

Experience and suitability of job applicants: two policy issues from a survey of employers*

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A survey of Christchurch employers advertising job vacancies in January 2001 found that far more positions required experience in a similar job than required a specific qualification, and that two-thirds of applicants were considered not suitable by the advertising employer. These results raise two important policy questions. First, will increased classroom-based training meet employer requirements? Second, is the current regime of work testing and low benefit levels encouraging some people to apply for jobs that they have no chance of being offered, creating costs for both employers and the jobseekers?

1 Introduction

FOR 30 YEARS after the Second World War, unemployment in New Zealand was low by international standards. Labour market programmes to assist the unemployed, therefore, tended to concentrate on providing income support during short spells of unemployment and on providing subsidised jobs, particularly in the public sector, at times or in regions of relatively high unemployment. As the number of jobseekers rose sharply in the early 1980s, there were two significant changes in government policy. The 'New Deal in Training and Employment Opportunities' announced in December 1985 moved away from subsidised employment towards a greater reliance on work-oriented training programmes, explaining that "the need for this approach is underlined by a curious anomaly: while unemployment still remains high by longer term historical standards, employers are currently reporting difficulty in filling many positions through lack of appropriate skills in job seekers" (Burke, 1985 p 5). Despite some argument over whether the low-level training programmes on offer were likely to address the skill shortages identified by employers (Gordon, 1990; Higgins,

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1997), the notion of skill deficit became one of the key ideas shaping employment assistance policy for jobseekers in the 1980s and 1990s.

The second significant policy change was based on the idea that many jobseekers needed stronger incentives to search for and accept employment (Higgins, 1999). This idea gained traction during the second half of the 1980s as unemployment continued to rise and it became a central element in the welfare reforms of the National government elected in 1990. The 'Economic and Social Initiative' announced in December that year observed that "many beneficiaries receive an income close to or even higher than what they could receive in paid work" (Richardson, 1990 p 19). New work tests were introduced for people receiving social security income support, and on 1 April 1991 benefit rates were reduced by between \$25 and \$27 per week for most families, and by up to \$35 for single adults aged between 20 and 24 years. The purpose of these changes was to "increase the rewards for moving from welfare to work by creating a greater margin between benefit rates and workforce earnings" (Richardson, 1990 p 26). In keeping with this idea, the government later announced a tax reduction and social policy programme expected to cost \$2.9 million per annum after three years (Birch, 1996). Beneficiaries and low-income single people received very little in the programme. "For these people, the real gain from the programme is additional encouragement and assistance to improve their lot by increasing their participation in the labour force and upgrading their skills" (Birch, 1996 p 18).

This paper reports the results of a survey of Christchurch employers in January 2001 that raise two important questions for policymakers related to the recent emphasis on low-level training programmes and providing greater work incentives for jobseekers.² The survey found that more vacancies required experience in a similar job than required a particular qualification (Section Five below), and that two-thirds of job applicants were considered not suitable for the advertised position by their potential employer (Section Seven). The first result raises a question about whether increased classroom-based training in low-level generic skills is likely to meet employer requirements. An additional question, raised by the second result, concerns whether the current regime of work testing and low benefit levels may be encouraging some people to apply for jobs that they have no chance of being offered, creating costs for both employers and jobseekers. The paper reflects on these issues in the light of the international literature (Sections Six and Eight respectively), but does not attempt to resolve them. As the conclusion in Section Nine discusses in more detail, attempting to resolve the issues would require more evidence on the two results, particularly through a

² We do not mean to suggest that these two developments are the only forms of labour market assistance provided by the Department of Work and Income; they are emphasised here because they were introduced as significant changes in policy in 1985 and 1991 respectively.

survey of jobseekers to supplement the evidence reported here from employers. The paper begins in Sections Two, Three and Four by introducing the survey and its coverage.

2 The survey

In early 2001, there was widespread concern in Christchurch that a shortage of qualified and experienced workers was restricting employment and business growth in the city. Responding to these concerns, a survey was commissioned from a team of researchers at the University of Canterbury to quantify the extent of the shortage (Dalziel *et al* 2001). The survey population was Christchurch employers who advertised one or more vacant positions in the *Press* on Saturday 20 January. The administration of the survey depended on the contact details in the advertisement. If a postal address, e-mail address or fax number was provided without a telephone number, the survey was sent to the address with a covering letter or message explaining its purpose. If a phone number was provided, direct contact with the employer could be made. Each phone call gave an explanation of who was calling and why. If the employer agreed to participate, the survey took less than two minutes to complete. This brevity was designed to elicit a high level of responses and the survey's overall response rate was 78.3 percent. Questions in the survey focused on whether successful applicants required experience or qualifications for the job, and on the degree of difficulty employers were finding in filling the position. A copy of the survey questionnaire is presented in an appendix to this paper.

