

Tertiary Education Report: Deferment of the Vocational Education and Training Marketing Campaign

Date:	16 July 2020	TEC priority:	Medium
Security level:	In Confidence	Report no:	B-20-00502
		Minister's office No:	

ACTION SOUGHT		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister of Education	<p>note that in 2019 Cabinet approved \$4.05m for a marketing campaign to raise the profile of vocational education.</p> <p>note that the marketing campaign is currently planned to launch on 31 July 2020 and will coincide with the pre-election period.</p> <p>note that the Tertiary Education Commission's Chief Executive intends to defer the campaign until after the general election.</p> <p>note the extensive information activities and campaigns in place over the next three months to ensure public visibility of government post COVID-19 and budget initiatives in the vocational education and training space.</p>	
Enclosure: No	Round Robin: Yes/No	

CONTACT FOR TELEPHONE DISCUSSION (IF REQUIRED)			
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Gillian Dudgeon	Deputy Chief Executive Delivery		

THE FOLLOWING DEPARTMENTS/AGENCIES HAVE SEEN THIS REPORT							
<input type="checkbox"/> DPMC	<input type="checkbox"/> MPI	<input type="checkbox"/> ENZ	<input type="checkbox"/> ERO	<input type="checkbox"/> MBIE	<input type="checkbox"/> MoE	<input type="checkbox"/> MFAT	
<input type="checkbox"/> MPP	<input type="checkbox"/> MSD	<input type="checkbox"/> NZQA	<input type="checkbox"/> NZTE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TEC	<input type="checkbox"/> TPK	<input type="checkbox"/> Treasury	

Minister's Office to Complete: Approved Declined
 Noted Needs change
 Seen Overtaken by Events
 See Minister's Notes Withdrawn

Comments:

Recommendations

Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education

It is recommended that you:

1. **note** that in 2019 Cabinet approved \$4.05m for a marketing campaign to raise the profile of vocational education.
2. **note** that the marketing campaign is currently planned to launch on 31 July 2020 and will coincide with the pre-election period.
3. **note** that the Tertiary Education Commission's Chief Executive intends to defer the campaign until after the general election.
4. **note** the extensive information activities and campaigns in place over the next three months to ensure public visibility of government post COVID-19 and budget initiatives in the vocational education and training space.



Tim Fowler

Chief Executive,
Tertiary Education Commission

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Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister of Education

29 / 08 / 20

Purpose

1. This paper outlines the issues raised by the timing of the planned vocational education and training marketing campaign (the campaign) during the pre-election period. The paper notes the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) Chief Executive (the Chief Executive) intends to defer the campaign until immediately after the election period.
2. This paper outlines the guidance and advice sought by the Chief Executive in assessing the risks of running the campaign during the pre-election period, and the steps that are being taken to ensure significantly increased visibility of VET during the election period.

Background

3. In 2019 Cabinet approved funding of \$4.05 million for a four-year campaign to shift the perception and raise the profile of vocational education and training (VET).
4. There is a deep set historical perception of VET as being less desirable than other forms of higher education. The campaign aims to change this perception and to improve the status and perceived value of VET, to drive participation in VET.
5. It was originally planned that the campaign would be launched in June 2020, however, the launch was deferred to 31 July 2020 as a result of COVID-19, meaning the launch would run during the pre-election period.

Campaign planning began in 2019

6. Campaign planning began with an RFP procurement process to contract an advertising agency to work with TEC to create and implement the campaign.
7. Running in parallel to this, qualitative research was carried out through a series of in-depth interviews with Learners, Influencers and Employers to ensure the marketing communications resonated with these audiences.
8. After completing the research, we conducted internal and external stakeholder and industry interviews which provided relevant perspective, insight and context. Interviews were held with leaders across key organisations including MoE, NZQA, BCITO, Competenz, NZIST, SkillsNZ, WorldSkills NZ, Whitireia/Weltec and Aoraki Development. These insights, combined with audience research, were used to inform the strategic marketing approach.
9. Creative, audience testing, channel and media planning are all in progress as the campaign moves through its development phases.

COVID-19 had an impact on campaign timing and the messaging approach

10. The campaign was planned prior to COVID-19, but has been re-framed to reflect a COVID-19 context and response.
11. The planned June 2020 launch was impacted by COVID-19 and slowed the planning process. This pushed the launch back from late June 2020 until 31 July 2020.

12. This timing takes the campaign into the pre-election period which, given its emotive nature, raises concerns as to whether the marketing campaign should proceed or be postponed until after the general election.

