



# Enhancing Youth Employability to support economic growth in Auckland

a discussion document

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## COMET Auckland

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## Whakatauki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi  
ki te raranga i te whāriki  
kia mōhio tātou kiā tātou.  
Mā te mahi tahi ō ngā whenu,  
mā te mahi tahi ō ngā kairaranga,  
ka oti tēnei whāriki.  
I te otinga  
me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.  
Ā tana wā,  
me titiro hoki  
ki ngā raranga i makere  
nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

*The tapestry of understanding  
cannot be woven  
by one strand alone.  
Only by the working together of strands  
and the working together of weavers  
will such a tapestry be completed.  
With its completion  
let us look at the good that comes from it  
and, in time  
we should also look  
at those stitches which have been dropped,  
because they also have a message.*

## Kūkupa Tirikatene

## About COMET Auckland

COMET Auckland, Te Hononga Akoranga (Community Education Trust Auckland) is a charitable trust and Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) of Auckland Council. Our mission is to advance education for Auckland.

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The report can be downloaded from COMET Auckland's website [www.cometauckland.org.nz](http://www.cometauckland.org.nz)  
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**We need a  
coherent focus  
on  
employability  
to grow  
Auckland's  
economy**

# Enhancing Youth Employability to support economic growth in Auckland

## Key messages

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Employability is a set of achievements, skills, understanding and personal attributes and attitudes which make a person more likely find a job, stay in work and build a successful career. Employability skills are needed throughout a person's work life but are particularly important for getting started in employment.

Employers and young people in Auckland both face challenges in the search for the right skills for work. Employers report that young people are not work ready and many young people agree. Young people need more preparation for the reality of work and a better understanding of the opportunities and obligations it brings.

All stakeholders have a part to play. The education system plays an important role but does not have an explicit focus on employability. Families need good information about today's world work, and to understand their important role in helping prepare their children. Business sees itself as providing a solution but needs support to do that. Present solutions are diluted by a lack of a whole of government response.

The consequences of a continued mediocre response will be a diminished workforce, a lack of skills and reduced productivity.

To enhance youth employability we need:

- An explicit focus on employability including a coherent employability framework that operates across sectors. Employers have a key role to play in influencing what young people need to learn.
- More real-world linked learning, both off and on the job. If work is the best place to learn about work, we need to make learning experiences more like work. And we need to break the catch 22 of 'No experience, no job – no job, no experience.'
- Clearer pathways into entry level jobs.
- Focused research on employability.

**The paradox -  
skill shortages  
while young  
people can't  
find work**

## Background to this report

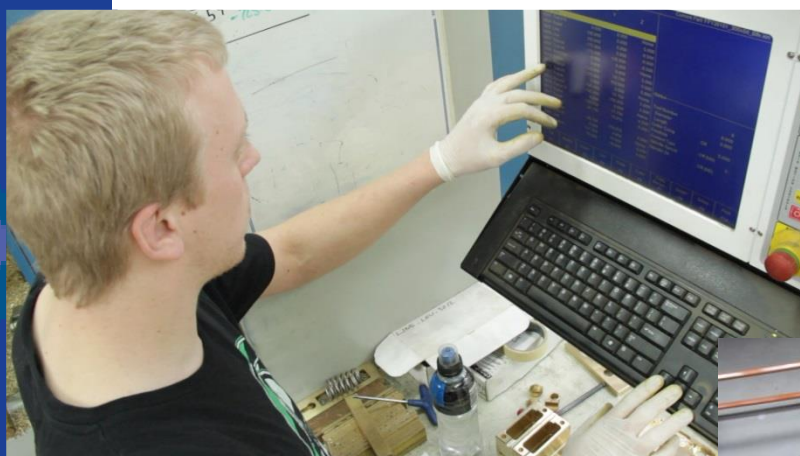
COMET Auckland in partnership with the Auckland Chamber of Commerce is holding an Auckland Forum on Youth Employability in November 2013.

Employers both here and overseas regularly report that young people are not work ready (UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009, Committee for Auckland 2012, Mourshed, Farrell et al. 2012). The Forum is an opportunity to bring together expertise from multiple players to identify one to two clear employer-led actions that will contribute to youth employability and skills in Auckland, and to build cross-sector support for implementation of these actions.

This paper provides background information for the Forum, summarising key issues and themes gathered from a series of conversations about employability with 70 young people and 18 employers during August 2013.

The conversations illustrate some of the tensions and challenges employers and young people face and point to some opportunities for action. This was a scoping exercise, to help us understand the landscape. More detailed research on employability is required.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the young people, employers and organisations that agreed to talk with us. We appreciate the contribution of Penelope Tuatagaloa from the Research, Investigation and Monitoring Unit of Auckland Council who helped shape the report. Our particular thanks go to the Auckland Chamber of Commerce, our partner in this project.



