

Hon Anne Tolley
Minister for Tertiary Education



SPEECH

Education Forum, Porirua

Venue: Te Rauparaha Arena, Porirua
Time: 4.30 pm, 24th August 2009

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā hau e wha. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Thank you Russell Marshall and all of you for welcoming me today. I'd also like to acknowledge my colleague Hekia Parata MP. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this Education Forum.

This forum is an excellent example of tertiary providers working with their communities to ensure their development needs are met. I understand this is the fourth forum that Whitireia has arranged in conjunction with the Porirua City Council, and I applaud this initiative.

The tertiary providers here today work with industries to provide their future employees. It is essential that we all coordinate our efforts with both the schooling sector and other tertiary providers, to ensure that students have clear pathways to achieve their goals, educationally and careerwise.

This is summed up in today's theme, 'Working Together to Lift Educational Achievement' – a theme that is particularly important and timely. The current economic climate presents challenges for the whole sector. It has highlighted the role of tertiary education as a key driver of our country's cultural, social and economic performance.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that we will be doing all that we can to ensure that our return to growth continues as strongly as possible, for as long as possible.

The Government has economic plans for achieving this, consisting of six main drivers. They are:

- Regulatory reform
- Investment in infrastructure
- Better public services
- Innovation and business assistance
- A world-class tax system
- And, not least, education and skills

We want to ensure the system makes your job of working together as easy as possible. By doing so, we can make it responsive to the needs of students, industry and communities.

Government priorities

Among our priorities for education, we want every young person to have the skills and qualifications to contribute to their – and New Zealand’s – future and we want relevant tertiary education that meets student and labour market needs. Just as importantly for your community, we want Māori to enjoy education success as Māori.

The Government has clear priorities for tertiary education. We want to:

- simplify the tertiary education funding system
- reduce central bureaucracy
- strengthen quality and require accountability
- support and encourage students, and
- improve the interface between schools and tertiary education institutions.

Work is under way to achieve these and they will present challenges for both Government and the sector. But it will also present opportunities to build a stronger, more responsive tertiary system.

Participation in tertiary education has increased rapidly over the past decade, and the cost of tertiary education has also grown significantly.

We don’t have the financial resources at our disposal that we had in the recent past. We have to work smarter to find ways to do more with what we have. We want a funding system that is easy to understand, provides more certainty for providers and is clear that a key driver of funding is performance.

To do this, we will increase flexibility for providers within their allocated funding, provide incentives for providers to respond to the market, and introduce a range of administrative efficiencies to the planning and funding system.

We need to reduce the Government’s administrative costs and the compliance costs faced by providers. We have worked hard already to streamline the TEC, and all education agencies will continue to look at their functions over the course of this government. We also want less central planning – in other words, the needs of students and the economy should have a bigger say in driving the provision of tertiary education.

We are committed to improving the efficiency of the tertiary education system to maintain its effectiveness and ensure access for priority groups is not compromised.

We can help do this by prioritising spending where it can most benefit students and the economy.

To help support and encourage students we will look to improve the quantity and quality of publicly available information. This will put the pressure on providers to respond better to the needs of students and employers. As part of this, we want to make information about provider quality more publicly available so prospective students can make informed decisions about what and where they want to study.

We want providers to focus on quality and we will hold them accountable, through their performance, for the education they provide. This includes lifting the numbers of our young people completing qualifications that are meaningful.

Tertiary Education Strategy

The Government's draft Tertiary Education Strategy, which we will release in late September, sets out these strategic priorities and will set the direction for tertiary education in New Zealand over the next 5 to 10 years. It will be more concise than the previous strategy and will give the sector a clear sense of the Government's priorities.

Ultimately, we seek to ensure that more New Zealanders achieve at higher levels of tertiary education.

We will be consulting with you on our draft strategy later in the year, and we will welcome your feedback.

Transitions and Youth Achievement

Just over a third (19,550) of school leavers in 2007 left school without completing NCEA Level 2. These percentages are higher for Māori and Pasifika students. This has to change, because those who leave school with low or no qualifications have fewer options in the employment market and, if they enrol in tertiary study, generally find the going more difficult.

Both the secondary and tertiary education sectors need to work together to lift the achievement of young New Zealanders.

