

Supporting current and future skills needs in the Waikato region: A Futures Academy



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Date: November 2023

CONTENTS

CONTENTS	2
Background	3
Definitions	3
Situational analysis	5
Examples of Future Academies or similar concepts	6
Key challenges for the Food and Fibre industry within the Waikato region	7
Stakeholder feedback on the need for a Futures Academy	8
Introduction	8
Summary	16
Benefits and Challenges of establishing a Futures Academy	17
Conclusions	19
Appendix One	20
Case Study: Growing Future Farmers (GFF)	20
Case Study: Agribusiness in Schools - Cultivating Future Leaders in New Zealand's Primary Sector	21

Background

The Waikato Regional Skills Leadership Group (RSLG) is one of 15 RSLGs established around the New Zealand as part of the Reform of Vocational Education.

Since their establishment in 2020 these groups have gathered intelligence and insights into the skills and training priorities to support their individual region to meet its workforce needs.

All RSLGs released their regional workforce plans by the end of 2021 containing a range of actions to progress social and economic priorities in regions. These include identifying priority industries, skills and training initiatives, and key partners and stakeholders to progress the actions and solutions identified in the workplan. Each plan contains priority actions that once met, will provide positive outcomes for the region.

Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence (Food and Fibre CoVE) is working alongside the Waikato RSLG to help implement one of these actions:¹

Action

Establish the Waikato Futures Academy that supports both current and future skill needs of the primary industries and added value manufacturing sectors, including Agritech, Biotech, Agribusiness, Environmental and Future Foods capabilities.

This report provides a short summary of findings from a national and international environmental scan². It offers an evidential basis for the Waikato RSLG to consider when designing their own Futures Academy. It draws strongly from analysis undertaken for the Hawke's Bay RSLG to inform the development of an education co-lab hub for their region. This report will be made available for all RSLGs and organisations to help inform their thinking into the establishment of similar Hubs around the country.

Definitions

The workplace is a constantly changing environment, driven by labour-market pressures, government policy, climate change, global impacts, and new emerging technologies. These constant changes present ongoing challenges when it comes to workforce planning and will continue to transform how we work over the next five, 10, 20+ years.

To respond to these changes, central and local government as well as sector organisations need to consider how best to prepare and support their workforce, employers, and industry to meet these challenges.

¹ <https://foodandfibrecove.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Literature-review-of-International-and-Domestic-Co-lab-Hubs-FINAL.pdf>

² An activity taken to understand the overall dynamics of the external environment. For example, trends, sizes, demographics, economics, resources, environment, technology, politics, culture, and competition.

Developing a ‘Futures Academy’ or similar is one vehicle through which these issues and others can possibly be addressed.

Identifying a definitive definition for ‘Education Hubs’, ‘Future Academies’, ‘Skills Institutes’, ‘Innovation Parks’ etc is a difficult task as they tend to share similar functions and purposes with definitions for each often being used interchangeably. Furthermore, there is also no ‘one-size fits all’ as they tend to be designed to meet local factors, priorities and needs which vary from country to country, and region to region.

For the purposes of this paper however, we have provided our understanding of different models with the aim of establishing a working definition. This will also assist the Waikato RSLG with determining which model may best fit their required outcomes.

Feature	Future Academy	Education and Employment Hub	Skills Institute
Focus	Preparing people for the future of work and supporting the development of skills necessary to support businesses now and in the future.	Providing learners with the skills they need to succeed in their current jobs, pre- employment services, job seeker services, linking learners to providers, employers and vice versa, career guidance, advice, and support.	Preparing people to work within the trades industry and providing upskilling opportunities for those already employed in the industry.
Curriculum	Futures-focused, with a focus on emerging technologies and new skills acquisition.	Job-specific, with a focus on the skills needed for current occupations, pre-employment training, advice, and guidance.	Job-specific focused on key competencies and skill acquisition for the trades-based work.
Service	Skill development, training in emerging technologies/methods, future focused learning, upskilling. Links job seekers, employees, employers, businesses, industry, and research and development.	Pre-employment skills training, job seeking, career guidance, advice, and information. Links learners, jobseekers, schools, industry, and employers/businesses.	Skill and competency development, links to employers, and sharing best industry practice.
Delivery Methods	Blended learning, with a mix of online and in-person learning. Can also be a virtual space supported by online services.	Online learning, with some in-person support. Career and information services both onsite in physical locations and online.	Blended learning, with an emphasis on face to face supported by online learning.
Target Audience	People who are interested in future-focused careers. Businesses looking to upskill current employees, engaging in latest methods and tech. Businesses looking to develop and grow.	Learners who are looking for employment, or to upskill or reskill for their current jobs. Employers seeking employees, and information for community organisations.	People who are interested or already working in the trades industry. Apprentices and those already employed looking to upskill.

