



SUBMISSION to the

NZ Productivity Commission

On New Models of Tertiary Education

Paper 082/16

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, May 4th, 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 Issues Paper.

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.

Comments on the structure of the consultation

We would like to congratulate the Commission on the content of the Issues Paper. It is clearly well-researched, covers a wide range of issues succinctly but still with sufficient depth for the purpose, and the data and diagrams add considerable value to the discussion.

Two changes would have made the issues paper even more effective as a consultation tool. Firstly, the section on the purpose of tertiary education should have been placed at the beginning, since none of the other questions can be answered without first addressing what the purpose should be. Secondly, the questions should have been much more future-focused – what should be, not what is – and there should be fewer, broader questions. The obtuse academic language in many of the questions and the sheer number of them may well have deterred all but the most determined submitters, thus reducing the diversity of input.

We suggest that any documents produced for the next phase of the consultation should put purpose first, focus on what should happen in the future rather than on what happens now, keep language approachable for learners and families as well as for academics, and ask fewer, broader questions.

The purpose of tertiary education (relevant to pages 23, 28-30 and 35)

It is hard to imagine how a real discussion of new models of delivery can be conducted without first agreeing on the purpose and goals of the system, in the light of our changing society and world. The multiple purpose statements listed in the Issues Paper show that such agreement does not yet exist, yet the Issues Paper does not seem to be asking for input on this. The paper contains no questions

that allow submitters to comment on the purpose, or even on the priorities among the currently stated goals and benefits of the system.

The list of goals in the current TES (quoted on page 24) is a useful summary but omits one key area – the need for adults to have access to high-level learning, to increase their skills and to retrain for new areas of work. Currently the only reference to adult learners relates to literacy and numeracy support, which is crucial for those who need it. However other skills are also needed so that adults can gain more secure, high-paying, fulfilling work. This includes a broad range of communication skills, generic employability skills, technological skills and job-specific knowledge and skills. This is especially important in our changing job market, where workers need to continually build skills to keep up with technological change and to move into expanding industries.

Another key issue absent from the Paper is the consideration of English language competence. The increasing cultural diversity of Auckland means many tertiary students have varied skills in oral and written English. This has major implications for both teaching and learning support staff.

We would like to see a broad conversation about the purposes of the education system as a whole, and of the tertiary sector within that system, to inform decisions about models. This conversation needs to recognise the ongoing changes in society, including the technological, demographic and labour market trends mentioned in the Issues Paper. It also needs to recognise that learners need multiple pathways for learning across the course of their lives, towards their own and their community's economic and social development.

Pathway to employment (relevant to questions 2, 17, 32, 34)

Most learners, at every level of the system, expect that their studies will help them in the workforce – whether to obtain a specific job (in the case of a vocational qualification or professional degree for example), or simply to improve their chances of getting some kind of secure, meaningful, well-paid employment. This is also an expectation of government in funding tertiary institutions.

However the pathway from school into and through tertiary to employment is unclear for learners and employers, and is often hazy even for educators.

Based on the feedback we receive from employers, students and educators, we believe the following changes would increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the tertiary system in preparing learners for their employment goals:

- Providing more information and advice for learners to help them choose a career direction (not a specific job, but broad pathway based on their values, strengths and interests), and to use this to identify the most suitable course(s) to take. Effective advice, provided before and during the transition to tertiary, could reduce the number of learners swapping courses mid-stream, thus reducing cost to taxpayers and to students themselves. There are some key points where it would be useful for stakeholders to align: late primary school, year 10 and then senior high school.
- Weaving work experience into all tertiary courses, so that learners build practical skills and employability competencies alongside theoretical knowledge. Apprenticeships have always provided this balance, and some professional degrees (e.g. medicine) have traditionally included work experience as a core part of the latter years of study. Some NZ polytechnics and universities (notably AUT) are now requiring a certain number of hours in the workplace as part of selected qualifications, and students report increased engagement and greater confidence in the transition to work.
- Specifically including courses on employability within tertiary qualifications (including degrees). Our investigation¹ of employers' and young people's beliefs about the transition to work showed that young people had very little concept of employers' expectations, while employers were frustrated at the lack of soft skills (such as time management, teamwork, communication and a positive attitude) among young job applicants – even those with post-secondary qualifications. We are in the second year of trialling a Youth Employability Project (YEP) to address this issue. The YEP includes interactive workshops on the nine key competencies employers prioritised, plus 20 hours of community service and 80 hours of work experience, aimed at practicing the competencies being learned. Learners receive a License to Work attesting to their skills, for use alongside their academic record when applying for jobs. To date the YEP has been used in secondary schools and youth transitions courses, with very positive feedback from young people, employers and educators. Initial evaluation results indicate the YEP successfully improved young people's engagement in the rest of their learning, and also improved their readiness for work. It would be worth trialling

