



RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON
EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT
LINKAGES

**TOWARDS A
LEARNING IDENTITY:
EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS
BECOMING LEARNERS**

Jane Higgins

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Abstract

This report presents findings from research with fifty-one Christchurch young people who left school with low or no qualifications. Most of these young people experienced a period when they were not in education, employment or training (known as NEET) but at the time of this research they were all in a learning environment of some kind. The report explores the ways in which many of these young people rejected their former NEET identities and were building learning identities for themselves. It examines what facilitates this process and the processes by which these young people make education employment linkages. The report concludes that some current policy directions risk excluding members of this group from assistance.

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Feedback on this report is welcome. It can be sent to:

Dr Jane Higgins (jane.higgins@lincoln.ac.nz)
AERU
Lincoln University
PO Box 84
Lincoln 7647
NEW ZEALAND

Executive Summary

1. Objective 2 of the EEL project has focused on education-employment support for young people who leave school with low or no qualifications. Earlier reports offer analyses of the transition infrastructure as it relates to this group (Report No. 3) and of education/training organisations and providers working with these young people (Report No. 4). This report focuses on the voices of the young people themselves.
2. Fifty-one young people in five Christchurch learning organisations were interviewed in pairs or small groups during the latter half of 2011. Almost all had left school early and experienced a period (from weeks to months) of non-participation in post-school education, training or employment (known as NEET). The learning organisations included two teen parent units, two organisations catering for young people facing multiple difficult challenges, and one offering both Youth Guarantee and fee paying courses.
3. The research question explored here is: what do young people who have left school with few or no qualifications have to say about their capacity to develop education-employment linkages, including about forms of support that facilitate this development and barriers that impede it?
4. Findings support the conclusion established in the EEL literature review (Report No. 2) that identity work is crucial for young people developing their learning capacities and crafting education-employment linkages. In particular, the young people in this phase of the project voiced an almost universal rejection of what might be called a NEET identity and spoke of themselves in terms of developing learning identities.
5. Their stories indicate that (i) rejection of a school identity does not necessarily constitute rejection of a learning identity; (ii) development of a learning identity is a complex, non-linear process and is often also an unstable and fragile process; (iii) a learning identity is always developed in relationship: to individuals, communities, institutions and structures.
6. The rejection of a NEET identity was frequently accompanied by comments about the importance of 'getting an education'. For some, this involved regrets about leaving school, but most told stories of the difficulties they experienced staying in school and preferred learning in their current organisation.
7. Relationships of recognition between tutor and student emerged as fundamental to the establishment of a learning identity. This contrasted strongly with school experiences in which many of these young people felt invisible and unable to bring themselves, with all their difficult circumstances (including being 'in trouble') to the classroom. In their current environment they felt recognised, and therefore understood and supported. This is the ground on which they were able to build learning identities.
8. Other aspects of the learning environment also supported the development of learning identities, including: the perceived relevance of the work done, paced learning, individualised support, small class sizes, engaged tutors who delivered a 'positive push' (rather than a punitive one), and an authority structure that students could understand and respect.
9. Asked about what would help them craft education-employment pathways, participants spoke of tutors and others who were trustworthy, understanding, honest,

patient and with high expectations. They also spoke extensively about the importance of their own motivation.

10. Informal networks emerged as significant forms of systemic support. The primary way individuals made the transition from NEET status into their current learning environment was through contact with networks of trusted individuals, such as family members, peers, youth workers, midwives, social workers and former school teachers. The value of this word-of-mouth approach was that these young people were able to take advice from people they trusted and so came prepared to trust the course in which they enrolled. This suggests that strengthening such networks and widening their scope so that they include as many young people as possible is a desirable step.
11. Reliance on informal networks also occurred when pathways into employment were being sought. The process relied heavily on individual tutors' knowledge of, and networking with, local employers. This was the case for both work experience and employment. This raises the question of how to support, strengthen and extend such networks which are currently ad hoc and reliant on the support of local employers.
12. Maintaining a learning identity and developing a worker identity will be a challenge for these young people if, having taken seriously the injunction to 'get an education' they are then unable to translate this into genuine employment. The assumption shared by many that 'it's all just down to me', will then reinforce an identity of 'failure' like that experienced at school, with the accompanying risk of disillusionment and a return to NEET status.
13. This is a dynamic policy area at present. Two recent policy developments in particular may give cause for concern in the light of these research findings. The first is the close policy focus on 16-17 year olds. This focus suggests an outdated 'age and stage' linear model of youth development and risks excluding those young people who come later to a learning identity because of difficult life circumstances.
14. The second development concerns the goal of all students achieving Level 2 NCEA. This is a laudable goal but if it leads to changes in learning organisations such as those participating in this research (e.g. in performance measures, course structure and length), and particularly if it leads these organisations to replicate schools, this will not cater well for these young people.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Education Employment Linkages project is a five year research project exploring how transition support systems can best help young New Zealanders make good education employment linkages to benefit themselves, their communities, and the national economy.

Objective Two of the EEL project focuses on examining how young people who have left school with few or no qualifications can be supported to craft pathways within the wider education system and between education and employment. This builds on work undertaken in earlier stages of the project, specifically work that has:

- (i) examined the international research literature relevant to this topic (Higgins, Vaughan, Phillips and Dalziel 2008),
- (ii) mapped aspects of the formal transition system of support available to young New Zealanders making education employment linkages (Vaughan, Phillips, Dalziel and Higgins 2009) and
- (iii) explored the regional transition infrastructure through interviews with a range of providers to examine forms of assistance offered by various Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) and connections services whose work with young people is associated with education employment linkages (Higgins 2010).

This report focuses on the voice of the young people themselves. Together with these earlier elements of the project the analysis here fills out a wider picture of the context in which these young people are trying to forge education-employment links. Because the international literature review and the interviews with providers offer important analyses for an understanding of what is happening for these young people, the executive summaries of these earlier reports are included as appendices at the end of this report. The full reports are available on the EEL website (www.eel.org.nz).

This document is one of four reports produced for stage four of the EEL project. Other reports produced from this stage of the project examine other dimensions of the wider education-employment infrastructure, specifically in school communities, Māori and Pasifika communities, and employer-led channels.

1.2 Structure of this report

The rest of this chapter sets out the research question, methods and scope. Chapter Two begins the analysis of group discussions with young people exploring these in terms of the development of learning identities among participants, looking in particular at what has supported this development. Chapter Three explores forms of support (both individual and systemic) that enable participants to craft education-employment pathways. Chapter Four examines some policy developments that are likely to impact on young people and organisations such as those participating in this research. Chapter Five concludes the analysis.

1.3 Research Question

This report is concerned with hearing from young people themselves. The research question explored here asks:

What do young people who have left school with few or no qualifications have to say about their capacity to develop education-employment linkages, including about forms of support that facilitate this development and barriers that impede it?

1.4 Research methods and scope

The research was conducted in Christchurch in the second half of 2011. Because of the significant disruption caused by the Christchurch earthquakes it was decided to focus on talking with young people who were enrolled in a (non-school) learning institution of some kind. This means that the research did not include young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), however, most of the young people spoken with in the course of the research were early school leavers who had spent a period of time (from weeks to months) not engaged in education, employment or training. For some, this NEET period extended from the time they left school until their enrolment in their current course. Others had left school and moved in and out of employment that was often casual and insecure. These young people are, therefore, an important group in that many had been NEET but they had all subsequently found their way into a learning environment. This means that they are well placed to reflect on (a) their experiences of being not in education, employment or training and (b) their pathway from NEET status into a learning environment.

This focus also enabled the research to address a question posed by recent reports from the Ministry of Education:

In 2005, of the 7400 school leavers with little or no formal attainment (13 percent of all school leavers), over 3100 students chose to continue their education in tertiary institutions. Almost all of these students are studying level 1-3 certificates comparable with the study options offered in the schooling sector. **We do not know why some students are choosing to pay for tertiary education rather than taking advantage of the free schooling sector** though it suggests that the schooling sector is not meeting these students' needs in some way, or that the tertiary sector is more attractive. These findings suggest that low level certificates are providing a way into education for students for whom school is not meeting their needs in some way, or a way out of unemployment for young people. (Loader and Dalgety 2008:11, emphasis added.)

and

It is important then to see what students do after leaving school, particularly for students with no or low school qualifications. We can then see how particular subgroups are faring in relation to the outcomes envisaged by the tertiary education strategy. While a study based on administrative data can't determine *why* students are deciding to opt for particular post-secondary activities, we can show *what* is happening. (Engler 2011:5, emphasis added).

The qualitative nature of the research offered in this strand of the EEL project enables us to identify clear reasons why some students with few or no school qualifications choose to undertake their learning outside the school environment.

Learning Organisations

A variety of post-compulsory learning organisations in Christchurch were invited to

participate in this phase of the research. Five agreed to take part and these offer a useful range of what is available in terms of the needs of those leaving school with few or no qualifications. Two organisations worked with young people facing multiple difficult challenges, including involvement in the youth justice system. These organisations offered a variety of services including case management and wrap-around support as well as education/training. Two organisations were learning centres for teen mothers. The fifth was a learning centre that included both Youth Guarantee (that is, government funded) and fee-paying courses for students.

Each of these organisations offered their students an environment that shared the characteristics identified in EEL Research Report No. 4 (see Appendix 2) as supportive of young people's learning by helping them to:

- gain confidence in their own capacity to learn,
- set goals for themselves which included career goals,
- learn through a pedagogy appropriate to their needs.

Specifically this involved fostering respectful and trusting relationships between tutors and students; self-paced learning; project-based learning that was relevant, contextual, integrated, specific, and holistic; and career education that encouraged career conversations between students and tutors. A holistic focus on the wellbeing of the student was fundamental to this pedagogical approach. Where possible, wrap-around support was offered in-house or through referral, class sizes were small (generally not more than a dozen), tutors were highly skilled at working with young people and learning was tailored to individual needs.

Focus groups and friendship groups

The main research tool was the focus group or friendship group¹ for which ethics approval was gained from the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee. Twelve such discussion groups were conducted in the different learning organisations. A total of fifty-one young people were involved. Most were young women – eight were young men (scattered through several groups). Pakeha, Māori and Pasifika young people were involved. Group sizes ranged from two to seven and involved young people aged (primarily) between sixteen and twenty. Almost all participants had been early school leavers, had spent a period of time not in education, employment or training, and had returned to a learning environment after this time.

