



Set4Work, Set4Life

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Abstract

System drivers in vocational education have become disconnected to the future of work and the workplace in NZ. There is a lack of confluence between the world of work and the world of learning, resulting in a call from the Vocational Education Working Group [1] for an outcomes-focussed framework. Set4Life produced and piloted an authentic connection between the workplace and those who will inhabit it. In this complex journey between education and work there are many rocks, uncharted waters and false safe harbours: culs-de-sac in careers and education. It is in these waters that the unprepared or unsupported founder. A lack of clear navigation is not limited to low socioeconomic groups or those not in employment, education or training (NEETS). Nearly a third of people enrolling in trades training in NZ have a degree and student debt [2]. The disconnect from the world of learning and what Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott refers to as “work ready plus” entrants are aggravating factors. Set4Life used a “navigator” approach to bridge that divide. A demand-driven learner facing economy requires work prepared entrants. The vocational education and training working group called for a system driven by outcomes rather than inputs. Without alignment of these worlds to outcomes are we giving our students a safe landing, but at the wrong airport?. The picture is complicated by funding in this congested space which may produce a lack of clarity of direction and purpose. Students, educators and employers benefit from neutral and informed guidance and effective navigation through this ever-changing space. Set4Life provided system integration with a weather eye to the future of the demand economy. Conscious development of the workplace and employer, the learning environment and the learner, produced a seamless coalition bridging this transition.

Keywords: Transitions, VET, Vocational Education, Training Induction, Navigator Outcomes, Change, Set4Life;

1. Introduction

Set4Life was launched in November 2016 and work with students in transition continued until the end of the 2017 academic year. World of learning stakeholders in the project included principals in Northland schools, careers teachers tertiary pre-trades tutors, and programme leaders in tertiary education. Industry Training Organizations (ITO) were the Primary Ito and The Skills Organization with both contributing to the governance and project staffing support. The navigator coordinated and facilitated the relationship with these stakeholders in the world of work on a personal and individual basis with the students in transition. This was evaluated using an action research methodology gathering the narratives and reflections before, during and after the project. One of the key barriers was finding staff who were capable and competent to work in this transition space. This is a particular problem in small regional communities where personal networks can be a key factor in success and a critical consideration in particular with regard to building a replicable system approach. This will be considered further in the guidelines with regard to building a sustainable system, which builds regional capability through collaboration [3]. A case can be made to build a national network of provision and support in this area.

2. Secondary Tertiary Transition (STT) a complex area

STT is a complicated and congested space. Barriers faced by learners are not limited to learning skills but include life and work skills. Issues in this space were as often about social issues as they were about learning or workplace, requiring a broad connected solution involving social, educational and work agencies. Learner resilience is an important part of the mix. Driven by market economy funding STT has been developed by multiple providers with unclear links to demand driven outcomes. This is complicated by factors that influenced employers which have resulted in a decline in on the job training [4]. The disconnected, supply driven provider learning solutions have not sufficiently heard the employer voice has led to a skills mismatch between skills supplied and those required in the

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workplace and by learners to achieve sustainable employment and a successful career [5]. The effects of policy and that of digital disruption has resulted in a job market which works against unskilled workers while at the same time limiting opportunities for work experience. As one employer commented “The whole school system is designed a certain way and there is a whole bunch of kids that don’t fit that model...they are really capable”. This is not to say that the only issues lie in transitions from school to work. Navigators or kaiwhakatere are critical in this space to appropriately inform between the world or work and learning and facilitate activities of the many others operating in STT. If productivity is to improve then practice should be designed for the future workplace. A study and report by the Productivity commission [6] identifies the effect of digital disruption and the change of the workplace which could change the character of 40 percent of Jobs, “it’s akin to coping with the large-scale shift from agricultural work to manufacturing”[7]. This will affect not only the STT space but also the redeployment market. One finding from the digit study in Northland around Māori digital capacity [8] was the ability to integrate the work ethics and skills along with cultural capacity of the older generation with the digital capacity of the younger.