The survey offers a particular snapshot of the job vacancy situation in Christchurch at the beginning of 2001. Using newspaper advertisements carries with it the obvious limitation that not all employment vacancies are advertised this way. Employers seeking highly specific skills may be more likely to advertise on the internet or in specialist publications than in the local newspaper. Also, those seeking to fill casual or unskilled vacancies may be more likely to use word-of-mouth. The timing of the survey may have led to an over-representation of permanent positions relative to temporary or casual jobs in so far as employers may be more likely to seek permanent staff at the beginning of a year. Thus, the representative nature of this particular snapshot is difficult to judge. Nevertheless, over four hundred employers responded and several common concerns emerged that are worthy of consideration in the policy context.

3 The advertisements

On Saturday 20 January 2001, there were 801 non-executive advertisements in the Christchurch *Press*, including farm, educational and health vacancies. Of these, 65 were excluded from the survey for various reasons, such as the advertisement was an invitation to register for possible future vacancies (22); the job involved selling on commission only without payment of a wage or salary (15); or the work

TABLE 1: Responses to the survey

<i>Major occupational group</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Number of advertised occupations</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>	<i>Number of non-responses</i>	<i>Response rate (%)</i>
1	Corporate managers	45	38	7	84.4
2	Professionals	74	62	12	83.8
3	Associate professionals and technicians	122	93	29	76.2
4	Clerks	62	46	16	74.2
5	Service and sales workers	144	112	32	77.8
7	Trades workers	68	58	10	85.3
8	Plant and machine operators, etc	35	25	10	71.4
9	Elementary occupations	21	13	8	61.9
	Totals	571	447	124	78.3

involved employment that the Department of Work and Income would not require of jobseekers, such as working for an escort agency (13). A second group of 225 advertisements were excluded because they involved jobs outside Christchurch City.

Thus, the survey covered 511 advertisements from Christchurch employers. Many of the advertisements were for more than one occupation, and several offered more than one vacancy in the same occupation. For example, one advertisement offered several positions for both registered nurses and nurse aides. In the analysis, this was treated as one advertisement, two advertised occupations (the occupation of registered nurse and the occupation of nurse aide) and at least four vacancies (because the employer was seeking more than one person for each of the two occupations). Following this pattern, the total number of advertisements was 511, the total number of advertised occupations was 577 and the total number of advertised vacancies was at least 742.

The advertised occupations were classified using Statistics New Zealand's Standard Classification of Occupations 1999. This classification system uses nine major groups ranging from legislators, administrators and managers (Major Group 1) to elementary occupations (Major Group 9). There were no legislators and administrators represented in the survey, so Major Group 1 is renamed as 'corporate managers' in this paper. The number of agricultural and fisheries vacancies in the survey was very low (only six) as expected in a large metropolitan area such as Christchurch, so Major Group 6 was excluded. Table 1 reports the number of advertised occupations and response rate for each of the other major occupational groups.

TABLE 2: Full-time and permanent positions

<i>Major group</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Full-time</i>		<i>Permanent</i>	
		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Corporate managers	35	92.1	35	92.1
2	Professionals	49	79.0	55	88.7
3	Associate professionals and technicians	63	67.7	83	89.2
4	Clerks	30	65.2	42	91.3
5	Service and sales workers	64	57.1	105	93.8
7	Trades workers	56	96.6	56	96.6
8	Plant and machine operators, etc	21	84.0	24	96.0
9	Elementary occupations	7	53.8	11	84.6
	Totals	325	72.7	411	91.9

4 The positions

The first section of the survey asked whether the position was full-time (more than 30 hours per week) or part-time (30 hours or less). Of the 447 responses, 325 (72.7 percent) were full-time, 120 (26.8 percent) were part-time and two did not know. This ratio of part-time to full-time work is in keeping with a trend towards increased part-time employment in the Christchurch labour market over the last 25 years. Census data indicates that in 1976 about one job in eight was part-time; by 1996 this had risen to about one job in four (Higgins, 2001). The survey also asked whether the positions were permanent (lasting longer than 12 months) or short-term (12 months or less). Nearly all of the positions (411 or 91.9 percent) were permanent; 29 were short-term and seven did not know.

