

Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) Consultation – Simplifying NZ qualifications and other credentials



Platform Trust

Atamira | Platform Trust (Platform) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) consultation – Simplifying NZ qualifications and other credentials. Platform has consulted with members in the preparation of this submission as the proposed options will affect a large portion of the mental health and addiction NGO and community workforce.

Platform is a peak body representing 66 Mental Health and Addiction (MHA) Non-governmental organisations (NGO) and community sector organisations that provide support to people whose lives are directly impacted by mental health and addiction, their whānau and the communities where they live. MHA NGO and community organisations include Māori and Pasifika providers, plus people with lived experience and whānau. Platform also represents a wider network of MHA NGOs, (approximately 166) who are not necessarily members but share the same aspiration of a MHA system and sector that is driven by the need for better and more equitable outcomes for all. The MHA NGO & community sector employs the largest number of community support workers within the MHA sector.

1.1 What option do you support and why?

Proposal 1 – Option B (further simplification)

Choosing standards as opposed to a national curriculum will always lead to more variability in training outcomes.

Creating a new system, will enable better collaboration across the sector including the Workforce Development Councils (WDCs), training providers, MHA NGO and community providers, support workers and peer support workers with a lived experience of mental distress and/or addiction. This collaboration will allow for more consistency in skills, training and qualifications development based on a national curriculum and allow for a greater input from the MHA sector to meet the needs of support workers, peer support worker, support workers with lived experience and employers in the MHA sector.

Platform is aware that Te Pou is making a submission and we are supportive of their submission also.

1.2 For option A – are there improvements that could be made or issues to be addressed?

The current system is not designed to meet the needs of MHA providers, support workers peer support worker, support workers with lived experience. We believe that small revision will not lead to sufficient change, but a national curriculum will be better places to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

1.3 For option B – do you have comments about how the WDCs and providers could collaborate on a national curriculum?

It will be critical for the right organisations to be involved as early as possible. These organisations must include the workforce development centres (Te Pou, Werry Centre, Te Rau Ora), peak bodies (Platform Trust, Disability Support Network, Home and Community Association and Community Housing Aotearoa), a cross section of MHA NGO and community providers and organisations that represent the peer workforce. Retaining and working with existing workforce advisory groups in particular those established through Careerforce will provide a good foundation for WDC to connect with subject matter experts.

Having the above organisations involved in the development of a national curriculum or content from the outset, will create trust, commitment, and dedication to the development of this curriculum.

Having the right people and organisation at the table will ensure key initiatives such as a human rights-based approach and the peer support strategy frameworks are incorporated into the curriculum development.

Platform trust alongside Te Pou has led several MHA support worker workforce development initiatives over many years and are well connected to the training, skills, and career pathway development issues for support workers within the sector. Platform's awareness of these issues will be vital to the development of option B to ensure the continued development of this large workforce which continues to grow.

The MHA sector is managing large systemic changes, with the health and disability system transformation that will have a large impact on the sector, starting during 2021. These are in addition to impacts of the Reform of Vocational Education. As the peak body, Platform can keep these systemic changes in mind to consider the most appropriate ways for sector engagement to occur in order to understand current and future vocational qualification needs for the MHA sector.

1.4 For option B – do you have any comment on how this option may work for non-WDC developed qualifications?

Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure non-WDC qualifications are developed and reviewed by a collaborative team of employers and support workers including those that have a lived experience of MHA.

It is essential there is consideration for maintaining a high quality of qualifications whilst acknowledging very good examples of skills development and training exist and how these can respectfully and accurately be reviewed and endorsed.

1.5 For option B what would the impact be on your organisation and others?

Platform Trust is a peak body for the MHA, NGO and community sector and supports members and those with a shared interest in the sector. Platform has an existing network that engages and connects MHA NGO and community providers regionally and nationally to collect, disseminate and discuss information relevant to training and workforce development of support workers, peer support workers, support workers with a lived experience of mental distress and/or addiction and employers. This includes understanding the needs of employers and tāngata whaiora, whanau and communities they support.

Platform expects to have an integral role in ensuring MHA NGO and community organisations are involved in the development of a national curriculum. By having a mechanism and processes to connect with the WDC. It will be critical that organisations with

different needs and perspectives are involved in a co-design type process including Kaupapa Māori, Pasifika, Youth, Asian and Peer, lived experience and other providers.

