A Blueprint for Education System Stewardship

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New Zealand Government

Lead Reviewers' Acknowledgement

As Lead Reviewers for this Blueprint for Education System Stewardship (the Blueprint), we would like to acknowledge the helpful, generous and collaborative involvement of the system stewards, leaders and staff of the seven agencies involved in this System Blueprint development – the Ministry of Education; the Education Review Office; the New Zealand Qualifications Authority; the Tertiary Education Commission; Careers New Zealand; Education New Zealand and the Education Council.

Hundreds of leaders and staff contributed generously of their time in a series of iterative co-creation workshops, which was the primary blueprint development method.

As part of the blueprint development process the Ministry of Education, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the Tertiary Education Commission and the Education Review Office undertook self-reflections using the Performance Improvement Framework (PIF) to determine the extent of alignment to the Education System Ambition and Four-year Excellence Horizon and how they could best contribute.

In addition, we had invaluable input from groups of employers and community leaders, learners and their families and whānau selected by the Ministry of Education to inform the project development. We also had the benefit of insights and involvement from officials from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the State Services Commission and the Treasury.

The development of this Blueprint was requested by Education System stewards who recognised the need for a more unified and coherent approach to their stewardship role. It has been a pleasure to work alongside Education System stewards and staff in the collaborative development of this Blueprint for the performance improvement of the system. Ambition for learners has been evident throughout and this widespread commitment bodes well for the future of the Education System and the agencies involved in working together to ensure that every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers.

Dr Murray Horn | **Dr Mike Pratt**
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Deputy State Services Commissioner's Foreword

Seven agencies have stewardship responsibility for different aspects of New Zealand's Education System: the Ministry of Education; the Education Review Office; the New Zealand Qualifications Authority; the Tertiary Education Commission; Careers New Zealand, Education New Zealand and the Education Council[1]. They have individual accountabilities and responsibilities but also need to consider how they work together to ensure the best outcomes for learners, their whānau and the wider community.

In 2015 the Secretary for Education and the State Services Commissioner[2] agreed to apply the Performance Improvement Framework to the Education system stewardship function. The aim was to develop a comprehensive, agreed, owned and durable blueprint to guide stewardship of the Education System

This is a new use for the Framework. It is not intended to review the performance of agencies within the system, rather it has used the framework to shape a blueprint for how those agencies can work together to shape an environment where all learners can succeed and New Zealand prospers.

This document represents a commitment for these system leaders to act and work as one to ensure they deliver on the system's Purpose they designed, that: "every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers through an Education System that works for all".

This Blueprint is the first part of the stewardship commitment. The system leaders, through the Education System Stewardship Forum, have described the most important next steps the agencies will take together to improve outcomes for New Zealand learners.

Debbie Power
Deputy State Services Commissioner

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[1]   The Education Council contributed to the development of this System Blueprint in its capacity as an independent professional body.

[2]   Peter Hughes was the Secretary of Education who co-commissioned the Blueprint, and is the current State Services Commissioner.

Executive Summary

The Blueprint for Education System Stewardship (the Blueprint) describes how the seven government agencies with stewardship responsibility for New Zealand's Education System propose to work together to ensure that every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers.

The Blueprint describes what must be achieved to deliver this outcome. It sets out a ten-year ambition and a four-year challenge that speak directly to the contribution that education needs to make to New Zealand's economic prosperity and social cohesion. This requires a system that is driven by the needs of learners. Because everyone can be a successful learner, the system has to be designed to ensure that every learner can succeed.

Three characteristics of a high-performing system can be applied to determine what more needs to be done to improve system performance. First, a high-performing system will deliver on the system's Purpose, in this case that every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers through an Education System that works for all. Second, the system would ensure that the available information, talent and money are best used to meet the system's aims and challenges. Third, a high-performing system would innovate and improve over time and evolve in a way that best meets these aims and challenges. These characteristics need to be common-place and enduring; the deliberate result of changes in the way the system is configured, rather than as an outcome of some participants succeeding, despite the system.

The New Zealand Education System is still some way off demonstrating these characteristics. There is too much variation in learner achievement, with long-standing problems for particular learners and learner populations, like Māori and Pasifika. Adoption of good practice is almost always referred to as patchy and the uptake of promising innovation is seen as slow to spread across the system. There are too many systemic weaknesses in the way funding, information and talent are developed and deployed to be confident that the good results we do see are the result of good system performance, rather than personality or situation-specific factors.

The seven agencies charged with system stewardship know that a more coherent and systematic approach is required to generate the substantial lift in system performance necessary to ensure that every learner can succeed. They accept responsibility for this outcome even though they cannot control everything that influences its success.

This Blueprint establishes a common purpose and the common beliefs and characteristics that underpin coherent stewardship. Critically, it defines the energising spirit "ambitious for learners" that motivates action.

The *Education System Agencies' Response to the Blueprint for Education System Stewardship* is the companion document to the Blueprint and is published on education.govt.nz. It describes what the seven stewardship agencies need to do to work as one to deliver learner success. It builds on work already under way across the Education System and identifies what more needs to be done. These actions fall into two broad groupings.

First, improving the understanding of what different learners want and need. Giving learners, their families and whānau and their future employers a louder voice and improving the way the system responds to those needs – are fundamental to creating a learner-centred system and require more systematic attention.

This requires a more systemic approach to: funding; investing in information and intelligence; the qualification, selection, development and succession of teaching, leadership and governance; and to partnering with those outside of the Education System whose active support is required.

Learner transitions between years and between providers and into work need to be far better managed. Assessment, pedagogy and curriculum need to be aligned to support "assessment as learning", including the introduction of digital assessment.

Second, inspiring system leadership is the other critical element in improving system performance. System stewards have to tell a coherent story about what is required and what they are doing to create an Education System that is ambitious for all learners; to create the expectation amongst all participants, including learners themselves, that they can and should be ambitious for learners and inspire and support action that is consistent with that ambition.

