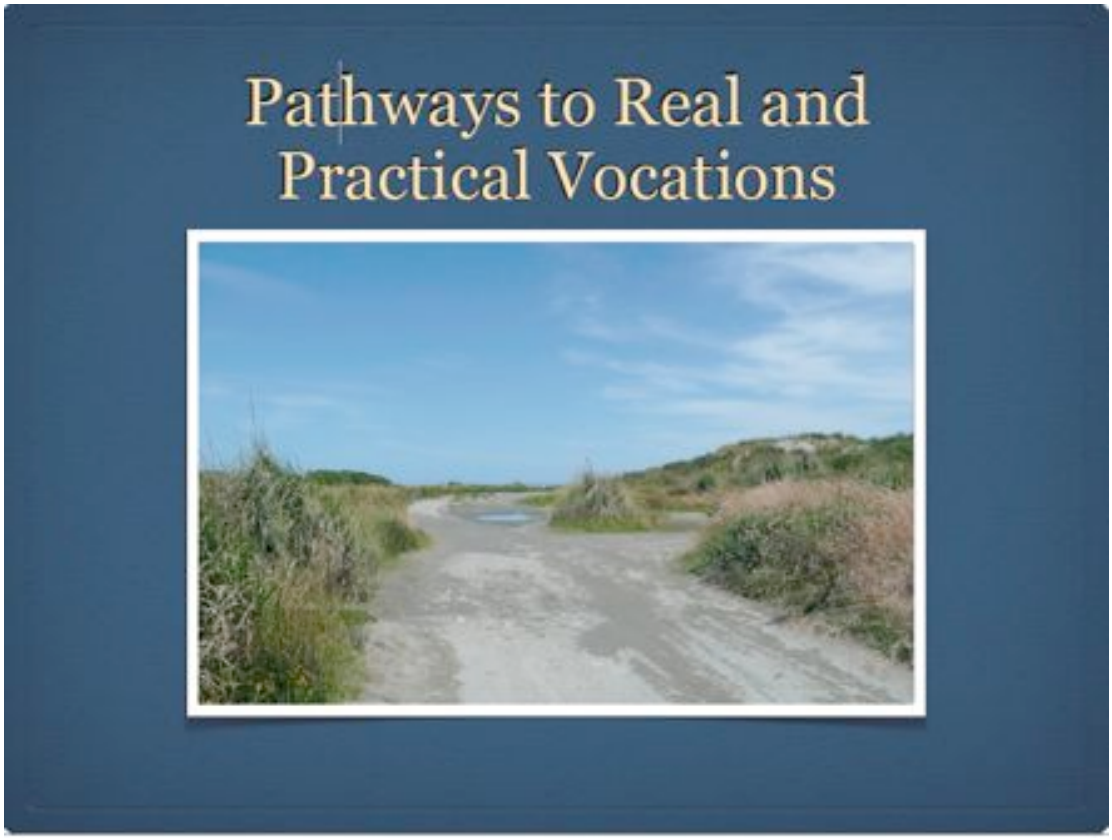
“Pathways to Real and Practical Vocations”

ITF Annual Conference– 29 July 2010



This is the road to Hokio Beach – one of my favourite places in New Zealand.

The beach itself is fantastic – long, white, sandy, stretching away north towards the Manwatu river and Foxton, and south towards the Kapiti Coast.

It’s a great place – if you can get to it. Not only is Hokio itself a little out of the way, and even a little run-down, it’s a one-way road, and this beach section of the road is full of pot-holes, prone to shifting and has lots of false turns….

A bit like pathways to vocational education and training in NZ.

The end point is undeniably a good one – but the pathways – like quite a few roads in NZ – leave something to be desired…

At the ITF, we have done a lot of thinking about how we could achieve better pathways and destinations in vocational education and training.

This is no simple matter. If it was, it would have been sorted long ago.

