

# Exploring the training and skills required for career progression within the Bay of Plenty region's Tourism and Hospitality sector

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### **Research Project Summary:**

This project was set up to explore the current training and skill needs of the Bay of Plenty tourism and hospitality sectors. One of the goals of this research was to inform the Faculty of Business, Design & Service Industries (FBDSI) to better equip students to operate more effectively at three different entry levels within an operational structure, namely, front-line, supervisory and management.

Interviews were conducted with 12 known tourism and hospitality operators to find out on what basis our local employers select and employ new staff and what was the expectations of the skills and attributes required from prospective employees for various levels of the industry.

Interfacing directly with tourism and hospitality operators enabled open dialogue between the FBDSI staff and industry employers. This helped build understanding and trust between the institute and the business community and provided future work experience and employment opportunities for students from Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology.

### **Research Aim:**

This research project was established based on the professional interest of the authors to collaborate with the community and industry in order to build the skills capability of the region as a tourism destination.

Literature indicated there was a growing concern at the ability of tourism and hospitality businesses to recruit and retain staff with the appropriate skill set and training to meet the needs of the tourists (Tourism Industry Aotearoa, 2015; ServiceIQ, 2017 & TRC Tourism, 2017). According to Wang et al (2009), suitable skills and attributes have always been an important part of effective and successful participation in the tourism workplaces. Wang et al (2009) recognised that tourism higher education had a mission to assure the quality of graduates and equip them with the particular skills and attributes to enable them to function effectively within the sector.

The aim of this research was to look closely at the training and skill needs of the Bay of Plenty Tourism and Hospitality industry to allow the FBDSI to prepare adaptable graduates, who were able to respond to certain change, in an ever-evolving industry.

### **Methodology:**

Qualitative data was sought through personal semi-structured interviews with relevant Tourism and Hospitality operators from Rotorua and Taupo. This included 12 businesses that represented the broad spectrum of tourism and hospitality in the Western Bay of Plenty region. These businesses had previously been used for student projects, student employment and practical learning placements and were all supportive of FBDSI's desire to remain at the forefront of graduate outcomes.

A personal approach with two tutors ensured comments were captured from busy operators and personal expectations clearly qualified. Interviews took approximately 30 minutes and were recorded using iTalk and individual notes.

The researchers reviewed interview notes and cross referenced with the recorded interviews to identify key themes. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review or alter their transcripts after the interviews were complete.

## **Findings and Discussion:**

Participants in this research project represented a mixture of Tourism and Hospitality specific businesses. Research questions asked of these industry participants (see Appendix 1) covered five main topics, namely:

1. Staff employment
2. Expectations of skills and attributes required for frontline, supervisory and management positions
3. Training and qualities seen as important for entry into frontline, supervisory and management
4. Career pathways available to employees
5. Ways the tertiary sector could work collaboratively to meet skill and training gaps

A summary and discussion of key findings and themes from research questions asked of all 12 participants were as follows:

### **1. Staff Employment:**

- *Most interviewees indicated a notable reduction in staff numbers since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The seasonal nature of the Industry meant that businesses normally operated with a mixture of full, part time and temporary staff.*
- *All participants currently and/or previously employed Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology graduates, but overall the numbers were small, usually 2 – 3 on average.*
- *Businesses were prepared to use a range of places; private training establishments (PTE's), polytechnics, advertising using social media, personal connections and referrals to recruit.*

Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology was competing directly with PTE's such as the Pacific International Hotel Management School (Pihms) and the New Zealand School of Tourism (NZST) but there was a desire by businesses however, to create purposeful relationships that align with recruitment strategies and values.

Where FBDSI's papers directly aligned (learning outcomes and graduate profile) with specific sectors, those businesses were more likely to employ higher numbers of Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology graduates (example Hotel and Adventure tourism).

It was also noted that, as an industry, there was a high turnover of staff and employees often used employment in the tourism and hospitality industry as a stepping stone to another career pathway.

### **2. Expectations of skills and attributes required for frontline, supervisory and management positions**

#### **2a. Front-line position:**

- *Soft skills (flexibility, effective communicators, engaging personality, reliable, willing to learn), customer service and selling skills are highly important.*
- *Many employers were looking for multi skilled employees that were adaptable. Practical skills such as barista training and cash handling were highly desirable.*
- *Relevant work experience and basic product and industry knowledge was important as well as a clear expectation of what working in the tourism and hospitality industry involved (industry is 7 days a week 24 hours).*

It was apparent that frontline positions were highly reliant on soft skills and many interviewees recruited frontline positions with the organisational intent to be able to grow and develop talent from within the business.

