

Feedback on Redesign of the Vocational Education and Training System

Feedback provided by the ACE Sector Strategic Group (ASSG)

ACE Aotearoa and the ACE Sector Strategic Group (ASSG)

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector is a critical partner in the education system, with a history of engaging with and changing the lives of New Zealanders socially and economically marginalised, and with intergenerational needs that inhibit their success in education and employment.

The ACE sector provides affordable, local education and professional development to communities. It targets adults and offers programmes to improve basic skills, language, literacy, and numeracy, building people's capabilities to seek further education, and employment and promotion within the New Zealand workforce.

ACE Aotearoa established the ACE Sector Steering Group to serve as an authoritative commentator on emerging ACE issues and provide strategic oversight from a sector and stakeholder perspective, for the benefit of all ACE learners.

The current members of the ASSG are:

- ACE Aotearoa
- Ako Aotearoa
- Community Learning Association in Secondary Schools
- English Language Partners NZ
- Literacy Aotearoa
- REAP Aotearoa NZ
- Te Ataarangi
- Workers Education Association (WEA).

Feedback on Redesign of the vocational education and training system

It is internationally recognised that the most vulnerable in our communities often engage in ACE learning as their first step to achieving positive and successful educational experiences, and pursuing beneficial employment opportunities. Throughout New Zealand, the ACE sector engages with at least 81,000 learners, and potentially more with the inclusion of the unfunded section of the sector, who would otherwise not seek to pursue post-compulsory education and training.

For this reason, while not formally involved in the consultation process, the ACE Sector Strategic Group (ASSG) seeks to register its interests in the ACE sector being a future contributor and participant of an integrated VET system, noting that there are potential VET learners that are not yet being reached or engaged with, while enrolled apprentices may have needs that, due to its distribution and experience, the ACE sector can help to assist.

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Currently, there are at least two other ACE providers that, like REAPs, operate in the VET environment, and are contracted by industry organisations to provide learning support and pastoral care to apprentices. The learning support is related to the theoretical aspects of apprentices' work, and can include literacy, language and numeracy assistance, and other options of assistance. The support is often provided locally and wherever apprentices are based.

This type of collaboration removes critical barriers to success, and has been found to be beneficial for apprentices' credit achievements and qualifications. Using the ACE sector to extend this form of support to apprentices across Aotearoa will facilitate greater local access to meet apprentices' related learning needs.

New Zealand needs a strong vocational education system to ensure our people, industries, and communities can thrive. This means greater responsiveness to current and future local needs, providing assurance that all learners are entitled to receive the VET access and support necessary for their development and future employment opportunities.

Projecting to 2040, where the workforce will be predominantly (70%) Māori, Pacific and Asian, the ACE sector can provide value to the VET system creating additional reach for diversity, equity and inclusion, especially of learners who seek to reengage with education and training.

The consideration of how the VET system can facilitate collaboration with the ACE sector and providers will enable stronger, organised pathways for ACE learners beyond foundation learning, and into the vocational education and training.

We believe that reconfiguring the system, and collaborating with the ACE sector, presents an opportunity to develop an improved and responsive system to benefit greater access and success to ACE learners in their transition to vocational education and training.

Closing Comments

The ACE sector continues to advocate for greater social investment by Government to create a broader view of outcomes, providing greater value for money, and through effective local solutions, enabling reduced benefit dependency and effective support for people back to work.

The ASSG seeks the opportunity for conversations to consider new and additional contributions of the ACE sector towards the current government agenda. Significantly, we see the value in scoping the ways the ACE sector can enhance opportunities through VET, for the expected future workforce of Aotearoa, noting that it is understood that it will be primarily made up from Māori, Pacific and Asian communities – the communities we work alongside to create transformative and relevant successful outcomes.

We welcome any questions or discussion regarding our feedback. Please contact:

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