**Hon. Chris Hipkins – Ōritetanga Learner Success Conference, August 2019**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Aotearoa whenua, Aotearoa mātauranga, Aotearoa tangata, tēnā koutou katoa. Kia orana, mālō e lelei, talofa lava, and warm Pacific greetings to you all.

To our visitors from overseas, welcome to New Zealand, welcome to Aotearoa. Thank you all for joining us today. To Ngāti Whātua, thank you very much for your very warm welcome to our venue here in Auckland today and for opening our proceedings this morning.

If I'm going to speak to you about why we need to make sure our education system in New Zealand serves all learners, I need to begin by paying tribute to one of our greatest New Zealanders and one of our greatest educationalists. His name was Sir Apirana Ngata. A man whose lifetime spanned two centuries, but whose incredible legacy will live on for generations of New Zealanders.

Sir Apirana grew up in a rural village, and more than 130 years ago, he headed far away to study. He would become New Zealand's first-- the first Māori New Zealander to graduate from university, but he wasn't satisfied with his BA. He went on to complete an MA, and then he went on to complete an LLB. And he wasn't done there either.

Over his incredible lifetime, Sir Apirana dedicated himself to the social, economic, and educational empowerment of Māori New Zealanders. A politician, a lawyer, an author, and a scholar. He was also an activist, demanding official recognition and support for Māori culture and language. He was uncompromising in his demand for Māori educational excellence and learner success.

Decades after his passing, his challenge remains crucial to our future as a nation. Like Sir Apirana, this government wants to ensure that all New Zealanders enjoy the lifelong benefits of tertiary education success. But instead of leaving it to chance, we know that we need to build a system that supports each and every New Zealander to set and to achieve our tertiary education and career goals.

It's a system based on collaboration, and not competition alone. A system where the goal is clear, the current and future well-being of all New Zealanders. Education is the enabler. It gives people the freedom and opportunities to be the best that they can be. The ability to contribute to their whānau and to their communities. As our economy becomes more technologically advanced, so must our people.

Take several contractors and road workers, as an example, the group that I met with yesterday. Their industry is no longer just about shovelling dirt or painting lines. It's science dictated by GPS coordinates and precision engineering, and a sector at the forefront of technological change and infrastructural transformation. Ensuring that our people have the skills to operate GPS and not just a shovel is the challenge and opportunity before us all.

The future of work will require all of our people to have greater skills, higher education levels, and higher levels of training than ever before. Already, it's estimated that two out of three jobs will require qualified qualifications above secondary school level. Right now, we need more apprentices, more people with specialist industry certifications, and more people with university qualifications too.

We're already facing extraordinary social, economic, and environmental challenges as technology advances rapidly. We need to prepare New Zealanders for an ever-changing future, where the one sure thing, the one thing that is constant is going to be the need to adapt to change. To do that, we need to keep learning. Lifelong education is the compass every one of us will need to navigate the journey that lies ahead.

Social mobility is about everybody having the opportunity to get ahead in life, but the reality is that social mobility today is easier for some New Zealanders than for others. Over generations, our education system has constantly failed to serve Māori and Pacific Island New Zealanders, who by 2030, will make up 30 percent of our population. We know that our education system has also failed to serve New Zealanders who live with disability, a community whose members already make up more than 20 percent of our population.

There is a part of this country's narrative that needs to change and that is it. We know that a key part of that to unlock our future and economic, social well-being for all New Zealanders is education and a holistic approach to learner success. That's why we need a tertiary education system that works for everybody.

Right now, our tertiary education system doesn't work for everybody, and the truth is, it never really has worked for everybody. That doesn't mean that the system is broken. In some respects, it's world leading, and across all of the system, we have examples of truly amazing and inspiring things that are happening for learners, no matter where they come from, and you're going to hear some of those inspiring stories over the next two days.

But we also need to remember what the reality is for many of our learners. One third of all working age Māori leave school with no qualifications. Often disillusioned by an education system that leaves them feeling isolated and unable to be who they are as Māori. As one leader has stated, the current model has not delivered equitable outcomes for Māori, so it's crucial that we address this as the Māori population continues to grow.

