

Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles Project: Final Report

An Ako Aotearoa National Project Fund Report



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Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles Project: Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles Project (YGPP) gathered the experiences and perspectives of young people in government-funded Youth Guarantee Fees Free training programmes and their education providers. The project explored the value of Youth Guarantee Fees Free for young people and whether it contributes to sustainable outcomes. As the project developed it became apparent that Youth Guarantee Fees Free is just one of the many experiences which influence young peoples' transitions and pathways to and from education and employment. It had a significant positive impact on the lives of most participants during their engagement with the programme; however, its ongoing impact varies according to the wider context of each individual transition that a young person makes. For the purposes of this report, transition generally relates to education and employment transitions, but as the data in this report highlight, it is important to remember that these transitions occur within the context of other transitions and life events young people may be experiencing.

The first phase of the project involved the collection of data from 437 students through surveys and interviews and from 22 staff through focus groups. Data on student outcomes was collected from their education providers. The second phase explored young people's pathways and longer-term outcomes after Youth Guarantee Fees Free through one-on-one qualitative interviews. We interviewed 63 young people at the start of their Youth Guarantee programmes in 2015 and tracked them until early 2019. Six interview phases were carried out, 30 participants were retained at the final interview.

The student cohort

The Youth Guarantee Fees Free students in the project cohort were aged between 15 and 19 years at the start of the project, with similar numbers of males and females and a good proportion of Māori and Pacific young people taking part. The interview cohort was recruited from the survey cohort and shared similar characteristics. Most participants did not complete secondary school and held few formal school qualifications when they entered Youth Guarantee. From the surveys and interviews, we learnt that the main reasons for this were related to poor relationships at school, bullying, mental health, poor behaviour and issues with learning and achievement. The majority of participants reported that they were engaged in either education or employment prior to starting their Youth Guarantee programme; most were at school and some had been working or attending other education. A small group had experienced long periods of not in employment, education or training (NEET). Overall these participants reported earlier disengagement from education than the rest of the cohort.

Core concepts

Through the collection and analysis of data for this project we have identified several factors which relate to all participants' experiences over time. The findings presented in this report should be understood in the context of these core concepts. We recommend that these messages be carefully considered by those involved in the planning and delivery of Youth Guarantee Fees Free and similar foundation education or youth transitions programmes. A summary of the concepts is provided here; these are explored in more detail in the body of this report.

Identity development

Identity development has a significant influence on participants' education, employment and transition experiences. The role of identity development, which we define as an iterative process that is informed by experiences and relationships, should be a key consideration when designing and assessing the impact of education and transition interventions for young people.

Complexity and context

Longitudinal data indicate that the context in which each participant lives, learns, works and makes decisions about the future has an impact on their experiences. Many of the factors discussed in this report are interconnected and their impact on young people is complex and varied due to diversity in individual characteristics, needs and contexts.

Iterative and multiple pathways

Participants experienced transitions in education and employment as an iterative process rather than a linear series of events. Education and employment transitions were not the only transitions experienced by participants, who also reported changes in their independence, their relationships and their identities.

The value of support

Consistency of support is extremely important. Participants reported receiving significant pastoral care as well as academic support at their Youth Guarantee providers. Ongoing pastoral care and support from whānau, friends and networks were essential to participants' development and positive education and employment transition experiences.

The value of skills

Participants' skills and capacity for self-development maximised the value of their qualifications. They reported that skills, gained through Youth Guarantee and other education and employment experiences, allowed them to progress in education and employment.

Defining success and positive education and employment transition experiences

Throughout this project we have interpreted success according to what we heard from young people, rather than relying on the outputs measured in the Educational Performance Indicators to define success in Youth Guarantee. This has ensured that participants' perspectives are central to our analysis and findings.

Research questions

1. What is the profile of young people on the Youth Guarantee Fees Free scheme?

The first research question of this project aimed to understand the profile of young people who access Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes. The intention was to create a profile or a series of profiles of this group through demographic data and information on pathways and experiences over time. After the first phase of data collection it became apparent that this approach would not result in a coherent profile of youth participants as it could not capture the complexities of their education, employment and transition experiences. Instead, we found that the main themes developed from interview data provided a more accurate representation of participants' experiences and perspectives.

The five themes of self-development, control, fit, networks and support, and direction and stability capture what is important to participants throughout different experiences during their post-school transitions and aid our understanding of what helped and hindered these transitions.

- Self-development relates to participants' desire to learn and grow and affects how they adapt to new contexts and experiences.
- Control is about young people being active participants in their education and employment transition and ensuring that their current and future needs are met.
- Fit indicates the importance of belonging within education, employment and other environments and acknowledges participants' search for alignment between their current context, pathways and future visions of themselves.
- Networks and support provided participants with a sense of security, information about and access to education and employment, and influenced the pathways participants considered.
- Direction and stability relate to participants' desire for forward momentum and the need to establish a base for further development.

The role of these themes in participants' experiences varied according to context. One example of this is participants' approach to self-development over time. Within Youth Guarantee, participants reported self-development as learning, educational achievement and personal growth with the support of education providers. After Youth Guarantee, the approaches to self-development described by participants became more strategic as they encountered different contexts and began to actively manage their transitions to education and employment. Some participants focused on self-development as a means of taking control over their future pathway and sought education or employment which could provide opportunities for further skill-development. A number of participants drew on their sense of direction or desire for stability to guide their self-development, using this as a framework to assess the potential of various activities to provide the required opportunities for development. Participants' perceptions of fit influenced self-development in terms of identifying suitable environments and pathways. These ideas about fit were informed by participants' networks which influenced the skills that participants valued and provided information and opportunities for further development.

2. What are the longer-term effects of educational interventions for this group?

To answer this question, we looked at participants' experiences in the short and longer-term. We wanted to establish whether the immediate effects of Youth Guarantee reported by participants were sustained over time, what contributed to this and whether participation in Youth Guarantee had other longer-term effects. This required an understanding of the role of Youth Guarantee in the broader context of participants' lives. We found that regardless of impact, Youth Guarantee was just one of many experiences that played a role in participants' education and employment transitions. For many participants it was an important experience, however, its influence could not be isolated from their other education, employment and life experiences before, during and after exiting Youth Guarantee.

The impact of Youth Guarantee reported by participants during and immediately after their engagement in the programme was largely positive. The majority of participants said they enjoyed their programme, particularly the practical elements. They reported that they were learning and achieving and their confidence and skills had increased. Many also noted positive changes in their personal development and future outlook, with the majority reporting that they were confident in their ability to achieve their next step after Youth Guarantee. Participants felt that this impact was a result of the supportive and respectful relationships with staff, who met their personal and learning needs. These relationships were the basis of a supportive environment at education providers where participants reported a strong sense of belonging and greater autonomy over learning.

In the longer-term, six months to three years after Youth Guarantee Fees Free, the immediate impacts of Youth Guarantee continued to have a positive effect on the education and employment transitions of most participants. These were enhanced by external factors such as ongoing support from others, further opportunities for self and skill-development and participants' sense of future direction. For many participants the increased confidence, skills and personal development gained from Youth Guarantee provided a base for future development. Participants reported that they drew on experiences from Youth Guarantee for motivation and encouragement during transitions. Skills, in particular, helped participants access and progress in further education, employment and other experiences after Youth Guarantee. The skills most commonly mentioned by participants were communication and interpersonal skills, self-management and employment skills, as well as skills which increased participants' capacity to continue their own development after Youth Guarantee.

While most participants reported feeling well-prepared for the future upon exit from Youth Guarantee, the ongoing interviews found that this did not necessarily result in positive or straight-forward education and employment transition experiences for all participants. Many participants expected that the qualifications gained from Youth Guarantee would open up pathways which they had previously found difficult to access. For those who continued in education, qualifications were useful in some cases, however, qualifications did not appear to help many participants who sought employment after Youth Guarantee. A number of participants reported that they lacked information about education and employment pathways and the support to interpret this information. While they received some information while on Youth Guarantee programmes, they were unable to recall it later on during their transitions to ongoing education or employment when it was needed.

As mentioned, a number of other factors influenced participants' experiences after Youth Guarantee. Participants reported that ongoing support, skills gained from other education, employment and life experiences, opportunities for ongoing skill-development and having future plans or a sense of future direction helped them do well. Some participants reported challenges during their education and employment transitions which influenced their pathways and the extent to which Youth Guarantee had an ongoing impact. The main challenges reported by participants were a lack of support, a lack of skills or information, a lack of motivation and problems finding a suitable pathway. Some challenges were specific to individual contexts, for example caring for whānau, financial concerns, health or mental health issues and the misuse of drugs or alcohol.

3. How do youth participants and service providers perceive the role that education providers and Youth Guarantee Fees Free play in addressing the educational and employment needs of young people?

