



National Conversation about Work Wellington Regional Report



Contents

Introduction	p3
Process of engagement	p4
Issues	p7
Long work hours/workload	p7
Childcare	p8
Pay	p9
Employment and income support	p10
Job security	p11
Flexible work	p11
Discrimination	p12
Career progression	p14
Leave	p16
Health and safety	p16
Conclusion	p17
Possible Recommendations	p18

Introduction

The Wellington region has a population of 448,956. Geographically the region encompasses the Kapiti Coast, Porirua City, Wellington City, Lower and Upper Hutt Cities and the Wairarapa.

The region is characterised by relatively low levels of unemployment at 3.5% and the labour participation rate is 70%, slightly above the national average of 68.7%. Youth employment rates are also lower than the national average, but the picture varies district by district. The rate of young people aged between 15 -24 years not in employment, education or training is notably higher than the national average in the Porirua district, and the rate for young people between 20 -24 years is also high in the Masterton and South Wairarapa.

Key industries in Wellington are government administration, education, hospitality and new professions (for example I.T.) There are 18,698 public servants in the Wellington region, with 41% of the public service workforce based in the region.

The Human Resource Capability Survey of the Public Service (2008) states that the gender pay gap in the public service has decreased slightly to 15.4% from 16% the previous year, but was still wider than the labour force as a whole at 14.9%. A decrease in the ethnic diversity of senior management was also identified in the Capability Survey although the percentage of women in senior management positions has increased slightly from 37.8% to 38.3% of management positions. Women comprise 59% of the public service workforce. Data on the employment of people with disabilities in the public service is estimated at between 2,900 and 6,200 people. Statistics NZ data suggests that there are fewer people with disabilities in the public service workforce than the labour force as a whole.

Key industries in the wider region include agriculture, viticulture and horticulture. Some 1,000 Wairarapa residents commute to Wellington or the Hutt Valley for work each day.

The top five career choices of 343 senior Wairarapa school pupils from six colleges are:

- Sports/ performance/arts/music
- Medical/healthcare
- Hospitality/tourism/aviation
- Legal/financial/business management
- Building design/construction trades.

However, once the students leave college, 70% intend leaving the district and the declining school population from 2011 will impact on the available district labour force, according to the Wairarapa Workforce Development Trust's Student Perception Survey 2008. Parents and subject teachers are their most influential vocational advisers. Female students accessed half as many workplace experiences as male students. When asked what would have helped career choice the students nominated more work experience and talking to people who do the job.

Process of engagement

Given the resources available the Commission has decided to target the following groups nationally:

- disabled people
- organisations supporting the employment of people with disabilities and employers
- Māori businesses
- cleaners
- women's groups with a focus on employment
- young families
- local government
- migrant workers
- sustainable businesses.

In each region we seek meetings with employers and/or employees in at least one key industry. We also include meetings with local groups who have expressed an interest in the project and where possible “new voices” – individuals and community groups who may not have participated in dialogue with the Human Rights Commission before. Engagement is reliant on access to individual employers, employees and groups who want to participate. Regional reports are based on this engagement and may not be necessarily representative of the regional labour market in each region.

As the National Conversation about Work proceeds we are keen to hear from other groups in different regions about how they can engage with the Commission.

Methods of engagement were tested in Wellington and the following summary follows discussion with approximately 200 people. Engagement with employers and employees for the National Conversation were structured around face-to-face meetings. The final, national report will also include information gathered from on-line engagement and will include recommendations for legislation, policy and practice to enhance equal employment opportunities.

The following groups were participants in the Wellington region:

Government administration

- Public Service Association (PSA)
- Young Māori public sector professionals

Women/Education sector

- NZEI national women’s group

Disability groups

- DPA and People First Head Office
- IHC Advocacy
- Association of Blind Citizens

Māori Business

- Kia Kaha Clothing

Community groups

- Members of the Wainuiomata RSA Club

Cleaners

- School cleaners

This report summarises dialogue held immediately prior to the first wave of the global economic recession including increasing redundancies and predictions of unemployment rising to 7.5%. It remains to be seen if job security becomes a predominant focus in the regions as the National Conversation progresses.

