

Small Businesses and Industry Training: Individualised approaches that work

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***INDUSTRY
TRAINING
FEDERATION***
LEADING A SKILLED FUTURE

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Foreword

This research adds to the New Zealand literature about our small businesses, our experiences in our place.

This publication builds upon the Industry Training Federation's (ITF) comprehensive research base. Its recommendations aim to assist Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) working with small businesses as we strive to enhance small business performance.

The ITF is the national body representing all 41 ITOs. The key objectives of the ITF are to champion Industry Training by:

- leading the development and implementation of policy that enhances the performance of Industry Training;
- engaging in and disseminating research/evaluation that enhances efficiency, effectiveness and innovation;
- promoting general awareness of Industry Training to provide the basis for individual ITOs' communications; and
- leading the development of good practice to support individual members.

The ITF vision is: *Industry Training that is valued, dynamic and comprehensive and that contributes to national prosperity.*

The ITF is proud of its growing research catalogue of works that contribute to national prosperity.



Darel Hall
Executive Director

Executive Summary

Small businesses are a significant and growing part of the New Zealand economy, but they have not participated in Industry Training to the same extent as larger businesses. The barriers to training for small businesses are well documented. In particular, the disproportionate effect of opportunity and financial costs for small businesses emerged strongly from both the literature and interviews.

Small businesses have some distinctive characteristics from larger businesses, including more informal and flexible ways of working, a shorter term focus and a desire for independence. The ITOs in the study reported that the common requirement from small businesses is for more interaction, including face to face contact and help with administration. ITOs serving a number of industries or a mix of small and large businesses sometimes further customise their business models in order to provide the additional support needed for small businesses.

Diversity is another important feature of small businesses. Differences around industry type including training tradition, stage in the business cycle and the characteristics and educational background of the owner/operator can impact on the likelihood for engagement and success in training:

- industry sectors with a tradition of apprenticeships often have Industry Training centred around entry qualifications;
- small businesses will take on apprentices to provide for the future of their industry as well as for their business;
- businesses that are just starting out are less likely to engage in training than established businesses; and
- each business is unique, and the approach to training therefore requires some degree of tailoring.

Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to guide ITOs in working with small businesses:

Context matters – For small businesses to engage they need to believe that the training will meet a particular business need.

Timing – A good time to approach small businesses is when they are most likely to be facing changes which require training such as:

- when new regulations/industry standards are introduced;
- during a period of business growth or change management;
- when they bring on board new staff; or

➤ as new technology and equipment becomes available.

Selective approach – Some small businesses are more likely to engage with training than others, and targeting firms with the following characteristics may be useful:

- competing on quality rather than cost;
- have managers who have engaged with the education system;
- for whom customer service is important;
- have a tradition of training; and
- are over the start up phase.

Customisation – While grouping businesses by the categories above may go some way towards customisation, every business is different and tailoring training to meet the particular needs of the employer and learner may be required to engage small businesses.

Personal relationships – Small businesses value face to face contact more than larger businesses, and while this is resource intensive, it is more likely to result in engagement than written material.

Reducing opportunity and financial costs – This can be done by providing additional administrative support and adopting a flexible approach so that training fits the way the business operates.

Introduction

Helping small businesses to make the most of learning opportunities is an important factor in assisting them to enhance their performance.¹ Working with small businesses has therefore been identified as part of the Industry Training Federation 2005 Research Programme. This research looks at the characteristics of small businesses and the different ways that Industry Training Organisations have responded to their needs.

Section 1 presents findings of a review of literature, section 2 draws together themes from interviews with seven ITOs and section 3 provides two illustrative case studies.

¹ This report defines small businesses as businesses with less than 20 employees.

Section 1: Literature review

New Zealand and international information on small businesses, and research on the involvement of small businesses in training, were drawn together to provide a framework for interviews with ITOs.

Summary of findings

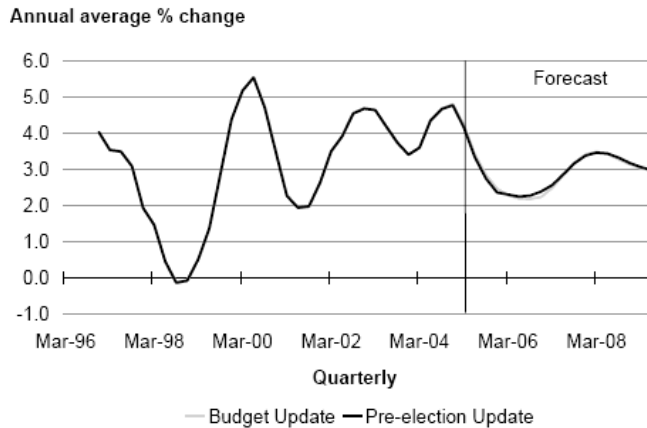
- Changes in the ways people are choosing to work and learn are having an impact on workplace environments and education delivery.
- Small businesses are an important part of the New Zealand economy, and skills development/learning can be a key element of business improvement strategies.
- Small businesses are not scaled down versions of larger enterprises, and therefore require different strategies to become engaged in learning.
- Other factors, such as stage of business life cycle, the owners' education background, and tradition of training in the industry also affect engagement.
- The specific benefits of training have to be clear to small businesses so they can balance learning needs with other business demands for their relatively scarce resources.
- The interaction between informal (non-accredited) and formal (accredited) learning in small businesses is important in engaging small businesses in training.
- Gains can be made by linking training to business development.

Context

Changes to the nature of work

New Zealand has recently experienced a period of economic growth, with high levels of participation in the labour force, and a low unemployment rate (3.7% June 2005).² With high levels of labour utilisation, experts believe that levels of labour productivity need to improve in order for the New Zealand economy to continue to grow.³ Skill shortages are also reported as a key issue for significant numbers of businesses.⁴

Growth in Real GDP: Statistics New Zealand and Treasury



An increasing percentage of the workforce is working part time (from 16% in March 1986 to 22% in March 2005)⁵ and women are increasing their participation in paid employment. Maori are participating in employment in increasing numbers, and their unemployment rate is falling (from 18.5% in March 1999 to 8.7% in March 2005). However Maori have the highest unemployment rate of all ethnicities.⁶

The New Zealand economy is also facing changes to production processes and organisational structures due to factors such as new technologies and globalisation. The Department of Labour predicts that as a result, we will need a more highly skilled workforce in the future. Other factors that will have an impact on the nature of work include the aging of the workforce and increasing ethnic diversity.⁷