Interviews with young people indicated that most did not distinguish between their education provider and Youth Guarantee Fees Free. This is most likely a result of participants accessing Youth Guarantee through their education providers. Participants felt that their education and employment needs were met by their education provider and valued the opportunity to gain qualifications for free in a non-school environment. However, most participants felt that it was their responsibility to ensure that their education and employment needs were met. They sought to achieve this through finding environments which catered to their needs and through ongoing skill-development.

Education providers felt a strong sense of responsibility for meeting the education and employment needs of their Youth Guarantee students. Overall, feedback from young people and staff indicate that staff had a good understanding of students' needs and were generally able to meet these. It was noted that this work was not always well-supported by the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework. This appeared to stem from the different approaches taken by education providers and the agencies that fund and monitor Youth Guarantee Fees Free. We observed that while education providers operate from a student-centred perspective, the Youth Guarantee framework is systems-focused and driven by narrow outputs, such as NCEA Level 2 achievement, rather than student needs.

Implications of project findings for educators and policy makers

Implications for educators

The core concepts indicate that the role of educators in supporting young people during their education, employment and broader transitions goes beyond the delivery of a qualification. This aligns with what we heard from young people and Youth Guarantee staff throughout the project. Feedback from participants provides useful information on what this group of young people value in terms of education content, delivery and environment. This information may help education providers identify areas where they are meeting student needs and areas where more effective support could be provided to young people. More information can be found in Appendix 1, which outlines the main messages from the project in relation to the provision of Youth Guarantee.

Implications for policy

Policy in the area of foundation education does not currently align with the realities of young people's education and employment transitions in Aotearoa New Zealand. At present, policy dictates the structure, delivery and outcomes of Youth Guarantee Fees Free in a manner which assumes a linear transition through education to employment. The findings of this project clearly indicate that young people's transitions are iterative, complex and closely linked to individual context and identity development. Furthermore, the needs and challenges of this group of young people cannot be met through education alone.

Future policy in this space should consider the value of holistic and ongoing support and the importance of skills in supporting young people throughout their transitions. Programmes which have greater flexibility to meet individual student needs, support collaboration between agencies working with young people and which focus on longer-term positive outcomes rather than immediate outputs, such as qualifications, are more likely to have a sustained positive effect on young peoples' experiences of transition in and out of education and employment.

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1. Introduction

This is the final report of the Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles Project which began in 2015. The project focused on the education, employment and transition experiences of young people enrolled in Government-funded Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes and sought to understand the value of these programmes for young people. The project was guided by three research questions:

1. What is the profile of young people on the Youth Guarantee Fees Free scheme?
2. What are the longer-term effects of educational interventions for this group?
3. How do youth participants and service providers perceive the role that education providers and Youth Guarantee Fees Free play in addressing the educational and employment needs of participants?

The Interim Report (Reid, Turner, Schroder & McKay, 2017) for this project addressed the first question regarding the profile of young people in Youth Guarantee Fees Free; the current report is concerned with the two remaining research questions.

1.1 Project context

Youth Guarantee Fees Free was introduced in 2012 as part of a wider government foundation learning initiative which aims to support young people to succeed in education. YGFF provides full-time study opportunities at polytechnics, wānanga and private training establishments leading to NCEA Level 1, NCEA Level 2 with a Vocational Pathway and National or New Zealand Certificates at Levels 1-3 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

Eligible learners are school leavers aged 16 years to 19 years with few or no qualifications. Eligible programmes are approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). Providers are funded by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) through an EFTS¹-based system. TEC also manage the YGFF criteria which include educational performance indicators (EPI). These cover participation, retention, course and qualification achievement and progression to further study. Programmes and/or providers who do not achieve EPIs may not be allocated funding in future years.

A major justification for this initiative was the expectation that NCEA Level 2 would provide young people with skills to succeed in further education or employment².

This project arose from a desire to understand more about the Youth Guarantee Fees Free student cohort, their longer-term education and employment transition experiences and the role of Youth Guarantee Fees Free in their transitions. Existing knowledge in this area draws on government performance measures and large data-sets which are unable to capture individual experiences. The inclusion of young people's perspectives of their transition into and out of education and employment provides a more detailed picture of the impact of the Youth Guarantee intervention.

¹ EFTS Equivalent Full-time Student is a funding unit used to calculate provider payments.

² See <http://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/fund-finder/youth-guarantee/> or <http://youthguarantee.net.nz/fees-free/> for more information.

2. Background Literature

This project is informed by research which views youth education and employment transitions in the context of identity formation and understands transition as a process rather than an event (Munford & Sanders, 2015; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012; Vaughan, Roberts & Gardiner, 2006). Research in New Zealand and internationally has shown that young people's transitions from secondary school are diverse and non-linear and transitions can be particularly challenging for young people with low skills and low levels of formal education, who often face other obstacles (Bibbee, 2013; Higgins, 2012; Vaughan et al., 2006). The literature emphasises the importance of understanding education and employment transition in the context of the transition to adulthood and the social and developmental changes which young people experience at this stage of their lives (Wyn, 2013).

The impact of context on young people's education and employment transitions and choices is a key focus of the existing literature. Family is identified as a significant source of support that influences young people's future pathways both in terms of shaping ideas and providing access to information and opportunities (Higgins, Vaughan, Phillips & Dalziel, 2008; Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2011). Other networks that young people have access to, for example, education providers, also contribute to their pathways and decisions during transitions (Educational Attainment Working Group, 2012; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Research has shown that regardless of the source, access to ongoing individualised support and caring, respectful relationships throughout transitions can provide a secure base from which young people can develop themselves and their skills and consider possible pathways (Kendall et al., 2003; Munford & Sanders, 2015).

Research regarding education interventions and transition programmes for young people, particularly those not in education, employment or training (NEET), has noted that successful programmes offer varied teaching styles, opportunities for achievement and belonging and exposure to a range of career or education pathways (Bonica & Sappa, 2010; Kendall et al., 2003; Polidano, Tabasso & Tseng, 2015; Wyn, Stokes and Tyler, 2004). In particular, a number of studies note the importance of supportive relationships and access to hands-on learning, which provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence and take control of the learning process (Bonica & Sappa, 2010; Davies, Lamb & Doecke, 2011).

Finally, it is important to note that this project contributes to a small body of New Zealand research which examines the role of education intervention programmes such as ACCESS, Training Opportunities, Youth Training and Youth Guarantee Fees Free (Benseman & Tobias, 2003; Earle, 2015, 2016a, 2018; Educational Attainment Working Group, 2012; Gordon, Sedgwick, Grey & Marsden, 2014; Mahoney, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2002).

3. Method

This project began in 2015 with participants comprising students and staff from three education providers; Community College, YMCA and Unitec. Student participants were recruited from Level 1 and 2 Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes taught at these providers during 2015. Staff involved in the administration and delivery of Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes were nominated to take part in focus groups by education providers. Participation was voluntary and participants were provided with detailed information about the study before deciding whether to take part. Data from students were collected through surveys, interviews and from information held by their education providers. Further data triangulation was provided through three focus groups and one conference call with education provider staff.

Students took part in two online surveys during 2015, an entry and an exit survey. In total, 437 students took part in surveys, 160 participants completed both surveys; 352 completed the entry survey and 251 participated in the exit survey. Students were asked about their experience of school, pathways into and experience of Youth Guarantee, future plans and expectations, use of support services, health and mental health, living situation, income and employment. Demographic data were also collected. Information gathered from education providers was linked to survey responses. This information included enrolment and exit data as well as information on qualification and course completion and scores from the Literacy and Numeracy Tool (LLNAT).

Interview participants were recruited from the entry survey. Students were given information about the interviews before completing the entry survey and at the end of this survey were able to click through to a separate survey to indicate their interest in participating in interviews. This survey collected students' contact details and their gender, age and ethnicity. We intended to use this information to ensure diversity of the interview sample; however, the 91 participants who indicated their interest in participating in interviews were representative of the diversity of the survey cohort. We approached the majority of these participants to invite them to participate but were unable to make contact with some, and a few declined to participate after being provided with further information about the interviews. The interviewers contacted participants directly to invite them to participate and ensured that they had access to an information sheet before deciding whether or not to take part; this resulted in the sample of 63 participants interviewed at interview one. At the first interview written consent was sought from participants. At each subsequent interview verbal consent was sought before beginning each interview.

As outlined in Table 1, six phases of interviews were carried out between May 2015 and December 2018. This consisted of interviews at entry and exit from the initial Youth Guarantee programme and follow-up interviews at approximately 6 months, 1 year, 2 years and 3 years after exit from Youth Guarantee. Sixty-three students took part in initial interviews, 53 participated in the second phase of interviews, 46 in the third phase, 39 in the fourth, 35 in the fifth and 30 in the final interview. This level of attrition was expected and influenced the initial sample size.

