



Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Association Te Hononga (TIASA) Inc.

**Submission to the Tertiary Education Commission
on the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) Proposal**

5th April 2019

Introduction

TIASA Te Hononga is the major professional staff association and union representing most allied (non-teaching) staff employed across the NZ tertiary education Institute and Polytechnic sector and Whare Wananga. Our membership is located primarily in the ITP part of the tertiary education sector; however, we also represent significant numbers of allied staff in the University sector and Wananga. We represent a wide and diverse range of occupations performing vital functions at every level. Our members hold a wide range of professional and technical qualifications, from advanced degrees through to vocationally specific certificates and/or recognition. They are drawn from a varied range of backgrounds and expertise across the private and State sectors, and together embody a depth of institutional, governance, managerial and administrative expertise and experience that is unmatched.

TIASA has been a key, respected, active stakeholder in the sector for half a century. We celebrate our 50th anniversary this year. We have operated under many different statutory frameworks. From the Polytechnic/ITP sector's inception as an initial adjunct to the secondary education sector, through to its evolution into the increasingly sophisticated tertiary education deliverer that it is today, TIASA has been a key player in the many changes throughout that period and a key actor throughout those many changes. We have detailed first-hand knowledge of and expertise in how those changes did, or do, impact on the sector, its constituents and the wider community it serves. Throughout our existence, TIASA has adopted a realistic, co-operative and responsible approach to the many changes within the sector. During periods of change, we make special effort to work cooperatively with all stakeholders in our sector and have gained a reputation for being progressive, constructive and innovative. We believe our experiences, objectives, and overall approaches to change well qualify us to make useful and informed commentary on the implications and potential impacts of the changes proposed by the RoVE.

Thirty years ago we were active partners in the first wave of tertiary education reforms heralded by the 'Hawke Report' and the subsequent 'Learning for Life' reform of NZ's tertiary education sector. The scope and impact of those reforms, coupled with other major concurrent changes to State sector and related legislation, was immense. We and our members have lived with, implemented, suffered through, and sought to operate effectively within the altered environment and context those reforms created.

Over the three decades since those reforms it has become increasingly apparent that what was required in the 1980s and 1990s is no longer what is needed to serve the needs of the 21st century and beyond. The system and sector created by these reforms has become increasingly stretched to the point where some ITPs have become technically insolvent requiring governmental rescue. Other consequences have been the development of a fiercely competitive system exacerbated by the funding model adopted and successive changes to that which have increased both financial and competitive pressure on the whole sector.

The wasteful duplication, counterproductive competition between different tertiary education providers, constant staffing and structural reviews, 'strategic realignments', course and job cuts, declining enrolments, and negative effects for learners, communities, business, employers and other stakeholders are only some of the clear evidence that changes to enable NZ's tertiary education system to meet the needs of today and tomorrow are overdue.

The RoVE consultation document describes very well a number of the problems that currently beset the Vocational Education sector. The Minister's Foreword notes that the RoVE proposals 'are ambitious, and necessarily so' (p.5). We agree. We welcome the opportunity to make this submission on the Review of Vocational Education proposal.

The current model

1. NZ's taxpayers invest significantly in the tertiary education sector. They do so both for present and future needs. Substantial assets, capital and cash are deployed across the sector for the betterment of our nation's student population, employers, and communities. However it would have to be said the return on that investment whilst often very good and sometimes excellent, has also at least sometimes been limited and occasionally non-existent.
2. While there are many success stories across the sector there are also many failures. Some argue that those institutes that are successful ought not to be penalised by RoVE for others' failures. This concern is understandable but we believe its focus is too narrow.
3. The problems the proposal seeks to address are not solely financial and funding formulae issues. The RoVE seeks to ensure the ITP and tertiary education system of education in NZ is equipped and able to ensure the learners of today and tomorrow can acquire, gain, retain, skill and upskill in appropriate and useful ways to both access tertiary education and adapt to the changing requirements of work, employers and society. That is wider than simple financial efficiency, which while very important is only one dimension of what is needed.
4. TIASA's direct experience is that frequently, institutional actions aimed at creating financial efficiency have proved highly counterproductive. Many of our members' survey responses identified this mismatch with compelling examples from their own experiences as allied staff.
5. The philosophical basis for the current system is the competitive model. That does not fit the goal of an effective, modern, agile and responsive tertiary education system in the operational shape that best fits current and future needs. This point is well canvassed in the RoVE consultation document and also in a large amount of research, globally and nationally, some of which the RoVE document cites.

