
Report of the Forum: The new Auckland - School-Business Relationships and Skills Held at the TelstraClearPacific Events Centre, June 23 2010

COMET Working Paper 036/10
Prepared by Bernardine Vester, July 2010

Attendees: by invitation, Gateway Co-ordinators from schools; not-for-profit leaders operating programmes in the school-business space; representatives from the EMA, AUT, Committee for Auckland. [48]

The forum was opened by the Mayor, facilitated by Julie Donvin-Irons (the Stanley East Company), and hosted by COMET.

The opening address by His Worship the Mayor Len Brown stressed the importance of education to the new Auckland; and the importance that he places on education as an enabler for the city.



Keynote address:

The keynote address was from David Wilson, Director of the Institute of Public Policy, AUT. The address focused on the “Super-City: Economic Development Challenges and Opportunities”.

Despite having re-organised our economy to be business-friendly, New Zealand is still only ranked 24th in the world for “competitiveness”.

So why the fuss about Auckland? Cities matter. Importance of agglomeration appears to have increased globally since early 1990s. In advanced economies cities are increasingly associated with

knowledge activities and provide scale and diversity.

In Auckland, businesses depend on consumer spending. We have relied on immigration to grow the economy. Housing is the key “investment” strategy.

Our exchange rate is overvalued, constraining growth in exports and manufacturing. We have high interest rates relative to other countries, and we rely on building houses and commercial buildings for jobs and growth.

Auckland’s economy is different to the rest of New Zealand. Auckland’s comparative advantages are in business and financial services, wholesale, retail, finance, real estate, communication services, logistics, cultural and recreational services and...manufacturing (albeit in relative decline to other sectors). Where is the strategic growth going to be? In the creative industries, creating digital content; tourism; biotechnology; specialised manufacturing; food and beverage manufacturing.

Auckland is NZ’s “trading town” (an essential and previously undervalued role). Now more than ever though it needs to lead in global and regional connectivity and build higher value industries and exports.

The Question is How?

- The school to work transition is important: we need to find connection points, build understanding and relationships and connections across sectors.
- Understand the Strategic context:
 - Fundamental to addressing this issue is Aucklanders understanding the local economy and Auckland’s role as New Zealand’s Gateway; and thinking about the workforce and economy of tomorrow.
 - Sociological phenomena – changing role of cities in society, the economy
 - The ‘greening’ of the economy – global phenomenon
 - The need for more knowledge intensive, high value, light footprint, export focussed industries in Auckland in particular
 - The need for creative, innovative, entrepreneurial people yes but..

Caveat

- We need to make a realistic assessment of [future] skills needs and opportunities – keep abreast of the real structure of the economy.

Challenges in the “school-business space”

Impact of the recession: Gateway co-ordinators and not-for-profit co-ordinators noted the impact of the recession on employers’ willingness to work with Gateway students and schools. One participant quoted her own experience of 30 students wanting to gain skills for hairdressing, but only being able to make one placement. Turnover of (business) managers affected relationship development. Businesses don’t usually have the time to take on students and mentor them, especially if they are under stress.

ITOs: Some ITOs work very effectively to support Gateway and school-business connection programmes in schools. Not all work in schools, and some only appear interested if the work leads to apprenticeship signups. Other participants noted that ITOs were not funded to engage with schools. A clear theme from participants was the unevenness of ITO involvement and understanding of the connection between schools and student pathways into their industries; and the selective engagement with schools in the south of Auckland in particular.

The Role of the TEC: Forum participants were unclear about the role of the Tertiary Education Commission. The TEC funds the Gateway Programme. Key challenges for participants were the timeliness of information, and the lack of connection to the TEC itself. Several responses reflected on the TEC's invisibility; and timeliness of decision-making.

"If I've got a question, I don't know who to ask. Who the hell do you talk to?"

The TEC did not appear to understand the nature of Gateway networks that operate in the city; and lacked a cohesive support structure for Gateway co-ordinators. The co-ordinators themselves were expected to liaise with each other. The cluster approach on the North Shore and in West Auckland was cited as a useful approach, operating however on the willingness of principals and schools to share resources; and on a supportive facilitation from council or the local economic development agency.

