

Better Working Environment for Older Workers in New Zealand

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◀Summary▶

- ◆ At the end of 2019, the Japanese government set forth the goal of realizing an age-free society in response to the needs of the 100 years of human life as a direction for reform at the All-Generation Social Security Review Council. Indeed, along with an expansion of human lifespan, there has been an increase in the number of people aged 65 or over (hereafter "senior workers") who would like to have more money to spend on living after retirement. However, this potential senior labor force has not been fully utilized. In developing a better working environment for senior workers in the future, Japan must examine desirable employment systems from various angles.
- ◆ This paper compares Japan with New Zealand and examines issues to reveal a desirable senior employment system. The reason for this comparison is that although New Zealand is a small country, the economic affluence of its people is on par with that of Japan. Moreover, the employment of senior workers is rapidly expanding under the job-type employment system, which is different from the Japanese membership-type employment system, and the satisfaction of older workers is higher. Such a better working environment in New Zealand was formulated by the decisive administrative and economic reforms since the 1980s.
- ◆ Considering the working environment in New Zealand from the three perspectives such as employment incentives, job opportunities, and employability, senior workers have been able to work as long as possible on the background of the prohibition of the mandatory retirement age and the pension system without income tests. In terms of job opportunities, under the strict ban on age discrimination, senior workers are not disadvantaged in recruitment activities, and working conditions are flexible and comfortable. Furthermore, in terms of employability, senior workers can take advantage of vocational education and training opportunities and maintain employable abilities.

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- ◆ Considering these advanced cases in New Zealand, there is still much room left to promote senior employment in Japan. First, Japan must abolish the retirement age system and, at the same time, adopt the job-type employment system in place of the membership-type employment system. Also, Japan must prohibit age discrimination strictly and implement flexible working styles according to the individual circumstances of seniors. Furthermore, Japan should improve the skills of senior workers by enhancing the quality and quantity of vocational education and training.

- This is an English version of “わが国とニュージーランドのシニア就業を巡る環境の比較—働く意欲の維持と働きやすい環境の整備が鍵—” in JRI Review (The original version is available at <https://www.jri.co.jp/MediaLibrary/file/report/jrireview/pdf/11711.pdf>)

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1. Introduction

In the interim report of the All-Generation Social Security Review Council issued at the end of 2019, the Japanese government set forth the goal of realizing a society in which people can play active roles throughout their lives, up to the age of 100. Indeed, along with the expansion of human lifespan, there has been an increase in the number of people aged 65 or over (hereafter "senior workers") who want to have more money to spend after their retirement. There is also an increase in the number of senior workers who are willing to work and want to keep a close relationship with society and maintain mental health, or who wish to contribute to the community by making use of their skills.

However, the potential workforce of these seniors is not fully utilized. Since the start of Abenomics (Japanese economic policies by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe), the number of senior workers has increased rapidly. Still, the number of seniors who want to work but are unable to work has also increased. According to the Basic Survey on Employment Structure, the number of seniors not engaged in work but wishing to work has increased year by year from 1.35 million in 1997 to 2.18 million in 2017 (Figure 1).

The employment of such seniors who are willing to work will not only directly improve their welfare but also benefit the macroeconomy. In addition to easing supply constraints caused by labor shortages, if all 2.18 million people could work, personal consumption would be boosted by at least 900 billion yen¹.

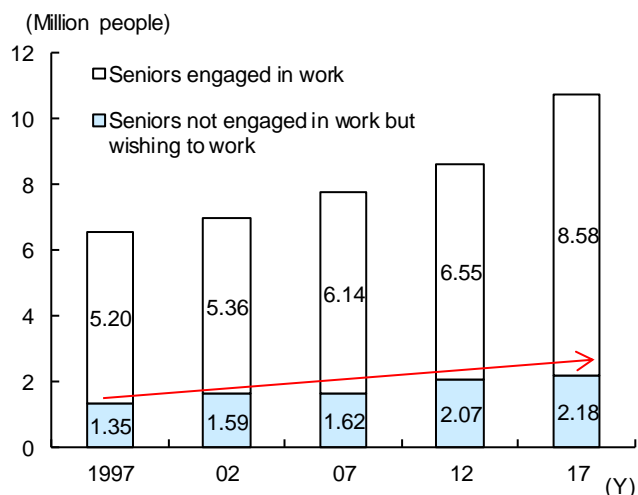
On the other hand, there is often a dissenting opinion from corporate managers that they cannot continue to employ older people who cannot contribute to business performance. Such managers have a strong sense of objection against the possibility of making employment opportunities until age 70 compulsory for firms, as proposed in the interim report.

In light of this situation, it is necessary to examine from various angles a desirable employment system for both senior workers and companies to improve the environment for senior employment. This report compares Japan with New Zealand, which is actively promoting senior employment, and highlights the challenges of realizing a desirable employment system.

2. Senior Employment in New Zealand

(1) New Zealand Overview

Figure 1. Employment Status of Seniors



Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
Note: Seniors are defined as persons aged 65 or over.

¹ Assuming that (1) consumption expenditure of households headed by people aged 65 or older exceeds that of unemployed households by about 50,000 yen per month, and (2) some of the 2.18 million people are not heads of households, the number of heads of working households will increase by 1.5 million. Estimated at ¥50,000 × 12 months × 1.5 million people.

New Zealand² is a small country with a population of 4.7 million, a land area of 270,000 km², and a nominal GDP of 200.3 billion USD (about 4% of that of Japan). Exports account for about 20% of GDP, and agriculture, forestry, and fishery products such as dairy, meat, and forest products account for about 60% of exported goods.

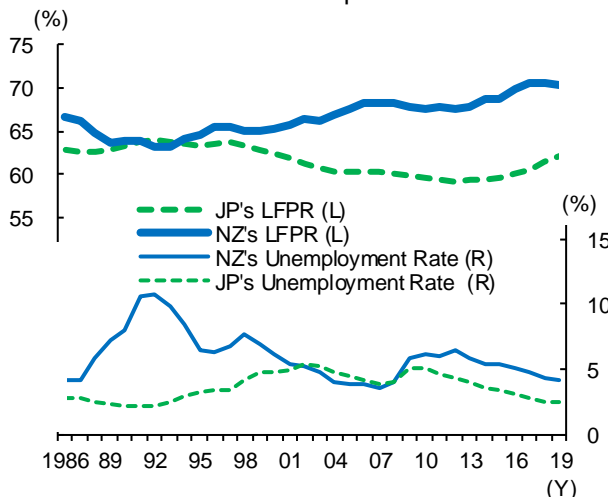
The industrial structure, however, is of an advanced country type with a large share of the service industry. In terms of the industrial structure, the primary sector accounts for 7% in GDP, the secondary sector for 19%, and the tertiary sector for 67%, which is not so different from the Japanese ratio by industry.

The economic affluence of the people is comparable to that of Japan. Per capita GDP (Purchasing power parity basis) in Japan is US \$43,000 (18th out of 36 OECD member countries), while that in New Zealand is US \$41,000 (20th). Labor productivity (GDP per worker) is US \$76,000 (26th) in New Zealand and the US \$81,000 (21st) in Japan³.

The labor market has been tight in recent years, and the labor force participation rate has been rising for many years. Women's labor participation is more advanced than in Japan. The unemployment rate has been declining since 2013, reaching 4.1% in 2019, far below the long-term average (6.0%) (Figure 2). The labor participation rate has been on an upward trend since the mid-1990s. Looking at the labor participation rate by age group, men's participation rate is generally at the same level as that of Japan, while women's participation rate is higher than that of Japan in almost all age groups except for those in their 20s (Figure 3).

The employment system is job-type. In principle, jobs, working hours, and place of work are restricted. In membership type employment often seen in Japan, jobs, working hours, and place of work are unlimited⁴. Many women in the child-rearing period work part-time, but wages (hourly rate) are set according to their jobs and skills in New Zealand. The salary (annual income) is calculated by multiplying the hourly wage by the number of hours worked. Even if he/she is a part-timer, his/her job is not limited to peripheral work.

