



Youth Pathways in Rotorua

Rotorua is ensuring all its young people have opportunities and support when they leave school

The Rotorua Employment Skills Survey

Through its Employment Skills Survey, **ROTORUA DISTRICT COUNCIL** hopes to ensure all of the area's young people between the ages of 15 and 17 have opportunities and support for further development when they leave school.

In 2002, the Rotorua Employment Skills Survey canvassed employers about their current and future job vacancies and skill requirements (see *workINSIGHT*, issue 2, May 2003, page 6 for more details about the survey). Back then, skill shortages were an emerging issue across the country, but in Rotorua the information was patchy and anecdotal.

The survey aimed to generate a fuller picture of the skills and knowledge gaps across a wide range of local industries. This would help policy makers, employers and education providers pinpoint where recruitment and training practices needed to be improved. Two years on and the survey results have been used to shape the **ROTORUA EMPLOYMENT SKILLS STRATEGY**, a cornerstone of which is the Pathways project.

The Pathways project

A major concern, in Rotorua as much as the rest of the country, is that a number of young people do not participate in work, education, or training after leaving school. In July 2003, the Pathways project began by establishing employment pathways for young people in the agriculture, construction, engineering, retail and tourism sectors. The tourism sector pilot project recently got under way with strong support from the **ROTORUA TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD**, which has taken on the outcomes as part of its goals and objectives for the year.

Why tourism?

In 2001, it was estimated that one in five of all Rotorua jobs were in tourism, making it the largest sector in the local economy. That alone qualified it as a prime candidate for a Pathways programme. In addition, growth prospects for the sector are strong. An estimated 4,500 jobs in 2001 are projected to increase to 5,500 by 2006/07.

The tourism sector is also characterised as a "young" industry. Hospitality businesses such as cafés, restaurants and hotels form a core part of the sector and in 2001, 46% of the people employed in hospitality nationally were under 30, a much higher proportion than the average age of all employed people, with just 26% under 30.

Tourism issues

Young people often see tourism-sector employment as a stop-gap rather than a career. Reasons for this include the seasonality of the work and working conditions. The Rotorua tourism sector is no exception, but the Pathways project aims to increase the industry's appeal as a source of long-term employment and encourage greater commitment from employers.

More than one-third (38%) of the tourism employers who responded to the Employment Skills Survey said their business was affected by seasonality. Peak times for employment tend to run from October to April and, for many staff, no work is available in the winter months. As a result, 46% of tourism employers felt that staff turnover was an issue for their sector. The Pathways project is closely integrated with the seasonal pattern of tourism employment and aims to deal with the turnover issue head on by offering industry placements prior to the busy season and further options for work and study afterwards.

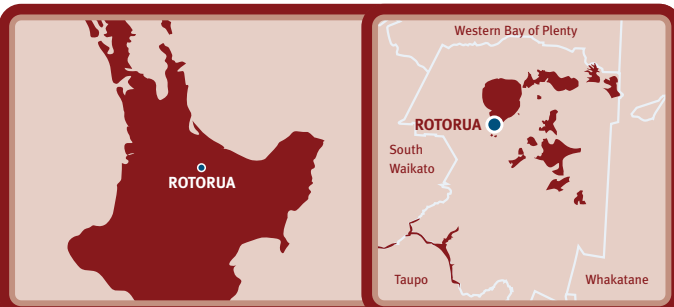
Pathways into tourism

STUDENT SELECTION

Candidates from year 12 and 13 tourism courses have been put through a rigorous *New Zealand Idol*-style recruitment process to ensure only the most committed are chosen. Under the watchful eye of employers, training representatives and the Pathways project officer, each student made a four-minute presentation about their tourism career aspirations and undertook a series of exercises designed to test their reactions to a variety of workplace scenarios.

EMPLOYER SELECTION

Only employers who have shown a commitment to training and good workplace practices have been selected for the Pathways programme. The **AVIATION TOURISM AND TRAVEL TRAINING ORGANISATION (ATTTO)** advised programme organisers about employers' staff training activities. Employers were also interviewed to assess the working conditions they provided and their track records of youth employment.



The Rotorua district is located in the central North Island.

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PHASE 1: JULY TO NOVEMBER 2004 – INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS

A small group of students have been offered industry experience placements. In many cases, this was through an existing **GATEWAY** programme. They spend an average of one day a week in a workplace, carrying out a variety of roles. This gives them an insight into the opportunities on offer and equips them with work-ready skills. Gateway coordinators and **CAREER SERVICES** consultants interview both employers and students on a regular basis to monitor progress.

THE BENEFITS OF INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS

Through these placements, students are able to form a realistic impression of what the work involves (pay, hours and perks such as social activities), before they commit to full-time employment. Developing work skills means they find the school-to-work transition less stressful and are less likely to drop out of the job as a result.

For their part, employers are more willing to commit to employing and training the school leavers who have chosen to work for them and who already have work skills and a solid understanding of their responsibilities.

PHASE 2: DECEMBER 2004 TO FEBRUARY OR MARCH 2005

By December, the young person will have completed their school exams and be ready to start working full-time for a fixed period over the summer months. During this time, the industry is at its busiest and demand for entry-level staff is highest.

PHASE 3: FEBRUARY TO JULY 2005

It is anticipated that 30% of the candidates will be offered permanent employment and will take up the training options offered through the sector's two Industry Training Organisations, the **HOSPITALITY STANDARDS INSTITUTE** and **ATTTO**. Candidates are expected to be offered **MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS**.

Those who wish to explore career pathways in areas such as management and highly skilled trades may choose to undertake tertiary studies at one of the three main local education providers while continuing to work part-time for their employer. This is a critical step for both trainee and employer. Trainees want to know that their investment in education will help them secure higher-skilled, higher-paid jobs. Employers want to know that the education trainees receive will equip them with the right skills for these jobs. It's chicken and egg stuff, which Pathways organisers are addressing by strengthening links between employers and tertiary education providers.

STRENGTHENING LINKS

This theme of strengthening links resonates throughout the Pathways project. By giving potential employees a taste of working life before they commit to full-time employment, and by ensuring the training they receive is aligned to the skill needs of the job, all sides benefit. The industry gets the most committed and enthusiastic new entrants, employers are encouraged to invest in training and good workplace practices in order to retain them, and education/training providers are confident that feedback about their courses comes from committed employers and employees. It is an idea that will be rigorously tested in coming months and years, not only by the Pathways project but also by further initiatives of the Rotorua Employer Skills Strategy.

TO FIND OUT MORE about the Pathways Project, contact Annie Ross at the **ROTORUA DISTRICT COUNCIL**. ☎ (07) 348 4199
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