



SUBMISSION to the

NZ Productivity Commission

Draft Report on New Models of Tertiary

Education

Paper 084/16

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, November 21st, 2016

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 New Models of Tertiary Education Draft Report.

Our comments are based on our experience working with employers, educators, community leaders and learners across Auckland's education and skills system, from cradle to career and beyond.

We welcome the government's commitment to taking a systems view of tertiary education and their recognition that change is needed in order to create a more responsive system to address our nation's current and future learning needs. It is clear that a great deal of thought and work has gone into the Draft Report, and we especially acknowledge the care with which themes from the earlier consultation have been analysed and represented.

Outcomes of the system

We would still like to see a much clearer statement of the overall purpose of the tertiary system, to guide decisions on future models. We note that the Education Act (Update) Amendment Bill which was recently out for consultation includes a list of goals for the schooling sector. We recommended in our submission on that Bill that goals be developed for the entire education system, from early childhood to tertiary, rather than for each sector separately, recognising the pathway nature of the system, from a learner's point of view.

We suggest that an inter-agency consultation be undertaken to develop a statement of the purposes of the education system as a whole, recognising that learning is continuous within and outside the formal system and that learners need multiple pathways for learning across the course of their lives, towards their own and their community's economic and social development.

Systems Settings

The Draft Report very accurately describes several key issues with the current tertiary system.

The disparities in achievement for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and for Māori and Pasifika students are a very significant concern. While gains have been made in participation, the inequities in completions are detrimental to the life chances of the students concerned, and to the NZ economy as a whole. As the Draft Report points out, current incentives such as Performance-Linked Funding are not having the desired effect on equity, partly because the amount of incentive is less than the investment required to address the inequities. Just removing Performance-Linked

Funding would not solve the issue however. One possible approach would be to replace it with targeted funding for high-need students, recognising that these students need additional support and different teaching approaches and that these costs otherwise create a disincentive for organisations to take on students identified as needing additional support.

It is disturbing to note that, as stated in F12.13, the system is “increasingly oriented towards full-time study (and) towards younger students”. As noted in the Draft Report, mid-career retraining for adults is a key role of tertiary education, especially in light of increasing technological and labour market change. Adults who are retraining to re-enter, change or further their career often need access to low-level courses to transition back into learning. They also often want to gain specific knowledge or skills that align with their employment goals, rather than studying for an entire qualification. The system needs much greater flexibility in order to be able to offer the part-time, extramural study options that older adults need. It also needs to recognise that qualifications are not always an accurate measure of success. Learners need to be able to pick and mix courses that provide the learning they need at any given time, whether this eventually leads to a formal qualification or not.

These and other issues are exacerbated by the issue raised at the heart of the Draft Report – the inflexibility and resistance to innovation of the system as a whole. We agree with the Report’s conclusion that this inertia is a property of the system, and is largely caused by government funding and regulatory settings. We therefore agree with the Report’s recommendations to revise the EFTS model to reflect learning rather than hours of attendance, to remove the requirement for universities to link teaching with research and to streamline the process for students to move between institutions.

We also agree with the general principle of funding students rather than institutions, but we do not agree with the proposal for a fixed Student Education Account. People’s learning needs differ according to their life goals, their prior success in schooling, the industry they work in and many other factors. Allocating the same amount of study funding to everyone ignores these differences – equality is not equity.

A learner who has not been well-served by the schooling system may need several years of foundation-level study before they can undertake courses at level 4 and above. We believe there is a strong argument for free education for all up to level 2, on the basis that their free schooling should have bought them to that level. Free courses to level 2 would allow all learners to start their higher learning on a level playing field.

However even this change would not make a standard \$45,000 education account workable. The country needs some people (for example in medicine or research) with very high levels of training that are well beyond what \$45,000 would cover. Many others would achieve their career goals with much less than their allocated funds, but if the remaining account was allocated to a particular person it would not be flexibly available for those needing higher training.

Preparing students for tertiary study and work

We agree with the Report's recommendation to re-focus career education to build skills rather than merely giving information. Careers education is currently under-resourced, and this is exacerbated by difficulties in accessing quality information about career and study options. Career support needs to be available from early in the schooling system (ideally in late primary school, well before students begin to choose subject options), should continue throughout schooling and tertiary study and should also be available mid-career. Websites are useful as information sources but most learners also need face to face guidance from someone who knows their strengths and aspirations, and opportunities for work experience in industries they are considering, before they commit time and money (their own or the government's) to study for work that may not suit them.

We would also like to see greater emphasis on building learners' employability skills (such as time management, communication and positive attitude), alongside more specific knowledge and skills. Recent work across several government departments has led to a nationally-recognised Employability Framework, which could form the basis for inclusion of these skills in senior secondary and tertiary courses.

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