## 1 in 5 young Aucklanders unemployed

### The labour market reality for young people

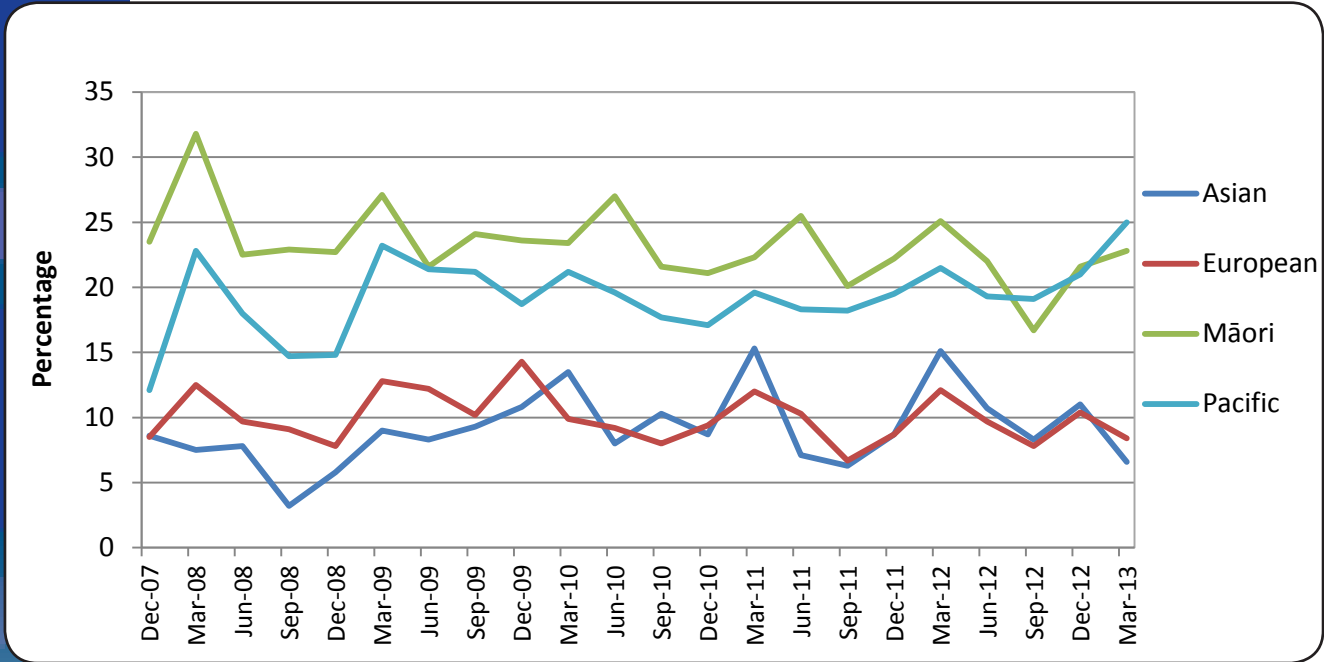
*Today, the journey from adolescence to adulthood is far more daunting. It takes much longer, and the roadway is filled with far more potholes, one-way streets and dead ends (Symonds, Schwartz et al. 2011).*

Young people today are entering the most difficult labour markets in decades, with potentially tragic consequences for their lives and futures (Kosinska 2013). The world’s young people are at a crisis point. Youth unemployment is about 16% in the larger OECD economies - Auckland’s stands at about 22% in 2013 for those aged 15 – 24 year olds.

The recession hit young people hard, particularly young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. This group “experienced disproportionate job losses over the course of the downturn” (McPherson 2011). High unemployment and joblessness has reflected a worsening of employment options and a reduction in the ability to compete for jobs with other workers in the labour force (Allpress 2013).

In Auckland, approximately a third of the 100,700 jobs held by young people in June 2012 were in two industries; retail and accommodation and food services industries (LEED, June 2012). As at March 2013, 27,200 young Aucklanders aged 15-24 (about 10%) are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (Figure 1). This group is likely to have lower education achievement than their peers and are the most at risk.

Figure 1: Percentage of 15-24 year olds who are NEET by ethnicity, 15- to 24-year-olds 2007-2013<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source: Household Labour Force Survey

**“Kids who left school in the recession are still unemployed 5 years later. They will be unemployable if we don’t get this sorted.”**

**A shrinking talent pool means global recruiting**

More than half of this group are Pacific and Māori - about 27% are young Māori and 36% Pacific. Māori and Pacific youth are more than twice as likely to be in NEET status relative to their NZ European counterparts.

At the same time, our young people are our most valuable asset. The proportion of young people aged 15-24 in the workforce is declining as a result of birth rates generally falling in recent decades, young people spending longer in education and the increasing participation of older people in paid work.

New Zealand will have the most prolonged numerical ageing of any OECD country because it had the highest and longest baby boom. Auckland is expected to age more slowly than the rest of New Zealand, but there is still a steady increase in the ratio of older people (65+ years) to children (0-14 years) – approximately five elderly for every ten children at present, increasing to approximately nine for every 10 by 2031 (Jackson 2012).