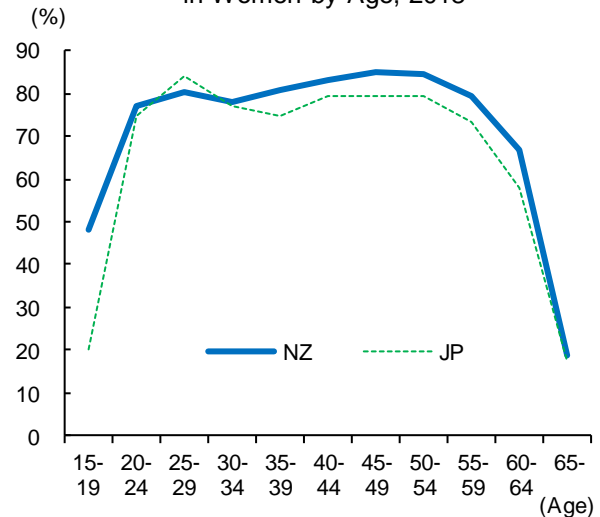
Figure 2. Unemployment Rate and Labor Force Participation Rate



Sources: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, and Stat NZ

Note: LFPR stands for labour force participation rate.

Figure 3: Labor Force Participation Rate in Women by Age, 2018



Sources: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, and Stat NZ

² For population, land, economy and average life expectancy in New Zealand, refer to Nisuiikai (2019). The population is as of the 2018 census, and the economic structure is as of 2018/2019. Nisuiikai is an organization established in 1972 that consists of Japanese companies and organizations in Auckland, New Zealand, and is an organization that promotes cultural goodwill.

³ These figures are based on Japan Productivity Center (2019).

⁴ See Hamaguchi (2014).

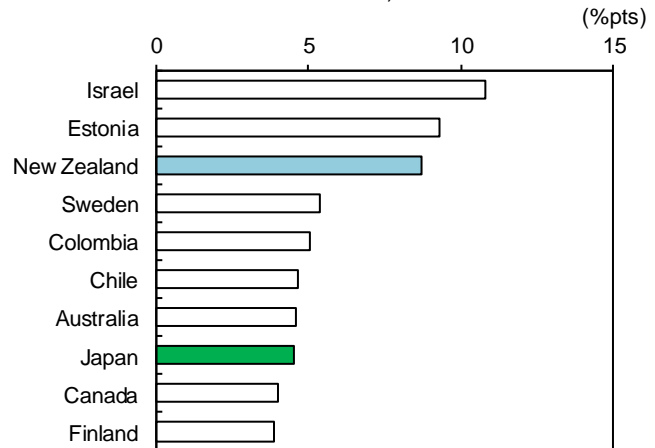
(2) New Zealand features

This paper selects New Zealand as a target country for senior employment because the rate of increase in senior labor participation is one of the highest in the world. Comparing changes in the labor participation rate over the past ten years shows that Japan has improved by 5% points, ranking eighth out of 46 countries, while New Zealand has been enhanced by 9% points, ranking third (Figure 4). In the meantime, the aging of the population is steadily progressing in New Zealand as well; the average life expectancy was 80.2 years for men and 83.6 years for women in 2017, an increase of 0.7 years for men and 0.4 years for women from 2013. According to OECD, the aging rate (percentage of the population aged 65 or over) in New Zealand was 15% in 2018, lower than that of Japan (28%). However, the pace of increase has accelerated since the mid-2000s.

Another characteristic is that the employment rate is rising due to structural factors rather than cyclical factors. In Japan, the employment rate has been growing because companies have become more willing to hire new employees as the economy has recovered since the start of Abenomics. Therefore, if the economy turns into a recessionary phase, the pace of growth may slow down somewhat. Indeed, if the cyclical component of the employment rate is removed, the rate of increase will shrink by a quarter (Figure 5). In contrast, the employment rate in New Zealand is hardly affected by the business cycle, and the uptrend is due to structural factors. The employment rate in New Zealand is likely to continue to rise even if the economy turns into a recession.

Second, the satisfaction of working seniors is high. According to a questionnaire survey of employed senior workers, the degree of job satisfaction is about 70% in Japan, whereas it is over 90% in New Zealand (Figure 6). In terms of the degree of satisfaction with work styles, whereas in Japan it was over 70%, in New Zealand

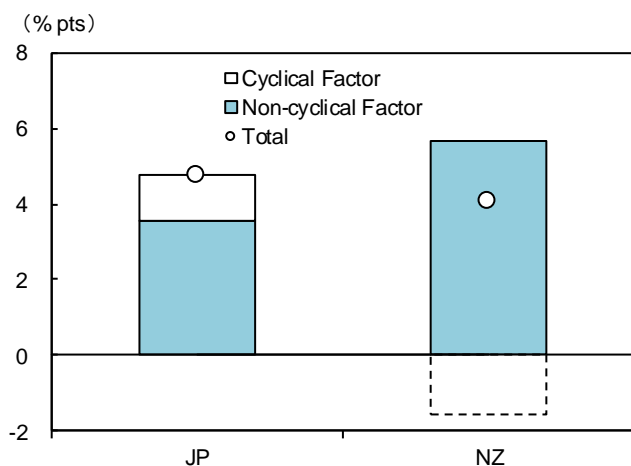
Figure 4. Change in Labour Force Participation Rate of Seniors, 2008-18



Source: OECD

Note: Seniors are defined as persons aged 65 years or over.

Figure 5. Decomposition of the Change in Labor Force Participation Rate, 2012-18



Sources: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, OECD, Stats NZ, and JRI staff calculations.

Notes: White bars show the factor explained by business cycles (the cyclical position of the economy). Coloured bars show the other factor. Circles show changes in labour force participation rate. Such a position is based on the estimation of the following equation.

Labor force participation rate = const. + $\beta \times$ Output gap + error term
The β in Japan is statistically significant. The β in New Zealand is not statistically significant.

it was around 90%. According to interviews⁵, many people pointed out that the reason for the increase in senior employment is heightened financial motivation. In recent years, the cost of owning a house in New Zealand has increased due to soaring housing prices caused by a shortage of housing supply. As a result, the percentage of senior workers with housing loans has been growing (6.8% in 2004 → 10.6% in 2011 → 13.9% in 2018)⁶. For this reason, there may be a certain number of seniors who have no choice but to continue working because they have the burden of repaying loans even when they receive relatively abundant public pension payments compared with those of Japan. It is noteworthy, however, that many seniors maintain high levels of satisfaction with their current work and working styles, even when they are employed under such a necessity.

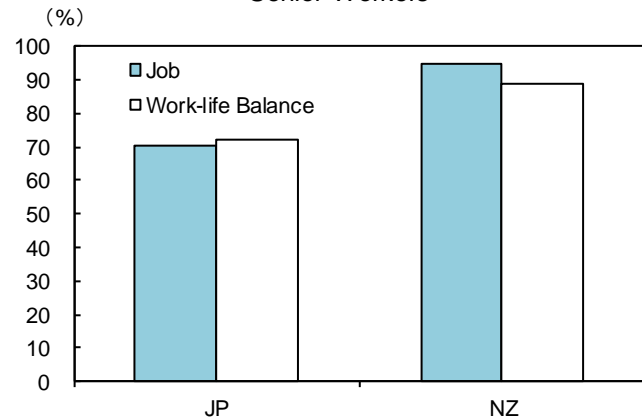
Thirdly, New Zealand has carried out bold administrative and economic reforms since the 1980s to rebuild its finances and economy. These reforms ranging from industrial policy to labor market and welfare policy, have led to the creation of a better working environment for senior workers and of a vocational education and training system that is accessible to all. The reform is outlined below.

As a member of the British Commonwealth, New Zealand enjoyed steady economic growth until the 1960s, supported by an increase in exports to the United Kingdom. At the time, there was a world-leading welfare policy, but in 1973 it reached a turning point⁷. Due to the UK's accession to the EC, the predecessor of the EU, and the contraction of the world economy caused by the oil crisis, the New Zealand economy began to deteriorate. By the first half of the 1980s, the country had no choice but to undertake administrative and economic reforms.

Under these circumstances, when the socialist Labor Party took power in 1984, the Minister of Finance Roger Douglas carried out the so-called "Rogernomics," a policy of economic liberalization, which included privatization of bloated government departments, the introduction of a consumption tax, and the abolition of industrial subsidies for agriculture.

Even after the change of government to the Liberal National Party in 1990, this trend of economic reform continued, especially the labor market reform that the Labor Party government could not undertake. One of

Figure 6. Job and Work-life Balance Satisfaction of Senior Workers



Sources: Adecco Ltd., Stats NZ, and JRI staff calculations.