Firm Foundations 2002: A Study of New Zealand Business Practices and Performance found that leading firms are more likely to be involved in

² Statistics New Zealand website main indicators www.stats.govt.nz

³ *Growth through Innovation: Economic Development Indicators 2005*, Ministry of Economic Development and Treasury, 2005

⁴ PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Employers and Manufacturers Association *Are Kiwi companies really clever? PwC/EMA Clever Companies Survey 2005*

⁵ data provided by the Department of Labour

⁶ Department of Labour, *Household Labour Force Survey: March 2005 Quarter* May 2005

⁷ *Work Trends: How work is changing in New Zealand* Department of Labour, August 2003

innovative activities, focus more closely on knowing and meeting the needs of customers and are more concerned with their employees' welfare (including by providing internal and external training and development activities). Structural training can also be a factor in fostering innovation. It also found that a lack of skilled staff hinders innovation and that small businesses are less likely to innovate than larger firms.⁸

Trends in tertiary education

Tertiary education participation and attainment of qualifications has increased significantly in New Zealand.⁹ The way people participate is changing: learning part time is more common, and as well as traditional ways of learning, adult and community education, distance learning and learning in the workplace are becoming more prominent. Maori are participating in tertiary education in much greater numbers than in the past. While 15-25 year olds are making up a decreasing share of learners, increasing numbers of people over 40 are participating.¹⁰

Industry Training has a growing role in the tertiary education sector, both in terms of growth in numbers of participating employees (from less than 20,000 in June 1995 to 140,000 during 2004), and with ITOs' new role in providing strategic leadership for their industries.¹¹

Key Industry Training facts and figures for 2004

- 139,597 people took part in Industry Training
- 17% of learners were Maori and 27% were women
- 26% of learners had no previous qualifications
- while the focus of Industry Training has been at level 1-4 of the National Qualifications Framework, 40% of learners were intending to achieve at levels 4 or above
- on average, trainees gain 20 credits a year
- industry invested \$46,624,978 in cash in training, or around 27% of total funding (industry contribution + government contribution)

Source: Tertiary Education Commission, Industry Training 2004, 2005

⁸ Knuckey, S and H Johnston et al, *Firm Foundations 2002: A Study of New Zealand Business Practices and Performance*, Ministry of Economic Development, December 2002

⁹ Formal tertiary education is defined here as learning towards a qualification on the New Zealand Qualifications Register. Informal learning in the workplace also makes a significant contribution to employee learning, as indicated in the recent business NZ survey.

¹⁰ *Tertiary Education Sector Profile and Trends 2004* Ministry of Education, 2004

¹¹ Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) develop and arrange workplace training for industry:

- set skill standards for industry,
- arrange for the delivery of training programmes and qualifications for industry, and
- provide industry leadership by identifying skill needs, developing strategic training plans, and promoting training that meets industry needs.

Characteristics of Small Businesses

Definitions of small business

The Ministry of Economic Development define New Zealand small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) as businesses with up to 20 employees.¹² What constitutes “small” in other countries varies, e.g. Australia less than 20 employees is small, in the UK small is less than 50 employees. A combination of turnover, balance sheet and number of employees is another way that small businesses are defined. The European Commission defines a small business as having up to 49 employees, 7 million euros maximum annual turnover, 5 million euros maximum annual balance sheet total and a maximum of 25% owned by larger businesses.

Small businesses are not scaled down versions of larger firms; they have their own challenges and opportunities. Some common characteristics attributed to small businesses are:

- personal ownership and management;
- few, if any, specialist managerial staff;
- narrow product and market focus;
- short term focus; and
- desire flexibility and independence.¹³

As well as differing from large business, they are also often different from each other. UK research argues that micro businesses needing to be looked at separately from small and medium sized firms, as real differences result from characteristics such as businesses with 0-2 employees tending to have an informal owner operator structure compared with those with 5 employees who will have an owner manager structure.¹⁴

What we know about New Zealand small businesses

SMEs in New Zealand: Structure and Dynamics, illustrates the significant role of small businesses in the New Zealand economy:

- 96.3% of businesses employ 19 or fewer people: 86.8% employ 5 or fewer people, 64% have no employees;
- the number of small businesses increased by 10.2% in 2004, following a 4.9% increase in 2003;
- 29.2% of all employees work in small businesses, and 10.4% work in businesses with 5 or less employees

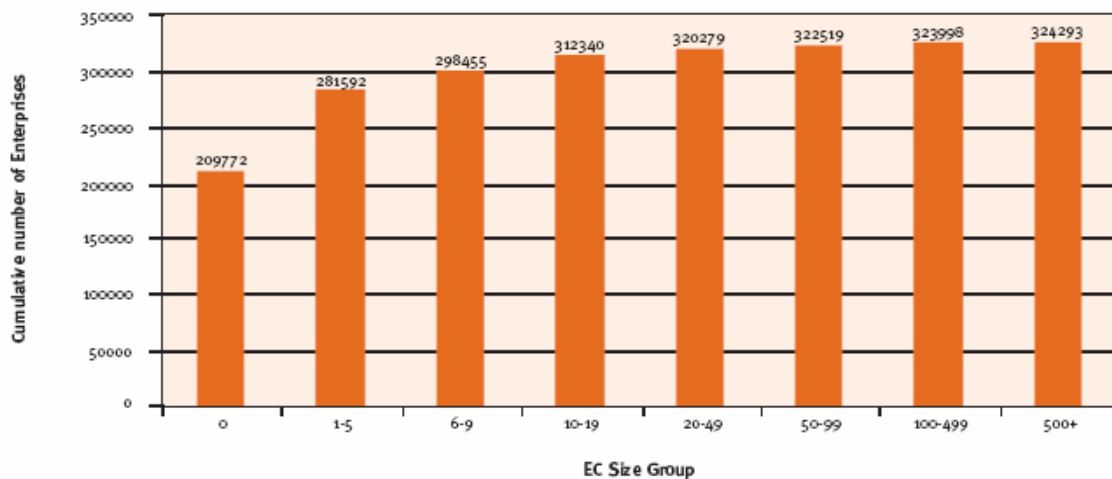
¹² Ministry of Economic Development, *SMEs in New Zealand: Structure and Dynamics*, 2005

¹³ MED, *SME structure and dynamics*, 2004, Vaughan, *Literature Review* 2001

¹⁴ Devons, D et al, *Management Development and Learning in Micro Businesses: a 'missing link' in research and policy*, Small Business Service, UK