The proposed structural change to one NZ Institute of Skills and Technology (working title) and reshaping of the role of ITO's

6. We agree with and support the thrust of the RoVE discussion document that we 'need to be ready for a fast-changing future of skills learning and work'. The rationale for this draws heavily on national and global research evidence.
7. We are aware that a number of submitters agree with the need for changes, but also argue that as they are successful institutions any incorporation into one national entity, however this may be structured, will damage and possibly destroy their current successes. We know that some will argue, "we're doing alright, just deal with those who are not" or, "all that is needed to fix the problem, is to change the funding model". In effect this is an argument for the status quo but with improvements to the current funding model and some other areas.

8. However, we believe this will not go far enough and would be a short-term approach. The issues and needs confronting the sector in our view and experience run far deeper and nation-wide – they are not just localised issues. We agree the funding model needs to change but so do many other aspects and practises of the current model. We believe that simply reforming the current funding methodology - which all parties accept requires significant change - is neither sufficient nor sustainable. If that is the only action taken, we believe the sector would soon be confronting even more difficulties and would rapidly prove unable to adequately address our dynamic and changing labour market and skills requirements. This includes employers' needs, as they too require adaptation skills for the same reasons as do workers.
9. Ongoing staffing reviews and organisational restructures, constant cost cutting of essential activities and services to try and meet financial imperatives, yet increased expenditure on other areas such as costly and unnecessarily top-heavy management structures, duplication of courses and programmes and many other well recognised problems are some of the consequences of the current competitive model. No matter how successful any individual tertiary education provider may be, addressing the funding methodology alone will not resolve those issues.
10. TIASA's own experiences highlight why changes to the funding model alone will not address the problems. Competition and patch protection have been major contributors, along with some stand-out foolhardy decision making (Unitec's student enrolment fiasco being a case in point, but it is far from the only such example). In some cases, poor governance has exacerbated problems of incompetent senior management.
11. TIASA has previously argued for changes to the governance model, not just to include genuine staff input and an equal voice for allied staff, but also for combined models to capture what is, due to NZ's small size, a limited talent pool of diverse but capable governance candidates. We see merit in the RoVE's suggestions for one overarching governance structure as long as this does not just replicate the current structures and methods of selection and appointment but on a larger scale. Greater diversity is necessary in composition and inputs at the governance level.
12. We expect to see allied staff representation chosen by allied staff, not, selected by their employer, as a given. Such representation proved very effective in the past under earlier legislation that required genuinely independent allied staff representation. There are many instances where such representation helped avoid costly errors through the active involvement of staff in the governance structures. Following its removal, problems emerged at some ITP's and were exacerbated due to the absence of informed, competent allied staff input at the strategic governance level.
13. TIASA realises recent amendments to the Education Act have reinstated staff representation but, only one position to somehow be shared between the academic and allied staff. This will mean that academic staff will dominate at the expense of any knowledgeable allied staff input. With no disrespect to our academic colleagues, that is not healthy and will not assist, especially as the new institution will be very large and will have to address a multiplicity of very different competing priorities and needs. It is true that the interests and view of allied and academic staff will be shared ones some of the time but for other things they will differ significantly. Anyone who has worked both in an allied staff and an academic role, as do many of our membership, can attest to the differences, not just in treatment but in real, work relevant knowledge.

14. Allied staff contributions ought not to be hamstrung by the absence of dedicated allied staff governance representation. To ensure effective governance we request that there be dedicated allied staff places on the governance structure alongside those of the academic staff as equal partners, in the same way that it is accepted as standard that there be separate representation for different employer and other groups. There is ample evidence of how this contributes to organisational success.
15. TIASA sees the prime purpose of the proposed changes as not just to rectify funding deficiencies or address 'failing' ITP's current or potential future difficulties. We believe the purpose of so major a change has to be much broader than parochial or patch protection interests, howsoever well intentioned they may be. Something more fundamental is required and we support the thrust of the RoVE proposals on this basis, and for the reasons outlined in the discussion document. However, we have many questions regarding its ultimate implementation.
16. We support the retention of effective regional structures, initiatives and operations and are aware of many such in the sector that are highly successful with excellent employer, student and community support. Many employers have spoken compellingly to us about current operations through and with their local ITP and how valuable those are, and we fully support continuation of all such effective ventures.

