

26 July 2024

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
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Tēnā koe Minister Stanford

RE: MEETING 27 JUNE 2024

Thank you for meeting with us on Thursday, 27 June 2024. We appreciated your time and the insightful discussion on the Government's priorities in education and immigration.

During the meeting, we highlighted the role of engineers, Engineering New Zealand and the Association of Consulting and Engineering New Zealand (ACE) in shaping New Zealand's future, and the challenges we are facing in education and addressing skill shortages.

Skill shortages in engineering

We discussed long-term skill shortages in the engineering sector. Industry is very concerned about the long-term development and retention of engineers in New Zealand. Historically, New Zealand has needed to rely on overseas talent to fill skill shortage gaps, however in a competitive global market and with New Zealand's difficulties attracting overseas trained engineers, this strategy is no longer fit-for-purpose. We are committed to supporting initiatives that grow a strong domestic pipeline of talent, underpinned by an education system that delivers first-class STEM education and showcases the amazing careers young people can have in the engineering sector.

Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) curriculum and future collaborations

To this end, we are encouraged by your leadership in the STEM curriculum refresh and your commitment to improving educational outcomes in maths and sciences. We are excited by your passion for the curriculum to support initiatives with industry. This includes Engineering New Zealand's Wonder Project, which brings STEM careers to life in the classroom. In addition, many of our members work closely with their local schools and we would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Ministry of Education to better coordinate and support these efforts.

Wonder Project and education initiatives

We discussed the critical role of the Wonder Project in inspiring young students to pursue STEM careers and in supporting teacher competence and confidence to teach STEM – we agree with you about the need to focus on teacher capability in STEM teaching. The Wonder Project Impact Report we left with you during our meeting outlines the success the programme has had in increasing teacher confidence as well as in engaging students and providing early exposure to STEM professionals, which is important for fostering interest in engineering and science.

Engineering New Zealand will discuss with officials at the Ministry of Education to see how the Wonder Project might assist the STEM curriculum and how best to provide you with further information to assist future Budget opportunities to support this programme. We will remain in touch with your office on this.

Immigration and visa settings

We are aware that Chris Dunlop of BECA who attended the meeting with us has been in touch with examples of the practical challenges with current visa settings for engineers. Please let us know if you require any further information to support your review of immigration and visa settings.

Current environment for engineers

We also talked about the challenges the current environment is having on our workforce. While the budget has promised infrastructure investment in a range of areas, the work is not flowing into the sector, which means businesses are struggling and cutting costs and we are losing people through redundancies or because they no longer see a future career for themselves here. If we lose people now, it will be difficult and intensive to attract them back. This matters because it will impact our overall workforce capability to respond to the Government's planned infrastructure delivery.

Our observation is that there are impediments to some government agencies mobilising in the current environment. To address this, we support an approach where the Government creates an authorising environment for its agencies to proceed at pace, break down the work that has already been committed and funded and collaborate with industry to get it to market as quick as possible. This is an urgent issue for the sector and has direct implications for our workforce.

Conclusion

Thank you for your engagement and openness to further discussions on these important issues. We are keen to provide any additional information or support that may assist in advancing Government's educational and immigration objectives. Please do not hesitate to be in contact.

Ngā mihi nui,



Dr Richard Templer
Chief Executive Engineering New Zealand



Helen Davidson
Chief Executive ACE