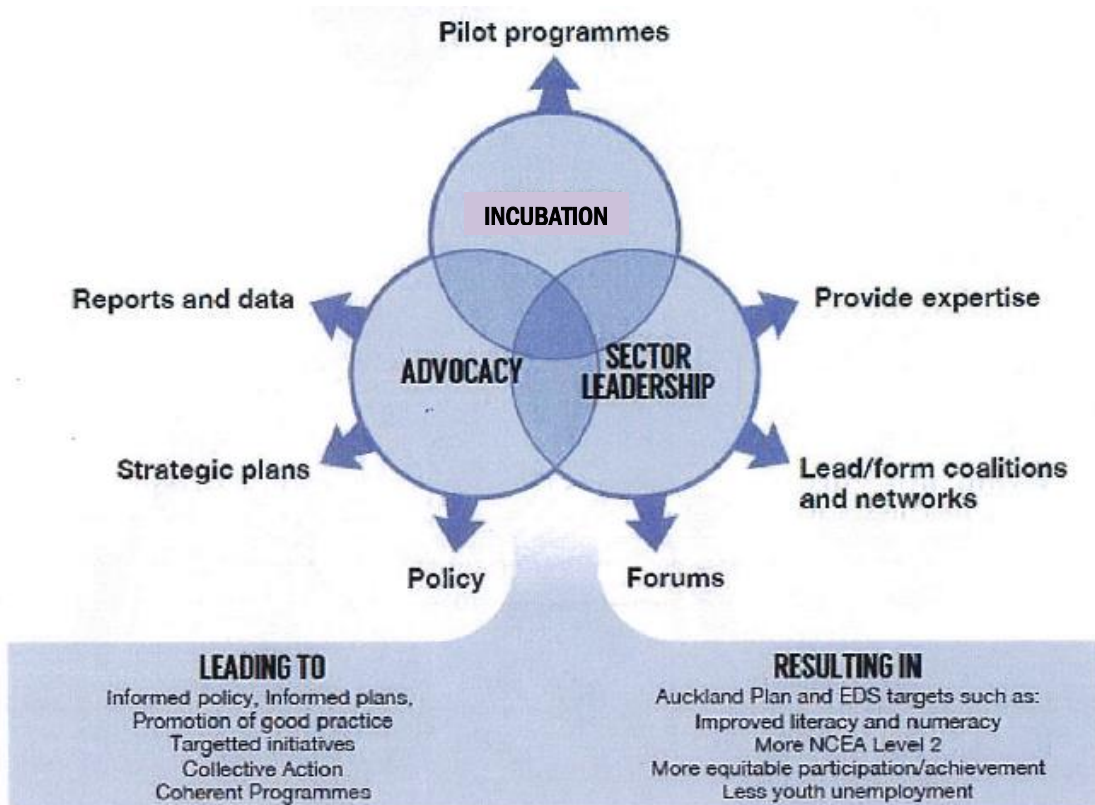
3. The significance of COMET Auckland, its role and what it achieves:

COMET Auckland believes that all Aucklanders have the right to shine and realise their dreams through lifelong learning.

COMET Auckland plays a substantial and specific role in Auckland as a Council Controlled Organisation. We:

- Drive systems change to make education and skills more effective and equitable across Auckland
- Are the only organisation that takes a helicopter view of Auckland’s education and skill system, from cradle to career and beyond.

COMET Auckland acts across three core, inter-dependent areas:



In addition to our strategic leadership and advocacy roles, our incubation activities deliver improvements across:

- **Mātauranga Māori** - lifting social and economic wellbeing to facilitate skills outcomes for Māori. We advocate for Te Reo Māori and have established the Tāmaki Makaurau Education Forum (TMEF) to identify and develop Te Reo revitalisation strategies
- **Skills Auckland** - creating a better match between skills supply and skills demand, raising youth employability, digital literacy, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) skills
- **Literacy** - we contribute to lifelong learning, advocating strong family attachment and early learning to improve literacy (including financial literacy), language and numeracy for both adults and children in communities most in need.

The proposed decrease in our budget would have two main effects:

1. *We would need to immediately end our involvement in approximately half of these specialised areas*
2. *Longer term, the trustees will have to consider whether the reduced funding would allow the Trust to continue as a viable organisation.*

4. The impact this Long Term Plan will have on COMET Auckland:

Through our advocacy work and our role in providing sector leadership, COMET Auckland has the knowledge, expertise and the respect of the sector to incubate education projects.

This incubation function is one of the most effective ways in which COMET Auckland contributes to the future of Auckland as the world's most liveable city.

The three functions (sector leadership, advocacy and incubation) are mutually supporting. Without one, the others are undermined.

The proposed budget cut will effectively end our ability to deliver incubation projects, as they won't be able to reach a stage where external funding might be sought.

In the long term this proposed cut will threaten all of our work, meaning that:

- Projects with potential will not progress
- Our role as sector leaders will thus become difficult to sustain
- We will struggle to hold expertise across our remit with the significant reduction in staff numbers that will result from the proposed cuts.
- **Longer term, the trustees may need to consider the viability of the organisation as a whole.**

5. Why Auckland Council should continue to fund COMET Auckland:

Our advocacy work aligns with plans and strategies that have been developed by the Auckland Council, and drive Auckland towards being the world's most liveable city:

- The Auckland Plan
- Economic Development Strategy
- Southern Initiative

- Shared Economic Agenda
- Independent Māori Statutory Board.