- 35.25% of people in businesses with 1-5 employees work part-time compared to the average of 29.9%;
- 95.77% of all businesses in the property and business services industry have 5 or less employees. Small businesses also dominate finance and insurance, cultural and recreational and personal and other services industries, where they make up at least 96% of these businesses
- SMEs accounted for 37.3% of the economy's output measured by value added in 2003; and
- Firms with 5 or fewer employees have the highest average real profits per employee.¹⁵

Figure 2. Cumulative Enterprise Count by EC Size Group, as at February 2004



Cumulative Enterprise Count by FTE category, MED (2004), *SMEs in New Zealand*

In addition, SME firms account for the majority of all business entries and exits. While business "failures" usually mean either insolvency for companies or bankruptcy for individuals - a business can also close simply because it has fulfilled its objective. British research undertaken by Kingston University found that 29% of the businesses that closed in the study were thriving at the time of closure.¹⁶ MED notes that business turnover is associated with greater economic efficiency, as new firms replace obsolete firms.

Issues for small businesses

The Small Business Advisory Group provides advice to the government on issues faced by small businesses. Some characteristics they ascribe to small businesses are:

- they may start out with one idea or product and continue to incubate innovative ideas or products;
- they have no formal governance arrangements; and

¹⁵ MED, *SMEs in New Zealand*, 2005

¹⁶ Small Business Service, *Research and Statistics Frequently Asked Questions*

- they operate on trust rather than through systems and contracts.¹⁷

On the basis of research and expertise, in their 2004 report the Small Business Advisory Group examined the issues facing small businesses and put forward recommendations focused on:

- increasing and improving business mentoring;
- improving management capability and governance arrangements;
- information provision tailored for SMEs;
- better access to finance; and
- developing an enabling regulatory environment.

ITO engagement with small businesses

The 2001 review of Industry Training found that small businesses are less likely to be engaged in Industry Training than larger ones. This was explored in an ACNielsen survey undertaken in 2002, where most ITOs identified that NQF training take up was more prevalent in businesses with 50 employees or more than in smaller businesses.

Reasons offered by stakeholders for a lower level of participation in training by small businesses included that the funding system made it more cost effective for ITOs to target a few large employers rather than many smaller organisations, and perceptions about the restrictive nature of unit standard based training. There were some ITOs where engagement in training was similar or higher among small businesses, such as agriculture, aviation, furniture, joinery, painting and road transport.

The Business New Zealand Skills and Training Survey 2003 explored the different experiences of skill development and training of 479 enterprises in New Zealand.¹⁸ While small businesses (0-5 employees) agreed that skills development and training was key to business strategy and that training contributes to improved performance in similar proportions to larger firms, they were less likely to be providing training.

Table 31: Training currently provided by Firm Size

		Is training currently provided for employees		Number of Firms
		Yes	No	
Firm Size	0-5	69.9%	30.1%	74
	6-9	78.2%	21.8%	56
	10-49	91.4%	8.6%	187
	50-99	98.4%	1.6%	62
	100+	100.0%		100
Total		89.3%	10.7%	479

Small businesses that did provide training, however, spent a greater percentage of their payroll on training and provided for more days of training per employee than larger businesses.

¹⁷ Report of the Small Business Advisory Group, *Small and Medium Businesses in New Zealand*, 2004

¹⁸ Business New Zealand and the Industry Training Federation, *Report of the Business New Zealand Skills and Training Survey 2003*, 2003. 15% of the businesses surveyed had 5 or fewer employees.

Smaller firms were less likely to identify an ITO covering their enterprise, and consequently are less likely to agree that ITOs effectively contribute to their enterprise and industry.

A TEC funded action research project involved trying new approaches to working with small businesses. Apparel and Textile ITO (ATITO), Aviation, Tourism and Travel ITO (ATTTO) and Retail ITO (RITO) participated in the project, and the following factors were identified as important in effective engagement between SMEs and ITOs:

- time and support is everything;
- follow-up is essential; and
- training requires a sense of partnership.¹⁹

New Zealand research on training and small businesses

Action Research Studies: the Challenge of Engagement

Retail ITO marketing campaign

The Retail ITO piloted a marketing campaign aimed at engaging small businesses in ITO delivered training. A newspaper campaign proved useful in raising the profile of retail training, and received a big response. Turning the interest into businesses signing up for training proved more difficult, with low turn out at information evenings. Working with small businesses continues to be challenging for Retail ITO. Visiting small businesses in person is the only really effective approach, which is costly and time consuming.

Apparel and Textile ITO – new recruits

In order to reduce opportunity costs for 2 small businesses, this initiative provided an external trainer/assessor to go on-site and carry out training and assessment of a 6 week introductory machinist programme.

One small business employer found the format of the training package reduced opportunity costs, and made it easier to recruit new people. Employees were keen to stay on and complete further qualifications, and found the creation of a formal training culture helped foster a more positive and supportive working environment. The second small business was not able to implement the training package successfully because of production demands, and only 1 of 4 new recruits was still working there after completing the training.

A comprehensive literature review of SMEs and training was undertaken for Skill New Zealand²⁰ by Karen Vaughn in 2002. *Turning Barriers to Opportunities: A Literature review on small to medium sized enterprise engagement with formal training* synthesises New Zealand and

¹⁹ Tertiary Education Commission, *The Challenge of Engagement: Involving small and medium sized enterprises in Industry Training*, March 2005

²⁰ Skill New Zealand and parts of the Ministry of Education came together to form the Tertiary Education Commission in 2003.

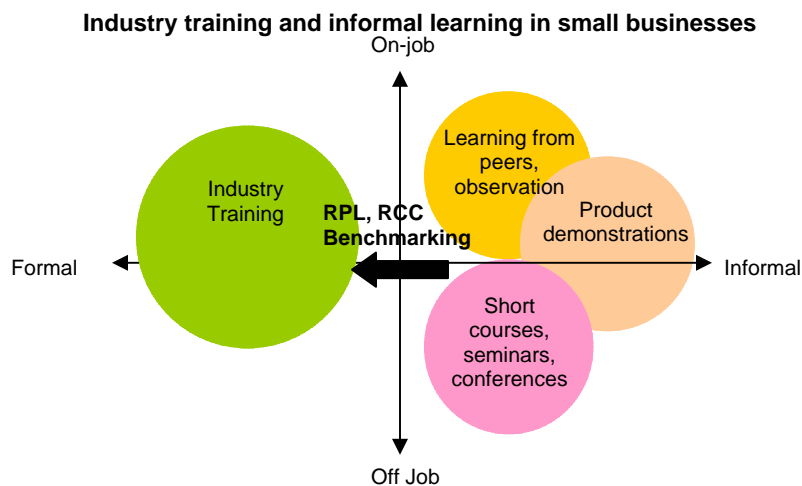
international literature covering involvement of small businesses in training. *Overcoming Barriers to NQF training among SMEs*, was prepared by ACNielsen in 2002 as a follow up to the literature review, and included interviews with key stakeholders and a survey of ITOs.