Table 1: Phases of interviews and participant numbers at each phase

Interview 1 Entry to YG	Interview 2 Exit from YG	Interview 3 6 months post exit	Interview 4 12 months post exit	Interview 5 24 months post exit	Interview 6 36 months post exit
N=63	N=53	N=46	N=39	N=35	N=30

Student interviews were conducted by two experienced researchers from the Collaborative Trust. These researchers were involved for the duration of the project and each young person was interviewed by the same interviewer at each interview phase. All initial interviews were conducted face-to-face and follow-up interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the phone (depending on the preference of the participant). Interview participants were asked about their school, Youth Guarantee and other education experiences, employment and other transition experiences, their pathways in and out of Youth Guarantee and future plans. In these interviews, participants discussed their general experience of transition into and out of education and employment and were asked what was helping, what was challenging and what other supports they needed. Numerical data presented in the findings section regarding interview participants are used to represent patterns observed in the data and are not necessarily indicative of broader outcomes. All names in this report attached to quotes from student participants are pseudonyms and any information which could be used to identify participants has been redacted.

Focus groups with 21 staff from each of the three participating training providers were conducted by Collaborative Trust researchers. These followed a semi-structured interview format focusing on how well participants and the organisations they represented were able to meet the education, employment and personal needs of their students within the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework. A range of staff took part including teaching, management, administration and support staff. Eleven of these staff were from Community College, eight from YMCA and two from Unitec. As focus groups were not able to be held with all participants, three focus groups and one mini focus group were conducted. Six participants took part in focus groups one and two and seven took part in focus group three and two staff were interviewed in the mini focus group via a conference call.

Data gathered through surveys and from education providers were analysed quantitatively using SPSS software and descriptive statistics such as mean, median and percentage were calculated. Data were analysed for differences by ethnicity, gender, age, educational achievement and school decile. The chi-square test was used to calculate differences for categorical measures and the t-test or ANOVA for continuous measures. Interview and focus group data were analysed qualitatively through thematic analysis.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews with student participants, focus groups with staff and open-ended survey questions were analysed using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006). Researchers used this method to identify common themes in the educational experiences and transitions of the young people who participated in the project. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of analysis which requires in-depth examination of the data to allow common themes to emerge (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006). Analysis of interviews also followed the two-directional strategy outlined by Thompson and Holland (2003) who recommend the use of cross-sectional analysis to identify themes and discourses within phases of data collection, and longitudinal analysis to investigate themes and discourses over time.

More information on the methodology and data collection in this project can be found in the Interim Report, (Reid et al., 2017).

3.1 Strengths and limitations

The findings in this report relate to the Youth Guarantee Fees Free students who took part in the Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles project. The ability to generalise these findings is limited by the population who participated in the project. Not all young people who enrolled in Youth Guarantee Fees Free at the participating Youth Guarantee providers in 2015 took part in the project. Furthermore, not all participants took part in both surveys and a lower proportion of Māori and a higher proportion of Pākehā participants took part in the exit survey. Some survey and interview participants departed suddenly and were unable to be tracked, while others declined to complete one of the surveys, or to continue taking part in interviews. While such attrition is expected, there is a risk that the voices of young people who faced challenges which prevented them from completing their Youth Guarantee programmes are not fully represented in this report. The level of attrition limits our ability to draw quantitative conclusions from the qualitative interview data, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The enumeration of interview participants' experiences was not a core purpose of the interviews, which were designed to capture young peoples' experiences and perspectives over time. However, the figures calculated from interview data are comparable with findings of large-scale analyses of Youth Guarantee Fees Free data carried out by the Ministry of Education (Earle, 2016a; 2016b; 2018).

The effects that these limitations have on the generalisability of the findings are protected by the design of the project, which allows the triangulation of data from surveys, interviews, staff focus groups and Youth Guarantee providers. A further strength is the longitudinal interviews which provide information from the same participants across several time points. Despite a relatively high level of attrition of interview participants over time, we retained a diverse sample in terms of demographic characteristics and education and transition experiences. The in-depth, semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed exploration of what was important to young people and how and why this changed over-time, which has resulted in a rich dataset. In addition, data saturation was reached at all six interview phases which strengthens the themes and core concepts developed from these data. This project provides in-depth information on the longer-term experiences of young people engaged in an educational intervention in New Zealand. However, a true understanding of the longer-term experiences and impacts would require further follow-up of this cohort, should funding become available.

4. Findings

In this section the findings of this mixed method longitudinal study are presented. This begins with a description of the student participants followed by an overview of some of the core concepts that emerged in all of the young peoples' stories. These concepts are presented separately to the general findings as they provide a context within which all findings of this study should be considered. A summary of the key findings according to each method of data collection is then presented. This is followed by a presentation of the general themes related to participants' education and employment transitions that emerged after analysis of both cross-sectional and longitudinal interview data. These themes aim to depict the iterative nature of the transition process experienced by student participants. Finally, a closer look at transition processes generated from both the qualitative and quantitative data provides young people's perspectives on what helps and what hinders education and employment transitions, as well as their views on the longer-term impacts of Youth Guarantee Fees Free.

4.1 Student characteristics

All student participants were enrolled in a Level 1 or 2 Youth Guarantee programme when they were recruited to take part. Interview participants were recruited from the survey sample and were representative of the survey cohort. Student participants were aged 15-19 years; the majority of survey participants (38%) and interview participants (33%) were 16 years old. A good proportion of Māori and Pasifika students participated in surveys, 35% and 10% respectively and were well represented in the interview cohort, with 43% identifying as Māori and 16% as Pasifika. Around 20% of participants reported multiple ethnicities across both surveys and interviews. Overall, slightly more females than males took part; this difference was marginally larger in the surveys, 52% female and 48% male, than in the interviews, 49% female and 47% male. A small number of participants chose to report an alternative gender identity or did not share this information. The majority of survey participants had no formal secondary school qualifications when they entered Youth Guarantee (70%), 21% had NCEA Level 1 and 6% had NCEA Level 2. Although we do not have verified qualification information from interview participants, self-reported qualification levels were similar to those of survey participants. For further detail on participant characteristics, please refer to the Interim Report (Reid, et al., 2017).

4.2 Core concepts

Through the collection and analysis of data for this project we have identified several factors which relate to all participants' experiences over time. The findings presented in this report should be understood in the context of these core concepts. We recommend that these messages be carefully considered by those involved in the planning and delivery of Youth Guarantee Fees Free and similar foundation education or youth transition programmes.

4.2.1 Identity development

It was not the intention of this project to explore identity development; however, there is a clear and inextricable link between participants' experiences and their identity development. In the current project we have followed the definition of identity described by Vaughan et al. (2006) as "something

which is continually being made” (ibid, pg. 4) by us and for us through experiences, relationships and discourses. For example, many young people in this project spoke about how the experience of learning and achieving in Youth Guarantee had led to changes in how they perceived themselves and their possible futures. A further aspect of identity relates to the notion of “multiple identities which change over time and in different contexts” (ibid). For some participants, their experiences during transition into education or employment reinforced existing elements of their identities, while others created new identities as they entered different contexts. The findings presented in this report, although discussed in terms of participants’ education, employment and transition experiences, also strongly relate to identity development.

4.2.2 Complexity and context

Longitudinal data indicate that the context in which each participant lives, learns, works and makes decisions about the future has an impact on their experiences. Many of the factors discussed in this report are interconnected and their impact on young people is complex and varied due to diversity in individual characteristics, needs and contexts. The complexity of participants’ experiences and the varied impact of these on their transitions, education and employment experiences have become increasingly apparent as we track participants through multiple contexts.

Due to this complexity, it should be noted that what works for one young person may not work for others. Furthermore, what works for a young person at a particular point in time in a certain context may not work for that same young person at a different time or in a different context.

4.2.3 Iterative and multiple pathways

Participants experienced transitions in education and employment as an iterative process rather than a linear series of events. This process was closely linked to participants’ identity development and influenced their decisions about education and employment pathways.

Despite their reported intentions to follow a linear pathway, most participants tried out a range of pathways as they searched for a route which matched their current needs and ideas about who or what they wanted to be.

It is important to acknowledge that education and employment transitions were not the only transitions experienced by participants. Participants experienced changes in their independence, their relationships and their identities.

4.2.4 The value of support

Consistency of support is extremely important. Participants reported receiving significant pastoral care as well as academic support at their Youth Guarantee providers. Ongoing pastoral care and support from whānau, friends and networks were essential to participants’ development and positive transition experiences. Some participants who did not have support networks reported negative transition experiences which they attributed, in part, to a lack of ongoing support.

4.2.5 The value of skills

Participants’ skills and capacity for self-development maximised the value of their qualifications. Participants valued qualifications for the sense of achievement and self-confidence gained from completing these. However, they reported that it was their skills, gained through Youth Guarantee and other education and employment experiences, which allowed them to progress in education and employment.

