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SUBMISSION ON REDESIGN OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

SUBMITTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Dr Chris Litten
General Manager, Research
BRANZ

The Ministry of Education can publish my name and contact information with this submission and can contact me in relation to this submission.

PREFACE

The Building Research Association of New Zealand (BRANZ) is an independent science and research organisation, focused exclusively on building and construction. Alongside research, BRANZ offers commercial, independent, science-based testing and assurance services.

Our current investment priorities for new research are in four main areas:

- Improving housing affordability for all New Zealanders,
- Improving the quality of Aotearoa New Zealand's building stock,
- Resilience of buildings to natural hazards, and
- Improving environmental sustainability and circularity of the built environment.

We have an interest in a strong vocational education and training (VET) system as it underpins each one of our investment priority areas. Improvements in these four areas are enabled when the workforce is set up to achieve, with the right mix of skills, knowledge, training and motivation.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further insight to the Ministry of Education on ways our research priorities could help achieve the ambitions of the changes being proposed.

BRANZ FEEDBACK

Our feedback here focuses on the attributes we believe are important for the VET system to have, to ensure it continually responds to the needs of the learners, industry and the providers. Our understanding is specifically related to the building and construction sector, however the attributes described below would also be relevant to other sectors.

Equally important is to undertake and weigh up the costs and benefits of any system redesign, taking into account what is working well in the current system and any positive outcomes from recent changes.

Close industry alignment

For the VET system to deliver the education and training required to meet an industry's workforce needs, it needs to be informed by and developed with the industry concerned. The industry should be working with the VET system at all levels, and both parties be enabled to receive and give advice and feedback.

Ongoing industry insight is essential to the VET system's ability to remain relevant. Industry insights can identify curriculum areas where new skills are needed now or in the future; regions where certain skills will be in demand in the near future; or trends indicating that a transfer of skills might be needed soon. An example of this is the Workforce Information Platform¹ developed by Waihangā Ara Rau (the Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Council). This platform is designed to provide forecasts about labour gaps and surpluses in the construction and infrastructure labour markets.

Currently, the function of listening to and representing the voice of industry to government is within the remit of the Workforce Development Councils. This function may require strengthening, prioritising and a commitment made to it being an ongoing cycle of feedback. This would inform continual curriculum development between the VET system and industry, in this case, the building and construction industry.

Continual feedback to and from sector research

As per the ongoing connection between the VET system and industry, there is a need to include in the reforms a way to ensure sector research is considered and developed. Sector research can assist with the development, review and updating of the curriculum, and also provide insights into delivery pathways, and acknowledge and address challenges within the VET system.

BRANZ funds and undertakes research relevant to the building and construction sector's VET system. Along with research from other partner organisations, such as ConCOVE² and HERA³, BRANZ research provides useful evidence, insights, as well as packaged curriculum content, for the sector. These linkages are critical to address key challenges facing the sector.

An example of this is the work we are undertaking, in partnership with ConCOVE, BCITO and Waihangā Ara Rau, examining how we can deliver training to the sector that incorporates climate change and the transition to zero carbon construction⁴. This BRANZ-led research identified zero carbon expertise as an increasingly urgent requirement for future skills in the construction sector. Now in its second phase, this research is working with industry to turn these insights into action.

¹ <https://wip.org.nz/>

² <https://concove.ac.nz/>

³ <https://www.hera.org.nz/>

⁴ For more information see <https://www.branz.co.nz/environment-zero-carbon-research/future-of-work/>

Consistency in curriculum content, delivery and assessment

The proposals to reform the VET system include a redesigned Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP) network consisting of stand-alone and federated ITPs.

BRANZ highlights the need for consistency across the VET system to be built into the model proposed in the discussion document; specifically, consistency in the teaching, delivery and assessment. The model does not describe how consistency of curriculum content (and its development), its delivery and assessment will be achieved across ITPs and between the ITPs that are federation members and those that are not. Nor does it describe how a consistent approach might be taken to future-proofing the curriculum – an approach that should leverage research and industry insights, and account for industry’s needs, today and tomorrow.

International connections and relevancy

Reform of New Zealand’s VET system should also consider international engagement with, among others, key feeder countries that supply a construction workforce to New Zealand, for example, Ireland, China and Philippines. International standardisation of construction qualifications is a key issue that needs to be considered in reforms. This is an area that could be strengthened in this opportunity to redesign the system. There are benefits to be realised from global connections, collaborations, research, trends and insight, such as greater understanding of universal skill sets, needs and gaps.

To assist with guidance on the internationalisation of construction VET, work is being undertaken by ConCOVE Tūhura as regional Lead Expert on the UNESCO UNEVOC-BILT Expert Group⁵, with BRANZ in a technical supporting role. This appointment connects New Zealand directly into current debates on new qualifications and competencies, ongoing initiatives within the sector, innovative practices, and develops recommendations and knowledge materials on new initiatives and practices.

Aligned to this is the need to consider how can the VET system can support diversity as the cultural and ethnic composition of the construction workforce changes. Actions to achieve change in this area could include implementing the Construction Diversity Roadmap⁶

⁵ For more information see

<https://unevoc.unesco.org/bilt/BILT+Expert+Group+on+building+and+construction>

⁶ See <https://www.constructionaccord.nz/assets/Construction-Accord/files/Construction-Diversity-Roadmap-Report.pdf>