Summary of findings:

- There is international evidence that SMEs who have engaged in training find training contributed to better job performance, increased satisfaction over job performance and a better chance of survival of the business. Interviews with New Zealand businesses found that they tend to focus on immediate short term benefits and believe that qualifications benefit employees more than employers, or that productivity gains are not outweighed by the costs.
- Both projects found that the biggest barriers are financial and opportunity costs, that these are proportionally greater for smaller firms than larger companies, and there is particular pressure around releasing highly skilled staff. The ACNielsen interviews also highlighted that small businesses fear losing trained and skilled staff to other businesses. The literature review found that these barriers can be overcome through partnerships and collaboration with small businesses, training subsidies and flexible provision.
- Interviews with employers found that they did not see the value of formal employee training, believing that they were in the best position to teach employees. In house, informal approaches were seen as more effective. There is a body of international research that focuses importance of understanding small businesses' informal learning practices, and building qualifications based learning around this.
- International research shows that the short term focus of small businesses means engagement in training is motivated by the need to address a problem related to job performance that cannot be addressed any other way. While a more strategic approach to training produces better results, training needs to be flexible and tailored to the specific needs of small businesses.
- Information about training needs to be well tailored to small businesses. The ACNielsen report pointed out that small business owners need to be persuaded of the benefits of formal training for their employees, and that awareness of the training options available needs to be raised among schools, employees and owners, and employer/employee organisations. The literature review cautions that profits and growth may not be all that motivates the small business owner.
- The literature review found that targeting small businesses competing on product quality and customer service rather than flexibility and lowest cost may be more effective than an across the board approach.

These projects have provided essential information on the issues around engaging small businesses in training and offer some approaches for making training for small business successful. They also raise questions:

- When engaging small businesses, how do different types of formal training interact? Is there something unique about the way that ITOs engage with small businesses?
- What are the differences between micro and medium enterprises? How do different definitions of “small” across countries impact on the research findings?
- How exactly are links made between formal and informal training? If informal (i.e. non accredited) training is seen to be working, is there any need for engagement in qualifications based learning?



The diagram above illustrates the types of learning employees in small businesses can engage in. The possibility for interaction between informal learning and Industry Training is provided through recognition of prior learning, recognition of current competency and benchmarking.

Recent international research

A number of overseas studies on training and small businesses have been completed since the 2002 Skill New Zealand project. This research reiterates the ongoing challenge of engaging small businesses in training, and the barriers around opportunity and financial costs, lack of information, and inflexibility of formal training.

Below are some points about small businesses involvement in training from recent international research:²¹

- recruitment practices – while bigger organisations have the capacity to bring in entry level staff and train them, small businesses often focus on recruiting trained and experienced people and therefore do not see the need for further formal training. This can become more difficult to sustain in periods of skill shortages;
- informal learning – most small businesses will undertake informal learning of some kind, and this is often seen as the most effective form of training;
- narrow focus – small businesses are becoming more specialised and this is not necessarily being catered for by the publicly funded tertiary education system; and
- employer involvement – small employers often take a hands off approach to training once learning agreements have been negotiated – leaving it to employees and trainers.

The size of the business is only one factor that influences engagement in training, and what works for one small business will not necessarily work for others. The following factors can also impact on whether a business is receptive to training, and the types of approaches that will work for them.

- Age and life cycle of the firm
- Age and status of employees
- Educational background of the owner
- Industry area
- Turbulence in the industry
- Degree of maturity of training experience, extent of apprenticeships
- Market strategy (low cost or high performance)
- Location²²

Recent literature also adds to the discussion about engagement of small businesses in training by focusing on ways of ensuring effectiveness.

²¹ Doyle, L and M Hughes, *Learning without Lessons: Supporting learning in small businesses*, Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2004; *Your Guide 2...Engaging Employers: Overcoming the barriers faced by Small Businesses* Learning Skills Council UK web resource, <http://senet.lsc.gov.uk/pf/pf/cgi>; Mawer, G and E Jackson, *Training of Existing Workers: Issues, incentives and models*, Australian National Training Authority, 2004

²² Peter Kearns, *Are two worlds colliding? The provision of training and learning services for small business*, ANTA, 2002

Seeing training as an element of business performance, and tailoring it to align with changes in business practices (such as the introduction of new technology or regulations, or organisational change) is one way that the literature shows is effective in both attracting small businesses into training, and making sure they see the benefits.²³

²³ Billet S et al, *How small businesses learnt about the Goods and Services Tax: Lessons for vocational education and training*, ANTA, 2003

Section 2: Themes from Interviews

Based on the findings of the literature review, a broad set of questions were developed to guide semi-structured interviews with ITOs. The themes that the interviews covered were:

- changes in work and learning;
- unique characteristics of small businesses;
- barriers to training for small businesses;
- different types of small businesses;
- different approaches to training for small businesses;
- effective approaches to small businesses;
- making training relevant to small businesses;
- informal learning practices;
- illustrating the benefits of training to small businesses; and
- approaches to engaging Maori small businesses.

Summary

There are some distinctive differences in ITO approaches to engaging small businesses, and this often reflects the industries they serve. Common themes also emerged, and one of the key ones was the importance of face to face contact. Building a personal relationship was mentioned by the majority of ITOs as necessary for engagement with small businesses and this was seen as less necessary for larger businesses. For ITOs that deal with a range of sectors, more administration was required for small businesses. There was often acknowledgement that engagement with small businesses can be harder than larger businesses because of lack of awareness of training, opportunity and financial costs and fear that trained people will leave.

Approach

Interviews were held with managers and staff of 7 ITOs, 4 with head offices in Auckland and 3 in Wellington. The following table represents the different characteristics of the ITOs and the industries they serve.