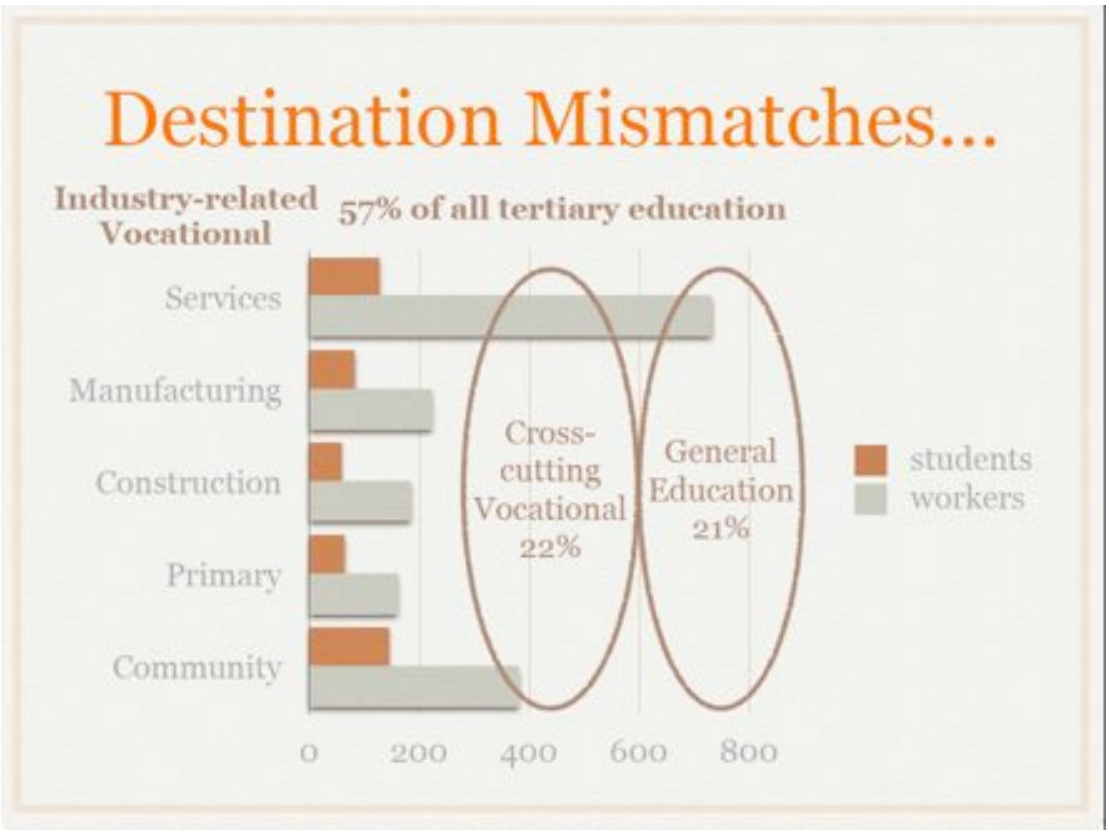
We did a lot of thinking last year about how to better match what is offered with what is needed by industry.

Those of you at last year's Conference who saw my presentation will recall we believe that we found some ways of moving forward.

The first key principle was not to assume that all forms of tertiary education and training could or should be matched.

We suggested that tertiary education could be logically divided into three broad categories:

- industry-related vocational education and training
- cross-cutting vocational education and training
- general education and training



We have continued to develop that thinking, and it has been used more and more by ITOs and other tertiary organisations using the Industry Profiles Tool and the Industry Skills Toolkit.