Considering these descriptions, a Futures Academy tends to focus on preparing learners for the future of work and identifying new innovations and trends, while an Education and Employment Hub is focused on providing learners with the skills they need to succeed in their current jobs and support them to be work-ready. Skills Institutes are mostly aimed at supporting people within the trades sector.

Furthermore, Futures Academies may be more likely to offer services that are designed to help learners develop entrepreneurial skills, while Education Hubs and Skills Institutes are more likely to offer programs and services that are designed to help learners advance their careers within a particular organisation, industry, or sector.

Situational analysis

As part of the Hawke's Bay Workforce Development Plan the Hawke's Bay RSLG in partnership with Food and Fibre CoVE, undertook research in the form of a literature review into Education Hubs. It evaluated the impact of Hubs on education and employment outcomes with a view to informing the establishment of a Hub (physical or virtual) for the Hawke's Bay region.

The report provided an overview of how Education Hubs have been used within New Zealand and around the world.

Overall, the literature review found there was very little empirical evidence as to the effectiveness of Hubs in terms of how well they encouraged people into training and employment and benefits they provide to employers, educators, and industry. This isn't to say that Hubs aren't effective, just that there are little formal evaluations of their impact.

Where evaluation did exist, it found that:

- a physical onsite location was important for employers and employees to drop in and discuss their needs with someone at the Hub.
- onsite training is seen as important by employers and employees. This meant employees weren't required to leave the workplace and thus reduced costs.
- Hub staff do the lead-in work and pre-employment screening for employers. This takes the burden off employers and reduces their costs.
- formalised credentials were seen as a nice to have but not essential – employers were after 'just in time' skills.
- a clear understanding of the local labour needs, employment sustainability and available career pathways was seen as essential.
- To measure the impact and outcomes of a Hub, data needs to be collected from the Hubs inception.
- a strong, joined up whole-of-government approach to the high-level operation of the Hub and strategic direction. This provides sufficient overarching support while allowing for local implementation.
- a neutral coordinator runs the operational 'on the ground' aspects of the Hub. This coordinator provides a focus point for relationships with industry and sub-contractors outside of the individual government entities.
- strong links to and relationships with the local community – employers, schools, providers, other partners, and stakeholders.
- a consistent and single funding source exists.

- there was little distinction between physical or virtual Hubs.

Research undertaken for the Hawke's Bay RSLG was focussed on Hubs as a means of connecting employees, employers, and industry to support current workforce needs and to ensure a pipeline of labour to support existing industries.

While this is also useful in the design and development of a Futures Academy for the Waikato, consideration of how an Academy might encourage future skills, innovation and development is also of value.

With this in mind, we have undertaken supplementary research into future focussed academies or similar organisations. A brief overview of these organisations is provided below.

Examples of Future Academies or similar concepts

VU RISE Victoria University, Melbourne

[VU RISE](#) (Recover, Innovate, Sustain, Evolve) is an initiative created by Victoria University as an innovative research initiative as part of their response to assist with COVID-19 recovery.

It is aimed at improving the west of Melbourne's long-term productivity and workforce needs and supporting economic and social development.

VU RISE is made up of four innovation hubs that undertake research projects selected for their impact:

- Stronger Communities
- Sustainable Futures
- Education
- Jobs and Skills.

These Hubs conduct research in partnership with industry, the local community and government in the west of Melbourne and aim to create initiatives that support new products, business ideas, grow the economy and support the community.

VU RISE doesn't act as an employment centre or hub aimed at connecting employees and employers, but it does provide research that supports future thinking and growth within the Melbourne area.

Dubai Futures Academy

[Dubai Futures Academy](#) is a knowledge hub aimed at creating learning opportunities and testing new ideas to support future thinking. They collaborate with education providers and industry to identify new and emerging trends and build partnerships with world-leading experts to design, test and develop those ideas.