ITO	No. of trainees (Dec 04)	Sectors represented	Head office	Tradition of training	Proportion of industry small businesses
ETITO Electro Technology	7,212	Telecommunications, security, call centre operations, electrical appliance repair, electronic manufacturing, ambulance, electrotechnology	Auckland	Variable depending on industry	High in electricians field
BITO Boating	497	Boat building, marine sales	Auckland	Yes for boat building apprentices	High
FITEC Forestry	13,126	Planting, harvesting, wood processing, wood product manufacturing	Auckland	Yes	Low
CMPETENZ Engineering, Food and Manufacturing	11,593	Food & beverage processing, engineering, refrigeration, heating, air conditioning, locksmithing, fire alarms & protection systems	Auckland	Yes	High in Baking and engineering, low in manufacturing sectors
HITO Hairdressing	1,331	Cutting, colouring, barbering, salon management	Wellington	Yes	High
ATTTO Aviation, Tourism, Travel and Museums	2,216	Aeronautical engineering, air crew, airport operations, rental car services, tourist operators, casinos, travel agents, tour wholesalers & booking offices, museums	Wellington	Yes for travel and aviation, no for tourism	medium proportion of small and large
RITO Retail	1,137	Retail & wholesale, merchandising, stock control	Wellington	No	High in retail, lower in wholesale

Topics

The interview questions were structured broadly around topics that emerged from the literature review findings. The following discussion picks out some of the recurring comments that emerged from the conversations.

Changes in work and learning

Throughout the interviews ITOs made observations about the changes in their particular industries and sectors, with technology having an impact in a number of areas. For example, in the electrotechnology industry it was observed that the nature of apprenticeships has changed, with more focus on higher level technology skills, and in travel the popularity of online booking has meant that travel agents have to provide extra special customer service in order to attract clients.

Some ITOs noted that many jobs have stayed the same, or have been evolving rather than changing dramatically, and ITOs see it as part of their job to constantly tweak what they are doing to match this. Changes in employment law and compliance costs making it difficult for small hair salons to stay in business. The internationalisation of the boating industry means there is a need among boat builders to develop the management skills necessary for export focused businesses.

Unique characteristics of small businesses

Differences in the skills of small business owners/operators compared with larger ones were noted, for example, boat builders and hairdressers will start businesses because they are passionate about/good at what they do, but will not necessarily have the management skills needed to run a business. This has led the Hairdressing and Boating ITOs to arrange management training. A number of ITOs said that small businesses tend not to have a dedicated person who deals with training, which means they are often dealing with the owner/operator. A couple of ITOs emphasised that every business is different, whether it is large or small, and therefore requires individualised approaches.

Barriers to training for small businesses

The literature on small businesses repeatedly mentions financial and opportunity costs as the main barriers to engaging in training. ITOs confirmed and elaborated on how they affected their industries. For instance, it was noted that boat builders who are starting out tend to be underfinanced, and electricians face pressure to get jobs done quickly and work on low margins which doesn't leave much time or resource for training apprentices.

Geographic location and the seasonality of work can be barriers to training in the tourism sector. Lack of information, ignorance of what ITOs do and difficulty in understanding the complexity of the education and training system were also highlighted. Several ITOs talked about the current tight labour market making it harder for small businesses to keep staff, and that businesses are reluctant to train because they are scared employees will leave or will be poached.

Different types of small businesses

For some spoken to, the differences between small businesses are based around the personalities of the owners, and the service the ITO provides will be flexible to reflect the needs of individuals. It was also noted that small businesses in industries with a tradition of apprenticeships are more likely to experience success than those with no training tradition. Owners who have not had training themselves are harder to convince of the merits of training, and require more support. ATTTO noted that small businesses

that are just starting out have too much going on to think about engaging in training, and will say to come back in a year.

Different approaches to training for small businesses

The ITOs were asked how their approach to small businesses differed from larger ones, and for some there was no difference as each business was treated as a unique entity. For others the approach depended on the sector, and in the ITOs where small businesses were the majority, such as in the hairdressing and boating industries, it was pointed out that no two businesses are the same, and that services are flexible to suit this. Competenz and Retail ITO observed that engaging small businesses in training is challenging because there are many of them and they are often geographically dispersed.

ETITO and Competenz mentioned that they take a more managed approach to small businesses, which involves taking a more active role in the administration of training and more site visits (though this can vary depending on the individual business).

For FITEC, where the majority of businesses are large, there is not really a different approach for small businesses, though it was noted that communication is particularly important for small businesses.

Effective approaches to working with small businesses

When asked about what worked well for small businesses, ITOs came up with both day to day practices and new approaches they have used. Flexibility was particularly important for a number of ITOs, which may involve arranging to meet business owners and trainees at times and places that suited them, whether early in the morning or in the evening, at the office or on a job site. Taking more time to understand the business and to develop a relationship with the owner/operator was also highlighted.

ITOs often adopt a broader role with small businesses than arranging training. Boating ITO mentioned that they provide mentoring as part of their role and Hairdressing ITO provide information on employment to employers such as around the minimum wage and good working conditions. Competenz are trialling training for a cluster of 50 employees from 10-20 small engineering businesses, and have employed a field staff member whose role will focus on small businesses.

When asked what was not so effective, one ITO responded that written material provided by the ITO is not always read because businesses don't have time, and another noted that approaching a new business too soon after starting rarely results in the business signing up.

Making training relevant to small businesses

Most ITOs mentioned the role of their industries in developing and revising qualifications, which meant that the training was up to date and tailored to the needs of businesses. ITOs are in the field and asking industry what they want, and if there was anything in a qualification that was no longer relevant, they know that businesses will tell them. ETITO have matched their training material to the traditional apprenticeship culture of the electrical industry, in order to suit the needs of electricians. FITEC constantly look for quality training approaches, and are directive with training providers in order to get what industry wants. ATTO provide a small programme in customer service to encourage small tourism operators into training.

Informal learning practices

Some Industry Training Organisations are just starting to think about how to go about customising learning for individual organisations. ATTO are doing some work on linking training to induction programmes in businesses. One ITO noted that there is too much focus within the current funding system on assessment, which means tertiary education organisations do not focus on tailoring learning.

Illustrating the benefits of training to small businesses

When asked how they illustrated the benefits of their training, many ITOs mentioned graduation ceremonies, competitions where trainees get to show the skills they have gained, and sharing good news stories in newsletters and on websites. The good reputation of New Zealand electricians overseas was also seen as an indication of the effectiveness of training for the Training Manager at ETITO. ATTO developed a DVD showcasing small business who won their training awards, which illustrates to other small businesses that they can become successfully involved in training too.