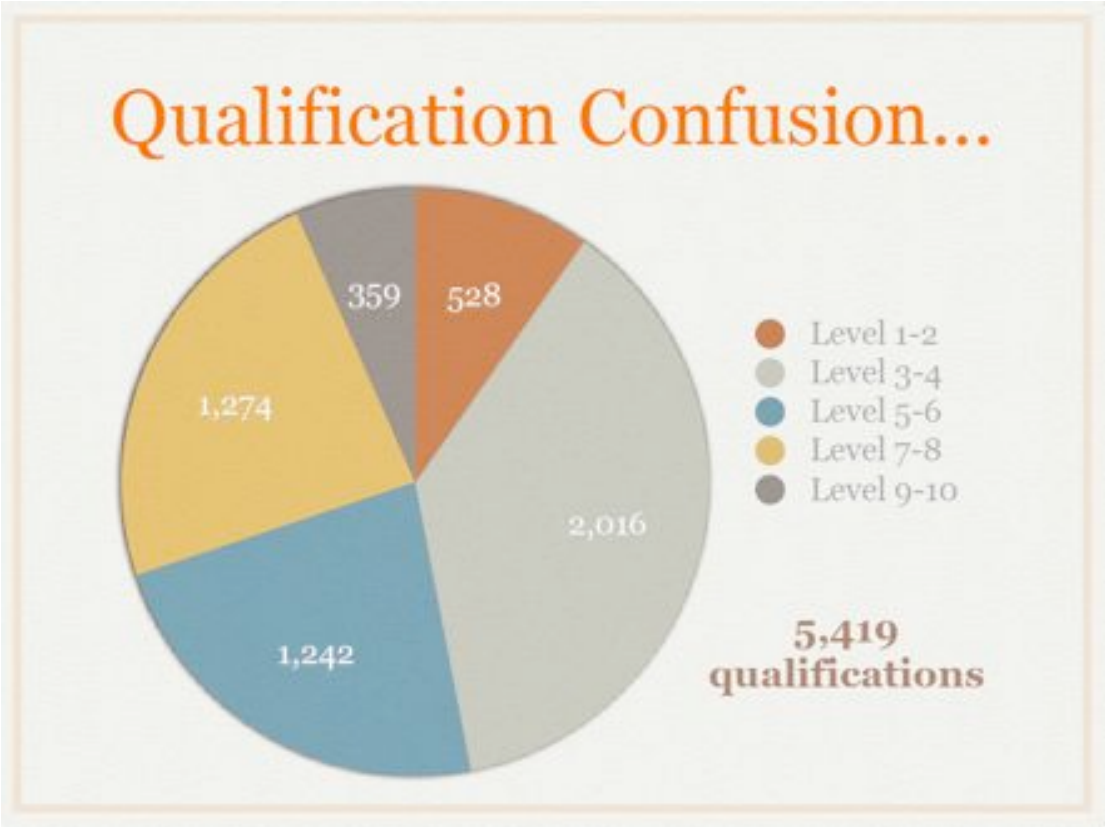
What that data showed us is that:

- around 57% of all tertiary education is “industry-related” – that’s a big chunk, and getting the match right here is not only desirable, but critical

- There are quite significant “gross” miss-matches between the numbers of people studying in this area relate to five broad sectors (show mismatches)

- Of course – “industry-related vocational education and training” isn’t all of tertiary – there are also

    - cross-cutting vocational – which is around 22%
    - general education – which is around 21%



So… there's at least a strong suggestion that there is some mismatch between what is being delivered and what is needed by industry…

What might be some of the causes of this mismatch?

Well, one area that everyone has begun to look at a lot more closely lately is qualifications.

Lets just review the figures:

- 528 at levels 1 and 2
- 2,016 at levels 3 and 4
- 1,242 at levels 5 and 6
- 1,274 at levels 7 and 8
- 359 at levels 9 and 10

This is 5,419 – down from the nearly 6,000 at the beginning of the year, NZQA is doing good work here, but a lot more needs to change.

Just changing the rules won't change the system. That's going to require a fundamental change in how we approach qualifications design and use – so that it is clear to students, to schools, to parents, to employers, to industry, and even to providers - which of these have real value.

Lets look at an **example**.

If you are a young person who wants to get in to hairdressing, where might you start? What path should you take?

Well – there are 5 National Certificates in the area. They broadly form a coherent structure. The first is the National Certificate in Hairdressing (Salon Support) Level 3, and this rises to level 5 certificates in management and advanced cutting.

20 providers are accredited to assist in gaining the level 3 certificate, which is 75 credits long. Seems like a good way to get in to the industry… no?

The problem is…. it doesn't end there.

There are a further … **58 certificates** in hairdressing available and active on the NZQF **today**.

- 12 are at level 2, with credit values ranging from 60 to 135.
- 32 are at level 3, with credit values ranging from 40 to 144
- 14 are at level 4, with credit values ranging from 40 to 303

It's all enough to cause your hair to fray, frankly. Irrespective of whether you think the National Certificates are up to scratch – this situation serves no one well.

Unfortunately, it just gets worse from here….

Its not just at the level of qualifications that this is pathway confusion – its that there are a very large number of different types of organisations offering vocational education and training pathways…

Lets look at them:

- senior secondary schools
- universities – the traditional, and ‘default’ option for many with academic interests – but also for very many vocational options. NZ has 8 universities – quite a few for a population of 4 million
- ITPs / polytechnics – 20 different institutions around and across the country.
- Wananga – have developed to meet Maori development and educational aspirations
- PTEs – fulfil many important roles in the system – and there are many of them
- and lastly ITOs… which don’t quite fit as they aren’t “training” providers – but which now arrange training for a very substantial number of people in work.

We need a change of approach.