The Academy's work is focussed around three pillars - Futures Literacy, Futures Technologies, and Futures Methodologies. It aims to be the global leader in sustainable innovation for the future using education and training as a practical means of disseminating and implementing their findings.

While Dubai Futures Academy is not an 'education hub' it does provide a good example of future thinking and how research and development can work alongside education providers and global networks to support the development of new and innovative ideas for industry.

Priority One Tauranga Moana/The Bay of Plenty

[Priority One](#) is the regional economic development organisation for the Western Bay of Plenty. It was initiated by the region's business community in partnership with local authorities and aims to support business through access to relevant resources. This includes workforce development – training and education, employment services and providing business growth opportunities.

They are also future driven. They are focussed on connected pathways, not only from education to employment, but exploring a whole-of-community ecosystem. This includes looking at efficiencies in transport, community development, housing, etc.

Their Talent Hub provides an online space for those seeking employment, moving to the region, or thinking about career options. It also provides information on future skill needs and encourages people to think about what skills they may need in the future.

Key challenges for the Food and Fibre industry within the Waikato region

The Food and Fibre industry is a major economic contributor to the Waikato region. However, the industry is facing several key challenges, including:

- **Labour shortages:** The Food and Fibre industry is facing a shortage of skilled labour, as young people are increasingly choosing to pursue other careers. This is making it difficult for businesses to find the workers they need to maintain production levels.
- **Climate change:** Our environment is already experiencing the effects of climate change, with more frequent and severe droughts, floods, and storms. The Waikato region is not immune to these changes and the impact they can have on food and fibre production.
- **Water scarcity:** The Waikato River is a vital resource for the food and fibre industry, but it is also under increasing pressure from other users, such as urban development and industrial agriculture. This is leading to water shortages, which requires businesses to make changes to their practices.
- **Rising costs:** The cost of inputs, such as fertiliser, fuel, and machinery, is rising, which is putting pressure on businesses' margins. External global events are also creating economic pressure on businesses.

These challenges are significant. However, initiatives such as a Futures Academy and the design of its programmes and support services can be directed to prioritise these issues and help future proof the industry through encouraging business growth, education and skill acquisition, and research and development. Through such mechanisms, industry, businesses, and government can find solutions to these challenges and ensure that the industry continues to thrive in the Waikato region.

Stakeholder feedback on the need for a Futures Academy

Introduction

To capture the views on the need and potential for a Futures Academy in the Waikato, Stakeholders from across the region were interviewed. Interviewees came from a variety of backgrounds but were all working within the Food and Fibre sector. Interviewees included business owners, farmers, educators from secondary and tertiary institutions and technology specialists.³ While experiences and opinions differed depending on which part of the sector participants were engaged in, similar themes emerged:

Challenges facing Employers

Feedback from Interviewees identified several challenges facing employers⁴ that are impeding their ability to develop their staff and businesses. One of the most significant issues they grapple with is lack of time. Interviewees reported that many employers find themselves stretched thin, unable to allocate time for employee training or personal development. This translates into an inability to work closely with their employees to provide or assess their training and upskilling.



Contributing to this pressure and adding to the workload of employers are compliance requirements which have reportedly increased over time. Staying abreast of new regulations and ensuring adherence to compliance standards has diverted employers' time and resources away from other aspects of the business such as training and development.

Other interviewees raised the need to foster innovation. It is recognised the sector needs transformation but competition between employers can limit progress. There were some instances raised about patch protection, which the interviewees felt that it might hinder the open sharing of innovative ideas. Interviewees suggested that the industry requires trailblazers who are willing to support innovation, to overcome this.



"Competition between farmers limits innovation...it will require brave and passionate people within the industry to champion changes."

³ Note: we have purposely kept the organisations and names of interviewees anonymous at the request of some participants to allow them to voice the thoughts and views freely.

⁴ In this context, "employers" pertains to any business owner involved in operating a business within the Food and Fibre value chain.

A Futures Academy has the potential to address many of these issues by creating a support network that helps business to manage demands of the industry. This network could assist business owners to keep up to date with new compliance requirements, best practice guidelines and help to cultivate cross-cutting skills by connecting businesses to each other. It could involve providing training in legal obligations, human resources, and health and safety, as well as access to legal advice, offering a comprehensive and supportive framework that would free business owners up.