Notes: Job satisfaction in Japan is defined as a simple mean of each share of persons aged 60-69 years who answer "satisfied" or "relatively satisfied" for "occupation," "contents of the job," "position/responsibility," "job evaluation," and "salary." Work-life balance in Japan is defined as a simple mean of each share of persons aged 60-69 years who answer "satisfied" or "relatively satisfied" for "holiday days," "working hours per day," "human relationship," "employment status," "welfare," and "personnel system." Job satisfaction in New Zealand is defined as a share of persons aged 65 years or over who answer "Satisfied/very satisfied" or "relatively satisfied" for job satisfaction (main job). Work-life balance in New Zealand is defined as a share of persons aged 65 years or over who answer "Satisfied/very satisfied" for work-life balance satisfaction (all jobs).

⁵ In mid-February 2020, I interviewed economists, policymakers, and business persons in Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand about the actual situation of senior workers. The main interview places are local Japanese companies, business schools, vocational education institutions, Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, Ministry of Social Development, The Treasury, a think tank, and Reserve Bank of New Zealand. From now on, the interview in the text refers to the content of the meetings. Besides, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who responded to it.

⁶ See Office for Seniors (2019).

⁷ See Nisuikai (2019).

these is the Employment Contracts Act, enacted in 1991. As a result, employment contracts that used to be rigid⁸ can now be freely settled between companies and employers, allowing for a variety of forms of employment. As the setting of working hours became flexible, it is considered that senior workers with limited working hours can work under flexible working conditions.

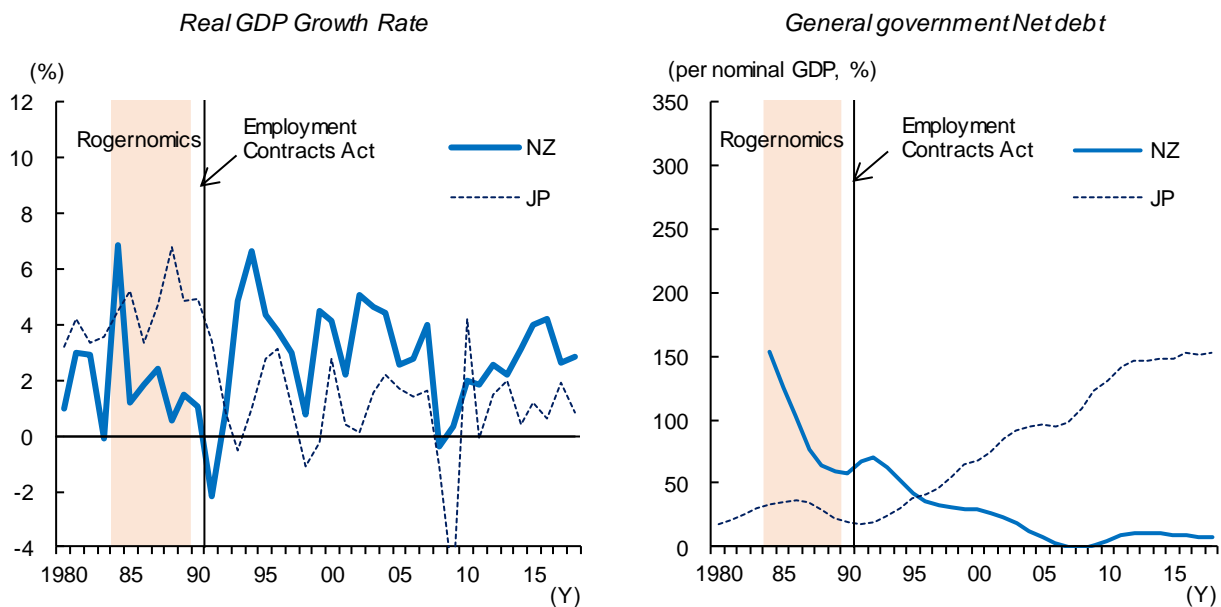
Also, the vocational education strategy has changed in response to changes in the labor market accompanying economic reforms⁹. When the Education Act was passed in 1989, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (hereafter "NZQA"), under the Ministry of Education in 1990, was established with the primary objective of maintaining the qualification framework and criteria. Through the unification of qualifications, the integration of vocational education and school education progressed, and a nationwide unified vocational education system was introduced in a wide range of fields.

In 1992, the Industry Training and Apprenticeships Act was enacted. Each industry established an Industry Training Organization (hereafter "ITO") to develop, implement, and manage necessary training programs.

This series of measures has led to the current vocational education and training system and has helped to secure such training opportunities for middle-aged and elderly workers, which is currently scarce in Japan.

As a result, the GDP growth rate, which had been stagnant for a long time since the 1990s, rose steadily, and the balance of the general government's net debt as a percentage of GDP significantly declined (Figure 7). From this point of view, it would be helpful for Japan, which has an unprecedented fiscal deficit and is concerned about the sustainability of the social security system, to learn from the administrative and financial reform.

Figure 7. The Effects of Rogernomics on the Economy and Fiscal Position in New Zealand



Source: IMF

⁸ Traditionally, while trade unions organized by occupation have strong bargaining power, companies are bound by negotiations with many unions by occupation, and wages, working hours are dealt with uniformly throughout the country for the same profession. For employees, welfare and training conditions did not become an issue for negotiation.

⁹ As to educational policies, I referred to International Affairs Division, Minister's Secretariat, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2001).

3. Comparison of institutions and customs

Where does New Zealand's high performance in terms of senior employment come from? In this chapter, we will highlight the causes by comparing institutions and customs with those in Japan. However, it is difficult to analyze systems comprehensively because they are diverse in content. Therefore, I would like to make a comparison based on the arrangement of the OECD (2019) that presents the policy direction for the promotion of senior employment to developed countries. Specifically, we focus on systems and practices related to employment incentives, job opportunities, and employability. The OECD argues that to maintain the labor force and the social security system in the face of aging societies, developed countries should promote policies that contribute to improving employment incentives, expanding job opportunities, and enhancing employability.

The first type of incentive is whether there is an institution in place in which senior workers feel it is better to delay retirement. For example, the mandatory retirement system that forces senior workers to retire at a certain age reduces their motivation to continue working. Therefore, it is desirable to maintain the motivation of senior workers to work by extending or abolishing the retirement age system.

The second point is whether companies have institutions and customs that do not restrict the employment of older people, or whether workplace management that is comfortable for people of various ages is widespread. For example, even for seniors who have a high desire to work, if companies provide jobs that require long working hours and are physically and mentally burdensome, it becomes difficult for seniors to continue working. Therefore, it is desirable to offer flexible working conditions, such as shorter working hours, according to the wishes of senior workers.

Thirdly, employability is the ability to be employed. Companies do not hire older adults if they are unable to perform their job effectively. As the economic and social environment changes rapidly, senior workers need to acquire new skills in addition to those that they have accumulated. Therefore, it is desirable to increase vocational education and training that is easy for seniors to use and to improve the quality of such training.

(1) Employment Incentives

From the viewpoint of the retirement and pension system, the employment incentives for senior workers are considered more potent in New Zealand than in Japan.

A. Mandatory Retirement System

In Japan, most enterprises have a mandatory retirement age. Also, even in the case of continued employment after retirement, it is customary that wages are drastically cut. For seniors, if they are offered low-skill jobs that do not match their skills, or if their wages are slashed significantly, they are less likely to continue working¹⁰. Indeed, the most recent wage curve shows that while the wage curve has consistently increased from young workers to those in their 50s, at the age of 60, which many companies set as retirement age, wages are cut by more than 20% (Figure 8).

¹⁰ Yamada (2018) states that senior workers are assigned to a subsidiary job in most large companies.

Behind the current practice is the fact that the retirement age system has become an indispensable mechanism in order to maintain the seniority system and seniority wages¹¹. On the assumption that a new graduate will continue to work for the same company for many years after entering the company, many companies have maintained a system in which personnel expenses exceed performance in older years, while wages below performance are paid in young years¹². As a result, when the ratio of older adults increases, the number of employees who get more return than their performance will increase, making it difficult for companies to make both ends meet. For this reason, the retirement age system is necessary to expel older people who have reached a certain age.

