

Tomorrow's Workforce Award Entrant: The Treasury – Te Kaitohutohu Kaupapa Rawa



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545451/48329dc60e>

In 2007, every graduate analyst employed at The Treasury identified as a New Zealand European. In 2017, the final 20 applicants for the intake are 20 per cent Māori, 15 per cent Asian and five per cent Pasifika. And of the remaining European candidates, three are from new migrant families or are foreign nationals.

The huge shift in demographics hasn't come about by chance. Reforms to address the diversity of recruitment began in the late 2000s, following prompting from the Secretary to the Treasury and Chief Executive Gabriel Makhoulf, and with support from the executive leadership team, and implemented by the organisation's Human Resources team.

The Treasury receives a staggering 880 applications each year to fill just 10-12 graduate analyst positions and 12 summer internships. In 2007 the graduates not only all identified as NZ European but 80 per cent had an economics major. These were talented young people, but New Zealand was becoming more diverse and the Treasury had to ask itself some hard questions:

Did it appeal to diverse communities? Did it value difference? And was it placing too high a value on too narrow a path to the Treasury?

As a 'good employer' required under legislation, the Treasury is bound to ask these questions of itself. But also, as an organisation that values freedom of the individual, they

were not willing to risk recruitment methods that may place unfair barriers to excellent talent joining their ranks.

In response to those hard questions, the Treasury took three approaches to achieve greater diversity in recruitment.

Firstly Treasury broadened its reach through school visits and engaging cultural groups on campuses. It became apparent that, “for no reason other than habit,” Treasury was visiting set universities and not others. This was expanded and graduate analysts were also asked to travel to high schools it had previously not connected to.

Secondly it introduced blind applications to reduce unconscious bias within the selection process. This meant that applicants now filled in online forms. Information like gender, ethnicity, grade average and university attended were redacted so that selection panellists focussed on core considerations, including relationship skills, economic capability, ability to think with empathy and responses to the policy questions.

And finally it recognised that community involvement brings unique skills and that economic capability doesn't always require an economics qualification. Eighty percent of the 2016 graduate analysts have an economics major or minor as part of a more complex set of qualifications, including law, politics, international relations, planning, Māori studies, and more. These skills enhance their abilities and bring in more perspectives to improve the advice that the Treasury brings to the government of the day.

Changing its recruitment process has had a major impact on the diversity of thinking from graduate analysts. They are, as a group, more ethnically diverse, broader in their qualifications, and from different backgrounds.

The graduate analyst recruitment reforms have been highly supported by the senior leaders at the Treasury who view it as a crucial component of creating a more diverse and inclusive Treasury. These leaders set the strategy and allocate the resourcing to implement the changes. The most recent reforms have been undertaken by Laura Baird in the human resources team who is responsible for graduate and internship programmes. Her efforts were acknowledged in the Treasury entry.

The Treasury has also worked hard to include young perspectives in important decision making. This involved running annual workshops with the McGuinness Institute (a privately funded, non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future), committing the time of its officials who ranged from graduate analysts to the Secretary to the Treasury.

The topics are never simple. In 2016 the workshop entitled ‘Foresight NZ’ asked groups of 20 to 50 diverse 18 to 25-year-olds to focus on the future New Zealand they wanted. Their insights will directly influence the Treasury’s work on the challenges and opportunities for NZ’s economic performance and long-term fiscal sustainability. The workshop has the support of the Treasury’s executive leadership team – in particular Girol Karacaoglu (Chief Economist) and Bill Moran (Chief Operating Officer) who wanted to see more diverse perspectives in our policy development.

The workshops are described as being not “tick-box exercises.” They are direct methods to include the inspired and insightful thoughts of young people in the policies that impact them and their future.

New staff at the Treasury are welcomed into Ngā Mokopuna a Tāne – the Treasury wharenuī – that was awakened in 1994. The wharenuī houses tukutuku, kowhaiwhai and carvings that honour tipuna who represent the history of New Zealand such as Tāne, Kupe, James Cook and Sir Apirana Ngata. These people provide a link to all New Zealanders and, for Treasury officials, forms the basis of the wharenuī as their place to stand. It is the heart of the Treasury, and hosts significant events right through to being a place to rest, sing and learn kapa haka.

Lastly, the Treasury provided quotes that demonstrated the perspectives of many employees, including graduate analyst Ngahuia Leighton. Ngahuia joined Treasury in 2015. She is of Ngāti Awa descent and has a Bachelor degree in accounting, taxation and commercial law and work experience in an iwi and government funded social and health service provider near her home town of Whakatāne.

As an intern, Ngahuia participated in the 2013 workshop that helped develop the Treasury’s living standards framework.

“I was asked to be a facilitator for the 2013 workshop when I was an intern fresh to the Treasury and to public policy altogether. It was a fantastic experience because it gave us the opportunity to fill our kete with knowledge from economists and experts in housing, in resource management and on the ‘brain-drain’ as just a few examples.”

“Then, when our kete was full-to-bursting, we unpacked the issues and, as a passionate and opinionated group of people working under immense time pressure on very challenging issues, we brought them all together.”

“I was so proud of the quality of our work and I learned so many new skills and insights about how to work with others to get the most from everybody, to challenge each other and to collaborate with each other. It excited me about the difference the public sector can make when it works like this.”