

TOP REGIONAL INSIGHTS



There is a state of calm in the regional labour market as employers and employees reflect on having experienced the varying Alert Levels previously. The support enterprises have been able to receive from Business Networks, Economic Development Agencies and Iwi has been well received and appreciated. Although there is a level of apprehension around the possibility of extensions to (or increases in) the current Alert Levels, and the affect this will have on businesses long-term.

There has been varying levels of demand for volunteers across the Region. Some Districts such as Ruapehu, are reporting available volunteers are close to burn out, and other Districts such as Tararua are commenting on how Council and some organisations have stepped up to fill these roles instead. What remains constant across the Region however, is that there is a need for these roles to be filled even though there is no available funding for these positions - and some of those that have stepped into these positions will need to return to their usual work once Alert Levels lower.

Vaccination rates for workers providing Essential Services and their Whānau continue to be prioritised, with Ngā Wairiki Ngāti Apa and Tararua Health Group setting up additional clinics to those already proposed. Employers with fully vaccinated worksites are reporting less disruptions due to being able to complete prioritised and scheduled works.

TRENDS AT A GLANCE



66% of the Manawatū – Whanganui workforce was operational in Alert Level 4. This is slightly higher than the national average of 64%.
Source: Infometrics



85.1% of the Manawatū – Whanganui workforce was operational in Alert Level 3. This is higher than the national average of 84.3%.
Source: Infometrics



41% reduction in consumer spend following the move to Alert Level 4 in Manawatū – Whanganui. Nationally the reduction was 41.2%.
Source: MarketView (for the week beginning 29 August)

TOP LABOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

- Employment opportunities continue to grow in the healthcare sector,** particularly as more testing and vaccination centres are stood up around the Region. There has been a notable increase in vaccination centres specifically providing services to Māori and Pasifika whānau.
- Online learning for students (particularly secondary and tertiary students) is seen as both a struggle and opportunity for many.** The increased flexibility is welcomed by many, particularly those looking to upskill outside of their usual working hours, and particularly in Manawatū.
- Many people are taking up volunteering as an opportunity to learn and develop new skills in areas they are not otherwise regularly exposed to.** This is particularly true in the Tararua and Ruapehu Districts where Council employees have been temporarily assigned to assist with coordination in the community through the varying Alert Levels.
- Many enterprises have been using the time at higher Alert Levels to refocus their business practices,** which they are hoping will result in greater longevity for the business. For many enterprises they are hoping to take on more staff in lower Alert Levels once they feel comfortable expanding their 'work bubble' to cope with the increased demand.

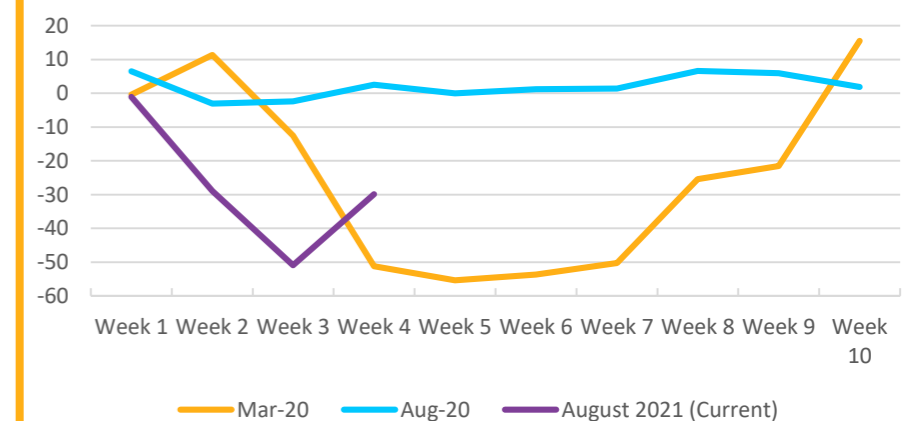
TOP LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

- There are increased reports of employers struggling with how to meet the social distancing requirements in their workplace practically.** They are also unsure of their ability to manage vaccinated vs. unvaccinated staff, particularly when they are considered frontline workers. The uncertainty around rights of employers and employees is challenging for many.
- Notable increases in "at home pressures" have been exacerbated by lockdowns in the Region,** which has not been helped by some people unable to get the help they need / had scheduled. The increased demand for support is struggling to be met by the existing workforce.
- The reduction in consumer spend is being felt unequally by enterprises,** as some struggle with their existing paths to market for their products. Concerns are growing that the inability for people to have options regarding consumer choices will affect the longevity of some enterprises.
- The increased requirements for International exporting is creating a sense of fear and responsibility among employers.** Concerns around ensuring products have not been handled by staff infected with COVID-19 continue to grow, as employers struggle to actively manage their responsibilities as requirements are regularly changing.

THE MANAWATŪ - WHANGANUI REGION

Cumulative Percentage Change in Manawatu-Whanganui Consumer Spend as at 9 September 2021

https://mbienz.shinyapps.io/card_spend_covid19/



OUR FOCUS FOR THE NEXT 2 MONTHS:

- Beginning aspirations planning, which will pave the way for analysis and actions as part of the development of the regional workforce plan.
- Supporting consultations with communities and stakeholders in the development of the regional workforce plan.