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http://www.cometauckland.org.nz/webfiles/CometNZ/files/072_Enhancing_Youth_Employability_2013.pdf

this programme in other tertiary settings, to improve the pathway between tertiary and work.

- Strengthening the links between employers' skill needs and the content of related tertiary courses. The ITO system currently does this reasonably well for vocational courses, but the system for professional qualifications is not as strong. Tertiary institutions need feedback from employers about the skills of their graduates – their strengths and gaps in relation to industry needs – so they can adjust course content to better prepare learners for the workplace.
- Strengthening the transition from school to tertiary. For example, work on alignment through the Health Academy development in Auckland shows how the teachers of Year 11 tertiary and senior secondary students had little understanding of the context in which the other sector operated, didn't have a common language, and used different assessment processes.

Teaching and learning (relevant to questions 1, 10, 11, 12)

The Issues Paper identifies a number of factors that limit tertiary organisations' focus on their core teaching and learning role. The lack of regular professional development for teaching staff; the tension between assessing staff on their research output or on the outcomes for students; the economies of scale that drive hour-long lectures to 300-seat lecture theatres; the perception that assessment, pastoral care and libraries are somehow separate from teaching (p13) and most notably the ranking of universities on research alone all mitigate against a strong focus on student learning.

What schools have realised over the past decade is that in fact all their activities need to be re-examined in light of a single-minded focus on ensuring every student achieves. Yes, they need attractive buildings, regular engagement with parents and strong systems for discipline, but only to the extent that these things contribute to better, more equitable learning. This realisation drives a relentless focus on supporting quality classroom teaching, informed by the latest research and by a collaborative inquiry process to fine-tune practice, and supported by coherent, learning-focused parent engagement, property management and all the other seemingly disparate activities of a school. Tertiary institutions (and policy-makers) could well learn from this model.

The Issues Paper questions whether research and teaching should continue to be bundled in universities. Clearly both are important roles, in themselves. However, as the Issues Paper identifies, ranking universities only on research can de-emphasise teaching. The question is, is there a learning benefit of having research integrated with teaching? John Hattie's research, quoted in the Issues Paper, indicates expert researchers don't make better teachers, but there is another potential benefit to exposing university-level learners to researchers.

Given that universities are our only training ground for future academics and researchers, they have an important role in providing exposure to working researchers, as a form of modelling for young people who want to follow an academic, research-focused path. In a sense, an academic course, taught by active researchers, provides staged work experience, developing research mind-sets by example as well as by explicit teaching.

Another issue that has emerged in recent years is the level of English Language competence. International students

Outcomes and measures (relevant to questions 30, 59)

The tertiary education system, and its individual systems, need to be able to track how well they are fulfilling their purpose. Some measures will need to be specific to particular types of institutions, but it is important that there are some measures that are consistent across the system.

These should include both process and outcomes measures, because process outcomes such as retention rates, student satisfaction and demographic reach can serve to identify potential issues while they can still be addressed.

Outcome measures should include measures of both employment and lifelong learning in addition to graduation rates. Examples of useful measures could include:

- employment rate, 6 months and 5 years post graduation
- income, 6 months and 5 years post graduation
- employment in a related field
- enrolling in further study within 10 years (as a measure of lifelong learning)

Success for priority learners (relevant to questions 53-58)

The data in the Issues Paper shows that the tertiary system has made significant progress in reaching more Māori and Pasifika learners, and others who have traditionally been under-represented in tertiary education. However these priority learners are still under-represented in higher level qualifications, and their completion and graduation rates are still far too low.