The process for establishing the groups involved a series of face to face meetings to explain the project and invite participation, first with members of staff, then to assembled students in each organization. At these meetings information pamphlets (with a consent form attached) were circulated to everyone present and the details of participation (including consent) were outlined and discussed (see Appendix 3). The researchers then returned (at an agreed later date) to conduct group discussions on-site with those students who wanted to take part.

The discussion groups ran for up to an hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Youth research consultant, Sarah McKay, from the Collaborative for Research and Training in Youth Health and Development, assisted with the networking necessary to establish the focus groups, conducted some of the focus groups and assisted with some of the coding and analysis of data.

¹ A friendship group involves a small group of friends (usually 2-4) who agree to be interviewed together. This offers an interview environment in which participants feel supported by each other (whereas individual interviews and larger focus groups may seem daunting).

Chapter 2

Towards A Learning Identity

2.1 Introduction

The analysis below draws on a conceptual framework elaborated in the research literature canvassed in the EEL literature review (Higgins et al, see Appendix 1). That literature emphasised the importance of identity work for young people developing their learning capacities and crafting education-employment linkages (e.g. Law et al, 2002; Lawy et al, 2004; Vaughan, Roberts and Gardiner, 2006; Stokes and Wyn, 2007). We noted in the literature review that:

concepts such as ‘learning careers’ (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Ecclestone and Pryor, 2003) draw attention to the ways in which young people construct a sense of self as a learner that changes over time and is mediated by the institutional structures in which they learn and which therefore impacts upon their view of work/career possibilities. In this literature, young people’s understandings of their own learning capacities are critical to their aspirations and ability to engage with particular education-employment linkages (Higgins et al. 2008 p.22).

This is a key passage. The stories of young people in this report are stories about identity and individuals’ sense of self developing over time facilitated by particular learning environments. **The most striking finding to emerge from the discussion groups concerned the identity work being undertaken by these young people and the link between identity and their own understanding of their learning capacities. In particular, they voiced an almost universal rejection of what might be called a NEET identity and spoke of themselves, again almost universally, in terms of a developing learning identity.**

This path towards a learning identity, and the work involved in crafting this identity, frames the following discussion. The stories told in this phase of the research are enlightening in their descriptions of what facilitates this development and what impedes it. These stories make it clear that:

- (i) rejection of a school identity does not necessarily constitute the rejection of a learning identity,
- (ii) developing a learning identity is a complex, non-linear process and, for some young people it is also an unstable, even fragile process,
- (iii) a learning identity is always developed in relationship – to individuals, communities, institutions and structures.

2.2 Rejecting a NEET identity

As noted above, almost all of the young people in the discussion groups had left school ‘early’, some as early as Year 10 although a few had gone through to Year 12. Many spoke of becoming disengaged from schooling well before actually leaving. They had come through schooling experiences that most reported as alienating, and many of them had been labelled trouble-makers and failures. They were keen to reject these labels, but had been unable to do this while in school. In Bottrell’s terms (2007, p 608) they were engaged in ‘struggles to be,

and be seen as, who they are ... struggles for chosen, and against unchosen, social identities.’

I started off in bad way in Year 9 and from that [the teachers] pretty much judged you from what you were back then even though you changed, and your behaviour’s so much better. They pretty much drove me out of school. I wasn’t learning because I was always sent out of class for nothing and here it’s different, I learn and I come every day.

I actually wanted to do something but the teachers were ‘oh no, she’s trouble’ and I had to sit in class and do dumb stuff and then I left.

I had one teacher, my science teacher, I would walk to the door and I was instantly referred. I wasn’t even allowed to sit down. Honestly, I wouldn’t do anything wrong. That is honestly what would happen. I would walk to the door and he would write me a referral and I’d sit outside or go to another class. I wasn’t allowed in. He just didn’t like me. And then my report would be – you’ve failed, you didn’t do any work this year. And I was like, ‘cause you wouldn’t let me in the door. I wasn’t allowed to sit down. I’d turn up early. Still wasn’t allowed in.

I made a decision early that I wanted to be [a radiographer]. I was really interested in that and I went to the teacher and said ‘I really want to do this’ and he said, ‘oh no, you won’t be able to do that’. When you’re passionate about something you’ll do anything. I was really interested in that, then he said that.

Some also blamed themselves for their negative experiences at school, identifying a younger self who was not tuned in to learning:

Before I got pregnant I was like, I don’t need school. I didn’t even go. My last three years of school – my whole high school was just a joke to me. That’s why I got kicked out of two schools. I was just a drop-kick. Look at me at [school] – no-one even knew me ‘cause I was never there. It was like, who is that girl?

I had teachers trying to help me but I was young and stupid and didn’t think I needed education, didn’t need my levels, and didn’t really listen and thought they were crazy.

At school I wasn’t really focused on learning, I was more focused on chatting with friends and here you can just get on with it. For some reason it’s different here—you want to do work.

Almost all left school early and experienced a period (from weeks to months) of non-participation in post-school education, training or employment. But they were keen now to distance themselves from this NEET status.

Individuals spoke with remarkable consistency about not wanting to ‘be a bum’ and about how being in a learning situation constituted being ‘somewhere’ rather than ‘nowhere’. The following exchanges are typical of the rejection of NEET status that came through in the discussions:

Int: What advice would you give to a friend who wanted leave school early?

At least do something with your life – staying at home you’re wasting your life – no future.

Being here [in a learning environment] is better than being a bum.

At home you’re nothing.

Don’t sit around and be a bum.

Don’t be dumb – get a job before you leave school. If I go back to school, when I leave school I’m going to apply for a job so I’m not a homeless bum.

You can’t just be a bum on a benefit for the rest of your life, you need an actual good paying job to support your kid.

You gotta do what you gotta do if you want to succeed. You can't just be 'I'm gonna be like a little shit during my whole school life' and then end up here.

This question often yielded comments about the problems associated with 'being a bum', such as:

It's all right to be a bum for the first week, but then it's so boring.

I've been a bum and it got pretty boring and that's when you got bored and did crime and shit.

Since I was at home all day I was getting bored so I started going to town and I became a town bum and then I fell pregnant.

2.3 'Getting an education'

The desire to move away from NEET status was generally accompanied by comments about the importance of 'getting an education'. The following exchange came from a group of young mothers:

Even if [this course] doesn't have to do with what we want to be, it's still education, and that's one thing that everybody needs growing up otherwise you won't really get anywhere.

Interviewer: Do you think most young people know that?

Most people would.

Most of them do but most of them ignore it. They're like, I don't need an education, I'm smart enough, but then it's like, if you don't have an education, what are you going to do? You can't apply for anything. If someone was real smart and they didn't have an education then they won't go anywhere.

No-one goes, 'don't get an education'.

Some in other groups were keen that getting 'an education' should be more specific than these comments suggest. In particular, those who were impatient to get a job wanted learning that was directly relevant to gaining employment. But others wanted to spend time learning before they looked for work: they wanted first to learn about themselves, their learning capacities and their goals and to explore different possibilities for crafting education-employment pathways.

An example of this mix can be seen in the following exchange, which took place among a group of young people some of whom had been involved with youth justice:

Int: Would you rather be in a job than here?

(Mixed chorus of yeses and noes).

I'd rather be working and making cash than coming here.

I want to be here until I know that I'm old enough to work.

I want to get my credits so I know that I can get a good job.

I don't want a shitty job – I want a career, not a job.

I just want to do some hard out work for some money ... when I don't have money, that's what influences me to do burglaries so if I have money then I won't do that stuff.

Discussion about getting an education was usually accompanied by the voicing of some regrets at having left school, although not (in most cases) by talk of a desire to return to a school environment. Not all experiences of leaving school were the same however.

A few saw school as the best place to get an education and wished they could return:

If I had a choice to reverse everything, I'd be at school now, wouldn't be as dumb as I am – I'd know maths and everything like that. I know English, but I don't know maths at all. . . . I was at [a prestigious school] and now look where I am. I went from 'up here' getting all my credits and shit to being back at the bottom.

I'd advise [friends] to stay in school otherwise they'd end up like us.

Stay at school and you can be whatever you want to be – if I didn't hang out with the wrong people, if I just kept to myself – I was a follower.

I tell my sister all the time to stay in school, don't leave, get all your qualifications, she'll miss out if she leaves school 'cause I won't be letting her get pregnant. Education is important. Pity we hadn't learned that a lot earlier.

That would have been one thing that I regret doing is leaving, but it's like mum said, we should have tried a different school, one with more options, but there just wasn't one and I just gave up and I never really told mum about it.

Even try and just stay there – it's only five years. And you can get out at 16. Just do a little bit of it.

This last statement gives some indication of just how difficult staying in school was for most of these young people.

Some simply accepted that school was not for them:

Some people are the type of people that are school people, and some people are the type of people that have to be on a course. It's better to be here than no-where at all. I'd rather be here than anywhere [else]. If I'm not here then I'm not anywhere.

I left [school] half way through Level 2. The school system wasn't for me because I've got quite a lot of learning difficulties.

Everyone is like, you've got to stay in school, but school's not for every person, but there's lots of other things you can do to get educated – like here, for example, there's all sorts of courses. School's not for everyone, school can be a harsh place.

Looking back at their school life and their departure from school, these young people interpret their experiences in terms of changed identity. They see themselves now as different from the individuals they were when they were at school and in the period after they left school.

In discussion, they were almost universally positive about their current learning environment and most were clearly in the process of developing their identity as learners. How, then, have they been able (and enabled) to construct a sense of themselves as learners, and what has been the role of their current learning environment in facilitating this development?

2.4 Recognition and relationships: being seen

A positive learning identity requires recognition. As Bottrell has observed, the struggle for a chosen, and against an unchosen, social identity involves a struggle to be, *and be seen as*, who one is. She argues further that 'recognition may function as a mechanism for privilege or marginalisation by differentiating young people through the relative valuing of differences' (2007, p. 599). The relationship between student and teacher is central to this recognition: recognition requires a genuine relationship.

There is a growing literature on the importance of relationships of recognition between young people and their teachers. Bishop and Berryman (2006), for example, found that effective learning relationships for rangatahi involve teachers caring for students as culturally located

human beings by ‘creating a culturally appropriate and responsive learning context, where young people can engage in learning by bringing their prior cultural knowledge and experiences to classroom interactions, which legitimate these, instead of ignoring or rejecting them’ (pp. 264-5). Atweh *et al.* (2007, p. 9) and Schawb (2001) found similar results in an Australian context. Schawb terms this ‘cultural fit’, a concept which (as we noted in Higgins *et al* 2008) is recognisable (if differently labelled) in a great deal of literature on social class and education as a dynamic that feeds the differential success of middle class children in schools organised according to middle class cultural capital.