It will, however, necessitate a collective commitment from businesses to collaborate and support such initiatives. Ultimately, these challenges underscore the importance of nurturing a robust and diverse future workforce. By pooling resources and addressing common concerns, industry stakeholders can work together to secure the sector's future success.

Identified challenges facing youth

Many of the Interviewees that work directly with youth reported that the challenges facing young people in the Waikato region are multi-faceted, their assumption is that a Futures Academy could potentially play a role in addressing these issues and bridging the gap.

Many interviewees reported that many young people lack basic foundation skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and basic life skills.

Many felt that the traditional schooling system often fails to provide these essential skills, making it difficult to bring new talent into the industry. Improving these basic skills was seen as a priority.



“it’s hard to bring people into the industry when they don’t have the basics.”

Interviewees felt that a Futures Academy could fill this void by offering specific programs that focus on fundamental skills development. It could provide smaller student-to-tutor ratios that can help students receive the necessary attention and support.

A Futures Academy could also provide a range of pastoral care services, including culturally appropriate support, transportation options, driver licensing assistance, and wrap-around services. The [Tamaki jobs and skills Hub](#) is a good example of where this type of wrap-around model works well to support youth.

The challenge of accessibility was also raised as an issue by interviewees. For some young people being able to get to training facilities outside of larger towns such as Hamilton was a common hurdle. This results in a loss of potential talent in the industry. If transport is a barrier to participation, providing transportation services may be necessary to ensure students can attend any training or appointments.

It is vital for a Futures Academy to extend its reach beyond the local Hamilton area to capture talent from a wider region. The varying work ethics and readiness for employment among young individuals should also be considered, recognising that some may take longer to mature and prepare for the workforce.

Some young people have family responsibilities that require them to work to support their households. A Futures Academy could provide flexible training options to cater to these individuals, enabling them to pursue higher-paying and more fulfilling careers? roles over time.

Some interviewees felt that some existing institutions were intimidating for some youth. A Futures Academy would therefore need to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for youth, placing a strong emphasis on pastoral care. It is essential to help young individuals with life skills, such as basic personal and interpersonal skills and responsibilities, in addition to vocational skills.

University is not the only career pathway

Many of our interviewees felt that while the school system in New Zealand often encourages students to pursue university education, there is a need to highlight other career pathways for school leavers. The Food and Fibre sector is an alternative pathway for young people and a Futures Academy could help facilitate this connection for them into life-long careers. This correlates with findings from the Attraction and Retention Research Programme report⁵ commissioned by the Food and Fibre CoVE.



“School system in New Zealand is still set-up to encourage people to go on to university, rather than get a job out of school. We need to change the perception of this.”

In the Waikato, the agriculture sector, primarily focused on dairy, beef, and sheep farming, has long been the cornerstone of the regional economy. However, there is an increasing emphasis on diversification and innovation, offering school leavers a broader range of opportunities within the primary sector. Interviewees felt a Futures Academy could offer a potential solution to this issue by providing people with a wide array of experiences in the wider Food and Fibre sector.

The Futures Academy could help facilitate or leverage existing 'taster' programmes designed to ignite interest among students and help them understand the multitude of career possibilities in the primary sector. While traditional sectors like dairy and beef farming remain important, there are also lesser-known opportunities like tea growing, blueberry farming, orchards, fishing, aquaculture, seaweed harvesting, and equine-related careers.



Some Interviewees also highlighted Gateway programs, Trades Academies, and similar Secondary/Tertiary programmes as crucial means of offering students pathways into various segments of the primary sector. These initiatives allow students to gain real-world experience that helps them form relationships with future potential employers as well as providing them with

⁵ <https://foodandfibrecove.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FFCoVE-A-and-R-Stocktake-report-19-Sep-22-final.pdf>

insights into what their future career might entail, bridging the gap between education and employment.



“Gateway programmes and Trades Academies (good ones) can offer students pathways into the various parts of the Primary sector and a chance to see what it’s like prior to leaving school.”

Promoting interest in sciences and trades among students is another critical objective. Schools need to emphasise the value of these pathways and show students that they can lead to rewarding and fulfilling careers. Career guidance and mentorship can be integral in this process. Equipping schools with information on Food and Fibre opportunities and career pathways would help support career choices in the sector.

To ensure students who are not inclined toward university have options, it's essential to capture their interest during their final school years, typically years 12 and 13 although there is little reason why schools could not offer STEM programmes as well as other Food and Fibre based programmes much earlier to students. This approach aligns with the need for a more balanced approach to education that acknowledges diverse talents and ambitions and contributes to future thriving Food and Fibre workforce pipeline.

