

TEU SUBMISSION ON THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF NZIST POARI AKORANGA

27 August 2020

Introduction

Staff in NZIST are hungry for change. The Charter of NZIST captures their aspirations for that change. Nowhere is this more true than in the requirement that staff and students are empowered in all relevant aspects of the new organisation, and especially in academic matters. Poari Akoranga and its sub-committees are probably the most important vehicle in NZIST for this empowerment. For academic staff – and indeed for allied staff as well (many of whom not only support teaching, learning, and research but are directly involved in it) – decisions made by subsidiary academic committees, the national academic sub-committees, and by Poari Akoranga itself will be the most influential in their daily experience of working with learners, employers, industry, and others. The values, motivation, and satisfaction of staff are at stake in these decisions. It is primarily from these academic governance bodies – and the support that management provides to them – that the kind of change staff are hoping for from NZIST must flow. Essential to that change is a return to making teaching and learning the central business of their workplace, thereby maximising the potential in that interaction and its supporting relationships – and allowing staff to fully contribute their in-depth expertise and knowledge in the foundational decisions that will shape education in NZIST. These considerations frame our comments below on the proposed Terms of Reference of Poari Akoranga.

Sections 1, 2, and 3 – Purpose, Role, and Function

The purpose, role and function of Poari Akoranga, as set out in Sections 1, 2, and 3, do a good job of reflecting the intent of the Charter of NZIST and the overall thrust of the wider reform of vocational education. However, there are some additional points to make.

With regard to the role and function of Poari Akoranga, these elements need to be introduced and exercised steadily over time, beginning as soon as practicable, so that they can be developed and refined in a dialogue with academic staff and students in subsidiaries, subsidiary academic committees, and external bodies such as Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) and Regional Skills Leadership Groups (RSLGs). The appointment of the full membership of Poari Akoranga including staff and student representatives should be completed as soon as possible to ensure practicable decisions are made that keep teaching and learning at the centre of the evolving structures and processes of NZIST (taking into consideration our comments below about membership).

A sudden assumption of control by Poari Akoranga and a corresponding divestment of the responsibilities of academic committees and others at the end of 2022 would be highly undesirable.

While acknowledging the dedication of those serving on subsidiary academic committees, the view of our members is that subsidiary academic committees have adapted to the competitive model of provision and the managerialist modes of operation that have been incentivised in the current system. While we have not surveyed all subsidiary academic committees yet, on all those that we have looked at so far there is a majority of managers on the committees. While most of these managers have had previous experience in curriculum and programme development as well as in the teaching and learning nexus – and they also have undoubted expertise in academic regulations and their application – their focus, as managers, is primarily on the relationship between the student as a customer and the institution as a provider in a competitive environment.

Further, the various roles and functions of Poari Akoranga, as set out in its proposed Terms of Reference, are not reflected in the Terms of Reference of subsidiary academic committees. Decisions at the subsidiary level are, unsurprisingly, made without reference to, or substantive consideration of, the experiences, practices, and objectives of the wider national network. This must change. We see the shaping of Poari Akoranga in all its key relationships – but especially in its relationship with subsidiary academic committees – as evolving in a timely fashion through ongoing interaction. This evolution would be reflected at key points in iterations of the Terms of Reference of Poari Akoranga – the iterative nature of the Terms of Reference are noted in the draft.

Two key functions that we would like to see added include:

1. Overseeing the establishment and curation of a national library, or repository, of NZQA approved courses, programmes, qualification, and industry approved work-based programmes that can be accessed by staff throughout the network. This will allow staff to, on one hand, avoid re-inventing the wheel and, on the other, provide access to best practice materials (perhaps inserted at bullet-point 3 of Section 3 [Function] and as a sub-committee task around bullet-points 4 and 5 of Section 6 [National Academic Committees of NZIST Poari Akoranga]).
2. Ensure transparent and timely communication of the work of Poari Akoranga and its sub-committees across the NZIST network including an up-to-date record of 'live' academic considerations and decision-making (perhaps inserted as bullet-point 11 of Section 3 [Function])

Section 4 – Membership

While we acknowledge the reasoning behind making membership of Poari Akoranga a matter of 'skills-based' appointments by Council, we believe a broader approach must be taken to membership. We agree that adequate numbers of academic staff and learners are required on Poari Akoranga. We would add that allied staff should be represented too (at least two). Allied staff are often involved in academic matters including learning support, research coordination, learning resource collation (including librarians), and learning and teaching innovation in face-to-face and online formats. Experience in administrative challenges at the learner-institution interface and elsewhere will be invaluable.

In the first instance, we believe that the number of practicing academic staff (still to be determined in the Terms of Reference), should roughly equal the number of non-teaching board members. These appointments (or nominations) would reflect more detailed criteria as discussed below with reference to 'Section 5 – Appointments.' These criteria would include skills, expertise, and leadership in the current practice of teaching, learning, curriculum development, and innovation in teaching and learning, especially in areas such as working with Māori and Pasifika learners, and in applied and other research – and so on. It is also important to note that academic expertise must be current within an environment that is, and will be, constantly changing. First, it will be changing because it will be reflecting the development of NZIST, the national network of provision. Second, it will be undergoing all the impacts and changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery from that crisis, including rapidly shifting learner needs and groups. Furthermore, academic staff members should have standing and support from their academic networks and disciplinary groups and, for this reason, we urge that appointment is made through a process by which potential members are elected for nomination by their academic colleagues.