The desire to be recognised emerged from the group discussions as fundamental to the establishment of a learning identity. Most participants commented on the ways in which their current learning environment provided this recognition. Tutors, fellow students, styles of learning and even physical environment all contributed.

Here it’s more like in your own environment. Here we’re all the same age. We all think the same thing.

You’re around people who are going to understand your situation.

[Here they] understand you and they all get on. If you are a person that has just come into school, no-one’s really like you. And when you come here it’s all like chilled and you can talk.

And everyone knows your mood. It’s good ’cause if you know how they’re feeling you can – if they’re in a shitty mood you don’t want to do anything to piss them off.

Relationships with teachers and tutors in which these young people are (or are not) recognised as *who they are* emerged from this discussion as absolutely key to the development of learning identities. Many of the young people felt invisible at school, often because their teachers seemed to focus only on those who were able to keep up with their work, but also because they became actually physically invisible through being referred and sent out of class.

My teachers swayed my decision why I wasn’t going to school. I had this real nice teacher who was really motivating and supported me and everything, but then I had teachers that didn’t help you at all, so I didn’t see any point in going to their classes, it was like you weren’t even there half the time and they wouldn’t teach you and just send you to referral and I just got over it.

Then referral had to stop taking me. So I just had to sit on the field.

Teachers have a big influence on you wanting to go to school or being able to go to school. I went to the classes but I wasn’t allowed in so that’s where my English and my science fell down.

Many compared these experiences of alienation and feeling left behind at school with learning experiences in their current environment:

You don’t [want to] sit [at school] for an hour and a half and put your head on your paper and rot. Here you do writing and they give you 15-minute breaks and you can go have a smoke and make coffee and come in here and do your work.

That one teacher for thirty students where you get one period and you get that teacher once and then they wonder why you talk all the time, because what else are you meant to do when you’re stuck? Just sit there?

I hated being at school because the teachers just helped the people that are real good and they don’t help you if you can’t do it.

I dropped out of school at the start of Year 10 – I hated school because I had some learning difficulties and the teachers said everyone had to learn at the same level so I hated that

aspect of things, so I left.

They focus more on the brainy ones and because I've got a hearing problem that makes it a lot more complicated.

Because of my learning difficulties and because I got bullied all the time, I hated being there, hated the teacher, got frustrated because I always got behind, couldn't keep up, I felt embarrassed really. Whereas here ... everyone can work at their own level and you can get help if you need help, one on one help, you don't feel pressure to work at the same level, everyone can just work at their own pace. That's what I like about here.

2.5 Recognition and relationships: understanding and trust

These young people felt recognised because they felt understood: some perceived that their tutors spoke a common language with them, some that tutors shared common experiences in their own backgrounds, and almost all felt that their tutors took time to really listen and understand them and their circumstances.

[The tutors] understand us. They talk like us. They joke around with us and make it fun. It's way better than teachers—they're there for class time and then you don't see them till the next period.

The tutors understand us cos they've been there.

That's why we listen to them. Because we know what they're on about.

They bring themselves down to our level.

One important way in which this depth of understanding was experienced related to 'being in trouble'. Students reported feeling safe to bring themselves with all their difficult circumstances into the classroom because their relationships with their tutors established a level of safety that school systems could not deliver.

You can talk to [the tutors] about anything. You don't have to hide nothing from them.

And no matter what it is, you can tell them eh? If you're in trouble.

They've got your back, hard.

If you've got problems, you can talk to someone, unlike school.

And they ring social workers, and they take you to court and stuff. I had to get myself to court when I was at school.

And if you need help [the tutors] will ring the social workers – at school they don't talk to the social workers, they talk to the principal.

They try to understand – the [school] counsellors try, but they honestly don't have the slightest clue.

[School] counsellors are so rude, like they say it's confidential but...

When someone leaves here, just walks out, they get texts and stuff like that, like 'are you all right?' but in school it's just 'tell the principal'.

This broad level of support was a significant part of the recognition and acceptance that students experienced. School teachers, by contrast, were perceived as taking a much narrower approach in their relationships with these young people.

Teachers – they're there for class time and then you don't see them till the next period.... next bloody day...

School teachers are just there to teach you, but here they do twenty different things, not just

teach.

They don't walk in the class and read out the roll and go blah, blah, here. They don't just teach you. They sit next to you and go 'how have you been?'

And [school teachers] get real grumpy. If there's shit happening in your life ... and you tell the teacher, she just says I've got to sit outside, and they'll be like 'go and see the counsellor'. Here they don't go 'we'll deal with it at lunchtime', they go 'ok come with me and we can talk about it'.

[Tutor] here – she's really good, she says if you just want to go swear at her, just walk into her office, shut the door and you can go vent at her. ... All I have to do is walk into her office and sit down and talk and she's really understanding.

2.6 Recognition and relationships: authority structures and learning

In keeping with the discussion above about the importance of being genuinely recognised within a learning environment, Atweh *et al.* (2007, p. 9) have argued that young people may become disengaged from schooling because of 'alternative and possibly conflicting perspectives, needs and frames of reference between students on one hand and their teachers and schools on the other'. Schools communicate to students what an ideal student identity should be through their systems of rewards and punishments (Akerlof and Kranton 2002). Those who identify with this ideal are likely to fit in and do well while those who do not are likely to struggle to belong. Many schools communicate an ideal that is associated with the majority culture and dominant social class so students who belong to neither are the ones most likely to take on the identity of 'school resister'.

In the UK, for example, the Rathbone/Nuffield Review, *Engaging Youth Enquiry*, found that active resistance to the authority structures of the school was a common way in which some students attempted to establish some personal control and agency in the face of the system from which they felt alienated. The researchers in that project heard from NEET young people about the importance of being treated with respect and being allowed to learn in ways that they thought suited them.

Discussions with the Christchurch young people yielded similar observations. Sometimes these seemed like relatively minor issues:

We're allowed to wear nail polish, we're allowed to wear accessories.

It's just shit at school because you're not allowed to text, not allowed to go out and get lunch and not allowed to smoke.

We're allowed our phones. We're allowed to charge our phones.

[At school] you have to have a card that says you can go and get lunch out of school grounds.

No uniform [here] – you can show your personality – brown shoes, ugh.

But, behind these issues lay more significant ones about being trusted and treated with respect:

Teachers pick on you – they give you shit and you can't say nothing back.

[Young people leave school because of] all the teachers and all the rules.

[Tutors] are not your teachers, they don't treat you like a student.

They treat you like adults

Here they trust you more.

[Tutors here] don't tell us what to do. They give us the option.

Some also referred to the way in which struggling with schoolwork became a touchstone for trouble:

Teachers at school are all grumpy and if you're talking they would yell at you. Here ... if we need help we just ask them, and we can talk while we work and we won't get in trouble.

If you do something wrong you don't get told off.

I didn't like school – didn't like being told what to do, like schoolwork, so I'd get up and leave or make a big drama and take off. Here, they do tell you what to do, but they give you time to do it.

2.7 Learning in a non-school environment

As noted above, the Nuffield study found that the young people they spoke with responded positively to being able to learn in ways that suited them. This was also the case among the young Christchurch people. They reflected at length, and positively, on the teaching styles of their tutors. As so many other studies have found (see also Higgins 2010, and Appendix 2), young people in alternative education respond well to small class sizes, paced learning, relevance of topics and having choices—including the choice to leave:

If we don't want to be here they'll tell us to go. They're straight up. Either you stay here or you know where the door is.

Not everyone had this choice, but even those who turned up as a bail condition were reasonably positive. One young man said, '[I come here] cos I have to. But I don't mind it. It would be harder for me to get bail [if I didn't]'.

Speaking about the importance of finding relevance in the work they were now doing, participants said:

Some subjects you take at school have got nothing to do with what you actually want to do.

The work at school is kind of pointless – the work here is good because it's based on what you want to do.

We choose all our own courses and that's all focused on where that's going to get you to - so we take courses that are actually going to get us somewhere, we're not just doing something for no reason, like a pointless subject.

We get choices each day.

On paced learning:

Here they give you time.

They don't pile it on – give you a big pile of stuff and go – go and do that now.

We do school work, but can do it at our own pace... there's not pressure like at school.

When you do something good here – like when you finish a correspondence book – they talk about it for days and they'll be real happy about it and keep telling you they're proud of you and at school they're like 'well done, I'm proud of you but it had to be done' or 'ok, here goes your next book'.

On class size:

It's easier to work in a small environment.

In a class of thirty people you can't talk about anything.

There's so much more students at high school.
They are really focused on each individual here.
Here they focus on everyone, to make everyone succeed.
[Tutors teach] one on one with you sometimes.

And on the engagement of tutors in the learning process:

The tutors are real enthusiastic and real happy and bright.
They enjoy coming here.
It's way different from school – it's friendlier.

These young people also reported that their tutors had clear expectations of them, including expectations of appropriate behaviour and commitment to learning and would push them to achieve these. As one young woman said, 'You just need that positive push'. Others agreed, particularly with the proviso that the 'push' should be positive, rather than punitive, and should come from a tutor who was trusted, who understood an individual's situation, and who had high expectations of that young person.

If someone didn't push me I wouldn't be going where I am at the moment.

If you can see that somebody believes in you it honestly makes you want to go for it so much more.

One group had the following exchange:

[Tutor] really pushes us a lot.

... she's really firm about it. As soon as she knows what we want to do, that's it, she'll keep pushing and pushing until we get there.

... all of them here – once they know what you want to do in life they'll help you with whatever you need.

...they're amazing.

What these young people see as the 'positive push' is a feature of the positive youth development literature (WFCT 2011) in which robust relationships between young people and their mentors promote resilience and extend development. In particular, environments in which significant challenges are put to young people in the context of high levels of support can provide stimulating learning situations in which young people want to be involved. By contrast a challenging situation in which only low levels of support are offered can create lonely, frightening and unsafe experiences from which young people are likely to opt out.