Structural reforms will save money, but designing a system that works better for Māori will change lives. We know that only 50 percent of Māori students who gain level 3 NCEA go on to gain university entrance, compared to 80 percent of non- Māori and non-Pacific learners. That trend continues with qualification completion rates.

In 2018, Māori completions at bachelor level were 47 percent, compared to 63 percent for non- Māori and non-Pacific learners. These gaps are not new and have remained persistent for a very long time. The current system isn't delivering equitable outcomes for generations of New Zealanders, and it's time that that changed.

Over years, we've seen many and varied interventions that aim to support disadvantaged learners. They've had mixed results. Pilot projects come and go, and I don't think I need to tell anybody in the room that that happens, but what we've failed to do in the past is make system changes that are holistic, comprehensive, targeted, and enduring. Systemic changes are required so that we achieve the parity of participation and achievement for all learners, then that were driven by a mindset that puts learner success at the fore of everything that we do.

To do this, we must prioritise our work, and this demands leadership from all of us who are here today. No one can do it alone. Individual heroics and more pilots have not, and will not work. If we're going to meet this challenge, we need to meet it together in whole of system ways. The government wants to collaborate now and into the future, with you, our tertiary sector members, educators, and leaders.

We recognise that many learners in tertiary education with significant challenges and supporting them to succeed isn't simple. Many factors impact on somebody's ability to succeed. They may be the first in their family ever to enrol in tertiary study. They may have not done well at school. Their home background can present significant challenges. They may have come from a family whose members have lived in poverty for generations.

But like you, we know that, unlike almost any other factor, education can help them to overcome these challenges and these disparities. And actually, once learners are enrolled, we all have a responsibility to help them to succeed. It's not a matter of blame. Tertiary organisations want their learners, all of their learners, to do well. Secondary schools want their learners, all of their learners, to do well, but while it's not altogether their fault, it's also not the fault of the learners who are trying to succeed within a system that hasn't been working for them.

We need to see that those of us within the system, whether they be policy makers, government agency, tertiary education organisations, or individual educators are doing everything that we can to make the system work for everybody. Together, we need to ensure that, at the very least, we're not part of the problem. It's critical that we get the system and the settings right to allow tertiary education organisations to do what they do best, which is to help learners succeed.

We can make a difference, and it's already happening in some places. Some of our tertiary educators are already delivering great results for Māori and Pacific learners, and I take my hat off to all of you. We are successful initiatives can be scaled and replicated, we want to support this period to happen, and we want to support it to happen quickly.

We need to learn from our local success stories. We also need to embrace knowledge and learn from institutions anywhere that we can find them who have managed to change their systems so that they deliver for all learners. Tertiary institutions who have made significant progress in reducing and even eliminating achievement gaps for learner groups, including of course, our friends from Georgia who are here today. So thank you very much.

Our government's vision is for a high-quality, collaborative public education system that provides all New Zealanders with lifelong learning opportunities so that they can live fulfilling and rewarding lives. We embarked on a fairly significant education reform program about 20 months ago when we became the government. And part of that is changing the education system to ensure that it's responsive and lifts achievement for all learners, but particularly, for those Māori, Pasifika, and disabled learners that we know we are not doing well by at the moment.

Last week, I announced the biggest reforms to our vocational education and training system that New Zealanders have seen in a generation. We are replacing a system that was largely based on competition with one that's based on collaboration. Creating a strong, unified, sustainable vocational education system, that delivers the skills that learners, employers, and their communities need to thrive.

With a skills shortage across every region, employers are crying out for skilled workers. Some parts of our vocational education system are doing really well, and we need to retain and build on those strengths, but the system as a whole, has been poorly positioned to serve New Zealand's future needs. It was and is in need of urgent reform.

So we'll create a unified, sustainable public network that supports work-based learning, whilst also bringing together the 16 existing institutes of technology and polytechnics to operate as a national campus network under the umbrella of the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology. A working name. We've got a bit of work to do to identify what we're going to call it.

