

Productivity Commission Issues Paper - Technological change and the future of work

The NGO Health and Disability Council is elected by the health and disability NGO sector, and works with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders on matters of importance to the wider NGO sector. For more information on the Council, please see:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/key-health-sector-organisations-and-people/non-governmental-organisations>

The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Productivity Commission issues paper.

The paper is informative (especially on education-related issues) and useful, as far as it goes. We note that the paper focuses (in examples and in its overall approach) only on the commercial/business/for profit sector and not at all the NFP/NGO or Health sector, or even the wider state sectors. Because the wider state sectors (especially Health, Welfare and Education) plus those agencies the government funds to deliver services in these areas employ the vast majority of New Zealanders, this omission means the paper misses a number of issues and examples relating to a large proportion of the workforce.

In addition to the paid health workforce in New Zealand, the number of unpaid health workers, including caregivers, in NZ has been estimated by the Ministry of Health to be around 240,000. These workers are especially vulnerable to being left behind by technological change, and yet their contribution to wellbeing is significant. In order to ensure that this group of the population (and those for whom they provide support) is in a position to respond to technological advances and remain effective in their interfaces and their roles, training and education in new technologies will increasingly need to be built into their lives.

We can't look at the effect of technology in isolation (Page 13)

As the paper notes, there is a wide range of factors influencing the state of the workforce, such as migration, demographic change, changing preferences etc. Social determinants of employment also influence the workforce. In this regard, the paper notes the possibility of technological growth accentuating the income gap (Page 36). The Council agrees with this observation and notes it raises serious issues of concern to be addressed.

Education as a solution (Section 5)

This section of the paper is important, as it presents the best solution to make technological progress work for us all and not against some of us. We support the suggestion of a stronger educational base for all, and would add the importance of lifting the educational focus for those who are most vulnerable, Page 36. We also support the growth of a wide range of in-work learning, development and retraining options - this is the only way the workforce stays ahead of the game. The paper correctly notes the disjunct between education and employment, and the weak link between employers and education providers, and weak management capability in NZ (Page 39). In this regard, the Council sees an important link between the Ministry of Health's work on future Health and Disability workforce strategies and the Productivity Commission's examination of disruptive technological change.