WeCreate Submission to Education and Workforce Select Committee
Education and Training (Vocational Education and Training System) Amendment Bill 150-1 (2025), Government Bill Contents – New Zealand Legislation
10 July 2025

Mōrena koutou, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

The speed of change in the world now is faster than at any other time in history. Where a generation used to be 25 years, now it's 7. This means my two eldest grandchildren – aged 13 and 5 – are from different generations but in the same family. When the speed of change is this fast, systems we're putting in place need to be agile and responsive in order to keep up. This Bill will not do that for our vocational education system.

WeCreate is the alliance of Aotearoa's creative industry associations. Our members come from music, game development, fashion, publishing, media, screen, architecture, photography, advertising and design. The sector is innovative – we're always making new things – and at the cutting edge of technology development and use. This enables us to understand what a future-focussed vocational education system should look like.

There are three main points I want to speak about today, that build on our written submission.

Firstly – we need to retain the WDCs. For the creative sector, Toi Mai is on a positive upward trajectory towards improving the VET system to meet our needs. With no place in the VET system prior to Toi Mai, we're just beginning to see the difference that is made by having an organisation that is our voice in the system. Neither the Minister, nor TEC, have proven that the WDC's aren't achieving their stated goals. Why are we getting rid of them? The impact on our sector will be significant and detrimental.

One of the functions of the WDCs (which will not carry over to the ISB's) is industry leadership. This has been a critical function for the creative sector in the WDC model. We do not have a home in central government, and government data systems do not capture or reflect our sector fully, meaning we're often overlooked in policy decisions. The data and insights that Toi Mai has published about us are not just tools for the VET system, they're needed and used by other parts of government, and by industry.

My **second** point is that we need to ensure the VET system is set up for **skills development**, not just qualifications, and that it goes beyond the employer-employee dynamic. Over 30% of the creative workforce are freelancers and contractors. I'm one of them. Freelancers don't have an employer to give them time off for training or to pay their study fees. They also don't have the luxury of taking months or years away from work to get traditional qualifications.

A skills approach will also enable the skills that everyone in the workforce needs – creative, tech and business – to be delivered to any learner regardless of the industry

they work in. Access to opportunities for immediate upskilling and reskilling is critical to meet industry's needs for high-demand roles that contribute directly to economic productivity.

Our game development industry is one excellent example of this. The skills needed in CreaTech (which is the fusion of creativity and technology) are increasingly required outside of creative fields like advertising and media, and in areas like e-commerce and healthcare, where visualisation and interface design are becoming critical.

A skills approach also allows learners to enter or re-enter the workforce more quickly which has numerous upsides for both the individual and for the government. This form of education and training is more accessible for underserved learners which can have a powerful impact on their families and communities.

We only have to look to the UK to see how this can be achieved. Skills England is a new government entity focused on growth and prosperity and also connected into other parts of the UK government's work programme, including a recently published Creative Industries Sector Plan.

Which leads me to **point three** – connected up policy making. This government has a clear focus on economic growth and growing exports. The Bill does nothing to support achieving those objectives. Minister Willis's **Going for Growth** plan includes a goal of **Developing Talent** that states:

New Zealand's most powerful asset is its people. The Government wants to maximise the potential of Kiwis. This means raising the earnings potential of New Zealanders and their living standards. It also means ensuring businesses can access the people needed to help them compete globally and grow.

Going For Growth sets out to:

- *ensure education, training and immigration settings support economic growth, and*
- *improve education and skills performance.*

That sounds aspirational but this Bill proposes to just shuffle the deck chairs. It will not lead to the VET system that New Zealand needs. It proposes to get rid of organisations that were set up to make a difference only 3 years ago.

Toi Mai has been making positive change from within the VET system which is beginning to make improvements for our sector. And now we're being thrown back to square one, where an industry that generates $17.5 billion dollars for the economy has had to fight to even get a place in the proposed ISBs.

What's wrong with the system now is not going to improve with this Bill which is clearly predicated on saving money, rather than bringing about meaningful and sustainable change for a future-focussed VET system.

The true cost closing down the WDC's has not been mentioned. While there are obvious hard costs like lease buy-outs and redundancy payments, the hidden costs including the loss of knowledgeable and experienced staff, team culture and the impact on industry are impossible to put a dollar value on. What we do know, is that there will be a significant loss of momentum – at a time when New Zealand needs to power up its economy to be focused on the industries of the future like creative and tech.

To be clear - the changes proposed to the WDCs are an unnecessary disruption to industry that will take years to make up. It's not too late for you to turn this Bill around and set our VET system up for the future. A number of you have personal experience of the VET system and will no doubt appreciate what vocational education can deliver to learners, business and communities. It's a powerful and historically undervalued part of the education system and, I suggest, is the part that can make the most impactful difference to the country, including in the short term.

Sending this Bill back to the House without making meaningful change is effectively consigning learners and industry to history.