

Slow but steady

NZ Labour market review, June quarter 2017

2 August 2017

- June's labour market figures were very close to market expectations.
- The unemployment rate fell to 4.8% (down from 4.9%)
- Looking through quarter-to-quarter volatility, the economy looks to be expanding at a moderate pace.
- With the unemployment rate declining only gradually, wage growth is likely to remain muted for some time.

Looking at the full suite of June quarter data, New Zealand's labour market isn't in bad shape, with continued moderate growth in the demand for workers and ongoing jobs creation. However, pressures in the labour market are building only very gradually, and any significant broad-based lift in wage pressures still appears some way off.

Job creation continuing at a moderate pace

In terms of demand for workers, the two labour market surveys released today – the employee-focused Household Labour Force Survey, and employer-focused Quarterly Employment Survey – did give slightly different results. But smoothing through the usual quarter-to-quarter survey volatility, today's data are consistent with continued, albeit moderate, growth in economic activity.

- The HLFS recorded a 0.2% decline in the number of people employed. However, we'd caution about reading too much into one quarter's data, especially as it's come in conjunction with a sharp - and unexpected - pullback in labour force participation. The participation rate fell from 70.6% in March to 70.0% in June. That's a sizeable fall for a signal quarter, and particularly surprising given the continued growth in the working age population (up 20,000 over the past quarter alone).

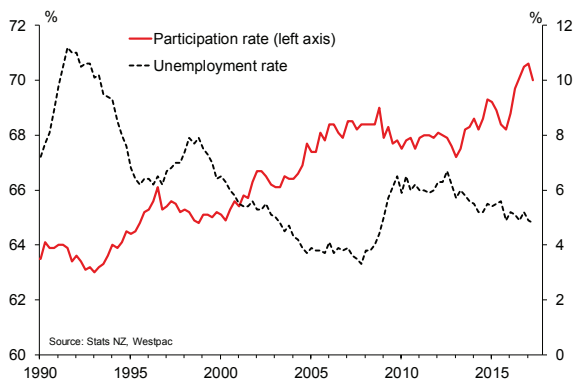
	Quarterly actual		Quarterly expected		Annual
	2017 Q1	2017 Q2	Market	Westpac	2017 Q2
Household Labour Force Survey					
Unemployment rate (s.a.)	4.9%	4.8%	4.8%	4.9%	-
Employment (s.a.)	1.1%	-0.2%	0.7%	0.7%	3.1%
Participation rate (s.a.)	70.6%	70.0%	70.6%	70.7%	-
Quarterly Employment Survey					
FTE employment (s.a.)	0.4%	0.7%	-	0.9%	2.7%
Hours paid (s.a.)	0.2%	0.9%	-	1.1%	3.4%
Private ave hourly earnings, ord time (all sectors)	0.3%	0.8%	0.9%	1.0%	1.2%
Labour Cost Index					
Private sector, ordinary time	0.4%	0.4%	-	0.4%	1.6%
All sectors, ordinary time	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	1.7%
Private, all sal & wage rates	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	1.6%

- The QES showed that the number of full-time equivalent employees was up 0.7% over the quarter, and is up 2.7% over the year.
- Importantly, both surveys showed continued gains in labour hours over the quarter. This is consistent with broader economic indicators which are pointing to firm (but not spectacular) June quarter GDP growth, as well as continued growth in the demand for workers.

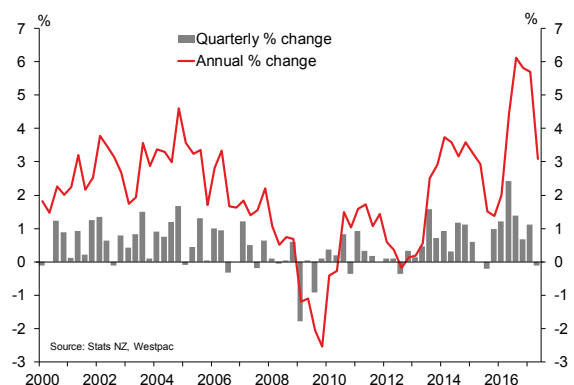
By sector, jobs growth over the past year has been heavily concentrated among professional services, and in the retail and hospitality sectors.

