

Future Proofing Timaru's Workforce

TO  WARDS
2050



Can a balanced approach to workforce and education planning ensure we're ready to meet the needs of both today's economy and the decades ahead?

Timaru's future success will be shaped by how well we nurture a workforce that draws on the strengths of all generations. A balanced approach, one that values the experience and knowledge of older workers while empowering the next generation with new skills and opportunities will ensure we're ready to meet the needs of both today's economy and the decades ahead.

A report released by Infometrics earlier this year highlighted how workforce participation has grown significantly over the past 30 years, particularly among women and older workers. Participation among women aged 15–64 has risen from 64% in 1994 to 79% in 2024, reflecting lower fertility rates and more women returning to work after having children. At the same time, many older people are continuing to work beyond 65, driven by better health, increased life expectancy, the rising cost of living, and a desire to stay engaged and contribute. These shifts have brought real strength to the labour force, but they can't continue at the same pace forever. As the population continues to age, participation rates are likely to level out, creating new challenges for future workforce growth.

To stay ahead, Timaru needs to take a proactive and balanced approach, investing in a workforce that can evolve with the changing times. Supporting flexibility, lifelong learning, and retraining helps older workers remain connected and valued, while accommodating the changing dynamics of modern families, including support for both mums and dads balancing parenting with work.

Equally important is our focus on younger people. Although Timaru has a lower rate of NEETs (young people not in employment, education, or training) than the national average, this highlights an opportunity to unlock untapped potential. Reducing this rate further could help ensure meaningful pathways and roles for all youth. Providing access to education-to-employment programs, apprenticeships, internships, and mentoring builds not only skills but also confidence and belonging. Leadership development opportunities can prepare young people to take on future roles in both our economy and community.

Supporting our future workforce also means preparing them for success in both traditional and emerging industries. Timaru's established and diverse sectors across the likes of agriculture, processing and manufacturing, trades, education and logistics remain central to our identity and economy. But these industries are changing, and with the right investment in innovation, sustainability, and digital tools, they have the potential to lead growth and create new markets. At the same time, sectors such as agritech, healthcare, and digital services are expanding and new sectors such as aerospace and screen are emerging – all offering promising opportunities for new jobs and careers.

A key part of this transition will be growing the number of highly skilled roles across both emerging and established industries. By focusing on professional and technical services, we can diversify and future-proof our economy. These roles are vital to driving innovation, improving productivity, and supporting the broader success of local businesses, particularly as industries become more interconnected and technology-driven.

As our community becomes increasingly diverse, embracing that diversity within the workforce will help spark innovation and fresh perspectives. Inclusive pathways to leadership and fair access to training ensure everyone, regardless of age, background, or experience has the opportunity to contribute and thrive.

By drawing on the strengths of all generations, leveraging our existing capabilities, and embracing change, Timaru can build a resilient and inclusive workforce, one that honours our past, meets today's needs, and sets a strong foundation for a thriving future.

Voice of the community – Leonie Rasmussen



Innovating workforce & education solutions

Empowering the next generation with relevant skills and opportunities is central to creating a workforce ready for both today's demands and tomorrow's challenges. At Ara, we ensure our programmes reflect industry needs by continuously reviewing and updating our offerings. For example, our mechanical engineering programme now features computerised input equipment that enhances precision in cutting and folding sheet metal. By teaching these digital and software-based skills, we help students succeed in an industry shifting from traditional manual methods to more technologically advanced systems.

We're also innovating how education is delivered. Our Diploma in Primary Industries is offered virtually, enabling rural workers and farmers across the South Island to access leadership and business training without needing to relocate. This accessibility is part of a broader shift towards flexible, work-based education.

The "learning and earning" model is a proven approach in vocational education or apprenticeships allowing individuals to upskill with NZQA-recognised qualifications while working. This model creates the opportunity to quickly acquire real-life, workplace skills that can lead to employment. Earning while learning reduces the financial burden of student loans and can enable young people to achieve financial independence sooner.

Ara also has experience in evaluating on-the-job training programmes and developing pathways for gaining recognised credentials. An example is our collaboration with a significant laboratory science company to provide the Level 5 NZ Diploma in Applied Science (Pre-Analytical Technician Pathway) for them online. This award-winning programme improved workplace retention and enabled entry-level employees to gain a recognised qualification.

Initiatives such as sector/taster days, dual-enrolment options, and our upcoming Open Day on June 12 help students explore career pathways, make informed decisions, and gain early exposure to training and employment opportunities.

Let's shape Timaru's future together.

The Towards 2050 plan is about more than just infrastructure or workforce development, it's about building a community where everyone can thrive. From creating meaningful career opportunities and expanding local businesses to fostering social cohesion and environmental sustainability, this plan is designed to support every resident in Timaru.

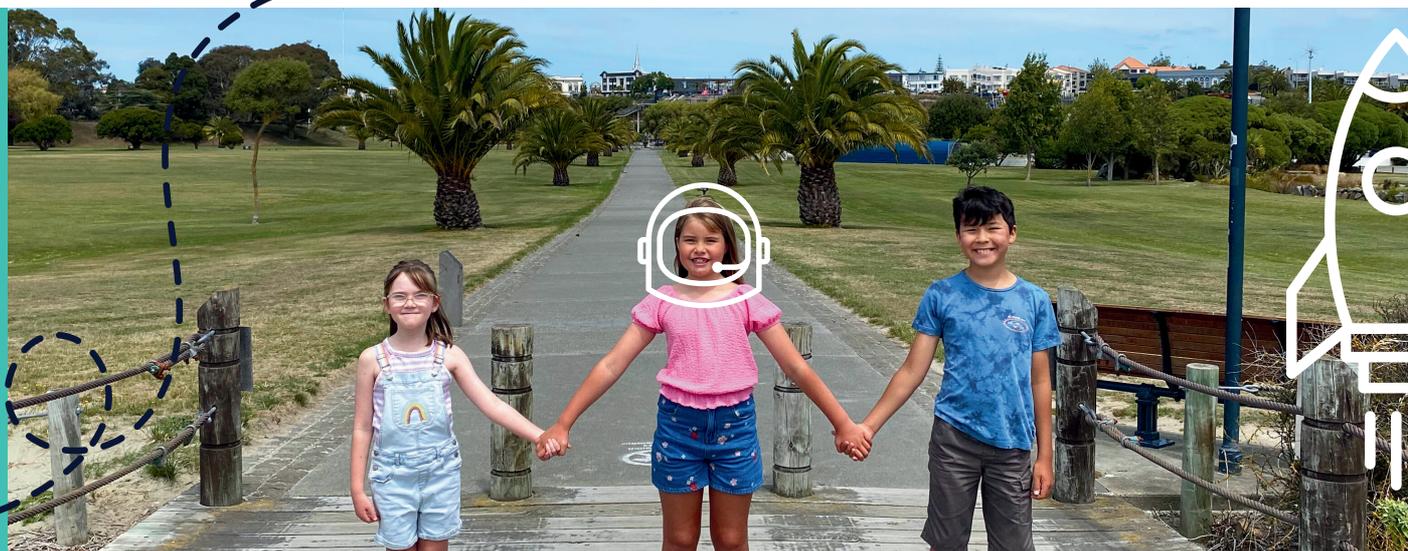
Your voice is key to ensuring our district remains sustainable, innovative, and prosperous for generations to come. Take part in the survey and help us build a brighter future for all – now and for those who will call Timaru home in the years ahead.

Help Develop: An Aspirational Vision for 2050.

Take the survey



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