Specifically, we propose that in addition to the members appointed from the national staff committee, staff are empowered to elect a pool of their peers (bearing in mind appropriate criteria), and that the initial appointments to Poari Akoranga and national academic committees be made, by Council, on the recommendation of Poari Akoranga in the case of sub-committees, from this pool. Those elected may have preferences for committees and these may be considered. However, the CVs of those elected may make them valuable members of a number of different committees and they would need to commit in advance to serving where they are most needed. The national committees may then be empowered to select further from the pool and to appoint from elsewhere if needed. The proposed Terms of Reference envisage the national committees comprising 5-20 members – and also "reflecting the value of an appropriate geographical spread of representation." That seems to fit well with elections from subsidiaries, as it would seem

that around 70 staff would be needed for the national committees, possibly more. We propose that academic staff in each subsidiary should be able to elect three academic staff to the pool, and allied staff elect one member per subsidiary. The criteria for staff on national committees would be publicised at the same time as staff members stand for election.

Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) represents approximately 3000 academic and allied staff members across the NZIST network and has durable, efficient, and democratic processes already in place for channelling staff voice and contribution of expertise from across the network. TEU nomination of staff members for Poari Akoranga would provide an effective, democratic, and well-supported mechanism for selection of at least one allied and one academic member.

We agree that Chairs of national academic committees should be members of Poari Akoranga.

We agree that members of the staff committee and Māori advisory committee should be members of Poari Akoranga.

We agree that WDCs need to be represented in Poari Akoranga but believe that all six WDCs should be represented (rather than the current proposal of two). At the same time, NZIST should seek reciprocal representation – i.e. a Poari Akoranga member on each WDC academic governing body.

Given the scale and ambition of NZIST – and the range of the national academic committees that must build the academic architecture of the organisation more or less from scratch – a sizeable group of members with adequate range and complementarity of skills and expertise is needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS – MEMBERSHIP

- Poari Akoranga and sub-committee membership should include approximately even proportions of academic staff members and non-academic members. Academic staff members should be currently active in teaching, learning, and/or research via elected nomination and appointment.
- At least two allied staff currently active in supporting teaching and learning, and/or research are appointed to Poari Akoranga and to each sub-committee via elected nomination and appointment.
- At least one TEU nominated academic staff member is appointed to Poari Akoranga and to each sub-committee.
- At least one TEU nominated allied staff member is appointed to Poari Akoranga and to each sub-committee.

- Six members drawn from WDCs (one from each) are nominated to Poari Akoranga

Section 5 – Appointment of Members

The current core criteria for membership of Poari Akoranga is high level but, in our view, too vague in regard to ensuring teaching and learning remain at the heart of academic matters in NZIST. It is not sufficient to suggest that membership criteria ‘may’ include:

- Academic specialist knowledge, skills, and experience
- Broad sector and systems delivery knowledge including work-based, online, on-campus, and regional competencies, and experience
- Experience in and a commitment to mātauranga Māori

Surely it will be *essential* to have a membership that includes these areas of expertise. We recommend that consideration is made to revise the introduction of these core criteria to require “at least 50% of membership of Poari Akoranga meet one or more of the following criteria.”

In line with our comments related to Section 4 – Membership, we also suggest that an emphasis on current practice knowledge is emphasised in these criteria. We also would like to see a stronger commitment to redressing existing inequalities in the academic framework of vocational, professional, and skills education.

A fuller outline of core competencies will better guide the nomination and appointment of members of Poari Akoranga and its sub-committees in a way that will ensure teaching and learning is kept at the centre of academic decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS – APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS

Change the core criteria to include: “At least 50% of membership of Poari Akoranga meet one or more of the following criteria:”

- Up-to-date academic specialist knowledge, skills, and experience
- Broad sector and systems delivery knowledge including current practice experience in work-based, online, on-campus, and regional competencies
- Demonstrated innovation in teaching and learning delivery
- Demonstrated experience in and a commitment to mātauranga Māori
- Demonstrated knowledge and experience in addressing inequalities in tertiary education provision related to gender, sexuality, age, disability, and ethnicity

Additional Comments

In order for full, meaningful, and effective contribution of members to Poari Akoranga and its sub-committees adequate resourcing of time is required. Academic and allied staff workloads across the NZIST network are typically precisely defined and measured. There is little room for additional discretionary effort. Staff membership on Poari Akoranga and its sub-committees must include an agreed allocation of proportional FTE. Depending on the requirements of the role – and based on our existing knowledge of time obligations for membership on subsidiary academic committees – we expect that an appropriate allocation would be in the region of 0.075-0.1 FTE of workload (equivalent to 61-82 hours of timetabled teaching hours).

RECOMMENDATIONS – ADDITIONAL

- Explicitly state the measure of workload relief that will be recognised for staff membership on Poari Akoranga and its sub-committees in the Terms of Reference