

2016 SECONDARY PRINCIPALS SABBATICAL REPORT

M. BOWDEN, SPOTSWOOD COLLEGE, OCTOBER 2016

BACKGROUND

An environmental scan by our Board of Trustees identified a number of factors that we needed to consider when developing our 2015 – 2018 Strategic Plans. Changing demographics within our school as well as our province have challenged us to:

- Recognise that at least 70% of our students do not go to University but who do require pathways which prepare them for the world of work.
- Seek to improve curriculum delivery to better engage students in learning for earning.
- Develop links within our community to assist students transition from school to work

Through the formation of our local Youth Guarantee Network we were able to meet with employers. The employers also held concern for the changing demographics within Taranaki. Employers wanted to encourage young people that good jobs exist without requiring a University Degree and that staying to work within Taranaki is a great option.

From this work we formed the Taranaki Futures Trust with the vision that:-

“Strong Employment, Strong People, Stronger Communities”

Sabbatical Inquiry

Through my work with Taranaki Futures I became aware of other initiatives where schools, tertiary providers, employers and local councils were collaborating to improve the transition from school to work.

The goals of the inquiry were:-

- To investigate how other school communities were linking with tertiary providers and employers to adapt their curriculum to assist students to be ready for the world of work.
- To determine if the projects were aligned to local economic plans and the extent to which they were supported by councils.

Issues:

From interviews, observations and readings a number of key issues were identified – some helpful, some require challenging:-

- “A perception of Vocational Pathways as being relevant only to students who are not achieving academically remains widespread”. ERO Vocational Pathways: Authentic and Relevant Learning May 2016.
- Employers and educators have not historically communicated effectively enough with one another and as a result unhelpful perceptions have developed which have clouded our abilities to strategically improve pathways from school to work.
- With greater numbers of students remaining at school through to year thirteen schools have had to modify programmes and work more closely with local tertiary providers and employers to offer more authentic learning opportunities which engage students in areas of their interests and which relate to their future vocational goals.
- The forecast demographic within Taranaki (within the next decade there will be more 65+ year olds than 0 – 14 year olds) is challenging employers to think carefully about how to recruit and train school leavers to ensure the future viability of their businesses.
- Gathering evidence and data is critical in planning strategies to assist young people into work
- Students are very aware of the pathway from school to university but not all students are aware of the pathway to work or work based training opportunities.
- To better meet student need collaboration with tertiary providers has had implications for timetabling. Thames High School has successfully implemented the 100 minute lesson to cater for the change.
- School communities need assistance to understand changes in secondary schools. The number of students gaining UE and Scholarship can no longer be the only valid measure of an effective school.
- Philosophical tensions exist between viewing schools as providing a broad liberal education as opposed to a gate kept conduit vocationally preparing students for the workforce.

Key Findings:

Following is a summary of findings from interviews and documentation shared with me from the following schools and organisations:-

Hillcrest High School

Thames High School

Thames District Council

Fairfield College

Te Kuiti High School

Mayor Andrew Judd, New Plymouth District Council

Hawera High School

Mayor Ross Dunlop, South Taranaki District Council

Mayor Margaret Kovellis, Manawatu District Council

St Peters College, Palmerston North

Whanganui College

- Councils have included employment strategies in their Economic Plans usually through the Mayors Task Force for Jobs. Smaller provincial Councils were particularly mindful of the need to assist young people into employment within their communities. For example the

Coromandel Action Network facilitated by the Thames Council identified four strategies that businesses could involve themselves in to assist youth employment :-

- Participate in a local careers expo to help students 'see, feel, smell' work to understand the various careers that exist within particular businesses
- Seek to understand the work of schools within Vocational Pathways and the potential links to their business
- Promote the importance of students getting their Drivers Licence to get 'work ready'.
- Encourage young people to contribute and participate in community volunteer organisations as a skill building commitment to work readiness.

The South Taranaki District Council is running a number of initiatives through their Community Development Team and the Mayors Task Force for Jobs. Celebrating Youth to Work Awards and Industry Training Graduations highlight the importance of youth in the workforce.

A number of interviewees identified the need for employers to be 'Youth Ready' as well as the need for young people to be 'work ready'. Ongoing and developing communication networks between the key stakeholders (schools, tertiary providers, employers, councils, Iwi) is seen as critical in this regard. Examples of groups that have been formed to enhance this communication include:

- Taranaki Futures
- Talent Central (Manawatu)
- Future Force (Waikato)

These groups represent formal structures to better link youth employment key stakeholders together. Where once school to work links were made through informal networks eg sports clubs, churches, neighbourhood connections etc, there is now a need to formally build these networks collaboratively.

The introduction of a 'Work Ready Passport' assessed by employers gives invaluable feedback to students and identifies if indeed they are ready for work or need to return to school.

In schools where many students come from single parent families coaching, mentoring and goal setting conversations are critically important to assist young people develop their vocational pathways linked and aligned from school to work or further study. This co-constructed approach enhances home-school partnerships and assists students to engage with their learning.

Community partnerships between educators, employers, tertiary providers, Iwi, Councils and social agencies are a model of collaboration to assist young people move from school to work. An example of such an initiative is the employer led programme "Work Inspiration" designed to help secondary school aged students to learn about the world of work. Developed by Business in the Community, Work Inspiration is an established work exploration programme in the UK and Australia. Careers NZ has been working with schools, Westpac, Toyota and Grow Wellington to introduce Work Inspiration to New Zealand.