

Lockdown of Training a Brake on the Recovery?

The Methodist Mission has raised concerns about the negative impact on the emerging economic recovery of decreasing access to second chance education. Chief Executive Laura Black said that “We know that the long-term impacts of a recession keep unfolding for some time after the economy begins to recover. Education and training seem a smart place to put our investment as a country while we wait for the recovery to arrive in ordinary people’s lives, and yet we’re seeing that access to education is actually decreasing”.

The OECD reportsⁱ that investing in education helps economic recovery, even going so far as to recommend governments consider this when setting education policy. The Secretary-General of the OECD, Angel Gurría said that “Investments in human capital ... contribute to recovery”.

“For some time” says Ms Black “we have had government tell us that the way out of N.Z.’s low wage economy is to build the knowledge and skill capital of the country. The Statistics Department reported the Benefits of Tertiary Education and Training on wage ratesⁱⁱ as recently as late last year. We have an over 10% unemployment rateⁱⁱⁱ amongst the unskilled, over 25%^{iv} for young Maori and Pacific people, 95,000^v young people not in education, employment or training. Wouldn’t this be an ideal time to throw open the doors to polytechnic and university study?”

“And it is a low-wage economy” she says, pointing to figures from the last census^{vi} that show Australian workers are on average paid 30% more than New Zealanders. “According to our calculations, over 1 in 5 of those in the workforce has no formal skills. How can the average family get ahead, if we can’t change the unskilled, low-wage, picture?”

“Yet we see headlines like Polytech Funding Dries Up^{vii}, University Halts Enrolments for Interest-Only Papers^{viii}, and Literacy Courses Cuts Hurt^{ix}” says Ms Black. “Last week, Minister Joyce also floated removing access for over 20 year olds to University^x, and of course there was the loss of community night classes to over 160,000 adults^{xi} in 2009.”

“Hundreds of places have been cut from Youth Training^{xii}, just as the government rolled out Youth Guarantee, and yet from information released under the Official Information Act, Youth Guarantee enrolments are running at less than 65% of allocation. We believe this is due not to a lack of need, but inappropriate entry and outcome requirements.” Says Ms Black

“There is a tremendous need for education and tremendous opportunity to do something about our low-wage and low-skill economy. We invite government to urgently reconsider the restrictions on entry to second-chance education.”

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ⁱ <http://business.globaltimes.cn/world/2009-09/465698.html>

ⁱⁱ http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/corporate/corporate/corporatecommunications_mrsept09.aspx

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.dol.govt.nz/services/LMI/tools/skillsinsight/slm/slm-05.asp>

^{iv} http://www.nzccss.org.nz/site/news_details.php?id=124

^v <http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/lmr/hlfs-investigation-reports/recession-impact/recession-impact.pdf>

^{vi} <http://neon.org.nz/newsarchive/nzlwe/>

^{vii} <http://www.odt.co.nz/on-campus/otago-polytechnic/62680/polytech-funding-dries>

^{viii} <http://www.odt.co.nz/campus/university-otago/110865/university-halts-enrolments>

^{ix} <http://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/70297/literacy-courses-cuts-hurt>

^x <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/3847167/Open-university-entry-for-over-20s-ending>

^{xi} http://www.teacherswork.ac.nz/journal/volume6_issue1/editorial.pdf

^{xii} http://www.nzherald.co.nz/training-courses/news/article.cfm?c_id=349&objectid=10590186