For most of the past year, the construction sector has also been a key driver of employment. However, the June quarter figures did show a drop in the number of construction workers employed. This will be worth keeping an eye on over the coming months, with a range of other indicators point to a loss of momentum in the building and construction sector.

Labour force participation and unemployment



Employment growth



Labour market tightening, but gradually...

New Zealand's unemployment rate fell to 4.8% in the June quarter, down from 4.9% in March. Unemployment has been trending down since 2012, and is now at its lowest level since 2008. However, while the current level of the unemployment rate isn't high, it's not really low either.

Similarly, the underutilisation rate (which includes the unemployed as well as those who are looking to work more hours), has also declined. However, it's yet to retrace most of the climb we saw following the recession in 2008/09.

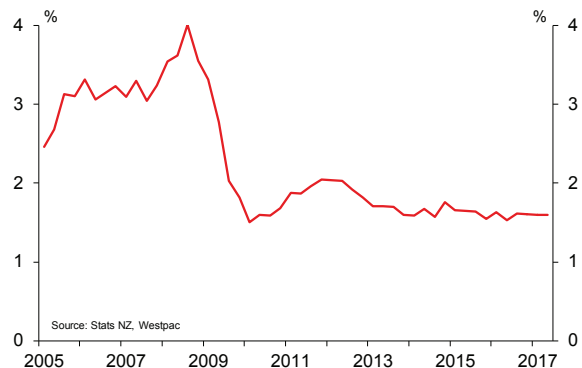
...and wage pressure remain muted

With the labour market tightening only gradually, wage inflation has remained muted. Private sector wages, as measured by the Labour Cost Index rose by 0.4% through the June quarter, leaving them up 1.6% over the past year. Similarly, the broader QES measure of average hourly earnings rose by a modest 1.1% over the past year. Both of those results included a boost from the recent increase in the minimum wage, the effect of which was most noticeable in areas like accommodation and retail.

Looking at the longer term trend in wage growth, we have not seen any material lift in wage inflation over the past five years. That's despite the continuing growth in economic activity and the more recent lift in consumer price inflation. This is true even in the construction sector, where wage growth has not accelerated since 2014.

Although wage inflation is likely to rise over the coming year as the economy continues to expand, we expect it will remain modest for some time (with the notable exception of the health care sector, where earnings for some workers will be boosted by the recent wage settlement agreement).

Labour Cost Index



Market implications

The New Zealand dollar fell 40pts to 0.7430 against the US dollar after the release, presumably in reaction to the surprise drop in employment.

Today's result is unlikely to have a large impact on the RBNZ's thinking ahead of next week's *Monetary Policy Statement*. While there were mixed messages from the jobs figures, overall today's data didn't deliver major surprises. Looking at the jobs figures in conjunction with labour hours and today's wage numbers, we're still left with a picture of modest growth in the economy but subdued inflation pressures.

Satish Ranchhod
Senior Economist

Contact the Westpac economics team

Dominick Stephens, Chief Economist +64 9 336 5671

Michael Gordon, Senior Economist +64 9 336 5670

Satish Ranchhod, Senior Economist +64 9 336 5668

Shyamal Maharaj, Economist +64 9 336 5669

Paul Clark, Industry Economist +64 9 336 5656

Any questions email: economics@westpac.co.nz

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. The forecasts given in this document are predictive in character. Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure that the assumptions on which the forecasts are based are reasonable, the forecasts may be affected by incorrect assumptions or by known or unknown risks and uncertainties. The ultimate outcomes may differ substantially from these forecasts.

Disclaimer

Things you should know

Westpac Institutional Bank is a division of Westpac Banking Corporation ABN 33 007 457 141 ('Westpac').