We're giving present and future generations a guarantee that successive governments will preserve a strong network of campuses and of delivery throughout the country. Workforce development councils will put industry more in the driving seat to provide skills leadership across these sectors. Regional leadership groups will be empowered by their local communities to ensure that local needs are met.

We want to ensure that our reforms include Iwi and Māori as key partners by setting up Te Taumata Aronui, the first Māori crowned national tertiary education group of its kind. Our focus will be on partnering with communities across Aotearoa. From Kaitaia to Bluff, Ruatoria to Greymouth, Napier to New Plymouth. Across our tertiary sector, we need organisations to prioritise the needs of learners who have traditionally been under-served by the education system.

Māori, Pacific, low-income people, and learners with disabilities are more likely to be enrolled in lower level qualifications and therefore, poorer employment outcomes. This needs to change, particularly as these communities are growing so quickly and making up such a larger proportion of our working age population. In the future, workforce development councils will have oversight for all vocational education, as well as comprehensive responsibilities for leadership, advising on funding decisions, standard setting, assessment of learning, and employer brokerage.

Vocational education will be primarily delivered or supported by a single institution spread across a range of regional campuses. It will support work-based learning and training and deliver education and training and provider-based settings bringing together the best of each of those systems. This will be underpinned by a single, unified funding system.

Learners will receive more support while they are in training and in vocational education that will be more relevant to employment. They'll be able to move more easily between regions, in between work-based and provider-based training, and they'll be able to continue training more easily if their employment situation changes.

The services of the whole institute will help regions to respond to the needs of their communities. We've got a significant opportunity here to do something that no other country has done. Iwi across our country have social, cultural, and economic goals for their members that span generations and not just years. As an agency of the crown, our relationship with the mana whenua of New Zealand also spans the past, the present, and the future.

In the spirit of our vocational education reforms, we are reflecting our commitment to Māori crown partnerships that prioritise Māori learners across the vocational education system. We recognise that, as custodians of the thriving $50 billion Māori economy, Iwi are also major employers and industry leaders. Te Taumata Aronui is going to be working with the crown to examine the tertiary education system as a whole, including how it works with the schooling system.

We'll work with this group to take a long-term view of tertiary education policy. Another key part of the reforms is making sure that we work on a unified and simpler funding system for vocational education, that better integrates on-the-job and off-the-job learning, so that learners can access more work relevant and tailored support where they need it and when they need it. The unified funding system will apply to all provider-based and work-based integrated education and certificate and diploma levels 3 to 7 in all industry training.

The design work will be informed by those using the system, many of you in the room, including employers, Māori and Pacific peoples, and learners with disabilities. And vocational education reforms will give all learners a more coordinated, inclusive experience that is based on strong connections between education, employment, and strong cultural competency. A more integrated vocational education system will better suit Pacific learners and their families and their communities, many of whom we know prefer to work and earn, rather than study full-time.

The new Institute will be governed and operated in a way that understands Pacific cultures and languages. We'll ensure transparency and stronger accountability for Pacific learners success is embedded into the way that we work. The new system will build on existing programs that best meets the needs of Pacific learners. Our integrated vocational education system will better serve the needs of disabled learners and people with additional-- and people with additional learning support through much more-- for better standards for inclusiveness.

Economies of scale will allow much more support, such as sign language interpreters. Our enhanced industry focus will help break down pre-existing negative attitudes, as employers work to support the success of learners living with disability. Everything we do, in some way, we focused on making sure that all learners succeed now and in the years to come. Next year, marks 70 years since Sir Apirana Ngata passed away, but his demands for educational excellence for all New Zealanders remain as powerful and inspirational as ever before.

And I'll close with some of his words. The words of one of our great New Zealanders. "Cherish the treasures of your ancestors. Master the technologies of the modern world. Grow up and meet the needs of yours and future generations. "Can I wish you the very best for this conference. May it be a productive one. May you all leave here inspired to make a real difference to current and future generations of New Zealanders. No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

[APPLAUSE]

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