Furthermore, the development of achievement standards should be tailored to facilitate a seamless transition from secondary education to post-secondary programs. This would provide a clear roadmap for students, ensuring they have the necessary skills to thrive in their chosen field.

The Waikato region's Food and Fibre industry has a lot to offer other than the traditional school to university route. A Futures Academy and similar educational initiatives can provide a path for students who may not be inclined toward university education, broadening their horizons, and creating a stronger link between education and employment. By offering a diverse range of options and emphasising the value of the sector, the Waikato region can better support and prepare its young population for a successful future in the primary sector.

The transformative role of technology in the sector

The role of technology in the Food and Fibre sector was a recurring theme in discussions with interviewees. Many interviewees raised technology as an essential feature of a Futures Academy namely, to increase interest from young people in careers in the food and fibre sector or as a vehicle for training employers and workers in new and emerging technologies.

Many we interviewed emphasised the role technology plays in attracting young people to the industry.



“They don’t realise it’s a potential career option. If they did know more about it, then it’s a possible attraction opportunity”.

In today's digital age, technology is a significant draw card for the younger generation, as they are more naturally inclined towards it. However, there seems to be a disconnect between their awareness of how technology is used in the sector and the realisation that it could form part of their career.

Young people are well-versed in the use of technology in their daily lives, from social media platforms like TikTok and Snapchat to various other digital channels. Yet, they often fail to see how these tech-savvy skills can be harnessed within the Food and Fibre sector. Interviewees felt that a Futures Academy could provide young people with insights into the opportunities technology offers in this industry and the potential career pathways open to them.

Interviewees felt it is necessary that technology is better utilised to market the Food and Fibre sector to the younger generation. Employing the same digital platforms that they are familiar with, would be a smart approach and one that a Futures Academy could employ. By showcasing the industry's technological advancements, the sector can pique the interest of potential future professionals.



“Technology is an important topic – young people aren’t aware of the pathways and use of technology in the food and fibre industry”.

Moreover, the role of technology in the Food and Fibre sector cannot be understated, and it is poised to become even more critical in the future. The use of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) exemplify this trend. AI is being used within the sector to carry out a range of tasks that would be attractive to many young people. For example, AI precision agriculture – AI driven sensors and drones that can analyse soil data and help optimise irrigation and fertilization for increased crop yields or in livestock management, where AI assists in tracking and monitoring animals to optimise their health and productivity.

Considering the digital proficiency of younger generations, marketing the use of technology should be an integral part of any discussion about the future of the Food and Fibre sector and subsequently part of the role of a Futures Academy.

Some interviewees also suggested a Futures Academy could offer comprehensive training in the use of current and emerging technologies. To support the industry to upskill in areas like AI, and machine automation would empower both employers and current workers in the sector. This training could equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance productivity, improve existing methods, and successfully introduce innovative approaches, fostering growth and sustainability.



While new technology holds immense potential in the industry, it is worth noting that for some areas meeting even the basic technology needs can be difficult, for example internet access remains a challenge in some remote rural areas. Addressing this

issue is crucial to ensure all regions can benefit from the technological advancements in the Food and Fibre sector.

By acknowledging and integrating technology into the Food and Fibre sector's present and future, it can promote the sector as a more dynamic, attractive, and sustainable field for young people, current employees, and employers. A Futures Academy could certainly play a pivotal part in promoting and supporting the use of technology for the benefit of all.

The current training system and innovative approaches for the sector

Some interviewees suggested alternative uses for a Futures academy or promoting programmes that have been successful or are currently in operation.

The current training system

Many of the participants we spoke to, had similar feedback on the current system for training and development.

Many felt that the system was struggling to support realistic skill development for the industry. There was a consensus that the same initiatives are being recycled and many of these don't work for a variety of reasons.

Interviewees felt that while there is abundant provision, the focus needs to shift towards addressing the skills gap and preparing young people for the real world. Any proposed Futures Academy must be rooted in practicality, understanding the genuine problems faced by various industries within Food and Fibre and have real sector buy-in for it to be a success.



“Focus on synergies with industry... shared problem-solving approach, a way forward to build skills, capabilities and long-term pathways for people to have careers in the Primary sector.”