Disclaimer

This material contains general commentary, and market colour. The material does not constitute investment advice. Certain types of transactions, including those involving futures, options and high yield securities give rise to substantial risk and are not suitable for all investors. We recommend that you seek your own independent legal or financial advice before proceeding with any investment decision. This information has been prepared without taking account of your objectives, financial situation or needs. This material may contain material provided by third parties. While such material is published with the necessary permission none of Westpac or its related entities accepts any responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any such material. Although we have made every effort to ensure the information is free from error, none of Westpac or its related entities warrants the accuracy, adequacy or completeness of the information, or otherwise endorses it in any way. Except where contrary to law, Westpac and its related entities intend by this notice to exclude liability for the information. The information is subject to change without notice and none of Westpac or its related entities is under any obligation to update the information or correct any inaccuracy which may become apparent at a later date. The information contained in this material does not constitute an offer, a solicitation of an offer, or an inducement to subscribe for, purchase or sell any financial instrument or to enter a legally binding contract. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure that the assumptions on which the forecasts are based are reasonable, the forecasts may be affected by incorrect assumptions or by known or unknown risks and uncertainties. The ultimate outcomes may differ substantially from these forecasts.

Country disclosures

Australia: Westpac holds an Australian Financial Services Licence (No. 233714). This material is provided to you solely for your own use and in your capacity as a wholesale client of Westpac.

New Zealand: In New Zealand, Westpac Institutional Bank refers to the brand under which products and services are provided by either

Westpac or Westpac New Zealand Limited ("WNZL"). Any product or service made available by WNZL does not represent an offer from Westpac or any of its subsidiaries (other than WNZL). Neither Westpac nor its other subsidiaries guarantee or otherwise support the performance of WNZL in respect of any such product. The current disclosure statements for the New Zealand branch of Westpac and WNZL can be obtained at the internet address www.westpac.co.nz. For further information please refer to the Product Disclosure Statement (available from your Relationship Manager) for any product for which a Product Disclosure Statement is required, or applicable customer agreement. Download the Westpac NZ QFE Group Financial Advisers Act 2008 Disclosure Statement at www.westpac.co.nz.

China, Hong Kong, Singapore and India: This material has been prepared and issued for distribution in Singapore to institutional investors, accredited investors and expert investors (as defined in the applicable Singapore laws and regulations) only. Recipients in Singapore of this material should contact Westpac Singapore Branch in respect of any matters arising from, or in connection with, this material. Westpac Singapore Branch holds a wholesale banking licence and is subject to supervision by the Monetary Authority of Singapore. Westpac Hong Kong Branch holds a banking licence and is subject to supervision by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority. Westpac Hong Kong branch also holds a license issued by the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) for Type 1 and Type 4 regulated activities. This material is intended only to "professional investors" as defined in the Securities and Futures Ordinance and any rules made under that Ordinance. Westpac Shanghai and Beijing Branches hold banking licenses and are subject to supervision by the China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC). Westpac Mumbai Branch holds a banking license from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and subject to regulation and supervision by the RBI.

UK: The contents of this communication, which have been prepared by and are the sole responsibility of Westpac Banking Corporation London and Westpac Europe Limited. Westpac (a) has its principal place of business in the United Kingdom at Camomile Court, 23 Camomile Street, London EC3A 7LL, and is registered at Cardiff in the UK (as Branch No. BR00106), and (b) authorised and regulated by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority in Australia. Westpac is authorised in the United Kingdom by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Westpac is subject to regulation by the

Disclaimer continued

Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Details about the extent of our regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority are available from us on request. Westpac Europe Limited is a company registered in England (number 05660023) and is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority.

This communication is being made only to and is directed at (a) persons who have professional experience in matters relating to investments who fall within Article 19(5) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) Order 2005 (the "Order") or (b) high net worth entities, and other persons to whom it may otherwise lawfully be communicated, falling within Article 49(2)(a) to (d) of the Order (all such persons together being referred to as "relevant persons"). Any person who is not a relevant person should not act or rely on this communication or any of its contents. The investments to which this communication relates are only available to and any invitation, offer or agreement to subscribe, purchase or otherwise acquire such investments will be engaged in only with, relevant persons. Any person who is not a relevant person should not act or rely upon this communication or any of its contents. In the same way, the information contained in this communication is intended for "eligible counterparties" and "professional clients" as defined by the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority and is not intended for "retail clients". With this in mind, Westpac expressly prohibits you from passing on the information in this communication to any third party. In particular this communication and, in each case, any copies thereof may not be taken, transmitted or distributed, directly or indirectly into any restricted jurisdiction. This communication is made in compliance with the Market Abuse Regulation (Regulation(EU) 596/2014).