Concerns

17. Allied staff 'invisibility'.
It is of concern that throughout the RoVE consultation and discussion document there is no mention whatsoever of allied staff. Teaching staff and the effects of the proposed changes on their work are specifically identified. But allied staff are omitted. This is disturbing.
18. There would appear to be an unspoken assumption that either allied staff work will presumably all be automated or robotized so that there are no longer any human beings undertaking their job functions in the new entity; or, that allied staff numbers will be so significantly further decimated that they merit no mention, either in the processes used to achieve that end, or in any consideration of their current or future role/s. If either is the reason for excluding allied staff then both are manifestly wrong. We do not understand why there is absolutely no mention at all of allied staff and how the proposal will impact them. Given that a large percentage of allied staff are women this invisibility and omission also raises equity and other concerns.
19. Allied staff are the glue that hold the whole system – current and proposed future – together. It is their knowledge, skills, and expertise that will be required throughout the implementation of the RoVE proposals. Without committed, competent allied staff these proposals cannot succeed. It is allied staff who will feel the impacts of the changes more immediately than any other group. We do not wish to see the mistakes of the past replicated in whatever shape the RoVE proposals may finally take. Allied staff deserve better than to be ignored or overlooked in this fashion and we ask that this not recur.
20. Participative decision making
For over 30 years allied staff across the tertiary education sector have carried the brunt of the 1989 reforms, through to the present day. Hundreds upon hundreds of allied staff have either lost their jobs through constant reviews, restructures and redundancies, and/or had to adjust to greatly

increased workloads that often raise significant health and safety concerns which frequently go un-addressed. Many allied staff have had to cope with changes to their job made by others with little or no real understanding of exactly what that work entailed, creating significant gaps in work flows and processes through such job 'redesigns' by some without the requisite knowledge of the job's real tasks.

21. A very great deal of key institutional knowledge has been lost to the sector through the huge numbers of allied staff redundancies. Some of the sector's current problems are the result of these and other ill-considered actions taken by some managements based on incorrect, preconceived assumptions about the nature of much allied staff work, to the detriment of their institutions, students and wider stakeholders as well as the allied staff employee/s concerned.

22. We ask that decisions as to allied staff work requirements, job designs, work processes and all related areas be made conjointly with TIASA as an equal partner to ensure those making such decisions do have real understanding of what they are deciding on. This will help to avoid the mistakes of the past being carried forward into the new entity, and assist to build allied staff commitment so that the new entity is not left to founder through the absence of allied staff expertise.

23. 'Back office' terminology

TIASA had expected the Roadmap to 2020 processes would have brought to the attention of all the issues that arise from excluding allied staff and making simplistic assumptions about their so called 'back office' work. As has been expressed many times, allied staff do not just undertake so-called 'back office' functions. Many allied staff are front office and student facing and all allied staff work to support front office, student facing roles.

The 'back office' nomenclature is to offensive to many allied staff and this came through strongly in TIASA's survey responses. To allied staff this terminology appears to trivialise their work, and, them, and fails to recognise the rich diversity of their contributions to organisational and student success. We ask that this term be dropped altogether in favour of suitable alternative nomenclature – for example, we suggest, allied staff!

24. Transitional Arrangements

The fact sheet headed "What the Government's proposal would mean for ITP Management and Staff" states that Government is seeking a well-managed transition to any new system and, as part of that process, ITP staff will become staff of the new, national institution. It acknowledges that there would be a plan for transferring to the new institution and that TIASA and other relevant unions will be part of that. That planning needs to start immediately. The anxiety levels of staff are extremely high and this and the uncertainty is increasing daily as a number of ITP's are rushing through staffing reviews.