4.2.6 Defining success and positive transition experiences

Throughout this project we have interpreted success according to what we heard from young people rather than relying on the outputs employed in the Educational Performance Indicators to define success in Youth Guarantee. Overall, success for participants meant being engaged in an activity which was meaningful to them, whether education, employment, travel or parenthood, and experiencing a sense of development. The iterative nature of young peoples' transitions does not fit well with notions of 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' transitions. Instead we describe participants' positive or negative transition experiences. Drawing on our conversations with participants, we have characterised positive transition experiences as those where participants feel engaged and have a sense of purpose and development. Negative transition experiences are those where participants do not report engagement, purpose or development.

4.3 Survey findings

This section describes the main findings of two quantitative surveys that were completed by student participants in 2015. Participants completed a survey at the start and at the end of their Youth Guarantee Fees Free programme.

Survey participants were aged 15-19 years, with a good proportion of Māori and Pasifika students and slightly more females than males taking part. Most participants lived at home with one or both parents (67.8%) and reported that whānau and friends were their main sources of support. Participants also received support from other services such as Youth Service, counsellors and school careers advisors. There was a change in the types of support services accessed by participants from entry to exit, with fewer school-based services reported. Exit survey participants reported accessing fewer services overall. Some participants reported issues with physical (30.7%) and mental health (37%). Participants' self-esteem, measured through the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, increased from programme entry to exit with overall average scores moving from 27.6 to 30.1.

The majority of participants (95%) did not complete secondary school and reported negative school experiences. Factors identified by participants as positively or negatively influencing their time at school and their reasons for leaving school, were related to issues with learning, relationships and behaviour. Friends (57.6%) and whānau (50.3%) were a positive influence on participants' time at school, while poor relationships with teachers and peers, issues with learning, bullying (40.8%), truancy (44.9%), mental health (35.8%) and poor behaviour (33.6%) contributed to negative experiences at school and participants' decisions to leave school. About three-quarters of participants had some experience with employment and these experiences contributed to participants' decisions about the future. Having a source of income was important to a number of participants and just over 80% reported receiving some form of income. Money from family and wages from employment were the most common sources of income for participants.

It appeared that most participants either had relatively short transitions between school and Youth Guarantee, or were not significantly disengaged during their transitions³. Information on survey participants' activity prior to enrolling in Youth Guarantee collected from their education providers

³ Significant disengagement in this context refers to young people who are long-term NEET (a continuous spell not engaged in education, employment or training for six months or more). Young people often experience short spells of NEET, so this is not an appropriate measure of disengagement. (Earle, 2016b; Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2013)

indicated that just over 70% had been at secondary school before enrolling in Youth Guarantee⁴. Forty-four percent of survey participants reported that they had engaged in some form of work or study after leaving school. Participants were motivated to enrol in Youth Guarantee to gain qualifications (80%) and skills for employment (56%) or further study (47%). Most exit survey participants planned to work (44%) or continue their education (53%) after Youth Guarantee. These plans ranged from well-developed, step-by-step plans to vague ideas about possible future pathways.

The full presentation of survey findings and the associated discussion of these findings can be found in the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017).

4.4 Interview findings

In this section the findings from qualitative interviews with student participants are discussed, with a particular focus on activities, pathways and plans. Six phases of interviews were undertaken with student participants between May 2015 and December 2018. Participants were aged 15-19 years and Maori (43%) and Pasifika (16%) were well represented in the sample.

It is important to note that the number of participant responses presented in this section have been included to illustrate fluctuation in participants' activities, pathways and plans over time and to provide context for the findings presented. It should be noted that these data indicate the activities, pathways and plans of the participants retained at the time of each interview and may not be representative of the experience of the wider cohort. The numbers have been calculated as a percentage of the total number of participants at each round of interviews. Sixty-three participants took part in phase one interviews, 53 in phase two, 46 in phase three, 39 in phase four, 35 in phase five and 30 in phase six.

4.4.1 Activities and pathways over time

In the first two interviews most participants were engaged in education; and many were nearing completion of their Youth Guarantee programme when they took part in the second interview. Participants' pathways after Youth Guarantee varied, although, for the first two years after Youth Guarantee there was a trend towards employment. Of those who participated in phase three interviews, 26% (12/46) were in employment, by the fifth interview this had increased to 60% (21/35) of remaining participants. By the final interview the percentage of remaining participants in employment was 46% (14/30); this coincided with an increase of participants in education. Initially, participants' involvement in education declined over time. At the third interview, 36% (17/46) of remaining participants were in education, the majority in their second year of Youth Guarantee at the same education provider. By the fourth interview this had dropped to 18% (7/39) and decreased further to 3% (1/35) of remaining participants at the fifth interview. However, at the final interview, the number of participants in education had increased to 23% (7/30). Information from participants suggests that this was a result of re-engagement after periods of employment or NEET spells. Some participants were following a previously planned education path while others had re-engaged due to a change in their path.

As participants exited their Youth Guarantee programmes, we began to see an increase in those who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). At interview three, 29% (13/46) of retained

⁴ These data record students' activity at 1st October 2014.

participants were NEET; many had recently exited Youth Guarantee and were looking for employment. By the fourth interview, when all remaining participants had exited Youth Guarantee programmes, the proportion who were NEET increased markedly to 44% (17/39); however, by the fifth interview this had dropped to 25% (9/35) and at the final interview had decreased further to 13% (4/30) of remaining participants. The percentage of participants who were not engaged in education or employment due to parenting commitments remained at about 10% across the course of the interviews, up until the final interview when it increased to 16% (5/30); these participants are not included in NEET figures.

While these figures indicate the spread of engagement in education and employment among interview participants, they do not provide much information on their pathways. Very few participants followed a linear pathway through education or employment during the time which they were engaged in this project. Speaking to participants about their experiences over time, gave us greater insight into how they navigated education and employment transitions and responded to changes in their context. Participants moved between education and employment as their needs and situations changed and many had periods of NEET. Although participants' pathways varied according to individual context, we were able to observe some similarities in the pathways of those who had more positive or more negative overall experiences of transition to education or employment.

Participants who reported overall positive experiences tended to have more access to support and have stronger networks, which provided information and access to opportunities. Participants reported that their self-confidence and belief that they were in control of their pathways contributed to positive experiences and protected them when they had negative experiences. These participants were more likely to have plans or ideas for the future throughout their education and employment transitions and, although their plans changed, they did not lose their sense of forward momentum. We also observed that participants who were better able to identify their skills and articulate their personal and skill-development, tended to have more positive experiences. It should be noted that not all of these factors were present at all times during participants' transitions into and out of education and employment. Some moved from negative to positive experiences over time (and vice-versa) as their access to support, networks and confidence levels changed. For some participants this was a gradual process of change, while others cited a specific experience or event which changed their pathway.

4.4.2 Future plans over time

At the initial interview, participants' future paths were mainly focused on education, with nearly 80% (37/47) of participants who had future plans (n=47) or ideas indicating a desire to continue in further education after Youth Guarantee. About 15% (7/47) of participants planned to work and a few were deciding between education or employment. By the second interview (n=51 with future plans), around half (25/51) of interviewed participants had changed their initial plan entirely and about 20% (10/51) had made adjustments to their planned pathway due to changes in their context or unexpected setbacks. The intention to follow an education pathway was still strong, 70% (35/51) of remaining participants with plans indicated that they would like to continue to study and 25% (12/51) planned to work.

Over time, more participants changed their plans toward employment rather than education. At the third interview, half (17/35) of the remaining participants with future plans (n=35 with future plans) intended to continue education and half (17/35) planned to work, a trend which continued through the fourth and fifth interviews. This appeared to occur after participants exited Youth Guarantee and

experienced different education and employment contexts. By the final interview we saw a slight change in the future direction of remaining participants. Instead of the even split in education and employment plans observed in the two years after exit from Youth Guarantee, after three years, 60% (16/27) of remaining participants who had a future plan (n=27) planned to study and 40% (11/27) planned to work.

Interview data suggest that a major reason for the initial shift away from education was participants experiencing a lack of fit with their chosen education pathway. Some of this was related to the learning environment or content not meeting participants' expectations, or participants realising that the path was not suited to them after having the opportunity to try it out. However, a number of participants mentioned that the reason they did not continue in education was due to not having the correct qualifications or being unable to pass required papers in bridging or pre-entry programmes. Others cited issues accessing education, for example, uncertainty about how or when to enrol and a lack of information about education pathways. Another major factor was the cost of education, not just in terms of course fees, but also living costs and loss of potential income through diminished capacity to work while studying. Many participants wanted financial stability and preferred to save money to pay for further education and associated costs, or hoped to access careers through progression in employment, rather than taking out a loan. In addition, some needed or wanted to contribute financially to their families and were not able to provide this support while in education. By the final interview, the slight shift towards future education appeared to come from participants achieving stability in the present. Some reported that they felt more financially stable, while others were more certain in their choice of pathway after having experienced a variety of paths and activities during transition to education or employment.

Other reasons given by participants for changes to their plans were employment related setbacks, such as not being able to find work, or issues finding stable fulltime work. A number of participants became parents during the course of the project, which caused them to re-evaluate their future trajectory. Transience continued to be an issue for a few participants; this did not necessarily result in negative outcomes, although it did affect participants' plans and development in the short-term.

