

National Conversation about Work

Auckland Regional Report



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Introduction

Auckland is the largest city in New Zealand and the largest Polynesian city in the world. The region stretches from Wellsford in the north to the Papakura and the Bombay hills in the south. To the west are beaches bordering the Tasman Sea and to the east the Pacific coast. The climate is temperate. At the time of writing the Auckland region comprises of seven territorial authorities – four city councils and three district councils. The cities of Auckland are North Shore, Waitakere, Auckland and Manukau. The districts are Rodney, Papakura and part of Franklin.

At the last census 1.3 million people lived in Auckland, a third of the population of New Zealand. Most (56%) of the population of the region live in Auckland City and Manukau. In terms of population size Auckland City is the largest city in New Zealand and Manukau is the third largest city. The Auckland Regional Council predicts that the regional population will reach two million by 2036.

The top five industry sectors in Auckland are: property and business services; manufacturing; retail trade; wholesale trade; and construction.

Auckland is the most ethnically diverse region in the country. It also has a relatively young population with 37% aged less than 25 years. While Europeans are the largest ethnic group (at 56.5%) this is much lower than the national average of 67.6%. Māori make up 11.1% of the population of the region and Pacific people are 14.4% of the population. Almost one in five (18.9%) Aucklanders are Asian. Almost one in four (24%) Māori in New Zealand live in the region. Two thirds of all Asian and Pacific peoples living in New Zealand live in the Auckland region.

Chinese businesses are an integral part of Auckland's economy and the Chinese community comprises 97,425 at the 2006 Census. The Chinese community is very diverse with New Zealand born Chinese comprising 17,682 people and those born in China 53,694. Those born in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia total around 18,000.

The percentage of people in the Auckland region who were born overseas is much higher than the rest of the country. While 22.9%

of all people in New Zealand were born overseas, 37.0% of people in Auckland were born overseas. England is the most common birthplace of overseas born Aucklanders, as it is for the whole of the country.

The median age (half are younger and half are older) for people in the region is 33.9 years compared to 35.9 years nationally. There are fewer people aged 65 and over (9.9% compared to 12.3% of the total New Zealand population) and more younger people (22.1% compared to 21.5%) The median age of Māori in the region is 22.6 years.

The median income for people aged 15 or over in the region was \$26,800 considerably above the median for all New Zealand of \$24,400. However there is considerable income disparity, with 22% of the population and 27% of all children in the region living in areas rated as most deprived on the New Zealand Deprivation Index. The proportion of the Auckland population on low incomes is 15.6% according to the Social Report published by the Ministry of Social Development.

A higher proportion of people aged 15 and over in the Auckland region have a post –school qualification than the national average, and a lower proportion have no formal qualification compared to new Zealand as a whole.

Employment

In the year to March 2010 unemployment in the Auckland region is 7.3%. This rate is higher than the national average of 6.4% and considerably higher than unemployment in the region a year ago, when it was 5.1%. Labour force participation is 67.7 %, a little lower than the national average of 68.2%. Labour force participation includes those in employment and those looking for work, whether or not they are on an unemployment benefit.

The Commission undertook “conversations about work” in the Auckland region during the period October 2009 to May 2010. The effects of the recession were beginning to be felt at the start of our meetings in Auckland and intensified over the year. During the period, public consultation about the Auckland supercity was also taking place and decisions were being made about boundaries and structures of the city. The Commission visited Rodney district during the regional visit to Northland and conversations in Rodney

are reported in the Northland report. The reason for this was purely pragmatic.

Process of engagement

The Commission met with 171 people in 23 different engagements - with employers and/or employees from a range of population groups and industries. In Auckland we held a number of meetings with migrant and ethnic groups, particularly the Pacific community and the Asian community. The Commission is keen to include “new voices” in the National Conversation about Work and so we have sought meetings with groups not heard from before. In Auckland this included a group of mental health consumers. This regional summary report is the outcome of discussions with individuals and groups in the Auckland region.

Engagement in Auckland differed from other regions that we visited over a week. Meetings in Auckland were held over several months in 2009 and 2010. Participants were given the opportunity to comment on the draft report before publication on the NEON website (www.neon.org.nz) and on the project website (www.haveyoursayaboutwork.org.nz)

The final national report will amalgamate the observations and insights from the sixteen regional reports. It will also incorporate information collected through other forms of engagement such as on-line submissions and meetings of national bodies.

The following groups and individuals were participants in the Auckland region:

Local government

- Manukau City Council
- Enterprise North Shore

Women

- NZ Federation of Graduate Women
- Tertiary Education Union Women’s Fiesta
- Heather Douglas (Home business)
- Mary Devine
- Robyn DeBruin-Judge

Pacific Community

- Arthur Anae
- Pacific community representatives
- Vaka Tautua
- Nuku Rapana

Asian Community

- Focus group New Zealand born Chinese
- Focus group migrant Chinese at Meadowland ethnic precinct.

Community Groups

- AUT students
- Mental Health Consumer Group

Armed Forces

- Devonport Naval Base

Conference Participants

- Beca Consulting workshop

Weathering the recession in the Auckland region

We heard that the suddenness and shock of the global economic recession meant the financial sector of the North Shore that last year suffered from labour supply problems, was hit by demand side issues in the recession.