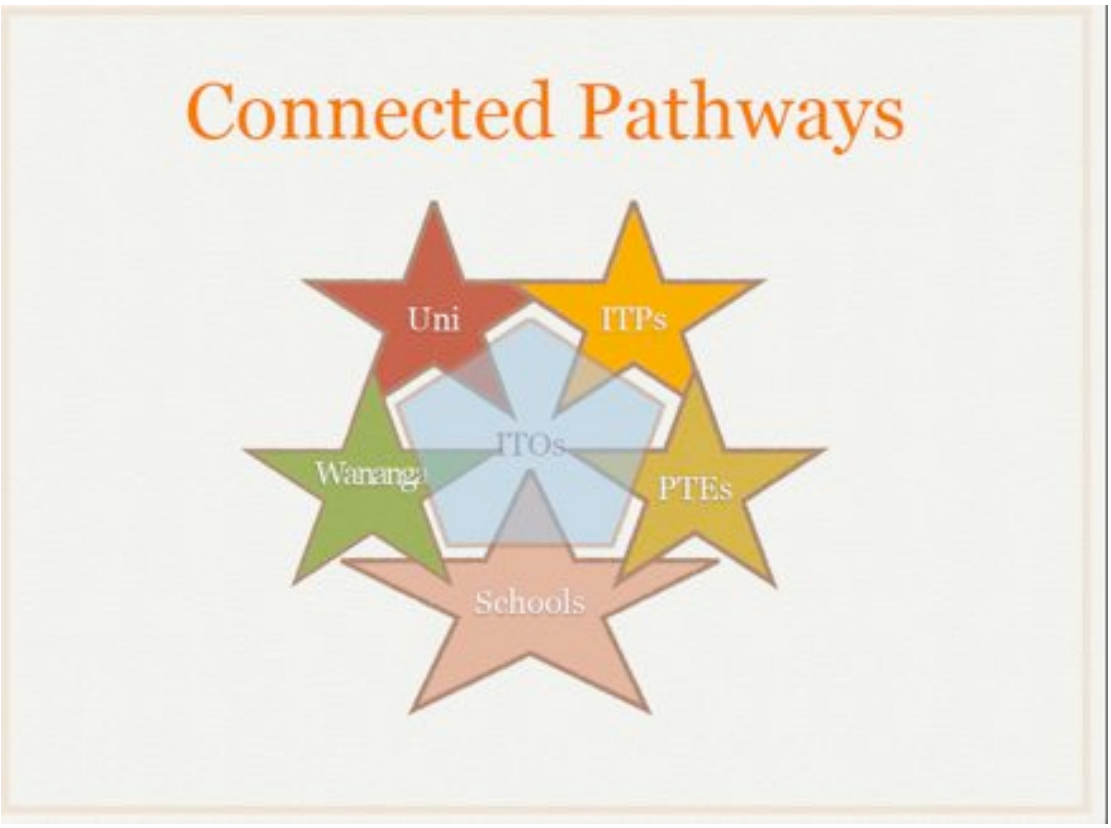
This is not about reducing the diversity or range of choices in the system; while this creates confusion, it is also a strength.

We need – however - to start focusing on **connected pathways**.

Each organisation in tertiary education using **taxpayer, learner** and **industry** funding needs focus on how what **it** does supports learner pathways.

Its pretty clear to us that ITOs – possibly slightly reconfigured – could play a very significant role in this area.

It is for this reason that we have indicated to the Minister for Tertiary Education that the Industry Training Act needs reviewing – that it is past it use-by date – and that one of the key issues that needs to be tackled is the **relationship** between ITOs and other vocational education and training organisations – including schools.



If we are going to be serious and successful at creating more real and effective vocational pathways in tertiary education, we are going to have to get back to some basics.

We need to be clear about the building blocks of successful vocational education and training, and how they are connected.

In tertiary education we always tend to start with **delivery**.