This requires more attention be given to understanding the forces shaping the future of learning and work and translating those into insights that can guide the evolution of the system and the choices system participants make, including the teaching and assessment of those 21st Century skills that employers already see as critical to future success.

It also requires defining good performance, identifying what drives that performance and encouraging the rapid and widespread uptake of successful innovation. And system participants need to know what is expected and what their roles are in delivering better outcomes for learners.

The Education System Agencies' Response describes these changes. The result is a substantial work programme of performance improvement goals that need to be achieved. Actions for some of these are already well under way and others need to be initiated. While this is a strong starting point, it is no more than that. What is required to meet the eight challenges identified in the Blueprint will be refined as changes are made and their impact assessed. Success now depends on bringing this Blueprint to life in a way that really is ambitious for learners.

The Blueprint: What must be achieved

1   Introduction

This Blueprint for Education System Stewardship aims to identify what the seven agencies with Education System stewardship responsibilities need to do to create an environment within which education can flourish. Improving the quality and coherence of system stewardship will support educators and learners to make a stronger contribution to New Zealand and New Zealanders, now and in the future.

Seven government agencies have responsibility for different aspects of system stewardship: the Ministry of Education; the Education Review Office; the New Zealand Qualifications Authority; the Tertiary Education Commission; Careers New Zealand; Education New Zealand and the Education Council.

Coherent system stewardship creates an environment that ensures educational success is common-place and enduring; it fosters a system that helps everyone succeed, rather than one in which some succeed despite the system, and one where some don't experience success at all.

This requires an Education System with a clear and coherent Purpose and set of aims; one that is configured to make the best use of the available information, talent and money to deliver on its Purpose and aims; and a system that learns and adapts to make the most of innovation and opportunity over time. That can only be achieved if those with system stewardship responsibility work together as one (and, when necessary, work effectively with partners across the social sector) to deliver a common Purpose.

The Blueprint describes what these seven agencies have agreed is the Purpose of the system and the character and beliefs that underpin successful system stewardship. It describes what they see as the long-term aims and medium-term challenges that the system has to be designed to meet. The Education Agencies' Response identifies the actions it will take to ensure that it works as one to create an environment where every learner can succeed.

2   Why is a System Blueprint important?

In New Zealand the environment within which formal learning takes place is largely shaped by government in its role as regulator, funder and provider of education and other social services. Elements of these various roles are executed through different Ministers and agencies, each with responsibility for different functions.

The more coherent the planning and delivery of these functions, the more coherent the environment will be within which people work together to facilitate learning. Clearly, the system-level functions of the education agencies need to be planned and delivered in a coherent way to be most effective (for example, to ensure learner assessment, pedagogy and curriculum are aligned). However, the same applies to the relationship between these agencies and the partners they need to enlist to help learners succeed, eg, in ensuring delivery of early and well-targeted health and welfare services to help address some of the underlying risk factors that frustrate educational achievement.

Ensuring a meaningful connection across agencies is particularly important in New Zealand because our Education System is highly devolved.

- Many decisions have been devolved to individual providers and their staff across the learner's lifetime (from early childhood education, to schools, to tertiary providers) and the way the Education System is configured largely determines who makes what decisions and influences how these decisions are made.

- The choices that learners and their parents and whānau make are deliberately constrained, influenced and informed by the Education System. Education is both highly regulated and heavily subsidised, even outside of the compulsory sector, and considerable effort is also devoted to helping inform and guide the choices that learners and their parents and whānau make.

- Employers' decisions are informed by the nature and quality of the qualifications learners receive.

The more coherent and connected the system and the environment it creates, the more likely it is that the right decisions are made by the right people at the right time.

3   Purpose of the Education System Blueprint

The purpose of applying the framework to the system stewardship function is:

> "To develop a comprehensive, agreed, owned and durable blueprint to guide stewardship of the Education System".

System coherence is critical to align the decisions of all system participants around delivering the results that the system is created to achieve. Senior managers from the agencies with stewardship responsibility expected the System Blueprint to help unify collective accountability and horizontal value across agencies (coherence) to deliver shared goals derived from a shared and unifying view of the future (CALYPSO[3] Forum, 10 July 2015).

The Blueprint aims to help deliver that coherence and meet these expectations. Engaging all of the seven agencies that have stewardship responsibilities ensured the approach was comprehensive. Creating common understanding, agreement and ownership demanded that the Blueprint be collectively co-created by those agencies over a series of workshops with a diverse number of staff. This methodology used to generate the Blueprint is at least as important as the final document[4].

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[3]   CALYPSO is the collective name for the meeting of the leadership teams of all the education agencies.

[4]   The System Blueprint is a new application of the Performance Improvement Framework (PIF). The framework provides a language and a set of concepts that describe performance within the State services. The System Blueprint is incorporates the key elements of the framework. The methodology for the Blueprint was primarily co-creation through workshops, as distinct from an agency PIF Review where Lead Reviewers follow a process of inquiry and judgement.

Co-creation required system stewards to work constructively to build agreement around the four main elements of the Blueprint:

▶ System Purpose (why we have an Education System)

▶ Stewardship Character, Beliefs and Focus (that define the character of stewardship, what system stewards stand for and what they will focus on; this also helps to identify the attitudes and behaviours that support coherent stewardship and collective responsibility)

▶ Performance Challenge (what the system is being created to achieve through a shared and aspirational ten-year ambition and tangible four-year challenge)

▶ Target Operating Model (what system stewards need to do to meet the performance challenge).

This helped create a common language and ensure each of the elements were commonly understood and agreed and, therefore, that the seven agencies can "act as one" as stewards of the system. The people involved in creating this Blueprint are now also the people accountable for its implementation. If successful, it creates a 'virtual organisation' for the system stewardship, while allowing the individual agencies to continue to meet their specific accountabilities.

Durability is important because education is an investment that is undertaken in anticipation of a future return, either material or otherwise. System durability helps provide the stability and certainty that system participants need to invest in learning and teaching and in building and maintaining the infrastructure necessary to support learning.