“Businesses that are looking for a silver bullet are looking in the wrong direction. The only way forward is for businesses to work harder. If there was anything easy to be done it would have been done by now,” a business leader said.

The recession lesson was that businesses needed to build resilience into their business models. Business had been sailing in fair weather, using fair weather sails and had encountered a huge storm with 100 year waves. Pre-recession businesses had not thought deeply about investment in people and had just “cranked the handle” and not necessarily made the networking contacts they should have. Business now had to rethink “survive and thrive” strategies.

There are “positives” in the recession including wider access to a greater pool of skilled job applicants, according to the chief executive officer of a large New Zealand retail company. We also heard that in some cases industry had used the recession to shed labour and that some companies might not be in a hurry to take on staff again when economic conditions improve. “Why bother with staff is a likely reaction from some when this is over.”

“Eighteen months ago we had difficulty finding skilled staff in certain areas such as finance administration-now they are more readily available.” The collapse of companies in the apparel industry also meant more specialists were available to choose from. “Remuneration expectations are also more realistic,” said the CEO.

Another participant said the recession had provided his start-up mobile advertising company with a timing opportunity and he had given up full time employment to go into business. While conventional advertising was down 11%, interactive advertising was up by the same amount which meant that the timing of the business start up was opportune. Another said that “you force yourself to do things that are difficult in these tough times such as selling which is much harder. But coming out of a recession these skills will provide me with an opportunity.”

The money the Government had spent on infrastructure during the recession was identified by another as a company windfall although there were signs this was drying up.

However skill shortages in the medium to long term were also predicted in areas like trades training to address the medium to long term supply demands of sunrise industries.

An employer said that in the current recessionary environment there is a need for even greater flexibility of employment relationships. She would like to see a moratorium until the end of 2010 on legislation that converts temporary work status into permanent work positions through fixed term contracts. She believes that employers should be able to roll over temporary contracts during this recessionary period because of the financial uncertainty and the unpredictability of forward orders.

“Many companies are in the position of knowing what they have on their books for the next two to three months but it is a big dark hole after that.” Many contracts were not just being tendered once but often 4 or 5 times and sometimes half way through jobs a process of re-tendering is required, she told us.

“Greater employment flexibility would allow companies to retain good temporary staff for as long as possible without being forced to lay them off simply because of the fear of having them declared ‘permanent under the law if their fixed term contracts are extended more than once.”

Several Chinese business owners said the current financial situation was very tough. Currency fluctuations impacted on the import/ export business and the printing and design business were surviving but were having to cut costs. One participant said increases in the minimum wage had also impacted on his business viability.

Another Chinese business who earns his money from Chinese clients who are looking to settle in New Zealand, described those at the table who were earning money from the New Zealand market as “heroes.” He said his clients had brought in over \$100 million into the Auckland economy through business migration.

We heard that there has been an increase in inquiries to Home Business New Zealand generally from older men who’ve been made redundant or cannot find salaried employment who want to start a home-based business. “Many of them are well equipped with skills and technical expertise. The recession has meant that many people have either voluntarily or involuntarily re-evaluated what they’re doing and have tightened systems and are watching stock and credit. Some have moved from commercial rental environments into the home environment.”

The Economic Development Agency – Enterprise North Shore has also noticed an increase in inquiries with more professional people who had been made redundant coming into the agency seeking assistance to start their own business. Its programme, Starting Off Right, had attracted 45 people made redundant. However, the agency believed it was better in many cases for people to register with WINZ and/or spend time looking for work and planning the

future rather than attempting to start their own business which would be vulnerable.

There is sufficient business start-up help available for home based business through regional economic development agencies, government and private sources, we were told. Those home businesses who know about these services attend courses and use the services. “There’s a lot of information available and government and private initiatives so I don’t favour more of the same. I’ve come to the realisation that many home businesses start up and feel their way. They may have to hit the wall first before they know they have a problem such as lack of financial management skills, how to do GST etc”.

“Many home businesses simply find their way and their owners are perfectly happy to create a job and income for themselves”.

The recession meant “twice as much work” to achieve the same results, according to one participant who identified that there was “a lot of pressure at work to perform to match everyone else” and this was particularly apparent for those who earned commissions.

Issues

The following themes emerged from discussions with people we talked to in the region:

- People with disabilities
- Migrants
- Women
- Work-life balance and flexible work
- Long working hours
- Voluntary work
- Leave
- Health and safety
- Child care
- Paid parental leave
- Transport
- Pathways to employment /career development
- Low pay
- SMEs

People with disabilities

During the course of our conversations in the Auckland region we were told about a number of barriers to employment opportunities faced by disabled people. The experiences of people with mental health issues are included in this section. The Human Rights Act explicitly includes mental health as a disability but we heard that “many of the people who experience mental illness don’t identify as having a disability.”

Housing

A disabled participant in a wheelchair who had doctoral qualifications spoke of her difficulties accessing appropriate and affordable accessible housing as a barrier to employment. She cited barriers to proximate and affordable housing as one of the reasons she had not worked in Wellington as a policy analyst.

Expectations about being better than anyone else

A common observation from disabled workers is “The feeling that you need never to be a burden, always reasonable, as good as everyone else but better,” One participant then went on to say, “it’s really tough and burns you out. It’s a form of self stigmatising.” Another person told us that normal emotions such as sadness or happiness or frustration were pathologised by the employer as a sign of becoming mentally unwell.