3. The Set4life approach

Set4life was set up to inform education system change “from cradle to career”. It used cohorts of school, pre-trade ITP and ITO learners to track real experiences around pathways in life, learning and workplace barriers to learning with a wide range of interventions while building relationships between schools, tertiary organisations, and workplaces. This was done using a funding impartial navigator approach to facilitate appropriate interventions and support for learners and for workplaces as needed. *Set4Life’s* induction programme provided a step up into the workplace increasing confidence of the students and ensuring a better reception in the critical transition to a work environment. The navigator facilitated the interface and mentoring between the employer and learner along with pastoral care. A common theme from students, schools and employers was that the navigator “cared” and “got” the students and employers. There is no doubt that this is a time consuming and labour intensive approach, but more holistically it recognises the social needs and appropriate information flows that must be addressed before relevant true learning can take place.

4. Data from Set4Life

4.1 Auckland summary

During the lifetime of the study a total of 91 learners were involved. Of these 42% were working with the Primary Industries Training Organization in horticulture, landscaping, arboriculture and agriculture. 58% were working with Skills Organisation in scaffolding, plumbing and electrical trades.

Students came from 14 high schools as well as a pre-trades academy and one private training establishment. One student was not associated with a school. Students were supported by three navigators in three cohorts.

Set4Life navigators met with learners once a month spending on average 34 minutes at each meeting. The meetings included induction, discussing career options, work experience feedback, supporting learners to get employed and signing training agreements for apprenticeships, supporting learners through life challenges and changes in career choices. The project lead was in contact with the learners as well on average twice monthly to support the work of the navigators, 87% of learners had a positive relationship with the navigators and 68% had a positive relationship with employers during work experience opportunities or employment

Of 47 learners in August and September 2017, 11 percent gained relevant employment that is associated with the project.

4.2 Northland summary

In Northland 32 learners were involved, of these 34% were working with the Primary Industries Training organisation in landscaping and horticulture and 66% were working with The Skills Organisation in plumbing and electrical trades.

Learners came from 4 different schools as well as the NorthTec pre-trades programme. Students were supported by two navigators in three cohorts. 58% of learners strongly agreed that they were more confident in themselves and that they had set goals. 20 out of 32 learners found employment.



5. Best Practice Guidelines & Productive Transitions

A well-managed and executed transition should lead to productive employment and result in regional prosperity.

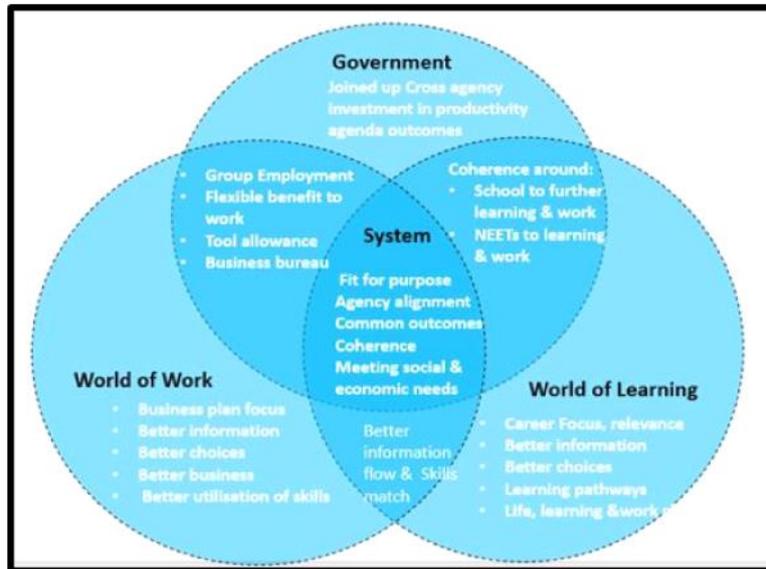


Fig.1. Productive Transitions

This should enable both the employer and employee removing barriers. The *Set4Life* induction programme prepares learners to enter the world of work in a safe space culturally and technically with safety training reassuring both employer and trainee. The navigator in turn prepares the employer with reasonable expectations of the employee so together they can work towards a destination which will be productive and valuable to both the local and national economy.