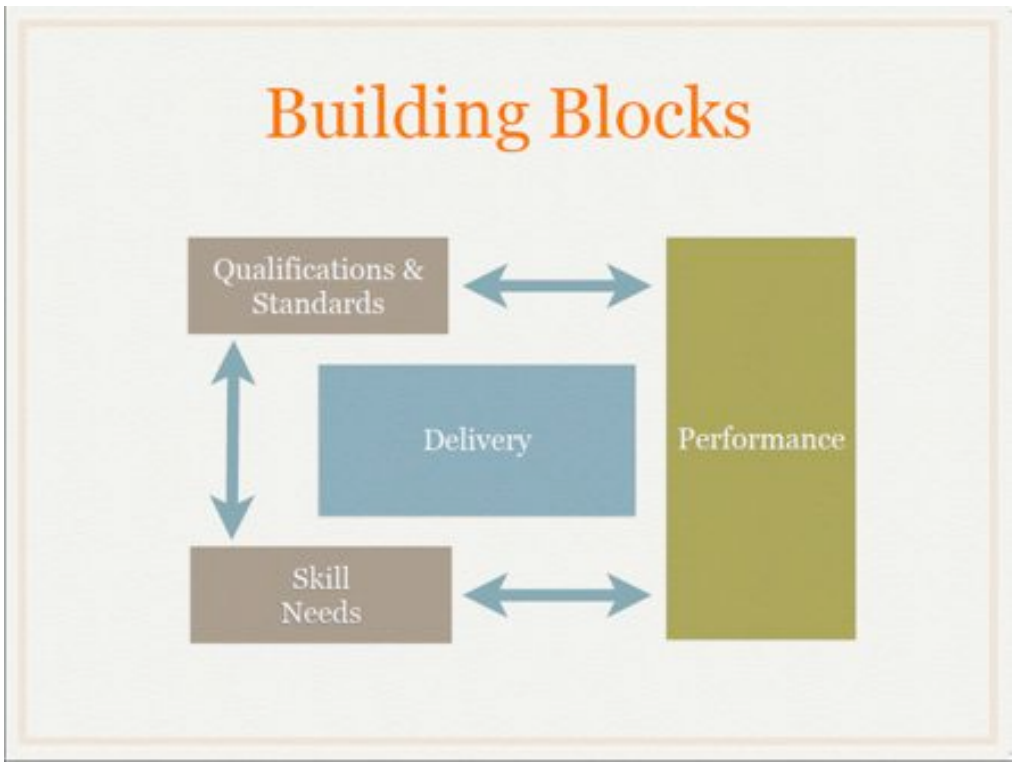
That's ok – but delivery without context or connection isn't really that useful – particularly in VET.

They way we in tertiary education provide context and connection for delivery is through **qualifications and standards**.

In VET the delivery needs to be pretty clearly related to **skill needs**.

And skill needs need to relate to **performance** – ie they need to be important skill needs.

And each of these things needs to work together to support quality VET delivery that results in effective performance.



We can’t fix all of this at once – or today.

So where should we start?

We would suggest with qualifications reform – because qualifications and standards are the currency of tertiary education, the basis of funding, and can provide the connections and framework we need.

Its also an area which is well and truely broken.

So what should we do?

We need to do a range of things.

We do need to reduce the number of qualifications – but that itself is not enough.

What we need just as badly is clarity of **pathways**.

We – and should still have – a range of options – but they need to be clearer to everyone.

We need more “broad-based” entry-level qualifications that don’t close off people’s options.

We need more “specialised” qualifications that people can move onto.

An we probably need further “generic” or “cross-cutting” qualifications at higher levels – in areas such as **management**.

We also need for people to be able to transfer credit from one qualification to another, so they don’t have to start all over again, and waste their time and money – and taxpayer’s money!

All of this is actually NZQA’s core role. It is vital that this role is put into effect – and we all have to help it happen.

So – where should we start with qualifications reform?

I'm a great fan of starting at the beginning – not sure why...

But seriously – vocational education and training in New Zealand needs firm foundations…

And than means in the senior secondary system. Now, I acknowledge that not all industries draw on secondary education directly – but it is a pretty good place to start.

So – what do we have?

Well – we have the **NCEA**. Its been through quite a few trials and tribulations, but its now a pretty well accepted qualification.

It board, has three levels, and is standards based – it integrates well with industry standards.

So everything should be ok? …. right?

Sadly… no – but its not the fault of the NCEA.

Its what **we** in vocational education and training have failed to do.

The university sector has "university entrance". This has become the "default" flavouring on the NCEA.

This isn't a criticism of "university entrance" – which is relatively clear and works well with NCEA (in fact research shows that NCEA UE is a much better predictor of university success than the old bursary system was…)

No the issue is – again – that **all** of use in VET have failed to provide the VET equivalent of "university entrance"….