Inequities in access to equipment for people with disabilities

A blind person said she was concerned about the inequity of access to specialist equipment for blind people. While there was funding available for specialist equipment, it generally wasn’t enough and there was a lack of even-handedness in its application by Workbridge and other agencies. “When you do find a really decent employer and you roll up on the first day you want to hit the ground running and often this isn’t possible. This increases the likelihood of negative employers’ attitudes towards disabled people in the workplace.”

Lack of work preparation for disabled people

A lack of self awareness among some disabled people about where they needed to be in terms of work preparedness was cited as a barrier to increased labour market participation of disabled people by one participant. “There is often a low vision of where am I now and a lack of awareness about where I need to be”.

Discrimination by the legal profession

“Why is it that employers don’t hire disabled people? We seem to be more risky than prisoners,” said a disabled participant. She was mentoring disabled graduates who could not get into law firms once they had passed their law degrees. She said that one outstanding disabled law graduate had been turned down by 6 law firms and one had indicated to her that because she used a wheelchair she wouldn’t be able to use the firm’s vehicles and therefore she wasn’t hired. “Disabled law graduates are bumped off every single time they apply for a job.”

Transport

A community adviser said the lack of accessible public transport for disabled people limited their involvement in workshops she ran and consequently she felt a lack of sense of achievement in her work because they were not able to attend and participate.

Experiences of deaf people

Two deaf participants provided written responses to the question, “what is the one thing that would make a difference for you at work?” They wrote:

“From a deaf viewpoint, having hearing people in your workplace that can sign” and “That I am being paid according to my skills and experience, not because of my gender, age and cultural background.”

Stroke victims

A participant working with stroke victims indicated that there were “enormously positive relationships” for some stroke victims returning to the workplace but equally there were some workplaces where employers were not open to employing stroke victims. In one case a 40 year old who had suffered a stroke took 18 months to return to work but when an approach was made to his employer, he was welcomed back and a job created with new boundaries reflecting the genuine skills of the stroke victim. Caring workplaces where there had been previous positive working relationships both held positions and redesigned jobs if necessary for stroke victims.

Discrimination when applying for work

One disability advocate suggested that the recession had hardened the attitudes of some employers that disabled people were “not as productive in a tight market.” Another participant said that employers wanted to know how not to become a de facto social worker and ask themselves “do I need the problem?”

Participants discussed recruitment agencies that they felt operated in a “grey area” or twilight zone. They had heard of many instances of discrimination through recruitment agencies who do not directly employ the applicant or because they are the “broker”. There was a common view that many recruitment agencies seemed to be able to ask whatever they wanted.

The job interview process can also be a barrier to people with experience of mental illness. “Quite often once you are “outed” as someone who experiences mental distress in your interview you’re often asked, ‘how do you manage that?’ whereas the question should be ‘what can we do that enables you to do your work well’. “We need to avoid stigmatising questions.” Another participant said in her organisation everyone that was interviewed was now asked, how do you recognise your own stress and how do you deal with it, rather than just those who had experienced mental illness.

To disclose or not disclose

The fraught issue of whether to disclose previous experience of mental illness to prospective employers was discussed at one meeting. Concern was expressed about the current use of recruitment forms that ask questions about experience of mental illness. Some of these forms ask general questions about health status but also include specific questions such as: Do you, or have you, ever suffered from mental illness? Where the question was asked it was quite clear that anyone acknowledging that they had experience of mental illness was not going to get the job anyway. Someone may have experienced mental illness in the past, be capable of working at the moment, but mental illness may reoccur in the future. “The hardest thing is for people to understand their rights about what they need to disclose”.

A second issue relating to disclosure concerns interrupted work careers. “Even if people aren’t asked if they have mental illness or how their health is, the period they haven’t been working is a real issue in that people don’t know what to say. Do they lie about it, do they say they’ve been doing something else because it almost always came up in interviews. Oh, you haven’t been working for a few years, what were you doing in that time? It’s a minefield.”

Another question asked that was considered to be problematic is, “do you have a long term illness that might require future support? This is quite tricky as well. Do you say yes so you can get the support?”

“The crux of the argument around disclosure is that there is still a lot of stigma around employability- there’s the view that if you’ve got a mental illness you’re actually not employable. You can’t handle stress, you’re potentially dangerous to yourself and to others, you are a lot of extra work, you’re unreliable, you will take lots of time off”.

Participants said some clinicians did not support people’s confidence in relation to employment and were more inclined than not to imply that work would be too much, work would be a strain and that work would be too stressful. These sorts of discriminatory attitudes, while changing, still lingered. One participant said he remembered when working in supported employment with someone who had a diagnosis of schizophrenia who got a job. He was told that he would have to have his diagnosis changed because it had said in the diagnosis that he would never work again.

We also heard from one disabled worker about the conditions of work that were particularly helpful to her: it is notable that many features of the conditions that support her as a disabled person are not specifically designed to enable her participation in the workforce but are arrangements available and used by staff generally.

- “Employer allowing me to work either from home or the office, in the light of having mobile phone and laptop access, so, the effect of a mobile office is created, and my job, being of a "thinking, drafting and planning" kind, wouldn't mean that I have to be at a desk from 8 till 5 literally and this is the case for colleagues too, so, it's not an exception for me, but works extremely well.
- Employer is flexible around me being able to work flexy hours if I need to take time to take my guide dog to the vet, attend medical appointments, etc. Although I work 40 hours a week, my type of work can be mostly done at any time, so, apart from when I'm needing to facilitate or host meetings and events, meet stakeholders, etc, the work can get done at any time.”

