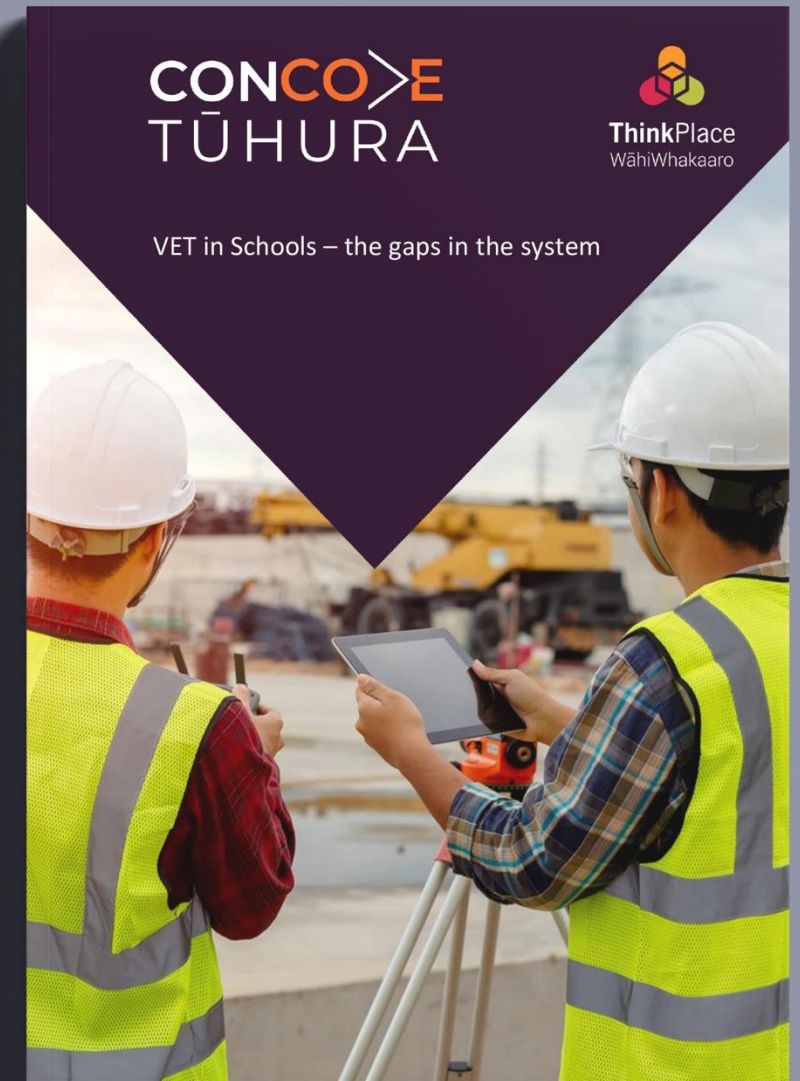




Vocational pathways in schools – the gaps in the system

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The challenge – making sense of the mental models

1. Explore the philosophy ('mental models') of vocational education in schools;
2. Identify opportunities to reframe it;
3. Presumption of material barriers to success.

Desired outcomes

1. Enhanced appreciation and dialogue about VET career pathways;
2. Options for targeted investments:
a future-focussed model for VET in schools;
3. Opportunities for codesign and collaboration.

**“ It’s not about
learning, it’s about
pass rates.”**

**“ Hard for teachers
to keep up with
the pace of
change. ”**

VET in Schools – the gaps in the system



1. Current state

In 2023, only 11.1% of school leavers achieved one or more Vocational Pathways Awards¹. Acknowledging changes to the Awards criteria impacting from 2019 onwards and the impact of Covid, this has been declining steadily since 2017 and is the lowest achievement since 2013. Only 0.7% of students achieved a Construction and Infrastructure Award.

1.1 Our assessment

We have summarised what people told us into five distinct themes (Table 3). Our assessment within and across these five themes is complex and heavily nuanced, and there is a high degree of subject-matter cross-over between the symptoms, evidence and root causes.

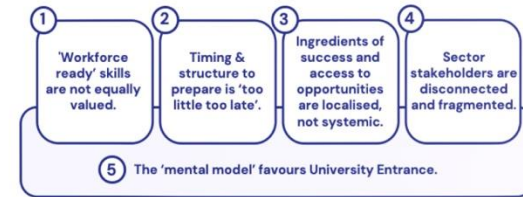


Table 3: The five key themes

Broadly speaking, we were told that VET in schools currently operates as an adjunct to the academic curriculum, is fragmented, and is inconsistently applied and accessible. There is a disconnect in the motivations, expectations, investment and needs between the construction industry and schools. The capabilities and characteristics that industry needs amongst 'workforce ready' young people are not being met, and schools do not specifically prepare students for employment.

To that end, successful vocational pathways rely on a school champion, industry and/or community connection to be valued and resourced – including funding, training and recognition. Quality and success requires the confluence of a school, industry body,

¹ Education Indicator, Vocational Pathways Awards August 2024.

community and region to make a cohesive and concerted effort - working together to create an approach that works for them and their young people.

Addressing the workforce readiness gap for industry (and more broadly across Aotearoa New Zealand) requires a multi-faceted approach involving stronger industry-education sector partnerships, increased funding and resources for vocational programmes, and a shift or perceptions to elevate the value of practical, work-based learning. Policies and practices that drive measurements of success and funding are fundamental influences within each of the five themes we have identified, but there are opportunities for positive steps within the current policy and practice regime.