Instead of an equally clear vocational pathway or pathways we have created a plethora of options –

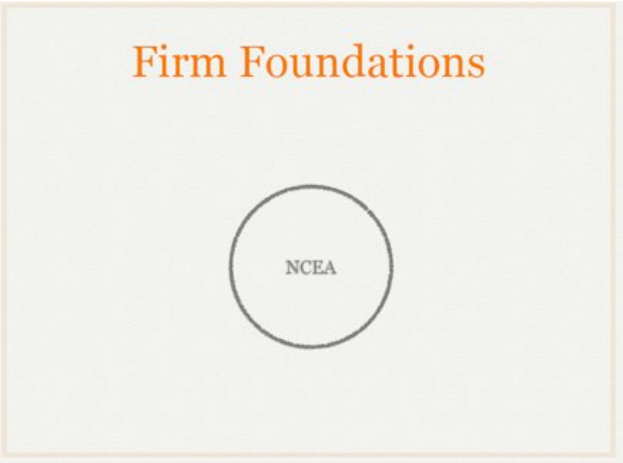
Its very hard for students, teachers, parents and schools to negotiate their way through this mass of options.

Remember - there are 528 certificates at Levels 1 and 2…

Again – this situation isn't really helping anyone. It's a loose-loose situation.

VET needs to provide another option to "University Entrance" for the **70%** of young people who **don't** go to university (and probably for quite a few that do….)

We need to help **clear up the confusion**, and create some real and practical pathways to a range of vocational education and training options.



Firm Foundations

ITOs have been thinking about this issue for quite some time.

In fact, as those of you who attended the previous session on vocational pathways in schools and what the data tells us about that, ITOs have been a lot more than thinking about this – they have been working to do something about it.

But while there have been huge successes here – with over 57,000 secondary students achieving at least one ITO-developed standard in 2009 – ITOs have increasingly realised that their efforts haven't been **sufficiently co-ordinated** – either with each other or with all the other activity that others engaging in with secondary schools.

So, ITOs have been thinking – and today we have a proposal for the whole VET sector in NZ:

Sectoral Qualifications for the senior secondary system

And what do we mean by “sectoral qualifications” for the senior secondary system?

We mean:

- broad-based qualifications at levels 1 to 3 which are linked to broad vocational “sectors” (the same broad sectors we identified in “Matching Supply and Demand”):
    - Services
    - Building and Construction
    - Manufacturing and Technology
    - Primary
    - Social and Community

- qualifications which integrate with and support the NCEA by providing motivation for students

- qualifications which link to a broad range of further vocational education and training pathways – but also don’t close off any options, including both vocational and general university study

What would this mean for?

- **A 15-year-old who has a clear idea of what they want to do and knows that includes going to university?**
  It might not change their schooling at all. The school system is already geared up to cater for students who want to go to university. But it might provide them with the opportunity to contextualise their academic interests. The Bright Sparks programme run by ETITO provides students with the opportunity to explore electro-technology; and 25% of these students go on to do university engineering degrees.

- **A 15-year-old who doesn't know exactly what they want to do, but knows they like doing something practical?**
  They could do a sectoral qualification in, for example, the built environment sector. It would not limit them to any one particular industry, but gives them a taste of the skills, knowledge and understanding that could lead to employment or further education in a particular industry. It would help contextualise the core curriculum subjects of maths, science and English into the working world and make those subjects more relevant to them. They might, after a year, have a more specific idea of where they want to head and head towards and apprenticeship in a particular industry through the Gateway. The work they have already done will support that pathway.

- **A 15 year old who really has no idea what they want to do?**
  They could choose a **broad** sectoral qualification based on the kind of things they like – and thus have the chance to explore their options. For example, if they like working with people, they might choose the sectoral qualification in the service industries area. This would in no ways limits any decisions they might make in the future for further tertiary education, but would give them a qualification when they leave school which *could* lead to work in a particular industry. Alternatively, they might decide that university is for them after all.

- **A teacher planning programmes for their students?**
  Teachers have a pretty good idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the students in front of them, and the NCEA system was designed to support students by recognising success in multiple pathways. By offering these sectoral qualifications, teachers could move beyond "university or not" and offer programmes to students that lead in a meaningful and valuable direction that suits the strengths of their students while helping them gain the NCEA at the same time.

- **Employers?**
  Through ITOs, industries would have an input into ensuring that the sectoral qualifications that can be gained in schools provide a wider range of students with exposure to their industries, and thus increase their future source of employees.

