

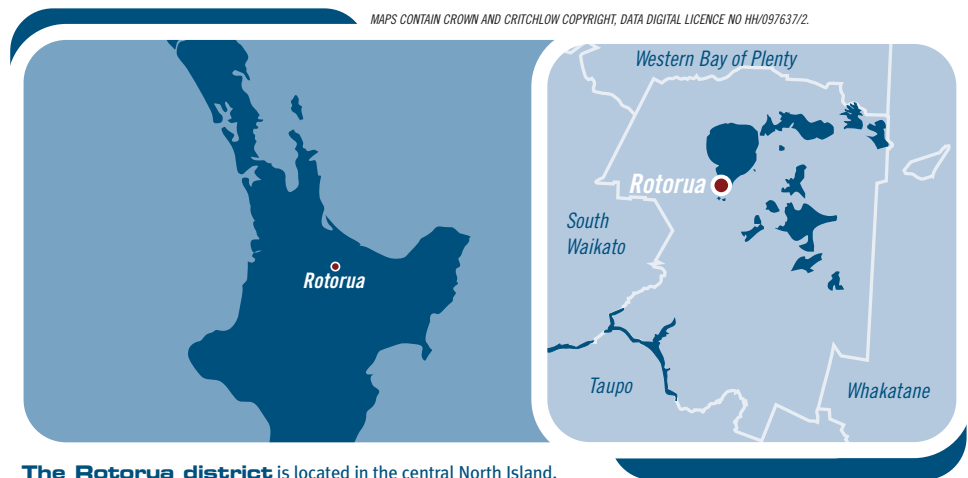


Right people, right place, right skills, right time

Rotorua's employers have identified their employment skills needs now, and in the future

REPORTS OF LOCAL EMPLOYERS desperate to hire skilled workers but unable to find those skills among the local labour force have been gathering steam in Rotorua. To address local employment issues, a project jointly commissioned by **ROTORUA DISTRICT COUNCIL**, the **TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION, WORK AND INCOME** and the **WAIARIKI INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY** set out to inform Rotorua's employers, educators and other stakeholders about current and future skill and knowledge gaps in the district. The aim now is to use the information to provide more effective education and training, and to develop industry-specific strategies to attract, train and retain staff.

The Rotorua labour market has its own unique characteristics and challenges. Both full-time and part-time employment has grown in the district over the last decade. Compared to the national average, however, employment is skewed towards elementary (lower skilled), trades, tourism and sales occupations. While unemployment has been falling, it is still higher than the national average and joblessness is a particular problem in the 15-to-24-year age group. Traditionally low levels of educational achievement have been steadily improving but remain below the national average, most noticeably amongst Maori and Pacific people. There's clearly room for improvement then, but a new problem has emerged that could put a brake on any plans to raise Rotorua's labour market performance – skill shortages.

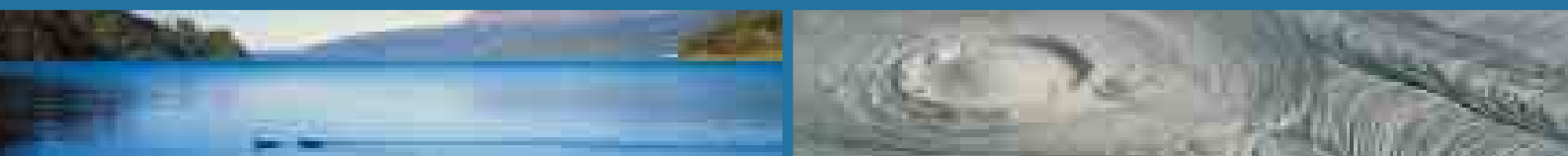


The Rotorua district is located in the central North Island.