1.2 What people told us

The scope and coverage of our interviews has been sufficient to surface a wide range of perspectives² and identify consistent thematic patterns. Our analysis of what people told us is contextualised by desk research about models of vocational education & training in New Zealand and overseas. What people told us also has a strong correlation to the student voice reflected in TEC's foundational '[Transitions from Secondary School](#)', 2022 research paper, the 2019 New South Wales report³ on [VET delivered to Secondary Students](#), and the extensive CEDEFOP resources that continually assess trends and form conclusions about vocational education programmes in Europe.

² Note: opportunities to explore a te ao Māori context, and student voice, will be investigated and resourced in the next phase.

³ Especially on topics of timetabling and curricular inflexibility, resources to enable cross-sector collaboration, relevance and quality of VET courses, the importance of workplace learning and industry experience, and effective support structures.

The problem in a nutshell – what people told us

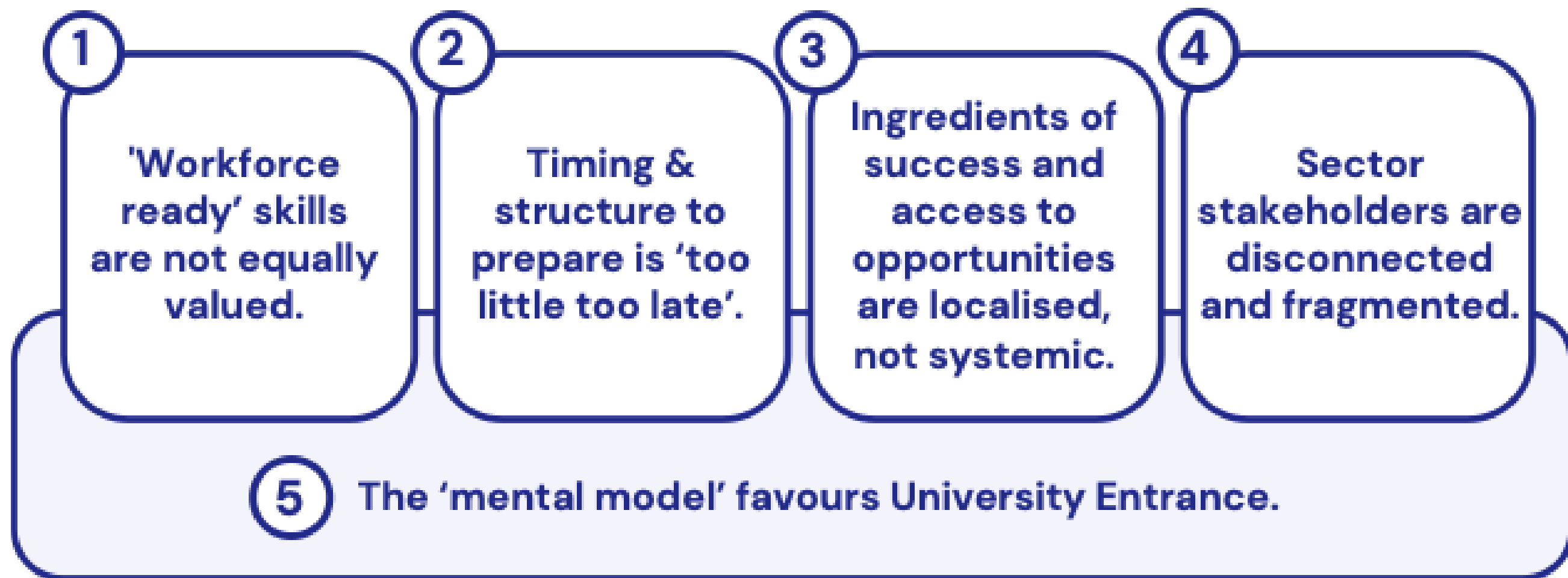
1. VET in schools operates as an adjunct to the academic curriculum;
2. Fragmented, inconsistently applied and inconsistently accessible;
3. Disconnect in the motivations, expectations, investment and needs between industry and schools;
4. 'Workforce-ready' capabilities and characteristics not being met;
5. Schools do not specifically prepare students for employment.

"The system can't change because it's run by people who have no other perspective."

“ Workforce development strategies being developed in a vacuum. ”

"Kids view vocational education as [attending] 'cabbage class' "

Five Key Themes



Root causes

1. Schools and industry have competing priorities, measure success differently;
2. Education system values academic pathways – vocational pathways are a ‘fall back’;
3. Industry values ‘work ready’ skills, knowledge and competencies;
4. Lack of vocational educators – knowing the world of work, workplace ability to teach;
5. Employers & schools struggle to engage – time, cost, effort, language, exposure;
6. Economies of scale, tyranny of distance, finance;
7. Funding regime is hard to navigate.

“ Students bear the burden of juggling two education systems at the same time. ”

“No appreciation for how schools operate.”

“ We don’t lack ambition [but] we lack scale. ”

Actions and next steps – moving towards....

1. Parity between academic and non-academic standards;
2. VET programmes resourced and funded for multi-year pathway and transition period;
3. Clear, equitable routes between education and employment;
4. Student access to information and role models about work options;
5. Workforce and industry experience within a school setting is valued and rewarded;
6. Schools, industry and the public sector communicate and collaborate;
7. Industry supported to engage schools and students.

“Mismatch in
[expectation] of whose
role it is to prepare
students for work.”

“ Industry is
invisible in the
school. ”

“Students experiencing a
gap in educational
exposure and delivery.”

Thank you

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designing equitable outcomes for all people
and places.*



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