

# Retail ITO Employer Survey Report 2006

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The questions in this survey (Appendix B) were developed to address a concern expressed by the Retail ITO Board in response to the survey of employees carried out in 2006.

Directors saw that the comments by trainees highlighted that **Managers were not getting enough guidance on how to support staff who had been signed up to the Retail ITOs programmes.** The main “customer” who should be involved is the “employer” who wishes to improve productivity factors.

## Methodology

This is the first formal survey of retail and wholesale employers. It was carried out in October/November 2006. It was designed as a pilot to establish an efficient and cost effective approach to obtaining feedback from employers (Appendix A). The level of response was disappointing, 34 replies were received, 28 fully completed. There is insufficient information to make generalisations about programme types across industry sectors. However questionnaires were completed by small business owner/managers, and directors, training and human resource managers of medium and large enterprises. These employers are responsible for a considerable number of employees and trainees. Sufficient information was gathered to address the purpose of the survey.

## Summary

For these respondents there is generally a high level of satisfaction with the services received from the Retail ITO in the delivery of its programmes and the role of the ITO in providing guidance and to employers on how to support their staff.

However the survey does identify a number of areas of concern that include a clear desire from some employers for assistance in supporting their employees through the provision of: a) additional resources and improvements in existing resources: b) mentoring in the form of more contact, guidance and information sharing between the ITO, the employer and the trainee; and c) improved communication about candidate progress.

The survey demonstrates that most employers see themselves and their managers as having sufficient training and resources to support their staff, and providing sufficient support for them in the workplace. However the survey identifies a trend among a number of employers to view the qualifications programme as the responsibility of individual employees. Some of these employers provided support to their employees in the form of time at work and assistance from their workmates and managers. These same employers identify the main difficulty that employees have in completing their programmes as an inability to manage their time. Employers with this approach tend view the programme as having more benefit to the employee than the business; they also have fewer completions. It is possible that more emphasis on the presentation of ITO programmes as a cooperative effort between employer and employee having benefits to both could encourage employers to play a more active

role in supporting their employees. This could be described as creating a 'learning-culture' at work that leads to increased productivity and job satisfaction.

## **Results**

### Guidance on Supporting Staff:

- 61% of the respondents (17) indicated that they received sufficient guidance from the Retail ITO on how to support their staff
- 36% said they did not (10), and one could not remember.

### Guidance That Could Help

The respondents that indicated that they did not receive sufficient guidance made a variety of suggestions about how the ITO could help them support their staff; their concerns were mainly in the area of:

- Providing more resource material and guidance in finding resources.
- Simplifying the presentation of assessment material and explaining assessment requirements
- Improved contacts between the ITO, the employer, and employees in terms of continuity and frequency, both for the candidates benefit (phone calls and time to discuss issues) and for employers for information and understanding.

### Management Skills

The issue of whether employers needed more guidance to support staff was explored further by asking employers whether they, and their managers, had sufficient training and resources to support their staff. Nineteen employers said they had the resources and the ability to support their staff, two were uncertain and three said they did not. The three negative responses were from SMEs and were among the group that had lower levels of completions.

When asked how any lack of training and resources could be addressed, respondents replied that they would like support from the ITO in the form of more information and knowledge relevant to the programme, including: an employer briefing, a "how to" book, information on the correct format for answers, training modules delivered outside store hours and greater involvement from the ITO in reviewing and checking candidate progress.

### Employee Support and Programme Benefits

The issue of employer support was further explored by asking employers what support was provided for employees at work to complete their qualification. All employers indicated that their employees had support at work; there two groups of responses that indicated the extent of employer involvement, generally the greater the involvement of the employer the more successful were the candidates

- The first group of employers (12, 43%) regarded the programme as an individual employee exercise where the employer offered time at work and support from other staff to complete, but it is the employees who is responsible and will benefit more than the business.
- The second group included a range of employers (11, 39%) who went out of their way to support their staff and/or organised staff to work as team and participated themselves; and employers representing larger well resourced businesses (5, 18%) that had established systems of support including the use of training coordinators.

The second group appear to be aware of the longer term strategic advantages and benefits to staff and the business that can be gained through the achievement of retail qualifications and training.

Businesses that do not see the strategic benefits to their business consider that the ITO programmes are of more benefit to their employees than to themselves, they also tend to be SMEs. They may see practical benefits, such as improving staff morale, retention, and self-worth, but may also fail to realise the potential productivity and efficiency gains available to the business.