There is a great deal of evidence about what works for specific groups of learners. Common themes include high expectations, relationships, recognition of cultural and linguistic strengths, support for study skills, pastoral care and disaggregating results to track effectiveness for each group so any disparities can be identified and addressed.

Among adults with low literacy, there is a significant number who would not feel confident enough to attend a tertiary campus or even enrol for a community literacy course. We have found that for learners who are parents, supporting their children's learning is often a more approachable goal

We have been advocating for a whānau-focused tertiary foundation qualification as part of the Tertiary Review of Qualifications. This would provide a nationally recognised starting point for some tertiary priority learners – a pathway for learners whose main starting interest is helping their children. International evidence shows that family learning strategies, led by schools, are needed to raise achievement and reduce the gap between low and high achievers².

COMET Auckland owns such a foundation level tertiary qualification programme - a local Level 2 Certificate in Family Learning and Child Development. A key component of the programme is endeavouring to break cycles of intergenerational low literacy. The full time, year-long course enables the adults to systematically build their understanding of child learning and development and family health and wellbeing while increasing their employability. The length of the course gives parents a year to stabilise their family situation and realistically prepare for work.

This programme is particularly successful for tertiary priority learners. In 2015, 75% of students graduated from Whānau Ara Mua. 80% of survey respondents started the course on Single Parent Benefits. 43% were Māori, 31% Pasifika. 63% had no or very low school qualifications. The Certificate pathways to higher level education, social sector and health courses as well as work. 39% intended to head to further study and 48% to work. The course impacts on more than the adults, because of the intentional focus on adults strengthening their parenting skills while also learning how to support their children's learning and development – 268 children lived with 126 course members.

² NIACE (2013). Family Learning Works: The inquiry into family learning in England and Wales. Leicester, England, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Collaboration – benefits and barriers (relevant to questions 8, 69, 71, 74)

If the tertiary system was truly student-centred, learners would be able to build up qualifications across several providers, learning from the best teachers and experts in each subject area they wanted to explore, with their learning in each case recognised across institutions. Learners would also be able to integrate academic learning and on-the-job skill building, and be recognised and attested for both.

The Qualifications Framework makes this theoretically possible, but competition between institutions for enrollments, recognition in league tables, and even reporting systems make it unattractive for tertiary organisations to offer such flexibility to learners.

There is already some collaboration among tertiary institutions, for example around articulation of qualifications. However without external drivers, it is unlikely that the more extensive collaboration required for the student-centred model above would occur. NZQA's proposed credit transfer and recognition project (page 88) would be a valuable step towards this, enabling prior learning to be recognised.

If learners were able to build up a qualification across more than one provider, this would enable providers to specialise in particular areas of expertise, knowing they could still offer a full range of learning options to their students, through collaboration with other providers. This would be easier now than in the past, because many tertiary institutions have multiple campuses across the country, so learners can access a wide range of providers from one place (including extramurally).

For this model to work, the funding system would need to enable per-student funding to be divided according to the proportion of a learner's course being delivered by each provider. Outcome measures would also need to be reviewed, to reduce risk to providers when they are unable to control delivery by others.

Efficient use of resources (relevant to questions 1 and 22)

The New Zealand education system has many strengths. Its diversity supports multiple pathways, to fit learners' needs and aspirations; it provides quality learning across an increasingly coherent

national qualifications framework; and it achieves valuable results, both for learners and for the economic and social development of our nation.

However it was largely designed in a world where only a few needed a tertiary qualification, face to face study was the only option, and most students studied full-time during term and then travelled home to work over summer. Now, most students mix online and face to face learning, and most work all year, alongside studying – yet tertiary institutions, especially universities, are closed for nearly a third of the year (except for a few summer courses). By moving to a three-semester year, institutions could make better use of expensive building and staff resources, and students could complete courses more quickly (or have choice of when they wanted to take a work break).

Resources could also be more efficiently used if institutions shared high-value but low-demand resources (such as specialised scientific equipment, simulators or recording studios). This would require collaboration, but would reduce costs while improving learning.

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