Figure 1. Challenge/support matrix for positive youth development

S U P P O R T	High Support/Low Challenge Patronising Boring Damaging What’s the point? Development?	High Support/High Challenge Stimulating Want to be there Learning Understanding Resilience Growth/Development
	Low Support/Low Challenge Boring Don’t want to be there It sucks Why are we doing this? Dumb No growth	Low Support/High Challenge Scary Don’t want to be there Feeling unsafe Damaging experience Lonely No growth
	Low	High
	CHALLENGE	

Source: *Positive Youth Development in Aotearoa: Weaving Connections: Tuhonohono Rangitahi*

These forms of emotional support, together with the institutional support of developmental pedagogy, emerge as clearly important to these young people as they go about creating pathways into learning, and eventually into employment, as the following chapter will show.

Chapter 3

Creating Education Employment Pathways

3.1 Introduction

We spoke with these young people about their transition pathways and in particular about two crucial transition moments: (i) their movement from unemployment or early school leaving to their current learning organisation; (ii) their anticipated move from this learning environment into further education and/or employment.

Discussion focused heavily on the importance of emotional support, from tutors, friends and family to help them gain the confidence to make these transitions. Participants also spoke about their own motivation.

At a more systemic level, informal networks played a significant role in enabling these transitions to take place. These features of education employment pathways are discussed below.

3.2 Emotional support

Participants were asked *'what kind of person would you be prepared to talk to about making plans for your future education and employment?'*. This yielded a long list of qualities which the young people generally associated with at least one tutor (and often more) at their place of learning. At the top of the list came *'someone who is understanding'* and *'someone who is trustworthy'*. This echoes comments made in the previous section about the importance of relationships of recognition between young people and their teachers/mentors. These young people felt recognised, and therefore able to have genuine conversations with tutors, because they felt understood by them. Because of this they felt safe to trust their tutors with the difficult aspects of their lives as well as with their hopes and dreams: they knew that they would be supported in making the move into unknown territory such as employment.

The importance of understanding is well illustrated by one young woman reflecting on her battles at school with a dean whom she trusted, even while they clashed, because she perceived that he understood her situation:

I absolutely hated my dean – I was a complete bitch to him.... But I always spoke to him. He always told me off for doing stuff but I knew I shouldn't have been doing it – like smoking on school fields, whatever. And he'd always sit me down, he knew the situation with my family and what was going on at home, so it was really easy to talk to him, but other people that you talk to don't understand.

Listening and being patient also emerged as important. Comments such as, *'they'd listen – they won't look away'*; *'they'd take in what you say – listen really well'*; *'people who listen and actually focus on what you're saying'*; all suggest experiences in which real listening has not taken place in the past.

Participants also spoke about the importance of a mentor or advisor having high expectations of them: *'someone who's willing to help anyone instead of being like "she looks like she's not going anywhere, I'm not going to help her"'*; *'people that want you to go far and tell you'*;

‘someone who has faith in you’; ‘someone who believes in you’; ‘who believes you can do it’; and who ‘is real encouraging’.

They spoke about the importance of patience: ‘Letting you change your mind and then giving you information so that you can decide, oh, that’s not actually what I want to do’; and someone who would help with finding ‘something you really want to do instead of trying to make up your mind for you.’ There was strong resistance to being pressured without being listened to:

Sometimes parents aren’t good to talk to because they just want what’s best for you and then they try to push you to do shit that you don’t want to do ... they’re pushing you in the wrong direction and if they push you too far you’re just going to be like ‘Nah, f— you I’m going to do something else.’

Honesty was important: ‘Not lying about what a job is like, as if we can’t handle the truth.’

People shouldn’t [pretend to] be enthusiastic just to make us get a job, they should be actually enthusiastic about the job. If I was working at Pak ’n Save and a friend wanted to work there, I would be honest with her.... Because you can go to all this trouble to get [a job] and when you get there [the hype about the job] is not even true.

The levels of emotional support that these young people needed—and knew that they needed— suggests that the learning identities they were crafting were ‘in process’ rather than firmly established and that genuine relationships between young people and tutors/mentors are a strong basis on which stable pathways through education into employment can be created.

3.3 Motivation

In the previous chapter, the key passage that introduced the analysis in this report noted that: ‘young people’s understandings of their own learning capacities are critical to their aspirations and ability to engage with education-employment linkages’.

As participants gained in confidence as learners, they formulated aspirations and gave thought to what they would need to pursue these. Alongside the emotional support discussed above, individuals spoke of their own motivation to succeed. When asked, ‘*When you leave here what’s the single most important thing you need for you to do what you want to do?*’ many answered with variations on ‘You have to be motivated’, including, ‘You just need to be in ‘go’ mode’; ‘be determined to succeed’, ‘be able to want to do something’, ‘think about what you actually want’, and ‘put your mind in the right space’. One young mother answered:

Myself. My motivation. I’ve got to go the extra mile. It’s all up to me. The teachers help me do it, but it’s my extra motivation. Like when I go home and [the baby] is in bed that I get back and do more work, just to work that extra bit. I motivate myself – I motivate off the energy of thought of [completing the course] being so close and the fact that I’m going to be somewhere, I’m going to get somewhere. You build off that energy of that thought of, yeah, I’m going to be somewhere in three years. I’m going to be a fully qualified nurse, just as [my baby] is going to primary school. It’s good.

The young mothers were generally highly motivated:

I think about my son, what do I want for him, what do I want him to see me do? Like, mum’s going to work every day, she’s earning money. When he gets older I want him to understand that. I don’t want him to see me doing nothing.

I don’t want [my child] to see me on the DPB.

Your children are a real motivation because you look at them and you think you want them to have all the best.

Not everyone felt like this. One young man was prepared to admit that he was frustrated about having to ‘go looking for [courses] yourself and that is not good for people like me ’cause I’m really lazy’. He thought that there should be ‘more people with a job to actually go ’round and get you work’. This kind of comment was the exception, however, and many responded to the discussion about what was needed to craft a pathway in terms such as:

At the end of the day, it’s all on you. You can have people supporting you, but at the end of it, it’s all your decisions—no-one’s going to force you to do anything – everything you want to be is all on you.

and

It puts a lot of pressure on you. If I fail it’s all because of me.

This last was also a common theme in an earlier research project (see Higgins and Nairn 2006, Nairn, Higgins and Sligo 2012) that involved young New Zealanders in transition from school in the early 2000s. In that project a more diverse group of young people participated than in this current project (in terms of school leaving status). It is possible that the assumption ‘it’s all just down to me’ has become commonplace among young people.

This also raises a question about the visibility of systems of support, discussed below.

3.4 Systemic support: the transitions infrastructure

The second phase of the EEL research programme examined the transitions infrastructure in detail from several perspectives: those of schools, regional and iwi communities, and employer-led channels (Vaughan et al. 2009). The results of this mapping exercise, and subsequent developments, suggest a changing landscape of assistance for young people leaving school with low or no qualifications. There has been a move away from the ad hoc labour market programmes that proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s and towards a more systemic approach developed through regional networks that include PTEs, trades academies, service academies, a tertiary high school, Youth Transitions Services offices, Career Services offices, Disability Action offices, and a range of other organisations such as local body initiated groups and Trusts that use local and central government, and philanthropic, funding to work in diverse ways in transition assistance (e.g. the Mayor’s Task Force for Jobs and Launchpad).

This underlying structure of assistance in the regions is not yet consolidated: these networks remain subject to on-going restructuring and funding changes. There is a strong argument to be made in favour of further consolidation—what Paul Ryan terms ‘the long haul of institutional development’ which is preferable to short term programmes that are always at risk of equally short term policy responses to youth unemployment. The development of a stable transition infrastructure allows learning and useful adaptation to occur within the system. As Ryan has noted in the context of an international survey of youth transitions assistance, there is a ‘contrast between the ephemerality and low status of most youth programmes, on the one hand, and the longevity and improving, if not always high, status of apprenticeship’ (Ryan 1999:449).

The New Zealand transition infrastructure for early school leavers falls well short of the highly structured approach of the apprenticeship systems of northern Europe but is a considerable improvement on the ad hoc proliferation of remedial labour market programmes that constituted the post-school landscape for early school leavers in New Zealand during the

1980s and 1990s. In contrast to those times, a significant proportion of those who have left school with no qualifications now enrol in a PTE. In 2008, 40 per cent of domestic students who studied for NCEA in the period 2004-2007 and entered tertiary education for the first time in 2008 with no school qualifications (but with some NZQA credits), were enrolled in a PTE. This percentage dropped for those with a Level 1 qualification (to 26 per cent) and again for those with Level 2 (19 per cent) and Level 3 (5 per cent) qualifications, for whom polytechnic and university courses are more likely destinations (www.educationcounts.govt.nz/tertiaryeducation/transition-from-school-to-tertiary).

It is not yet clear whether trades academies will take a substantial proportion of those who might otherwise be early school leavers, but initial indications are that they may not, but rather that they are likely to seek young people with a good record of school attendance with few problems of school engagement and who are almost work-ready². This means that in the current system, PTEs (such as the learning organisations visited in this current research) perform an important role for a sizable minority of young people. So how does the current transitions infrastructure assist early school leavers to find a PTE that suits them, and, subsequently, how do these organisations assist their students to take the next step into further education and employment? These questions are discussed below.

3.5 Systemic support: finding a way into learning

A key aspect of rejecting a NEET identity and moving towards a learning identity involves finding a path into a learning environment. The primary way in which the young people spoken with in this research came into their current learning organisation was through informal networks: friends or siblings who were or had been enrolled there, parents, midwives, ante-natal tutors, social workers, youth workers, former school teachers, all pointed the way and gave some assurance that this was a step worth taking.

The value of this word-of-mouth approach was that these young people were able to take advice from people they trusted, and so came prepared to trust the course: this provided a solid foundation for crafting a learning identity. The value of a trusted source recommending a learning organisation cannot be underestimated, however, this means that, in the absence of more systemic forms of support, a successful transition does rely on young people being involved in networks both of family and friends and of professional support in which these organisations are well known.

There is problem here in that PTEs (and Alternative Education providers) are, in the words of one provider ‘the Cinderella’ of the education system, particular in so far as their funding tends to be provisional, year on year, and they experience frequent bouts of restructuring. Providers interviewed during an earlier stage of the research (Higgins, 2010) felt that they were regarded by many as a marginal part of a transitions system which has traditionally involved movement from school to polytechnic or university, if not directly to employment. A greater recognition of the value of diversity in the post-school environment might make these organisations more obvious in the landscape and therefore more accessible. As one young man said, ‘Courses like this aren’t advertised enough – not at all – you don’t hear about it.’