These same businesses tend to provide non-interventionist support to their employees to complete their qualifications – that is offering time at work and peer support. They consider that they provide good support for their employees but appear less aware that such support is easily given, but difficult for some employees to access in a busy retail environment. This may leave employees more isolated and vulnerable to non-completion (see below).

Businesses that see qualifications and training as a strategic advantage acknowledge the potential for up-skilling to increase staff productivity and performance. They describe their commitment as an investment in the future of the business and the employee. For example one firm saw the benefit of involvement in RITO programmes as:

“To attract high calibre employees – those passionate about development, and to help position ourselves as employers of choice”

### Employee Difficulties

Another way of finding out how employers supported their employees was to ask them about the difficulties they thought employees had in completing qualifications and how these difficulties were addressed.

Five employers said their employees encountered none; four that providing written information and understanding questions was a problem, others noted challenging areas such as maths or legislation (3), lack of internet access (1), sourcing knowledge and keeping on track. The most significant concern was employee time management.

Eleven employers (39%) respondents identified aspects of employee time management as the most significant difficulty they faced in completing their qualification – this included “finding time”, “being short of time” and “making time available.

### Overcoming Difficulties:

Seventeen employers provided suggestions on how employee difficulties could be overcome. Six of these suggestions involved improving individual employee time management (“time management on their part”), three were concerned with providing greater support from the team, and seven were concerned with improving the ways that the ITO programme is delivered. These included improvements in the resource material, clearer questions, and more information in the initial seminar. One employer recommended “Basic old hard work and perseverance”

### Explaining Completion Rates

The above themes were repeated in explanations given by employers for their completion rates. Those with high completion rates attributed this mainly to the support given employees at work or by the assessor. Those with mixed completion rates (8) identified poor time management as a significant factor (4), or the influence of an effective assessor or a training coordinator.

### Difficulties in Managing the Process

To further explore the experience of employers and managers in managing ITO programmes in the workplace employers were asked if they encountered any difficulties administering the process. Ten said they had none and four did not reply (50%). Six gave answers relating to managing their employees, especially in terms of freeing up time.

Eight employers expressed concern about the administration of their programme. Three of these related to making payments and dealing with invoices, and five concerned communication difficulties that arose out of keeping track of employee progress and gaining information from the ITO. The common concern is the need for a more efficient tracking/feedback system, one respondent commented:

“I need to be given assessment dates so I can follow up and often the stores don’t communicate this info to me. Lots don’t ask for help either. I find the reports sent by ITO not entirely useful. I would rather have a spreadsheet including everyone, when they enrolled, what date their assessment is, who has completed, who has been sent their certificate rather than just who has joined since last report”

### Improvements in the Administration of a Programme

Nine employers were happy with the present system “Overall they do a pretty good job” and five did not comment (50%). Four were concerned to see improvements in the payments and invoicing systems.

An easier payment option so that we did not have to pay, then claim back, the funded portion. We have 550 employees and it is easy to loose track of the invoicing progress

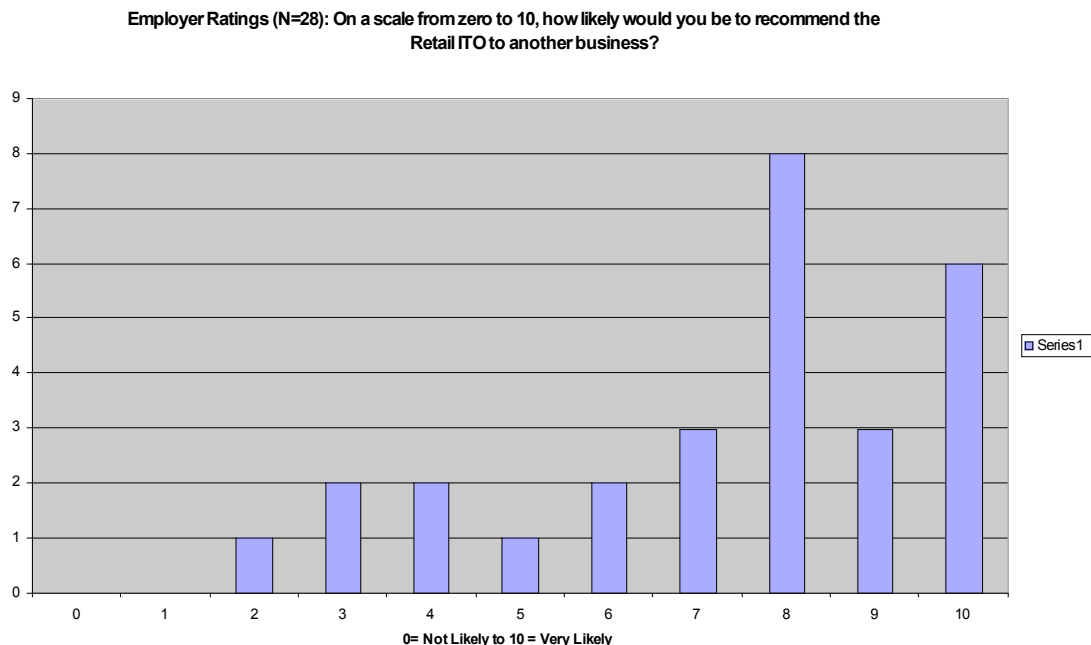
And four were concerned to see improvements in communication and reporting between the ITO and enterprises