Conversations with employees were structured around the following key questions;

1. What would make a difference for you to achieve equality at work?
2. How would this affect your family?

These questions were followed by a general discussion about equality and fairness at work and what was needed to effect the desired change. Typically these discussions elicited a wealth of personal work experiences, stories both positive and negative, and highlighted a number of issues related to fairness at work.

Similarly conversations with employers focussed on key questions which included;

1. Does your workplace have formal written EEO policies?
2. Are you currently facing any specific EEO issues?
3. Do you need help to improve EEO in your workplace?
4. What kind of assistance would be most helpful?

Responses from employers also portrayed a range of views and experiences.

Issues

The following issues were prevalent in discussions with participants from both employer and employee groups. These have been grouped into themes.

- Long work hours/work load
- Childcare
- Pay
- Employment and Income Support
- Job Security
- Flexible Work
- Discrimination
- Career Progression
- Leave
- Health and Safety

Employers also described the effect of skill shortages on their business. It is difficult to recruit and retain skilled people in rural areas and where highly specialised skills are required. Compliance costs related to the employment of migrant workers was raised by one employer. The importance of youth employment initiatives in rural areas has also been flagged and will be further explored with the Wairarapa Development Trust.

Long work hours/workload

Many of the workers we spoke to identified long work hours and heavy workloads as a significant issue for them. For some groups such as cleaners, long work hours are necessary to earn enough for living, while for others working long hours are essential to get their job done.

What is striking about the comments about long working hours is the regularity of the demand for long hours. Some workers received compensatory time off in lieu (usually an informal arrangement), but this was rarely recompensed fully. No-one we spoke to received overtime payments.

The consequence of long hours was the same regardless of the reason. Long hours at work means that the quantity and quality of time at home with family are reduced and people become tired and stressed.

“I need the hours to get money for my family, with a pay rise I can work less hours and spend time with my family” Cleaner

“In my dreams the Government would give me a pay rise and I could have time with my family and my grandchild” Cleaner

“I’ll be honest and say my hours at school are not healthy for our marriage” Teacher

“I work an average 50 -60 hours a week, up to 70 hours. It’s the nature of the business” Machinist

Childcare

Two key issues related to childcare were identified. The cost of childcare for those in minimum wage jobs is prohibitive and so informal care arrangements with family and friends are made. The availability of flexible hours at childcare centres is a problem where unexpected work demands on parent’s time mean centres cannot accommodate extended or late pick-ups.

“Childcare that is flexible to be able to change days, times to fit with work meetings” Public Servant

*“I pay \$300.00 a week in childcare”
Retail manager*

Pay

Fair pay and a living wage were identified as two pay issues. Cleaners we spoke to were paid at hourly rates between \$12.00 and \$13.50. At such low rates, long hours are necessary to meet family needs. Concern was expressed by a number of other low paid workers (school support staff) about adequate retirement income.

Fair pay was an issue for a number of workers including cleaners. In particular, those in low paid work felt that they were not being paid fairly for the work they did. A number of teachers felt that they were not remunerated for additional responsibilities or that they faced discrimination in accessing more senior roles.

Some workers in the school sector are paid an hourly rate for 45 weeks a year (support staff) or 48 weeks (cleaners) which further reduces income.

Concern was raised in several of the meetings of national disability organisations about implementation of the intent of the repeal of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion (DPEP) Act and subsequent amendment to the Minimum Wage Act. Prior to repeal of DPEP Act “sheltered workshops” were able to pay workers below the minimum wage, now exemptions must be sought for individual workers. In practice, each worker is assessed and a wage rate determined. In some cases rates as low as 15c an hour have been granted. Further investigation of this complex issue is needed.

*The one thing that would make a difference for me:
“Progression through my grade that is based on fair and
transparent process” Public servant*

*The one thing that would make a difference for me:
“recompense for taking on extra responsibility which require time
and energy which inevitably gets added to the already busy day”
Teacher*

*“We look forward to getting paid what we deserve, \$14.62 same
as the hospital cleaners” Cleaner*

*“I feel like I’m not being paid appropriately for my skills and
responsibilities” Technician*

*The one thing that would make a difference for me: “taxation
based on family income” - this would make more money
available to spend on children’s opportunities and enable my
partner (wife) to continue her community involvements without
feeling resentful about foregone income” Scientist*

Employment and income support

Concern was raised about people with an intellectual disability either not taking up work at all or limiting the hours worked because of, for example, misunderstandings of how income affects benefit payments, failure to apply the 15 hour rule correctly in relation to eligibility for Invalid’s Benefit or under-utilisation of various income exemptions under the existing legislation. We were told that fear of losing the safety net of the Invalids Benefit can be a barrier to taking up work opportunities especially if that work is precarious, part time or at minimum wage levels or less.