It is quite possible, even likely, that trusted networks are the most powerful mechanism by which young people who have been outside education or employment can make the transition

² This was suggested by presentations from a number of trades academies providers at the symposium *Creating Multiple Educational Pathways to Improve Student Success*, Centre for the Study of Multiple Pathways, Manukau Institute of Technology, July 18-19, 2011 (see <http://csmp.manukau.ac.nz/events/national-symposium/presentations>).

into a learning environment. Strengthening these networks and widening their scope so that they include as many young people as possible, giving them access to a wide range of learning environments is, therefore, a desirable step.

3.6 Systemic support: finding a way into employment

Reliance on informal networks also occurred when pathways into employment were being sought by participants. The process relied heavily on individual tutors' knowledge of, and networking with, local employers.

There was a range of activity associated with the search for further education and employment:

- (i) *Individualised assistance*: Tutors sat down with students and worked with them to identify what kind of employment they would like to pursue, what qualifications they would need and how to go about this. Generally students had not spoken to their school's career educator:

I think there was about one teacher out of all my teachers that actually spoke to me about it.

It was never put out there that you could go and speak to [school careers educator]. And I'd say it was more for the sixth and seventh formers.

No one talked about [a career] until I came here and [the tutor] talked to me about it a couple of times a term. And it wasn't until then that I actually started thinking about what I wanted to do. And when I told him – I changed quite a few times – he'd always give me information on what courses I could do to get that qualification so that was really good.

Yes, [the tutor] hauled me in the other day and said 'right, tell me what you want to be', I told him what I wanted to be, he gave me all the information and said, 'read through it and see if you still want to do it.' He tells you what levels and grades you need to have, and what subjects you need.

This one-to-one help was valued by students, many of whom saw the road ahead as difficult and complicated:

I'm terrified of university – I'm so intimidated by the thought of it, I don't think I want to go there, even though I want to get a bachelor in English, it's the only thing I'm actually good at – but I'm just intimidated.

Knowledge was seen as important for planning pathways: someone who 'can put you on the right track with information' and can give 'support—with job applications and CVs—[someone who is] onto it'; 'I need quite a lot of knowledge—I find it hard to...work out a plan by myself.'; 'you need help to figure out the plan—how it's all legit.'

- (ii) *Internet based research*: Students did their own research, which tended to be internet based. They reported mixed results for this. When asked if they went to career websites, such as Career Quest, many said they did and some found these helpful: 'It came up with heaps of things to do with sport, modelling, early childhood'; 'I went on to [Career Quest] – it came up with everything I'd like to do. And I was like, oh, I've never heard of that and I looked into it. I did it four times and it came up with childcare and social work.'

But others were not so sure: 'I did type in stuff about plastering – it had nothing'; 'Some

people came in and showed us a career website – and you could get to know what you want to do. It was alright'; 'It was real boring'. And for some it was a mystery: 'I might do that. I haven't heard of it'; 'It's not there any more'.

Other internet sites were also explored, including Seek and Trade Me. Some participants found the internet useful for finding out about jobs, but they did not experience much success in using it to get a job. The young man who wanted a plastering job said:

'There was a thing on Trade Me Jobs about an apprentice plasterer – but you needed your own vehicle, and I was like, dammit, that could have been me.' (*Int.*) *So you're not sure where to ask about plastering?* 'No, no idea.'

- (iii) *Acquaintances*: Many fell back on relatives, friends and informal networks: 'It's just people that you know'.
- (iv) *Career expos*: Some students had attended career expos and found these helpful:

'It was really cool – there were people from every job description and they're really *excited* and they talk to you one-on-one and all this information and they give you numbers of people to call, and it was really helpful – I think there should be more of those. I really enjoyed that – I got heaps of information and I took it all home and read over it.'
- (v) *Job search assistance*: Tutors offered help with CVs, interview techniques, job applications, and offered general encouragement when students applied. They also brought people in from other educational institutions, such as a local polytech, to talk about courses that these young people could move on to.
- (vi) *Work experience*: Tutors also looked out for job opportunities and set up work experience placements. Both processes relied heavily on tutors' own networks within industry and with local employers.

Work experience was the subject of extended discussion in the focus groups.

Participants knew the value of experience in the workplace for gaining employment and felt the dilemma of being unable to get work until they had experience. Some had wanted to do work experience through Gateway at their schools but had not been able to. One young man observed, 'You had to be real good at everything to be eligible,' and another, 'I tried to but they declined me'. This made work experience gained through their course an attractive idea and many had had some access to this arranged by their tutors.

The attractions of work experience were various. Some wanted to use it directly to get work, while others were keen to explore different types of employment to help them plan their futures:

I want to do a variety of stuff that helps someone in the future – I want to either be a nurse or a flight attendant or a personal trainer so they're completely different things and I'd like experience of every one of them to know more.

They gave examples of both good experiences and poor experiences. One system, spoken of highly by students, enabled them to explore different aspects of the industry for which they were training. Students went on a work experience placement for a short time once a week throughout the course and at the end of the course chose a place where they did a full two week placement.

You don't pick where you go on [the weekly placement] – you have to go where [the tutor] arranges, because we have to go to all the different [strands of the] industry. She picks heaps of different ones. At the end you can pick where you want to go [for the two week placement].

It gives you a good outlook on what it's like.

Some places you won't enjoy personally, but some one else might really enjoy it.

Plus it's good to find out what the different [strands] are about. Like, I didn't enjoy [one]— it wasn't for me, but I'm really glad I tried it through work experience.

The success of this model relied entirely on an individual tutor's own extensive networks in a particular industry.

[Tutor] rings [the employers] – it's all by word of mouth. ... She advertises as well. And goes out to speak to them before sending us.

In this case the tutor acted as an important gatekeeper for both the students and the employers involved:

She won't send us to someone that doesn't have a good reputation.

If the work experience place is looking to take someone on permanently, and they ask [the tutor], she is not going to recommend someone who won't work hard. ... It's basically how you work, and your determination to get a job.

Tutors were not always so successful in getting support from local employers, and experiences were not always positive:

I did [work experience] once but it was the worst experience ever. ... The place, it was like, shit - it is just so dirty. It was completely different from what we get trained in [here]. So grotty.

[It's a good idea] if it's the right place. You need a place that, if they write you a reference, people aren't going to look at it and laugh. If it's a high end place – you've obviously worked hard. It needs to be somewhere higher up than KFC.

In summary, pathways into employment for these young people depended on informal networks, particularly those of their tutors and acquaintances, and on the willingness of employers to be involved in processes such as offering work experience and placements.

It is worth considering whether more formal processes for involving young people in industry networks could be established—or re-established—on a more widespread basis than currently exists in New Zealand. Apprenticeships have traditionally been a mainstay of this kind of structured approach, and as Ryan has observed, 'apprenticeships tend to be associated with better outcomes in early labour market experience, particularly employment rates, than either full-time vocational education or simple job training' (Ryan 2000:43, see also Ryan 2001).

In times past, particularly during the full employment decades of the post-WW2 era, most young New Zealanders entered the labour market through sheltered ports of entry: these included apprenticeships and the exit of many women from the labour market to raise children, both of which created a labour market environment protecting young men and women from competition from more skilled and experienced workers. It was also an environment that assumed on-the-job training as the norm for the majority of jobs (Higgins 2002).

Much has changed since those times: high levels of unemployment during the 1980s propelled a great deal of skilled labour into the market, workforce participation by women increased, the apprenticeship system collapsed in the nineties and has only slowly been rebuilt, and expectations have grown among many employers that training should take place in tertiary institutions so that job seekers come to the job already skilled (or close to it).

This leaves young people having (largely) to fund of their own training with no security about future employment. For many young people, work experience while in tertiary education

offers a valuable opportunity to gain an understanding of workplace culture and to explore what kinds of occupations are likely to suit them.

The value of a quality work experience placement is threefold: (i) there is the obvious opportunity it offers a young person to gain general experience of workplace culture and practice; (ii) it offers young job seekers a point of entry into industry networks through which they might find jobs, if not in their current placement, then through word of mouth and internal industry labour markets; (iii) finally, it offers an opportunity to explore an occupation and, in some cases, a range of jobs within an industry (as in the system discussed above).

This last is particularly valuable if it broadens young people's horizons about what is possible for them in terms of future employment (cf. Campbell 2011). As discussed in the EEL literature review (Higgins et al 2008), when considering potential employment, individuals tend to draw on their own experience and that of people they know and trust (Hodkinson et al 1996). For example, many of the young women in the current study wanted to be social workers, youth workers, midwives or nurses—occupations they knew well from first hand experience. Tutors worked to help them expand their horizons, and work experience is one important way to allow them to do this.

Overall, comments by participants were in keeping with the results of the survey of education/training providers conducted earlier in the EEL programme (Higgins 2009) which found that these organisations all provided forms of advice and guidance on education and training options and made links with local employers, including offering employer visits and links to ITOs or employer related reference groups. Nevertheless participants would have welcomed more contact with employers. For example, one young man sitting at the table during a focus group pointed out (to general agreement) that 'it would be good to get people together like this [focus group] but with employers'.

3.7 Maintaining a learner identity, developing a worker identity

The young people in these learning organisations had made the (reasonable) assumption that they were gaining an education that would enable them to move into suitable employment. They frequently voiced comments such as 'everyone needs an education so they can get qualifications for a job' and 'in the end you can't get a good job without education'. They had heard the message linking education and employment and were acting on it. As in the earlier research project mentioned above (Nairn, Higgins and Sligo 2012), the equation of qualifications with labour market power was commonly voiced and seldom challenged. This is not surprising; this equation is well established in popular discourse and young people hear it from teachers, parents and many others. As one young woman said: 'My parents were always, stay in school and you can achieve whatever you want.' Another commented: 'Even shop owners—they'll say you should get an education otherwise you'll have to work here', and another, 'Even total strangers that you meet on the bus and you start talking to them, and they're like, it's good that you're getting an education'.

Participants were prepared to start at the bottom with their employment, but they were getting an education because they didn't want to stay there.

No-one wants to work in KFC all your life.

I wanted to get an education for [my son's sake] so that I can go out and earn money and not be a checkout chick for the rest of my life. You got to start somewhere in the career path, so I'm not completely judging them [checkout chicks] but I don't want

to stay there forever. I can start there to get some experience, but I don't want to stay there.