Table 2 presents an analysis of the occupations by major group. Groups 5 (service and sales workers) and 9 (elementary workers) had a high ratio of part-time vacancies relative to other groups, but even in these cases more than half of the positions were full-time. All groups had very high ratios of permanent positions, perhaps indicating that casual employment is not so likely to be advertised in the newspaper.

5 Qualifications and experience

Employers were asked what specific qualifications applicants needed to have for the position. The majority, 273, said that no specific qualification was required. One response did not know, while 173 employers specified at least one qualification. The qualifications varied from a driver's or forklift licence through to a trade certificate or university degree. Table 3 reveals some important differences in this part of the survey. While nearly four-fifths of the professional occupations (Major Group 2) and half of the trades occupations (Major Group 7) required

TABLE 3: Qualifications or Experience Needed?

<i>Major group</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>		<i>Experience</i>	
		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Corporate managers	14	36.8	31	81.6
2	Professionals	49	79.0	42	67.7
3	Associate professionals and technicians	42	45.2	63	67.7
4	Clerks	5	10.9	33	71.7
5	Service and sales workers	23	20.5	69	61.6
7	Trades Workers	30	51.7	49	84.5
8	Plant and machine operators, etc	8	32.0	14	56.0
9	Elementary occupations	2	15.4	4	30.8
	Totals	173	38.7	305	68.2

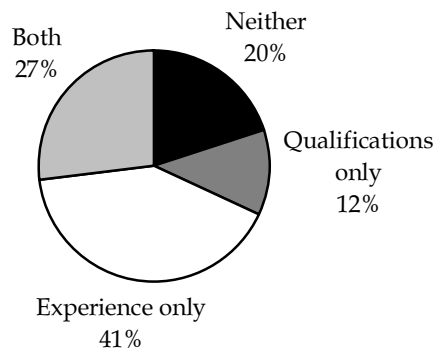
qualifications, no more than one-fifth of the clerk positions, service and sales positions and elementary occupations did.

While this study found that qualifications were important for many employers, a significant finding was that a far greater number required previous experience. Respondents were asked whether or not applicants needed experience in a similar job, perhaps at a lower level: 305 (68.2 percent) said yes, 141 (31.5 percent) said no, and one did not know. In both the telephone and postal surveys, a number of employers volunteered that although previous experience was not necessary, it was preferred. Table 3 records that experience was required for more than 80 percent of the occupations classified as corporate managers (Major Group 1) or as trades workers (Major Group 7). More than half the responses in all occupational groups required experience, except for the small number of elementary occupations in Major Group 9.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of advertised occupations: 89 respondents stated that they required neither qualifications nor experience; 52 respondents said that they required qualifications, but not experience. There were 183 replies saying that experience was required without qualifications and a further 121 replies requiring both experience and qualifications. The two responses who did not know for either of the two questions are not included in the figure.

6 Experience and training

The finding that the majority of employers were seeking people with previous experience in a similar job suggests not only that work experience is important for jobseekers, but that employers are looking for experience of a specific nature. This amounts to something more than general work experience of the kind that might be offered through workfare (work for the dole) programmes or through make-work schemes such as those offered in many job creation programmes in

FIGURE 1: Does the position require qualifications or experience?

the early 1980s. This finding is consistent with findings from a large body of international research that links successful employment search with work experience (Ryan, 2001, pp 53–56).

This research indicates that forms of employment assistance not directly linked to the labour market (training schemes that offer generic training, for example, and work experience programmes not associated with on-going employment) are unlikely to be of much help to jobseekers. For example, O’Connell and McGinnity’s (1997) study of employment assistance programmes in Ireland explored four different types of scheme designed to assist jobseekers:

- training in the workplace in firm-specific skills;
- the provision of wage subsidies to workers already in employment;
- general training schemes; and
- direct job creation schemes in which employment is created outside the needs of the market.

The researchers found clear evidence that participants in the first two types of scheme were more likely to find employment, and to remain employed in the long term, than participants in general training or direct job creation schemes. The key feature seems to be the concrete link into real employment offered by the first two types of scheme. Likewise, Raffe’s (1990) work in the United Kingdom showed that young people engaged in the Youth Training Scheme found the marketable value of their training to be minimal unless they were in the scheme with the sponsorship of an employer. Others have established similar findings in other countries (Adamski and Grootings, 1989; Bynner, 1991; Holbrook, 2000; McDonnell, *et al*, 1998; Miller and Rosenbaum, 1997).