"Looking at the literacy and numeracy issues of school-leavers... TEC is not real about what it is funding – [we] need more bridges being built for students."

Measuring value: Participants noted the lack of support from both sides about the value of schools and businesses working together. The tools for measuring the real value for employers and schools are still being developed. Each sector has distinctive aims and objectives (see also *priority-setting, below*). How can schools and businesses show the value in the relationship?

Marketing, Co-ordination and Research The perception of schools is very important to the school principal. A school's reputation is dependent on student behaviours in the workplace and the school has to deliver on its commitments. This is why schools are selective about who they put up for the programme.

Co-ordinators also noted that it was outside the scope of schools and businesses to 'market' their search for partners. There is competition between schools and tertiary and private

Gateway is available to state and integrated secondary schools, and supports senior secondary students (Year 11 to Year 13+) undertaking structured workplace learning across a range of industries and businesses around New Zealand, while continuing to study at school.

Gateway delivery involves arranging structured workplace learning with the following characteristics:

- a formalised learning arrangement set in the workplace
- clear understandings about the knowledge and skills to be attained by learners
- clear understandings about the assessment method used (workplace learning).

There is no cost to learners. Schools must comply with requirements which specifies the learning environment, health and safety requirements, and the information needs of learners and stakeholders.

(from the Tertiary Education Commission website)

Gateway differs from work experience positions as the student has specific tasks to learn and be assessed on, whereas work experience positions provide a "taster" experience for students to identify a possible industry of interest to them.

Gateway students work one day per week for a minimum of 20 weeks.



education providers for placements. The work of co-ordinators and not-for-profits would be

enhanced if there was someone who could take responsibility for “selling the idea” first; and building an environment of co-operation around work placements. There was very minimal “cross-fertilisation” of contacts such as through the YES programme and other initiatives. And there was no-one who was researching programmes from an independent perspective to provide feedback on quality or effectiveness.

Establishing partnerships. Associated with the marketing challenge is the establishment of new partnerships on a school-by-school basis. Participants commented that lots of opportunities for schools were being missed because of the lack of resources to connect into the “wider world”. They also noted that a different set of skills is required to network and develop contacts to arranging the placement of students and monitoring the placement for outcomes.

There was consensus that the new Auckland could provide access to larger networks, but that managing the network – and opening up new contacts for schools - was really about local knowledge. Many of the Gateway co-ordinators had not thought of or did not know about the local Mainstreets organisations or business development programmes in their community.

Opportunities

A number of suggestions were offered about what could support school-business relationships.

Leadership. Several participants felt that they were isolated in their work, and it felt like they were being ‘pioneers’.

“We’re all having to do our own thing...where is the leadership for this?”

Participants also mentioned leadership in relation to developing sector expertise.

Businesses also did not appreciate the ‘added value’ that students could give to the local business scene.

Priority-setting. Both schools and businesses had their own priorities. Businesses are looking for potential employees with the right skills and attributes. Schools are looking to build the credit profile for students, and offer them a structured learning opportunity.

“There is a mismatch of cultures. Students feel that teachers are so focused on credits that the subjects are not aligned to their career aspirations. This is not the teachers’ fault – it’s driven by Ministry thinking. Students have to get the credits.”

Responding to regional difference. Participants noted the very different community cultures that operate in different parts of the city. An approach that works on the North Shore might not be as effective in the south. A whole-of-city approach needs to respond to diversity and need.

Qualities. Some participants noted the challenge of reliability of commitment and sustainability.

“People don’t always follow up on their commitments. Students don’t turn up when they are supposed to. Employers don’t ring back to confirm arrangements.”

Brokerage. Participants felt that someone should have responsibility for promoting business and education involvement in Auckland.

Brokerage would be very useful to connect schools to business associations such as the EMA, Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Associations of each area. Many realised that Mainstreets associations were community-based organisations who might like to connect into schools, but did not know much about them or how to connect into them.

In addition, participants recognised that there existed a range of programmes sponsored by businesses, if only co-ordinators and people in schools knew about them.

