



Shauna Eldridge,  
Deputy Principal

## Closing the gap in school leavers' skills and abilities

“ In a very large number of areas and suburbs across New Zealand, [employability] skills are never taught explicitly at school, but through communities, church, parents, family members. It is unrealistic to imagine that students become work-ready by a process of osmosis. Even for our university bound students we found that they were not work-ready. ”

“ The reason why it is so successful is that the students are prepared adequately prior to entering the workforce, but they need to be scaffolded, they need to be supported through that process. ”

When it was discovered that approximately 30% of school leavers were not going on to further study and were not work ready, Shauna Eldridge and other senior managers at Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate decided that they needed to completely revise their curriculum to enable school leavers to be 'work-ready' in order to enter the workforce.

Shauna discovered that since employability skills are not specifically taught in New Zealand schools, they would need to look for a specific programme that the careers advisor/tutor teachers could offer, which would equip all the students from Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate with the skills to successfully transition into the workforce. It was at this time the school was approached by Shirley Johnson of COMET Auckland, who was piloting the Youth Employability Programme in 2015.



**Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate student Manu Inukihaanga receives his “Licence to Work” at the 2016 evening certification event.**

### **Why the employability framework works**

Shauna understands that in order for students to be work-ready, they need an explicit framework that can be taught alongside school subjects, to understand what ‘work readiness’ requires. It is more than teaching students how to prepare their resume, for example (which they were doing anyway). The Employability Skills Framework offers the exact skills that employers in New Zealand have requested that their future employees have, for example, resilience and self-management. The Youth Employability Programme (YEP) was used as the tool to learn, practice and incorporate those skills through the 20 hour training sessions, and the 80 hour work and 20 hour volunteer placements.

### **How the framework works with the school curriculum**

Shauna credits the “school champions” for the successful implementation of the Employability Skills Framework and the triumph of YEP. The school champions understood the significance of the challenges many young people were facing and were prepared to provide additional support and work extra hours to assist the students to complete the programme. The school took on the responsibility of ensuring that students got to work or volunteer placements by using school transport and preparing them to exhibit the right attitudes and skills, while the employer/supervisor assessed and reported on each student’s performance. This gave students formative feedback on their placements, helping shape their understanding of the employability skills.

The school has developed a number of secondary-tertiary-industry pathways using the Vocational Pathways as a curriculum design tool. Vocational Pathways help show students how their NCEA learning is relevant, what skills are valued by employers and how they pathway to future employment opportunities. Shauna recognises the importance of the partnerships she has established between the school, local tertiary providers and employers in the community in helping to shape a more coherent, relevant learning experience for the students, with explicit links to local employment opportunities.

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More than 80% of students were offered work by those companies [where they had completed their work placements] in the holidays and these students have gone on to secure holiday, weekend and permanent work; whereas my academic students have not secured holiday jobs.

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