

TE HONONGA AKORANGA

**COMET**



# Submission on the **Draft National Education and Learning Priorities**

Submission 101/19  
Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, November 2019

## Whakatauāki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi ki te raranga i te whāriki kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.

Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu, mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga, ka oti tēnei whāriki.

I te otinga me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.

Ā tana wā, me titiro hoki ki ngā raranga i makere nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

- nā Kūkupa Tirikatene

The tapestry of understanding cannot be woven by one strand alone.

Only by the working together of strands and the working together of weavers will such a tapestry be completed.

With its completion let us look at the good that comes from it.

And, in time we should also look at those stitches which have been dropped, because they also have a message.

## About COMET Auckland

[COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga](#) is an independent charitable trust and Auckland Council's CCO focused on education, skills and lifelong learning across Auckland and, increasingly, other parts of the country. Our latest Statement of Intent is [here](#).

Briefly, our work involves:

Sector leadership – mapping data and evidence, working with sector leaders to identify and prioritise the most pressing areas of focus, and connecting people around that common agenda, to plan collaborative action.

That can then lead to advocacy or changes to partners' business as usual, or sometimes to planning and trialling new ways of working (incubation projects).

These incubation projects generally develop through scoping and planning to trialling, and then implementation and evaluation, with the goal of handing them on once they are fully developed so we can move on to focus on another part of the system.

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## Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities.

This submission has been assembled based on our own collective knowledge and experience, and our ongoing engagement with our stakeholders, including educators, community leaders, employers, parents and students.

We are interested in presenting an oral submission, if this can be done in Auckland.

## General comments

It was refreshing to see a significant education document that includes all the major sectors in one plan, from early learning to tertiary. It was even more refreshing to see some alignment across the sectors, especially in the over-arching objectives. Disconnects between sectors in terms of priorities, measures and ways of working have often made it difficult for learners to find effective learning pathways. These disconnects also create barriers to cohesion and positive change in the system.

For these reasons we welcome the alignment of objectives, but we question the decision to have separate avenues and even separate dates for feedback on the ECE/schooling and tertiary parts of the plan. This makes it difficult for stakeholders to comment on ways that connections between sectors could be strengthened.

## Vision for education

We support the proposed vision and congratulate those who wrote it, as it draws several important messages together cohesively.

## Objective 1: Learners at the centre

COMET Auckland supports all the proposed actions for government. We especially support, and wish to comment on, the following actions.

Under “Create Partnerships”:

**Enhancing student voice:** This is much needed. However, we recommend that this action should be broader than just tertiary education. There is a need for greater student voice at every level, to ensure the education system is responsive to the needs of learners and to support student agency. This is especially valuable at the classroom level, so students have a say in what they learn and how they learn it. There is also a need to enable young people to raise issues at the school/institution level and at the national level. The Ministry of Education now has a youth advisory panel which is a valuable step, but there is potential to make greater use of social media, face to face youth meetings on key topics and other engagement methods to get a broader range of youth voices. This will be especially important as the proposed reforms are implemented, in order to quickly pick up any unintended consequences that may negatively affect learners.

Under “Support places of learning”:

**Improving ECE adult/child ratios:** This is a crucial action because of the evidence of the importance of the early years, and especially the first three years of a child’s life when 80% of brain development occurs. Given the very high rates of ECE enrolment for under-3s, it is crucial that ECEs provide high-quality learning environments for young children. One of the most important aspects of quality is

the amount and type of interactions between teachers and children; two and fro talk builds brains, yet evidence from ERO and others shows many ECEs struggle to support children's language development. Our own work through our [Talking Matters](#) campaign shows the level of adult-child talk in even high-quality ECEs is well below what a child might experience at home. With support and regular feedback, teachers can learn to increase interactions. Improving teacher/child ratios would further increase the amount of talk and interaction a child receives at ECE.

**Developing resources for local history and knowledge:** This would be an opportunity for greater connection with local iwi, so they can share their history, their traditional stories, their tīkanga, their reo a iwi (local language/dialect) and their unique knowledge about local flora and fauna, natural environments and place names. The importance of local history and language is a frequent theme in discussions and feedback from the regular [Tāmaki Makaurau Education Forum](#) hui that we host, bringing iwi education representatives, Māori educators and others interested in Māori education together. Participants often ask for greater emphasis on local history and on reo a iwi in the education system. This could contribute to authentic learning across the curriculum while also strengthening connections between schools and local iwi.