Other helpful support is more specific to her disability:

- “Employer is hugely assistive with regards to helping out in instances where Workbridge cannot fund all my service and equipment needs as disabled person. For instance, (my employer) is doing most of my administrative support (but they're doing it for others too so it's a good general system) so that my Workbridge Job Support funding can go towards transport and adaptive technology services and equipment. My employer also pays for adaptive technology upgrading as Workbridge is not covering this for all clients.”

Other participants said that a workplace culture which was supportive of people with mental illness was beneficial to everyone.

The need for better data about employment participation and representation of people with disabilities including experience of mental health issues was called for. One group called for: “education for employees in terms of resources about their rights

and education for employers so they're not afraid and know what they have to do."

The need for positive stories was also identified. One person said we need "evidence-based material of positive social and economic outcomes for both employers and people with experience of mental illness but ensuring that it is "real" and balanced so that the struggle of coping with mental illness is not minimised." Another argued for "greater promotion of employers' responsibilities couched in "win-win" arguments, business case, triple bottom line, "what's in it for them" rationales."

Migrants

We also heard about the discrimination experienced by migrants. The issue of transferable skills held by migrants to New Zealand was discussed as a major barrier to labour market participation at comparable levels. "There is a need for a diversity of models to ensure the recognition of equivalent qualifications and whether they are recognised." The participants felt that some professional bodies were using models that were exclusionary not inclusionary whereas a different approach would see overseas qualifications more readily accepted and New Zealand benefit from transferable skills rather than migrants working well below the levels they could and in poorer paid jobs.

"My father had real problems. Even though he was a very experienced manager in India no one would give him a chance, they wanted 'NZ' experience. There still seems to be hidden racism in NZ especially in smaller companies that can get away with it. In larger companies it seems better as there is Human Resources to look out for fairness."

Employers preferences for "Kiwi experience" was seen by a number of migrants we talked to as a barrier to accessing work. This is recognised as covert discrimination against migrants and new Kiwis. One participant said: "We have so many engineers coming in, they're highly skilled and I've actually seen their applications. But they're turned down because they don't have Kiwi experience. Yet the company employs many from South Africa, the UK and Europe that don't have New Zealand experience but they are from a Caucasian country. If they come from an Asian country, India is a bit of an exception, but other Asian countries they'll be turned down."

One participant said there was occasionally discrimination in starting salaries. “I’ve heard of Kiwis getting specialist jobs with starting salary of \$80,000 but the successful Chinese applicants have to compromise. They’re told that because of their language they will be offered \$50,000 to start and, ‘would you like to take it or not’.”

Language, lack of New Zealand experience and contacts were identified as barriers to employment. “Very often Chinese people are told their language is not good enough. Some employers just assume if they see a Chinese name that someone can’t speak English. All most migrants want is an interview”.

Several English as second language participants expressed support for employment-related information for employers to be available in Chinese languages. The complexity of changes in employment law and regulations, legal language and Kiwi terminology were often not understood.

One participant who was a company employee said he was aware of active discrimination among some of his client and supplier companies against migrants on the basis of their names. He said he was sometimes in the offices of clients when they were seeking job applicants. Advertisements on SEEK had prompted comments such as “look at all these immigrants”. One had recently said that the company “wanted someone with at least one English name in their name”. “This is silly given that there are a lot of good people out there.”

The issue of Anglicising names on curriculum vitae was discussed. One participant said obviously the ideal was trying to persuade employers to “stop looking at the names” and accepting people on the basis of competence. However, anglicizing of names could be seen as “repackaging yourself for the New Zealand market”. It was accepted as common practice among some people in curriculum vitae preparation. “As long as I know who I am and what I am then it wouldn’t worry me”, said one participant.

Apparent contradictions in employment policy in New Zealand were identified by an employer we spoke to. One valuable worker the company currently employs is a migrant on a temporary work visa without formal qualifications who had been employed during the previous buoyant period of skills shortages. His immigration

status, though, may mean he cannot stay even though he has meticulous job standards, has learnt on the job and wants to remain in New Zealand.

The employer said government and business organisations urged companies not to be close-minded about diversity during the skill shortage. Employers who have invested in the skill development and assisted the integration of migrants in to workplaces and the community should be able to continue to employ these workers if they are happy with them in her opinion. These workers should not automatically lose their jobs when their temporary visas expire simply because more New Zealand workers are temporarily unemployed.

Pacific people we spoke to felt that their skills were not fully recognised and therefore valued. “At work you take your Pacific ethnicity with you. It’s not something that’s specific in your remuneration package. It’s part of who you are and its positive for employers.” However, several participants said they did not feel that Pacific peoples were promoted according to merit and their skills. “I can think of a very good nurse in one organisation. The employer allowed her flexibility because he so valued her, but she should have progressed upwards. Her skills didn’t translate into greater remuneration. She could have gone higher in the organisation than she did.”