Globally, firms are going to compete for the shrinking pool of talented young people. Currently, Auckland’s younger workforce gives our firms a competitive edge over their regional competitors. However, it also means that other countries’ employers will be actively recruiting here to take our highly skilled and qualified young people overseas. Our young people will be more sought after, harder to find, and more expensive to secure as firms compete for labour in short supply (Lees 2013).

While the workforce ages, those starting out in work will be more ethnically diverse. By 2021, nationally 36% of 15-24 year olds will be Māori, Pasifika and Asian (McPherson 2011). To make effective use of our assets, they need to be employable. There is a dichotomy in Auckland between young people who are highly skilled and qualified and in demand in a global market (largely European and Asian) and those who have low or no skills or qualifications and are disengaged from work, education and training (largely Māori and Pasifika). Our efforts need to work for all young people but particularly for those furthest from the labour market.

Young people are the workforce of the future, and are entering the 21st century workforce with different attitudes to work and careers and limited or no skill sets for the jobs of tomorrow.

The ageing populations and dwindling natural resources means that growth in advanced economies will increasingly depend on knowledge-based increases in productivity. Auckland needs to seriously address its skills mismatch if it wants to remain a highly competitive knowledge based economy. Its youthful population means that there is a real opportunity to improve Auckland’s economic performance through effective and better skills development.

## **The cost of not acting**

Not taking action will be expensive because today’s joblessness is dangerous. Studies have shown that the earlier a young person first receives a benefit, the greater the chances of long term benefit receipt. Early unemployment results in a wage penalty. A six month spell of

## Early joblessness is dangerous and leaves scars

unemployment at age 22 may result in wages that are 2 or 3 percent lower than they would have been at age 30. Young people exposed to periods of unemployment have higher rates of substance use and anxiety disorder relative to those who don't experience unemployment in their youth (Pacheco 2013).

*Young people out of employment or education are likely to have a lifetime of future unemployment, lower future wages and even reduced happiness.*

Based on the 27,200 youth disengaged from employment and education in Auckland, the expected per capita cost (over the next three years) of each NEET youth is \$28,981 (Pacheco 2013). The per capita lifetime cost of a poor transition of lifetime is estimated to be just under a quarter of a million dollars (Pacheco 2012).

## What is employability?

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*Employability refers to a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make a person more likely to gain employment, remain in employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke 2012).*

Employability is not just for low-skilled young people or school leavers or those getting a first job. It's also the ability to secure fulfilling work that makes use of a worker's skills and abilities, with both current and future employers.

Paul Spoonley suggests four pillars of employability:

- **a qualification**
- **networks** (because many jobs, particularly part time, local and/or entry level jobs come via family, friends and known contacts)
- **work experience** (either through part time work, working in a family business or work experience programmes at school)
- **employability skills and attributes** (a raft of communication skills such as being able to work in a team, having a work ethic, being prepared to learn, having a driver's licence (Spoonley 2012).

## Employability

A  
qualification

Networks

Work  
Experience

Employability  
skills &  
attributes

Employers and  
education  
providers don't  
communicate  
enough

In a very comprehensive approach that takes into account young people's life experience, The Journey to Employment (JET) Collective Impact project in the UK (Copps and Plimmer 2013) has identified seven factors that impact on getting jobs: (1) Personal circumstances; (2) Emotional capabilities; (3) Attitudes to work; (4) Employability skills; (5) Qualifications, education and; (6) Experience and involvement; and (7) Career management skills.

The JET project has created a set of measurements for the organisations who work with young people so there is a shared approach to measuring the impact of different interventions and programmes.<sup>2</sup>

Employability skills are increasingly important as the world of work changes. Almost all twenty-first century jobs require teamwork and good communication skills. Jobs are becoming increasingly complex. Over a working lifetime people will change jobs more frequently and work in different sectors, so specific skills will become obsolete. There are new patterns of work organisation emerging, firms becoming more flexible and innovative with their organisation and production and new technologies are enabling people to change how, where and when they learn and work. These changes are having a significant impact on the skills employees need to attain (Committee for Auckland 2012).

This report focuses on young people. Because of the immediate and long term consequences to society of youth unemployment, there has been a concerted effort in Auckland to lift skills. A range of major initiatives are focused on getting young people better qualified (such as the NCEA Level 2 school leaver target, Youth Guarantee's fees-free tertiary places and Vocational Pathways for more relevant subject choices) and getting them work experience or connected to work (for example schools' Gateway programmes, Auckland Council's Youth Connections Project, New Zealand Defence Limited Service Volunteer programme and the Auckland Chamber of Commerce-sponsored CadetMax service).

There is less clarity or focus across the board on how to effectively and quickly build employability skills – at school, in pre-employment and vocational training, and when young people first start on the job.