Some places you don't need an education for whatever job you want. If you don't need it for your career, that's a different story. But I think you need it.

You don't want to be working in a supermarket for the rest of your life, do you? Especially if you've got children. I personally don't want to be a dole bludger. I want to be out there.

A few voiced reservations: 'My sister stayed on to Year 13 and she can't get a job anywhere and she's got levels 1, 2 and 3'. But such comments were unusual. Generally, participants were hopeful of finding good employment as a result of their efforts to gain a qualification.

Two assumptions come together here in potentially unhelpful ways. The first is that individuals who have taken seriously the injunction to get an education will be rewarded with work. The second is that, as noted above, many of these young people currently believe 'it's all just down to me'. If these young people find that they cannot proceed to further education or employment because financial constraints (often mentioned by them as a potential barrier) prevent the next step in the qualifications pathway, or because the jobs simply are not available, then these assumptions may combine to reinforce an identity of 'failure' like that experienced at school. There is also a risk that disillusionment will set in, and possibly a return to NEET status and a NEET identity.

3.8 Earthquake disruption

Each discussion group was asked about the effect of the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010/2011 on their learning. The earthquakes had certainly been disruptive, but in general they had not thrown these young people off course.

- Anxiety about their families had been significant – especially among the young mothers who were anxious about their children and concerned to find childcare close to where they would be studying or working in the future so that they would be near their children should other quakes occur.
- Some mentioned difficulty in focusing, especially where learning or living arrangements had been disrupted. For example, one young mother said that the quakes 'slowed us down [in our study]. My [baby] was really traumatised. It was hard to settle him because he wasn't settling so I wasn't focusing. [But] you get on with it.'
- Some had experienced disruption to their learning programme in that they had been unable to finish the year with the credits they had hoped for because so much time had been lost to the quakes and also to the two snowfalls that occurred in late winter.
- Those who were looking to move directly into employment after their course (rather than further education) were gloomy about the prospect of finding work because of the closure of businesses and the increased competition from skilled and experienced labour. A small number who had been employed prior to the quakes had lost their jobs because of business closure.

While the quakes preyed on people's minds and complicated living arrangements they were not as disruptive to learning as might be expected. In general they had not lessened participants' motivation to complete their course and move on.

Chapter 4

Policy Developments

4.1 Introduction

The youth transitions field has been a focus of policy development since before the Education Employment Linkages project began and continues to be a rapidly changing field at the policy level. Developments over the last few years have included: the introduction of the Youth Guarantee for 16-17 year olds; the emergence and spread of trades academies and service academies; the establishment of a tertiary high school at Manukau Institute of Technology; the design of a vocational pathways framework as a way of organising secondary school learning; a commitment by government to ensure that all young people are able to gain at least NCEA Level 2; and the development of the Youth Service (formerly known as the Youth Pipeline) to undertake tracking and referral of young people ‘at risk’—activities currently undertaken by the Youth Transitions Services around the country.

Some of these developments have had, or are about to have, a significant effect on learning organisations of the type visited for this strand of the EEL project, and on young people in similar circumstances to those participating in this research. Two developments that are of particular significance are discussed below: (i) the focus on 16-17 year olds, and (ii) the emphasis on all young people gaining at least the equivalent of Level 2 NCEA.

4.2 Focus on 16-17 year olds

A strongly aged-based focus has emerged in recent youth transitions policy. For example, the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Service both focus on 16 -17 year old school leavers with the aim of, respectively, providing funded training places, and providing assistance to those deemed to be at risk of becoming NEET. In general, those outside this age group will be eligible for assistance through short training courses focused on fast tracking them into employment.

While the aim of this focus is undoubtedly to catch early school leavers before they reach the stage of being outside education, training or employment, it is worth considering whether some young people are going to be missed by this system because they come late to a learning identity for all the reasons discussed earlier in this report. Participants in this research knew that they were second chance learners:

Here they give us a second chance.

Fresh start—different system. And you’re around people who are going to understand your situation.

We’ve got a second chance – a big second chance. I used to be a bad person —didn’t want a career, didn’t want a job, until I got pregnant, then I was like—well I’d better start thinking about it. ... Now I want to be either a childcare teacher or a social worker. Or photography.

If I didn’t have my son I don’t even know where I’d be – I feel like he saved me – he was my last resort to change what I was doing, and it did, because the day I gave birth I never went back to town, never had anything to do with the people there. I’ve come such a long way since having him.

Some of them had tried and failed and come back to try again:

This is my second time here—I came here the first time to the sports course and I got kicked off that course and I decided a year and a half later I'd come back and do the chef's course.

I came here [while pregnant] and I was here for about a month and then I left because my attitude was like 'Nah, bugger this' and then I had the baby and I wanted to be a stay-at-home mum for a year, and I got to about 10 months and I was just over it and couldn't stand being at home, so I rang up here and I re-enrolled.

One observed:

When the new rules came into course we got told if you were over 17 you were going to get kicked off and there were quite a few of us who were [over 17]. Some completed Level 2 and wanted to stay on for Level 3. One person got told she couldn't and I think that's a bit harsh, because she had a kid when she was younger and she had to support herself and she didn't have time to get an education and yet she still can't without paying out seven or eight grand to get to CPIT.

These young people illustrate that the moment of wanting to grasp a learning identity is not age related. Set-backs at school, difficult family circumstances, health related problems and individual psychological development all contribute to the possibility that some young people come to learning later than others. One young man observed:

[Being here] has matured me – my parents think so as well, just keeping out of trouble. When I was at school I was in trouble every day, then I was getting in trouble with the folks cause I was so naughty at school.

Policy that focuses learning assistance exclusively on 16-17 year olds assumes an 'age-and-stage' model of youth development in which individuals are expected to be at a certain stage of learning because they have reached a certain age. It also assumes a linear model of transition which the research literature has shown to be the exception rather than the norm for young people (e.g. Campbell 2011, Higgins 2002, Wyn and Dwyer 2002). This constraint excludes those who are motivated second chance learners who could, with help, craft education-employment pathways that take them beyond minimum wage employment and a high risk of future unemployment.

4.3 Achieving NCEA Level Two

The goal that every young person achieve NCEA Level two is clearly an important goal. Many participants in this study were well on their way to gathering enough credits to achieve this level, but a substantial minority were not. These were young people for whom circumstances were particularly difficult. Nevertheless, they kept turning up to their courses. One young man said, 'My court thing is I've got to get educated and if I had to do it at school, I just wouldn't go. But I'm here – all the course students are making me come, convincing me to come.' This is telling. Young people such as this young man have had a deeply negative experience of school; their circumstances mean that their lives are complex and unstable and their needs high. They do not arrive at a course ready to launch into NCEA levels, although given time in this alternative education environment, they have a much greater chance of achieving these levels than if they were sent back to school.

If the requirement that students achieve NCEA Level 2 leads to changes such that these organisations begin to replicate schools (e.g. in performance measures, course structure and length) they are unlikely to cater well for this group of young people. This is certainly not to say that the Level 2 goal should be abandoned, but there is a question here about the way in

which funding requirements will shape learning organisations in relation to the quest for the Level 2 goal³. Wrap around support, paced learning and individualised pedagogy are all valued by students in these organisations precisely because these are characteristics that make it not like school.

There is a case to be made for the kind of intensive assistance within a learning environment that some of these organisations offer. This does not mean lowering expectations for what these young people can achieve, but it does mean giving attention to the environment, and the time, they need to achieve it.

³ One manager of a successful PTE in the North Island observed that the new criteria were encouraging him to consider reorganising his PTE to be much more like a school (from a conversation with the author).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Learning careers

The learning careers of the participants in this study are complex and non-linear, marked by alienation from school, and by disengagement then re-engagement in learning. These are second chance learners who have discovered (or rediscovered) their capacity to learn after leaving school. When they were at school the sense of self that they constructed – or had constructed for them – was of ‘school resister’. They experienced feeling invisible and unrecognised. Some of them rebelled against this, and some simply left. But this school refusal should not be confused with learning refusal. These young people offer clear evidence of a desire to learn. In leaving school early, they were not necessarily rejecting learning but they were rejecting what is taught, and (especially) how it is taught, in school.

It was noted at the beginning of this report that the sense of self (as a learner) that a young person constructs is mediated by the institutional structures in which he or she learns. This was certainly the case here. These young people experience their current learning environment as profoundly different from school: small class sizes, paced learning and topics that are seen as relevant to future plans, all contribute in important ways to the positive experience of learning. But the single most important difference from school concerns the relationships of trust and understanding that exist between students and their tutors. This is not to say that these are ‘soft’ or ‘easy’ relationships – students reported the importance of ‘the positive push’ from tutors. But they are relationships of recognition. Students reported that they were able to talk to tutors about their (often difficult) lives and their learning, and that their tutors understood their circumstances and were able to support them in a range of ways.

Once students begin to think of themselves as learners they can also begin to set their own learning targets in line with their interests and aspirations, and so craft education-employment linkages, as these young people were doing.

5.2 Support systems

Some systemic issues and questions arise out of this: first, how can young people find their way into the kind of learning environment which will enable them to learn, and secondly, what will facilitate their movement on from there into further education and employment?

Many of these young people had made their way into their current learning environment through trusted networks and word of mouth. This is not a very systematic process, but it does have the advantage of encouraging genuine engagement with an education/training course because a recommendation has come from a trusted source. Many of these networks included professional service providers such as midwives, youth workers and social workers: in other words, networks currently exist to engage with these young people, but these could be strengthened and their scope widened. The Youth Service, currently in development, is intended to catch early school leavers at risk of becoming NEET, but the importance and effectiveness of networks of trusted individuals should not be underestimated when

considering how to ensure that all young people can access assistance.

In crafting education-employment linkages, the link into genuine employment is obviously critical, not least because those who have been NEET and have made the commitment to re-engage with learning have heard the message that gaining a good job requires a good qualification. Here again, the process is not particularly systematic, relying as it does on tutors' own networks with local employers to provide work experience and job opportunities. There is a case to be made for developing a more systematic approach to engaging employers in the processes of work experience and on-the-job training for young people. For the young people in this study, and others who have been outside education, training and employment, the possibility of churning back into NEET status remains if the follow-through into employment is not there. Those who have been NEET, and then gained qualifications, only to discover that employment is simply not available for them despite their efforts to get 'an education' may return to NEET status, deeply disillusioned with the education/employment system.

