

30 January 2020

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

Tēnā koe Minita,

We thank you for your invitation to provide further commentary on the Tertiary Education Strategy.

Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union (TEU) works to ensure our tertiary education system provides transformative learning experiences that are accessible to all tauira/learners. For our members, tertiary education is about more than acquiring work-based skills and training; it is also about ensuring tauira/learners develop both the capacity to think critically, as well as the disposition to act in the interests of their communities, the wider public good, and the environment. As such, we commend the government's overall vision for the tertiary education sector, and acknowledge that the objectives and priorities contained in the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) align, for the most part, with the values and recommendations of the TEU.

However, if our tertiary education system is to be genuinely transformative, we think greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that: education is free and therefore accessible by all; stronger Te Tiriti relationships are developed and maintained; the wellbeing of staff and students continues to be prioritised; teaching and learning occurs in safe spaces; meaningful collaboration is encouraged throughout the sector; and, crucially, adequate resourcing is provided so that the above goals can be achieved. Underlying these aims is our assertion that tertiary education – due to the innovative thinking, scholarship, and research of staff and students throughout the sector – plays a key role in contributing to the public good by addressing the major issues of our time; perhaps the most pressing of which is climate change and the need for environmental sustainability.

There is currently a lack of clarity in the TES surrounding the public role of tertiary education. Recognising and strengthening this element of tertiary education would mean expanding the government's view so that the TES includes an explicit statement outlining the value of tertiary education both within the context of wider society and in relation to social change. Related to

this – and with regard to Objective 4 of the TES – we think that, in order to sufficiently account for the changing nature of learning and work, education should be oriented toward encouraging citizens to, firstly, act as the critics and conscience of society, and, secondly, be in a position to thrive in a rapidly changing work environment.

More specifically, the last two paragraphs of page 25 of the TES require further clarification. There are two important issues:

1. There need to be incentives, support – and, perhaps, requirements – to enable employees to undertake ongoing upskilling and engagement with the formal education system – ideally on an annual basis – so that they can adapt to changes in their jobs or more radical changes in their work environment – i.e. the future of work. Whether this is grounded in collaboration between industry/employers and TEOs, or just entails such collaboration, is another question.
2. Employers often say they are looking for employees whom they can train and adapt in various ways but who bring good core employment competencies, communication and interaction skills, ‘soft skills,’ and good literacy and numeracy to the employment situation. To this we might add that employees need a good understanding of the employment relationship itself and how mutual expectations are structured. We say these skills need a basis of understanding of citizenship and active responsible participation in society – and that work needs to be done on ensuring that this education gets properly built into all vocational education and graduate attributes in both work- and institution-based education at all levels.

Objective 2 of the TES makes it clear that the government is committed to providing barrier free access to education throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. However, although the TEU has voiced strong support for the government’s first-year fees-free policy, it is also our conviction that for tertiary education to be truly accessible to all New Zealanders – irrespective of age, socio-economic background, or geographical location – it must be free at all levels.

Similarly, while the TEU supports the intentions of Objectives 1 and 3 of the TES to place tauira/learners at the centre of education, foreground the need for Māori-medium education, and ensure quality teaching and leadership, we also think that more can be done to: build stronger Te Tiriti relationships; empower and ensure the wellbeing of staff and students through the provision of quality pastoral care; and, make sure our education institutions are safe spaces conducive to teaching and learning and free of all forms of discrimination.

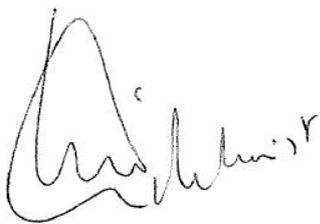
Additionally, in order for quality teaching and leadership to take place, it is necessary that the current audit culture is dissolved. This would also mean that evaluation strategies based on blunt metrics would be replaced by a focus on reviewing the extent to which long-term learning outcomes are being achieved across the sector.

Adequate funding is essential to ensuring a tertiary education system that is set to achieve the objectives of the TES. As it currently stands, the funding approach in place for the tertiary education system is inadequate and, indeed, can be seen to replicate many of the inequalities observable throughout our society. So that our tertiary education system is truly accessible to all and meets the needs of taira/learners, we think it necessary that the amount of funding available for the tertiary education sector be increased to 2.7% of GDP per annum by 2021.

Lastly, given our view that tertiary education is an inherent public good that endeavours to address – if not alleviate – the major issues and crises of our time, we think it appropriate that the TES includes an explicit statement pertaining to tertiary education as a public good in relation to environmental sustainability and the current climate crisis.

Again, we thank you for this opportunity to provide further insight on the TES.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Michael Gilchrist

NATIONAL PRESIDENT