Not all participants agreed that brokerage was important, however:

“Schools and businesses should just get on and do it. The less intervention from central and local government the better!”



Developing and sharing best practice.

Several participants commented on the non-availability of best practice models and research about what is happening with school-business relationships; and felt that TEC was not arranging this for Gateway co-ordinators. Other programmes did evaluate their services, but this did not reach a very wide audience.

Other ideas raised included

- the development of a **Directory** of businesses who would be willing to participate in workplace learning, developed by a broker group;
- **web-based matrices of skills** for Auckland industries, available to co-ordinators and easily and rapidly updated;
- the use of **GIS systems for mapping school-business relationships** across the city;
- more **information** for schools about where the skill needs are across the city;
- a co-ordinated approach to **marketing school-business** relationships;
- support for **showing the value of school-business activity**, including from the mayor;
- Council could take some initiative with **Local Boards as sponsors** – building opportunity for local action.
- A process for companies to pass on **surplus machinery** to schools.
- A city approach to involving **Australian-based businesses** which did not appear interested in pursuing relationships;
- **Mayor to champion programmes** such as Gateway and YES.
- how schools could be engaged in city campaigns - eg. a **“buy locally”** campaign; or a campaign to build particular skills.
- A transport policy to enable students in mufti to travel to work placements at discount rates.

Several participants expressed interest in understanding how cluster approaches might work better. A further suggestion was to take a more business-focused approach to the Gateway programme itself – for example, getting proposals on how to run it across Auckland.

“Local government could be an active employer [of Gateway students] – also government agencies – they are employers too.”

Shaping the policy environment

This session triggered a number of additional suggestions about the kinds of programmes that already work well:

- Inviting young graduates (eg. former pupils or emerging leaders) into schools to profile different jobs;
- Futureintech as a successful programme
- Young Enterprise Scheme, which connects into business networks

Participants were looking for ‘on the ground’ efficacy.

“Too much hui, not enough dooey – we need practical solutions: someone who can facilitate what happens on the ground for us. The YES programme is a good example [of co-ordination through a council agency]”.

Participants were challenged to look at school-business operations from a non-operational perspective. It brought forward suggestions that there is an absence of policy that supports coordination and sustainable funding for the Gateway programme. Participants were looking for policy which

moved young people “from school to no school”, incorporating career education objectives. One participant requested bi-partisan policy which allowed schools and businesses to plan over a longer timeframe.

Several participants noted that there needs to be incentives for employers to work with schools. That incentive needed to compensate, at least in part, for the time employers take to work with young people.

Participants also noted that a regional approach to skills development – perhaps through a joint approach with the Industry Training Federation – could support more ITO involvement in connecting to learning in schools.

Finally, participants noted that in Auckland we have to “pay attention to the transition points: from early childhood to school; from primary to secondary; from secondary to tertiary or the workplace.” Basic skills at each level help students to make successful transitions.

Presentation

Sir Ron Carter, Chairperson, Committee for Auckland: Joining the Dots.

Sir Ron challenged participants to think about Auckland’s future as part of a continuum of progress. Change is a feature of modern life. Today, it is cities that make a country great. There is opportunity in the new Auckland to make a difference to New Zealand’s future –



and we have to see local government as being a different kind of enabler. Aucklanders need to work together, and we have to see 'a team result' in Auckland.

Schools are part of the economic mainstream of Auckland, and they can become better connected into Auckland's future. New structures are possible in supporting school-business engagement, and we shouldn't be afraid of looking at things differently.

Concluding session:

Bernardine Vester –

The dots in Auckland's new governance are:

- A **Social Policy Forum**, which will have leadership from the Mayor and Cabinet Ministers.
- A new Auckland **Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) for Economic Development** supporting business.
- A **CCO for education** that will play an intermediary role for skills growth.
- **Local Boards** who will shape local communities. Schools and businesses have an opportunity to influence community decisions.

The Key Question is: how could these parts of the new Auckland add value to the work of participants?

How can the relationships that matter for skills growth (including business relationships with schools) be supported and enhanced?

Feedback to this report can be addressed to bvester@comet.org.nz.