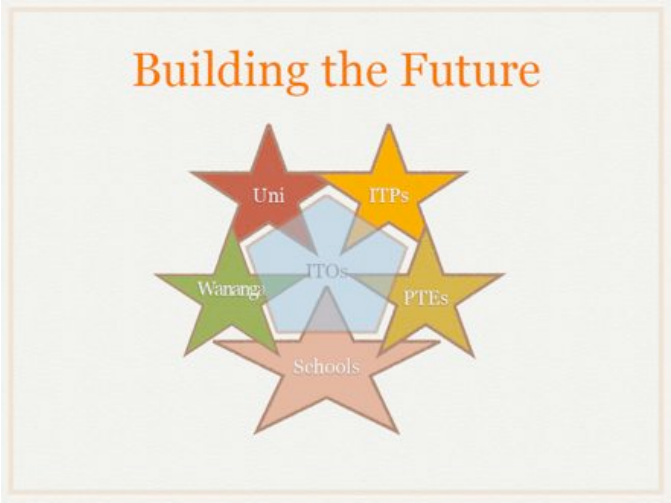
ITOs think the proposal for sectoral qualifications is a win-win-win-win-win proposal:

- a win for students and their parents
- a win for secondary schools and teachers
- a win for employers and industry
- and a win for the vocational education and training sector

– **if** we can get it together…

If we are to successfully implement this proposal, then the vocational education and training sector - along with government agencies – is going to have to work together.

- Schools
- PTEs
- Wananga
- Universities
- ITPs
- and ITOs



We will need to put aside quite a few of our differences, and come together to develop a set of qualifications which work for all of us.

Because, in the end, its not really about us at all.

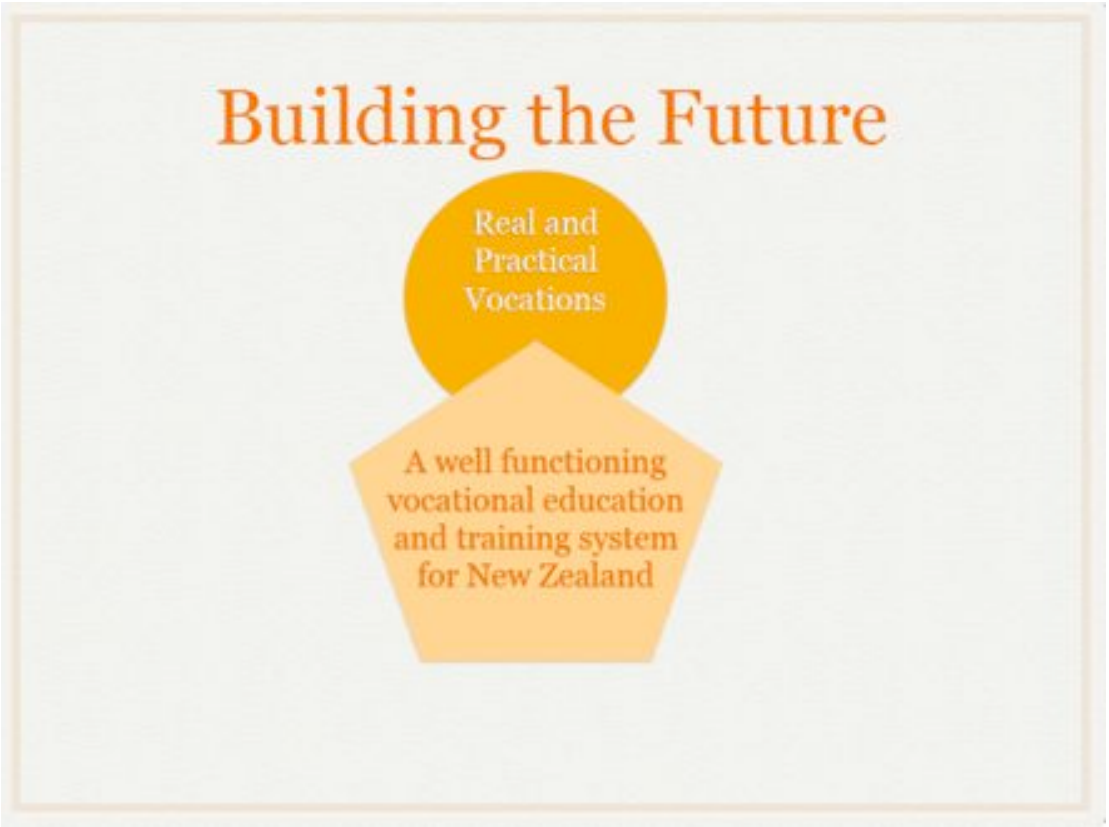
Its about the students, their families and the industries and employers we serve.