## **2b. Supervisory position:**

*All of the above requirements for front-line positions were expected at this level, plus*

- *Ability to lead, manage and train team members, practical and proven experience in leading staff*
- *Business acumen skills and financial awareness.*
- *Additional soft skills were also mentioned, such as being calm under pressure, empathic and being adaptable to change Having the maturity to deal with complaints and to problem solve.*
- *Qualifications were often looked at for this level*

## **2c. Management position:**

- *Understand economics of business, strategic planning, forecasting and sustainability*
- *Ability to develop relationships and networking skills, to be an ambassador of the industry*
- *Leadership skills to develop high performing teams, to be a mentor to staff*
- *Qualifications and relevant industry experience, it was mentioned that the LCQ certificate is required at this level in hospitality. The length of service in the industry was often considered.*
- *Additional soft skills were also highly desirable including the ability to sell themselves and having a high degree of confidence.*

A gap in training and business acumen was identified between frontline and supervisory, but supervisory and management positions were often considered as the same role by participants when responding to the questions.

Supervisory and management positions were more likely to require training and qualifications. However, it was interesting to note that some of the interviewees preferred to hire supervisory and management positions internally as established relationships were valued and prospective employees already had a clear expectation of the organisation's direction, culture and operational knowledge. This suggested the need to incorporate a work experience element into lower level five and six programmes to enable students from the FBDSI the opportunity to gain relevant work experience and build a working relationship with a specific tourism and hospitality business. Currently, internship papers are only provided at level seven.

## **3. Training and qualities seen as important for entry into frontline, supervisory and management**

### **3a. Front-line position:**

- *Passion and physical capability to undertake physically demanding tasks. Plus, the confidence to undertake tasks and show initiative*
- *Self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, professional presentation of self. Interpersonal skills, ability to interact with a wide range of people, including cultural awareness. A wide range of personal interests to demonstrate a balanced life and worldly perspective.*
- *Understanding the New Zealand hospitality context and the New Zealand Tourism industry*
- *Ability to work in a team effectively and technical skills, such as barista capability and bar skills*

- *Relevant work experience (internship programmes or practical experience whilst studying)*

### **3b. Supervisory position:**

- *Financial capability and training*
- *Understanding the law associated with hospitality and tourism industry*
- *Managing staff, rostering, handling practical situations and conflict, providing leadership to teams*
- *Local knowledge of place and knowledge/understanding of Maori culture including language, willingness to learn*

### **3c. Management position:**

- *Confident leadership capabilities and management training required, ability to build a team's professional capability with training*
- *Adaptive, an understanding that the industry requires a hands-on management style, management required to pitch in with menial tasks when necessary*
- *Strategic planning and thinking ability and ability to apply sustainable principles.*
- *Financial understanding and knowledge of relevant legal requirements (legislation) for the industry*
- *Relevant experience in the wider tourism and hospitality industry*
- *Willing to continually learn and develop self*

Often the participants implied that the training and qualities important for frontline built into the higher positions. It was evident though, that supervisory training and management positions were, for many participants, treated as one group.

It was also apparent that industry appropriate soft skills were desirable for all levels, especially level five. Soft skills such as confidence, communication and selling skills can be difficult, however, to teach and assess in an academic setting. By incorporating a work experience component into the level five and six programmes it allows students the opportunity to better develop and hone these qualities and soft skills in a relevant work place setting.

It was also affirming to note that many of the general content-based skills desired by industry participants were already incorporated within the FBDSI programmes. However, there was an obvious gap in the training of specific practical skills such as barista training or a passenger drivers' licence. If the training of these specific skills could be incorporated within the level five programme this would help meet industry needs and better equip our level five graduates in gaining employment within the industry.

## **4. Career pathways available to employees**

- *Not often a formal internal pathway but offered support and individual development to specific members of the team that demonstrated a willingness to learn and progress in the business. Often used as a technique to retain valued staff members*
- *Within the Hospitality industry there appeared to be a more formal structure to training and progression. Succession and inhouse training were planned for.*

- *Some participants aligned with educational providers or Industry Training Organisations (Toi Ohomai, Service IQ) to develop staff skills and provide qualifications for staff while working within the business*
- *Smaller businesses had limited opportunities to provide career pathways but viewed the development of staff from a more holistic perspective*

It was apparent that employees were at times recruited based on their perceived ability and desire to progress within the organisation. It is important to note that this support to progress often begins whilst students are on work experience within the specific tourism and hospitality business. This further confirms the desirability of introducing a work experience component in all levels.

### **5. Ways the tertiary sector could work collaboratively to meet skill and training gaps**

- *Industry experience required for students (such as an internship, cadetship or apprenticeship model) to ensure students are aware of the expectations of the workplace*
- *Maintaining a working relationship*
- *Hiring staff arrangements with tertiary providers, having a priority arrangement in recruiting potential staff*
- *Solving problems for the industry through student research and enquiry learning projects (e.g. how to engage the domestic market, how to create return visitation, what are the travel needs of 'new' New Zealanders).*

Interviewees mentioned that they required students to have work experience because students lacked knowledge and skills related to their specific tourism and hospitality business. Work experience provided an opportunity for students to be work ready and gave them the confidence and ability to operate in a specific role effectively, from day one.