System stability is especially important at a time when disruptive technology (technology that displaces another), combined with a fundamental system reorientation to learner-centricity, creates different risks and opportunities for different participants in the system. These influences are described in more detail below.

If the changes described in this Blueprint create a more coherent system, where educational success is common-place and enduring and where helpful innovation spreads quickly, then the system is more likely to endure.

4   What is the Education System?

In its broadest sense, the Education System is people working together to facilitate learning. Who participates and in what capacity, and how these participants work together and to what end, will be determined by the environment within which they operate.

Because most people want their children to succeed, people would "work together to facilitate learning" even in the absence of specific government involvement in education – so an Education System can exist without this involvement.

Government is involved because the community it serves wants to create an environment where system participants will behave in different ways and to different ends, eg, to encourage social cohesion. In our case the community is likely, for example, to want a higher and more even level of participation in formal education, along with a greater degree of commonality in what is learnt, and with achievement more widely recognised, than would be achieved without government involvement. These are significant reasons why much education is compulsory and heavily subsidised and why there is a regulated national curriculum and qualifications framework.

For this Blueprint, therefore, the focus is on: "the actions and influences of the system stewards that shape the environment within which system participants operate". In particular, the focus is on how this environment can be shaped so education will make a stronger contribution to New Zealand and New Zealanders, now and in the future. This is well reflected in one of the core beliefs of the system stewards: "that a successful Education System contributes to economic growth and social cohesion".

Taken together, the ways these actions and influences are configured and delivered define the system's operating model. They are grouped into five areas that are similar to the Performance Improvement Framework agency model: leadership, governance, organisation and decision rights; delivery for customers and New Zealanders; relationships and communication; people and performance development; and financial, knowledge and resource systems.

These actions and influences include the usual array of government interventions that are designed and managed by the seven agencies and their Ministers: ie, regulation (including allocation of decision rights, standard setting, accreditation, curriculum and qualification); funding and fees; ownership and provision (including the provision of information and support, as well as the direct provision of education services). They include the way these various 'levers' are managed, such as the way performance is measured and encouraged. However, they also include a wider array of actions and influences, for example, effective leadership (which tells the story and helps set ambitious expectations and inspires action) and partnering (with all those outside of education that need to be enlisted to help learners succeed). Of all these actions and influences, inspiring system leadership is likely to be the most important.

5   Focusing on learners helps define the system

The education agencies charged with system stewardship agreed at the outset that they wanted to reorient the system around the learner, ie, to "ensure that lifelong learners are at the centre, with their journey and outcomes strategically aligned across agencies".

Doing so requires:

▸ greater understanding of the needs of learners, their families/whānau and employers and how those needs are best met, including better understanding of what they are likely to need to prepare them for living and working in a world that is evolving rapidly

▸ more and better informed engagement of learners, their families/whānau and employers in service design and delivery

▸ a systematic approach to ensuring that learners and their families/whānau are able to make more informed choices about what learners learn, as well as where and how they learn and from whom.

Creating a truly learner-centric Education System is seen by most people we spoke to as a significant shift in the current system orientation. The paucity of available information on what is understood about what learners, their families/whānau and employers want and need reinforced this view. To transform the system in this way, system stewards need to take a far more systemic and comprehensive approach to developing a common understanding about what learners, their families/whānau and employers really need. In section 10 we explore the expectations of learners as an input into the Blueprint development.

6 Education System Purpose and Stewardship Philosophy[5]

A high-performing system delivers on its Purpose, ie, the reason for having the system or, in this case, a system that is shaped so decisively by government. A common and agreed understanding of the Purpose provides the foundation for setting aims and challenges, as well as for defining the characteristics of stewardship that are most likely to be productive.

The stewards of the system worked together in a series of workshops to build a shared understanding of the system's Purpose and their stewardship philosophy.

6.1 Purpose

At the heart of any organisation or system is its Purpose. Purpose is a unifying idea that explains why the organisation exists and the value it creates. An inspiring Purpose should provide meaning, intent and direction. This is particularly important for a system that spans multiple organisations, because clarity of shared Purpose can substitute to an extent for the integrating role of structure.

The Purpose for the Education System was co-created as:

> "We make sure every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers through an Education System that works for all".

This should not be seen as a vision or desirable picture of the future but rather as a commitment and a cause.

That "every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers" speaks to the reasons for having an Education System so heavily influenced by government: to promote social cohesion and economic growth that is widely shared through the broadest participation in wealth creation. Some learners would succeed in a system without specific government involvement but that would not help either objective. Government involvement recognises that the Education System can be configured to produce public as well as private benefits, especially in the early years of a learner's development. These public benefits rely to a large extent on a system that is inclusive and so works for all. That is why it is so troubling that the current system does not work well for significant groups of learners, like Māori and Pasifika learners.

The preface "we make sure" speaks to a deep-seated sense of ownership of the ultimate outcome of the system ("every learner succeeds and New Zealand prospers"), which underpins the unique Purpose of system stewardship. If those charged with this stewardship are not responsible for the outcome produced by the system, then who is? "We make sure" is a recognition that system stewardship implies responsibility even when system stewards do not control all the factors that influence this outcome. This attitude defines stewardship: it is about 'best endeavours'.

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[5] Gilson, C., Pratt, M., Roberts, K., and Weymes, E. (2002). *Peak Performance: business lessons from the world's top sports organisations*. HarperCollinsBusiness; London.

6.2   Beliefs

The attitudes and behaviours of the system stewards will reflect their beliefs, whether these are made explicit or not. Co-creating a set of collective beliefs helps align attitudes and behaviours to support the Purpose of the Education System and the role of system stewardship.

These beliefs will inform choice of action and provide a unifying framework across the seven agencies. This alignment is essential if these seven agencies are to "work as one".