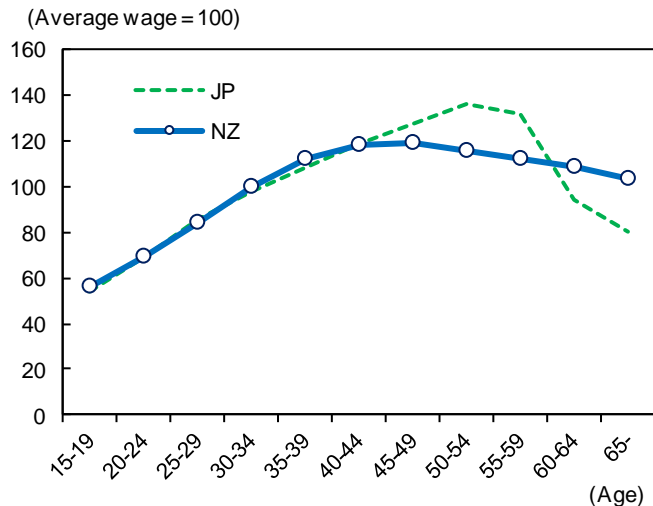
In contrast, New Zealand does not have a mandatory retirement age. Although they once existed, the Human Rights Act was enacted in 1993, which made it illegal to dismiss or retire workers because of their age until the pensionable age. In addition, the law was amended in 1999 to make it illegal to demand that workers retire even if they are older than the pensionable age.

The prohibition of the mandatory retirement system seems to have contributed to the expansion of senior employment in New Zealand. The employment rate remained flat until

1998, but it has changed to a clear upward trend since 1999 (Figure 9). In addition, the employment rate of those aged 70 and over has turned to an upward trend, though not at the same pace as that of those aged 65 and over.

In addition, in New Zealand, wages are set according to jobs and skills, so wages tend to be less likely to fall even if workers continue to work when they are older (Figure 8 above). In this respect as well, unlike Japan, where wages are drastically cut after the age of 60 regardless of jobs or skills, it seems to have a positive effect on the continued employment of seniors.

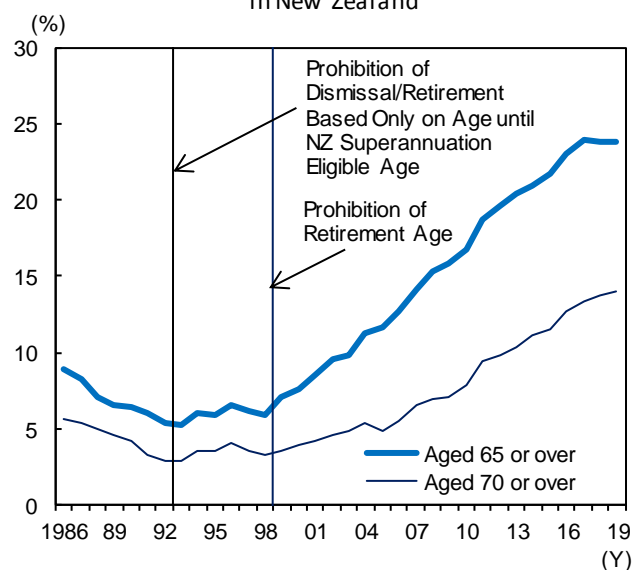
Figure 8. Wage Curve



Sources: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Stats NZ, and JRI staff calculations

Note: All industry and both sex. Average in 2017. Total hours worked in New Zealand is used the figures in 2013.

Figure 9. Employment Rate of Senior Workers in New Zealand



Sources: Hurnard (2005), Hyslop et al. (2019), and Stats NZ

¹¹ See Hamaguchi (2019).

¹² See Naganuma and Nishioka (2014).

B. Pension Plan

Japan's old-age employees' pension system (*zaishoku rorei nenkin*, in Japanese) also hurts employment incentives. In the case where an older adult who is 65 years of age or older but younger than 70 years of age is covered by the employees' pension insurance, the amount of old-age welfare pension benefits after the age of 65 will be reduced if the total amount of the basic monthly amount of old-age welfare pension benefits and the total monthly amount exceeds 470,000 yen.

According to a recent analysis by the Cabinet Office in Japan¹³, there is little negative impact of the retirement pension system on the employment of seniors because the total remuneration of an older adult who is 65 years of age or older but younger than 70 years of age rarely exceeds 470,000 yen. Hence, the abolition of the system will lead to the deterioration of pension finances further with a small increase in employment of seniors. Although this is true from a short-term perspective, it is inevitable to review the system considering the positive effects of the employment of high-income older people with high skills on companies and the economy. Also, potential positive impacts on promoting employment of the seniors are still unclear when the system is abolished. The Cabinet Office itself said, "the estimation does not take into account the potential effects of labor supply that emerge as labor supply behavior changes."

On the other hand, New Zealand's public pension system (New Zealand Superannuation) does not reduce pension benefits according to income. The public pension system for all New Zealand citizens has a long history, dating back to 1938 when the Social Security Act was enacted. Under this law, a public old-age pension system was established for all people over the age of 65. The system is characterized by the fact that it is financed by taxes (non-contributory plan) and does not require a survey of financial resources. In 1977, the eligible age was lowered to 60, but in about 10 years from 1992, the eligible age was again raised from 60 to 65. Since 2001, there have been no changes in the eligible age and no income tests (Table 1).

For this reason, combined with the ban on the mandatory retirement age system, it is considered that employment incentives for senior workers are somewhat positive because they can earn wages and receive pension payments without any financial penalty¹⁴. Besides, New Zealand's pension payments (monthly and before tax) are substantial compared to Japan's basic pension payments: NZ\$1,442 (approx. ¥104,000) per person for those aged 65 or older who are married, and NZ\$1,902 (approx. ¥137,000) for those who are single and living alone. Unless they must repay their housing loans, they will be able to live at a level sufficient for their essential lives.

¹³ See Director of Economic and Fiscal Analysis, Cabinet Office, Government in Japan (2018).

¹⁴ See Hurnard (2005).

Table 1. Pension system in New Zealand and Japan

		New Zealand	Japan
Funded from		Tax	Social Security Contributions and Tax
Qualifying Conditions		Citizenship and Residency	Contributions
Eligible Age		65	65
Income Replacement Rate		65~72.5%	61.7% (2019)
Income Test		No	Yes (Old-age Employees' Pension System)
National Pension Benefit Amount (per Person, per Month, before Tax)	Single Person Living Alone	1,902 NZD (about 137,000 yen, as of April 2019)	
	Couple both of which Meet the Criteria	1,442 NZD (about 104,000 yen, as of April 2019)	
	Category I Insured Person (e.g. Self-employed Person)		about 65,000 yen (Basic pension)
	Category II Insured Person (e.g. Employed to Work at a Company)		about 221,000 yen (Basic and Earnings-related Pension)
	Category III Insured Person (a Dependent Spouse of a Category II Insured Person)		about 65,000 yen (Basic Pension)

Sources: 9th Social Security Council Pension Section (2019), Research Institute for Policies on Pension and Aging (2019), and the website of Work and Income New Zealand government (accessed at March 9th, 2020)

Notes: National benefit amounts in New Zealand are calculated at 71.887 yen / NZ\$ which is the average exchange rate in 2019. The benefit amount of a category II insured person is the amount that a standard household receives where a husband is a category II insured person.

(2) Job Opportunities

A comparison of job opportunities for the elderly from the perspective of age discrimination and working styles shows that those in New Zealand are more abundant than those in Japan.

A. Age Discrimination

In Japan, senior workers tend to be subject to age discrimination during job hunting. Indeed, according to a survey of senior workers who found jobs after job seeking, more than 40% of them felt that the upper limit of job age was low (Figure 10). Notably, women aged 70 or over are more likely to think age restrictions.

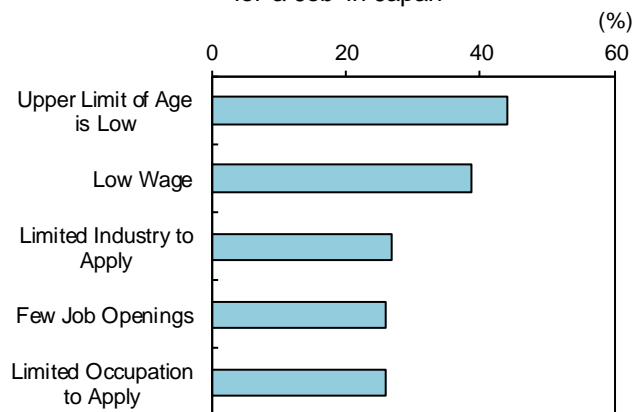
In this regard, according to a survey of companies that employ senior workers, more than 40% of companies set an upper age limit. In this case, the average upper age limit for all seniors is 66 years. Many seniors aged 65 or over are turned away because of their age without asked whether they can contribute through their skills or personality.