4.5 Focus group findings

This section summarises findings from the three focus groups and one conference call carried out with staff from three Youth Guarantee Fees Free education providers during 2015 and 2016.

The focus groups with staff were designed to capture organisational perspectives on working within the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework. Staff were asked about their views of Youth Guarantee and how well it aligned with the needs of their students, with a particular focus on whether and how education providers met their students' educational and employment needs within the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework.

There were clear themes relating to the value of Youth Guarantee, student needs, the challenges in meeting these, and what is needed to improve the current system. Overall, feedback from staff focus groups aligned with what we heard from Youth Guarantee students in the surveys and interviews for this project. Staff valued that Youth Guarantee gave young people who had not succeeded in mainstream education the opportunity to gain qualifications, personal development and experience educational success. They spoke about the vital role of support and relationships in engaging young people and meeting their needs and discussed how challenges faced by young people can affect their

experience and achievement in Youth Guarantee. Of interest is the strong feedback that while Youth Guarantee Fees Free is suitable for some young people, its structure is not conducive to achieving success for all young people.

A number of challenges to the delivery of qualifications and skills through Youth Guarantee were identified by staff. Staff reported that these stemmed from a lack of alignment between the needs of their students and the Youth Guarantee framework. The main criticism was the lack of flexibility within Youth Guarantee to meet the needs of a diverse group of young people. Specifically, the lack of flexibility in the time that students have to achieve on Youth Guarantee Fees Free and the narrow definition of achievement, which does not capture all of the personal or educational gains made by students. Another concern was the lack of on-going support for young people. Staff said that young people required more support in transitions out of Youth Guarantee. They reported that there was a gap in provision after Youth Guarantee, in terms of the available education options at Level 3 and ongoing support and development for young people. While staff did their best to prepare students for their next step after Youth Guarantee and in many cases continued to support students after their departure, this often went above and beyond their roles within their education organisations and beyond the scope of Youth Guarantee provision. The staff who participated in focus groups felt that changes to the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework are needed to create a system that is student-centred and supports staff to meet student needs.

4.6 Project themes

These themes were developed through thematic cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of the interview data. This provided information on the main characteristics of participants' experiences at each time point and helped us identify overarching themes which impacted upon participants at all stages of their transition from school to education, work and other activities. The themes have evolved over the course of the project, as discussed in the Themes Report (Reid, Reid, Turner, Schroder & McKay, 2018). These five themes contribute to understanding what helps, hinders and influences our participants as they transition between contexts and provide a framework for interpreting participants' experiences and actions. The 2018 Themes Report provides further detail on these themes.

4.6.1 Main themes

The five key themes of *Self-development*, *Control*, *Fit*, *Networks and Support* and *Direction and Stability* encapsulate the iterative process of transition and development experienced by the young people in this project. The theme of *Self-development* recognises participants' desire for growth and access to opportunity, *Control* is about being an active participant in transitions and *Fit* acknowledges participants' need for belonging and their search for alignment between self, current context and planned pathways. *Networks and Support* act as a stable base for participants' transitions and development, while *Direction and Stability* provide a sense of purpose and a framework to guide transitions.

4.6.1.1 *Self-development*

Participants reported that self-development, including skill-development, helped them do well during and after their Youth Guarantee programmes. For participants, self-development was about growth, change and ensuring future success. This involved gaining practical skills for employment and further education, academic achievement and changes to mind-set and behaviours.

Although participants' main focus for self-development was increasing access to, or success in, education and employment, personal growth had an integral role. Participants' capacity to increase access and success was enhanced through their personal growth and improved personal skills gained through self-development. Whether attained from Youth Guarantee, other education, employment or personal experiences, participants said that the confidence gained from self-development created positive momentum for continued development. This was an iterative and self-reinforcing process; participants reported that the confidence gained from learning new skills and achieving in education prompted them to see themselves and their futures in a different light and encouraged further development. As participants' capacity for self-development increased, they began to evaluate their current skills and consider which skills they could develop to increase their chances of success. They also sought opportunities for development which were directly connected to their desired pathway and assessed the value of particular pathways according to their potential for future development.

4.6.1.2 Control

Participants' desire to have control over themselves, their choices and decisions which involved or affected them was a strong and consistent theme in interviews with young people. For these young people, control was about independence, self-responsibility and forging their own path. They used control to gain and maintain independence, to access opportunities and to reject situations which undermined their sense of self-efficacy or identity.

The role of control in participants' experiences varied according to their individual needs, aims and contexts. Most participants used control to ensure future independence through developing themselves, their skills and choosing pathways that provided stability and/or flexibility. Some reported choosing a course of study or a career that offered diverse pathways and opportunities for progression. Others employed control to achieve immediate independence and stability, for example finding a job to pay for living expenses, which sometimes resulted in a narrowing of options in the longer-term.

As participants experienced success in various contexts, they appeared to become more proactive in setting their future direction, accessing their networks to support their transitions and searching for education or employment that met their needs. A number of participants reported that self-development enabled them to take control as it increased their confidence and gave them the skills they needed for independence and self-responsibility, for example, time-management, communication and interpersonal skills. Overall, most participants were keen to gain independence and relished the chance to take control of their choices; however, a few reported that they felt uncertain about making decisions and were afraid of making the wrong choice.

4.6.1.3 Fit

Finding fit was a central part of participants' education, employment and transition experiences. Participants mentioned two types of fit, one was related to belonging in their physical environment; being accepted, valued and feeling confident and competent when carrying out tasks. The other was about participants finding alignment between their current activity and planned path and how they saw themselves now and in the future.

Most participants who experienced physical fit reported feeling engaged and confident about their future choices. Those who had found fit with a pathway also reported engagement and confidence, as well as a sense of purpose. In both cases, fit provided stability which allowed participants to focus on self-development and explore future options. Participants used their experiences of fit, or a lack of

fit, to assess the likelihood of fit in other contexts. Positive experiences of fit tended to broaden the future options considered by participants as these increased their self-efficacy and provided stability to explore a range of pathways. In some cases, participants' strong sense of fit with a particular pathway restricted their future options as they did not consider other possible pathways. Negative experiences of fit could limit or broaden participants' future options. Some participants reported that negative experiences led them to re-evaluate their trajectory and seek alternative pathways. Others ruled out certain careers, industries or activities, for example continuing in education, after experiencing a lack of fit. Regardless of whether they had a desired path, participants who lacked networks or knowledge to find alternative pathways when they experienced a lack of fit faced limited future options.

4.6.1.4 Networks and support

Networks and support, in particular whānau and friends, were a strong influence on participants' education, employment and transition experiences and their future decisions. We have already noted the value of ongoing support. In addition to this, networks were an important source of information about current and future pathways and could facilitate access to education or employment. Participants reported that networks and support provided them with a foundation to search for suitable activities or pathways, influenced their ideas about what was possible and practical for them and were a source of motivation.

Networks were particularly important when participants were moving between activities or assessing options for their future. As participants gained confidence and independence, they began to think about how existing networks could guide their education and employment transition and leverage opportunities, and they sought to access or create new networks. Support helped participants succeed in their chosen activity and guided their overall transition and future outlook.

4.6.1.5 Direction and stability

Participants reported that having stability and a sense of direction supported their transitions into and out of education and employment. They gained stability from a variety of sources including a stable home and personal life, ongoing supportive relationships, finding fit with a particular pathway and having a sense of direction. Overall, participants who lacked stability struggled to find or maintain direction as their energy was concentrated on finding stability and managing their lives. Throughout their transitions, participants found that having stability allowed them to focus on finding direction.

For participants, direction was about forward momentum and could involve a next step plan, a longer-term goal or idea, a clear plan or path, or a general sense of moving towards 'the future'. Some participants reported that having direction provided stability as it guided their choices and brought meaning to these. In these cases, direction was used as a framework to help participants judge the usefulness of certain activities, pathways, networks and self-development. Over the course of their transitions, most participants gained stability from a variety of sources and changed direction at least once. These changes in stability and direction were closely connected to changes in fit, self-development and identity development.

4.6.2 The role of themes in education and employment transitions

Overall, when these themes are present, i.e. when participants experience fit and self-development, have a sense of control, direction and stability and have access to networks and support, participants tend to report more positive experiences. This indicates that these elements are a valuable part of young people's transition; however, it does not follow that any intervention for young people which

provides these elements will be successful. The iterative nature of young people's transition means that these themes can take on different roles according to an individual's current context and needs. We have seen throughout participants' transitions that what helps, or is important to them, in a certain context does not necessarily confer the same benefits or importance in a different context. The themes discussed here align with findings from the quantitative data and build on the findings discussed in previous reports. Both qualitative and quantitative data emphasise the importance of support, development and having a future direction, and highlight the diversity of participants' experiences.