Under "Support wellbeing by addressing racism, discrimination and stigma":

**Addressing racism and discrimination through programmes like Te Hurihanganui:** It is disturbing to all New Zealanders to think that there might be racism in our schools; yet clearly this is the case. The recent report from the Office of the Commissioner for Children shows that a significant proportion of school students report experiencing racism at school. Our own consultation with rangatahi from a range of education settings confirmed these findings. The striking thing was that young people who attend kura reported that they did not experience racism in school, and in fact they were shocked to hear that their counterparts in English-medium schools faced racism. There is an opportunity for the English-medium system to learn from the values, attitudes and practices that kura use to celebrate young people's identity, culture and language and to support positive relationships between teachers and students.

**Implementing new initiatives to address bullying:** When we ask young people about the issues that most affect their learning, bullying is consistently mentioned. Bullying is far too frequent in schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. Addressing it could improve child wellbeing, engagement and attendance at school and student achievement. In the slightly longer term, it would probably also reduce the youth suicide rate. If the approach included addressing prejudice and increasing tolerance of difference, anti-bullying programmes could also improve lifelong wellbeing and social cohesion.

## Objective 2: Barrier-free access

COMET Auckland supports all the proposed actions for government in this section. We especially support, and wish to comment on, the following actions.

Under "Address financial barriers to learning":

We strongly support all actions in this section because of the evidence that children and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to achieve at a high level, and much more likely to achieve below expectations, than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Not all of this disparity can be addressed through funding, but the actions listed will make a significant difference for children's learning. There is also a justice issue in charging fees for a qualification that is part of the (otherwise) fully-funded compulsory schooling system and that the

government has identified as essential for all learners. For this reason, removing the NCEA fee is a long overdue step.

Under “Meet the needs of all learners”:

**Revitalising the ACE sector:** In an economy where whole categories of jobs are likely to disappear over the next years and decades, opportunities for adults to retrain will be especially important. Those who had a positive experience of education the first time around and who have resources for the time and cost of formal training will be able to enrol at polytechnics or universities or in on-the-job training to upskill. However, many people who need to change career in mid-life lack the confidence and resources for these formal avenues. For them, ACE is a more approachable and affordable first step, which can then lead to further learning if needed. As well as the economic benefits, ACE supports inclusion and social cohesion. Our experience from ten years of supporting an intergenerational family learning programme, Whānau Ara Mua (passed on to the Solomon Group in 2012) shows that ACE can also indirectly contribute to student achievement for ACE learners’ children, as they see their parents engaging in learning and as parents gain confidence and skills to support children’s educational journey.

**In addition to the actions in this section,** we would have expected to see an action focused on supporting Māori and Pasifika students to experience success through their own language, culture and identity. The absence of effective support for this is currently one of the most significant barriers for diverse learners to access learning. We note that ERO recently published a report on Pacific bilingual education which notes that the value of bilingual education is well-evidenced, yet in NZ bilingual education is under-resourced and is not available to as many children as could benefit from it. **We recommend that an additional action be added to support Māori and Pasifika students to more equitably access education, through greater support of bilingual and immersion education in te reo Māori and in the main Pasifika languages.**

## Objective 3: Quality teaching and leadership

COMET Auckland supports all the proposed actions for government in this section. We especially support, and wish to comment on, the following actions.

**Improve initial teacher education:** We understand that in a standard three-year primary teaching degree, most future teachers receive only a few hours’ instruction on te reo Māori (unless they specifically choose this as an elective). Principals frequently comment that beginning teachers arrive with few if any skills in using student achievement data to inform their teaching. These are just two examples among many. Despite the best efforts of initial teacher educators, training programmes are often stuck in the past, partly because of the pressure of time, especially in the one-year secondary training programme. Adjusting graduate requirements may not be a strong enough lever to shift teacher education; government may need to provide stronger specifications of what training needs to include. Moving to a four-year degree and/or a post-graduate requirement, as many other countries already do, would also make a significant difference.