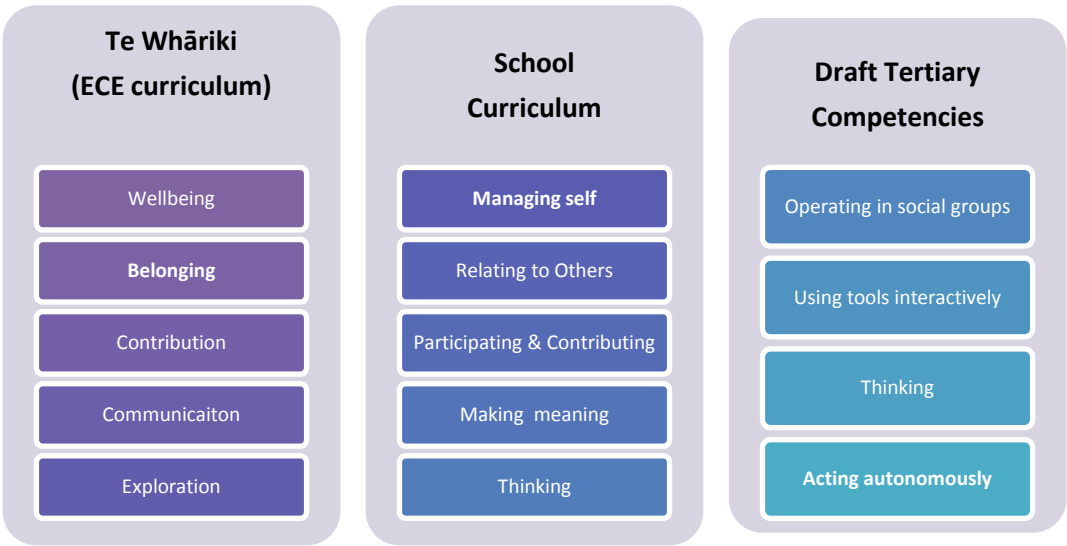
<sup>2</sup> See page 17 for the JET framework. <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/the-journey-to-employment/>

# Building employability skills

There is no clear definition of employability skills that builds across the different education sectors in New Zealand, as Figure 1 shows (Education 2005). The NZ school curriculum includes key competencies that are similar to employability skills but they are not necessarily applied in work-related contexts. Tertiary education competencies are not well developed or well used. Careers New Zealand’s career benchmarks for education providers include a different set of student competencies. These curriculums and frameworks do not use the same terminology and are not in a language particularly accessible to employers or the public.

Alignment of these various components would help schools, tertiary institutions, vocational training programmes and youth development organisations ensure they were developing a common set of skills that young people could develop systematically within different contexts.

Figure 2: Alignment of competency frameworks across education sectors



The employability frameworks and major research projects that are developing internationally are useful to help identify how we move forward.

A 2009 UK study of 200 organisations (UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009) identified eight employability skills: a foundation of a positive approach; three functional skills - using numbers, using language and using IT effectively; four personal skills - self-management; thinking and problem solving; working together and communicating; understanding the business.

The study suggests that building employability skills requires three strands of action:

**Need a systems approach - a common framework, agreed measures and shared expertise**

- experiential action-learning (in particular using skills rather than simply acquiring knowledge)
- work experience - placement in an actual business, or an authentic classroom simulation based on a real workplace
- opportunities for reflection and integration, so young people can transfer their understanding and skills into work and between work sectors.

The report concludes that many education providers either neglect to develop these skills or for a variety of reasons find it difficult to develop them. Providers need to include a focus on developing soft skills and self and career awareness skills as well as job search tools such as CV writing and interview skills. They suggest much more active employer involvement in both the definition of what needs to be taught and in setting up opportunities for skills development in education settings and in the workplace.

The 2012 McKinsey analysis of 100 education to employment initiatives from 25 countries (Mourshed, Farrell et al. 2012) also emphasised the lack of connection in the system:

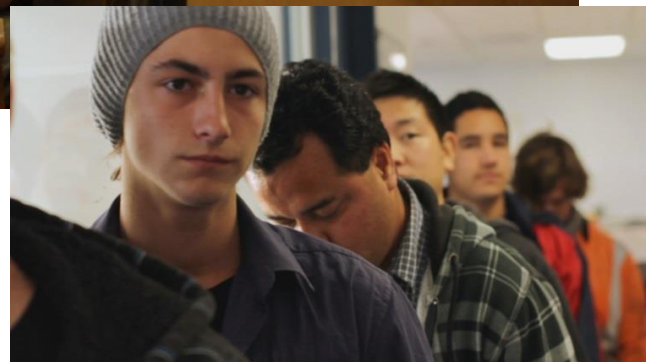
- Employers, education providers and young people live in parallel universes, with very different understandings of how education and work link, largely because they are not communicating.
- There are many obstacles – enrolling in post-secondary education, building skills and finding a job. Building skills is particularly interesting because the study showed a mismatch between the on-the-job training and hands-on learning that young people wanted and courses that actually provided those experiences.
- Only employers who regularly reached out to education providers were likely to be successful in getting the talent they wanted
- The elements that worked included employers and education providers actively working together and stepping into one another's worlds, and working early and intensively with young people.