Investment Recommendations Disclosure

The material may contain investment recommendations, including information recommending an investment strategy. Reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that the material is presented in a clear, accurate and objective manner. Investment Recommendations for Financial Instruments covered by MAR are made in compliance with Article 20 MAR. Westpac does not apply MAR Investment Recommendation requirements to Spot Foreign Exchange which is out of scope for MAR.

Unless otherwise indicated, there are no planned updates to this Investment Recommendation at the time of publication. Westpac has no obligation to update, modify or amend this Investment Recommendation or to notify the recipients of this Investment Recommendation should any information, including opinion, forecast or estimate set out in this Investment Recommendation change or subsequently become inaccurate.

Westpac will from time to time dispose of and acquire financial instruments of companies covered in this Investment Recommendation as principal and act as a market maker or liquidity provider in such financial instruments.

Westpac does not have any proprietary positions in equity shares of issuers that are the subject of an investment recommendation.

Westpac may have provided investment banking services to the issuer in the course of the past 12 months.

Westpac does not permit any issuer to see or comment on any investment recommendation prior to its completion and distribution.

Individuals who produce investment recommendations are not permitted to undertake any transactions in any financial instruments or derivatives in relation to the issuers covered by the investment recommendations they produce.

Westpac has implemented policies and procedures, which are designed to ensure conflicts of interests are managed consistently and appropriately, and to treat clients fairly.

The following arrangements have been adopted for the avoidance and prevention of conflicts in interests associated with the provision of investment recommendations.

- (i) Chinese Wall/Cell arrangements;
- (ii) physical separation of various Business/Support Units;
- (iii) and well defined wall/cell crossing procedures;
- (iv) a "need to know" policy;
- (v) documented and well defined procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest;
- (vi) steps by Compliance to ensure that the Chinese Wall/Cell arrangements remain effective and that such arrangements are adequately monitored.

U.S.: Westpac operates in the United States of America as a federally licensed branch, regulated by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency. Westpac is also registered with the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission ("CFTC") as a Swap Dealer, but is neither registered as, or affiliated with, a Futures Commission Merchant registered with the US CFTC. Westpac Capital Markets, LLC ("WCM"), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Westpac, is a broker-dealer registered under the U.S. Securities Exchange Act of 1934 ("the Exchange Act") and member of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority ("FINRA"). This communication is provided for distribution to U.S. institutional investors in reliance on the exemption from registration provided by Rule 15a-6 under the Exchange Act and is not subject to all of the independence and disclosure standards applicable to debt research reports prepared for retail investors in the United States. WCM is the U.S. distributor of this communication and accepts responsibility for the contents of this communication. All disclaimers set out with respect to Westpac apply equally to WCM. If you would like to speak to someone regarding any security mentioned herein, please contact WCM on +1 212 389 1269. All disclaimers set out with respect to Westpac apply equally to WCM.

Investing in any non-U.S. securities or related financial instruments mentioned in this communication may present certain risks. The securities of non-U.S. issuers may not be registered with, or be subject to the regulations of, the SEC in the United States. Information on such non-U.S. securities or related financial instruments may be limited. Non-U.S. companies may not be subject to audit and reporting standards and regulatory requirements comparable to those in effect in the United States. The value of any investment or income from any securities or related derivative instruments denominated in a currency other than U.S. dollars is subject to exchange rate fluctuations that may have a positive or adverse effect on the value of or income from such securities or related derivative instruments.

The author of this communication is employed by Westpac and is not registered or qualified as a research analyst, representative, or associated person under the rules of FINRA, any other U.S. self-regulatory organisation, or the laws, rules or regulations of any State. Unless otherwise specifically stated, the views expressed herein are solely those of the author and may differ from the information, views or analysis expressed by Westpac and/or its affiliates.