

Government support secures tertiary education on Coast

The Government's decision to continue financial support for Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP) is great news for the future of tertiary education on the West Coast.

Funding support for the coming year was confirmed today by Education Minister Chris Hipkins www.beehive.govt.nz. It coincides with the release by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) of its investigation into TPP delivery between 2010 and 2015 www.tec.govt.nz.

Funding support allows the institute to keep operating while plans to develop a new model for the delivery of quality, sustainable tertiary education at both a national and regional level are progressed. Chief Executive Alex Cabrera says TPP, as part of a range of improvements made over the past 18 months, is considering new ways of working that take an innovative approach to tertiary education in one of New Zealand's most isolated regions.

"We know we have to do things differently to secure the future of vocational training on the Coast so we've worked closely with the local community, partner organisations and Government to come up with a proposal for the future. Today's indication of the Minister's strong focus on how the regions can be better supported by tertiary education is a positive step toward change."

Crown Manager Murray Strong says TPP's new management and governance teams are very aware of the financial and strategic challenges they face, along with the serious issues identified in the TEC report, commissioned two years ago and released earlier today.

"While the findings are not a surprise, they remain disappointing. However, we have already taken steps to address many of the issues raised in the report. The appointments of myself and Mr Cabrera in 2016 marked a period of positive change for TPP. Our focus has remained sharp on the need to deliver quality education that gets local people into local jobs.

"We've been continually improving our processes, quality and financial performance as we come up with new ways of working. We have already created more robust systems and processes, introduced coordination and moderation improvements and improved stakeholder engagement. We remain conscious that the Polytechnic's situation is serious and we have a lot of hard work ahead."

TPP Chair of Council Andrew Robb says TPP remains committed to shaping a better future for tertiary education on the West Coast. Quality is a key priority, he says, along with providing education that makes a contribution to the local economy and is relevant to local industry.

"Times of change are never easy and we'll only succeed if we remain focused on why we're here: to meet the needs of Coast students and Coast businesses in way that is financially sustainable. We'll have to make tough decisions but our focus must remain on meeting these three core values and ensuring we're ready to deliver for the West Coast," Mr Robb says.

For more information contact:

Mequa Hourston, Communications Manager

DDI: 03 7699 405 | mobile: 027 237 5844 | email: mequah@tpp.ac.nz

What does the TEC report say?

In 2015, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) undertook a regular scheduled audit on TPP that identified possible under-delivery of learning hours across five programmes. A subsequent investigation looked in to a further nine programmes. The investigation found under-delivery of learning hours in 13 of the 14 programmes considered. Read the full report and TEC summary at www.tec.govt.nz

What does this mean for TPP?

Because TPP has been aware of the investigation for some time, the institute has already been able to address some of the issues identified in the early audit. Financially, the under-delivery means TPP had been over-paid for the amount of training delivered by \$24.878 million (GST inclusive). This debt has been written off due to the financial challenges faced by TPP. TPP is very appreciative of the debt write off as this will allow for the continuation of training on the West Coast while we also continue our work to improve performance and quality.

What has been done to address the issues raised?

As set out in the TEC overview, both organisations have worked together to address the issues identified in a number of ways. A Crown Manager was appointed in December 2016, assuming responsibility for all matters relating to finances and the quality of programmes. Under the new Acting Chief Executive, appointed in late 2016, TPP has undertaken a number of initiatives to meet its compliance, student experience and financial sustainability requirements. TEC has indicated its confidence with the approach TPP is taking to ensure business improvements are made.

What are some specific examples of changes made to address the issues raised?

Academic Quality Improvements

- A review of the Academic Board and reconfiguration in line with ITP sector best practice
- Review of all programme curriculum documents and realigned teaching hours where appropriate
- Establishment of a Curriculum Advisory Group to ensure programme components are fit-for-purpose
- Signed MOU with SIT
- Academic Board support from SIT
- Pre- and post-moderation and assessment verification with SIT
- Working with SIT to align academic processes
- Self-assessment support from SIT
- Access to academic capability support through SIT Academic Support Unit
- Use of SIT Quality Management System
- Development of action plan to address academic quality with NZQA
- Establish a Teaching and Learning Sub-committee of Academic Board
- Appointment of an Independent Chair of Academic Board

Internal System & Control Processes

- An in-depth review of internal controls, delegations, policies and practices with consequent changes and improvements in reporting practices

- Structural changes to improve central oversight of business practices and decision-making, including access and rights to institutional information
- Access best-practice models from other ITPs
- Develop a consistent process for data collection and analysis

Financial & Compliance Focus

- Analysis of teaching hours and payroll information and amendments where necessary
- Working closely with the institution's auditors to support compliance
- Staff capability development
- Staff workshops to embed understanding of the necessary policies and procedures
- Working with TPP management to build capability
- Accessing SIT Academic Support Unit to support academic capability

Stakeholder Engagement

- We are introducing a new ethical framework at TPP that focuses on social responsibility – our organisation has an obligation to act for the benefit of the West Coast at large and we want our students to learn about social enterprise and our community to be motivated by the potential of what we can achieve by working together.
- We have been working closely, and will continue to do so, with staff, the West Coast community, local and central Government, TEC, NZQA, our quality partner (SIT), key industries, and many others.
- Our partnership with SIT will result in efficiencies for TPP, as well as addressing some of the wider challenges we face around shared services and resourcing.

What is TPP's financial position right now?

It is well-known that TPP has been facing significant annual deficits of between \$3m and \$4m. This is clearly not sustainable. The Government's decision to continue financial support for the institute while plans to develop a new model for the delivery of quality, sustainable tertiary education at both a national and regional level are progressed means TPP can continue delivering training on the West Coast.