It was found that from supervisory level to management, participants required work experience *and* formal qualification to support growth and career pathway.

It was evident that many participants valued a close working relationship with Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology as the local training provider but felt, that in some cases, this was now missing due to a lack of local presence (example Taupo businesses) and the absence of industry specific training (e.g. a current Adventure Tourism programme). Concern was also voiced that Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology was not meeting specific employee skill needs and businesses were forced to look to other providers that could support their businesses and meet their needs, such as NZST.

The FBDSI has worked hard to maintain relationships with industry by providing opportunities for industry to have representation on local advisory committees and inviting relevant industry representatives to participate in classroom learning (e.g. guest speaker, student assessment evaluations), and arranging industry visits. However, this relationship could be further strengthened and enhanced by consistently staying in contact. This could be achieved by providing regular information (e.g. quarterly newsletter) about training, collaboration opportunities and qualifications to ensure the wider industry stay informed and there continues to be a 2-way dialogue contact between Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology and the Tourism and Hospitality Industry.

### **Recommendations:**

To meet the demands of industry it is evident that at level five it is more important to include a mixture of work experience and practical hard skills within the academic learning, in order to ensure the success of our graduates.

This work experience component, that is expected from industry, will need to be scaffolded at the higher levels (six and above), to include more targeted supervisory and management type work experiences needed to meet our graduate profile.

Creating a voluntary or embedded work experience component to the FBDSI programmes that complements the formal tertiary training programme will allow students to develop a relationship with specific operators, gain practical hands-on experience and create their own reputation and brand. This can support employment opportunities and enable students the opportunity to create and direct their own career pathway with confidence.

Establishing a regular dialogue (two way) with the tourism and hospitality industry could be an additional way to seek stakeholder input and provide an avenue for the industry to have a voice. For example, this could be a quarterly e-newsletter informing and updating industry.

Continue to work with industry to develop programme content that is relevant and reflects the local context. For example, operating in a bi-lingual city there is a need to ensure Te Reo Maori and cultural capability continues to be included in FBDSI courses. Industry engagement provides an opportunity for Toi Ohomai Institution of Technology to strengthen relationships and create whanaungatanga.

Develop targeted and customised short courses in collaboration with industry, that meet specific needs of the tourism and hospitality industry. For example, six-week rafting skills which leads onto an on-job apprenticeship, high ropes skills, barista training, first aid, Liquor Controller Qualification (LCQ) license.

The impacts of Covid19 has been widely felt throughout the education sector. Since this research was undertaken some PTE's (referred to in this report) are no longer delivering tourism and hospitality specific courses. Recently the Trans-Tasman and Cook Island bubble has opened and confidence has grown within Industry, which has been reflected in the increasing number of jobs opening in the tourism and hospitality sector. This creates an opportunity for Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology to be well-positioned to widen the scope of its delivery of tourism and hospitality courses to service the wider New Zealand market. It is especially pertinent that Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology continues to grow the capability of this resilient industry as it is located in the birth place of New Zealand tourism and in a world-renowned visit destination.

### **Conclusion:**

This research has enabled Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology to reconnect with industry, to hear their concerns and learn about their specific business needs. It was found that there was a real desire on the part of the local industry to work in partnership with Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology as a local provider, to train and educate potential employees. It was clearly apparent from the research that



there is an opportunity to refine current FBDSI programmes to incorporate industry experience and/or on-the-job learning for career progression from front-line to management levels.

The research findings also reflected an industry that was facing the challenge of closed borders and an uncertain future in a Covid19 environment. Future research could therefore focus on whether the needs of the local tourism and hospitality industry had changed in a post Covid environment.

Additionally, these findings were specific to Western Bay of Plenty and may not necessarily reflect the wider Bay of Plenty or other regions within New Zealand as a whole. Further research could be undertaken to include other areas of New Zealand, under the Te Pūkenga umbrella. This research would support the development of relevant training delivery for Te Pūkenga by delivering skills based training to meet the specific needs of local industry.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview Questions:**

What sector of the industry do you operate in? e.g. adventure tourism, accommodation

How many employees do you have in your business?

Have you employed Toi Ohomai graduates before? How many?

If you have not, where do you employ your staff from?

Within your organisation, what is the expectation of the skills and attributes required from prospective employees applying for a:

- Front-line position?
- Supervisory position?
- Management position?

In order to ensure that our graduate profile is relevant, what training and qualities do you to see as important for entry into each of these three levels above?

Is there a career pathway offered with training options within your business?

How best could the tertiary education sector work collaboratively with your business to meet identified skill and training gaps?