Some interviewees offered programmes like "Growing Future Farmers" or "Agribusiness in Schools" as examples of successful programmes that are currently providing pathways for young people into the Food and Fibre sector⁶.

It is suggested these types of models could be better supported by both public and private entities to help prepare people for careers in the sector and that a Future Academy could play a role in either promoting these existing programmes or helping to facilitate them. While replicating these models within a Futures Academy model is a possibility, it is essential to acknowledge that duplication is not preferable especially when the existing models are successful.

Interviewees consistently highlighted the funding system as a recurring barrier. Interviewees expressed that the present government funding framework sometimes acts as an obstacle to innovation and the sustained success of initiatives in the sector. The absence of adequate funding from government or the compartmentalisation of funds results in valuable programmes, with the potential to advance skill development in the Food and Fibre sector, being deprived of continuous government support. Consequently, these programs are frequently compelled to seek private funding to sustain their operations. The development of a Futures Academy (in whichever form it may take) will need to carefully consider sustainable funding sources which could include government funding and funding from industry.

⁶ Appendix One includes a short case study of Growing Future Farmers and Agribusiness in schools.

[The Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park](#) based in Northland provides a good example of how funding sources can be shared to help operationalise and support innovation in education and employment.

Ultimately, the success of a Futures Academy in the Waikato region lies in its ability to connect the dots, provide real-world experiences, and offer comprehensive support for youth looking to enter the Food and Fibre sector.



“A Futures Academy can’t just be a duplication of what we’ve tried already, it needs to be different. We have to invest time and effort to create interest and excitement. What’s the “Country Calendar” excitement factor... robotic tractors interest youth, just milking cows doesn’t.”

A Futures Academy as an advanced leadership centre

While the sector is familiar with current provisions and programmes, feedback from interviewees indicates various initiatives have been attempted previously. Despite these efforts, challenges such as labour shortages, as well as attraction and retention issues, persist in the Food and Fibre sector.

One interviewee proposed that a Futures Academy could act as a strategic solution. Instead of replicating what has been tried before, or what is currently being delivered, it could be designed to offer participants a unique and advanced level of exposure to the sector. A Futures Academy could function as a finishing school or leadership development centre, catering specifically to emerging leaders, and serving as a nurturing ground for high-potential candidates.

[Grassroots Dairy Management programme](#) is a similar concept currently being run in Canterbury. This programme takes people who have recently graduated from University and matches them with an employer within the Dairy industry. Graduates work on the farm alongside the employer to learn on the job but also complete specified management and ownership programmes to help fast track their career.

This envisioned academy could adopt a group training model, cultivating star performers who embody a commitment to excellence. Positioned as a graduate programme involving multiple businesses, it not only addresses skill gaps but promises a pool of individuals adept in cross-cutting skills capable of connecting diverse sectors within the industry. The success of such a venture hinges on the commitment of businesses to actively participate, fostering a collaborative environment that contributes significantly to meeting the skill demands of the market. In essence, a Futures Academy isn’t just an educational institution, but as a catalyst for industry growth, ensuring a pipeline of skilled professionals ready to drive excellence in their respective roles.



Summary

The insights gathered from stakeholders across the Waikato region underscore the challenges and opportunities present in the sector and consider how a Futures Academy could contribute to resolving these questions within the Food and Fibre sector.

From business owners to farmers, educators, and technology specialists, a diverse array of voices has merged around common themes and challenges facing both employers, employees, and young people in the region.

For employers, time constraints and escalating compliance requirements have emerged as formidable obstacles, hindering their ability to invest in employee development. The proposed Futures Academy could serve as a crucial support network, offering guidance on compliance, best practices, and fostering multiple skills through industry connections.

Addressing the complex challenges facing young people in the Waikato, the Futures Academy could be transformative. By focusing on foundational skills development, offering pastoral care services, and mitigating accessibility barriers, it has the potential to bridge existing gaps and cultivate a more prepared and diverse workforce.

The Futures Academy's role extends beyond local boundaries, encompassing a regional approach that recognises varying work readiness among individuals. Ideally it should be adaptive, providing flexible training options and acknowledging familial responsibilities, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all.

Technology, a pivotal aspect of the Food and Fibre sector's future, is a key theme. A Futures Academy could assist in demystifying the sector's technological landscape, making it more accessible and attractive to the younger generation. Moreover, comprehensive training in emerging technologies could empower both employers and workers, fostering growth and innovation.