Approaches to engaging Maori small businesses

The case study from ATTO illustrates the approach taken to engaging a small Maori tourism operation in training, with success relating to building a relationship based on confidence and trust, through face to face meetings with the owners.

The ITOs interviewed do not tend to have a different approach for Maori businesses, some noting that there are very few Maori businesses operating in their industry, or they tend to operate in the same way as other businesses. Some talked about ensuring that qualifications and off job training does not exclude Maori and other ethnic groups, and others

mentioned the Capita group initiative to support the achievement of Maori learners.²⁴

Case Study: Aviation, Tourism and Travel ITO and Ko Tane

Tourists come to New Zealand first for the scenery and then for the cultural experience, so an emerging trend in the tourism sector is the increasing numbers of Maori tourism businesses starting up.

The Ko Tane project is an example of an ITO responding to the needs of Maori and catering to specific resource needs of a small business. Ko Tane provides international visitors with a cultural experience at Willowbank Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch.

Ko Tane's manager – David Brennan, views training as central to business success, and from the start and included it in strategic planning. He saw that training would give his business something different to other performance shows – and would provide young Maori performers with additional skills to help them into full-time employment.

For ATTTO's Maori Industry Advisor – Ron Taukamo, a fundamental part of his approach is to build a partnership with business based on confidence and trust, making sure that the training solution developed is based on the needs of the business. Face to face contact is an essential part of this.

Customer services and attraction guiding skills were identified as the additional skills needed by employees, and a package consisting of Kiwi Host and industry-specific guiding training was developed leading to a level 3 National Qualification in Tourism.

“Our staff have to be real and honest and thoroughly enjoy their work...the training makes our service more customer oriented, and a lot more interactive...basically, training is crucial to our success” - David Brennan, Ko Tane

What are the differences between ITOs? What effect does this have on their success in engaging small businesses?

In determining whether small businesses will successfully engage in training, size seemed to be less important than other characteristics, such as business life cycle, industry sector (whether there was a tradition of training, the proportion of small business) and the individual characteristics of business owners and trainees.

The tradition of training in the electrotechnology and hairdressing industries seems to over-ride other factors which make small businesses

²⁴ The Capita group is made up of ITOs involved in construction: this includes BCITO (building and construction), Flooring, Plumbing, Joinery, Furniture, ETITO (electrotechnology) and Infratrain.

difficult to engage with. Electrotechnology requires a qualification for licensing, and for hairdressing it is preferable to have a qualification to practice. While this requires a commitment from the employer and employee for over 3 years to training, employers will commit to it because they did an apprenticeship, and it is seen as necessary for the future of the industry.

There is not the same tradition of training in sectors like tourism and retail; more work is part time, and there is often a perception that jobs in these industries do not lead to careers. This makes it harder for ITOs to engage employers in training, and if they are small, the dispersion of businesses requires a higher proportion of travel and liaison which takes time.

In the hairdressing and boating industries, where the majority of businesses are small and the industries are relatively discrete and homogeneous, it seems that a small number of qualifications and one service model is well suited to the businesses involved. For ITOs that represent a range of sectors, such as ETITO, Competenz and ATTTO, different business models and approaches are required to engage small businesses, whether this is providing more administrative and pastoral support for apprentices and businesses, clustering small businesses together or providing limited credit programmes to initiate engagement in training.

Section 3: Case Studies

In light of the differences of approaches taken by ITOs to meeting the needs of small businesses as illustrated in the themes from the interviews, two case studies have been prepared. The case studies explore training for small businesses organised by ETITO and the Hairdressing ITO.

Electrotechnology Industry Training Organisation Case Study

This case study is informed by interviews held with the CEO in Auckland and the Wellington region Training Manager, and a field visit with the Training Manager to an electrician and his apprentices in Petone in July – August 2005. The electrician visited has 11 staff, 4 of whom are apprentices – 2 in their 4th year and 2 in their 1st year.

Context

ETITO works with the Electrical, Electronics, Call Centre, Telecommunications Security industries and Ambulance. In December 2004 they had 7,212 people engaged in training. In order to cater to such a diverse range of industries, ETITO have developed different service options.

The business models adopted by ETITO are largely based around the average size of businesses within the industries. Industries where the majority of businesses are small such as the electrical industry tend not to have the time or expertise to arrange training for their employees, and therefore ETITO provides a more intensive service. This is done through a centralised administrative system which arranges off job training and monitors and records apprentices' learning.

For larger businesses such as in the manufacturing and call centre industries which have extensive human resources and staff development systems in place, the subsidy goes to the businesses to arrange training.

The Electrical Industry

Background

Because of the large numbers of small businesses in the electrical industry, this case study focuses on training needs and issues for small electrician businesses. In 2001 there were 9,912 people employed as electricians, 95% were working full time, and 99% were male.²⁵

²⁵ Kiwicareers website: Job profile of an Electrician

The electrical industry is characterised by a tradition of apprenticeships with registration as an electrician requiring a National Certificate in Electrical Engineering and a registration exam. This tradition means that there is recognition amongst electricians of the need to train apprentices in order to provide for the future of the industry. It also means that the basics of being an electrician haven't changed much: the fundamentals of applied electricity and physics have stayed the same.

In saying this, changes in technology have altered building construction and manufacturing processes and the increase in the amount of electrical devices in households are changing the ways that electricians operate. This means that the nature of the electrical apprenticeship is also changing; there is more focus on higher level technology skills.

In order to meet future demands ETITO recognise that there is a need to move from a sole focus in apprenticeships on technical skills to equipping electricians with a basis on which to adapt to change:

“Specific technical skills will increasingly have a short shelf life, with the consequence that fundamental underpinning knowledge will become even more important than it has been in the past as the demands increase for workers to become more flexible about where they work, and as the pace of product development increasingly makes highly specific technical skills regularly obsolete.”²⁶

New Zealand has recently experienced a construction boom, and a general shortage of trades people has had an impact on the sector.²⁷ Because of the increased demand for electrical services and the lack of skilled staff, electricians are busier and more small businesses are taking on apprentices. The amount of work available has also meant that electrical labourers have become more common. This situation may be easing, as the Department of Labour's July 2005 Job Vacancy monitor reported that there has been a drop in demand for jobs in the electrical and electronics occupations.