The reason why this kind of age discrimination exists under a low birthrate and aging population is that companies are not sufficiently considering how to utilize human resources. According to a survey on senior employment conducted by companies, many companies cite improvements in productivity, cost reductions through employee retention, and reductions in overtime as results of senior employment (Figure 11). Companies that have realized these results will likely be more willing to hire senior workers regardless of their age. On the other hand, many companies that are reluctant to hire seniors cannot point out the reason for this (Figure 12).

As a result, even though the utilization of senior workers should be regarded as one of the vital management strategies in the rapidly aging society, many companies continue to follow precedents. Thereby they are losing talent due to skilled seniors forced to exit from the companies, as well as restricting employment opportunities for senior workers.

In contrast, in New Zealand, age discrimination is prohibited by law, as described above. In hiring activities as well, it is forbidden to include the age on a resume, and it is no longer necessary to add a photo. Indeed, according to interviews, companies sometimes find out about age, gender and other factors for the first time in an interview. Under these circumstances, companies usually evaluate the skills, connections, and personalities of job seekers through interviews, and decide whether to hire them based on their ability to fulfill the job requirements.

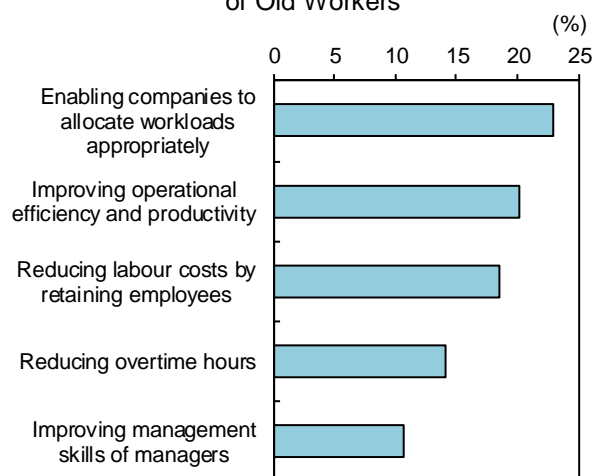
Figure 10. What Seniors Felt while Looking for a Job in Japan



Source: Recruit Jobs Co., Ltd "Survey on employment status and awareness of seniors 2018"

Note: Those who have searched for a job within 5 years and found a job are targets.

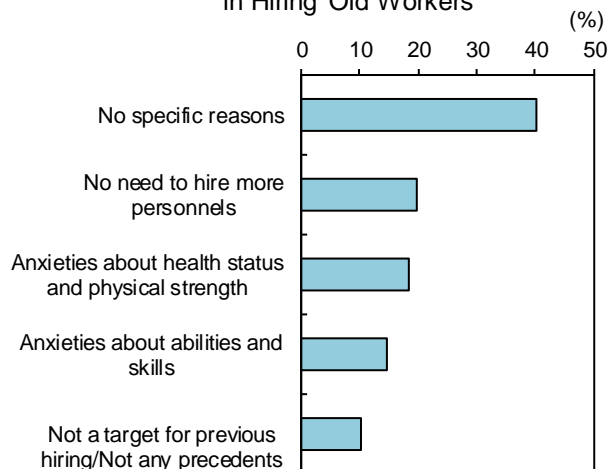
Figure 11. Achievements by Employment of Old Workers



Source: Recruit Jobs Co., Ltd "Survey on employment status and awareness of seniors 2018"

Note: Firms which hold employees aged 60 or over are targets.

Figure 12. Reasons for Not Actively in Hiring Old Workers



Source: Recruit Jobs Co., Ltd "Survey on employment status and awareness of seniors 2018"

Note: Firms which hold employees aged 60 or over are targets.

B. Working Style

Although the way of working in Japan has been gradually changing in recent years, it is generally rigid. Indeed, the actual number of working hours is longer than the ideal number of working hours, and the number of working days is higher than the ideal number of days.

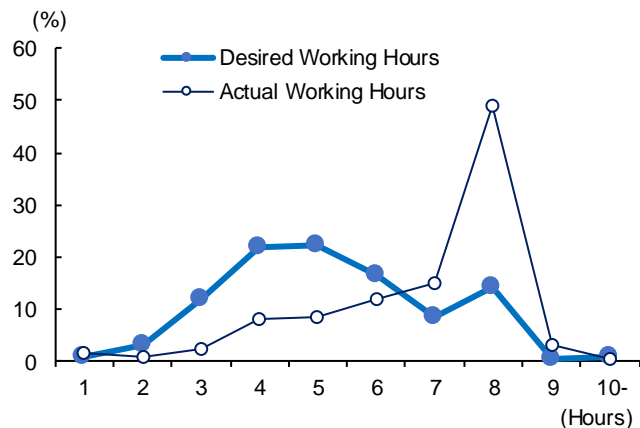
Looking at the average number of working hours per day that senior workers desire, "four hours" or "five hours" accounts for more than 20%, whereas actual working hours are "eight hours" in half of the senior workers (Figure 13). Hence, the gap between the ideal and reality is estimated to be 3 ~ 4 hours.

Looking at the number of working days that senior workers desire, while "working one to three days a week" is the most common preference in around 40% of individuals, more than half of senior workers are working five days a week (Figure 14). Hence, the gap between the ideal and reality is about 1 ~ 2 days.

Although there is a gap between the ideal and reality for senior workers, at least in terms of working days and hours, almost all companies recognize that current working days and hours are in line with the senior workers' wishes. For this reason, though companies can hire seniors who have the motivation and skills to work if they flexibly change their working hours and days, they tend to stick to the current work style (e.g., 8 hours per day) and fail to take advantage of such potential labor force. Besides, many companies answered that they have no complaints based on interviews with senior employees, but this is only because senior workers who prefer shorter working schedules are excluded from hiring.

On the other hand, the working style in New Zealand is flexible. As mentioned above, various forms of employment were realized with the enactment of the Employment Contracts Act in 1991. After that, the law was abolished in 2000, and the Employment Relations Act was enacted, but there has been no significant change in the content of allowing various forms of employment. Diverse types of employment are, for example,

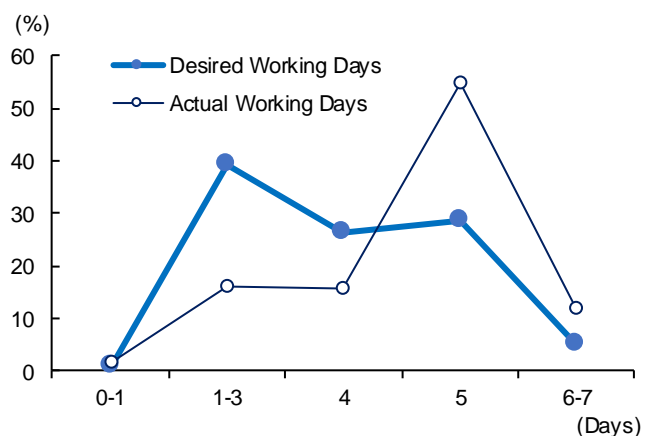
Figure 13. Working Hours for Old Workers



Source: Recruit Jobs Co., Ltd "Survey on employment status and awareness of seniors 2018"; and JRI staff calculations.

Note: Average working time a day. "Actual working hours" is a weighted average of each working hours of regular employees, part-timers, and other forms of employment.

Figure 14. Working Days for Older Persons



Source: Recruit Jobs Co., Ltd "Survey on employment status and awareness of seniors 2018," and JRI staff calculations.

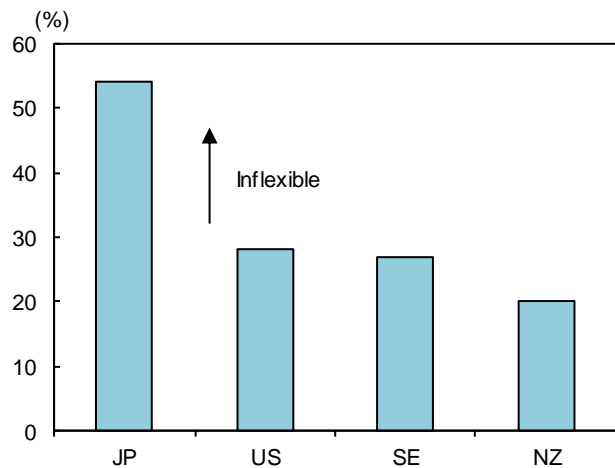
Note: Average working days a week. "Actual working days" is a weighted average of each working hours of regular employees, part-timers, and other forms of employment.

indefinite contracts, including part-time work, fixed-term contracts, and intermittent and irregular temporary contracts. Workers under these employment contracts have their rights as workers protected by the Employment Relations Act¹⁵.