The beliefs are:

▸ Every learner's lifelong success is at the heart of everything we do

▸ Everyone can be a successful learner

▸ Equity of access to quality education is crucial to achieving equitable outcomes

▸ We make the biggest difference when we work together as one for learners

▸ Identity, language and culture are critical for learning success

▸ Our work will be informed by the best available evidence

▸ If we get it right for Māori we get it right for everyone

▸ A great system is one where Māori succeed as Māori

▸ A successful Education System contributes to economic growth and social cohesion.

As well as providing a foundation for strategic choice, the beliefs convey to other system participants what the system stewards see as fundamentally important.

6.3   Spirit and character

The driving spirit of system stewardship is "Ambitious for learners", and a successful system would see this sprit embedded in everything system participants do: from system stewards to sector leaders to teachers, employers, families/whānau and the learners themselves. Indeed, one of the most inspiring discussions we had was with learners who were confidently ambitious for each other and for themselves.

All aspects of system design and provision can be approached from this perspective. It supports and energises progress towards the ambitious Purpose and will need to be reflected in the attitude and behaviours of system stewards and participants.

The following attributes or behaviours define the agreed character of coherent Education System stewardship:

Learner Centred

▸ putting students' interests first and valuing student voice as central to the learning experience

Inspirational

▸ inspiring others to be their best

Courageous

▸ resolute, tenacious and frank and fearless in giving advice

Agile

▸ energetic and quick to respond

Innovative

▸ a propensity for new and better ways of living the Purpose

Collaborative

▸ working together with commitment towards the shared Purpose and goals

Cohesive

▸ connected, coordinated and close-knit

Professional

▸ ethical, courteous, conscientious and business-like

Manaaki

▸ supportive, caring and respectful.

The Education System develops a character that influences people's expectations, the way things are done and the way education is experienced by everyone involved. It is best that this is made explicit and aligned to the Purpose.

Having identified this spirit and character, system stewards now need to bring them to life through their attitudes and behaviours and reflect them in the way they communicate and the expectations they set for themselves and others. It will be much easier to meet the challenges facing the Education System if it is widely seen as being truly "ambitious for learners".

6.4 Focus

System stewards agreed that their stewardship needed to focus on "working as one to deliver learner success". System transformation has to be driven by a relentless focus on the needs of learners. That will require an operating model for system stewardship that unites and aligns the stewardship function of the seven agencies to "deliver learner success".

7 Ten-year Ambition

Stewardship has to take the long view and strategy should be developed backwards from the future that it aims to create. Because of the long lead times in education, system stewards wanted a ten-year ambition for the system that helps to better define this future.

For a learner-centric system, this ambition has to be defined in terms of the value that a system that is "ambitious for learners" aims to create for all the learners it seeks to serve. Consideration of the megatrends facing education pointed to a future where a greater share of education will be provided and consumed globally. In this future, the system's ambition has to ensure that a New Zealand education is one that domestic and foreign learners will choose when both have more choice. And that means that the system's stewards will need to ensure that in ten years: "A New Zealand education equips you to contribute locally and compete globally".

"Compete globally" recognises that both domestic and foreign students will need to earn their living in increasingly globalised markets and as part of increasingly global supply chains. As other education systems become more accessible and relevant, learners with a New Zealand education will need to work with, and compete against, learners educated in other systems.

"Contribute locally" recognises the public-good nature of a New Zealand education: that it will need to equip learners to live harmoniously with others from increasingly diverse backgrounds and cultures.

This Ten-year ambition is supported by six aims that provide greater colour and relevance to the overall ambition:

1   New Zealand will be leading the world in <u>educational achievement and have achieved equity</u> of outcomes

2   The Education System contributes to a vibrant <u>society and economy that capitalises on diversity</u>

3   Qualifications, competencies and credentials are well regarded, coherent and portable so that <u>everyone can contribute effectively</u>

4   The <u>system inspires active participation</u> of learners and engagement of families/whānau locally and globally

5   The <u>demands of learners</u> and the changing nature of work drive the Education System

6   We will <u>use everything we have</u> in the best possible way to deliver our Ambition.

These aims speak directly to both the nature of the Ambition and the system Purpose. They are aims in the sense that the system stewards should continuously strive to achieve them, "using everything we have in the best possible way to deliver the Ambition".

More needs to be done to better define the value the New Zealand Education System creates from the learner's perspective; especially those elements of value that are unique to the New Zealand Education System or at least hard for other systems to replicate. This will become increasingly important as the provision and consumption of education services become more global.

8   Four-year Performance Challenge and Supporting Challenges

The Four-year Excellence Horizon is defined as the greatest contribution that the Education System can make to New Zealand in four years. It should be challenging but achievable within the four-year timeframe. This overarching challenge is further developed in eight supporting challenges that define what it is that the Education System needs to deliver over the next four years to ensure that it is well placed to achieve the Ten-year Ambition.

While the New Zealand Education System compares favourably with systems in other jurisdictions, overall, educational achievement needs to keep improving to simply hold this position. Moreover, the variability in achievement and, in particular, the failure to address persistent underachievement among significant groups of learners, presents a major challenge to a system with a Purpose that is to "ensure that every learner succeeds … through a system that works for all". There is a wide measure of agreement that the Education System is not yet working well enough for all and, in particular, that it is not working well enough for Māori and Pasifika learners, nor for many learners with learning difficulties.

When held up against the Ambition, there is also wide agreement that more needs to be done to make the system more responsive to the "demands of learners and the changing nature of work, to inspire active participation and to ensure that we use everything we have in the best possible way".

The degree to which we are making progress toward "leading the world in educational achievement and equality of outcomes" can only be assessed in terms of the extent to which others are following our lead. That will not happen unless the New Zealand Education System is widely recognised and valued for the progress it is making on these fronts within the next four years. Indeed, the contribution that foreign learners make to our Education System is significant and unless that system is recognised and valued for the educational outcomes it can produce, that contribution may be increasingly difficult to sustain.