“Perhaps a regular update of staff on the programme and exactly who had completed the course or were in the process of etc etc. No one really got in touch to update when staff had completed the programme”

### Employer Satisfaction with Retail ITO Programmes

When employers were asked how successful had their involvement in the Retail ITO programme been for their business, there were twenty one positive replies ranging from “brilliant” to “successful” (9) “beneficial” to “good” (9) and three were “Average”. Three said “Not at all”, one said “very little” and three commented that it was too early or too difficult to tell (as a result of a recent takeover).

These positive responses were reflected in the extent to which employers were willing to “recommend the Retail ITO to another business”. The results are represented in the following chart.



17 out of 28 respondents rated the ITO at 8 or above and 6 rated the ITO at five or below.

Appendix D compares employer ratings with completion rates.

## Employer Dissatisfaction with Support from the Retail ITO

Five of the six employers who rated the ITO below 5 were also employers who were dissatisfied with the support that they had received from the ITO

Two of these employers said that they had not received sufficient guidance about how to support their employees, these employers also stated that they did not have the training or the resources to do this and felt that the ITO should play a more active role, their employees had mixed/ poor completion rates.

The other three employers were dissatisfied with their communications with the ITO; they requested improved feedback, information and contact with the ITO. Their employees had mixed completion rates.

The fifth employer was dissatisfied with changes in programme funding and commented:

“While it cash neutral it was worth doing, but not now that it costs the benefit is not really there for Level 2.”

## Employers Failing to Engage

Two employers were contacted to participate in the survey who had signed up between 6 and 10 employees as trainees but none had completed. They did not complete the questionnaire but gave feedback to say that their employees had done nothing towards completing the qualification. Both employers stated that changes in management personnel and structures had resulted in the programme being sidelined - they wanted to resume their involvement.

## Conclusion

This survey has highlighted areas in which the Retail ITO might evaluate its relationships with its key stakeholders – the employer and the employee/trainee in terms of assisting employers to support employees to complete their qualifications.

The survey demonstrates a general level of satisfaction amongst the participants with the support and services they receive from the ITO. However, for some employers there is an expressed need for guidance from the ITO on how to support their employees to complete their qualifications. Employer suggestions include better communication, more frequent contact, and a mentoring relationship with both employer and employee. Additional support was requested in the form of improved and additional resource materials, simplifying the presentation of assessment tools, and assistance with workplace literacy and numeracy.

The ITO may need to develop a communication strategy that emphasises to employers the strategic benefits of training arrangements through the Retail ITO. The move away from a focus on individual employee achievement in “Pride in Being Qualified” to a focus on business development through “Growing Productive People” may contribute to overcoming the view of some employers that the main beneficiary of Retail ITO programmes is the employee who should take most responsibility for

completion. This view of retail and wholesale qualifications and the role of the employer in supporting employees may contribute to the failure of some employees to achieve a qualification.

There is a theme throughout the survey that highlights the need for the ITO to be proactive in its communications with its stakeholders; poor performance by employees and employer dissatisfaction with services may be remedied when there is an awareness that problems exist and can be addressed. Fortunately the Retail ITO has a growing reputation for being proactive, in the words of one of the survey respondents:

“I like the way that the ITO is constantly looking to make improvements and is open to feedback. I would like to see us working together in the future to map some of our material into the qualification to further improve our success with it.”