**Build cultural competency across the workforce:** Data on achievement by ethnicity shows clearly that our education system is not doing well enough for Māori students or for Pasifika students. Teachers want their students to succeed but need more support on using students’ first language in teaching and learning; understanding and celebrating diverse cultures and worldviews; engaging and partnering with diverse families; and addressing their own unconscious biases. The proven Te Kotahitanga programme showed that change is possible, but that it requires far more than a one-day

course in greetings and rituals. Deeply held attitudes take time to shift and only intensive, ongoing programmes like Te Kotahitanga can do this.

**Increase proficiency in te reo Māori:** We strongly agree with this goal and we agree that Te Ahu o te Reo has promise as a means of building teacher competence in speaking and potentially in teaching our national language. However, there are other proven programmes that achieve the same goal and it would seem unwise to place all our proverbial eggs in one basket, especially as some other options would seem to bring additional side-benefits at a lower cost. **We recommend that alongside continuing Te Ahu o te Reo, the government should consider funding other existing programmes, including Te Reo Tuatahi.** Note that COMET Auckland has no financial or programme interest in Te Reo Tuatahi. However, part of our role is to look at work that is making a difference for Auckland learners. Having observed the programme in action, heard from stakeholders and seen the results of an [external evaluation](#), we note that Te Reo Tuatahi is achieving outcomes in three areas. Firstly, children are gaining knowledge and skills in te reo Māori – this happens immediately, in contrast to the longer-term effects on students from purely teacher competency-focused programmes like Te Ahu o te Reo, because children are taught by fluent language assistants. Secondly, teachers build both knowledge of the language and also skills and methodologies for teaching it because they are in the classroom working alongside the language assistants and are also reinforcing the learning throughout the rest of the week. Thirdly, a number of the language assistants from Te Reo Tuatahi go on to train as teachers, which increases the availability of teachers who are fluent in te reo Māori.

## Objective 4: Future of learning and work

COMET Auckland supports all the proposed actions for government in this section. We especially support, and wish to comment on, the following actions.

Under “Improve skills, knowledge and competencies”:

**Creating a school leavers’ toolkit:** The work on the school leavers’ toolkit to date is valuable but seems to focus mainly on providing guidance on skills young people need before leaving school, and links to resources that schools could choose to use to support this. For many students that will be fine – they already have support from home to ensure they have what they need for a successful transition out of schooling. However, this is clearly not enough for the worryingly large numbers who leave school to become NEETs. Schools need much more guidance and focused resourcing to better support the transition from school to further learning and/or work for their students. COMET Auckland’s experience of designing and delivering the [Youth Employability Programme: License to Work \(YEP\)](#) over the past five years has shown that it is possible to prepare young people for a more successful transition to work by deliberately teaching employability skills, and providing extended work experience so students can practice those skills in an authentic work environment. Schools continually tell us that they do not have the time or skills to do this on their own. Even with training, expert advice and programme resources provided through philanthropic support, they often struggle to cover the costs of a part-time facilitator and work broker to make YEP available to more than a few students. **We recommend that the School Leaver’s’ Toolkit should include targeted funding for employability skill-building, and guidance on how to select employability programmes to suit the needs of different student groups.**

Under “Support lifelong learning”:

**Launching a Careers System Strategy:** There is a desperate need for an overall strategy in the careers space. The repeated upheavals and then disestablishment of Careers NZ have led to a worrying vacuum. There seems to be a perception that a website is all any job-seeker needs to help

them navigate the complex range of training and employment options that could be open to them. For most people, this is completely impractical; it ignores the importance of relationship and emotion alongside information. Any careers strategy needs to take this into account. It also needs to address the increasing need for mid-career changes in direction as the nature of work changes and as some industries and job categories are likely to disappear in the coming years. The current tertiary funding system largely ignores the need for re-training in mid-career, yet a 40-year-old who becomes redundant has another 25 years (at least) of working life ahead, which surely more than justifies funding for advice and training to enable a successful career change.

Under “Strengthen Māori medium pathways”:

Māori young people who come through the kohanga reo and kura kaupapa system are more likely to succeed in NCEA, and anecdotally they also seem to have advantages in wellbeing and employment (this would be an extremely valuable avenue for further research). There is also increasing demand from employers for employees who are fluent in te reo Māori, confident in tikanga, understand Māori values and worldview and are able to connect the business/agency with iwi mana whenua, mataawaka and other kaupapa Māori organisations. Sadly, only around 5% of Māori young people attend a kura or wharekura. This is partly due to a lack of supply, and also to perceptions of variable quality which are partly due to ongoing under-funding.