The value of schemes with links into real work appears to be twofold. First, they place individuals in actual jobs. Even if these are only temporary, the office, shop or factory environment facilitates access to networks of employers and fellow workers through which new recruits are able to gain knowledge about

work opportunities and become known as workers in an industry. Such networks are important in helping jobseekers to find employment and in helping employers to find workers (Miller and Rosenbaum, 1997; Rosenbaum and Kariya, 1989; Windolf and Wood, 1988). Similarly, recent New Zealand-based research indicates that the industry networks established by tutors in Private Training Institutions may be more important in successful job placement for graduates of their Training Opportunities or Youth Training programmes than the qualifications gained through the programmes themselves (Strathdee and Hughes, 2000).

Secondly, alongside specific occupational competencies that may be learned on- or off-the-job, there are tacit skills that workers must learn on-the-job because they cannot be taught in a classroom situation (Brown, 1996; Streeck, 1989). This means more than general work habits, such as those covered in generic 'life skills' courses (punctuality, dress and so forth). Rather, Brown and Streeck refer to skills associated with the culture of particular workplaces. These include an understanding of the quality of work that is expected; knowledge of what is thought to be reasonable in terms of how hard an employee should work; awareness of the range and depth of responsibility that a worker is expected to undertake; the rewards that can be expected for extra effort or responsibility, and so on. These forms of knowledge are specific to the culture of particular types of work and often of particular workplaces. Roberts (1997) observes that in the United Kingdom, many Youth Training Scheme trained graduates failed to last long in new workplaces precisely because the generic, non-work-based training they undertook left them ill-equipped to understand the culture of the workplaces into which they eventually moved. For their part, employers may not recognise that these tacit skills are an important learned part of the job, so they cannot be taken for granted.

In summary, both this survey and an extensive range of international research suggest that work experience in real work is very important for jobseekers. Employers regard it as an indicator of suitability for an advertised position and, for both employers and workers, it offers access to networks within the labour market through which information about work and workers circulates.

7 Suitability of applicants

Respondents were asked about the number of applicants and how many of them had the qualifications and experience being sought. Fifty respondents did not know, and these have been excluded from the data in Table 4. The 397 remaining responses reported receiving 7,571 applications, or 19 applicants per advertised occupation. However, only 2,566 of these applicants were thought to be suitable. Thirty six respondents reported that there had been no suitable applicants.

TABLE 4: Number of applicants and suitable applicants

<i>Major occupational group</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>	<i>Average number of applicants</i>	<i>Average number of suitable applicants</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	Corporate managers	32	38.2	8.6	22.5
2	Professionals	49	16.6	6.7	40.4
3	Associate professionals and technicians	84	20.2	6.7	33.4
4	Clerks	42	31.3	11.0	35.2
5	Service and sales workers	99	13.9	4.5	32.4
7	Trades workers	57	11.3	4.8	42.6
8	Plant and machine operators, etc	23	9.1	2.4	26.3
9	Elementary occupations	11	27.1	14.5	53.4
	Totals	397	19.1	6.5	33.9

Some care needs to be taken when interpreting these data, because there are indications that employers frequently used a wider definition of 'suitability' than qualifications or experience alone. For example, 89 respondents stated that their advertised position(s) required neither qualifications nor experience, and yet reported that 1,728 out of 2,417 total applicants were not suitable (71.5 percent). To explore this broader understanding of suitability would require a more extensive survey using open-ended questions or more qualitative interviews. This would be a useful direction for future research.³

The analysis by occupational group reveals that employers of Major Groups 5, 7 and 8 (service and sales workers, trades workers, and plant and machinery operators) had the smallest numbers of suitable applicants per advertised occupation. This result was reinforced by another question in the survey, which asked whether the vacancy was easy, difficult or impossible to fill with a suitably qualified person. In the trades group, 55.2 percent described the situation as difficult and a further 13.8 percent described the situation as impossible (see

³ See, for example, the research project by Harland and Duckworth (1999) for Work and Income New Zealand. This project involved in-depth interviews with 27 employers exploring their recruitment needs, primarily in relation to unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The report cites that, for these employers, a "positive attitude" was the core attribute required in jobseekers (p 8). Consistent with results in this paper's survey, Harland and Duckworth also reported that work experience was regarded as more important than qualifications (pp 28–29).

