

Submission to the Curriculum Review

The Mayors Taskforce *for Jobs* is a nationwide network of 70 (96%) Mayors taking leadership on the jobs issue, currently with a particular focus on youth (up to 25). This submission is from the Core Group which is the governance body of the Taskforce, comprising 14 Mayors. The Taskforce has the goal “that all young people under 25 years be in paid work, in training or education, or in productive activities in our communities” and is therefore interested in the curriculum particularly, in secondary schools.

This submission is confined to the key issues which the Mayors see affecting the achievement of the Taskforce goal, namely foundation literacy and numeracy skills, early school leavers and the technology curriculum.

In many of our communities we are seeing younger people (sometimes 13 and younger) finding it difficult to contribute positively, and not thriving or achieving at school. This is the group that most concerns us at this time. It is clear that these young people are not fitting into the current system and many are leaving school with few or no qualifications. Many do not have the basic literacy and numeracy skills. Only 90% of 16 year olds are enrolled in secondary schools, participation in senior secondary is declining and there is a trend for students to substitute tertiary education for senior secondary.

More importantly, 20% of school leavers have no school qualification (although currently there is some small improvement in this probably as a result of NCEA). At the same time there is a significant skills shortage in New Zealand which is being addressed largely through immigration. Youth unemployment rates are not reducing. We contend that for many students as they get older they learn best when the purpose and content of that learning is increasingly related to their needs as a productive member of the community and the economy.

It appears to us that there has been a move away from manual/mechanical technology towards a focus on ICT, and design skills within the technology curriculum. We would like to see an increase in the “practical” skills available for young people earlier in the curriculum. We also see this as a way to lift literacy and numeracy skills as students can learn these skills in a practical environment, perhaps more suited to their aspirations. With a primary focus on “high skills” there is a risk of devaluing the importance of some manual jobs that will remain important to keep the economy going. Traditional manual jobs will increasingly involve dealing with complex machinery and systems that require good motor skills that cannot be gained from a keyboard alone.

A closer link with business and the wider community when designing and delivering the curriculum would assist the transition from school to tertiary education, training or work for our young people. We therefore suggest increased funding to allow schools to participate in business and community projects which could be linked to the qualifications framework.

Many of the young people could also be encouraged into entrepreneurship and enterprise. Research and anecdotal experience has told us that entrepreneurs often do not fit into the neat “boxes” we provide in many of our learning institutions. A greater focus on identifying and nurturing these entrepreneurial skills would benefit New Zealand immensely. The Taskforce therefore asks that consideration be given to increasing this aspect of the curriculum.