

12/09/2024

Ministry of Education
Matauranga House
33 Bowen Street
PO Box 1666 Thorndon
Wellington 6140

Submission on the Redesign of the Vocational Education and Training System

Tēnā koutou katoa

Age Concern New Zealand (ACNZ) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the Vocational Education and Training Reforms Consultation.

As a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to support older people, their friends and whānau, we have a vital interest in the effectiveness of the Vocational Education and Training Sector.

ACNZ strongly supports the aim of having an effective, accessible, academically rigorous and affordable vocational education system.

We acknowledge the important role that the vocational education system plays in the training of many New Zealanders, equipping them to work in trades, healthcare, information technology, food and fibre sectors and community care.

We also acknowledge the vital role the vocational education and training system plays in providing a career pathway for people who are currently not employed or have a need or desire to retrain. This has benefits for the individuals, their families / whānau as well as the country's economy.

ACNZ does not have a strong view about which structure would work most effectively for the sector, however, we are mindful of the human and financial costs incurred by restructuring. We urge caution at a time when Aotearoa New Zealand needs to make wise investments in updating infrastructure and addressing our housing, health and cost of living challenges. We recommend finding alternative ways to address concerns identified in the Regulatory Impact Statement, particularly as the interim analysis "does not indicate that there is a fundamental problem with the Workforce Development Councils". A national focus and regional flexibility are not mutually exclusive.

Our primary comments for your consideration are:

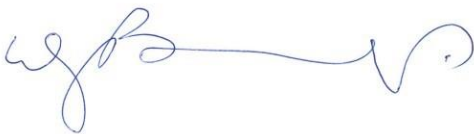
1. The vocational education and training system must meet the needs of underserved geographical areas and underserved population groups, including people of all ages and people with disabilities. This is important regardless of whether the current structure is retained or any changed structure is implemented. For this to happen the vocational education and training system needs to be thriving across Aotearoa New Zealand, not only in major cities.
2. The vocational education and training system must recognise the diversity of Aotearoa's New Zealand's population. Training and vocational education provision needs to reflect the requirements and learning styles of various population groups, including Māori, Pacific Peoples, Asian populations, migrants, the Rainbow community and people with disabilities.
3. The intent to retain skill standards, regardless of the model chosen, should be made explicit.
4. We support industry playing a key role in standards setting and industry training, alongside education professionals. Social workers, health care assistants, homecare assistants and support workers, for example, are incredibly important workforces for our older population to help them to age well and age in place. Those working in these professions and their employers can add huge value to setting nationally consistent standards. They can also bring lived experience to the delivery of training that best meets the requirements of residential aged care and home and community based care.
5. Easy access to vocational education and training is essential, as is affordability. We have workforce shortages that will be challenging to fill, especially with an ageing workforce. We need to train and retain these valuable workforces that contribute to the health and wellbeing of others, including older New Zealanders. Not all of the career pathways delivered by the vocational education and training sector lead to highly paid work. Workers are frequently juggling working at the same time as training, and we need to value and respect them, demonstrated practically through supportive training environments and fair employment terms and conditions.
6. Aotearoa New Zealand has a growing and increasingly diverse older population. Within ten years the over 65 population is expected to reach 1.2 million, with the over 85 age group being the fastest growing. Age Concern New Zealand's vision is "*Every older*

person feels connected, has positive choices and can age well.” We want to see older people able to age in place regardless of whether they live in their own home, are one of the increasing number of older renters, live with extended family / whānau, or live in a retirement village or residential care. Aotearoa New Zealand is dependent on the vocational education and training system to help meet the health and wellbeing needs of this population. We need the healthcare, social work, aged care, home and community based care workforces to be strong and thriving. Whatever structure is chosen must support achieving New Zealand’s current and future needs.

7. The vocational education and training system plays a vital role in helping to equip workers essential to meet Aotearoa New Zealand’s housing issues and challenges. Housing options for all New Zealanders need to be diverse, affordable, secure, accessible and healthy. We would like to see the vocational education and training sector prioritise helping to achieve this outcome.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission on the *Redesign of the vocational education and training system*.

Nāku noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen
Chief Executive
Age Concern New Zealand