A study of the key competencies being developed within the American youth development, college readiness and workforce readiness sectors (Lippman, Atienza et al. 2008 ) highlighted areas of common priority focus –developing high expectations, self-management, critical thinking and academic development. It also revealed significant differences. Academic /tertiary readiness programmes don't necessarily cover career planning, listening skills, decision making and other skills needed for work. Youth development programmes focused more on developing healthy behaviours and a positive identity than either workplace readiness or college readiness programmes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a chart of the key competencies for each sector of this US project go to pp 32-34 [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Child\\_Trends-2008\\_09\\_15\\_FR\\_ReadinessReport.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Child_Trends-2008_09_15_FR_ReadinessReport.pdf)

These studies all highlight the importance of a common framework of skills, the need for being able to measure progress and the importance of developing teaching and learning strategies and approaches that work in a variety of contexts.



## The perspectives of employers and young people

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The next section provides insights on some of the skills employers consider important and look for in today's young people and the perspectives of work that young people carry with them based on discussions with young people and employers.

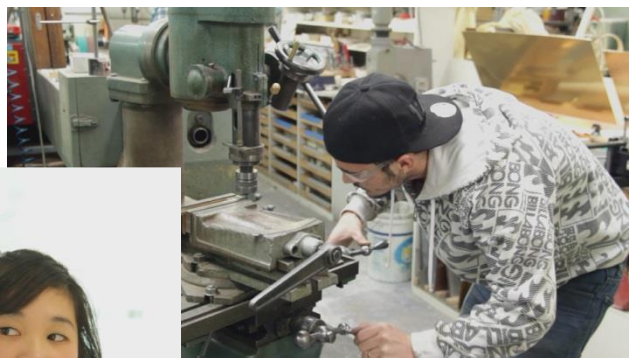
We spoke with 70 young people and 18 employers during August and September, 2013.

Two groups of *employers* contributed their experiences employing young people:

- 11 HR or Communications managers from medium to large businesses that employed young people (food manufacturing, electricity, banking, retail, infrastructure, retail, health, telecommunications, construction, and hospitality sectors), recruited randomly.
- 9 small and medium enterprises (events management, engineering, trucking, ICT, manufacturing, sales,) known to the Auckland Chamber of Commerce.

Eight groups of *young people* (including Pākehā, Māori, Pasifika and young new Aucklanders from China, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and India) met with us to discuss their perceptions of the skills they needed to get a foothold in work. The education provider recruited the students. Groups included:

- senior school students from a mainstream high school
- two groups of Māori senior school students attending Kura Kaupapa Māori
- a group of Pasifika new tertiary students
- a diverse group of tertiary students in the last stages of their degrees
- students who were in transition programmes after fairly unsuccessful school experiences
- a small group of disabled students interviewed by phone
- a group of CadetMax trainees (post-school, looking for work).



The costs of employing young people are high. So are the social costs if they don't get work

## Key themes - Employers

### “Young people add real value “

All employers were enthusiastic and positive about some of the young people they employed, particularly new graduates.

*Graduates bring excellent skills and generally excellent attitudes*

*Highly successful - particularly with young graduates. We lose very few- but we recruit with real care.*

*.....these young people [graduates] have drive, motivation and energy.*

A hospitality-focused employer was quite positive about recruiting young people generally.

*[they] like the structured environment, with lots of support around them..... They also like that uniforms and meals are provided.... We take care of the many little things which they are not good at - washing their uniforms, helping them grow skills in communication and teamwork etc. Wages are not good but these little things seem to keep young people engaged.*

Unfortunately, for some employers, the experience of recruiting lower skilled young people was not very positive.

*The lower skilled roles are more of a mixed bag. It seems with this group the transition from school seems to be more difficult.*

*..Young people were not work ready. They were often late for work, not well presented, nervous, not customer focused, their communication and interpersonal skills were lacking. Their CV's were also of a very poor standard.*

*We have not been particularly successful. The last group we took on were principally exited with the exception of two young people. The work is hard and the other staff are not particularly tolerant of young people mucking about – not turning up or not doing what is asked of them.*

### “We must invest in our young people but we need support.”

In general, the employers we met with recognised the need to employ young people, particularly Māori and Pasifika, and saw the need to ensure workforce replacement. Many wanted a local workforce that would reflect local cultural diversity. Many recognised the social costs if young people did not get work. But the demands on their time and the costs associated with supporting young people were high and impacted negatively on productivity.

**“We need  
young people  
able to focus  
at work”**

*It is very expensive taking on a young person who requires significant training. Is it not possible for them to remain on a benefit while we work with them to build up their skills? After 90 days if they show promise we employ them or at least we give them a good reference.*

*We do do up skilling but the time it takes is a loss in productivity. Sometimes after 3 months we give up trying to up skill them and then we need to start again, or the good ones then leave.*

**“Young people don’t prioritise work.”**

Many of the employers thought that some young people were less capable than a decade ago. Some thought that young people were not developing a healthy work ethic early enough; they were reluctant to take on first-time employees because of work readiness issues.