Importantly, a Futures Academy could align with existing successful programs like "Growing Future Farmers" and "Agribusiness in Schools," leveraging public and private support. While addressing the funding system's challenges, it must strike a balance between innovation and sustainability, avoiding duplication of efforts.

In essence, a well-designed, fit-for-purpose Futures Academy, deeply embedded in the sector's realities, has the potential to be a transformative force, nurturing both the industry's leaders of tomorrow and the skilled workforce required for sustainable growth in the Waikato region's Food and Fibre sector.

The Challenges

Funding Constraints: One of the primary challenges is securing sufficient and sustainable funding to establish and maintain a Futures Academy.

Ownership: Consideration needs to be given as to which organisation would be responsible for the establishment, design, and operation of a Futures Academy.

Coordination and Collaboration: Ensuring effective collaboration and coordination among diverse stakeholders, including public and private entities, is a potential challenge.

Adapting to Industry Changes: A Futures Academy would need to stay agile to adapt its programmes to the ever-evolving needs and changes within the Food and Fibre sector.

Ensuring Long-term Impact: The challenge lies in creating a Futures Academy with lasting impact, ensuring that the skills imparted lead to sustainable careers in the sector.

Balancing Regional Differences: The regional approach needs to balance the unique needs and contexts of different areas within the Waikato region, ensuring relevance.

Technological Infrastructure: Overcoming technology-related challenges, including ensuring access in remote areas, is essential for effective technology integration in a Futures Academy.

Establishing and Retaining Industry Buy-In: Establishing and maintaining commitment and support from businesses and industry stakeholders over the long term is critical for success.

Avoiding Duplication: Ensuring that a Futures Academy's efforts complement, rather than duplicate, existing successful programs requires strategic planning and collaboration.

Conclusions

Based on the above summary of models, findings, and options to support and refine Waikato RSLG's thinking about the shape and scope of their Futures Academy concept are presented.

As outlined in the definitions section, a Futures Academy is more than a place (real or virtual) where people, businesses etc can go to seek information about education and employment. It is an organisation that is focussed on the future needs of its region and offers tangible tools to equip solutions to existing challenges through future driven initiatives, whether those be, education and training based, policy, research and development, or community/industry-based solutions.

However, it can also draw on lessons learned from Education Hubs in how they add value to the communities in which they operate and how they maximise their effectiveness. Findings from the situational analysis show that at a minimum, an Academy should:

- have a clear understanding of the current and future local labour needs, employment sustainability and available career pathways.
- be able to access and interpret measurable data through which to evaluate its impact and outcomes.
- have a strong, joined up whole of government/management approach.
- employ a coordinator to establish and maintain relationships with industry and the community, government, and other stakeholders.
- have a consistent and single funding source.

We recommend the Waikato RSLG use evidence from the situational analysis in combination with Stakeholder feedback to consider how a Futures Academy might support future business and labour needs, respond to challenges now and in the future, and how an Academy might fit in as a part of the wider social and economic regional ecosystem.

To further support them to do this, we recommend the Waikato RSLG work with organisations like the Tamaki jobs and skills hub and Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park to learn more about how these organisations operate especially in regard to student pastoral care and co-funding options.

Appendix One

Case Study: Growing Future Farmers (GFF)

Background: Growing Future Farmers (GFF) is a pioneering initiative in New Zealand, dedicated to propelling the careers of aspiring farmers from entry-level Essential Farm Skills to the advanced stages of Farm Skills and Business Management. The program operates on a structured framework, integrating specialized industry training, formal NZQA learning, and extensive practical work experience.

Program Components: GFF's two-year program spans 46 weeks each year, commencing in mid-January and concluding in mid-December. The comprehensive curriculum covers 10 regions in New Zealand, providing participants with exposure to diverse farming environments. The key components of the program include:

Practical Workplace Training: GFF emphasises hands-on learning through extensive practical work experience. Participants work alongside experienced and motivated farmers who are committed to growing the industry.

NZQA Level 3 Qualifications: The program offers formal learning opportunities through NZQA Level 3 qualifications, ensuring participants acquire a solid foundation of theoretical knowledge.

Pastoral Care and Liaison Support: GFF recognises the importance of supporting participants beyond the academic and practical realms. The program includes pastoral care and liaison support to address the holistic needs of each participant.