As a result, companies have come to flexibly change their working hours and days according to the various circumstances of their employees. According to interviews, a law banning children under the age of 14 from being alone at home¹⁶ played a role in driving flexible jobs. Under these regulations, if there is only full-time work in the labor market, it would be difficult for both parents with children to work, and companies would not be able to secure a labor force. Therefore, companies have created jobs with flexible working hours so that parents can balance work with childcare and housework.

These measures are also helping to secure employment opportunities for senior workers who have limited time to care for their spouses and their health. As to the degree of rigidities in working hours of people aged 50~64, who are not precisely senior workers, more than half of people in this age bracket in Japan feel working hours are inflexible, compared to 20% in New Zealand (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Inflexibility of Working Hours, 2015



Source: OECD

Notes: "JP" is Japan. "US" is the United States. "SE" is Sweden. "NZ" is New Zealand. Those who are aged 50-64 are targets.

(3) Employability

Finally, a comparison of the institutions surrounding vocational education and training regarding employability shows that job training opportunities in New Zealand are more plentiful than those in Japan.

Vocational Education and Training

In Japan, only a small number of senior workers participate in vocational training. According to panel data tracking the same individuals, the participation rate of persons aged 65 or over in efforts to improve skills and abilities related to work was 4.3% for unemployed seniors and 10.7% for employed seniors in 2017¹⁷. For international comparison, the participation rate in work-related training for not-strictly senior workers who are aged 50-64 was just over 20% in Japan, 40% in Sweden, and 50% in New Zealand (Figure 16).

At least the following three points can be pointed out as the reasons for the lack of progress in the utilization of vocational training for senior workers compared with overseas countries.

¹⁵ See Persol Research and Consulting Co. (2019).

¹⁶ <https://www.govt.nz/browse/family-and-whanau/childcare-and-supervision/leaving-children-home-alone/>

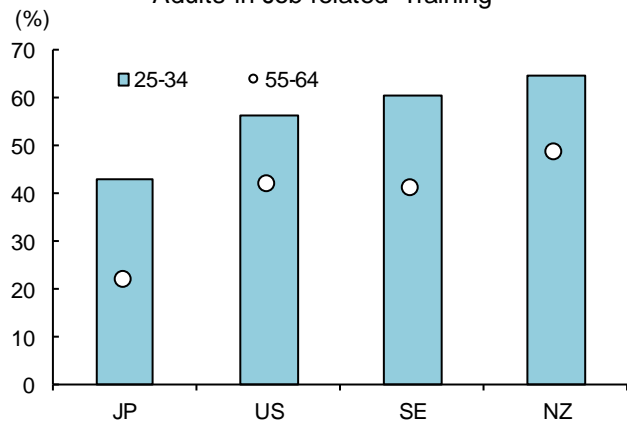
¹⁷ See Yasui (2020).

First, there is a lack of accessible vocational education and training opportunities. Public vocational education and training are particularly tricky for senior workers. First of all, the burden of training is too heavy. According to training programs provided by local governments for job seekers, the training period is limited to 3 - 6 months on weekdays, and classes are held for a long time around from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Second, the training area is limited. Because some programs have only a few training sites, it is difficult for senior job seekers to live far away in the same municipality to participate.

Second, there is little industry involvement. Since public vocational training is considered to be part of a support for SMEs in the first place, at present, the involvement of industry is limited to listening to the needs of SMEs by local government officials in charge of vocational training. For job seekers, if there are opportunities for internships where they can put the skills they have developed through training into practice at a company, they can easily be connected to a job. However, few companies currently accept internships. Although some private vocational training programs have received cooperation and sponsorship from related industries, the qualifications acquired by participating in the training programs are not necessarily incorporated into the personnel evaluation system of companies. Japanese companies often transfer even those who hold the qualifications to a department where they cannot make the most of their skills or do not directly lead to salary increases under the membership-type employment system. Therefore, even if the industry requires the skills, there is a problem that it is difficult for senior workers and middle-aged workers to motivate themselves to receive training.

Third, there is a deep-rooted prejudice by companies against the effects of vocational education and training on senior workers. According to a survey asking companies that do not use OFF-JT (training outside the workplace) for their reasons, 'Not enough time for OFF-JT even if positive impacts are expected' was the most common response for OFF-JT targeted at workers aged 20 ~ 59. On the other hand, concerning OFF-JT aimed at workers aged 60 or over, less than 10% answered that they did not have time to spare, and the percentage of companies that answered 'Positive impacts cannot be expected' instead increased significantly (Figure 17).

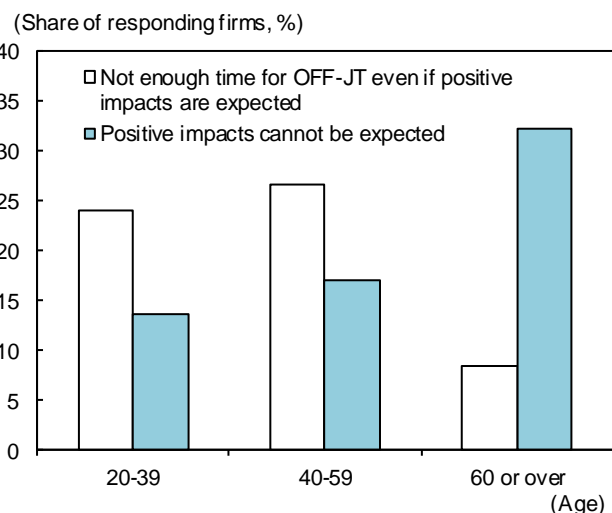
Figure 16. Share of Young Adults and Older Adults in Job-related Training



Source: OECD(2019)

Note: "JP" is Japan. "US" is United States. "SE" is Sweden. "NZ" is New Zealand.

Figure 17. Reasons Why Employers do not Exploit Off-JT for Their Employees



Source: Cabinet Office, Government of Japan (2016)

Companies must include senior workers in vocational education and training so that they can contribute to corporate activities by having them work for a long time while exhibiting their high productivity.

In contrast to this situation in Japan, many senior workers participate in vocational training in New Zealand. The share of senior workers participating in vocational education and training was approximately 40%, which is almost four times as many as that in Japan (Figure 18). By type of training, OJT (training through work in the workplace) accounted for the largest share at around 30%, followed by company-funded OFF-JT at approximately 20%. Off-JT, which is paid by employers, is only about 2%.

As described above, the following three points can be pointed out as the background of the ongoing vocational education and training by senior workers in New Zealand.

First, vocational education and training are available to all senior workers. In the workplace, vocational education and training are collegial, and if companies try to keep senior workers away from such practice, it will violate laws that prohibit age discrimination¹⁸. Besides, although opportunities for vocational training are not always abundant, public and private professional training institutions, as well as industry organizations (e.g., Employers and Manufacturers Association), are providing various opportunities for seminars and lectures with the help of universities and other institutions.

Second, government support is substantial. First, the government subsidizes the cost of training. For example, Industry Training Organisation (ITOs), Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), and Private Training Establishments (PTEs), are all subsidized by the government based on performance (Table 2). ITOs provide industry-specific skills for employees in an industry. ITPs develop highly skilled human resources in technical rather than academic fields. PTEs train skills in relatively niche areas. For individuals, the government provides interest-free student loans and student allowances. The interest-free student loan (up to 3 years) will be used mainly for tuition at vocational schools, while the student allowance will be used to pay for material costs such as spendings for textbooks. Third, vocational education and training are closely linked to the nationally standardized qualification system recognized by the government. Governments are strongly involved not only in supporting the cost of vocational education and training but also in maintaining the qualification system. Indeed, since many jobs in New Zealand require public qualifications, vocational education and training and the qualifications acquired through them are related to employment and wage levels. When people want to change jobs in other industries, it is common to take vocational education and training to obtain the necessary qualifications before changing careers.

Figure 18. Study and Training Participation Rate in New Zealand



Sources: Stats NZ, and JRI staff calculations
Note : For employees only. Surveyed in December 2018.