1.6 For option B – what do you see as the implementation challenges?

If engagement with critical organisations such as the workforce development centres, peak bodies, providers and tangata whaiora is undertaken early on, this will mitigate many of the challenges in implementing option B.

1.7 What impacts do you foresee arising from option B?

With good stakeholder representation (described in 1.5) through a comprehensive co-design process, we expect the impacts of a national curriculum to be positive and include an improvement in quality and consistency of graduating learners, more scope and flexibility for learners to seamlessly move between providers and regions (another incentive for the workforce) and an improved match between organisational/support worker needs and graduating learners.

1.8 For option B – do you anticipate any risks?

The risks of not consulting and/or co-designing with the right people could undermine trust in the process and lead to poor sector engagement and a curriculum that is not fit for purpose.

1.9 For option B – do you anticipate any costs?

Significant upfront costs will be required for the WDCs to develop and maintain a national curriculum. These costs must include provision of a comprehensive co-design process.

There is some concern that over time if resourcing is reduced this could undermine the WDCs ability to maintain and ensure the national curriculum is kept up to date and relevant.

There are potential cost implications (including opportunity cost) to peak bodies and MHA NGO and community organisations engaging in curriculum development when this is neither funded or a part of business-as-usual activity. It is important that curriculum development and review is sustainable, and there is concern this may not be possible across all qualifications.

1.10 How could the system encourage greater collaboration by providers?

We anticipate that early and good engagement via established workforce advisory groups, relevant workforce development agencies within the MHA NGO and community sector will result in greater collaboration within the sector.

Early collaboration will allow providers and organisation to learn from and see the value of the lived experience voice and how the voice of support workers and peer support workers can have a greater role in the provision of training.

1.11 Do you have anything else to say?

No

2.1 Do you support replacing training schemes with micro-credentials? Why?

Yes, the MHA NGO and community sector support replacing training schemes with micro-credentials. However, this should be done in a way which is informed by the needs of employers, the MHA sector focus on improving outcomes for tangata Whaiora, whilst promoting career pathways for the support worker workforce.

Based on Platforms partnership with Te Pou and work around developing the MHA support worker workforce over several years, Platform is aware of the skills development, training and career pathway issues raised by support workers (including Peer Support Workers) working in the MHA sector. The development of micro-credentials offers the opportunity to improve several problems identified by this workforce that include:

- the lack of a career pathway
- the lack of educational qualifications (linked to pay rates) which support a career pathway
- time, cost, and accessibility issues associated with current training options
- slow, cumbersome, and inflexible responses from the education sector to the fast-paced changes in the MHA sector.

Micro-credentials offer support workers a pathway for developing specialist skills on top of their base qualification that could lead to 'stacking credits' and gaining further qualifications.

Micro-credentials also offer a way to cater for regional variations around specific skills that may be required for a region, or organisations. For example, 'harm reduction' to tackle high alcohol and drug abuse in a region, 'long-term health conditions' for health coaches (support workers) working with people with mental distress and addiction in a primary health setting.

The MHA NGO and community sector has already started a consultation process in partnership with Te Pou to engage with the MHA NGO and community sector to understand what 'topics' would be needed for the development of micro-credentials to address training gaps that currently exist within the sector.

2.2 What impacts do you foresee for your organisation or others arising from the proposed changes?

The impacts:

- Organisations may retain staff more easily due to the potential for a career pathway to lead to further qualifications and roles
- Increased skill in specialist areas whilst not having to complete a lengthy qualification
- The workforce is more equipped to respond to the changing needs of tangata whaiora and whānau

2.3 Do you anticipate any risks associated with replacing training schemes with micro-credentials?

- The learner may end up with a set of additional skills that may not necessarily add up to a recognised qualification and may not be associated with a recognised career pathway (with equivalent rates of pay)
- Micro-credentials should augment but not replace the formal qualifications system
- The minimum standard for a MHA support worker is a level 4 qualification. Achieving a level 4 health and wellbeing certificate entitles a support worker to pay rates and increments.

There is a concern that the development of micro-credentials does not weaken this qualification benchmark that has been agreed as part of the pay equity settlement Act 2017.

END.