These considerations led the system stewards to define the greatest contribution that the Education System can make to New Zealand in the next four years as: "Our Education System is recognised and valued for delivering equity and excellence of educational outcomes".

This challenge has a number of aspects described in the following eight supporting challenges:

1 Achievement outcomes are significantly improved and sustained

2 Accelerate achievement outcomes for Māori and Pasifika to achieve equity

3 Learners and communities most in need will experience unified education, health and social services

4 Learners, their families/whānau and employers understand, influence and believe in the system

5 Learners and their families/whānau expect and believe they can succeed and are supported to do so by the system

6 Our Education System delivers 21st Century skills and knowledge and engenders behaviours relevant to learners, employment and society

7 Unlock, access and deploy the full range of resources available to deliver our objectives

8 Learners consistently experience high-quality teaching and learning.

The first three supporting challenges give more relevance to the excellence and equity elements of the overarching challenge. Challenges 4 and 5 are necessary if the system is to be valued by domestic and foreign learners alike. Challenge 6 speaks to the importance of what is learnt in our system for it to remain relevant and deliver value. Challenges 7 and 8 are necessary to meet the overarching challenge from the available resources and to deliver a consistently high-quality educational experience.

These challenges define 'what' the Education System needs to deliver. The next step is to define a set of measures that enable accurate assessment of progress toward meeting these challenges, so that adjustments can be made in implementation to ensure that the overarching challenge is met. An illustrative set of measures need to be developed and refined, baselines agreed and a process put in place for recording, managing, analysing and sharing progress.

The following three sections – 9, 10 and 11 – provide input into the determination of major Education System performance improvements required to deliver the Four-year Excellence Horizon. These are summarised in section 12.

9   Megatrends

Education helps prepare people for their future life and work, so the educational choices participants make inevitably reflect their views of how emerging trends might shape that future.

Stewards of the Education System need to consider how that system should be configured so it evolves to meet changing demands and is flexible enough to adapt to what is a rapidly changing set of powerful external forces. While a great deal of how we teach and learn today would seem familiar to people from early last century, there are simply far too many powerful megatrends already at work today to think this situation will continue indefinitely.

The following five megatrends were identified in the series of workshops with system stewards and their staff, as well as one workshop with about 30 employers and community leaders:

▸ Demography and geography: the school-age population is projected to decline for all regions except Auckland (where it significantly increases) at least through to 2031. Migration, combined with higher birth rates among Māori and Pasifika, means that the population will become increasingly culturally diverse, especially at younger ages. Education will need to respond to different cultures and needs and prepare people to work and live well with others from different backgrounds. Improving the relative educational achievement of Māori and Pasifika will be critical to raising the overall skills and attributes of the future workforce. The general population will age, with older learners more likely to require additional specific learning.

▸ Fiscal and social pressures: the need for fiscal restraint is likely to remain for some time and education's share of this restrained spending is likely to be squeezed as an ageing population increases pressure on health and superannuation costs. At the same time child poverty remains a concern, as is the incidence of children with developmental and learning difficulties; so education will need to work more effectively with its health and welfare partners to identify and address the underlying causes of poor educational outcomes earlier in a learner's life. There is also growing pressure for education to address a wider range of social ills that used to be seen as better tackled in the family/whānau and wider community, raising the risk that education becomes "a mile wide and an inch deep".

- Changing nature of work: demand for more highly skilled workers is likely to increase, although automation will change the nature of most jobs, with more demand for skills/aptitude in discovery, creativity and emotional intelligence. Globalisation of supply chains means people will need to work more collaboratively and with others from very different backgrounds. People are likely to have to adapt to an increasing pace of change over multiple careers or roles; so the ability to learn how to learn, to be more self-directed and to apply learning to solve real problems will be even more important. Employers emphasised the increasing importance of teaching, learning and assessing some key elements of the UNESCO 21st Century skills[6]. These trends require learners to develop their technical, creative and interpersonal skills, as well as their ability to learn and adapt to a changing work-scape over their lifetimes.

- Technology disruption: easy, quick and cheap global connectivity and access to information are likely to disrupt or change traditional models of teaching and learning. The marginal cost of digital supply of both information and instruction is extremely low. Given that, a few trusted brands may be able to capture a large slice of what is likely to be a global market for those elements of education that are best supplied digitally and remotely, especially if their qualifications have widespread recognition. At the same time, the ability to analyse the way people use digitally provided education services in real time will allow that service to be quickly and effortlessly customised to meet the different learning styles, as well as the changing needs and demands of individual learners.

  This is likely to lead to the unbundling of the value currently created by traditional teaching and learning because much of what a digitally provided education service has to offer will be attractive to a number of learners for a number of applications, including blended learning within modern learning environments. A proportion of that value will, therefore, be captured by digital providers, even if that is as part of a mixed digital/traditional model.

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[6]   These skills include:

- Critical thinking, problem-solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, synthesising information

- Research skills and practices, interrogative questioning

- Creativity, artistry, curiosity, imagination, innovation, personal expression

- Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, initiative

- Oral and written communication, public speaking and presenting, listening

- Leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, facility in using virtual workspaces

- Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis, computer programing

- Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy

- Economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism

- Global awareness, multicultural literacy, humanitarianism

- Scientific literacy and reasoning, the scientific method

- Environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystems understanding

- Health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety.

This will require a rethink of the way system stewards use their "actions and influence" to shape the educational environment to enable digital delivery to thrive when this best meets the needs of learners (eg, in maintaining a wider subject choice for learners as rolls shrink outside of Auckland). Understanding the impact and opportunity for New Zealand's $2 billion-plus international education business also seems pressing.

▸ Information and data analytics: the same technology that will automate many work activities and disrupt traditional educational models can be used to improve our understanding of the needs of individual learners and what will work best to meet those needs, whether digitally provided or not. It will also enhance our ability to inform and engage learners and their parents and whānau in their education; to better predict the likely outcomes of different interventions aimed at improving educational achievement and the outcomes that are expected to flow from that achievement; to better target and tailor assistance and provide that sooner when early intervention is most effective to address the underlying risk factors that frustrate educational achievement; and to assess the value that different providers add along the learner's journey. Delivering these benefits will require investment in information capture, analysis and communication.