Disability advocates said that while there are a range of services and funding sources to support people with disabilities into employment, these services are somewhat fragmented and it can often be a matter of

luck making contact with the people or agencies who know what is possible and what is available to ensure that the optimum mix of services and support is obtained

Job security

Job security was mentioned as the most significant issue for a number of people in the education sector. Support staff and specialist teachers who rely on insecure funding feel particularly vulnerable.

“Financial security to provide more choice for my family” Teacher

“I am a reading recovery teacher with unpredictable hours and variable income dependent on how schools and boards decide to fund my hours with insecure terms of employment and variable conditions” Teacher

Flexible work

Flexible work arrangements were sought by a number of people in order to meet family responsibilities. For some, the flexibility sought is to work part-time, for others flexibility within fulltime work is desired. Those seeking part-time work want well paid part-time work. Flexible work arrangements were seen as a solution to work and family pressures. A number of workers we spoke to, talked about their appreciation of their boss in supporting flexible work practices. The young Māori professionals group saw Māori concepts of whanaungatanga (family) and manaakitanga (caring) as being pivotal in their work environments.

Access to flexible work arrangements was a difficulty for people who had unique roles in their workplace whether it was a senior management role or a specialist skill set. Other people, cleaners and those working in hospitality talked about the family and social

impact of working “unsocial hours”, that is evenings and nights.

The one thing that would make a difference for me is “being able to have more flexibility of work, without being made to feel guilty”

*“Flexible work would give more opportunities to my daughters to pursue their careers and allow them to have a better work/life balance –while I could remain young looking after our mokopuna.”
Teacher*

“When I need time off there is no-one to cover me, so time off is denied” Chef

“We are a whanau based company with family values. Staff are treated as part of the extended family.” Kia Kaha manager

*“The one thing that would make a difference for me is “part-time work at senior management level” that would “create more non-paid-work time and opportunities” in the transition to retirement.”
Senior manager*

Discrimination

There is little doubt that discrimination in employment continues to be a major barrier for some at work. In our conversations with almost all groups, examples of discrimination towards older workers, beneficiaries, women, people with disabilities and ethnic groups featured. In many cases participants felt that they had missed out on opportunities at work or had missed out on the opportunity to work because of discrimination.

The lack of accessible transport to and from work was a barrier for people with disabilities.

Unmasked questions and incorrect assumptions were particularly difficult to manage in an interview situation. Employers concerns about possible occupational safety and health risks were believed to be a reason for not hiring people with disabilities including those who had been previously injured at work. In a few cases participants displayed discriminatory behaviour and attitudes themselves towards others. One manager said that a probationary period as mooted by the incoming government (prior to the passage of the legislation) would assist employers take a chance on employees they might otherwise be reluctant to employ.

Work experience opportunities for young people with disabilities were raised as a concern. Many young people are able to access after school and holiday jobs through family contacts and informal community networks but this process is more difficult for young people with a disability.

The one thing that would make a difference for me is “removal of discrimination in the workplace. Recognition of all workers skills and abilities irrespective of the country of origin.”

“Age discrimination. The inference that the older age group cannot keep up with new technologies in the educational field.”

*“People immediately think of the terrier at home” (when a prospective employer hears that you have a guide dog) “and they think it will want to go to the toilet every five minutes.”
Board member Association of Blind Citizens*

The one thing that would make a difference for me is “greater understanding of mental health issues – at present I would not let an employer know if one had a mental illness. Greater understanding/acceptance would make it easier to explain the illness days /time off or other ways mental health might impact on your overall work life” Public servant

“Even when I have the capability to do the job, once they know I have been on ACC for a back injury they treat me like I’m a liability” Unemployed worker, community volunteer.