4.7. What helped and what didn't help throughout education and employment transitions

In this section we explore factors which participants reported helped them during their transitions and discuss factors which didn't help or were a challenge for participants. We have used quotes from interview participants to provide examples.

4.7.1 What helped during education and employment transitions?

As mentioned, a number of factors were reported by student participants as having a positive impact on their education, employment and transition experiences. The major factors identified by young people are closely connected to the core concepts and main themes arising from this project.

4.7.1.1 Support

Of all the factors reported by participants as helping during their education and employment transitions, support was described as having the greatest positive impact. Longitudinal interview data suggest that ongoing supportive relationships may have a greater overall impact on participants' experience of transition than short-term support. Participants characterised supportive relationships as those where they felt valued, respected and their needs were understood. The most enduring supportive relationships were those with whānau and friends. Participants who had access to ongoing support were more likely to report engagement in education and employment over the course of the project and less likely to experience long-term NEET spells or benefit use. We observed that support, whether ongoing or short-term, came in two main forms: active support, for example, a parent helping them create a C.V.; and moral support, i.e. general encouragement. However, moral support alone was not always enough to help participants do well in education or employment, or successfully navigate their transitions. A combination of active and moral support appeared to work best.

"Yeah, I always talk to my Mum. My mum's like always the person that helps me try and figure out things....She was saying I should study, soon and like, she just, she helps me try to plan it, she showed like, coz I had no idea anything about Student Loans and everything and she just like showed me, and took me online and showed me this is what happens." Crystal

Access to short-term support, particularly in the form of active support, was valued by participants. For example, working with a recruitment agency to find employment, support with academic skills from a student support service and counselling. These forms of support were accessed by participants at certain points during their education and employment transitions when extra help was needed, regardless of whether they also received ongoing support. For participants who did not have ongoing

supportive relationships this type of support was particularly valued, although its impact could be limited as it was short-term and addressed immediate rather than ongoing needs.

“Um, I just heard a lot that they (recruitment agency) are quite good at helping people get people jobs and that, and they actually do stuff to help you, not like the others... about two days and then they found me that job.” Hayley

The amount and type of support reported by participants changed over time, data from surveys and interviews indicated that participants were accessing fewer support services at the end of their Youth Guarantee programme than in the period before they enrolled in Youth Guarantee. Reasons for this varied: some participants no longer required additional support, while a number became ineligible for certain services once they left school or turned 18 or 19 years old. Aside from whānau and friends, other sources of support reported by participants were education providers, employers, work colleagues and other support services, for example Youth Service or Work and Income. The majority of participants reported that support from educators, employers and Youth Service met their needs. However, support from Work and Income was often insufficient and seen as impersonal.

As mentioned in section 4.6.1.4, networks were an element of support which helped participants during their transitions through providing information about and access to education and employment opportunities.

4.7.1.2 Skills and qualifications

Participants reported that gaining qualifications was important to them; however, it was the skills that they gained throughout their transitions which helped them progress in employment and education. The majority of participants reported gaining their skills through Youth Guarantee and improving these through further employment, education and life experiences. We heard from participants that these skills were useful not just in education and employment settings, but also in their daily lives in interactions with whānau or members of the community. The most valuable skills, according to participants, were communication and interpersonal skills, self-management skills, skills for self-development and employment skills.

Across all participants, communication and interpersonal skills were the most frequently mentioned. Participants reported developing confidence in communicating with others and were better able to deal with conflict and get along with others. Some participants mentioned increased cultural awareness as a result of their Youth Guarantee experience. These participants felt that they were more open and tolerant of people who were different or had different perspectives from themselves.

“People skills, getting along with people. That’s probably the biggest thing in the industry, you gotta get on with people. Clients, customers, and, yeah, just everyone.” Ryan

“Well one of the customers was really kind of upset about the price of one of the products we were selling, and um, they wanted it lower, but yeah, I just, yes we did do some lower prices, but the price they were asking was ridiculously lower, so yeah I kind of stuck to it, while still being polite. That’s the main thing.” Daniel

Self-management skills, in particular time-management and self-control, were useful to participants in their transitions after Youth Guarantee. Information from participants indicated that this was part of a wider process of change and development. As mentioned in the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017),

many participants reported personal changes as a result of Youth Guarantee and said that improved self-management had contributed to this.

"I had problems with my timing, ... like I used to rush coz in the [workplace] it's quite fast, so I used to run around and use all my energy, but now I know kinda how to like, maintain it and flow and do the same job without like using all, a lot of energy." Jasmine

"I did learn that just because I'm angry doesn't mean I should let my anger impact someone's else, um, (a) learning (b) what's the word, attitude. Like just because I'm angry doesn't mean I should make everyone else angry." Samson

As discussed in section 4.6, self-development was an important part of the transition experience for the young people we interviewed. Participants' ability to learn from others, self-evaluate and identify opportunities for development contributed to their development, along with a willingness to capitalise on the available opportunities. We heard from participants that communication, interpersonal and self-management skills, as well as their own motivation and determination, increased their capacity for self-development.

"Well because I supervise, like, um, I'll be like telling people what to do, um, it was a little bit (difficult) at first, but then when I, when you get to know people a little bit more, and then you understand like their learning curves, because like um, my friend who works there as well, he taught me that everyone learns differently."
Jake

A number of participants mentioned that employment-related skills, specifically job interview preparation, the creation of CVs and cover letters, knowledge about how to apply for a job and what to expect in employment settings, had prepared them for employment and helped them find a job. Participants reported that the skills they learnt during practice interviews at their Youth Guarantee providers gave them confidence in job interviews and helped them understand and answer questions more effectively.

"Um, they just helped me so much, and they helped me build my CV from the start and just, um, prepped us with life, how to go to interviews and everything, that's how I got the job." Nicole

Some participants, particularly mothers and those with less access to support, reported that general life skills played a role in their transitions. The main skills mentioned were cooking and food preparation; a small number of participants said that information about renting property, tenant's rights and knowing how to access services had been useful to them.

"Well, yeah, it's the food handling skills and the, um, food preparing skills and just basically using all of that. Using my knowledge that I have that I've gained from [YG provider] to be a better Mum to my kids." Ashley

For most participants, the vocationally specific skills learnt during Youth Guarantee were not particularly useful in the longer-term, as very few participants ended up following the path they had planned when they entered Youth Guarantee. In the longer-term, skills which could be transferred to other contexts were of most value. Aside from the skills noted above, participants reported using health and safety, first aid and IT skills throughout their transitions.

“One thing I would say about [YG provider], it did help me with hospitality. It did help me with a broad knowledge of menus cos I was also working in the restaurant. I tried to explain it to the customer before they were purchasing, and computing skills really help me now with spreadsheets, like a data inputting.” James

The majority of the skills which participants reported had value to them in the longer-term were applied mainly in employment and personal contexts. However, participants who took part in higher education reported that the soft skills gained in Youth Guarantee and the study skills gained along their education pathway were a significant factor in their success. The main skills mentioned by participants were self and time-management skills, formal writing and knowledge of how to structure and correctly reference an essay. The participants who continued in education after Youth Guarantee found that qualifications provided some access to education pathways. However, most participants reported that overall their skills were more useful than their qualifications in helping them achieve their education goals.

“Like a lot of things and like writing also, like writing essays and stuff. Like I didn’t know that you could write like, you couldn’t write can’t or couldn’t, you can only write cannot and could not.” Tyler

“[YG provider], they kind of showed me all these different ways, how to study properly, how to look up things on the computer so I didn’t get frustrated and I can do it properly. Um, I think that’s one of the big reasons why, you know, I went to another course, is just coz I knew I’d be able to do it. Or I knew I’d be able to think of other ways how to do it, if I couldn’t do it.” Megan

This finding should not detract from the personal value that participants placed on qualifications. The majority of participants left school without qualifications and expressed a desire to achieve NCEA Level 1 and 2 through Youth Guarantee, with 80% of entry survey participants reporting this as a main reason they enrolled. From interview participants, we learnt that gaining a qualification gave them a sense of achievement and boosted their confidence. Participants also told us that they believed qualifications, particularly NCEA Level 2, would help them gain employment and progress into higher level education.

4.7.1.2.1 The role of NCEA Level 2

Given the value that participants placed on NCEA L2 as a path to further education and employment, we were interested in the role that its achievement played in their pathways after Youth Guarantee. Our interest in this was also motivated by the findings of quantitative analysis of project data in relation to NCEA Level 2 achievement. As discussed in the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017), logistic regression analysis of survey data showed that simply having prior educational attainment, whether NCEA credits or qualifications, was a strong predictor that participants would achieve NCEA L2 through their YG programme. Although there are clear differences between using prior achievement to predict outcomes within a defined programme and the influence of NCEA L2 on broader transition experiences, research suggests that a relationship exists. In New Zealand for example, government analysis has linked qualification achievement to higher levels of employment, earnings and further educational achievement (Mahoney, Park & Smyth, 2013; Tumen, Dixon & Crichton, 2018).