The stewards of the Education System will need to pay more attention to understanding the implications of these trends for the way education is likely to be provided and consumed and reflect this in the advice provided to Ministers and in the information provided to system participants.

Understanding these trends underscores the need for system flexibility and adaptation, for innovation to be evaluated and for successful innovation to be widely spread. Uncertainty about the future puts a premium on learning how to learn.

Themes that emerge from these trends also point to the way in which the Education System is likely to evolve. The changing nature of work and society suggests the need to develop a wider range of skills and attributes in learners, like the ability to effectively collaborate with a diverse range of people. The likely tension between a constrained fiscal environment and the need to address the growing needs of those Māori and Pasifika learners and others most at risk of poor outcomes, suggests the need to develop a more targeted and tailored system with a greater wraparound of health and social services. The opportunities created by the development of digital teaching and learning need to be better understood and the system adapted to embrace digital delivery when that makes most sense.

10   Understanding the needs of learners

Understanding what learners need (and the views of their parents and whānau communities and future employers) is fundamental to creating a learner-centred system. A review of the information held by system stewards highlighted that too little attention to date has been given to developing this understanding.

Indeed, developing a far better understanding of the needs of different learners and strengthening the voice of learners their parents and whānau and of prospective employers in system development is critical to developing a more learner-centric Education System.

To ensure that more weight was given to these voices and to build richer understanding than that available from written documentation reviewed during the project, we conducted a workshop with 30 employer and community leaders and visited two communities recommended by the Ministry of Education. During these field visits we listened to learners from early childhood education to secondary schools; their parents and whānau, teachers and school principals, and agency staff on the ground. We also talked to two of the 14 'Parents, Families and Whānau' staff across New Zealand who work with learners and families/whānau that are not well catered for in the current compulsory system.

This process cannot substitute for the systematic, scientific and in depth discovery process that is a precondition for creating a truly learner-centred system. However, the important themes that emerged were tested and refined with the system stewards and are summarised below.

10.1 What employers and community leaders said about value

There was a great deal of commonality in the views expressed by employers and community leaders on five areas where the Education System could add more value:

▶ Preparation for work: understandably, employers wanted employees to be more work-ready with a less 'jagged' transition between school and work.

Employers and community leaders emphasised the importance of literacy and numeracy. They also underscored the importance of teaching, learning and assessing elements of the UNESCO 21st Century skills – especially effective collaboration with strong communication and inter-personal skills, self-directed learning, problem-solving and digital skills in addition to the more academic skills already taught and assessed. They thought that teachers focused on subjects, learners on credits and employers on skills and that we needed a shared focus and language to take us forward.

The ability to apply learning was seen as important and would be encouraged with more project-based than subject-based learning. In subsequent interviews, learners and teachers made the point that the more relevant the learning content to the learner, the easier it was to engage them. Learners were enthusiastic about a project-based approach to learning, which helps develop the 21st Century skills highlighted by employers. They enjoyed applying their learning to practical, real-life issues that held meaning for them.

▶ Learner assessment: assessment of learners is important not just because it helps employers understand learners' educational achievement but because it influences what is taught and learnt. Employers wanted more of the 21st Century skills to be assessed and more assessment information that reflected learners' work readiness, eg, aptitude, attitude and attendance.

▶ Lifelong learning: employers wanted more attention given to the education and training of the existing workforce, both in terms of addressing existing learning and skill shortages and recognising the value of on-the-job learning.

▶ A cohesive community: both employers and community leaders stressed the important contribution that education needed to make to helping people of different races and backgrounds understand one another and live and work happily together, ie, a social good that was not necessarily captured by individual learners. The Education System needed to be much more effective at addressing inherited disadvantage and reducing disparity in society. They both stressed the importance of school leadership and governance and did not think that the approach to developing, selecting and supporting school leaders and governors was good enough.

▶ Employer and community engagement: both groups thought that the Education System would benefit from a more structured involvement of employers and the community in advising both the system, eg, on service design and delivery, and on learners.

10.2 What learners, parents and whānau said about value

Eight themes emerged from the two field trips:

1 Leadership: variability in performance among schools has a lot to do with the degree of inspirational leadership from the school principal, supported by effective governance. The result of this leadership could be seen during the visits as having made a real difference to: the development of a positive, collaborative, confident culture; the degree of family and whānau and learner engagement; and learner experience and outcomes.

Principals need to be seen as a system resource and much more systematic attention given to their qualification for selection by Boards of Trustees (BOTs) and to their ongoing development and succession. That should be supported by giving more systematic attention to developing governance capability, particularly of school BOTs.

2 Learning needs: some of the people we spoke to were distressed by the lack of support for learners with learning difficulties. While some individuals receive good support, especially those with the most serious learning needs, many do not and too little systematic attention is being consistently applied to the early identification and remediation of the underlying health and social causes of poor educational outcomes.

We heard about a broad range of learning difficulties: from those that require classroom assessment and support; serious difficulties that require direct support from Special Education; and broader health and social issues that require support across a range of health and social services.

Special Education as currently configured is not sufficient to address the broader problem, especially for those with less severe needs or where broader wraparound services are required. Indeed, it may not have been designed or intended to do so. In addition, Special Education is also seen as being difficult and unpredictable to access and then retain across the learner's journey, even for those for whom it is intended.

For those learning difficulties best identified and addressed by the education provider or teacher in the classroom, practice appears patchy and to depend, at least to some degree, on the priorities of the provider/school and the interests and ability of the individual teacher and the support they receive.

