



## **Toi Mai submission on the Ministry of Education consultation on proposal to replace NCEA**

Toi Mai is the workforce development council for the creative, cultural, recreational and technology industries.

We are an independent statutory entity established under s366 of the Education and Training Act 2020. Our legislative functions include standard setting and providing investment advice to TEC, which we do by identifying gaps and needs in workforce skills and training through industry engagement and research. Toi Mai was established to act as an advisor to government and oversee vocational-level qualification for the creative, cultural, recreational and technology industries.

Our vision is that Aotearoa has confidence in and aspiration for our sectors and sees them as crucial to our success as a nation.

Our purpose is to ensure our industries are supported by a skilled, thriving and sustainable workforce. We do this through developing qualifications and standards, and providing trusted advice to government, industry and education providers about what needs to change to ensure our industries have the skills they need.

### **Toi Mai supports the proposal to strengthen foundational skills, but there should be a greater focus on future-proofing New Zealand's economic future through digital, creative and transferable skills...**

Building foundational skills is essential for enabling a future resilient and adaptable workforce.

Having gained insight from our industries such as journalism, technology and screen through workforce development plans, we support the reform's intention to strengthen foundational skills, particularly traditional literacy, given the concerns raised about current levels of some learners.

However, for the reforms to be both effective and provide long-term value, there needs to be an expansion and more explicit focus on foundational skills other than numeracy and literacy, but those that span across the whole economy. Research points to three areas of particular importance: digital literacy skills, creative skills, and transferable skills.

For digital skills, research shows that to cultivate a strong domestic technology workforce, it is crucial to integrate digital technology throughout the school curriculum. Limiting subject choice early on can create pathway issues, and if not addressed, could perpetuate a workforce that is already facing shortages and significant under-representation of Māori, Pacific Peoples, and women. Early exposure in school is a key factor in building interest and participation, and without this, learners may be less likely to pursue these fields in the future.<sup>1</sup> The further need for a focused approach on digital foundational skills is highlighted by the increase in digital technology related occupations between 2018 and 2023, where the number rose from around 105,000 to 173,000 – a 65% rise.

Creative skills are expected to play an ever-growing part in the future economy. In New Zealand though, enrolments in secondary school arts subjects have dropped by 30 percent since 2008. Creativity as a skill has been linked to jobs which are more likely to grow as a percentage of the workforce by 2030, and the value of these attributes is not limited to creative occupations.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, for instance, creativity has been identified as the most significant predictor of occupation growth up to 2030. As identified by Manatū Taonga | Ministry for Culture and Heritage, in its release of *Amplify*, creative skills are an asset to both those working in the industry and those in the wider workforce, through supporting education, health, social cohesion, but also through its contribute directly to productivity and innovation in industry.

Research undertaken by Toi Mai - in collaboration with other workforce development councils identified five core transferable skills: sense of self, learning to learn, critical thinking, interacting with people, participation and contributing. Ensuring these skills are reflected in the new curriculum and assessment regime would likely have a significant benefit across wider working population. Toi Mai is concerned with the decision to remove Outdoor Education as a senior subject, given the value and opportunity it provides for learners to develop and apply leadership and transferable skills. Likewise, the removal of subjects, such as Art History, which promote broad knowledge and deep thinking, must be reversed.

Without a more targeted approach to skills, these reforms risk undermining the long-term sustainable pipeline of talent, reducing innovation in other parts of the economy, and ultimately limiting productivity.

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<sup>1</sup> [toimai.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Screen-version-Barriers-to-diversity-in-the-Aotearoa-tech-sector.pdf](https://toimai.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Screen-version-Barriers-to-diversity-in-the-Aotearoa-tech-sector.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre. Creativity and the Future of Skills (London: Nesta, November 2018). <https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creativity-and-the-Future-of-Skills-report.pdf>.

## **...and ensuring our future workforce have the skills our economy will require**

Toi Mai is concerned with how the current proposal will prepare our future workforce for the skills they will need to support our economy over the next few decades.

By 2050, it is estimated that just under a quarter of the population will identify as Māori – it is critical the skills system prepares them for this future and enables them to learn in ways that meet their needs.

## **The proposed changes to focus on subjects will limit future pathways for learners**

As the independent voice of industry within the vocational education and training system of the creative, cultural, recreation and technology sectors, the reforms will raise some concerns for our industries. The reclassification of certain vocational subjects' risks the opportunities available to students to develop skills, such as Outdoor Education.

Offering a broad range of subjects is important for young learners to explore areas of interest they might not otherwise encounter. An overemphasis on academic routes further disadvantages vocational pathways that provide direct entry into industries such as technology, digital, screen, and exercise, with many of these areas not requiring degrees. It's important to give learners the options of both vocational and academic pathways, rather than one or the other.

Enabling learners to develop skills through a wide range of interests—whether through creative subjects, digital fields, or outdoor activities, is essential for building a resilient and adaptable workforce.

It is important the new vocational-aligned subjects are seen as complementary and knowledge enhancing to the academic subjects also offered, providing deeper learning in a subject and providing both vocational and academic tertiary pathways to learners. There is a risk the vocational subjects will be seen as subservient in relation to 'academic' subjects and thus create unintended streaming within the secondary school system.

## **Industry needs may not be met due to reduced flexibility, unclear learner capabilities, and less practical assessment**

Some of our industries have raised the move to a subject-based approach rather than a competency –based standards approach risks misalignment between learner capability

and industry needs. The proposed changes would show overall completion of a subject, but not a learner's capability. This risk is further elevated with fewer standards available limiting the range of knowledge and skills that can be taught.

Without this clarity, employers cannot easily recognise learner strengths, and important opportunities for practical skill development and reassessment may be lost.

The increased focus on external assessment as opposed to internal assessment risks reducing opportunities for skill development through practical skills demonstration. Outdoor education is an example here, where schools currently use a combination of unit standards and achievement standards to teach physical-context skills as well as the knowledge rich part of the subject. For creative subjects, we have heard of the importance of maintaining portfolio and performance-based assessment. In addition to this, there is concern around the reliance on standardised testing and the lack of consideration for different learning styles and needs.