### Recommendations:

Recognising that the ITO is aware of many of the issues raised in this survey and has taken steps to address them, it is apparent that there is a level of concern among some employers that their needs are not being addressed and their understanding of their relationship with the ITO is unclear. A review of communication procedures with employers might identify strategies that could help identify employers with problems and steps that could be taken to help employers address their problems. Both employees and employers would benefit.

The Retail ITO should encourage its members to supply feedback on the ITO's services using an annual questionnaire that is posted or emailed to all its members. This survey should be standardised so that responses from year to year might be compared. The questionnaire could contribute to developing the culture of participation by employer stakeholders

## **Appendix A: Methodology and Recommendations for Next Survey**

This is the first formal survey of employers carried out by the Retail ITO. The survey was designed as a pilot to establish the best and most cost efficient method of obtaining replies from retailers. There were two important steps 1) Designing the questionnaire 2) Sending it out and receiving replies. The next important step in the methodology will be to evaluate the process for this survey and decide how to improve on its use in the future

Designing the Questionnaire: The questions were guided by the Board's feedback from the Employee survey that

Directors saw that the comments by trainees highlighted that **Managers were not getting enough guidance on how to support staff who had been signed up to the Retail ITOs programmes.** The main "customer" who should be involved is the "employer" who wishes to improve productivity factors.

The draft questions were written by Chris Dunn and circulated to RITO management for feedback. They were designed to address the Board's concern by gathering in-depth information to help understand the relevant issues. The redrafted questions and format of the questionnaire was also submitted to RITO management for feedback and approval. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix B.

### **Distributing the Questionnaire and Obtaining Feedback**

We considered that posting the questionnaire to all Retail ITO members could be a costly and possibly inefficient approach as few of the members might reply. It would also fail to collect information from employers who were no longer members. Two approaches using telephone and email were adopted:

- 1) To create a representative sample<sup>1</sup> of approximately 100 employers, invite them to participate by telephone, forward the questionnaire by email or post as requested to facilitate ease of response. This approach produced 20 replies.
- 2) To supplement this response we decided to email the questionnaire to a mailing list of over 400 individuals and enterprises held by RITO. This resulted in a further 14 replies

Both approaches were relatively unsuccessful in eliciting a good response rate. Obtaining feedback from retail and wholesale employers is not easy. In this survey contact with major participants was limited by RITO management as many were in a developmental phase with Training Pathways programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> The sample was made up of employers that had engaged with RITO programmes between 2004 and 2005 to provide information on completion rates. Retail and wholesale employers were selected to represent a range of small, medium and large enterprises whose success, measured by trainee completions, was categorised as good, mixed or poor. New employers in 2006 were contacted by email and included if they responded.

## **Appendix B: Employer Survey Questions**

- 1)** Why did your business become involved with obtaining qualifications for employees through the Retail ITO?
- 2)** How were your employees selected to participate?
- 3)** How successful has your involvement in the programme with the Retail ITO been for your business?
- 4)** How has it worked for your employees?
- 5)** Please answer the following option/s that may be appropriate to your business
  - a. If your employees are currently working towards their qualifications what are your impressions of their response to the process?
  - b. If most of your employees who took part in the programme have completed a qualification; can you please explain why you think this outcome has occurred?
  - c. If your employees had mixed success with the programme; can you please explain why you think this may have occurred?
  - d. If few employees completed the qualification; can you please explain why you think this may have happened?
- 6)** What support did your employees have at work to complete the qualification?
- 7)** What difficulties do you think your employees had completing their qualification?
- 8)** How do you think these difficulties could be overcome?
- 9)** Do you or your manager(s) have sufficient training and resources to support employees to complete their qualifications?
- 10)** If no, how do you think this could be addressed?
- 11)** What guidance did you receive from the Retail ITO about how to support your employees to complete their qualifications? Was this sufficient?
- 12)** If no, how could the Retail ITO better help you to support your employees?
- 13)** What difficulties did you encounter in managing the process?
- 14)** How could the Retail ITO improve the administration of the programme?

**15)** On a scale from zero to 10, how likely would you be to recommend the Retail ITO to another business? Please place the arrow at, or above, the point that you chose ↓

Not likely    0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10    Very likely

Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. The results will be published on the Retail ITO website at [www.retailito.org.nz](http://www.retailito.org.nz) in early 2007. If you would like be sent a copy of the report please include your contact details below:

Your Name:

Contact Details: