

2015 Westpac Work Inspiration Pilot – Case Study

Pilot background

Work Inspiration is an interactive work exploration model for school students and employers. The model aims to make young peoples' first experience in the workplace more meaningful and inspirational in order to raise their ambitions and aspirations. Work Inspiration is an employer-led initiative, offering an opportunity for students to learn about employment in a way that is unique from other, more traditional, work placement opportunities.

In 2015, Careers New Zealand (CNZ) acquired the license to deliver the Work Inspiration programme in New Zealand. CNZ and Westpac Bank successfully undertook a pilot with a small group of participants to assess the viability of the approach with Westpac bank in Christchurch in September 2014. For the second pilot of the program, CNZ collaborated again with Westpac bank in Christchurch. Eleven students from three schools, Linwood College, Burnside High School and Hornby High School, participated in the pilot.

The programme

The schools varied in the processes they used to select the students, due to variation in school roll sizes. Regardless of the selection method, the individual students selected for the second Work Inspiration pilot were perceived by schools young people who are reliable, who would benefit the most from the project, and who would be the most interested.

The Westpac Work Inspiration pilot took place over four days and included various activities and resources. All students received the Work Inspiration toolkit¹, a collection of workbooks which provided guidance for the placement as a whole as well as exercises for students to complete. As part of the program, the students interviewed various staff members from across the organisation to learn about their individual career journeys and about their role. Through the pilot programme, Westpac provided the chance for the young people to learn about different employment opportunities from Westpac's business.

At the end of the project, within a week of completing the four day placement, all students gave presentations to the other participants, their families, CNZ, school, community and Westpac stakeholders, outlining their ideas for Westpac in 2020.

¹ The workbooks were: Insight 1, Insight 2, Insight 3, and a student placement book

Key Successes of the Westpac Work Inspiration Pilot

Allen + Clarke² were contracted to undertake an evaluation of the pilot to identify what worked well in the Westpac Work Inspiration Pilot to inform and support the nationwide rollout of the programme. Key successes of the pilot were:

Students learned about themselves

The different parts of the Work Inspiration Pilot helped students learn more about themselves. This included becoming more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and understanding their personalities. Students improved their sense of self, and as a consequence, were in a better position to think about where they wanted to go.

One student had no idea what she wanted to do with her future, and felt that her career goals were too far-fetched. She learned a lot about herself and how she can work. Work Inspiration made her future seem brighter, she is more relaxed about her career options, she wants to work harder in class and understands that she can start “small” and do lots of different jobs to set her up on her way.

Students developed useful skills and built knowledge

Students developed useful skills during their Work Inspiration placements. These skills included: working with Westpac staff, and talking with customers in a bank branch; better public speaking and communication; leadership and how to be more focused with their work. Students also developed time management skills and strengthened their listening skills and concentration. They said that the skills learned could be applied in any workplace.

Students developed skills through training for working in a branch, including showing customers the new technology such as Smart ATMs and mobile phone apps, fundraising for the chopper appeal, interviewing Westpac staff and giving presentations at the end of the placements.

A student said that she used to lack confidence, and was shy and nervous around people. Work Inspiration helped to boost her confidence in her inner self, particularly when she had to give a speech for the presentation at the end of the placement.

² Allen and Clarke Policy and Regulatory Specialists Limited, trading as *Allen + Clarke*

Relationship between CNZ, Westpac and schools

The relationship between CNZ, schools and Westpac underwent a significant change due to Work Inspiration. Work Inspiration took a different approach to other work experience initiatives that were facilitated through secondary schools, in that it was led by Westpac, rather than by the school. The commitment, investment, and leadership demonstrated by CNZ and by Westpac in developing and piloting Work Inspiration was a key factor that led to the establishment of this relationship.

A Head of Department at a school said that the developing relationships (between Westpac and schools) have huge potential, particularly due to buy-in from the employer, because it can be quite difficult to place students in work experience. Work Inspiration helped to facilitate these relationships.

Students developed and built confidence

Students had developed or built confidence as a result of participating in the Work Inspiration pilot. Generally, students were more confident with public speaking and talking with groups of people. Students' confidence levels lifted and grew through the course of the time in the Westpac branch.

A Westpac employee noticed the evolution of students over the four day Work Inspiration placement. He said that before Work Inspiration, students had a limited knowledge of banking and workplaces and some schools lacked resources and opportunities. When the students presented their ideas at the end of Work Inspiration, he could see how they demonstrated new knowledge and understanding of Westpac's business through their ideas.

Students learned about working in an organisation or company

Students gained information about what it was like to work for an organisation, including learning about the different job roles at Westpac, learning that jobs at a bank include more than being a bank teller. Students learned this information through being in the work environment at Westpac: attending an induction, interviewing Westpac staff, and working in the Westpac branches. Westpac staff noted that students asked "really good" questions during interviews, about "things we take for granted" in the workplace, demonstrating student engagement with the information they were learning. Westpac staff also noted that students demonstrated their understanding of the business through the ideas shared in their presentations.

A Careers Advisor saw improvements in communication and literacy of the students who participated in Work Inspiration. The students were required to give a presentation, and were supported by their peers, families, Westpac and school staff.

Career choices and decision making for students was influenced

A number of the students said that taking part in the Work Inspiration pilot had influenced their career choices and had given them more insight into what they felt they could do for their individual careers or career paths. This included learning more about different school subjects they could take to help them in their journeys, the kinds of qualifications they could take when they finish school, and how different job roles could suit their personalities more appropriately, or may be more realistic, than their original career choices. Work Inspiration created a connection between school and the world of work, or theory and practice, and identified some jobs as an option for them.

A student wanted to be a Chartered Accountant. Through her involvement in Work Inspiration, in particular the 'All About Me' personality exercise, she realised that being a Chartered Accountant may not suit her personality. Work Inspiration made her think about other options she might have for a career.

Impact on students and community

Work Inspiration had a positive impact on students' lives, and students, their parents, and school staff also gave positive feedback around their involvement and engagement in the pilot. Westpac staff talked about the relationships they had developed with students to inspire and motivate them to make decisions about their future and careers; as well as the positive feedback they received from their staff members at Westpac branches about the students. Giving students from different communities, ethnicities and backgrounds the opportunity to be involved in Work Inspiration has the potential to have a wide community impact.

A Business Analyst at Westpac said that it was important for Westpac to be in Work Inspiration and work experience opportunities. He said that finance can be challenging for certain communities, and that students who did Work Inspiration could spread the word that banking is not scary and a good job opportunity.