



Briefing on Muka Tangata's work plan

Report of the Primary Production Committee

July 2023

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Steph Lewis
Chairperson

Briefing on Muka Tangata's work plan

Recommendation

The Primary Production Committee has considered a briefing on Muka Tangata's work plan, and recommends that the House take note of its report.

About Muka Tangata—People, Food and Fibre

Muka Tangata is one of six Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) established in October 2020 as part of the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE). Muka Tangata is the WDC for the food and fibre sector. It supports education and training providers and industry by providing advice and developing qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials, so that people in the sector gain the skills needed for their profession.

We received a briefing from Muka Tangata on its work since being established, and its plan for the future.

Issues faced by the food and fibre sector

Over the past year, Muka Tangata has undertaken a number of engagements with industry groups. From them it has observed that:

- there is an “endemic” skill and labour shortage in the food and fibre sector
- the number of students in vocational education has been decreasing
- employers, learners, and education providers find formal vocational education to be inflexible and complex
- the vocational education and training system does not work for those with diverse needs.

How Muka Tangata is responding

To address these issues, Muka Tangata has set four objectives, which we discuss below:

- simplifying qualifications, standards, and programmes
- improving relevance, accessibility, and quality
- having good and easily accessible information
- removing barriers and complexity.

Simplifying qualifications, standards, and programmes

Muka Tangata's first objective is the “radical simplification” of qualifications, standards, and programmes. Historically, it has taken between two and four years for new qualifications to be developed and then made available for study. By that time, study material is unlikely to be relevant to learners and their industry. Muka Tangata is aiming to reduce the development time for new qualifications to one year.

Qualifications reviews

Muka Tangata began its *Seafood Qualifications Review* in April 2023. The review covers seafood processing, commercial fishing, and aquaculture qualifications. It is focused on refining and simplifying these qualifications and developing new, mandatory skills standards. The review should result in qualifications that meet the current and future needs of employers, and enable all learners to succeed. Muka Tangata highlighted the benefits of working with iwi Māori, industry, and vocational education and training providers on the review. It said that having everyone at the table allows the review to progress quickly. Muka Tangata hopes to increase enrolments within a year of the new qualifications coming into effect. Muka Tangata informed us that the review is scheduled to be completed in December 2023. It will then commence its review of forestry qualifications.

Improving relevance, accessibility, and quality

Muka Tangata's second objective is to improve the relevance, accessibility, and quality of vocational education and training (VET). It believes that VET needs to move away from a "tick-box approach" to an "enabling approach". Muka Tangata informed us that a number of education providers left the sector in the past decade, and that its role is to work alongside providers and encourage their re-entry into the vocational education system.

Engagement with primary school students

We noted that the Ministry of Education has found that children begin to consider their future careers between the ages of 7 and 9 years old. We asked whether Muka Tangata is considering primary school students as well as secondary school students.

Muka Tangata said it remains focused on its role of simplifying qualifications. It noted that it inherited 86 qualifications and 1,332 standards. It acknowledged the challenges faced by schools careers advisers who must advise on a complex system.

Consistency with NCEA

We asked Muka Tangata how it can ensure that its qualifications are consistent with NCEA (the National Certificate of Educational Achievement). Muka Tangata told us that it is doing a lot of work so that industry-based standards are used in schools. We learned that schools no longer have to pay to use industry-based standards. Muka Tangata is responsible for moderating the standards. It said that this approach is working well.

Muka Tangata is also considering whether to continue to use the industry-based standards that are currently available and applicable to secondary school learning, or whether to begin a more comprehensive review of the existing curriculum.

Consistency across workforce development councils

We asked about the level of consistency across the six WDCs. Muka Tangata explained that each WDC is different, as are the workforce conditions and needs of each sector. Although there are shared principles across the WDCs, Muka Tangata believes that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be appropriate.

Having good and easily accessible information

The third objective is to have good and easily accessible information. Alongside the other WDCs, Muka Tangata has developed a shared data platform so that all participants are using the same information.