²⁶ WEB Research Ltd, Competency International Ltd and Marilyn Davies and Associates, *Future Skills Report*, ETITO, 2003

²⁷ The Department of Labour's Skills in the Labour Market June 2005 report found that 54% of electrician job vacancies were filled with adequately experienced people within 6 weeks of advertising. Electricians are also on the Immigration Service's long term skill shortages list

Electrical small businesses and training

What's different about small businesses

According to the CEO, working with small businesses is expensive and labour intensive, because they need more support. Their commitment to training varies over time, and they can make poor recruitment decisions. With small businesses it takes the boss's commitment for training to work. Because there is a tradition of apprenticeships in the electrical industry, businesses are more likely to support training regardless of size.

Small businesses require a more hands on approach, so the Training Managers visit each business once or twice a year to see how things are going, or to explain changing assessment requirements. Another observation was that small businesses like to see people from ETITO.

When dealing with electricians on a day to day basis, there is a need for flexibility, particularly during busy times - training visits need to work in with this. The Training Manager felt he had a good relationship with small businesses in the electrical industry, because people are happy for training to be taking place.

Barriers to training for small businesses

Barriers to training for small electrical businesses include:

- money and time;
- fear of apprentices being poached;
- recruitment difficulties; and
- training systems can be complicated and difficult to understand for employers new to training.

The opportunity cost of having workers and workplace assessors less productive was mentioned, but it was also observed that this happens when taking on new staff regardless of whether they are in training or not. Due to skill shortages, at the time of the interviews 600 businesses have taken on new apprentices in 2005. This illustrates the necessity in the electrical industry for training new people to keep up with the demand for work. The high volume of work puts pressure on electricians, and this means that it can be hard to provide an effective on-job learning environment when they have to rush through jobs. This also means there is potential for conflict between managers and apprentices, with the manager prioritising getting through the work, which an apprentice may feel will be happening at the expense of their training.

Tight margins mean training can be seen as a cost rather than an investment. The level of commitment required for an apprenticeship (3 ½ years) can be difficult for small businesses. However they train because they know that it is necessary for the industry.

Poaching of apprentices and employees going overseas was raised, but there also seems to be an acceptance that some apprentices will leave soon after their training in order to broaden their experience, and if the business they trained with is good, they will come back.

Fitting in with the culture of electricians – an individualised approach

In order for small electrical businesses to buy into the training, ETITO leverages off the apprenticeship tradition. “Sparkies embrace new technology but rebel against new ways of doing things.” (ETITO Training Manager) This involves matching the culture of the industry, by providing workbooks that look like electricians’ documentation, and interpreting unit standards into simpler language.

With small businesses, the relationship with the Training Manager involves a high level of trust. When it comes to the day to day interface with businesses, the approach will differ as no two businesses are alike. With small businesses this often comes down to the personality of the manager. Because of the established apprenticeship culture, some employers do not like interference, so visits will focus on the off-job elements of training. Others will look for advice on a broader range of issues, including running the business.

A qualification built off a training tradition

To work as an electrician requires registration and while the fundamentals of the electrician’s qualification have not changed, reviews are undertaken to keep up with technology and regulation changes. ETITO are working on a new qualification, with the aim of making it more flexible. National Certificates are becoming more accepted, but in practice, some electricians will not sign off on an apprentice as achieving competency until they have served a period of time, reflecting how the old apprenticeship system worked.

Industries are involved in the development of qualifications, and ETITO have advisory groups that provide ongoing feedback on qualifications. “They tell us if the training is relevant or not.” (ETITO Training Manager) When asked about the relevance of the qualification, the employer spoken to felt that it provided a good theoretical basis for working as an electrician.

There is only one form of registration, however the types of work electricians do varies, and some may not do everything they are taught in their qualification. Not all of the qualification will be relevant to people’s day to day work in a small business, and while some employers will see

that a broad range of skills is needed to be a versatile electrician, others will take the more resigned attitude of, “well I had to do it, so you do to”.

Directions for the future

As well as increasing the numbers of people engaged in training, ETITO is focusing on the success of trainees and providing for an excellent training experience. ETITO are also looking to work on how to provide for more tailored learning within small businesses. Another shift that is happening is moving from a focus on the apprentices to the whole business, so that the business is supported to get the most out of training.

Discussion

ETITO was very much focused on serving their industries, regardless of the size of the businesses within them. Rather than seeing small businesses as a problem, there was an emphasis on providing models that worked for small businesses, recognising their need for more interaction and support.

For a large part of the interviews the focus was on the nature of the electrical industry, including the tradition of apprenticeships, suggesting that this has a bigger impact on engagement in training and the responses that ETITO provide than the size of the businesses. The training that ETITO organises for the electrical industry is very much focused on the initial qualification required to become a registered electrician.

To some extent the barriers to training for small electrical businesses are overcome by the belief that training is a necessity for the future of the industry, which is partly based on the long tradition of apprenticeships. In small businesses, much relies on the commitment of the employer both to support their apprentices, and to believe that training will pay off in the long run.

Hairdressing Industry Training Organisation

Case Study

Information about small businesses and the Hairdressing ITO (HITO) was gathered through an interview with the CEO of HITO in August followed up by accompanying the central Sales and Liaison Manager to visit a hairdressing and beauty services salon signing up an apprentice in Petone. Background information is also provided from HITO's 2004 Annual Report and draft 2006-08 Profile.

Context

HITO's mission is to establish and maintain the achievement of high quality, relevant hairdressing qualifications, and see this as an essential investment for the industry and its clients.

In order to do this, HITO regularly visits and provides advice to employers and apprentices, moderates assessment towards qualifications, ensures qualifications meet industry needs and produces training related materials. They are also beginning to help match employers and apprentices.

In December 2004, HITO had 1,331 hairdressing trainees, 92% of which were women. The majority are working towards the National Certificate in Hairdressing Practice, with a smaller number working towards the National Certificate in Barbering. These qualifications are aimed towards people entering the industry. Because of the number of small businesses in hairdressing, HITO has identified a need for salon owners to improve their management skills and is working on promoting the National Certificate in Management qualification and developing a limited credit programme.

The Hairdressing Industry

Background

Hairdressing is a relatively discrete service industry, and has a long tradition of apprenticeships. The sector is experiencing a period of growth, with increasing numbers of employed hairdressers and growth in client expenditure, particularly among people aged 45-64. The hairdressing industry has a high proportion of employers (17%) and self-employed people (22%) and the majority of hairdressing businesses are small: the average size is 2.9 employees. Other characteristics include low wages, and high turnover of staff.