To assess the ongoing impact of NCEA Level 2 achievement for our cohort, we examined the outcomes of 47 interview participants who had participated in at least three interviews and who had provided information on their achievement of NCEA Level 2. We looked specifically at whether participants who

gained NCEA L2 were more or less likely to report being in employment or education, complete further education and access government benefits. We were unable to draw sound conclusions on the role of NCEA Level 2 in any of these areas. When comparing those who had achieved NCEA Level 2 with those who had not, we found that in both groups, a slightly higher percentage of participants were in employment than on the benefit. Overall, participants had similar rates of employment and benefit use regardless of NCEA L2 achievement. In terms of educational achievement after Youth Guarantee, participants with NCEA L2 were more likely to complete the education programmes. None of the participants without NCEA Level 2 completed their post-Youth Guarantee education programmes, compared with 39.5% of participants with NCEA L2. It should be noted, however, that some participants continued in other programmes at the same level, with 31.5% of those with NCEA L2 achieving at L3 or higher.

While this analysis suggests that achievement of NCEA Level 2 may predict further achievement in education, its role in employment and transitions pathways, more generally, is not clear. Furthermore, it should be noted that for most participants, the achievement of higher qualifications occurred two to three years after exit from Youth Guarantee. We found that a number of factors demonstrated a much stronger impact on participants' experiences and outcomes. In particular, whether participants had access to support, the types of challenges they faced, the opportunities they had access to, their skills and whether they had a future plan or direction.

4.7.1.3 Future direction and plans

Qualitative analysis of interview data showed that having a plan or even a general direction for the future helped participants during their education and employment transitions. There were differences in participants' future plans. Some had step-by-step plans for achieving specific goals, while others were guided by their overall direction, for example, a desire to work in a certain industry or become a certain type of person.

"I'm doing Level 1 Mechanics at the moment, and then I'll be doing Level 2 and then going into an Apprenticeship. I've already got work experience at the moment. And, um, I might get it (apprenticeship) through that." Ben

"I signed up for hospitality but then I wasn't really sure, so I just signed up for social work. You know that I've always wanted to be one (a social worker). I thought that being a bartender or whatever or hospitality skills were not really gonna change the world, not change the world, but it's not gonna really do any help to anyone or anything." Grace

As mentioned in section 4.6, having a direction could guide participants' transitions as it gave them a framework to evaluate the usefulness of certain activities or pathways in relation to their future goal. Participants told us that having a future direction or goal was a source of motivation and contributed to their self-development. We noted that regardless of how developed plans were, those who had some sense of future direction were more likely to have positive education and employment transition experiences than those who lacked direction. This is supported by quantitative analysis of survey data outlined in the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017). Regression analysis of various factors related to participants' experiences found that survey participants who had future plans when they enrolled in Youth Guarantee were significantly more likely to achieve NCEA Level 2 compared with those who did not have a plan. It seems that having a plan or direction contributes to further momentum; feedback from participants suggests that this influences motivation and self-development.

4.7.1.4 Confidence and self-motivation

Increased confidence was a major outcome of Youth Guarantee reported by participants. Most survey participants said they felt ready to exit Youth Guarantee and that they had gained the skills and knowledge needed to support them in their next step. This increase in confidence is reflected in the increase in mean Self-Esteem Scores for survey participants from entry to exit.

Information from interview participants supports survey findings and provides more detail on the role of confidence for participants. Participants reported that they gained confidence through experiencing success in Youth Guarantee, in terms of achieving qualifications and through positive experiences with learning and personal development. According to participants, increased confidence lead to greater motivation, determination and a willingness to take more responsibility for themselves. This contributed to their positive future outlook upon their departure from Youth Guarantee. During their transitions, participants reported drawing on their personal growth and past experiences of success as a motivator when faced with changes and challenges. Many participants identified themselves, specifically their confidence, determination, motivation and self-responsibility, as a key factor in their success so far.

“I left school without Level 1, so that was, just sort of in myself and everything I didn’t feel too great about it, and then, leaving the [YG provider] with more qualifications and broader experience and skills and stuff just, yeah, definitely feel a whole lot, I suppose better about myself.” Logan

“You know, like I guess it was all self-influenced, a lot of the confidence and that, like you know, changing my life was all really self-influenced after I left [YG provider].” Dylan

In the interviews, a number of participants identified motivation as a major influence on whether they were or were not doing well. Those who were motivated were more positive about current and future experiences than those who reported a lack of motivation. Participants said that, as well as drawing on self-confidence, they gained motivation from having direction and the support of others. This contributed to higher levels of self-efficacy and gave participants a greater sense of control over their transitions. However, there was a less positive dimension to this for some participants who faced significant or unexpected challenges which undermined their control. Their sense of self-responsibility and control, which had previously been positive, led to them becoming overwhelmed by the perceived magnitude of the challenge ahead. These participants reported a loss of confidence and motivation and found it difficult to make decisions about the future.

4.7.1.5 Opportunities for continued development

The skills participants gained from Youth Guarantee and throughout their transitions helped them progress in education and employment and contributed to their self-development. Opportunities to use and develop these skills beyond Youth Guarantee were a significant part of participants’ continued development.

A number of participants reported that they received support and opportunities to use and develop their skills through employment. This included advice from employers, support from co-workers and being given chances to use their skills in new areas of their job as they gained competence.

“I used to like just get annoyed, like when they took so long to give their order, and then like my boss was like, “you need to learn how to be patient,” and he was just

telling me like, I'm not growling you off or anything, this is just a learning for everyone and stuff. So slowly I learnt from there, and yeah." Brooke

In education, participants said that the skills they gained at each step in their pathway contributed to their success in the next level of education. This appeared to be the case even for participants who did not continue in a single pathway as they were able to transfer their knowledge of generic study skills to new contexts.

"Um, in terms of [PTE], I didn't really use my time wisely, I felt like I could have done better, but it did help me with the start though (at ITP), because in the previous semester that I saw were my strongest subjects and which ones I struggled with, so I like scheduled my time within different assignments like, do one of them and do the next one like, get it over and done with so I can work on the others." Laila

Participants also reported applying skills in their daily lives, for example, when moving into a flat or when they became parents. Overall, the greatest growth in skills came from those who were in employment or education as these participants had clearer pathways for development and progression. However, not all participants experienced skill-development in employment. Those who were in low-skill jobs, for example, working on a production line in a factory, found that this work was not challenging and offered few opportunities for growth.

In the interviews, most participants expressed a desire for pathways which offered them chances to develop themselves and their skills. They wanted to build on the gains made in Youth Guarantee and continue to experience momentum. We observed that participants who did not have opportunities for continued development, or who were not well-supported to capitalise on available opportunities, were more likely to lose their motivation, confidence and skills over time.

"I'm happy to start at the bottom. And work my way up. But I don't want to get stuck in something that I'm going to do over and over and over and not learn anything. If that makes sense. I want to achieve high and I'm kinda picky. I just, I guess I don't want to be stuck in a job where I'm earning shit money and not going anywhere." Rachel

4.7.2 What was challenging during education and employment transitions?

The challenges reported by participants relate to the main themes developed from the interviews and were often connected to a lack of support, networks, skills, development, fit, direction, stability and control. While most participants reported challenges throughout their transitions, the impact of these challenges varied according to the wider context of their lives. Some participants were able to effectively manage challenges, while others struggled to overcome them. The potential for challenges to have a negative impact was higher at points in participants' transition where they experienced a change in circumstance. Furthermore, the greater the number of challenges faced by individuals, the harder these were to overcome.

4.7.2.1 Lack of support

As discussed in section 4.7.1, participants reported that access to consistent and timely support helped them during their transitions. Conversely, a lack of support was a challenge for some participants. While most participants reported having at least some support, this support was not always timely or relevant. For example, some participants were unable to access the necessary support when they experienced changes or challenges, or did not have access to useful information on study or career pathways.

“WINZ. Yep, I kept hassling them for weeks (for a job), they were fucking me around for AGES...not calling me back, and when I do go there, they’ll be like “oh you gotta book another appointment because someone took your time” or something like that, I’m like “I thought that’s the whole point of making appointments you know” so we have that time for us.” Grace

In some cases, participants were able to overcome this challenge by finding new networks which could provide them with the support they needed. For a number of participants, this lack of support, coupled with a lack of knowledge about how to access alternative support, had a negative impact on their transition. These participants found it more difficult to make decisions, access education or employment and were more likely to experience disengagement.

“I’m not really good at motivating myself...I just used to have [YG provider manager] and all the tutors like, motivating me every single day, coz I was going to course every single day, had motivation every single day and then once I finished it was just myself. And then I sort of lost it for a while.” Mikayla

A few participants reported having no or very small support networks, they had no-one to turn to for help or advice and very few people who supported or believed in them. A few of these participants reported high levels of self-sufficiency and the capacity to create and access new networks. However, the majority of participants who reported a lack of support struggled to find or remain on an education or employment path and often ended up disengaging. It is important to note that for these participants, a lack of support was usually just one of a range of challenges they faced during their transitions. A number of these participants also reported unstable living situations or transience, some experienced mental health issues or had learning difficulties.