¹⁸ <https://www.govt.nz/browse/work/workers-rights/age-discrimination-at-work/>

Table 2. Overview of Vocational Education and Training in New Zealand

	ITOs (Industry Training Organisations)	ITPs (Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics)	PTEs (Private Training Enterprises)	Wānanga
Target	Employees belonging to an industry	Persons aiming to acquire vocational qualifications in line with business practices	Persons aiming to acquire vocational qualifications in line with business practices	Māori (Indigenous people of NZ)
Purpose	To satisfy industry training needs by developing and maintaining industry-specific skills	To develop highly skilled human resources in technical fields, not academic fields	To train students to acquire specialized niche skills	To pass on and develop Māori language and culture
Content	Support for firms' OJT (formulation of training plans and improvement of OJT level)	Practical classes and training (OFF-JT)	Practical classes and training (OFF-JT)	Classes of Māori traditional culture
Government Subsidy (as of 2017)	176 million NZ dollar	271 million NZ dollar	130 million NZ dollar	55 million NZ dollar

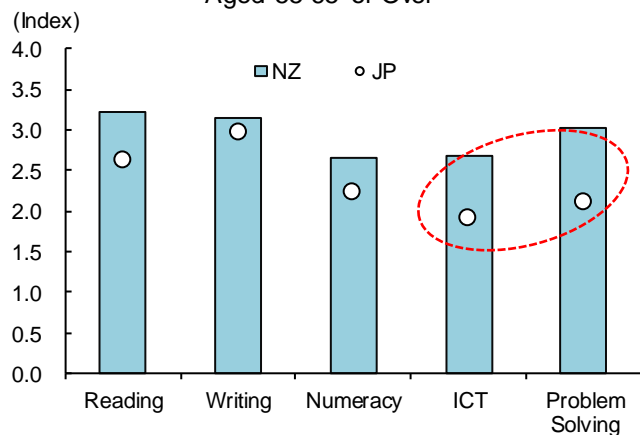
Sources: Kim (2005), Ministry of Education, NZ (2019b), Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare Secretariat International Division (2001), and Mizuta (2007)

Note: Although ITOs mainly support firms' OJT, in cases they organize OJT plans blended with OFF-JTs provided by PTEs they purchase. Note that it is prohibited that ITOs offer OFF-JT to firms directly.

Fourth, there are low psychological hurdles. In the interviews, some experts and businesspersons told that there was almost no sense of shame about receiving vocational education and training even among senior workers. At ITPs in New Zealand, they often see middle-aged and older students relearning, though there are not necessarily many senior workers. In this way, there is a widespread awareness that learning new skills and obtaining qualifications will help you improve your career.

As described above, New Zealand has increased the employment potential of senior workers by investing more in human capital than Japan. As a result, the employment of senior workers has been promoted, and many senior workers seem to be able to engage in relatively high-skill jobs in the workplace¹⁹ (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Skills Used at Work Among Workers Aged 55-65 or Over



Source: OECD

Note: For reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills, skills use indicators are scales between 1 "Never" and 5 "Every day". Problem-solving skills use refers to respondents' answers to "How often are you usually confronted with more complex problems that take at least 30 minutes to find a good solution?". The set of possible answers also ranges between 1 "Never" and 5 "Every day".

¹⁹ It is also considered that the middle-aged and older adults who are out of line under the umbership employment are likely to be assigned peripheral jobs in Japan.

4. Suggestions for Japan

This paper attempts to compare the working environment surrounding senior workers in New Zealand and Japan to highlight issues that Japan should address. To a certain extent, we can understand the differences in institutions and customs that affect the employment of older people. Based on the above comparison, I propose the following policies to promote their employment.

First, age discrimination should be prohibited, and the mandatory retirement age should be abolished. Although Article 9 of the Japanese Employment Measures Law states that employers must give equal opportunities for the recruitment of workers regardless of their age, many senior job seekers still feel some discrimination. It is necessary to revise the provisions to control age discrimination strictly and to prohibit the retirement age system.

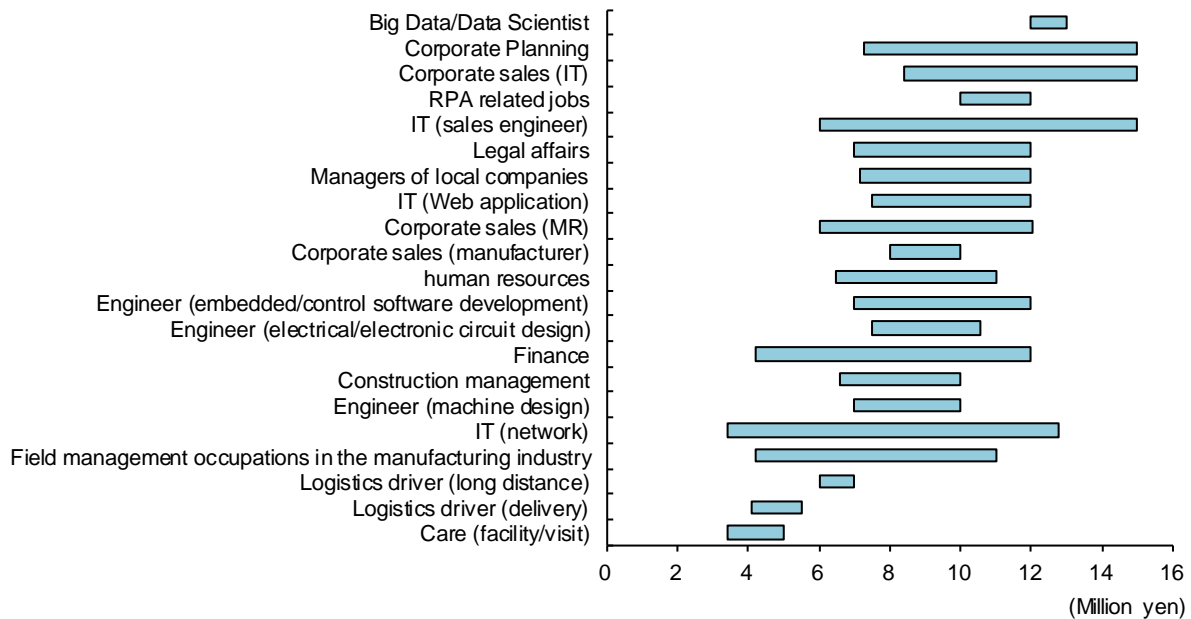
Of course, under the current membership-type employment system, the abolition of the retirement age system will not contribute to improving performance. Hence, it is necessary to realize a complete shift to the job-type employment system targeting at least middle-aged and elderly workers with the abolition of the retirement age system. As shown in Figure 8, the reason for the sharp wage cut in the 60s is that many senior workers who are out of line and are assigned to peripheral jobs that do not match the skills they have developed. Companies can provide duties commensurate with their skills and pay wages comparable with job performance by segmenting operations into job categories, clarifying the scope of responsibility, and utilizing senior workers as professionals. Transforming from membership-type to job-style employment system would increase the senior workers' incentives to work longer. However, as described below, seniors with insufficient skills are required to improve their skills through vocational education and training.

Also, some managers in charge of personnel and recruitment planning are complaining that they are short of information to set wages according to jobs and skills. They have been setting salaries based on seniority-based wage schedules under the collective hiring of new graduates. Recently, as the job market expands, wage information by job and skill has been accumulated (Figure 20).

The second is the promotion of work style reforms. In the first place, work style reforms are intended to enable workers to make their own choices in various and flexible ways of working according to their circumstances. While the upper limit of overtime and the use of five days of paid annual leave have attracted attention in terms of working hours, these measures are just a starting point. As we have seen, the wishes and realities of senior workers who are willing to work in terms of working hours and days are quite different. To realize such employment for senior workers, the government needs to encourage companies to adopt the wishes of senior workers and to change working conditions flexibly. Specifically, it may be possible to oblige employers to disclose not only the ratio of mid-career hires²⁰ but also the number of days and hours worked and the results of stress checks by gender and age group.

²⁰ In 2020, the partial amendment of the Labor Policy General Promotion Law has been enacted, which requires large companies (with a scale of 301 or more employees) to disclose the ratio of mid-career hiring and experienced hiring of regular employees.