SHARES (%) OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION GROUP

OCCUPATION GROUP	2001	
	ROTORUA DISTRICT %	NZ %
LEGISLATORS, ADMINISTRATORS AND MANAGERS	12	13
PROFESSIONALS	13	14
TECHNICIANS AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSIONALS	10	11
CLERKS	11	13
SERVICE AND SALES WORKERS	16	14
AGRICULTURE AND FISHERY WORKERS	8	8
TRADES WORKERS	9	8
PLANT AND MACHINE OPERATORS	8	8
ELEMENTARY OCCUPATIONS (including residuals)	13	11
TOTAL	100	100

Source: Statistics New Zealand, 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings



Reports of skill shortages in the district were largely anecdotal and policy makers were unable to pinpoint which skills were in short supply. An earlier skill shortage survey in the forestry sector had helped identify successful strategies to improve recruitment and develop new training opportunities. Following this model, a broader survey was proposed to take stock of skill and knowledge gaps across a wide range of key industries and job types in the district.

A collaborative approach was taken from the start. In August 2002 an Employment Skills Reference Group was convened to guide the project. Representatives from local education and training organisations attended, as well as employers from key industries. It was agreed that a survey would be undertaken to canvass employers and a postal questionnaire was developed. Several hundred face-to-face interviews were also scheduled. During the design and testing process, local employers and educators were relied upon to give the questionnaire and survey programme critical “reality checks”. This allowed the market researchers to understand the questions employers wanted to be asked, and how they should go about asking them. More than 1000 employers from a cross-section of industries provided useful responses to what were often difficult questions. In the adjacent table you will find some examples of what employers were asked, and how they responded.

The results provide an invaluable insight into current and possible future skill shortages for those in a position to do something about it. Over coming months, Rotorua employers from key industry sectors will meet to create action plans to address skill shortages. The detail of each plan will depend on the nature of the industry – for example, in the construction sector there appears to be scope for training local trades people, while the health sector is competing for skilled staff in a global labour market.

The Rotorua District Council will be using the survey results to support its **YOUTH POLICY** goal of increasing employment opportunities for young people. Already there’s strong support for the **LAUNCHPAD** Programme that recently arrived in Rotorua, and the concept of a “pathways” project to ensure all Rotorua young people aged 15–17 have opportunities and support for further development when they leave school. The Waiariki Institute of Technology has also responded with a range of new training opportunities, and fed the survey results into its strategic planning for 2004 and beyond.

A major concern is the number of young people not participating in work, education or training. No one agency is responsible for such people until they reach 18 years old and become eligible for unemployment benefit. With no obvious source of income and with support agencies unable to keep tabs on them, they run the risk of “falling through the cracks”. However, Work and Income representatives in the Bay of Plenty region are working to bridge the gap. Under the “Straight Up” strategy, Work and Income staff are talking to year 10 secondary school pupils

about the reality of being unemployed, providing them with information about their local labour market, and emphasising the fact that education improves employment opportunities. Teaching staff are also being encouraged to identify at-risk school leavers and put them in touch with Work and Income case officers who can assist them on the path to employment. This is where information on employer skill needs is most valuable, enabling support agencies to better identify areas of need and match opportunities to the skills of those who need help the most. ●

Do you currently have any vacant positions?

Current vacancies were reported in 19% of businesses, mainly for trades workers in wholesale, retail, manufacturing and engineering.

How are skill and knowledge needs likely to change over the next three to five years?

Employers in a wide range of industries identified areas where skill and knowledge needs were likely to increase.

- **AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE:** scientific, business and sales, technical and electronic knowledge, computer literacy, people management.
- **TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY:** customer service, food hygiene training, languages, computer literacy, professionalism, presentation.
- **WHOLESALE AND RETAIL:** computer literacy, computerised control systems, product knowledge, health regulations, changing fashion and trends, consumer legislation, food labelling requirements.
- **CONSTRUCTION:** health and safety, new technology, new product knowledge.
- **TRANSPORT:** computer literacy, business knowledge, product knowledge.
- **HEALTH AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES:** computer and information technology literacy, legislation, specialisation, professionalism.
- **EDUCATION SERVICES:** government strategy, curriculum changes, information and communication technology literacy, strategic and management skills, understanding of child development.
- **MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING:** new technology, electronics and computerised equipment, safety and health requirements, multi-skilling.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the Rotorua Employment Skills Survey, contact Rotorua District Council, Council Administration Building, 1061 Haupapa Street, Private Bag RO 3029, Rotorua. ☎ (07) 348 4199 📠 (07) 350 0182 or visit the website at: www.rotorua-business.com/working.