If we pull this off – and I have believe on the basis of the positive response we have had to this proposal so far from government and other sector groups – then we will have a “firm foundation” something we absolutely need:

> “A well functioning vocational education and training system for New Zealand”

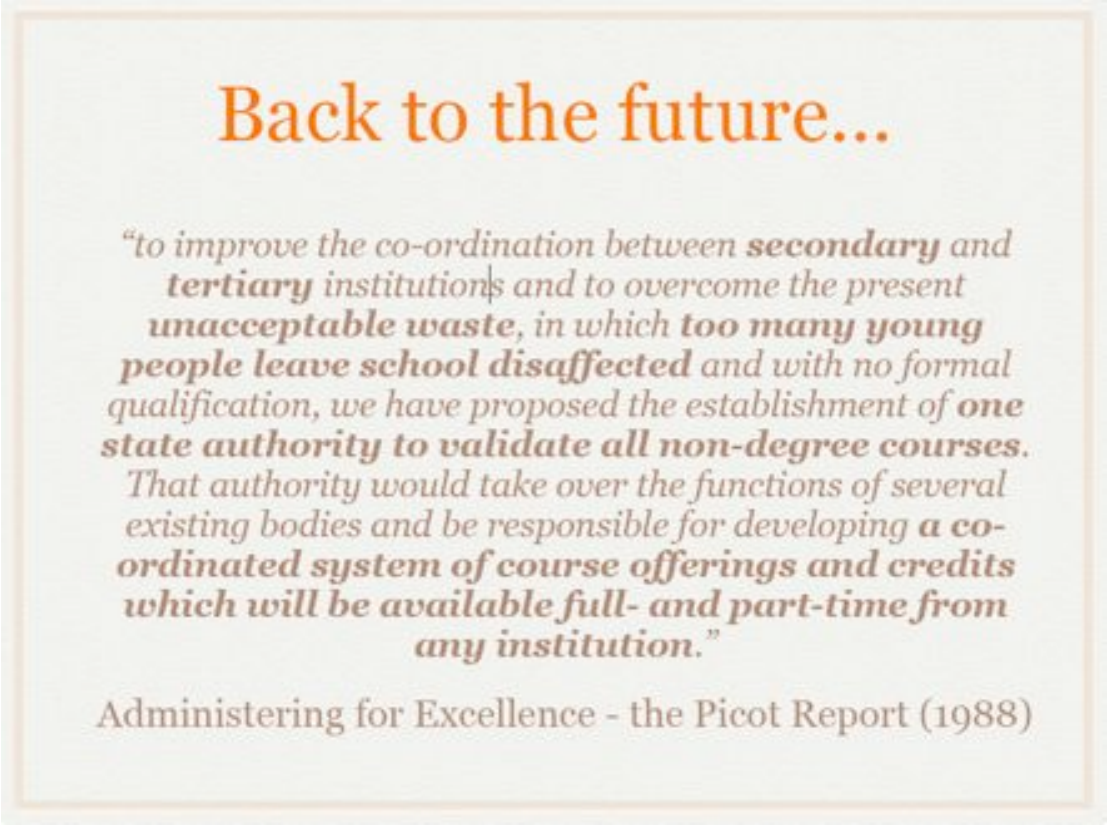
A well functioning VET system is critical to New Zealand’s future economic and social prosperity.

It provides the means by which we help students achieve real and practical vocations that add meaning and value to their lives and those of their families.



While I'm positive about our ability to put in place sectoral qualifications and thus the foundation for a better functioning vocational education and training system, I'm under no illusions how challenging it will be.

In fact, we have been here before…



If we are to avoid having this same debate twenty years in the future, I'd like to suggest that all of us have to take some responsibility for building the foundation we need for a well functioning VET system in New Zealand.

We will all have different parts to play – but we will all have role:

- **Industry** – will need to promote the value of sectoral qualifications and pathways in schools
- **ITOs** – will need to review how we develop qualifications and standards, so that others in the VET sector feel they have a stake in them
- **Schools** – will need to identity curriculum connections and promote broad VET pathways
- **Tertiary providers** – will need to identify pathways from the broad sectoral qualifications, which will almost certainly involve some streamlining of qualifications
- **Government officials** – will need to help us create the policy framework
- **Everyone** – will need to participate in the process of developing these pathways and promoting the concept

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it's in our hands...