

Policy | 2014

Centres of Vocational Excellence

HIGHLIGHTS

Labour will:

- establish Centres of Vocational Excellence to drive training and innovation in industries that are vital to our economy and our regions.

The Issue

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) are a crucial element of New Zealand's tertiary education system.

They play a key role in ensuring that the workforce has the skills and training to drive innovation and to ensure labour market needs are met at a regional and national level. They are important for regional development, and serve as economic 'anchors' for the regions they serve.

In the recent past not enough attention has been paid to supporting the development of trade and skill training. An emphasis on degree qualifications and attending university has diminished an interest in trade training, undermining our ability to grow the economy. We need to actively encourage young New Zealanders into trades training, and support others to re-train.

ITPs are not being valued –and they are losing out financially. The Tertiary Education Union estimates that the government has cut funding for regional polytechnics by a total of \$60 million since 2010¹.

Labour's Plan

Labour will ensure that there is a network of regional institutions dedicated to meeting the labour market and skill needs of our regions. In some cases this may require additional support to enable institutions to operate where there are not the student numbers to support them.

Labour is putting aside \$1 billion (rising with inflation) each year to meet cost pressures in health, education, and other public services. This will allow us to guarantee that the education sector gets enough funding to maintain real spending in the face of inflation and population growth. Further details about funding for tertiary institutions will be released in our full Tertiary Education policy.

In addition to support for individual institutions, we will also take action to reinforce the strengths of our ITP network and to lift the status of vocational education. Excellence and quality are as much a part of vocational education as they are in research-led university education.

¹ <http://teu.ac.nz/2014/05/assault-regional-polytechnics/>

In order to develop excellence in vocational training it is essential that there is a high level of collaboration. This requires a partnership between ITPs, tutors, industry training organisations, businesses and local communities.

Labour will:

establish Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) to be based at Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics to provide a focus for driving excellence in training, research and innovation in a particular industry or sector.

The Centres will operate in a similar way to CoREs and support collaboration between those working in a field from different institutions, agencies and businesses. ITPs will be invited to propose the establishment of a centre based on an existing area of expertise or specialisation.

This policy will strongly align with regional development plans that will be developed in consultation with regions. The Centres will support partnerships between local polytechnics and industry.

Particular priority will be given to regional ITPs which have existing expertise in an industry or sector or in whose region an industry has a significant footprint, and where there is evidence of good partnerships with Industry Training Organisations and businesses.

We will commit \$40 million dollars over four years to this initiative (\$10 million per annum) and we will aim to have 10 Centres established by the end of our first term.

The final criteria and process for deciding on the location and focus of Centres will be agreed in consultation with ITPs and ITOs.

Both in relation to CoVEs and in general, an effective, innovative and quality vocational education and training system is only possible if ITPs and ITOs work closely together to ensure that quality training is provided in a relevant manner.

Labour will:

improve the way that ITPs and ITOs work together including through joint curriculum development, clearer qualifications and more flexible learning pathways.

A focus on the regions

The Centres of Vocational Excellence policy will dovetail in with Labour's focus on the regions. We will put the money in to lift our regions to their full potential and improve the lives of families because it is the right thing to do.

Labour will work in partnership with each region to develop a Regional Growth Plan. These plans will identify the opportunities and barriers to growth, as well as practical measures to create a step-change for each region's economy. These will not just be more strategy documents to gather dust on the shelf; Labour is going to back these plans by investing in infrastructure and by investing in our people. A \$200 million Regional Development Fund will help pay for capital investments that will upgrade regional economies in line with their Regional Growth Plans,

These plans will provide an important context for the activities of Centres of Vocational Excellence.