25. Some employers are stating that they cannot enter into bargaining for any term that goes beyond 31st December 2019, as they will not be the employer after that. We consider that to be a nonsense as, until the new national institution comes into existence, it is business as usual and the current employers can make new commitments for periods beyond the proposed date of the 'merger'.

26. Contractual commitments – Transitional and Beyond

The Minister has stated that redundancies are the last option; retraining and redeployment the first. Jobs may change but staff would be supported through the transition. There also needs to be

provision for voluntary redundancy for those who may seek this, or where retraining, redeployment etc. are not appropriate. This will require adequate resourcing and a genuinely open and transparent approach from all tasked with implementation. Unfortunately too often TIASA has not experienced such an approach, despite contractual and legislative requirements that mandate this. The new entity ought not to treat any staff in the cavalier and dismissive manner we and some of our membership have sometimes experienced. We ask that all those tasked with HRM responsibilities in the change processes have the necessary skills to ensure best, cooperative practice in the handling of all HRM related matters.

27. Employment agreements

Transitional processes not only need to ensure robust and fair job change processes that fully involve TIASA as an equal partner; they also need to include contractually binding guarantees and protections to avoid what may otherwise become a 'lowest common denominator', cost cutting approach if existing contractual arrangements are transferred into some type of merged document. Allied staff should not be forced to onto inferior pay and/or conditions, yet this has already occurred in institutional changes processes at some ITP's. The proposed RoVE one institution change should instead lift allied staff rewards and recognition to the true value of their contribution. This also fits with the thinking behind pay equity and fair pay agreements, both of which are established government policy.

28. Recognition and rewards

Much of the research the RoVE documents identify refers to the changing skills needs for workers and employers of all types and finds that skills sets at all levels will need to increase, along with commensurate increases in remuneration. The research shows that higher skills sets requiring continuous updating and refreshing, result in higher levels of remuneration and reward. This must also hold true for allied staff who will form a core part of the RoVE implementation processes and structures. The essential, valuable contributions allied staff make at all levels to the sector must be fairly recognised in the new system.

29. **We propose** that Government urgently establish a working group (strategic advisory group) which will include TIASA and other relevant unions to work through the transitional matters and timelines. We also ask that proper resourcing for such involvement is provided, including, adequate release and relief staffing (both of which are often very difficult for allied staff to obtain) so that those involved are able to give their full focus on this important work.

Conclusions

This submission has of necessity focused on specific aspects as they will directly affect TIASA's allied staff membership. We know that other submitters have many suggestions for the shape of any new entity, including whether there should be one at all, the proposed regional structures and leadership groups, participants in those, course and programme design, delivery, systems and technological applications and many other important considerations. We have attached feedback from our membership through our own national survey where many such matters drew comment, criticism and concurrence.

We have not included any further overall view on these matters here, but reserve our right to do so if and when the final shape of the RoVE changes is made known.

At base our position on RoVE and its ultimate form is firmly based on our belief that any changes now must be with the overarching aim of achieving the best way forward for the learners of today and tomorrow. They must be able to adapt to a vastly and rapidly changing environment and contexts, with greatly altered skills and jobs demands in the immediate future and beyond.

This submission reflects that premise. From that baseline, our submission focuses on practical aspects of the RoVE proposal for our membership. The allied staff stand to both be heavily impacted by it and will also have to implement it in whatever form the final RoVE decisions may take.

TIASA will work constructively and cooperatively with all stakeholders. We will do our utmost to ensure a smooth and just transition to whatever new form our sector may see implemented through the final RoVE decisions.

Over the past few weeks, TIASA has conducted a nationwide survey of our membership across all TEI's with good response rates. A summary of the detailed feedback from our membership is attached at Appendix 1. Our members' responses reflect many of the views held by other stakeholders including their own ITP's. They also underline much of the content of TIASA's submission, and illustrate the real concerns and questions many allied staff hold.

Their feedback also well illustrates the genuine commitment allied staff have to the wellbeing of the sector they give such dedicated support to, both now and for the future.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to respond.

*“Ki mai koe ki ahau, He aha te mea nui o te ao?
Maki e ki atu, He tangata, he tangata, he tangata!”*

*“You ask me what are the important things of the world?
I reply forcefully. It is people, it is people, it is people!”*

Nga mihi,

Shelley J Weir
National President

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