There appears to be a significant group of learners who fall outside the scope of Special Education and beyond what a well-supported teacher can do in the classroom. Current identification and response appears to be patchy and slow, difficult to access and based on a pre-defined category of potential problem rather than on individual learner needs. Identification of these learners is often later than desirable (identification at early childhood education or earlier is preferred) and even when identified there does not seem to be a timely and well-coordinated set of wraparound education, health and/or social services that are able to be tailored to individual need. The social sector trials and children's teams may well end up providing the basis for a systematic response and seem to be working well in one of the communities we visited but these are not available across New Zealand.

3   Information: parents and whānau and learners were all looking for better and more accessible information and advice to understand the system, early childhood education and school performance and learner progress and achievement, so that they could make more informed choices. This also makes it easier for them to engage constructively with each other and with teachers.

They would appreciate information and support that includes quantitative data about institution and learner performance and progress, communication about options and choices available to them and advice on how to go about making decisions, including questions to ask and how to ask them.

People were also concerned about transitions between institutions and between years/classes within institutions. The information available here is patchy and the offering needs to be made more systematic. Different and often non-interoperable student management systems are used to manage learner information. In addition, there are significantly different practices across schools in regard to providing access to these systems.

Communication is often provided using language that learners and their supporters find difficult to engage with, including the use of arcane language riddled with acronyms.

4   Decile system: the reputation of the school has a big influence on school choice and on learners' perceptions and expectations of themselves. We heard that decile rankings are often used as a surrogate for school performance. Parents and whānau want a simple rating of their school's performance and use deciles in the absence of an alternative that better reflects actual performance. Principals, teachers, agency staff and some learners commented on the importance of growth in learner ability – value add – during the learner journey, which would provide additional valuable information to the current approach of comparative National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) achievement ratings.

5   Coherence: looked at from the ground up, the system does not appear to be coherent at the local level in terms of information systems, policies or organisational design. This makes the system appear overly complex and difficult to understand and engage with.

6 Learner transitions: the journey of a learner from early childhood education to primary through secondary to tertiary and the world of work was often described in terms of the learner having to stop and start afresh at each stage. Successful transitions seem overly dependent on situation-specific factors, rather than a result of a systematic approach. Transitions seem to work better when institutions along the learner journey:

  ‣ are well led

  ‣ collaborate amongst themselves (and with tertiary and employers and communities)

  ‣ seek and share information about learners they are receiving and learners who have graduated from their institutions

  ‣ ensure parents and whānau and learners are well informed about learner progress within and between years.

  Establishing Communities of Learning nationwide is important to develop a coherent and systematic approach. The degree of success will depend on getting these four things right.

7 Learning: it was a delight to see how personalised and self-directed learning could work effectively in practice within a modern learning environment at all levels. The modern learning environment idea is both about the concepts that underpin effective learning and the physical infrastructure that best enables learning to take place. Practise in this, however, appears to be patchy and best practice is not sufficiently well researched and promulgated.

8 Digital: integration of digital devices and digital learning was well established in the schools and early childhood education centres we visited and in some cases was being used to support personalised and self-directed learning and greater family/whānau engagement. With the move to widespread use of digital devices for learning there were questions about why this was not used in the assessment process. We observed the way in which at the primary school level personal learner objectives, learning activities and achievements were integrated in such a way that assessment was part of learning not separate. This seems to be very motivating for learners.

11   Agency Self-reflections

The seven education agencies with stewardship responsibilities each conducted Performance Improvement Framework self-reflections as part of the Blueprint process. The purpose was to determine the extent of alignment between agencies and the system, how well placed they were to deliver their contribution to the system Four-year Excellence Horizon and what more they needed to do.

This process reinforced the large degree of consensus among system stewards about what needs to be done.

Through the self-reflection process it was evident a great deal of work is happening already across the agencies that will contribute towards the Education System Four-year Excellence Horizon. The process of raising agency self-awareness helped enable the seven agencies to harmonise current planned activities for maximum learner benefit, minimise unnecessary duplication and develop additional priority work programme items.

12 System Performance Improvements required to achieve the Four-year Excellence Horizon

Three characteristics of a high-performing system can be applied to determine what more needs to be done to improve system performance. A high-performing Education System will:

1 Deliver on its Purpose, which is now well defined, along with the ten-year aims and four-year challenges

2 Ensure that the information, talent and money available are best used to meet the system's aims and challenges

3 Innovate and improve over time and evolve in a way that best meets these aims and challenges.

The only way to ensure that these three characteristics are common-place and enduring is for them to be the deliberate and expected result of changes in the system operating model applied systemically, rather than as an outcome of participants succeeding despite the system.

Some people and organisations will succeed regardless of the system they work within, including one with heavy government involvement. They are able to "work together to facilitate learning" very well and for the learners involved to achieve considerable success in their education and lives, within a broad range of system designs. However, this success is personality and situation specific, so the resulting pattern of success is patchy. Others will not succeed unless the environment within which they operate supports that success.

A high-performing system produces consistently good results because it takes a systemic approach to the key factors that determine its success, for example, teaching practice, organisational leadership and learner, parents and whānau and community engagement.

A key measure of system success is, therefore, the degree of variation or patchiness in learner achievement and associated teaching and organisational practice. A healthy system will produce a low degree of variation, with system-wide uptake of good practice and rapid spreading of successful innovation. By contrast, a poorly functioning system will produce highly variable learner achievement, with some learner groupings consistently underperforming, and patchy practice with slow and patchy uptake of successful innovation.

The New Zealand Education System is still some way off demonstrating the characteristics of a high-performing system:

▶ There is too much variation in learner achievement, with long-standing problems for particular groups of learners, like Māori and Pasifika, and insufficient early attention from education and its health and welfare partners to learners most at risk of poor educational outcomes, especially in identifying and addressing early the underlying health and social risk factors likely to cause learning difficulties

▶ Adoption of good practice is almost always referred to as patchy and the uptake of promising innovation is seen as localised and slow to spread across the system

▶ There are too many systemic weaknesses in the way funding, information and people resources are developed and deployed to be confident that good results are the consequence of good system performance, rather than individuals and organisations doing well despite the system.