The value of employees with Pacific languages was a strong theme from the participants. Feedback from clients and service providers reinforced the value of receiving information, advice and support in their own languages. In some Pacific organisations there was a need not only for gender balance and ethnicity but a desire to balance different Pacific groups and their languages. Some participants spoke three Pacific languages. “I love coming back here (to work) so I can use my language”. The desire for their children, including those born in New Zealand, to learn and use their Pacific languages was strong.

Women

A senior female chief executive officer who sees directorship as part of her future career believes both the Institute of Directors and the agencies such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs need to be doing more to improve the number of women on boards of major companies.

“The Institute of Directors (IOD) and the Ministry need to look at how they can influence change. I believe the IOD needs to modify its profile and be more engaging as an organisation.”

The CEO said when she was ready she would “have a quiet chat over a glass of wine with three key guys. It’s all about internal networks. I’d play the boy’s game to do it.”

It was pleasing to see New Zealand Global Women get off the ground and promote the issue with great publicity. Global Women now needed to “get some runs on the board” to influence governance patterns and trends and develop the skill base of potential female directors.

Young female students talked about their expectations of employment when they graduate and said that they expected to get equal pay with male graduates with equivalent qualifications and experience.

Women from minority ethnic backgrounds experienced multiple discrimination. An improved understanding of different cultures in a conservative industry was identified as a “must change” element for one female participant. She said she felt she had suffered when she first began in her job from being “young, a woman and an Asian” Often she had to advise technical experts against decisions they’d made, because she could foresee negative business impacts. Men aged 50/60 years old in suits were the hardest to change and she believed it would have to be a generational change of attitude in traditional male dominated industries. Because many had no experience of working in Asia they did not realise that not all Asians were the same and that there were different cultural considerations in Taiwan from Thailand, for example.

Ingrained societal attitudes were a barrier in traditionally male-dominated occupations. A participant spoke of an Asian female colleague with the appropriate technical background. “She is very good but a lot of the time she finds it had to communicate and argue her points through. Being a girl, young, and smallthose who’ve been there forever will never listen to her point of view.”

Work life balance and flexible work

A number of participants said that increased flexibility around work hours would make a big difference to them at work. A number of suggestions were made about the form flexible work hours might take.

One employee talked about time banking, saying “It would be good idea to have a time account, allowing people to follow personal rhythms, working more or less when personal needs/desires dictate.”

Others advocated for an outcomes focus on working hours. “Sometimes we work 80/90 hours in a week on projects. Other times its quiet/not anything to do. But we don’t get to take time off. True flexibility would allow balance – not paid to be idle or just there, but paid for outcomes.” This form of workplace flexibility is called Results Only Work Environment (ROWE) and is described in a recent report from Executive Office of President Council of Economic Advisers (EOPCEA.)

The benefits of flexible work practices to the workplace and to society were raised. One participant said “Work life balance is usually about home and work. What about time to participate in society? i.e look after the communities/volunteer. If 10% of people wanted to or were allowed to pick this up it would be a huge societal change.” Another said “My volunteer work complements and helps my work life”.

Home businesses generally try and avoid the “hassle” of conventional employment. “The biggest barrier to growth comes because many home businesses don’t want to employ staff because of compliance issues, space problems and people don’t want the stress and responsibility. Outsourcing through the use of contractors is a familiar home business relationship pattern” a home business operator told us.

The SME (small and medium enterprise) perspective on labour market reforms and employment law changes could easily be overlooked we were told. For example, we heard that ironically, the right to request flexible work legislation which compels employers to respond to employees’ requests for flexibility under certain situations diminished a competitive advantage held by SMEs. Many small companies were informally allowing employees that

flexibility prior to legislation because of the organisational need to retain good value staff and not being able to pay corporate salaries. Now employees wanting flexibility can compel larger organisations to provide it.

Students also identified the importance of flexibility of hours so that they could better reconcile work and study demands. Time off for exams was not guaranteed and in some case employment conditions specified that for university study to be acknowledged it had to be the core area of work (for example a management professional studying management).

An Indian female director of a large healthcare group of companies spoke about the huge level of multitasking required by women across employment and family life. Referring to Esther's story in our introductory DVD to the project she said "It IS true that every woman needs a wife, particularly in the Indian community where many women are working and running families."

Some workers made the distinction between balance between work and life and balance at work. "We talk about work/life balance – it should be balance of work and life together (at the same time). Allow time out zones, ability to take a break, do personal things when need to read paper, relax." Another participant commented on work intensity "Everyone has a computer and it means more work, faster and faster. The pace of life is going faster, more demands, more intense stress."

Several participants wanted greater autonomy to manage the ebbs and flows of work demand and their own preferences. "It would be good for employees to be able to configure how they work. Like working 3 days on, 3 days off. Be able to configure it, work it around, not tied down to Mon – Fri 40 hours – provide maximum flexibility but also considering the company needs."

Employees recognised the complexity of making flexible work practices a reality in the workplace. One participant, a single parent, said that "flexibility doesn't work for me. I need structure and to know what I am doing and when, otherwise I have to pay for a nanny. When I do work longer it ends up costing me extra". Another working parent said that flexibility of hours to arrange school transport would make life easier. Others said that flexibility

also needed to work within the team. A participant observed “Flexibility needs lots of work for it to work well for companies.”

We also heard about the particular challenges faced by home businesses in respect to work and life balance. People operating a home business find it hard to separate home and family, which impacts on privacy and personal safety. Issues arise like space in the home and separating family time from work time. Equally one of the attractions of home businesses is the flexibility it allows families with children e.g. running the kids to soccer at 3.30pm. “There are both more and fewer stresses sharing home and family in this way.”