6. Closing remarks a way forward

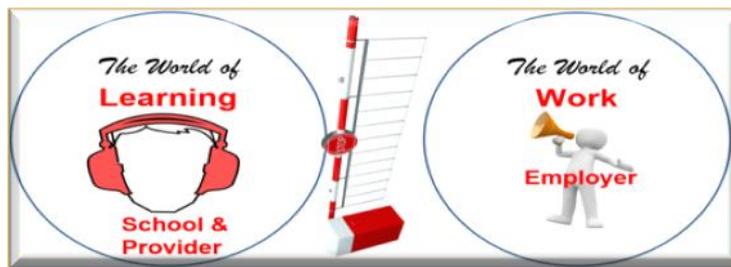


Fig.2 Bridging the divide

Current funding and measurement drivers in schools and across the Vocational Education and training system are supply driven and so more designed to meet suppliers needs rather than the actual skills needs of work places (work ready plus employees) [9] and the ever changing needs of learners as their skills increase and horizons lift.

Set4Life demonstrates that interpreters/facilitators are needed between the worlds of work and learning as many languages are used and these are not universally well understood. Without alignment of these worlds we are giving our students a safe landing, but at the wrong airport [10].

Well selected and inducted facilitators can improve productivity and clarity of starter career pathways and develop better well supported learning and development routes. Learners are better informed and not used to fill gateway places but use this to take advantage of relevant and appropriate skill development opportunities. This follows an intensive well thought out triage of the learner to establish



an appropriate viable pathway. Use of an induction programme increases the value for all learners but especially those with limited support.

This system must be agile and flexible as pathways are not linear and change based on the learners experiences and situation. This requires a truly collaborative approach or network of provision model. This network should engage and inform learners and families across career possibilities and associated vocational pathways. Foundation and workplace skills should be developed from year eight and informed by well-developed feedback loops from the world of work. Workplaces should reward effective leadership and ambition ensuring well skilled entrants can utilise skills appropriately and contribute to workplace productivity. Project evidence suggests that Navigators could benefit from specialised Workbroker's ensuring a good match between parties.

POLICY GUIDELINES

- Aligned policies, incentives and agile processes that 'value add' [9]
- Whole of government approach linking Ministry of social development ,Tertiary education commission ,Ministry of business innovation and employment and Ministry of education into unified policy approaches to developing and applying a demand driven, end to end vocational education system
- Central funding and administration networks with local leadership (Agile, local governance, funding independent and agnostic)
- Demand led funding and investment driving a flexible network of provision focused on building both employee and employer capability to achieve successful life, learning and employment outcomes
- Establish a Navigator & Workbroker function to facilitate coherent and effective vocational learner pathways across the transition space. Design this structure to support transition across the **cradle to career** value chain into sustainable employment increasing workplace productivity
- Short and medium term "life" outcomes based provider funding and successful measurement not linked to effective full time student accounting (Effective fulltime students).
- Outcomes based evaluation of each providers contribution to successful outcomes using tools such as the IDI, broad algorithms and regional socioeconomic impact
- Learner and employer Induction integration into the transitions space through professional development opportunities such as Skills Organisation's Building Business Ambition
- Refocus on technical education and drive a perception change using information such as the BERL findings to develop a culture in families, communities and schools that includes vocational pathways to successfully meeting learner, workplace and productivity goals as it does for a university based pathway
- Fund regional centers of technical excellence within regional economic development agencies.

Figure 3. Policy Guidelines from *Set4Life*



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