

## TOP REGIONAL INSIGHTS



There is significant anxiety amongst many businesses and organisations about managing staffing and burnout due to Omicron, as well as ongoing recruitment and revenue issues caused by COVID-19. Some employers are rethinking roles and responsibilities of existing staff as a result of vaccine mandates. At one local primary school they were set to lose a staff member due to the COVID-19 vaccine mandate, however, the school's administration was able to rethink roles to accommodate them with the use of technology. Further, the school has been able to increase hours for other staff who were seeking more work.

The Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT) has introduced a new programme "QualifyMe" to entice more full-time workers into part-time education. This programme is designed to recognise past work experience and correlates it to time spent gaining a formal qualification. It aims to help working professionals gain credits towards the completion of a qualification, and it is hoped that training and upskilling can be fast tracked by up to 66%. By quantifying previous on the job learning and experience, employees are better equipped to remain competitive in the labour market and keep up to date with current industry trends and skills.

## TRENDS AT A GLANCE



**4.1% unemployment rate**, which is down slightly from the same quarter last year. The unemployment rate has been decreasing since the December 2020 quarter.



**15.6% youth (aged 15-24 years) not in employment, education or training rate.** This is an increase of 3.7% on the same quarter last year. The national NEET rate is 10.9%.



**57% of businesses surveyed are reporting significant skill shortages** and/or difficulties recruiting appropriate staff. This is an increase from 31% in Nov 2020.

*Sources: September 2021, Household Labour Force Survey | December 2021, Venture Taranaki - Taranaki Business Survey*

## TOP LABOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

- 1. Despite many businesses continuing to struggle under certain conditions, there has been some increase of cash flow into the region, allowing retailers, tourism and hospitality businesses to retain staff for longer periods of time.** Historically these businesses have relied on employees being on short-term contracts only, however, ongoing closure of the borders and New Plymouth being crowned the sunniest city for 2021 are believed to be driving domestic spending.
- 2. Jobs also continue to be created under Government investment, such as from Yarrow Stadium Redevelopment, Project Maunga, Te Ara o Te Ata: Mt Messenger Bypass Project, roading spend, and the Stratford Pool.** Stratford's new \$20 million aquatic centre will require more than the approximately 20 staff currently employed and these current staff will also get further training opportunities with the deeper pool.
- 3. Increased business confidence in the rural sector is having positive employment effects.** Both on-farm and in supporting service industries, employers are feeling confident when considering milk price forecasts and vaccine levels, and are opting to spend more on support services. For example, Power Farming are needing to bring on more staff to meet demand as farmers opt for new machinery.
- 4. Taranaki campground businesses have enjoyed having fully booked cabins and camping sites over the first few weeks of 2022.** The threat of COVID-19 has not affected these businesses, which may be partially attributed to the outdoor setting being viewed as a safer option. Campground managers have claimed they are as busy as ever.

## TOP LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

- 1. Recruitment challenges are being felt across the region.** This is being felt widely, for example, across IDEA Services, Tegel, Countdown and other supermarkets. Further, Local Councils continue to struggle recruiting Building Control Officers and Project Managers as the public sector cannot easily salary-match with the private sector.
- 2. Taranaki District Health Board (TDHB) is currently struggling to meet the demand for midwives in the region.** A number of qualified midwives left the profession due to vaccine mandates, stress and continual high workloads. The TDHB is using locums, registered nurses, and on-call staff to fill the vacancies. They are also promoting a community service for antenatal and post-natal care to reduce pressure in the sector.
- 3. 'Close contact enterprises' such as beauty therapy and hairdressers are struggling with losing staff and clients due to the vaccine mandates.** Due to the nature of 'close contact' work, those not vaccinated have had to leave the industry, with remaining providers also facing reduced client lists. There is also growing concern about "black market operators" who are providing services that otherwise would have been provided by legal operators.
- 4. A transport company has altered a transition period for highly skilled drivers after losing a substantial contract.** While there is high demand for qualified heavy transport drivers, there are many factors that influence where an employee works, so not all are expected to transition to the company who was successful in being awarded the contract. The stark reduction in the original transition period (from two years to a matter of months), is causing extra stress on the drivers.

## REGIONAL WORKFORCE PLAN

The Regional Skills Leadership Group (RSLG) continues with the development of the Regional Workforce Plan, to be published in June 2022. The RSLG is looking to continue engaging with regional stakeholders and partners on the labour market and skills needs within the **Energy and Food, Fibre & Whenua Sectors**.

The RSLG has identified that **Wellbeing, Rangatahi, Essential Skills and Technology** will be considered for all of the sectors focused on for future Regional Workforce Plans.

Through a collaboration with **Energy Resources Aotearoa**, the RSLG will be working with industry representatives within the Energy Sector to gain a clear understanding of the current and future skills gaps within the sector. Engagements will begin in February and will also include consultation with training providers within the region.

Targeted stakeholder engagement is currently underway within the Food, Fibre and Whenua Sectors, including engagement with **Taranaki Catchment Communities and Primary Processors** throughout the region.

## OUR FOCUS FOR THE NEXT 2 MONTHS:

- Stakeholder engagement around barriers to skills attainment and development within the Energy and Food, Fibre & Whenua Sectors.
- Understanding of training opportunities in demand and predicted to be in future demand within the region.
- Drafting of the Regional Workforce Plan.