One woman talked about how much she valued a flexible workplace. “In a good team you know other people and you know how they feel and come to understand who they are, and their circumstances. For example my husband is fully paralysed and if others understand that, then they will also understand why we do things a bit differently. If we come a bit late then we need a little bit of leniency there or flexi hours and when we come to the office we will do our work better. We need support from the office rather than coming here worrying about not doing this or that and what will happen to your family.”

More nuanced policy responses to recognise the huge number of different working models was advocated. In Robyn deBruin-Judge’s chapter in an edited book on work-life balance in New Zealand,¹ she uses the policy on fringe benefit tax (FBT) on vehicles as an illustration. Many small businesses, including self employed people, have multi-purpose vehicles used for business and for family purposes. The criteria for vehicles eligible for FBT exemption includes: the principal design of the vehicle cannot be for carrying passengers. If a vehicle is used for business documentation is required to help calculate FBT on the private component or to claim a percentage of business expenses if the vehicle is privately owned. Robyn writes:

“In a monochromic, strictly ‘work’ environment recording mileage tends to be an instituted practice. Such documentation requirements become much more of an issue for those operating a

¹ R.de Bruin-Judge (2007) “Invisible work of partners in compliance for small-business operators”. In M.Waring and C. Fouche (Eds) *Managing Mayhem: Work –Life Balance in New Zealand*. Wellington: Dunmore Publishing Ltd pp 235-253

polychromic schedule where one might well be dealing with a leaky iceblock given as a treat for being 'good at the accountant' and racing to meet another child by the three o'clock deadline before throwing them in soccer gear and dropping off the GST return in the post on the way to practice; or in fact using the vehicle as a mobile office at the sports ground while the children are under the supervision of the team coach" (p.246-247). The 9-5 lease dealt with this well but has since been eliminated as an accounting option because it apparently gave SMEs an advantage over corporates.

Yet Robyn claims there are examples where larger entities have advantages over SMEs. For example, if an SME was to provide paid gym membership for employees it would incur approx 50% FBT whereas if a corporation set up a gym on site it would be tax deductible. Similarly with child care, paying external child care costs for employees incur FBT whereas setting up a child care centre would not.

Long working hours

Long working hours were also identified as an issue. One group told us that stipulated work hours should be honoured, for example 35 (contracted) hours should mean 35 hours rather than 50 hours of work expected by salaried graduates.

At one of the meetings with Chinese participants we heard that all of the participants worked longer than the conventional forty hour working week, and most had an expectation of long working hours. One employee said he worked 60 hours a week and was engaged in post graduate study on top of that. Another said between 30 to 60 hours week depending on business demand and another said 50 hours a week.

A business owner said the hours of work were "indefinite". She could be on holiday and have a great idea for work but it was "different for business owners." One of the more established business owners said he worked seven days a week when he started up but he now tries to regulate his working life with a half day on Monday where he has no meetings until midday and similarly on Wednesday afternoons. Now he spends many hours travelling internationally. "It started off being an adventure, now it's really hard work".

One participant said the Asian work ethic was a “huge bonus” for small businesses where the cost of compliance with employment legislation was an issue. There was strong support for the 90 day probationary period trial for employees registered by this participant who also said she’d hate to pay public holiday rates to staff who did not work hard.

Voluntary work

One community leader told us that he was poorer financially because of the choices he made but “I’m richer in so many other ways.” He gave up a successful business to concentrate on his community development role. He told us that he almost lost his house but was able to find alternative financing. “I had to be able to live through a period of almost two years with no income coming in for me and my wife. I don’t how we survived but we did...that’s the kind of commitment needed to make this happen (a community centre and a number of community owned business units).

Leave

The amount of leave provided in NZ compared to other countries was discussed by migrant workers. It was clear that many found New Zealand leave provisions limiting and restricted the time available to pursue interests, provide family time, volunteer in the community and also have time to go back ‘home’.

One migrant told us “In NZ leave is quite limited. In the UK I got 25 days per year (not including all the extra public holidays). Coming to NZ with less leave was a shock to the system – and it means even less time to travel back to my home country.” Another talked about French leave provisions ““In France I had 8 1/2 – 9 weeks leave, at another company I had 11 weeks but worked 60-70 hours per week. Here it seems the government/companies don’t want to give more leave, believing it will make the economy grow – but are people really more productive just because they work more?”

Others made the point that four weeks leave did not allow enough time for dealing with personal issues such as moving house or in the case of bereavement, needing to take more time to organise a funeral and deal with a death in the family than allowed within a three day bereavement leave provision. “Bereavement is only 3 days. But for me this hasn’t been enough. At my age I’ve been

involved with organising recent funerals and had a role to play in the family. I've had to take annual leave. This isn't right."

Sick leave entitlement of five days per year was inadequate people told us. "Five days sick leave is never enough when you have children. All the leave gets taken up with them."

Students sought study leave, not only study leave provisions in the workplace but also the ability to use study leave if the employer offers it.

Health and safety

Reference was made in one of our meetings of the importance of ensuring that workplace were not just safe, but healthy too. "In health and safety there's lots of safety but not much health. (There is) not a focus on mental stress." In that vein, a safe working environment was defined as an "approachable boss and (being) safe from harassment" by one participant.

Several students with part time jobs as cleaners spoke of the physical strains associated with cleaning work- for example back problems from vacuum cleaning and using cleaning solvents.

Child care

An Indian migrant who had been in New Zealand for seven years said the one thing that would make a difference for him and his family was tax deductible child care. He said both he and his wife had to work to meet their financial commitments in New Zealand and family commitments overseas. "If child care was tax deductible it would make a huge difference to us."

Parents we spoke to talked about the problem of accessing child care facilities close to the workplace. "In Europe big companies support people more by providing more facilities and services in house or close by. This means people can work well, and longer – be more productive which means profit for the company."

Another parent explained the reality of managing the work day when child care facilities were some distance from work "Having to run around can be stressful – drop off kids/pick them up later – and try and manage work around the timings, and try to get across

town to do it.” School holidays were also identified as “very hard for parents”.

Child care issues are particular acute for single parents. “Single parents have it very hard. Hard to earn money, develop career and look after children. Something has to give. Parents either give up hope of developing a career or compromise the on bringing up the kids. Government needs to help out more. Children are paying for it – and this will affect the future of NZ.”

An older parent noted that there have been considerable improvements in child care arrangements for parents since she had her first child 15 years ago with paid parental leave provisions, 20 free hours, increased availability of child care and the right to request flexible work.

One participant suggested involvement in early childhood education maybe a future voluntary role for some Pacific grandfathers retired from work. “Older men may be more comfortable about going back to work, especially for their grandsons. A retired grandfather’s at ease with kids and kids actually identify with that grandfather image in their own real lives so they won’t see this as anything unusual.” The participant said as more academically qualified Pacific men who were grandfathers retired they might be a “rich group to pick up”. “If they’re already a grandfather they will be less fussed about the issues that might worry younger Pacific men.”

A group of Pacific people discussed the importance of early childhood centres for children’s learning. “A lot of the perception in our communities of early childhood is still around care. The parents are out working or doing something else. Some people think that an early childhood centre is just a day care centre. There is change starting and I think people are starting to buy into the foundation of learning and are getting more interested in that.”

Paid parental leave

The absence of Paid Parental Leave (PPL) for fathers as a primary entitlement was raised several times. One father said “When a woman is having a baby the leave is all about her. I’d like paid father leave so I can be there and help. I’m new to the country and we have no family support. I can’t afford to take unpaid leave to support my wife; I’m torn between wife/baby and paying bills.”

Another said “In UK they split child leave between both parents – on full pay.”

Transport

Lack of reliable public transport meant that many working people felt some pressure in their lives; with commuting times and its affects, the cost of car parking, the difficulty in doing personal activities during normal work days, and the impact and pressures on family life with both parents working. One commuter said “It (the public transport system) is 50 years behind the times. I have to get up at 5.15am to get here at 6am quickly otherwise I’d lose hours in travel.”

Pathways to employment/career development

A number of people were weighing up the cost of up-skilling and wondered if more support could be provided to encourage further education in order to “grow our GDP, grow productivity”

The cost of education funding was a barrier identified for many young Pacific people in health and other areas. “When I trained as a nurse under the old hospital system I was earning as I was learning. It was an apprenticeship. It’s tragic to see the numbers of Māori and Pacific in training drop out because they can’t afford the cost. The families need them to work and to be generating income. You should hear the stories at family meetings.”

Reference was also made to cuts to night classes and a concern that this would “affect those wanting to up skill as well as limiting chances for more holistic/personal interest learning.”

On the question of whether younger people have enough education about entrepreneurship, a business woman said many large secondary schools have business models such as the Takapuna Enterprise Centre at Takapuna Grammar to expose student to self employment. However, she perceived a lack of knowledge about personal budgeting as a deficit in young people’s skills.

Manukau City Council in partnership with Work and Income/Ministry of Social Development are using initiatives such as Community Max to employ disabled youth. The council include people with diverse needs into their work experience programmes.

The Town Centre Ambassador Scheme is another council –MSD venture which includes disabled people among other people in the local community who've found securing employment difficult.

The leader of one of the Pacific communities in Auckland told us that while he was not aware of disproportionate unemployment “young people coming out of school are a big problem and I have concerns about the type of work they are going into. Their lack of qualifications coming out of school means they’re ending up in the same jobs as the ones that came from the islands. That’s not good. We need to make sure their educational levels are higher. That would be my priority. Not only that, the statistics are telling us that our Pacific population is much younger.”

Another Pacific leader told us he strongly supports New Zealand’s first Tertiary High School at Manukau Institute of Technology which aims to keep secondary students in the education system for longer and bridge the secondary/tertiary divide. Potentially disengaged school students who are unlikely to succeed in a traditional school setting are identified to enter the Tertiary High School in Year 11. It’s aimed at keeping students at school rather than in school. He also strongly supports local government’s role in stimulating employment opportunities for young people such as the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs. “The city needs to make it easy” for businesses to set up where they are guaranteeing jobs.

We heard about the aspirations Pacific parents had for their children. Some concern was expressed about the emphasis on white collar jobs rather than trades. “We have to be able to market that there is a career pathway that will come from trades training as well as going to university of having a white collar job.” One participant said for several generations Pacific people in New Zealand had pushed the idea that “If you’re not going to have a white collar job, you are not worth a great deal.”

