

Response to the New Zealand Productivity Commission - New models of tertiary education

From Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre, Wairarapa.

The Productivity Commission's draft is an excellent review of the current state of tertiary education in New Zealand. Each actor network in the tertiary landscape has a perception of their issues and where the problem lay, often with the transition to the respective TEO's domain, whether that be Secondary to Tertiary or ITP/PTE to University. The focus seems to be on the transition from level to level and what wasn't done to prepare the learner.

There are several problems with this view;

Learners vary across the tertiary spectrum

Learner journeys are often not linear

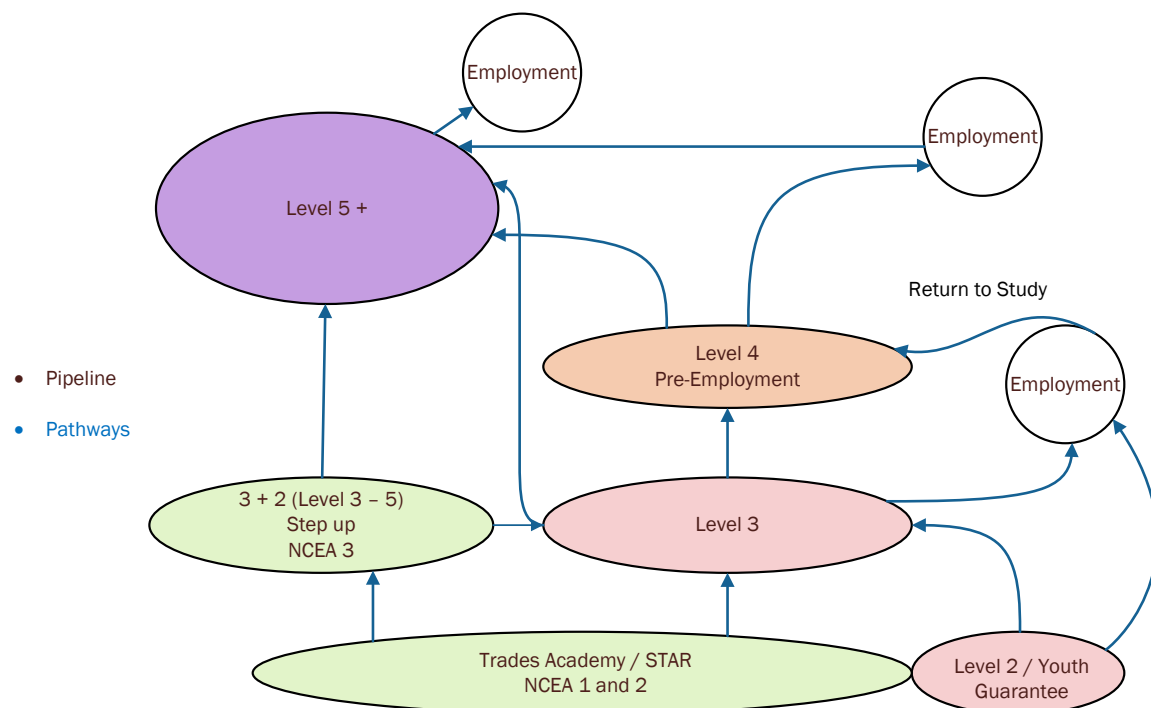


Figure 1:

Taratahi works within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) paradigm. Our mantra's have been 'real learning/training on real farms' and 'agricultural training for New Zealand'. While laudable as educational aims and applauded by employers, we struggle to exist within an educational framework as it is currently bounded. Our learners, as indicated in the above diagram, enter from many pathways, and indeed exit at multiple points to pursue employment or higher levels of study. It may be years between formal education, however the learner may have engaged in on-the-job training. The current tertiary system is poor at recognising the value of these learning experiences.

Taratahi is faced with the ever increasing global demand for smart and high performing production systems and increased skills; the growing demand for evidence of environmental and animal welfare quality in food production systems and products; our own industry demand for increased productivity through higher technical skills, skills provision when they need it and work ready

people; our national need for good managers with modern skills; and, a rapidly changing global education environment which is facing big questions about the relevance of qualifications and their alignment with the world of work. In essence it is about being curriculum and demand centric - what works for industry and students.

To achieve this shift, a review of the current funding system to accommodate the ability of sectors to address the employment demand is a welcome opportunity for change. The development of Incentive demand driven curriculum that is funded to work closely with employers would be a most desirable outcome.

Government are concerned, rightly, about removing its current capping policy as the status quo allows mitigation of fiscal and political risk. The Australian example of VET sector rorting (12.3) did nothing to assist the value of VET as an educational methodology. The scandals reported however were largely as a result of poor structures of compliance management which allowed such rorting to occur. Government has the right to be concerned about wasteful expenditure, it is our tax's after all. Negotiated, flexible structures of compliance on quality and fit of the education provided can mitigate such poor behaviour. While arguably the costs of applying differing compliance methodologies to various sectors of tertiary education may be greater, I suggest that this would be balanced by a more streamlined learner journey to employment and employers' requirements.

Better integration of NZQA, MoE and TEC toolsets to develop joint frameworks to manage quality of education should be considered. As an example, the quality of the delivery of a programme of study rests with the NZQA. As such it approves the framework and measures, via the EER process, the quality and completeness of the programme of study. This in of itself could be used as the primary point of compliance rather than the measures currently submitted through an SDR. It would require an EER is carried out at more regular intervals but this is a matter of capability to supply and TEC to except the admission of an EER as a valid measurement for the release of funds.

We do harbour some concerns over the Student Education Account (SEA). While it is important for a student to have surety over the amount available for education, such a fund changes the manner in which institutes may behave. Rather than students choosing the best institution on the basis on what's best for them and their current educational aims, the process can be manipulated by TEO's that have the best marketers to recruit learners. Perhaps a 50/50 is a better model, with learners paying what amounts to a fee from their respective SEA to the TEO and the equal amount supplied by a funding grant for that programme of study by the TEC. This still gives TEC the ability, along with MoE and NZQA, to duly accredit programmes of study and minimise abuse by either TEOs or learners.

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