Current policy developments are focussing intensively on young people at risk of becoming NEET. The findings from this strand of EEL research suggest that while this focus is important it risks excluding some young people, specifically those who are second chance learners aged 18 years and over, and those who are not yet ready to pursue NCEA credits to Level 2, especially if these are taught in a school-like environment. The young people who contributed to this research have shown clearly that they are motivated to be learners and to gain employment, despite many of them being outside education, training and employment in the past. What they needed for this positive development was access to learning environments in which they were enabled to develop their learning capacities. What they will need in the future is access to genuine employment opportunities.

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Appendix 1

International Literature Review: Executive Summary

1. The transition from an Industrial Age in the late 20th century to a Knowledge Age in the early 21st century means that forging a career path is fundamentally more difficult than it used to be. This raises critical questions for people involved in assisting young people as they make education and employment choices. Once viewed as marginal to public policy and focused on providing career advice to early school leavers, career support services are now more broadly understood as ‘career development’ integral to national policies of economic transformation.
2. This report is the second in the Education Employment Linkages Research Report series. Its purpose is to document what is already known in the international literature, drawing on the research team’s respective backgrounds in education, sociology, indigenous studies and economics to begin a trans-disciplinary account of key issues for young people making education and employment choices in their transition years from school to work.

Choice in Education-Employment Linkages

3. Choice can be conceptualised in a variety of ways. Significant disciplinary differences exist between approaches that emphasise the role of individual agency in choice-making (as economics tends to do), those that emphasise structural conditions that constrain choice (sociology and education) and those that incorporate community involvement in making choices (as is prevalent in indigenous studies research).
4. The economics literature is built on the Shultz-Becker individual choice model of human capital investment, in which an individual compares the income benefits of further education with the costs (including forgone wages) of ongoing study. Initially these models focused on a single choice made at a key moment in a young person’s transition from school to work; more recent contributions have treated human capital decisions as sequential choices repeated year after year.
5. A lengthy tradition in the sociology and education literatures emphasises the powerful impact of structural constraints – particularly class, gender and ethnicity – on young people’s decision-making in their transition years. More recently, there has been a developing interest among social scientists in approaches to choice-making that explore interaction between structure and agency in youth transitions. A key text by Hodkinson et al. (1996) conceptualises choice in transition in terms of ‘pragmatic rationality’, explicitly incorporating the unforeseen, as well as the planned, aspects of career decision-making.
6. The model of pragmatic rationality has three interlocking dimensions: decision-making is a process, not a one-off event, and is part of the life course; choosing a post-school path is part of a wider lifestyle choice and is strongly shaped by context and culture; and decision-making is a social process, taking place in interaction with others.

7. It may not only be the young people involved who should be encouraged to broaden their horizons. Literature in the field of indigenous studies has highlighted ways in which forms of institutional racism are in play for some young people attempting to navigate the careers landscape. This raises the issue of who interprets the landscape and plots the pathway through it.
8. When considering choice, the pathways language, economic models and the pragmatic rationality approach all tend to conceptualise agency in ways that either suggest, or are firmly based on, the primacy of the individual, even in a context of constraint. Developments in indigenous studies research challenge this focus in important ways. The choices of young indigenous people thus may not fit neatly with standard models of choice. An extensive literature regards them as being ‘at risk’ and/or in some way deficient because of this, failing to understand these choices in terms of the aspirations, world views, values and practices of these young people and their communities.

Crafting Identities

9. Many studies suggest that young people explore particular pathways because these suit the sense of identity that each individual has or would like to have. A great deal of the literature on youth transitions now conceptualises identity not as a state definitively arrived at, but as relational, multiple, contested, and dynamic, particularly because these young people are engaged in ‘border crossing’ from childhood to adulthood. This complex and fluid understanding of identity challenges traditional models of career decision-making by proposing that identity is neither fixed (as in trait theory) nor linear (as in developmental theory).
10. This understanding of the complexity of youth identities has implications for understandings of how young people engage in education employment linkages and how formal systems can assist them in this process. Since the ‘ideal’ identity that many schools tend to communicate is associated with the majority culture and dominant social class of their society it is not surprising that students who belong to neither are the ones most likely to take on the identity of ‘school resister’ and be given the unchosen identity of being ‘challenging’ or ‘a failure’.
11. A significant proportion of the literature on mismatch between schools and young people who ‘do not fit’, particularly research focussing on young indigenous and ethnic minority people, is located within a deficit framework that conceptualises these young people as ‘at risk’, locates this risk primarily at the individual or ethnic community level, and is concerned with risk management and the unpredictability of these young people in terms of their decision making with regard to school leaving and job choices. A more interesting and important question is this: given the importance of identity to young people’s experience of education-employment transitions, how can the understanding of youth identities outlined in the previous section inform our research question about helping young people make effective education-employment choices?

Discovery and Development of Abilities

12. Guy Claxton has emphasised the importance of enhancing young people’s learning capacities (helping them to be better learners) to enable them to prepare for a life-time of change. Research explicitly measuring or analysing learning capacities in relation to

career and work abilities, aspirations, and choices is hard to find. Nevertheless, some recent research draws attention to the ways in which young people construct a sense of self as a learner that changes over time and is mediated by the institutional structures in which they learn and which therefore impacts upon their view of work/career possibilities. Young people's understandings of their own learning capacities are critical to their aspirations and ability to engage with particular education-employment linkages.

13. The research literature records a wide range of opinion among young people themselves about the difficulties or otherwise of setting career related goals, but some research suggests that those who have such goals are more likely than those who don't to establish themselves in a stable career pathway and to move into work that is a good match for the education or training they have done. A series of approaching deadlines may help individual refine their aspirations into more concrete and achievable goals. Identity work appears to be a key element of this process.
14. This has very important implications for career guidance in schools. Without dynamic working relationships between careers educators and young people any amount of information gathering and recording of goals may founder. Career dialogues or conversations between teachers and students are important, taking care to avoid limited conceptions of giftedness, inappropriate identification policies and practices, low teacher expectations and negative deficit based stereotypes of certain groups of students in the school.
15. Models in the economics literature have sought to explain how individuals choose their careers and their level of education based on their innate abilities. An important class of models in economics, known as signalling or sorting models, assumes that individuals know their abilities, but potential employers do not. Given that individuals with higher ability will choose more education in these models, employers can demand higher qualifications to screen for higher productivity job applicants.
16. More recent models have recognised that an important role for education is to enable students to discover and develop their abilities. This approach suggests that 'failure' in education need not always be a bad outcome. In an entrepreneurial culture, people should be encouraged to try new things and to explore their potential interests and abilities. If they learn in the process that they do not have an ability to do well in a particular course of study, this is important new information in their personal development. This approach also emphasises the importance of education quality in affecting subsequent employment outcomes.
17. Completing a programme of study is an important step towards achieving better employment outcomes, but a substantial literature warns that it is only a step. People can end up in occupations where their qualifications are higher than necessary for the occupation, or where the qualifications lie in different fields, known as education-employment mismatch. This may be due to insufficient demand for people with particular skills, or may be the result of a person completing a qualification in a field where they have no particular ability or interest, or may be caused by structural barriers in the labour market such as discrimination based on class, ethnicity or gender.

Opportunities and Structures

18. Families have a powerful influence on career pathway choices: family relationships are often the primary relationships through which young people craft identities, and family members tend to be a key, trusted source of information, and of emotional and financial support in relation to career decisions. Young people's career aspirations are often closely linked to family aspirations, and the educational attainments of parents are very strongly associated with those of their children.
19. Family income appears to have a number of related effects. Poverty has a detrimental effect on academic achievement, and this in turn is associated with low aspirations. Poverty at home is also likely to mean that parents struggle to offer financial support to their children to get them through post-school education or may wish them to move straight from school to work in order to start contributing to the family income as soon as possible. Young people themselves may consider this to be important too.
20. Parents may also be influential in ways they may not expect. Several studies suggest that young people are influenced in their ideas about work by the way their parents talk about their own jobs. Neblett and Cortina (2006) found that how children perceived their parents' work in terms of (i) the rewards it offered, (ii) the amount of self-direction parents had, and (iii) the levels of stress involved, all influenced their own outlook. Young people were more likely to be optimistic about their own opportunities in education and work if they saw their parents were positive about their work.
21. A great deal of research suggests that young people from poor neighbourhoods do not achieve as well in school and in their career development as their counterparts in better-off neighbourhoods, known as the 'neighbourhood effect'. It may be helpful to frame these results in terms of risk. It is risky for a young person to move away from home, particularly from a tight-knit community where he or she feels a strong sense of belonging and security. This is especially so for those who have a powerful identification with their community or who don't have many resources in the form of money or qualifications.
22. This risk can be addressed from two directions. One solution involves increasing the opportunities available in a particular neighbourhood or community. This option includes economic development leading to improved job opportunities, but might also include the introduction into the neighbourhood or community of quality educational institutions; so that young people from that community feel that they can take up post-school education without risking the security and sense of identity they gain from belonging to that community.
23. The second possible approach involves increasing the level of security for those leaving to find education or work elsewhere. Since networks play a key role in providing security and helping people explore career development opportunities, it is useful to consider ways of enabling young people to link into networks that offer better opportunities than those available in the neighbourhood but which also give a strong sense of belonging and security.
24. The perceived lifestyles of workers in the industry or occupation (including their personal

life, their income and their relationships) are also important when an individual forms an image of a career. One way of creating a bridge between education and employment, therefore, is through the use of mentors who enable young people to engage with learning in an education/training programme, or on the job, through a significant relationship with a person whose position and expertise they respect and trust. This is a topic of particular interest in the indigenous studies literature.