TABLE 5: Overall assessment of filling the vacancies

<i>Major group</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Impossible</i>	<i>Do not know</i>
1	Corporate managers	15 39.5%	22 57.9%	0 0.0%	1 2.6%
2	Professionals	22 35.5%	36 58.1%	2 3.2%	2 3.2%
3	Associate professionals and technicians	43 46.2%	36 38.7%	5 5.4%	9 9.7%
4	Clerks	24 52.2%	15 32.6%	0 0.0%	7 15.2%
5	Service and sales workers	44 39.3%	59 52.7%	3 2.7%	6 5.4%
7	Trades Workers	17 29.3%	32 55.2%	8 13.8%	1 1.7%
8	Plant and machine operators, etc	5 20.0%	15 60.0%	2 8.0%	3 12.0%
9	Elementary occupations	6 46.2%	5 38.5%	1 7.7%	1 7.7%
	Totals	176 39.4%	220 49.2%	21 4.7%	30 6.7%

Table 5). Only 20.0 percent of employers of plant and machinery operators described it as easy.

These results are not surprising given the widespread closure and relocation that took place in Christchurch manufacturing during the 1980s and, to a lesser extent, the 1990s (Higgins, 2001). That period of significant restructuring had consequences beyond the immediate impacts of the associated closures and redundancies. It is likely, for example, that the restructuring led to the transfer of skilled trades workers to other centres and/or industries. Moreover, those who remained behind formed a pool of experienced labour available to employers and this may have acted as a disincentive for investment in training new workers. This cohort of experienced labour is now beginning to retire. It is also possible that de-industrialisation in the city influenced the decision making of school leavers regarding the long-term viability and rewards of training in a trade.

This study cannot identify the extent to which any of these factors has contributed to the shortage of trades workers in Christchurch – further research would be necessary to do that. It is clear, however, that the levels of training and experience offered by a skilled trades worker cannot be produced quickly and that the development of a skilled manufacturing workforce in the city is a long-term matter likely to require consultation and coordination among a number of

groups including government (both national and local), industry and worker organisations and educational institutions. Some of these issues are likely to be addressed by the 2001 Industry Training Review carried out jointly by the Department of Labour and the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with Skill New Zealand (Department of Labour, 2001).

8 Suitability and work attachment

The survey found that large numbers of people are applying for jobs for which they are regarded as unsuitable by the advertising employer. While the shortage of skilled trades labour has reasonably clear historical origins it is not so clear why there should be difficulties in finding suitable workers in some of the other occupational categories. In the absence of more qualitative data from employers it is impossible to know what criteria of suitability, beyond qualifications and experience, employers applied in judging job applicants.

The US literature on employer hiring practices surveyed by Rosenbaum and Binder (1997) and Miller and Rosenbaum (1997) suggests, however, that employers often do not trust (and so do not use) official channels of information about the suitability of job candidates (such as references from teachers or former employers, employment agency referrals, tests), and that in the absence of such information, decisions about suitability are made on the basis of their own judgements of candidates in interviews. These judgements tend to be strongly influenced by candidates' general demeanour, speaking styles, communication skills, non-verbal behaviour, dress and general appearance. Such practices are, by employers' own admission, less than ideal for judging the suitability of a worker. They may also introduce unintended bias into the hiring process. Whether the same factors influence hiring practices in the New Zealand context is not known and awaits future research.

From the jobseeker's perspective, fiscal policy over the last 10 years was designed to strengthen incentives for unemployed workers to look for and accept employment. The benefits cuts in April 1991 widened the wage-benefit gap while the tax reduction and social policy programme of 1996 sought to encourage participation in paid work by increasing the financial margin between work and benefit incomes, by lowering benefit abatement rates, by reducing tax rates for people in employment and by introducing the Independent Family Tax Credit. Initiatives implemented following the Employment Task Force also imposed greater obligations on beneficiaries to increase their work-readiness and to search for employment. Standard economic theory suggests that such policies are very likely to have encouraged more people to search harder for work. It is also likely, however, that some of the increased search effort will have spilled over into some people applying for jobs for which they lack the requisite skills and experience. In Table 4, only one-third of applicants were described as suitable for the vacancy.

Such a high ratio of non-suitable applicants is likely to be imposing costs on employers, as well as jobseekers, that should be considered when designing work tests for people receiving income support from the State.

