



10 September 2024

Ministry of Education

By email: VocationalEducation.Reforms@education.govt.nz

Tēnā koutou

RE: REDESIGN OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Ministry of Education's consultation on the redesign of the vocational education and training system.

Engineering New Zealand is the largest professional body for engineers in New Zealand. We have both regulatory and membership roles. We support over 23,000 engineers in shaping a better New Zealand. This submission reflects the views of Engineering New Zealand.

Overview

Engineering New Zealand appreciates the Government's commitment to strengthening the vocational education system. We are not sure, however, that the case for change has been sufficiently made in the Consultation Document. Structural reform has costs, and the consultation document did not clearly show why refinements to the current system could not over time achieve the desired outcomes.

If we had to choose one of the new proposed work-based learning option, as presented, it would be Option 2B, which promotes closer alignment between work based and provider-based learning. We did not, however, find there was sufficient detail for us to see why either option was better than the current approach nor to assess them.

This submission leverages our skills and knowledge of being both a participant in the education system and through our expertise in advocating for the engineering profession. This submission discusses:

- our role in the system
- opportunities to leverage standard setting expertise within the system
- the long-term engineering skills shortage and impacts of the reforms on this
- the importance of nationally consistent and relevant training
- enhancing the integration of industry expertise and voices into the new system
- our support for increased funding.

Our educational role in the vocational system

Engineering New Zealand has several roles supporting the vocational pathway of potential and future engineers. This submission is informed by our insights in being a participant in the system.

In our role we accredit Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Electronics, and Fire Engineering programs for two-year diplomas¹ and three-year engineering degrees² offered at Te Pūkenga.

This process accredits the qualifications to internationally recognised standards, so students have qualifications that are respected both locally and globally.

We recommend that the reforms formally utilise and recognise the expertise of existing professional bodies such as ourselves (Engineering New Zealand) and the Vocational Engineering Education New Zealand (VEE.NZ)³ in the future standards-setting process of this system. We have the expertise and established frameworks to contribute effectively, making our involvement a cost-effective option for maintaining and enhancing the quality of vocational education.

Skills shortage and impact of the reforms

Despite the recent economic slowdown, New Zealand faces a long-term shortage of skilled engineers, including technicians and technologists. We need at least 2,300 additional engineers per year to keep up with economic growth.⁴ Engineering is estimated to contribute between \$14.6 billion and \$18.1 billion for the year.⁴ Engineering New Zealand is particularly interested in ensuring these reforms help address the long-term skill shortages and do not exacerbate it.

We are aware from the sector that enrolments have been impacted during the recent reforms and would be concerned if this period of change and any different future system led to any further decline in enrolments. We need to train engineers to meet New Zealand's current and future needs.

National consistency and quality assurance

One of our key objectives when reviewing any vocational reform is ensuring that the system remains nationally consistent in terms of qualifications and delivery. It is our view that while regional responsiveness is important, it should not compromise the quality and consistency of engineering education. The proposed federation model involving the Open Polytechnic raises questions about how quality and consistency will be maintained across different regions. We would like to see more detail on how the Open Polytechnic will ensure that high standards are upheld throughout the network.

We also believe it is important to maintain a strong element of collaboration across the entire ITP sector. Even a financially viable regional ITP may not be able to deliver a broad range of engineering education programmes without support from a national network.

¹ Two-year engineering diplomas. <https://www.engineeringnz.org/engineer-tools/ethics-rules-standards/accredited-engineering-qualifications/two-year-diplomas-engineering/>

² Three-year engineering technology degrees. <https://www.engineeringnz.org/engineer-tools/ethics-rules-standards/accredited-engineering-qualifications/three-year-engineering-technology-degrees/>

³ Vocational Engineering Education New Zealand (VEENZ). <https://www.vee.nz/>

⁴ PWC August 2021 Economic Impact of Engineering update: Engineering NZ

Work based learning - role of the industry

A core part of this reform must involve the voice of industry and its expertise on what is needed. It is our view that industry expertise should directly inform vocational education and training decisions, particularly in terms of standards-setting and funding. We strongly support the functions of the Workforce Development Council and would like to see many of them continued.

In the current system, industry standards-setters provide advice to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). This mandate is a key strength of the system, and we strongly advocate it be retained and reinforced. This connection between industry needs and funding decisions is essential for ensuring that the system remains relevant and effective.

While we see merit in Option 2B, which proposes a clear separation between standards-setting and training delivery to reduce conflicts of interest, we have concerns that this proposal does not require industry standards-setters to provide advice to TEC.

Funding

We are in support of the proposal to restore provider-based funding rates, which is particularly important in areas of more advanced vocational education such as engineering. Funding of provider based vocational education must keep pace with rising costs to ensure standards are maintained.

Conclusion

Engineering New Zealand is committed to supporting the development of a vocational education system that meets the needs of the engineering sector and contributes to the growth of New Zealand.

We want to ensure nationally consistent high-quality training is delivered to support and build the workforce of the infrastructure sector and the system leverages current expertise in the industry.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback and would like to be involved in ongoing discussions as these reforms develop. If we can be of any assistance or provide further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Nākū, na



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Chief Executive