Systems Linking Education and Employment Choices

25. In a number of northern European countries (notably Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark and Luxembourg) there are highly formalised systems based on apprenticeships. Japan also has a highly formalised system involving close relationships between individual school and individual firms. Elsewhere (in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, for example) the linkages between education and employment are less structured and require young people to create their own individual pathways.
26. Making an early decision about which education and career path to take can reproduce inequality and reduce choice, but it does enable a high level of focus and training over an extended period. Leaving a decision until much later, and enabling a high level of flexibility in changing course, can mean that a school leaver will flounder in the labour market, lacking useful high level occupational skills. But it also can mean that the young person has considerable freedom of choice about pursuing a career path and may have a chance to challenge parental expectations about that path.
27. Many critiques of systems of vocational education in the research literature focus on their lack of transparency. In particular, problems arise when students are undertaking school work and vocational training (or work experience) at the same time but the links between these are neither close nor clear. The students don't understand (i) how their vocational training links to their school work, (ii) the relevance of their school work to their training, and (iii) how to combine these to create a career pathway.
28. A great deal of research points towards the desirability of integrating academic and vocation work integration but also indicates why there are difficulties achieving this – notably because these are often perceived as having different objectives and are typically set in opposition to each other in formal educational contexts. Academic knowledge and work is aligned with theoretical, abstract, discipline-based knowledge and thinking. Vocational or technical knowledge and work is aligned with practical, experiential and observable phenomena.
29. There are increasing calls to integrate vocational and academic subjects in school as part of the emphasis on an emerging 'new work order', 'new vocationalism' and a 'knowledge society', potentially bringing together the needs of employers and schooling in new ways and giving new impetus to lifelong learner identities. This requires resources: schools must have the necessary time and teacher numbers, and employers must be prepared to take training seriously and to commit resources to this. A Scottish policy programme entitled Determined to Succeed is attempting to put these principles into practice.

30. Local and international research has consistently highlighted the need for qualifications that are credible (they are meaningful to employers, educational institutions, students and parents), transparent (it is clear what they are representing and how), and flexible (they can be attained and used in a number of ways). New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) provides a good example of a qualification, within a wider qualifications framework, that was explicitly designed to address issues of flexibility, transparency, and credibility, as well as to challenge the persistent divide between an academic and a vocational curriculum.

Conclusion

31. This report has focused on five themes: choice in education-employment linkages; crafting identities; discovery and development of abilities; opportunities and structure; and systems linking education and employment choices. In the concluding chapter, the authors bring together recent developments in their four disciplines to lay firm foundations for the remainder of the Education Employment Linkages (EEL) research programme.
32. These recent developments tend to reinforce each other. At their collective centre is the young person, conceptualised as a dynamic individual who is continuously constructing self-identities in diverse contexts, discovering and developing their personal abilities, making purposeful choices that are influenced by perceived and actual social, economic and cultural constraints, and engaging with education and employment systems in their schools, in their workplaces, in their local communities and in their countries
33. The EEL research programme is concerned in particular with systems that aim to support young people make good education and employment linkages. In New Zealand, as in other countries, these support systems are themselves in a state of flux, reflecting the changing conceptualisations reported in this literature review. The next phases of the EEL programme will map the support systems that are currently in place, and analyse how they interact in assisting young people during their transition years.

Appendix 2

Key Informant Interviews in Regional Communities: Executive Summary

1. This report focuses on the provision of education-employment assistance, at the regional level, to young people who leave school with few or no qualifications. This report builds on and deepens the analysis in EEL Report No. 3, which mapped aspects of the formal transition system of support available to young New Zealanders making education employment linkages.
2. A series of in-depth interviews was conducted with key informants working ‘on the ground’ with school leavers with few or no qualifications. Interviewees included managers and tutors in Tertiary Education Organisations offering foundation and pre-trade courses; connections services that track and assist school leavers (including Youth Transition Services); and disability support services. Forty two people were interviewed, in twenty-two organisations, in fourteen centres across the country.
3. The aim of the interviews was to explore how formal support systems can assist young people to make effective education employment linkages, and how the current system is, and is not, facilitating this.

Analytical Framework

4. TEOs and other youth service providers are important both as gatekeepers and enablers for young people in transition. Questions of access to, and participation in, both post-school education and employment underlie this discussion.
5. Four key themes identified in the international research literature influence young people’s capacities to craft education-employment linkages. These are: identity formation, discovery and development of abilities, opportunities and constraints, and infrastructural pathways through education into employment.
6. The first two of these themes are closely linked to the concept of vocational imagination: the capacity to imagine oneself in a career pathway, with some specificity about what that might involve in terms of educational qualifications and occupational possibilities. The second two themes are closely linked to the concept of labour market literacy: the ability to read the labour market in terms of possibilities for a career pathway.
7. In order for young people to actively employ both a vocational imagination and labour market literacy in crafting their education-employment linkages, they need access to, and facilitated movement within, the transition infrastructure and the labour market.
8. The interviews undertaken for this part of the research explored the ways in which providers understood their capacity for enabling young people to develop vocational imagination and labour market literacy, and for facilitating young people’s exercise of

these in making education employment linkages.

Findings

9. Diversity. Diverse providers catered for a diverse range of young people, from those who were almost work-ready to those who had become disengaged from learning while in school, to those with a significant truancy history and high levels of need. Inclusion is a key issue here: how can this diversity be catered for so that every young person has access to the transition infrastructure and assistance to navigate a pathway within it?
10. Learning support. Many young people required significant support to even begin to engage in learning, and on-going support to remain engaged. This included social work, health care and counselling. Providers referred young people to services as appropriate, but also found it necessary to offer in-house support beyond education narrowly defined, because learning could not be separated off from the process of addressing these other needs. One of the most commonly expressed concerns was that the 'siloed' nature of funding made catering adequately for these young people very difficult.
11. Transition support for disabled young people. This involves beginning the transition process early, and managing disability throughout, as new settings are encountered (in employment or tertiary education). It is important to review progress early and often with a view to making adjustments that can assist in a stable, supported process. Inclusion is important; 'continuing the oddness' is not inclusive.
12. Fostering vocational imagination: providers spoke of this in terms of helping young people to gain confidence in their own capacity to learn, to set goals for themselves which included career goals, and to learn through a pedagogy appropriate to their needs: specifically this involved fostering good relationships between tutors and students; self-paced learning; project-based learning that was relevant, contextual, integrated, specific, and holistic; and career education that encouraged career conversations between students and tutors.
13. Fostering labour market literacy: providers spoke of this in terms of helping young people to develop their own pathways plans into further education and employment. Students were encouraged to find out about occupations for themselves and to develop networks through part time work and volunteering. This also included being realistic about possibilities, likely income and so forth.
14. Facilitating linkages: training providers were active in facilitating linkages (into further education and/or the labour market) by enhancing opportunities, mitigating constraints and smoothing infrastructural transition pathways. They cultivated relationships with employers both informally and formally and employed work brokers. They stressed the importance of all partners understanding each other well, and recognising that tensions must be carefully managed between business needs and the learning needs of students.

Conclusions: Key concerns

15. Three issues in particular emerged as common and urgent. The first related to what providers saw as the siloed nature of funding, which made assisting young people with

diverse and inter-connected needs difficult. For young people with significant needs, wraparound support was regarded as the most effective way to deliver assistance. ‘Person- centred’ approaches, rather than ‘service centred’ approaches were advocated as the best way to ensure that young people received the transition assistance they needed. This concern echoes Hudson’s (2006:56-57) comment that ‘the purpose of transition planning is not to move individuals from one service to another, but rather to support a young adult to move towards a new life stage’. ‘Whole system’ or ‘person centred mapping’ was regarded as an important way forward.

16. Second, there was much discussion about how best to measure success: whether in terms of ‘hard’ outcomes (such as success in the labour market) or in terms of ‘soft’ outcomes that measured progress towards achievement relative to the starting point of each individual. Supporters on the former (a minority) preferred a hard outcomes approach because it put the onus on providers to work hard to deliver for their young people. Others were concerned that this approach led to (i) creaming; (ii) ‘coaching’ in credit attainment; and (iii) the exclusion of young people with significant needs.
17. Third, there was evidence that the location in the transition infrastructure of PTEs catering for young people with low or no qualifications continues to be unstable in various ways. Training providers spoke of feeling marginalised in the education sector but argued that they can cater for a large minority of young people who have not engaged well with school culture and are unlikely to engage well with the culture of polytechnics or universities. Several providers also spoke of feeling like ‘guinea pigs’ with the frequent restructuring of the PTE-TEC relationship and regretted the disestablishment of the TEC relationship managers. These concerns suggest that a stable transitions infrastructure has yet to emerge for school leavers with low or no qualifications.

Appendix 3

Information and consent pamphlet for participants

What's this project about?

What is it like to be studying here compared with studying in a standard school? Better? Worse? If so, how?

What kinds of things are helping you, or hindering you, in making a plan for your future career pathway?

Have the quakes made a difference? Has living in 'quake city' changed what you are able to do in terms of education or training, and eventually finding the job you want?

This project reports to government policy advisors. It's important for them to hear your voice about these issues.

If I choose to take part, what will I be doing?

You will talk about these questions with our researchers, Jane and Sarah. You can choose how you do this: either in a small group, or with a friend, or on your own. The discussion will be relaxed and informal.

How do I become involved?

Talk to your tutors. Read this pamphlet. Sign with your name or a tag at the end so we know you are happy to take part.

Who are the researchers?

Dr. Jane Higgins is a Senior Researcher at Lincoln University. Sarah McKay works with

the Collaborative for Research and Training in Youth Health and Development.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about the project you can contact Jane:

Jane Higgins,
Senior Research Officer
AERU, Lincoln University

jane.higgins@lincoln.ac.nz
Phone or text: 027 303 9754

For more on our project check out:
www.eel.org.nz

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Can I change my mind and withdraw from the project?

Yes, you can choose not to take part in the project at any time. If you don't want to answer any particular question in the discussion you don't have to. If you'd like any comment that you have made to be left out of the research results, we will arrange that.

What information will be collected, how will it be used and how will it be helpful?

We are talking with young people all around the city. The discussions will be recorded so that the researchers can study what has been said.

The researchers will write a report on what is said in these discussions. This report will be available to anyone who takes part. It will be discussed with people working on national policies about transition for young people moving from school to tertiary education and employment.

The report will help them understand what you and other young people think.

Nothing that is said in the report will be linked to any particular person. All reported comments will be anonymous. Only the research team will have access to the recorded conversations.

If you'd like to take part, please sign below with your name or a tag:

- ✓ I have read this pamphlet and understand what this project is investigating.

- ✓ I know my involvement is voluntary and will be anonymous in any published results.

- ✓ I know I can withdraw from the project, and withdraw any information I have provided, until a month after I have talked with the researchers.

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RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON
EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT
LINKAGES



EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN
'QUAKE CITY'

ARE YOU BETWEEN 16 AND 20
YEARS OLD?

ARE YOU STUDYING FOR A LEVEL
1, 2 OR 3 QUALIFICATION?

WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!