System stewards recognise these challenges, which is why they have asked for this Blueprint and been so actively engaged in its development.

This section identifies the broad priority areas where the system stewards need to focus their attention to change the way they operate. There are two major areas where new effort is required. These are:

1   Improving the understanding of what different learners want and need, giving learners, their families/whānau and their future employers a louder voice. Improving the way the system responds to those needs are all fundamental to creating a learner-centred system and require more systematic attention. This is a necessary pre-condition for creating a learner-centric system and requires significant investment

2   Inspiring system leadership from system stewards has to tell a coherent story about what is required and what is being done to create an Education System that is ambitious for all learners. It needs to create the expectation amongst all participants, including learners themselves, that they can and should be ambitious for learners; and inspire and support action consistent with that ambition. More attention from system stewards is required to understand the forces shaping the future of learning and work and translating these into insights that can guide the evolution of the Education System and the choices of system participants.

These two major areas are supported by ten priority areas for performance improvement. In many cases work is well under way as part of the existing education work programme. This is highlighted in the discussion below.

1   Funding: a clear framework is needed for identifying where to allocate resources to give greatest return. This has been recognised with a number of reviews of funding streams already under way for the early childhood and compulsory sector. This needs to include adoption of an investment approach when appropriate. For example, to address long-standing areas of system underperformance where the lifetime payoff to learners and their families/whānau, as well as to the wider community, is likely to be highest. A small investment in identifying risk factors that influence educational achievement has been made and this now needs further development – especially better access to data and additional investment in data management and analytics.

2   Information: a comprehensive assessment of the information and intelligence needed to support better decisions and how that is best delivered is required and an investment made to ensure that the various participants in the system can make informed decisions to:

   a.   Inform learners and their parents and whānau about choosing a provider, and how they are progressing within and between years, including over key transitions, and how they might best help themselves

   b.   Inform employers about what they want to know about learners

   c.   Identify what works best to improve both professional practice and provider performance

d. Assess performance of providers and progress of learners

e. Target funding to those learners where it will have the greatest impact

f. Identify how to provide the best offering to each learner, ie, provide more personalised learning.

3   Talent: a systematic approach to the development of teaching, leadership and governance is required, with more systematic attention given to qualification, selection, ongoing development and succession, especially of institutional leaders in the first instance. While the Principal Recruitment Allowance should help, it would be more effective if seen as part of a more comprehensive approach to the development of school leadership.

4   Partnering: more effective and focused collaboration with health and social sector partners when it is necessary to enlist their support to meet the system challenges, eg, to help early identification and rectification of learning difficulties that require specialist attention. Learnings from the social sector trials and children's teams need to be used to identify what works and to ensure rapid adoption across the system. A comprehensive approach to tackling learning needs would include this collaboration, the Special Education service update under way and a more systematic approach to strengthen the ability of teachers to better support learners with learning needs in the classroom, including the additional teachers' aides hours already contemplated.

5   Encouraging and supporting a louder voice for, and more engagement of, learners, parents and whānau and employers, with more systematic focus on helping inform and support the choices they make, anticipating their needs and ensuring that the Education System is more responsive to those needs. This would include more systematic engagement of these groups in the design of learner-focused education experiences.

6   Clearly defining good performance, identifying what drives that performance and strengthening participants' abilities while encouraging them to rapidly adopt better practice. This includes addressing persistent poor performance amongst providers and significant learner populations. And it includes the discovery of good practice through research and evaluation, with this being actively sought, effectively disseminated and adopted broadly. This requires professional leadership that is ambitious for learners, celebrates success and ensures high professional standards are met.

7   Teach and assess the 21st Century skills that employers have identified as important as part of the broader initiatives under way to strengthen 21st Century practice for teaching and learning.

8   The journey of a learner around points of transition from one year to the next, between education providers and into work could be far better managed. Information about a learner's progress could be more widely accessible and collaboration improved among and between providers and between providers, communities and employers. The need for smoother transitions for learners has been recognised and a significant body of work is already under way to improve student-centred pathways. The introduction of Communities of Learning will also help address this issue.

9   Assessment, pedagogy and curriculum need to be aligned to support 'assessment for learning', including through the introduction of digital assessment.

10 Clarifying and aligning roles and responsibilities, with expectations, decision rights, accountabilities, encouragement and support for roles needs to be well understood and aligned to delivering the system aims and challenges. This needs to be considered as part of the current Education Act 1989 Review.

It is important to emphasise that although this appears a substantial body of work, and it is, a significant number of projects are already under way that will contribute directly to transformation towards the target operating model. In particular, the introduction of Communities of Learning will not only help smooth learner transitions, it will also make it much easier for good practice to be more rapidly and widely adopted and for communities, employers and the system's health and social sector partners to engage with the Education System, as well as making it easier to align roles and responsibilities to meet the challenges outlined above.

13 Conclusion

Attitude is everything – a system that becomes truly "ambitious for learners" will deliver for learners.

Outstanding teaching and learning is happening every day in pockets throughout the system from early childhood education, through primary, secondary, tertiary and lifelong learning. Many great initiatives are already under way for system improvement. There is a great deal of consensus about what needs to be achieved and what needs to be done to ensure every learner can succeed.

What is needed now is an environment that ensures success is common-place and enduring, where long-standing underperformance of the system for particular groups of learners is addressed through a more personalised approach and where the system continually evolves to meet changing needs and circumstances.

This requires a reorientation of the system so that it is learner-centric and delivers a personalised learner experience that leaves each learner best placed to live and work constructively with others and so contribute as best they can to the economy and society.

The Blueprint has been designed to address these issues. The Education System Agencies' Response describes the work programme of improvements that need to be made, some of which are already under way and others that need to be initiated. While all of these are necessary, ultimately system transformation is not won on the playing fields of projects and initiatives, important as these are. It is won by understanding the needs of learners and inspiring system participants to meet their needs and deliver outstanding learning experiences and achievements.