

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



We know our country can produce talent. What we need to do now is explore what to do with it and how to ensure we attract and retain that talent in order to create an economic and social landscape that provides all New Zealanders with the opportunity to take full advantage of their potential.

Charlotte Greenfield
Scholarship recipient



A dynamic, creative and thriving Aotearoa New Zealand is one where vision and foresight play a leading role in nurturing and supporting future generations of locally grown or incoming talent from overseas.

Darren Zhang
Scholarship recipient

In 2013, with the support of Sam Morgan, the Institute announced the Sir Paul Callaghan Science Meets Humanities Scholarship recipients, Charlotte Greenfield and Darren Zhang. Charlotte and Darren travelled the country, as well as utilising Skype to interview the 30 kiwis featured. They then wrote up the interviews as if the reader was in the room with them, listening to the narrative unfold. We wanted the outstanding 210 ideas to be accessible in a bold, creative, and fun way. Their final observations from the 30 interviews are overleaf.

OBSERVATIONS

Charlotte Greenfield and Darren Zhang share their reflections in response to the seven questions.

1. In the context of your professional background, what does 'talent' mean to you?

In our conversations, everyone initially described talent as comprising factors like character, personality, having specific academic or technical skills, and commercial drive.

As talent was explored further, these components and what defines 'talent' soon fell away as people moved beyond the idea of talent being concrete, to something that encompasses more than just the sum of its parts. Ambition, focus and the zest to make things happen were mentioned. Talent, it seems, is forward-looking and driven; it involves curiosity and really hard work to bring about results.

2. Are you aware of any talent gaps that exist or might arise within the next ten years?

Although there were varying responses to this question, it became clear that in the next ten years there will be many emerging fields, in particular involving science and technology, and professions that do not currently exist.

One historic challenge has always been our size. Traditionally, the lack of a sufficiently large pool to find the right people has reduced our capacity to scale up. Given the intensity of competition all around the world, perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on ourselves.

A number of people raised the need for specialist skills (especially in science

and IT). However, adaptability is vital, and we need those specialists who can also play other roles, such as in commercialisation, marketing and com-

Talent, it seems, is forward-looking and driven; it involves curiosity and really hard work to bring about results.

munication. We learnt that for a lot of people it's a good idea to get really good at something, and then develop a completely different, complementary skill-set.

3. How do successful organisations attract, keep and grow talent?

While pay is important, income is not what ultimately attracts truly talented people (although it helps).

An inspiring, challenging and fun work environment, the opportunity to collaborate with interesting people from a variety of disciplines and to work on exciting projects, and being given the space to experiment and figure out who you are professionally are what make an organisation a talent magnet.

4. Think about talent hubs around the world, what is cool and why?

The central characteristic of a talent hub appears to be a place where like-minded people converge and are buzzing. The theme of talent attracting talent was mentioned a number of times in relation to this question.

San Francisco and Silicon Valley, New York, Singapore and London were referred to repeatedly. Non-geographical conceptions of a talent hub were also described, such as physical spaces, websites or groups found on the internet, and large corporates.

A supporting ecosystem of universities, major transport hubs, incubators and venture capitalists characterises and is considered necessary to build and sustain the growth of talent hubs. At its heart are vibrant talent communities of like-minded people.

While Singapore and Finland were highlighted as good places for New Zealand to draw lessons from, due to their similar population sizes, each is distinctive in character and history and should not be directly emulated. Instead, we need to grow our own peculiar and identifiably unique talent hub, while learning lessons from abroad.

5. Can you assess New Zealand's performance in attracting talent on a global scale?

Most people commented that we need to, and can, do better in this respect.

Many described our clean, green image and our lifestyle as attractive factors, but noted that we rest on our laurels when it comes to these attributes. To get local and incoming talent to contribute to our economy and society, it will take more than mountains, rivers and the ability to go to the beach after work. We need to create dynamic talent ecosystems and industries that mark New Zealand out in the global community and attract talent here. Weta was seen as a great example of this – but we need a lot more Wetas. Many people who are based overseas reminded us that the world is a big place, and New Zealand needs to stand out.

6. What does New Zealand need to do in order to attract, keep and grow talent?

A commonly shared sentiment among all the interviewees was that we need to step up with a well-planned vision and strategy to realise a talent-driven society. Many interesting ideas and possibilities were raised.

Some people talked about active immigration policies to attract highly talented people from overseas. However, there first have to be opportunities in creative, innovative or high-tech businesses and work on stimulating projects to attract talented employees. Many thought we had the potential to create these businesses and that this is already happening, but they are not polished to world-market standard or are being sold too early. The availability of more start-up capital might help this.

A key factor would be changing the world's view of New Zealand from a place with nice mountains and The Hobbit to a place with really dynamic industries. This could be done by word of mouth, flowing naturally from the creation of more dynamic businesses, but the creation of promotional materials by the government and business

groups could also help. Some people mentioned PR drives that tap into current events. For example, one suggested option was to promote New Zealand as a country that protects internet freedom, which would attract a lot of disgruntled tech workers from the United States in the wake of the NSA leaks. While the most effective PR strategy can be debated, this type of thinking around reworking New Zealand's brand away from simply '100% Pure' (which most pointed out is a lie) is something we need to adopt in the future.

A commonly shared sentiment among all the interviewees was that we need to step up with a well-planned vision and strategy to realise a talent-driven society.

Another great idea was to capitalise on our perceived weaknesses. Our small size means we are nimble, so that it is easier for people to make things happen. People seeking to make changes and set up new enterprises are able to talk to the 'right' people in government and business in a way that is not possible in many other countries. We should celebrate that and sell it as an advantage to people overseas. Equally, our isolation can be of benefit; for example, Google X recently launched its Loon balloons in Christchurch because of our geographic isolation. Attracting Google X's attention and resources is a major coup.

Everyone acknowledged that New Zealanders travel a lot and often work overseas. Instead of seeing this as a problem, perhaps we should be taking advantage of it. Provide greater connectivity to New Zealand for New Zealanders overseas, use their international networks, and show them how they can help New Zealand businesses from overseas. Global businesses like Xero are a great conduit for this. The KEA network was also mentioned as something that could be used more to drive specific outcomes rather than just socialising and casual networking.

One very practical suggestion for ensuring that New Zealand can play on the global stage is getting faster internet. A fibre-optic cable could make a significant difference to New Zealand's connectivity.

7. Any final thoughts for young people?

Travel and going on an OE was highly encouraged as a way of providing young Kiwis with the experiences and exposure to understand global best practice in order to stay ahead. Travel was also seen to help people appreciate the potential of living and working in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Surprisingly, even the business-minded stressed the importance of pursuing your passions and doing what you love, noting that it could lead to a worthwhile and meaningful job, enhanced creativity and the ability to make money and create opportunities for others.

Many people also talked about how much the world is changing, stressing that set careers and jobs don't exist in the same way as they use to. They emphasised that it was good to keep an open mind about your career path, and that doing what you love will ensure that this lack of certainty will be exciting rather than overwhelming.