“Repeal of the (DPEP) Act was seen as the answer but still discrimination happens. There’s an expectation that people can and do work in the community but the support is not available”. DPA

Career progression

Participants spoke about career progression and professional development opportunities. Teachers in particular wanted more clarity around career pathways while people with disabilities discussed limited opportunities for career development.

A lack of study leave and access to funding was identified by some as a barrier to career progression. Being able to complete higher qualifications or gain additional work skills would lead to greater work opportunities some stated. However often study leave

provisions were non-existent or because of heavy workloads, impractical. Accessing funding for study from employers was also difficult to attain some said. In the case of cleaners long working hours meant there was no time to return to the classroom to improve skills and therefore access to career development opportunities.

The disability groups all commented that lack of career progression was a particular issue for them. It was felt that work brokers and support agencies “sold” people with disabilities as employees who would be loyal and reliable and that as a result career progression was limited. One group observed that career progression can be based on fitting into the social fabric of the job and if social activities were not inclusionary then opportunities to demonstrate certain skills were missed.

“I am a second year teacher and feel quite unsure of career pathways past senior teachers and extra units.”

“If I had more time I would return to the classroom to improve my English to get a better job.” Cleaner

“Not being able to participate in social activities such as golf, or team building activities which have been designed by and for sighted people is a barrier to promotion. Team building is designed to build trust and develop bonds but if you can’t participate then you are put out of contention by the management team” Board member Association of Blind Citizens

Leave

Leave entitlement was raised in our discussions with cleaners and teachers. Current sick leave entitlement included leave taken to care for sick dependents, rather than a separate provision for dependent leave. Most stated that they had 5 days sick leave which was insufficient to cover their own sickness as well as time off to care for sick family members. In those cases unpaid leave had to be taken. Some older workers expressed concern about sick leave being insufficient to cover their health needs. At Kia Kaha clothing, a family based business meant that greater emphasis was placed on the role of whanau/family at work. This resulted in a relaxed attitude to leave including time off for tangi or for when children were sick.

“Recognition that working mothers use most if not all of their sick leave entitlement annually on their children, leaving little or none for themselves.”

“Mothers should get additional sick leave according to the number of children they have.”

“Special leave for tangi for example is recognised as something that staff just have to do.” Kia Kaha Manager

Health and safety

Cleaners discussed the effect of cleaning products on their health. Asthma, and other respiratory conditions and dermatitis were believed to be either caused by, or exacerbated by their exposure to chemicals at work. Protective clothing was felt to be inadequate for the level of exposure.

Conclusion

Our conversations with people in the Wellington region reinforced the principle that equality and fairness in the workplace is a fundamental human right. The first Global Report on discrimination published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) stated that *“the workplace, be it a factory, an office, a plantation, a farm or the street is a strategic entry point from which to combat discrimination in society. People who are denied equal opportunities, equal treatment and dignity at work often suffer discrimination in other spheres as well. In the workplace, however discrimination can be tackled more readily and effectively.”*

All conversations with participants produced a wealth of experiences and a feeling that there is some way to go to achieve equal employment opportunities in their workplaces. We were struck by the impression that employees were realistic about what was a reasonable expectation of their workplaces and the majority we listened to are aware of the economics of employment. Many of their suggestions for improvement were pragmatic. Employers also acknowledged that equality at work is important to them and has a value to their businesses even if they had different opinions about which regulation, policies and practices had the best outcomes.

Employees identified issues including concerns about the impact of long working hours and workload; access to childcare both in terms of availability and affordability; fair pay including pay rates assessed for minimum wage exemptions; the effect of the interaction between income support and pay for people with disabilities; concerns about job security; access to flexible work opportunities; the experience of discrimination both subtle and overt; concerns about access to career progression; leave provision for

people with dependents and for older workers; and health and safety issues.

Employers identified issues such as labour and skill availability, compliance costs, retention difficulties and “trial periods”. In rural areas the wider issue of economic development and job creation is a priority.

We anticipate that recommendations to address specific issues will be developed over the course of the project. One recommendation, however, has already emerged and that relates to the repeal of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act and consequent changes to minimum wage legislation.

Possible recommendations for the final report

- Review the impact of minimum wage exemptions to ensure the intent of the repeal of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act is being honoured.