**We recommend** that a cohesive plan be developed to encourage more whānau to choose kohanga reo, kura and wharekura for their children and young people. This should include increasing provision, especially in areas where there is even greater need; increasing funding; ensuring local pathways for immersion and bilingual learning in te reo Māori so parents are not forced to drive long distances as their children progress; and sharing data about the value of this option for children’s learning and future success.

**We also recommend** that the above plan for kaupapa Māori pathways be integrated within a wider plan for ensuring all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand have access to learning te reo Māori. Ideally this should include opportunities to learn te reo as a language, or to learn in and through te reo Māori (i.e. in bilingual or immersion settings) if they choose. Clearly this cannot happen immediately but there needs to be a deliberate plan to make it possible over time, as otherwise it will never happen. The [Strategy for Languages in Education](#) which we co-wrote with other members of the Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group includes a suggested plan which could be used as a starting point.

What’s missing in this section:

In order for learning to be “relevant to the lives of New Zealanders today and throughout their lives”, it needs to reflect who they are – their culture, language, identity, background and interests. The section on strengthening Māori medium pathways is a valuable contribution to this. However additional actions are needed to ensure the education system is relevant for Pasifika learners, and for learners of other ethnic groups, especially recent migrants. **We recommend** that additional actions be included to support bilingual and immersion education in at least those Pasifika languages that have recently been identified for official support through the new language unit within the Ministry of Pacific Peoples. **We also recommend** that guidance and support be given to ECEs and schools to enable them to use community expertise to provide for first language maintenance and for recognition of learners’ cultures and identities in the classroom, for their diverse learners.

## Objective 5: World-class inclusive public education

COMET Auckland supports all the proposed actions for government in this section. We especially support, and wish to comment on, the following actions.

### Under “Ensure education provision is in the right place”:

**Creating an early learning establishment process:** Relying on the market to regulate ECE provision has led to imbalances of supply and variability of quality. However, there is a tension between the current model of a largely privately owned and run ECE service and the level of government control that would be required to prevent gaps and overlaps in provision. Care would be needed in the setup of any more controlled ECE establishment process to ensure there is still opportunity for a range of service types that respond to community need. A number of years ago, COMET was involved with a cross-agency initiative to increase ECE provision in Manukau, working with the then Manukau City Council, MOE and others. Actions included streamlining the consent process for ECEs, finding space on council reserves in areas where no other suitable land was available, and trialling a play truck to encourage participation. Now, under-provision is rarer; the issue to be solved is more about over-provision in some areas, and inconsistent quality. Changing the establishment process is unlikely to solve the quality issue.

### Under “Promoting interdependence, collaboration and accountability”:

**Increasing monitoring of early learning services:** As stated above, variable quality is a key issue in the early learning system. ERO already monitor ECEs and increasing the frequency of these visits would be unlikely to have much effect. However, it would be useful to review the content and focus of ECE reviews to ensure the main emphasis is on factors that closely affect children’s learning across all strands of Te Whāriki. More importantly there is a need for a stronger support system to ensure that ECEs have the support and expertise needed to address issues identified.

**Strengthening networks at all levels:** Networks among ECEs, schools and tertiary institutions can be extremely valuable for mutual learning and to ensure better pathways for students. The recent review of Tomorrow’s Schools could have been an opportunity to strengthen connections within local areas. Unfortunately, this opportunity seems to have been rejected. This means that Kahui Ako increase in their importance as the strongest existing support for connections across educational institutions. There is still a lot of learning and development needed to find out how to best support Kahui Ako so they achieve their potential. The roles of the MOE Student Achievement Facilitators and of external contracted coordinators are crucial to the success of Kahui Ako and it is important that their numbers and skills are not watered down.

### Under “Realise Māori-Crown partnerships”:

**Greater recognition of Mātauranga Māori:** It has been encouraging to see in recent education documents an increase in mentions of things like language, culture and identity; partnership with iwi mana whenua; and Mātauranga Māori. These things have been largely ignored for too long. There is some concern that these important concepts could be implemented at a surface level only. It takes time and effort to understand values, concepts and worldviews other than the ones from our own culture and up-bringing. Fully recognising Mātauranga Māori through the education system will be a long process but could yield very significant benefits for Māori learners and also for all New Zealanders.