Data use and collection

The new shared data platform hosts Muka Tangata's 14 industry-specific workforce development plans.¹ These plans provide the user with trends and analysis of workforce, industry, and learner data. Muka Tangata emphasised that the new platform is designed to be user-friendly. We heard that it has carried out user testing to be sure that the platform functions as it should. Muka Tangata said that the workforce development plans are only a first version. It continues to seek feedback from industry on ways to improve and refine the plans.

We asked Muka Tangata how it considers and incorporates te ao Māori in collecting data. It said it is acutely aware that the way data is collected and used can reinforce biases. It emphasised that it endeavours to collect data that accurately and appropriately reflects what success looks like for ākonga Māori (Māori learners).

Removing barriers and complexity

Muka Tangata's fourth objective is to remove barriers to participation and reduce the complexity of the VET system. Industry groups have found that qualifications are overly complicated and dense. Muka Tangata described the 86 qualifications and 1,332 standards as being "stuffed" full over the past 30 years, and said that they must now be stripped back to essential material.

Supporting diverse needs

We asked what Muka Tangata can do to support neurodiverse learners. Muka Tangata responded that it can "get out of the way". It acknowledged that the VET system historically has not been responsive to the needs of disabled people and neurodiverse people. It said that taking a less prescriptive approach to assessments is very effective. It added that it is interested in broadening the ways in which learners can present evidence for assessment, such as videos, photographs, and work evidence. Muka Tangata is still considering how assessment frameworks will accommodate these different presentation methods. It hopes that, by focusing on outcomes rather than the process, VET providers can better cater for different learning needs.

Culture of the food and fibre sector

Accommodating learners

We observed that, despite their desire to continue learning, a number of people early in their careers on-farm struggle to get the time they need for classroom learning. We asked how Muka Tangata encourages farmers to accommodate the needs of their employees.

¹ Workforce development plans are available to view at <https://mukatangata.workforceskills.nz/>.

Muka Tangata said it needs to encourage as many models of learning as possible. It reasoned that learners and employers have diverse needs, and that it cannot design an education system that only works for some. It reiterated that qualifications and assessment methods need to be less prescriptive, to allow for innovative methods of teaching and learning.

Recognising the value of qualifications

Muka Tangata pointed out that job listings in the food and fibre sector rarely specify any required qualifications. We heard that the sector needs to recognise the value of qualifications.

We asked how Muka Tangata is working to address this. It acknowledged that the current cost of living makes it challenging to encourage changes in behaviour. Many farmers will be reluctant to alter their approach to hiring when there are increasing cost pressures. We heard that a change in perception is a long-term goal that Muka Tangata will continue to work toward.

Te ao Māori approach

We asked Muka Tangata how it incorporates te ao Māori into its work. Muka Tangata said that it is keenly focused on kaupapa Māori “because it is the right thing to do”. It informed us that every business group at Muka Tangata has a senior Māori lead, and that 30 percent of its staff are Māori.

Muka Tangata has also undertaken a literature review which demonstrated that a strong focus on Māori pedagogical approaches is central to ākonga Māori success.² We also learned about *Te Whakatōnga*, a report on how Muka Tangata can incorporate mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori values into its National Quality Assurance and Moderation Plan from 2023 onward.³ Muka Tangata reasoned that VET providers need to support ākonga Māori to succeed, because ākonga Māori success rates are currently “nowhere near where they need to be”. It described incorporating te ao Māori into its quality assurance system as one of the “biggest levers” it has.

² *Whiria te Muka Tangata report: Literature scan and research recommendations*, Muka Tangata, August 2022.

³ *Te Whakatōnga*, Muka Tangata, February 2023.

Appendix

Committee procedure

We met between 9 March and 27 July 2023 to consider this briefing. We received written and oral evidence from Muka Tangata.

Committee members

Steph Lewis (Chairperson)
Mark Cameron
Nicola Grigg
Anna Lorck
Hon Todd McClay
Joseph Mooney
Soraya Peke-Mason
Angela Roberts

Evidence received

We received two written submissions from Muka Tangata as evidence for this briefing. They are available on the Parliament website, www.parliament.nz.

A recording of our hearing can be accessed online at the following link:

- [Hearing of evidence 4 May 2023](#)