People Supply

- **Vaccination rates are gaining momentum in the region**, with 283 essential supermarket workers, Police & Defence Force personnel vaccinated in one day in Rangitikei.
- **There is some confusion in the region regarding allowing essential workers to continue with their daily tasks while unvaccinated.** Employers are conscious of staff burnout, and the need to ensure safety of staff and customers (particularly within the health sector and those delivering goods within the community).
- **Concerns have been raised around the availability of alcohol (delivery) right from the outset of Alert Level 4 this time**, and how this may have combined with the stress of being “trapped” at home to influence the rise in reported incidences of domestic violence. This has resulted in some people sliding back into negative alcohol/drug use habits as there is no training or prospect of work on the immediate horizon. Once working becomes an option, these people are likely to require more assistance to once again become ‘work ready’.

People in Workforce

- **The health workforce is struggling to meet and maintain staffing levels for vaccination and testing clinics** as Alert Levels decrease and staff are required to go back to their normal roles.
- **The high stress levels of volunteers is becoming more evident** as more entities are requiring volunteers to assist with operations, for example at the supermarket. The pool of available volunteers is less than historically seen, and those volunteering are working longer and more regular hours to meet demand.
- **There is increased pressure on the community sector, specifically those working within mental health, food banks and family harm areas.** With more emphasis being placed on the importance of these areas, current staffing levels are being stretched.
- **Those who are on casual contracts are finding the Alert Level lockdowns particularly difficult as they are not being called in, or therefore paid.** This increases the difficulty of ongoing financial resilience for those who are not on permanent contracts.

Jobs

- **The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) Work Brokers are actively prioritising the recruitment needs of employers who provide essential services.** Essential services that currently have openings in the region include those working within distribution warehousing, horticulture, food processing, support service providers and supermarkets. There were concerns regarding wait times initially, however after escalations wait times are now reported to be under 5 minutes for callers.
- **Some essential service employers are reluctant to take on new staff**, due to fears of expanding their work bubbles during the pandemic, so part-time and casual staff are picking up extra hours to meet the demand.
- **The Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) has passed on advice to NZ Meat Exporters around increased regulations coming from China Customs.** They have determined that if a staff member returns a positive COVID-19 test, they will recall any exports from that producer to China and suspend all exports. This has created fears among exports around the unknown length of time of the potential suspension, due to how difficult it is to be approved as an exporter into this market.
- **Forestry Crews are able to resume planting work under the new guidelines**, with the sector providing support and solutions to employers and employees so they can remain safe and work efficiently during differing Alert Levels.

Skills Development

- **The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has been utilising its hardship grant for learners.** This grant was brought about to provide temporary financial assistance for current tertiary students who are facing hardship due to COVID-19. Eligible students are able to apply for grants through their education providers.
- **As Tertiary providers have activated online learning in the past, they were able to swiftly activate this method of delivery and make contact with all students.** Massey University is maintaining online / distance delivery for the remainder of Semester Two.
- **Many training sessions planned in Taranaki for August and September have had to be deferred due to the changing Alert Levels.** These sessions were designed around easing skill shortages, so it is predicted that the pressure from skill shortages will continue in these industries particularly civil infrastructure and horticulture.

Employers

- **Employers are placing a greater emphasis on mental health support for staff** across a range of industries, as they recognise the stress that changing Alert Levels has on individuals and their families.
- **There is a mixed response from employers around knowledge and eligibility to gain wage subsidies.** Some report they are not aware of their eligibility, while others (who have made use of the subsidy before) are commenting on the ease of access.
- **One large poultry provider had been finding differing staffing numbers difficult to manage to meet expectations.** They have offered all staff a bonus of \$80 to get vaccinated and an additional \$20 per day to turn up to work. So far this incentive programme is working and the provider is able to meet demand.
- **Anecdotally there are reports that many business owners are taking this time to work ‘on’ their enterprise, rather than ‘in’ it.** This has resulted in less talk of employers needing to restructure, compared to last lockdown.

Demand Drivers

- **Market Gardeners are struggling to sell produce**, as they are not able to sell in higher Alert Levels without supermarket contracts (which many do not have). Their normal markets (independent greengrocers, hospitality trade and markets) are all closed. There are concerns this may affect the long term viability of these businesses.
- **In the Taranaki District there has been a lesser demand for volunteers**, as organisations and the Council have lined up their staff to take care of different aspects of community support, as required.
- **Business networks like Whanganui & Partners, CEDA, Te Manu Atatu & the Chamber have been providing businesses with support packages.** This has helped with business confidence and it is hoped will allow for greater employee retention rates.

KEY

People Supply (School Leavers, Work Transition, People not in the Workforce, Migration)

People in Workforce (Environment, Intentions, Responses, Challenges, Trends)

Employers (Environment, Intentions, Responses, Challenges, Trends)

Skills Development (Tertiary, Apprenticeships, Work Ready, Other Education and Training)

Jobs (Conditions, Standards, Recruitment, Vacancies, Trends)

Demand Drivers (Economic Trends and Development, Project Stimulus, Sector Trends)