The emotive focus and language of the campaign poses a risk in the pre-election period

13. The campaign deliberately takes an emotive approach to addressing perceptions about VET careers and jobs. It has been informed by audience research undertaken in March and later internal/external stakeholder and industry interviews, which have provided the relevant perspective, insight and COVID-19 context used to inform the marketing approach.
14. The insights being used to develop the campaign include the value of connecting this to how people feel about being a New Zealander, to doing something for the greater good, and something that has meaning and value outside of individual gain. It actively leverages the inward focus and national pride that we currently have as a country (a focus that has increased post-COVID) and directs this focus onto the value of VET and the drive to rebuild New Zealand.
15. To achieve the campaign's objectives, the language and imagery in the creative collateral is deliberately emotive and uses advertising language to make an emotional connection. References to the impact of COVID-19, to "rebuilding New Zealand" and that "we are building a more resilient and self-sufficient New Zealand" are all examples of the types of language that will be used in the creative execution. State Services Commission (SSC) and Cabinet Office guidance highlights the acceptance of using public information language but not language that can be considered as having more than educational or informational meaning. The emotive language used in the campaign, which are key to its cut through, strays into this territory. Consideration has been given changing the collateral to be less emotive, but the view is that would undermine the effectiveness of the campaign.

The Chief Executive sought advice on the issue and on balance intends to defer the start of the campaign

16. Advice was sought on this issue from SSC, the Central Agencies General Election Coordination Group, and from TEC's lawyers.
17. The Central Agencies General Election Coordination Group was of the view that the Chief Executive had taken into account the appropriate considerations in reaching his initial view that it would be best to defer the campaign, and concurred with the concerns identified with some of the particular language in the planned campaign.
18. Advice from TEC's lawyers was that there is a high risk that the campaign will breach the State Services Commission's requirements for advertising campaigns, and there is a risk that the campaign will attract general criticism if it is viewed by members of the public as being in any way supportive of the current government.
19. The advice received was shared with the TEC Board, which agrees that TEC should defer the campaign launch until after the general election.
20. While it would be optimal to launch the campaign as planned, the Chief Executive judges there is a significant risk of TEC being perceived as not acting in a politically neutral fashion. Similarly, there is risk the government could be perceived to be inappropriately using public funding during an election period. On this basis the Chief Executive intends to defer the campaign launch until after the election period.

We will, however, expand the promotion of Vocational Education and Training initiatives during the pre-election period

21. In the interim, we are progressing multiple activities to advance the key messages to support VET.
22. **The Targeted Training and Apprenticeships Fund (TTAF)**, which makes vocational training and apprenticeships free, started on 1 July 2020. There has already been a significant effort from NZIST and its subsidiaries to promote this fund, as well as from transitional ITO's such as BCITO.
23. In addition, there are several media opportunities planned over the coming weeks where TEC is working with your office to reach apprentices, employers of apprenticeships and parents of apprentices through regional publications and radio interviews.
24. We ran a **marketing campaign** in June to raise awareness by displaced workers around tools and resources (such as the Job Hunters Workbook) on the careers.govt.nz website. This was a successful campaign, attracting approximately 20,000 new users to the website during a four week period. We are now looking to repeat a similar campaign in August and September with a focus on VET.
25. The **VET information campaign** will include functional messages until the full marketing campaign begins post-election. The campaign will leverage channels allowing us to target specific audience groups, and will include links to Fees Free, TTAF and Apprenticeship boost programs. A new landing page on the careers.govt.nz website will be dedicated to VET.
26. **The Apprenticeship Boost/Apprenticeship Support** programme, which will help employers retain existing and pay for new apprentices in their first two years of training, will be available from August 2020. Media and other information opportunities to promote this program are already in place, including op eds in trade publications and sector news.
27. **The Education, Employment and Training (EET)** website is due to go live on 7 August 2020. This website will bring together all of the relevant initiatives that have been developed as a response to COVID-19, which end users will be able to access from one location. MSD is leading this work, in collaboration with key agencies such as TEC, MoE, MBIE and TPK. We will ensure the full suite of links available to promote VET initiatives and pathways is on this website.
28. There are multiple initiatives in schools that promote vocational education pathways. **Gateway and Trades Academy** places were significantly increased in 2019 and these are widely communicated to and within schools, as well as to employers by Education to Employment work brokers. Planning is currently underway for the **2020 Vocational Excellence Award**, an award which was introduced last year.
29. Overall, there is no shortage of activity to reach students, apprentices, employers and key influencers with messages on the availability of and options for VET while we pause the overarching campaign until later in the year.

Next Steps

30. We will keep you informed of the performance of the VET information campaign to attract users to the new landing page on careers.govt.nz, as well as other interim measures. You will also receive regular reporting on the new EET website.
31. We will continue to develop the creative platform and plan marketing execution of the campaign so that it is ready to proceed immediately after the election period.