Comprehensive Package: GFF provides a holistic package that covers course fees, access to subsidized gear, equipment, a clothing pack, and even two pups. This approach ensures that financial barriers do not hinder participation.

Living Allowance Bursary: Acknowledging the financial challenges faced by aspiring farmers, GFF offers a living allowance bursary to support participants throughout the program.

Industry Collaboration: GFF collaborates with registered farms and farm trainers across New Zealand, creating a network of genuine workplaces for teaching and training. This collaboration ensures that the program is deeply rooted in the realities of the industry, offering participants exposure to diverse farming practices.

Career Pathways: With a focus on career acceleration, GFF provides a clear pathway for school leavers to progress from entry-level skills to advanced farm management. The program not only equips participants with technical skills but also instils the business acumen necessary for successful farm management.

Innovative Learning Approach: GFF's structured programs incorporate a variety of learning methods, including cloud-based learning, on-farm workshops, cluster group learning, and classroom studies. This multifaceted approach ensures that participants receive a well-rounded education, blending practical experience with theoretical knowledge.

In conclusion, Growing Future Farmers is unique in the New Zealand agricultural landscape, helping to nurture the next generation of farmers and ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for the

industry. The program's commitment to practical experience, formal qualifications, and comprehensive support sets a benchmark for excellence in agricultural education.

Case Study: Agribusiness in Schools- Cultivating Future Leaders in New Zealand's Primary Sector

Background: Agribusiness in Schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, NZQA, and the primary industries, has undertaken a transformative initiative to design an agribusiness program aimed at preparing high-achieving students for careers in the primary sector. Recognizing the evolving demands of the sector, this academic course is offered at NCEA Levels 2 and 3, targeting students excelling in science and commerce subjects.

Program Objectives: The agribusiness program seeks to address critical skill shortages across the agribusiness value chain. With a focus on the forecasted demand for professional skills in engineering, science, and management, the initiative aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for the future of the primary industries.

Industry Support: Key industry partners, such as Waikato Milking Systems, have actively contributed to the development of the Agribusiness in Schools program. Recognizing the pivotal role of skilled leaders in driving New Zealand's primary sector, industry leaders emphasize the importance of providing high-academic focus agribusiness curricula to cultivate future leaders.

Challenges and Perceptions: The initiative addresses existing challenges in public perception, dispelling the notion that agricultural and horticultural courses are solely for less able students. There is a recognized need to improve school and community perceptions regarding the importance of agribusiness to New Zealand's economy. Bridging the gap between the urban sector and the primary sector is highlighted as a priority.

Government Initiatives and Industry Demands: Aligned with the government's ambitious target of doubling primary sector exports by 2025, the agribusiness program responds to the call for investment, innovation, and a skilled workforce. The sector's estimation of requiring an additional 50,000 skilled workers by 2025, with half needing tertiary qualifications, underscores the urgency of initiatives like Agribusiness in Schools.

Program Structure and Content: The Agribusiness in Schools program offers a fully resourced teaching and learning curriculum, integrating primary industries and businesses. The program covers agriculture, aquaculture, dairy manufacturing, equine, forestry, horticulture, seafood, and sports turf. The four strands of Science, Innovation, Management and Finance, and Marketing, underpinned by Future Proofing, Innovation, and Growing Value, ensure a comprehensive education for students.

Educational Impact: The program encourages future and innovative thinking, developing problem-solving strategies and lifelong skills. By providing knowledge of the entire operation, students engage with economic, physical, climatic, political, environmental, technological, historical, social, ethical, and cultural influences on agribusinesses.

Closing the Gap: Agribusiness in Schools addresses existing gaps in content knowledge and skills through a thorough gap analysis across current subject areas. The program's aim is to attract the brightest and best students into agribusiness careers, both on and beyond the farm gate. Through

academic rigor at Levels 2 and 3 NCEA, the initiative integrates agri-science and agri-business concepts, ensuring a holistic and forward-thinking education for students.

In conclusion, Agribusiness in Schools is a transformative initiative that is paving the way for a new generation of skilled and motivated leaders in the Food and Fibre sector. The initiative not only addresses the immediate skill shortages but also contributes to the country's long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the global market.

For more information or to discuss the findings of this report, please contact Lilla du Toit, Portfolio Manager, Food and Fibre CoVE at ldutoit@foodandfibrecove.nz, www.foodandfibrecove.nz