This put a great deal of pressure on children. “I think our people always want their children to become doctors and lawyers and they go into tertiary education for the wrong reasons and part way through they fall off the radar.”

We heard of an example of a 17 year old boy who wanted to be a physiotherapist but was advised to ‘give away this silly dream of being a physiotherapist, you could be a doctor.’ The person

recounting this story said, “I was actually concerned for that child and his future. A lot of parents don’t want their children to be vulnerable but they have different ambitions for their kids than their kids have.”

For these reasons career advice and planning needed to focus on young people but involve their parents in the discussions as well. At the end of the third form there needed to be a “marriage between the child, the school and the parents” to decide where the future lies because very often parental aspirations and the student’s ability are not aligned.

The Pukapuka Island Community in New Zealand is an example of a unique and successful approach to community services and employment.

Social entrepreneur, Nuku Rapana, the president of the Pukapuka Island Community, has turned a vision into a reality, despite personal sacrifices along the way. The community in New Zealand has structured itself as an incorporated society which has created a number of community-owned business units which employ about 30 people. They include a bakery, the Pukapuka Social Services which delivers a range of integrated programmes on family wellness, a pre-school and afterschool and holiday programmes, a vehicle licensing operation and a training enterprise which employ about 30 people. With Nuku’s experience and knowledge in business, the community bought premises at Mangere where several of the enterprises are based.

The founder and managing director of Entech Electronics Nuku has a background in the electronics industry specialising in the fabrication and supply of printed circuit boards for the likes of Tait Electronics and Wormald.

Nuku says his vision involved a 15 year plan starting in 1995 until the present day. The first five years was the establishment phase, the second was the consolidation phase and the third phase is the expansion phase. The Pukapuka Community centre has also helped groups in Brisbane and Hawke’s Bay.

In the next 20 years Nuku sees lifting the skills and training levels of Pukapuka people as the main priority. The centre has been in partnership with Te Wananga o te Aotearoa in computer and business studies training. “The main strategy now is to aim at higher tertiary qualifications and lift and push people up. We’ve got a team of 11 teachers in training now and hope to have more mid-year and we want New Zealand qualified teachers for here and in the Cook Islands.” The current business climate provided opportunities for niche approaches which did not bring the community’s business enterprises into direct competition with bigger companies.

“The opportunities are huge for our people and that’s why I’m looking forward to the next 10 to 15 years....”

Low pay

As in other areas the inadequacy of the minimum wage was raised. Students said that they sought better pay rather than being offered more hours of work at the minimum wage.

SMEs

The SME criteria, which generally includes business and organisations in the 0-20 staff, has been used as the threshold for activating employment legislation such as the right to hire an employee on a grievance-free probationary period. A SME business director made the point that the company she helps run with her husband has 24 staff and is therefore subject to the same policy rules as companies as large as Fletcher Challenge.

A business leader who supports the probationary period said that he believes that current employment frameworks could be too restrictive for younger, immature businesses that were smaller. “We need greater flexibility for small and very small business, for example.”

We heard that Small Business Advisory Group (SBAG) supports the probationary period legislation as a means to increase employment opportunities. “A huge number of employers are reluctant to take on staff because they’ve made the wrong choices in the past and been severely burnt. Giving someone a go and judging them on whether they can do the job and are right for the company in a certain period of time is a huge plus. After all a tradesperson ‘boss’ in a small company can’t be expected to have a degree in human resources and most SMEs don’t have specialised human resources people.”

An employer with a start up businesses said when they eventually hired people they would probably use the Auckland Chamber of Commerce’s New Kiwis website. “As a small company we don’t have a human resources policy and New Kiwis is a good easy way, no risk, to try someone out.” The use of contract staff was also preferred as less risky way of employing labour. “If they don’t do the contract they don’t get paid. If they do, then they get extra work”. The company was “almost likely to discriminate the other way” in terms of migrants specifically Koreans and Japanese who had the competitive edge in mobile marketing.

The owner of an eight year old small business said that that changing employment laws and regulations were a compliance hassle for her. She believed there should be free, emailed weekly employment law updates to help small businesses and advocates and an info line approach. She suggested more school-based, business enterprise education about how to start a small business.

Another business owner said while he agreed with the principle of a certain level of employees' rights, some of the responsibilities on business owners were "quite stifling" in relation to hiring and firing.

Conclusions

This Auckland report is the last of the regional reports from the National Conversation about Work project. Many of the issues identified in this report have been raised in other regions and have been further articulated by the Aucklanders we spoke to.

These issues include: the challenge of ensuring fairness at work for SMEs; the desire for greater flexibility at work and the need for more comprehensive discussion of the various options for greater flexibility at work; identification of problems of access to affordable childcare/early childhood education when and where parents need it; working hours; discrimination; and youth employment.

Auckland is also the largest and most ethnically and culturally diverse of the sixteen regions. Insights into the experience of new migrants and second (and third) generation "migrants" emphasise the unique talents brought and challenges faced by these communities in the region.

Recommendations

- Encourage employers to recognise the value of Pacific language skills as an additional competence which benefits the business /organisation where the customer base includes the Pacific community.
- Employment law information and updates are provided in Chinese languages for the growing number of Asian employers and businesses.
- Develop Human Rights Commission guidance in partnership with the community on the issue of disclosure of mental health status at job interviews.