*They don’t seem to prioritise it - make it central.*

*Some young people don’t grasp that their job is of critical importance, it is not something they work around their social life or sports – This needs to be explained to them.*

*They don’t take up opportunities if they clash with their lifestyles - like the need to go surfing or demands of a girl-friend.*

*They are erratic- turn up late or not at all- and then wonder why their work mates are angry with them.*

**“Young people’s self- management skills are erratic.”**

Some employers were unwilling to take on young people who have not had work experience because they needed coaching in so many aspects of work.

*A disturbing number of young people have never done a day’s work before they get to us - what has happened to weekend and after school work?*

*I need to constantly remind them no texting or Facebook while at work- they don’t get I am paying them to work.*

*My experience is that they think its optional to turn up, that they can ring up half an hour before they should be there or they go out get drunk and then ring in sick and then wonder why their peers - who have to pick up the extra work - are so annoyed with them*



**A focus on  
work  
readiness in  
pre-industry  
training  
makes a  
difference**

*We have found some young people find it very difficult when they finally turn up to transition from school to work. Going to bed at a reasonable time-giving up the gaming-getting up early, keeping off their face book.*

A lack of work readiness was apparent across many young people, not just low skill young people or those without family support. Employers described young people whose parents were (overly) involved in their lives who were also not modelling useful work-related attitudes and skills, particularly around consequences.

*They don't teach personal responsibility, making a contribution, helping out, accountability- taking responsibility for your own mistakes, owning up and putting things right. If family are unable to teach these attributes, can schools step into the gap?*

**“Many lack communication and social skills.”**

For many employers, there was a theme of poor skills readiness and a lack of practical application of skills for both graduates and non-graduates. The lack of skills impacted on customer service, team work and workplace fit across many different sectors.

*Lower skilled young people do not appear to have been taught work readiness- tertiaries and universities need to be doing much more to prepare their students for work.*

*I see young people pay thousands to get a qualification in polytechs or PTE's and they come out and don't know how to use a screw driver*

Employers discussed a range of specific communication skills they expected of new employees: being able to speak politely to a customer on the phone or a client /team member; talking to people they don't know; knowing how to fill in basic forms; being able to read and understand a simple employment contract. The lack of a driver licence was a major barrier to job entry.

*Poor social skills means numbers of young people are in and out of relationships and they bring their ugly moods to work. This costs money for the business. Young people need to develop inter-personal and communication skills before they get to the workforce.*

*Some young people's phone manners are dreadful- and the messages they leave on answer phones can be very inappropriate.*

*Young people who can just manage yes and no answers cannot do this sort of work [telemarketing]. They need to have wider life experiences so they can talk on a number of subjects. I interview young people on the phone. I need to know they can build on a conversation.*

Two employers described how having a work-readiness focus during internship or pre-employment training made a real difference to getting young employees settled and useful early.

**“We have work but young people don’t seem to know where to look or don’t really care.”**

Three of the large employers talked about having roles for non-graduates but not having many applicants.

*Young people think they can only apply for the graduate programmes where only a very few will be successful. There are a number of jobs that do not require degrees but young people don’t apply for these. Possibly a perception they don’t have the skills needed.*

Some of the larger employers were actively recruiting for women or for Māori and Pasifika and some were connected to Auckland Council’s Youth Connections project that helped link young people to local jobs. The issues of work readiness and communication skills applied to the recruitment process as well as when successful applicants started work.

*Young people apply for a job and then you try to reach them for an interview – after three tries you give up.*

*...their lack of clarity about what qualifications they have. They often do not seem to be clear about whether they have achieved level 1 or not.*

*CV’s can be dreadful- Why are young people not getting help with these? If someone sat down with them they could craft something much better. Spelling mistakes, sentences not making sense, dates are all wrong.*



**“Funny thing to hear people say heaps of opportunities but we’re still unemployed”**

## Key themes - Young People

### ***“Give us a chance”***

The strongest theme from young people was how hard it was to look for a job. Some were daunted by their inability to get started and get experience.

*Recruitment companies come to Uni and tell us about these wonderful opportunities. But they hire very few. They want experience!*

*They want extra qualifications and experience but we can’t get started.*

Many felt frustrated and rejected during the job seeking process – particularly when they applied for dozens of jobs and didn’t get any replies or even a thank you rejection email. Some tertiary students felt recruiting drives for graduates raised false expectations because there were so few places.

*Qualifications don’t mean you get lots of jobs.*

*Employers don’t seem to care. There are too many, they just reply to the ones they’re interested in.*

*A low level job isn’t helpful if it isn’t related to what you want.*

*Employers should not expect people to know everything from the start. They should be prepared to put experienced workers alongside us to develop our skills as well as offer us professional development and mentoring.*

### **“A few young people know what employers want”**

A small number of young people (typically more confident, older or more educated) were able to articulate what they believed employers wanted.