Institutes of technology and polytechnics such as Whitireia play a vital role in this. The applied professional and vocational education you offer provides clear pathways for many high-school students looking to their futures, providing the skills they need, the skills New Zealand industry needs and the skills your community and region needs.

You also provide a vital source of foundation learning for those undertaking study at levels one to three of the National Qualifications Framework, and provide the skills for others to advance on to degree level learning at university.

Young people face a more challenging employment market than they have for many years, and the importance of vocational skills and education is increasingly well understood by young New Zealanders.

We recognise the challenges being faced by young people, and the crucial role your sector has to play in helping them ready themselves for the employment market. We have committed to an \$8 million funding boost to help high-performing polytechnics and institutes of technology collectively to provide up to 700 new places to help cope with forecast enrolment growth next year.

I welcome the effort you've put in so far, but I want to encourage you all to do more. Last week I announced proposals to improve ITP governance alongside a more flexible interventions framework. I look forward to working with people, such as Dennis Sharma from Whitireia who is also the Chair of the ITPNZ governance sub-committee, to strengthen the education that ITPs offer our communities.

More young people must complete tertiary education. I'm pleased to see that around 90 percent of students enrolled at Whitireia complete their courses. We have to ensure more New Zealanders are successfully completing their studies.

Part of helping more young people to complete tertiary education is assisting them to gain recognised qualifications that lead to employment.

Reviewing both unit and achievement standards of the NCEA in senior secondary schooling is part of this. So is the work on Trades Academies, trades in schools, and the initial roll-out of the Youth Guarantee Scheme.

Youth Guarantee

For some of our young people, the school system isn't a good fit. The Youth Guarantee is a key initiative in ensuring that these young people have opportunities to participate in tertiary education without paying fees.

While most 16 and 17 year olds stay at school, Youth Guarantee recognises that others will be more motivated to achieve qualifications in a tertiary education setting. It will provide them with this opportunity now, rather than leaving them in the more challenging scenario of attempting to re-enter the education system at the tertiary level after disengaging from schooling.

Youth Guarantee will focus on a range of vocationally focused courses linked to Levels 1-3 on the National Qualifications Framework. Building on the ability to read, write and do maths will also be part of the course.

There will be up to 2000 full-time equivalent student places for the Youth Guarantee in 2010 and 2011, at a cost of \$52.7 million. The scheme will focus on areas with high youth unemployment rates and look at access to suitable vocational training programmes.

The ultimate aim is to make the scheme available to all 16 and 17 year-olds as funding permits. The decision to fast-forward the Youth Guarantee delivers on the Prime Minister's commitment at the February Jobs Summit.

Trades Academies

As an example of where we are heading, Trades Academies will provide to school-aged students opportunities to undertake trades and technology programmes. They will be based on partnerships between schools, tertiary institutions, industry training organisations and employers. Currently we have 11 plans for Academies that are now at the stage of putting together a business plan. Included amongst these are some truly innovative proposals – it is very rewarding to see that when we issue the challenge for better and more responsive education for New Zealanders, the sector can come up with great ideas.

In addition, plans are underway to launch the country's first Tertiary High School at Manukau Institute of Technology in 2010. The Tertiary High School will offer a course of study to students in years 11-13 who have been identified by their schools as unlikely to succeed in a conventional school setting, but who are motivated to succeed in a tertiary setting, and whose parents support them in this move.

Lifting system performance for Māori in tertiary education

A crucial part of improving the way we do things is lifting system performance for Maori. This goal underlies all priorities in the education sector. The whole sector needs to understand and act on the evidence about what matters most to improve education for and with Māori learners.

As Minister of Education, I am absolutely committed to achieving change for Māori in education at all levels. Change is critical to the revitalisation of tikanga, mātauranga, and te reo Māori through teaching and research.

Tertiary providers are accountable for achievement by their Māori students and must build partnerships with their local iwi and communities. Wānanga have played a significant role in encouraging tertiary education participation for Māori, and I acknowledge their tremendous achievements here. However, I expect all tertiary providers to consider how their environment and teaching practices can improve for Māori students. I'd also like to note that I have the same expectations for other sectors within education.

Concluding remarks

I'd like to thank you for your time today. We know what needs to improve, plans are in place, and work is underway. Working together, we can achieve our goals.

Thank you.