In addition to the 'push' factors described in the previous paragraph, people are also drawn to employment through an attachment to work as both a source of income and an important component of identity. Despite high levels of public rhetoric about the failure of young people in particular to adopt a work ethic (reflected, for example, in the April 1991 cut of almost 25 percent in the unemployment benefit for single adults aged 20 to 24 years) there is considerable evidence to the contrary, including research in Canada (Andres *et al*, 1999), Denmark (Danielsen *et al*, 2000), Finland (Nyyssola, 1997), the United Kingdom (MacDonald, 1998; Rudd and Evans, 1998), the United States (McNeal, 1997; Lewis *et al*, 1998) and New Zealand (Sultana, 1990). This research indicates considerable attachment to paid work by young people, even in contexts where unemployment is very high and the chances of employment are correspondingly low. MacDonald's research with 300 working class young people and adults in the industrial region of Teeside in the United Kingdom, for example, found that "those locked out of the formal labour market are remarkably persistent, enterprising and resilient in their search for work" (MacDonald, 1998 p 168). In the United States some authors have voiced concern about students becoming more attached to employment than to education, with possibly detrimental effects (McNeal, 1997). This literature echoes a constant theme in New Zealand policy discussions since the early 1980s: that it is not general training or make-work schemes that jobseekers need and want, but actual employment opportunities.

9 Conclusion

This paper has presented evidence from a survey of Christchurch employers to raise two issues for future labour market assistance policy design. First, while the 'New Deal' of December 1985 emphasised the need for jobseekers to undergo low-level generic training and acquire classroom-based qualifications, employer responses in the survey suggest that skill deficits in the Christchurch labour market may owe more to a lack of appropriate work experience (and, by implication, work-based training) than to insufficient generic and classroom-based training. Second, while policies such as the benefit cuts of April 1991, the tax cuts of 1996/1998, and the tighter work test regime of recent years are all likely to have encouraged greater work search by jobseekers, some of this extra effort may have spilled over into some individuals applying for jobs they are unlikely to get, imposing costs on both employers and jobseekers.

These issues are raised from the employer survey on the basis of two pieces of evidence in particular: far more positions required experience in a similar job than required a particular qualification, and two-thirds of applicants were considered

not suitable by the advertising employer. The paper has also shown how the concerns raised in this discussion are consistent with overseas research suggesting that consideration be given to greater emphasis on work-based training for jobseekers to enhance work experience and access to labour market networks. The Modern Apprenticeships scheme is a good public sector example in New Zealand. An interesting private sector example is a recent employer initiative in Christchurch known as the Employment Scholarship Programme. Under this programme, participating firms make waged, entry-level positions available to school leavers for a fixed period of one year that include an individualised and carefully planned programme of work-based training coordinated and monitored by Simon Mortlock Lawyers. The international literature also suggests that policy development could build on the significance of labour market networks for successful job search. Thus, careful case management, including intensive job search assistance by those who know the local labour market well, is likely to be an important element of successful employment assistance policy.

Although the results from the survey warrant raising the two issues highlighted in this paper, they are not conclusive. Further research would be very useful to supplement the evidence presented here. Structured interviews with jobseekers to ask questions about the factors influencing the number and targeting of their job applications, about their understanding of work test requirements, and about their expectations of success with their applications, would provide more information about the impact of current policies on efficient job search activity. Controlled studies of participants in classroom-based training and participants in work-based training would provide more information about the effectiveness of the current emphasis on the former. Further surveys of employers asking about what factors influence their assessment of the suitability of job applicants would assist in designing effective assistance for long-term unemployed jobseekers. More generally, our understanding of the nature of skill requirements in New Zealand would be improved by more local studies that take account of the historical, geographic and economic characteristics of specific labour markets.

Appendix: The employer survey form

Please circle the appropriate response, or fill in the blanks.

- | | | | |
|----|----|---|-----------------|
| 1. | a. | Does the job involve more than 30 hours per week? | Yes / No |
| | b. | Is the job expected to last for longer than 12 months? | Yes / No |
| 2. | | Has the job been filled? | Yes / No |
| 3. | | What specific qualifications for the job, if any, does the successful applicant need to have? _____ | |

4. Does the successful applicant need to have previous experience in a similar job (perhaps at a lower level)? Yes / No
5. a. Approximately how many people applied for the job? _____
 b. Approximately how many of those people had the qualifications and experience you were looking for? _____
6. Overall, would you say that the vacancy was (please circle a, b or c):
 a. easy to fill with a suitably qualified person;
 b. difficult to fill with a suitably qualified person; or
 c. impossible to fill with a suitably qualified person.

Thank you for your time. I expect the results of the survey will be published by the Christchurch City Council in March or April this year.

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