*Tangata e hiakai ana ki teteahi mahi, ka mate ana ki te mahi. People willing to learn and listen and want the job badly.*



*Don’t leave getting work experience to the end. Be in the industry – they know you are interested. Once you know what it is, work for free. Better to work than not work.*

*Employers aren’t looking for a list of quals and stuff. They want you to explain why you would make a difference. You have to put some effort into working out why what you have done would be good for their job.*

**“I don’t know  
what to say  
about my skills  
because I  
don’t know  
what job I am  
looking for”**

*A lot of students have a lot of expectations when they haven’t had any experience, but in an actual workplace it’s quite different. You have to start from the bottom, always have to ask, things won’t be given to you.*

***“Don’t know what kind of job to go for.”***

Finding a career direction is easier when young people can recognise the strengths and skills they have and know what sorts of things they like to do. Not all young people can do this. Some of those we met with had no idea of work options or ideas of the path to their desired work.

*In our family, if you hear nice things about yourself you’re cocky.*

*I used to have trouble selling myself. I couldn’t have answered my strengths. I would have said nothing relevant to the job. I couldn’t figure out how skills related to an employer.*

*I was lazy but then my girlfriend talked some sense into me and I’m getting better. I want to go to university. My confidence to get in is 50/50 as I don’t know what qualifications are enough and haven’t actually talked to anyone.*

Some of the young people with the lowest skills talked about careers and jobs that were not matched to the pathway they were on e.g. being an international athlete, being an airline pilot. One or two knew where they wanted to go but not how to get there.

*I want to be a Policeman so I am going to the gym to get fit. I train hard out 6 nights a week. I don’t know what I need to do to be a cop but I am getting real fit and staying out of trouble and hope somehow I will work it out.*

***“Where do I start? What steps are needed to get a job?”***

Tertiary students were (understandably) the most likely to know what they had to do to get work – but not exclusively. Many (but not all) had career aspirations, influenced by whether they were doing a specialised qualification (nursing, engineering, design) or a more generic arts, science or communications qualification. But a larger group of young people didn’t seem to have been prepared.

*I don’t know what qualifications are enough.*

*I dropped topics and took what I liked. I didn’t get any advice or guidance on elective subjects and then it was too late.*

**“When you  
leave school,  
you are on your  
own – ready or  
not”**

*Mum and Dad had work and they’ve done alright. Why should I want to do better than them?*

Support has to be staged and scaffolded if it is going to help build skills.

*[the provider] dropped us at a street in Wiri and told to knock on people’s doors with cv for two hours – but they hadn’t told us what to do – hadn’t prepared us.*

Disabled students need particular support because they experience discrimination and low expectations.

*People see problems and assume I can’t do things, but I know I’m capable. Sometimes it would be easier if it wasn’t so obvious that I have a disability. When youths with a visual impairment want to work, their families sometimes put them off. They need to be told that they can do things using the support they have.*

### ***“Scared of work”***

There was quite a strong theme from young people about being scared: they were nervous about making mistakes, about not understanding what was wanted; they were scared about asking for help, being told what to do – and still not getting it. Many believed the consequences of making a mistake was that they would be fired.

*..scared I won’t be able to do the mahi [the work]*

A number of the young people had (or expect to) experience racism.

*Employers are closed in their thought process - NZ-centric. They say they are world class but they are not - don’t know how we fit in. Why don’t employers set up internships? When we start applying, HR people are difficult. I have visited about 30 companies – can’t get in the door.*

*They won’t employ horis like us*

*They only want kiwi English.*

### ***“School is different to the reality of real work.”***

A few young people (often older, with some work experience) believed that school had not prepared them for the reality of work.

*I feel that high school gives false expectations; it is too positive and not very realistic. They give too much support, so you feel like you can get away with not arriving on time and working hard.*

*Kia mataara – when you leave school you're on your own, kia mataara ki anga ahuatanga katoa.*

***“I don't know anyone, I don't have any networks.”***

Some of the most vulnerable young people did not have role models or networks, had few working people in their lives and appeared to have very few people they could talk to about work. These young people were going to need a great deal of support over a considerable time to be employable and employed.

Those who were actively looking for work didn't necessarily know how to go about selling themselves to employers.

*I mucked around in front of a customer and got told off by my uncle [working for family]. It was a real shock as never had my uncle tell me off before.*

*The teacher always said I needed to put myself out there but I didn't know how.*

Some of the international students had experienced more specific work mentoring as part of their studies.

*Where I was [USA] a group of about 5 students had a mentor, a lecturer but not here. Over there, the industries have mentoring programmes. But here, nothing like that.*

Networks are an important pillar of employability – particularly for getting that all important first job. The majority who had worked had got their first job through a relative, friend or a family contact. The young people with very few working contacts were at a distinct disadvantage.

Some young people reported that their parents didn't understand what looking for work was like, because there had been full employment when they were young.

***“Work costs.”***

Some young people could only see the obstacles and costs associated with getting work experience and finding a job that may not be recognised.

*I want to get an after school job, but all the jobs are the other side of town, and the cost of the bus is too much. I want to get a licence but none of us have cars we should be driving in.*

*In our street few people have work, most is part time and low pay. Getting support to find a job is hard, and finding my way to work that is different to jobs my family has always done is impossible. It is hard to stay at school and be positive when you know, that even if you try real hard, your future is probably going to be lots of crappy jobs that will take you nowhere.*

Work is the  
best place to  
learn about  
work.