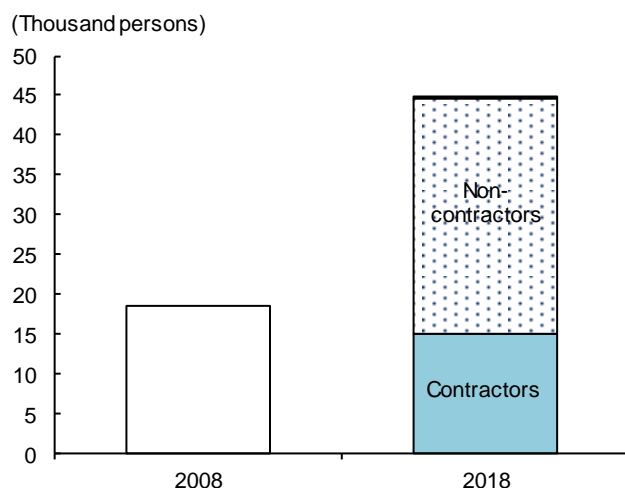
Figure 20. Annual Wage of the Job Market in Japan



Source: Japan Association of Human Resource Services Industry, and JRI staff calculations.
 Note: The highest and lowest values in the top 15% of the highest annual income at the time of recruitment.

It is also vital to support business start-ups (freelance entrepreneurs), which can be said to be ultimately freeways of working. According to Labour Force Survey in Japan, the number of self-employed workers²¹ aged 65 or over increased from 0.88 million in 2008 to 1.11 million in 2018, at an annual rate of 2.3%. In New Zealand, the number of self-employed workers increased from 19,000 in 2008 to 45,000 in 2018, a rapid increase of 9% (Figure 21). As of 2018, independent contractors with a high level of expertise accounted for about 30%. The New Zealand government is also strengthening its support structure by providing essential advice on financial planning and compliance regarding payment of Goods and Services Tax and employment of employees. In Japan, the interim report of the All-Generation Social Security Review Council states that entrepreneurship by senior workers after the termination of continuous employment until the age of 65 is expected as a measure other than employment by companies. Hence, it is necessary to strengthen supervision so that business can be conducted on an equal footing, for example, by optimizing transactions between large enterprises and self-employed business owners.

Figure 21. Self-employed Aged 65 or Over without Employees in New Zealand



Source: Stats NZ

²¹ Those are in non-agricultural sectors and do not hire any employees.

Third, the quality and quantity of vocational education and training should be improved. Vocational education and training are effective in enhancing the employability of senior workers. Using panel data in Japan, the analysis of the impact of learning for work-related skills and capabilities on employment probabilities has shown that such learning has been effective in promoting employment of senior workers for at least three years²².

Currently, Japanese public expenditure on vocational education and training is relatively small compared to other countries²³ (Figure 22).

Expanding the training to all generations is necessary as well as young unemployed persons and employees who work in small and medium-sized enterprises. Japan might need organizations that assess the content of training programs and certify appropriate national qualifications²⁴.

The fourth issue is the abolition of Japan's old-age employees' pension system (zaishoku rorei nenkin, in Japanese) or a further increase in the maximum amount. However, it is necessary to secure alternative financial resources and control medical and nursing care costs by improving productivity. Regarding the former, it is desirable to reduce the public pension deduction in income tax²⁵, which makes it possible to secure financial resources for the pensioner generation. The latter should be realized not by controlling labor costs per person but by improving productivity through the active introduction of digital technologies in the medical and nursing care fields.

Finally, I would like to mention the remaining issues. To examine the risk that the promotion of senior employment would crowd out the job opportunities of young workers is necessary. Suppose the retirement age is abandoned, and the skills of young people are precisely the same as those of senior workers, the employment of senior workers would substitute that of young workers. On the other hand, if vocational education and training improve the skills of senior workers, and higher skills of senior workers complement those of young workers, postponing the retirement age would lead to creating new products and services that can cultivate potential demand. As a result, employment opportunities for young workers will also increase.

The other is the problem of matching senior workers with companies. Many senior workers in Japan rely on the relationships they have built up in the past to find jobs, and they tend to miss out on other employment opportunities. In New Zealand, on the other hand, job seekers, including senior workers, find jobs primarily

Figure 22. Public Expenditure on Training Programs



Source: OECD

Note: "JP" is Japan. "US" is United States. "SE" is Sweden. "NZ" is New Zealand.

²² See Yasui (2020).

²³ Sekiya (2019) points out that the Japanese public expenditure on training program in OECD statistics is too small. However, the amount would not change so much even if the amount based on the actual situation is used: Fiscal 2015 spending amount in public vocational training policy of Japan < Excerpt from p.83 in Sekiya (2019) > 177.6 billion yen / FY2015 nominal GDP 53,278 billion yen x 100 = 0.033%.

²⁴ At the same time, if the shift from the membership-type to the job-type employment system leads to the advancement of professionalization of senior workers, as Yamada (2017) points out, the idea that the responsibility for career development lies with the individual, not companies, permeates. This would encourage senior workers take an active part in vocational education and training.

²⁵ See Nishizawa (2018).

through online advertising. Online ads show positions in a form that is viewable by anyone and show job descriptions and wage distributions²⁶. Because the environment surrounding matching is so different, New Zealand may be more efficient than Japan. Although this time, I was unable to compare the efficiency of matching with specific data²⁷, this will be another issue to be tackled.

²⁶ In the interviews, some mention that in New Zealand, if he/she applies for unemployment insurance benefits, the government (Ministry of Social Development) will guide him/her how to write a CV, how to interview for employment. Also, the government requires him/her to register online with a private placement agency.

²⁷ If Japan shifts to the job-type employment system and the concept of occupation is established, as Yamada (2017) points out, "occupational communities such as trade unions by occupation and professional organization are formed. These communities would increase the possibility of changing jobs and re-employment through the formation of human networks." Indeed, in the interviews, an economist pointed out that professional associations are functioning effectively in finding jobs.

BOX Vocational training system reform in New Zealand

The New Zealand government announced a comprehensive review of the vocational training system in 2019 (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2019a).

The first reason for this is the plight of ITPs, which are government-run institutions of higher education. Notably, the management of ITPs in small cities has become difficult. Behind this, it has been pointed out that ITPs have become challenging to attract students. In ITPs, where there are many full-time students, even though the tuition is high, it is difficult to obtain a suitable job even after graduation.

Second, there is a sense of crisis that soon, one-third of all jobs in New Zealand will be automated, requiring more than half of all employees to be retrained and thus resulting in skills shortages across a wide range of industries (see Box Figure 1).

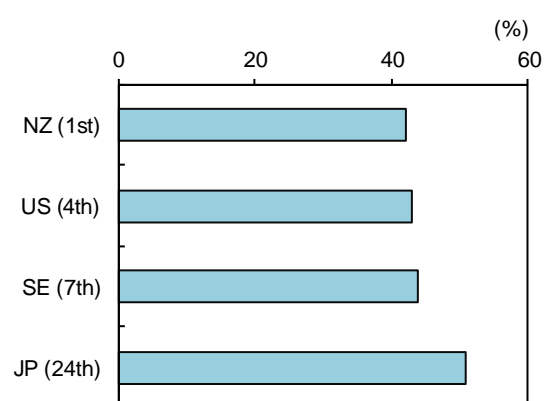
As for the content of the review, first, Workforce Development Councils will be established by 2022, which will replace the existing ITOs and respond to changes in the needs of skills and work in each region. Second, a system will be established that can provide OJT and OFF-JT in an integrated manner. To this end, ITPs will be integrated into a single national organization, and it will be run as the New Zealand Institute of Skills & Technology (a working title). Third, the establishment of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in the region will improve collaboration between education, industry, and research. Fourth, the government will integrate subsidies that used to be divided into OJT and OFF-JT (dual funding system) so that workers can optimally match OJT and OFF-JT to their jobs.

Education Minister Hipkins, who oversees the reforms, said "The changes we are making will give industry greater control over all aspects of vocational education and training, making the system more responsive to employers' needs and to the changing world of work. Industry and employers will identify skills needs, set standards and approve qualifications and credentials, and influence funding decisions. The changes will also ensure we do better for learners who haven't been well-served by the present system²⁸."

However, some ITOs have voiced opposition. For example, they said, "Only the financial problems of ITPs are getting serious, and NZ's vocational education and training itself is not a big problem. ITPs are unprofitable because many people are reluctant to spend a lot of time learning there under the situation where jobs are easy to find. Employees can be more motivated and learn more efficiently while working like OJT supported by ITOs."

An analyst said, "ITO's are likely to be absorbed into state institutions as reforms progress. There is a significant risk that ITOs may lose their good training in this regard."

BOX Figure 1. Probability of being automated



Source: Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018) Table 4.5.
Notes : Bar indicates degree of automation for an average worker. () indicates ranking when ordering low est automation risk among 32 countries. "JP" is Japan. "US" is United States. "SE" is Sweden. "NZ" is New Zealand.

²⁸ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-dawn-work-skills-and-training>

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