

Options for the future of Work-based Learning: Consultation Document

Submitted by the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi

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This submission is made on behalf of the 31 unions affiliated to the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU). With over 340,000 union members, the CTU is one of the largest democratic organisations in New Zealand.

The CTU acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and formally acknowledges this through Te Rūnanga o Ngā Kaimahi Māori o Aotearoa (Te Rūnanga), the Māori arm of Te Kauae Kaimahi (CTU), which represents approximately 60,000 Māori workers.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This submission is made on behalf of the unions affiliated to the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (NZCTU). With over 300,000 members, the NZCTU is one of the largest democratic organisations in New Zealand.
- 1.2. The NZCTU acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand and formally acknowledges this through Te Rūnanga o Ngā Kaimahi Māori o Aotearoa (Te Rūnanga) the Māori arm of Te Kauae Kaimahi (NZCTU) which represents approximately 60,000 Māori workers.
- 1.3. The NZCTU reiterates its opposition to continuing unnecessary reforms of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. Once again, we encourage the Government to listen to the concerns raised by a wide range of stakeholders, including our affiliated unions, on these proposals.
- 1.4. The NZCTU remains concerned that the current reform process has been rushed, requiring submitters to respond to proposals that are severely lacking in detail. To date, no analysis has been provided on the key issues proposed, such as the financial sustainability of the VET sector, and the purported lack of connection between the VET sector and industry. Furthermore, there has been no explanation of how the proposed reform will address these issues.
- 1.5. Rather than ongoing unnecessary reforms, we would welcome a discussion on how all stakeholders can work together to ensure that the sector delivers for all learners and is responsive to the needs of industry, and New Zealand's economic development goals.

2. Industry Training Boards

- 2.1. We note that the Industry Skills Boards (ISB) will mostly retain the functions of the Workforce Development Councils. While we remain of the opinion that WDCs should stay funded and operational, we are pleased that these functions will remain.
- 2.2. This does, however, raise the question as to why these new bodies are being set up in the first place, and the waste of time and resources involved in duplicating the efforts of the already established WDCs. We note that in the regulatory impact statement accompanying the earlier consultation, the Ministry of Education did not identify any significant issues with WDCs and recommended they be maintained. No evidence has

been provided by the Minister to justify her claim that WDCs are not working well and/or not sufficiently connected to industry.

- 2.3. This is further perplexing given our understanding that the funding provided to ISBs will be less than that provided to WDCs.
- 2.4. Regardless of the form of the bodies, it is critical that worker voice must be represented on the ISBs (as currently exists on the WDCs). In any discussion of industry, it is crucial to recognize that the term industry encompasses not only employers, industry associations, and other groups, but also workers and their unions.
- 2.5. Working people are central to the VET system, and their perspectives and needs must be represented by unions in both the design and operation of this system. For VET to truly serve industry, it must also effectively serve working people and their unions.
- 2.6. And finally, ISBs must cover the whole of the economy as WDCs currently do. Under the pre-2020 model, some industries, such as the creative sector, were not covered; it is critical that these growth industries are supported.

3. Work-based learning consultation

- 3.1. We note and agree with sector concerns regarding the consultation processes followed and endorse the submissions of our affiliated unions. There is no reason why this 'targeted' consultation necessitated such a narrow scope that excluded critical stakeholders, and key subject matter experts. Work-based learning is a critical part of vocational education.
- 3.2. Of the two proposed models up for consultation we would, on balance, recommend that the collaborative work-based model is chosen. This is on the basis that this model will help to ensure that work-based learning provision remains publicly provided. We do not believe that a compelling case has been made as to why work-based learning provision should be privatised. Our experience is that publicly owned polytechnic and wananga institutions are strongly linked with their local communities and industry. It also the case that these institutions have the necessary educational expertise.
- 3.3. Our major concern regarding the independent model is the risk of the creation of new private agencies competing for public funding within the sector; this model has not served NZ well in the past. Such profit motives drive instability in education, and it is not a good use of resources to have having multiple agencies competing for funding as they

must focus attention on securing funding at the expense of focusing on delivery for learners.

Pastoral care

- 3.4. While we on balance prefer the collaborative model, we strongly oppose the suggestion that ISBs should have responsibility for pastoral care. Practically speaking, having two entities involved in work-based learning (both the employer and the provider) can already be challenging for learners; adding a third entity would compound this. It is also misleading to distinguish between pastoral care and education elements in teaching. Teaching involves both, and learners tend to do best when they have a teacher that supports them and who they trust.
- 3.5. Work-based learning can be complicated by the power imbalance between the employer and the trainee. And while good employers do provide pastoral care, because of the inherent imbalance of power in employment relationships it is critical that pastoral care functions are secured by the provider.
- 3.6. Pastoral care functions do not align with the other functions of the ISBs, and this increases the risk that they will be delivered incoherently.
- 3.7. We would like to see pastoral care functions provided by employers and education providers cohesively. If pastoral care has been identified as an issue that needs addressing in the system, then we recommend that the emphasis is placed on upskilling employers to provide pastoral care and adequately funding and resourcing pastoral care functions within WBL providers.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The NZCTU remains fundamentally opposed to these VET sector reforms, which will create further disruption across the VET sector. These reforms come off the back of a period of disruption and change in the sector over the past five years. We are concerned by the impacts that another several years of change processes will have on the VET sector, learners, and industries.
- 4.2. We also reiterate that a compelling case for change, backed by evidence, is yet to be produced by the Minister.

- 4.3. These reforms pursued by the Minister seem inconsistent with the Government's stated objective of 'going for growth'. Sustainable and high-quality economic development requires equipping workers with the right skills to build the industries of the future. This in turn requires a well-funded VET sector that is sensitive to the needs of learners and industries, while also forward looking. Yet the consultation process so far has failed to make the case for change and has not explained how the proposed reforms will deliver better outcomes for learners, industries, and the country at large. The Minister's insistence on pushing ahead with this poorly thought through change process is thus likely to create several more years of instability in the sector, further change fatigue for the VET workforce, and more uncertainty for learners and industries
- 4.4. The Ministry should listen to and engage with stakeholders on ensuring that the sector delivers for all learners and is responsive to the needs of industry, and New Zealand's economic development goals. The starting point of this conversation remains an analysis of what all stakeholders need, including the needs of learners, employers, and the VET workforce. And whether the current system is meeting these needs or not.