It is also stated in s29 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 that the Auckland Council must prepare and adopt a spatial plan for Auckland, to contribute to the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the city.

For Council to fulfil its governance role under the terms of the Local Government Amendment Act (2010), the Council and the Mayor are required to articulate and promote a vision for Auckland, and provide leadership for the purpose of achieving objectives that will contribute to that vision.

Reducing our budget would limit Council's ability to meet its statutory obligation to influence the education and skills outcomes that are so crucial to Auckland's long term social and economic wellbeing.

6. How this relates to the Auckland Plan:

The Auckland Plan is the vision all Aucklanders have of being the world's most liveable city.

COMET Auckland's contributions to this are vital to establishing milestones toward this vision.

We contribute to:

- Transformational shift 1 - to dramatically accelerate the prospects of Auckland's children and young people
- Transformational shift 5 - to substantially raise living standards for all Aucklanders and focus on those most in need
- Transformational shift 6 - to significantly lift Māori social and economic wellbeing
- Priority 2 - to improve learning for all Aucklanders, especially those most in need.

7. How COMET Auckland's role is different to the Ministry of Education and Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development (ATEED):

The Ministry of Education has a key regulatory role to fund and support early childhood and school education in New Zealand. It identifies and develops national policy, towards each successive government and Minister's focus.

COMET Auckland is in a unique position, looking across all sectors (not only ECE and schooling) and seeing the structure and system from the outside. We provide a regionally focused cross-sector approach to education in Auckland that the Ministry of Education cannot.

There is a broad difference in approach between COMET Auckland and ATEED

The core of ATEED's work is business-focused, developing the international education sector, building a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting business and investment, growing a skilled workforce and building Auckland's brand and identity.

COMET Auckland works more closely with the education and community sectors, while also creating connections between education and community across the city.

"An integrated approach to lifelong learning would be a source of competitive advantage for Auckland. This is not optional - it's a pre-requisite for long-term economic growth for the city. COMET Auckland's role leading

Learning Auckland is crucial because Learning Auckland provides the data engine and the coordination for this integrated approach to happen.” Brett O’Riley, CEO of ATEED

8. It would not be simpler just to combine COMET Auckland with ATEED:

- **It would not save much money:**
Our rent is only \$25,000 per year, much less than similar space in ATEED’s building.
- **We would lose the expertise our board bring from across the education and skills system:**
This is free as they are voluntary, which is not the case for boards of other CCOs.
- **We would lose our charitable trust status and so greatly limit our opportunity to raise funds from philanthropics:**
This means that we would lose an additional \$250,000 to \$300,000 per year.
- **We would lose credibility and trust with the education and not for profit sectors:**
They would not feel as comfortable working with a division of ATEED.
- **Our focus on the education and skills pipeline would be diluted:**
It would probably become skewed towards the top end – yet evidence shows it is intervention at the beginning of the pipeline that makes the most difference.

9. Why is COMET Auckland needed?

There are 270,000 school students across Auckland, and every year about 20,000 children start school in the city.

Currently and repeatedly, about 20% of the children and young people fail in our education system:

- About 36% of Auckland’s children are behind in reading at the end of their first year of school
- About 24% are behind when they start secondary school
- About 20% drop out of school before reaching the age of 16.

The city size, our cultural and language diversity, concentrations of poverty and Auckland’s housing challenge compound these issues.

We need different approaches if we are going to stop education success being defined by people’s ethnicity and where they are born.

In particular, all levels of education need to connect with the needs of industry, and draw on and support the strengths of families to support their own children’s learning.

10. What sort of feedback has COMET Auckland had about the value of its role?

In late 2014, COMET Auckland issued a survey via Survey Monkey to 192 stakeholders.

With 67 completed surveys, the response rate was just over 35% - well above average response rates of 10–15%.

The purpose of the stakeholder survey was to gain qualitative and basic quantitative information on how COMET Auckland is perceived and valued by its core audience and project partners.

Data snapshot:

According to the survey respondents:

93.33% said that improving education and skills outcomes to enable Auckland to become the world's most liveable city is very or highly important

83.33% said having an independent, cross-sector organisation advocating for the particular needs of Auckland and supporting coherence in education and skills is very or highly important

81.36% said COMET Auckland fulfils an important function

55.56% of Public Sector / Central Government respondents said COMET fulfils a unique function in Auckland's education and skills landscape, in a way that no other organisation does.

Among the responses, the following comments stood out:

"COMET has played a key role in fostering the financial literacy programmes in the Tamaki area and, through this, contributed to a growing recognition of the possibility of change amongst the financial wellbeing of the Pasifika community. We provided a better service through working with budgeting and family focused groups in our local area". (Not-for-profit/community organisation)

"An appreciation of COMET's ability to bring a wide range of organisations together to discuss and as a consequence act on educational need in Auckland, an example being provider meetings at Mt Eden prison resulting in us running 3 ESOL classes in the prison." (Not-for-profit/community organisation)

COMET "pulled together major organisations in South Auckland to collaborate on education in Tamaki Makaurau... Inspired learning by bringing together specialised Māori in their field to present and discuss issues that relate to many of us". (Local Government respondent)

"COMET is great at doing research / collating data so that arguments can be presented to Auckland Council / funding agencies etc. that are based on sound information and not just anecdotal / emotional responses... It's an important role."

11. 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.