



Skills Report Position Paper 1: Workforce Readiness

REPORT FINDINGS

Focus groups with employers during the research uncovered a range of issues affecting the take-up and offers of apprenticeships and traineeships. These factors are impacting on the willingness of applicants to take up roles and the difficulty employers have in recruitment. Issues include:

- Mature age apprentices and trainees find it difficult to meet their financial responsibilities so are unwilling to take on roles or unable to continue.
- School leavers tend to have poor attitudes towards work.
- There appears to be a mismatch between employer expectations and the level of understanding school leavers have of appropriate workforce behaviour.
- Employers feel they need to spend too much time on basic work readiness rather than the specific skills for the role.
- School leavers carry a sense of entitlement that is a barrier to taking on low-paid, bottom-level entry roles and causes problems with sick leave and other employment benefits.
- School leaver apprentices and trainees have very little understanding of how business works.
- Young apprentices and trainees focus on pay rates, with little appreciation of the additional benefits of their roles and the pathway that can lead to greater rewards on the medium to long term.

"Youth need to be exposed to the expectations of employment and its responsibilities at an earlier age."

These barriers to engaging apprentices and trainees are compounding the skills gap problems.

While some employees are keen to train younger students (at age 16) who may not be as highly academically inclined and are at their peak of training potential, others prefer those who have completed the HSC and have higher levels of maths and a driver's licence.

Two businesses in the hospitality field suggested that any 13 year old who came through their door looking for a job would be employed in some manner in recognition of their willingness and the courage taken to cold call. Others believed there was a lack of work ethic and workplace appreciation in teenagers applying for roles, but that if they didn't have prior experience of some sort they were less suitable.

"If they haven't worked by the time they are 17, I don't want them."



SITUATIONAL REVIEW AND GAP ANALYSIS

RDA Orana has reviewed the current situation to consider the gaps and issues in the programs already on offer in the region. Findings suggest the following:

- formal programs for work readiness and support do not become available until job seekers are classified as unemployed
- life skills programs that do exist in schools— such as the Clontarf Foundation and Girls Academy—target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and focus on keeping them engaged at school
- there is no support for employers to put workplace appreciation training programs in place within the workplace, especially smaller employers with no formal human resources function in their business.

In the past, many young people earned employment skills and gained industry specific training by working as a child in their parents' businesses or place of employment. This is particularly relevant in agricultural industries and hospitality where a large number of businesses have been, and are currently small family enterprises. As these industries employ fewer staff, this training ground has become greatly reduced.



RDA Orana Position

RDA Orana is committed to helping employers with skills gaps. RDA Orana will work with the community to encourage school leavers to take on apprenticeships and traineeships that keep them employed within the region.

RDA Orana recognises there is a need to:

- develop an appreciation among school students for the expectations of the workforce and acceptable behaviour in the workplace
- build the skills of employers to effectively communicate with young employees.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seek funding to develop an (in-school) job readiness training program for 14-17 year olds to address:

- interview techniques
- preparing job applications
- the expectations of the workforce
- appropriate workplace behaviour
- communication skills for the workplace to build positive and effective relationships with employers, colleagues and customers
- career planning to develop long-term thinking.

2. Develop a short course for employers to address the communication skills and styles needed for dealing with school leavers.