HITO's CEO noted that there is a perception among hairdressing businesses that business is getting tougher: compliance costs, legislative changes around employment and low profit margins are meaning that employers are selling up. There is also a trend among employers for taking on apprentices with no previous experience.

Differences and similarities by business size

In hairdressing, a small business is thought of as having 3 or less employees, while larger ones will have 10 or more. For HITO, the main distinction between a small business and a larger one will be around who they interact with. With small businesses, this will be with the owner, and with larger ones, it will be with a trainer (i.e. a senior stylist in the salon who supervises an apprentice's training).

Making time to meet with owners is more difficult, and HITO are often more involved in supporting the implementation of training plans when the owner is the main contact rather than a trainer. While working with smaller businesses often requires more work, seeing a successful apprenticeship is satisfying: particularly when a business owner has training systems in place, and closely follows their apprentice's progress. The Sales and Liaison Manager emphasised that size is less important than having the right mix of a motivated apprentice, and a supportive work environment.

The size of the hairdressing business impacts on the breadth of skills, the amount of staff movement, and career opportunities. There tends to be more turnover in larger salons, and a person moving on does not have the same impact as in a smaller salon, where someone leaving and taking their clients can be devastating. While there are not always the same career progression prospects in smaller salons, there may be the option of going into partnership with the owner. In the salon visited, there were 11 staff including beauticians and the employer mentioned that the broad range of clients will provide variety for her new apprentice.

Barriers to training

A barrier for HITO is that a number of hairdressers do not know about HITO or what they do. While there is a tradition of apprenticeships in hairdressing, the expansion of learning options available to potential hairdressers and employers can be confusing. Another issue is fear – a trainer may not be sure what to do, or an employer may have had bad past experience with an apprentice or unresponsive training.

The cost of signing people on can also deter people from engaging, as can the view that an apprentice is an outlay rather than an asset. Most businesses are time poor – they want support from HITO but they are often not sure what they want support for. Finding the right person to sign on as an apprentice can also be difficult.

Maintaining quality and relevance in hairdressing qualifications

The hairdressing qualification is comprehensive, covering: communication, first aid, health and safety, retail skills, as well as specific hairdressing skills. It is therefore very much focused on providing entry level

hairdressers with everything they need to work in a small business. Keeping the qualification relevant is done by spending time out in the field and monitoring what's happening in salons: this helps HITO to figure out what works best for organisations.

One of the issues with the qualification is that it is not particularly flexible, it takes 3 and a half years to complete, and apprentices are required to follow a set path. Some will not be able to keep up, because their work in the salon will involve only a narrow range of tasks, for others, it may be that they want to finish earlier, which has to be arranged in discussion with HITO and the employer.

Good relationships with employers and apprentices

Hairdressing businesses share similarities, but each one is dealt with on a case by case basis, and more time will be given to those who need it. Often employers come to HITO for employee relations advice and while in the past HITO have not wanted to interfere, they have started to provide some information on employment issues to employers. This includes basic entitlements (i.e. around the minimum wage, and providing good working conditions) and HITO have published an employment agreement suitable for apprentices/trainees in the hairdressing industry.

In order to form good relationships with small businesses, HITO emphasises that it is the basic things that work. Fitting in around businesses needs can involve simple things like making appointments to visit, finding out through conversations what people do not know and filling the gaps and breaking up information into bite size pieces. Employers may also ask broader questions about the education and training system, and HITO see part of their service role as being able to answer them.

HITO also highlighted the importance of the relationship between the apprentice and employer for training to work, which will often depend on the individuals involved. The motivation of the apprentice is vital to their success, particularly in getting through the second year of training, which is when they are most likely to terminate their apprenticeship. It is important that the employer provides an environment which is conducive to success, including making available the range equipment needed to undertake the qualification, and supporting both the off-job and on-job elements of training. There was enthusiasm and encouragement for the new apprentice at the salon in Petone, who had the support of her employer and mother.

Spreading the news about training in the Hairdressing industry

The benefits of undertaking training are illustrated by HITO through publication of good news stories on their website and in newsletters: they have developed one for apprentices and one for employers. HITO sent a brochure for employers explaining the benefits of training with a

Hairdressing Association mail-out to all salons, which has received a positive response from employers. HITO also raises its profile by writing articles for hairdressing magazines that cover aspects of the business and how training can improve retention of staff and lift the quality of service.

While written material is successful up to a point, the most effective way to engage small businesses is to go and talk to them. HITO likes to stay in touch with what is happening in salons, and one approach is to have their sales and liaison managers go on collective visits to salons with tutors who teach the apprentices when at off job training. They have found that employers really like to see a collaborative approach.

Future Directions

While the last four years has seen significant growth in provider based hairdressing training in institutes of technology and polytechnics and private training enterprises, there has in the last year been an increase in the number of employers signing on apprentices with no previous experience. HITO see this as a sign of a return to workbased learning as the preferred model of hairdresser training. When asked why she chose to do an apprenticeship, the hairdressing apprentice mentioned getting a better idea of the environment and the opportunity to talk with clients.

Management and human resources training for employers is an area where HITO is planning to be more involved in the future, and as well as promoting the National Certificate in Hairdressing Management is planning developing limited credit programmes in management and hairdressing for experienced hairdressers.

Discussion

The majority of hairdressing businesses are small, and therefore HITO's facilitation of training takes into account the need for more contact with business owners and apprentices.

Hairdressing has a tradition of apprenticeships, and so salon owners who have gone through this form of training will take on an apprentice themselves. There is always a tension between seeing apprentices as a cost, and seeing the value they can add. The salon owner spoken to felt that having an apprentice provides her with support to grow her business and to carry out particular services in the salon.

While the majority of HITO's training is focused on providing people entering hairdressing with the technical and generic skills needed to work in a salon, there is also recognition of the need for experienced hairdressers and owners to develop their management skills. This is necessary in order to understand their market and work to their strengths as well as providing good employment conditions that encourage staff retention.

Lack of awareness of training will continue to be a challenge for HITO: the number of businesses and the fact that they are spread evenly around the country makes them difficult to get to. Lifting the profile of training requires continual provision of high quality service and maintaining relevant qualifications, communication through industry and employer associations and publication of material, as well as ongoing contact and site visits with salons.

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