## Discussion

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Comments from employers and young people confirmed the principal findings from international studies: employability skills are important; it is helpful to have a clear framework of skills so everyone knows what they are trying to develop; and skills need to be consciously developed across education, youth development and work.

To enhance youth employability in Auckland, there needs to be:

### **An explicit focus on employability**

There is clearly a need for a systematic approach that connects schools, tertiary providers, mentoring and youth development organisations, employers and families.

Since employers want more work-ready young people, employers have a major role to play in influencing what young people need to learn in order for them to be effective and successful contributors to today's labour market. Most employers reported a lack of work readiness across many young people, and a lack of practical application for both graduates and other young people. Many employers reported these soft skills as key to hiring young people.

*We receive academic ready young people, but typically they are some way from being practically ready.*

There is poor matching of skills acquired in education with those required in the labour market. Young people noted that what's taught at school is different to the reality of real work.

*"....qualifications doesn't mean you get lots of jobs."*

This includes building young people's confidence and aspirations as well as their skills. We also have to support young people to clearly articulate and demonstrate their skills and attributes.

### **A coherent employability framework**

We need a common understanding about what skills to build, an agreed framework of skills that is clear, coherent and develops skills across different education sectors. A framework with

agreed measurements of progress would give all stakeholders a common language and a structure through which to scaffold students. Identifying effective ways to develop employability in a range of settings and showcasing that information widely would support the many players endeavouring to prepare young people for work.



### **More real world learning experiences – on and off the job**

Young people and employers wanted more connection between education and work. If it is true that employment is the best place to build work readiness, we need to be able to provide more real world experiences and project based learning that enable young people to practice and develop those skills in ways that match real-world demand.

Employers, families, communities and churches as well as schools and tertiary providers play an important role to ensure young people practice communication skills in contexts as close to the real world as possible.

### **Clearer pathways into entry level jobs**

Some of the young people interviewed had no idea of where to go when they finish school, i.e. where and how to look for a job. On the flipside, employers say that they have jobs but young people don't seem to know where to look. Auckland Council-sponsored Youth Connections is starting to make headway in this in some local board areas but the scale is still small.

There is clearly a need for better communication of jobs, in particular entry level jobs that are available to young people. Relevant and up-to-date information needs to be effectively communicated to all young people seeking employment and to youth development organisations that work with them. Schools, tertiary providers, mentoring and youth development organisations and employers all play a part in ensuring young people actively seeking employment know where and how to look for a job.

### **Break the catch 22 - no experience, no job: no job no experience.**

Young people have stressed the pain and the frustrations in being rejected because they had no experience, as they look for their first job. Employers on the other hand acknowledge the importance of investing in young people but needed some assistance to do this

*It is very expensive taking on a young person who requires significant training. But why should it be all at the employers' expense and risk?*

Support systems for employers who provide entry level jobs need to be examined and extended so young people can be mentored, to help keep them in work.

### **More data and understanding of the Auckland situation**

Focused research into youth employability would help create a system response. For example,

- What are the most effective teaching and learning approaches to build employability skills?
- Has part time work decreased in New Zealand as it has in the UK during the global recession? If it has, how can we grow work experience opportunities?

- What pre-employment and vocational training is going to be available for young people aged 24 and over, who missed out on employment during the recession, and who are about to become ineligible for programmes focused on 16-24 year olds?
- Where are entry level jobs in Auckland? What skills do they require and are the numbers of these jobs falling?
- How can we use digital learning to enhance employability?
- What kinds of support work best for employers who are willing to take on entry level staff?



## Possible actions

The discussion groups identified some possible actions that would strengthen employability skills building. This list will be expanded and amended as a result of the forum.

- Grow more and scale up intermediaries/brokers/navigators services:
  - Pre-employment services that set up employment opportunities that works for both employers and young people. See for example  
  
CadetMax – Auckland Chamber of Commerce youth employment service  
<http://www.chamber.co.nz/Find-Staff/EmploymentProgrammes.aspx>  
  
Auckland Council Youth Connections: <http://www.youthconnections.co.nz/>
  - Subsidised work: It would be helpful to review the type of support available for employers through Work and Income, to enable employers to take on more entry level staff <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/business/develop-your-workforce/index.html>
- Provide support to young people when they first start work (including extending pre-employment mentoring into the first few months at work) to mitigate the culture shock some young people experience and to build their resilience and to take this burden off employers
- Develop projects that focus on education providers 'building, speaking and listening for work' – with the help of employers. See for example Words for Work [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/words\\_for\\_work](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/words_for_work)
- Build more workforce-readiness training into vocational training
- Encourage employers to link with schools, tertiary providers and youth service organisations to ensure young people practice communication skills in contexts as close to the real world as possible.
- Explore a set of common measures for work done by a variety of stakeholder groups, as has been developed for the Journey to Employment Project (Copps and Plimmer 2013).

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