4.7.2.2 A gap in skills or knowledge

Some participants reported a lack of information or skills regarding education or employment pathways; this was often linked to a lack of relevant support in terms of finding and interpreting information. In many participants’ experiences, the skills and knowledge possessed by their networks either enabled or limited participants’ access to information and, therefore, the pathways they followed. As participants relied mainly on information from whānau and friends about what to expect from education or employment, they sometimes found that their expectations did not align with reality and experienced a lack of fit with their chosen pathway.

Participants who found themselves in this situation indicated that this contributed to their disengagement from the pathway.

“Like, ever since school I’ve always been interested in Botany, but I’ve looked at it, but how the hell do you get into it, like, it’s, you know, they say oh yeah, this is what you do and like they do it there for you but once you leave it’s like where do I go now, who do I talk to?” Rachel

“I went to [University] and I found that hard and then I just came back (to YG provider). Um, my friend was going. I only wanted to do it because you got a Diploma out of it, because my friend was getting it.” Tiana

Finding employment was a challenge for a number of participants, many of whom attributed this to their lack of work experience. For some participants, the capacity to recognise their own skills and apply these where appropriate and the ability to identify areas for self-development, was a barrier to employment. Information from these participants indicated that they were unable to identify suitable opportunities, demonstrate their skills to employers, or develop themselves in order to increase their employment prospects.

“Um, well, I have been trying to look for a job, and it’s been a bit difficult ... I’ve got my CV and stuff but a lot of people don’t hire unless you’ve got some sort of experience so it’s kind of hard if you don’t have the experience kind of thing.” Luke

In terms of ongoing education, a number of participants indicated that they lacked knowledge about how to access this and related services. Many participants reported confusion about eligibility for student loans, allowances and living costs and a number were discouraged from studying due to the complexity of accessing this system. Some participants also struggled to apply for education because they could not make sense of eligibility criteria, or had problems with online application systems at education providers. Some participants reported that difficulty in communicating with organisations caused them to give up on the process entirely.

“I wasn’t accepted, I think it was to do with me not meeting the criteria. Yeah, they didn’t say what specific criteria it was, so it was confusing for me was that I don’t actually know why I didn’t meet their criteria... Ever since I haven’t been, didn’t get accepted, it kind of crushed my confidence and my hopes I guess.” Casey

Some participants reported feeling that they were not well-prepared for further education after Youth Guarantee. This was particularly the case for those who entered Level 4 or 5 programmes at large institutions. The majority of participants had been enrolled with smaller education providers for their Level 1 and 2 Youth Guarantee programmes and they found the change in study environment and learning style overwhelming.

“Too many different classes and subjects and tutors to keep track of, all the work you had to do, it was just too much. I’d rather just have like one subject to study... I didn’t like the tutors (at ITP), they were too uptight. Like at [YG provider] it was like, they were like friends as well as tutors.” Tom

4.7.2.3 Finding fit

Some participants reported difficulty in finding a suitable pathway; at least some of this is connected to the challenges described above in relation to a lack of support, skills or knowledge. In addition, participants said that their ideas about fit changed over time according to their immediate needs and circumstance and their future ideas. Participants gave a variety of reasons for a lack of fit, the most common being poor relationships with others and a mismatch between their ideas and the reality of what a certain activity or path entailed.

“I had a painting and decorating, um, job, plastering, painting, wall papering, and that. It was alright until like, I just didn’t like it, what I was doing and yeah. Just like the physical side of it. I don’t know, I just didn’t really like it, to be honest. I thought it would be really good, but yeah.” Nathan

“We had, coz it was a training procedure, we were doing experience, one of the managers was like a bitch to all of us. She would like, make us cry in front of customers and all of that.” Melissa

For some participants this was positive as it allowed them to further develop their ideas about fit and identify more suitable options. However, for those who described a lack of fit as a challenge, this could lead to disengagement, particularly when participants lacked support, information or skills to find a new pathway. Some participants also reported that negative experiences lowered their confidence and reduced their desire to re-engage with either education or employment.

4.7.2.4 Self and motivation

As noted in section 4.7.1, many participants reported that their personal motivation helped them during their transition. A small group of participants reported negative effects from motivation and felt that they were holding themselves back during their transition. Reasons for this given by participants included low confidence, lack of knowledge about options, feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of making a decision, or by the perceived magnitude of the decision, and mental health issues.

“Yeah, I keep contemplating (further study) over and over and over. I don’t really wanna waste my time again, like...that’s why I’m just taking my time going into it, coz I don’t wanna rush like last time and then (not complete) yeah.” Brooke

“I haven’t really been doing anything, like going outside or anything. I’ve been like told what to do and everything and then I think WINZ is going to sort out this course for me soon.” Tom

Participants reported that the longer they spent not engaged in an activity, or the longer they delayed decision-making, the more difficult it became to re-engage or reach a decision. Participants also mentioned that disengagement and a lack of motivation caused a loss of momentum. This was particularly true for participants who had previously been engaged on a path and had positive education or employment experiences before facing an unexpected setback or challenge.

“I didn’t get a call back so I just stopped. I just gave up.” Awhina

4.7.2.5 Context-specific challenges

Other challenges described by participants were specific to individual circumstance; these challenges can be grouped into three main areas: whānau, living and finances; health and mental health; and drugs, alcohol and crime.

4.7.2.5.1 Whānau, living and finances

Some participants said that family responsibilities, such as caring for children or other whānau members and the need to make a financial contribution to their household, limited their ability to engage and remain in education or employment. Other financial concerns, like paying for housing, transport and other necessities, as well as a desire for financial stability, also contributed to this.

“Um, I need the money to be honest, at the time. I need the money, rent, yeah, just help my mother out a bit.” Rawiri

“I want to (work) but, childcare’s just a bit expensive and if I’m not getting a high enough pay then it’s like, there’s not really much point. Like it gets me out of the house and stuff, but then I just lose time with [child] and I’m more than likely going to be losing out on money as well.” Brittany

Many participants reported that money was a major barrier to their continued engagement in education after Youth Guarantee, in terms of living expenses as well as course costs. The need for financial security also influenced participants’ decisions around employment. Some reported accepting jobs with few development opportunities due to their immediate need for income.

“I don’t know, I just didn’t like the price, I think it was a lot, and I just didn’t, I didn’t want to go on the loan. I’m really scared of getting in debt so I just changed my mind, I was like “nah, it’s too much”.” Crystal

Issues with housing, for example, unstable living situations and moving around a lot, affected participants’ ability to find and stay in education or employment. Participants reported that this caused issues, as it was difficult to plan for the future and focus on their own development.

“Uh, my mum and her partner owned a property together and he didn’t want me living there so, I didn’t live there, I couch surfed for a bit. And then I, I didn’t end up sussing a property, I never ended up finding, um, a place that would let me jump on a lease or anything like that.” Dylan

4.7.2.5.2 Health and mental health

In the entry survey, 37% of participants reported issues with mental health and 31% reported long-term health problems. Similar numbers of interview participants reported issues in these areas and provided information on the impact of these on their transition. Ongoing health issues disrupted participants’ learning due to time out of education and falling behind with classwork; and affected their ability to work fulltime or retain permanent employment.

“Um, nah, I can’t go back there just because it’s like, there’s no way to stop [health issue] from happening so I’m deemed not safe in that factory, because if I had fallen over my head would have gone into the machines and would have been crushed.” Hayley

Participants reported that mental health issues affected their desire or ability to engage in education or employment and influenced the types of pathways they chose to pursue. For some participants, severe anxiety or depression resulted in long-term disengagement. Others took the time out that they needed to care for themselves before returning to a pathway.

“I had a slump where I didn’t really wanna do anything for a while. It was just, when I left (employment) I just got oh I hit a really low part of the year. Just felt really crappy. I just really didn’t wanna get out of bed, mental health and tired.”

Samson

The degree to which mental health impacted upon participants’ transition experiences was influenced by the personal and professional support participants had access to and their willingness to access support.

4.7.2.5.3 Drugs, alcohol and crime

In the initial surveys and interviews, a number of participants reported that misuse of drugs and/or alcohol and involvement in crime was a problem for them. Participants who were retained for follow-up interviews reported that these behaviours diminished over time. Many said that their experience of self-development and achievement in Youth Guarantee had contributed to a change in behaviour and some received counselling or other support for alcohol and drug issues.

By the final interview, none of the remaining participants reported issues with alcohol or drugs, however, those who had previously been involved in criminal activity continued to experience challenges. These were mainly related to the impact of criminal convictions on their ability to find employment.

“I reckon if I didn’t have a criminal record it would be easier, but, like even when I go into my interviews, I just feel like they just, they’re probably like, up themselves, you can tell like, when people look at you, and then they judge you from what you look like, and then they think “oh well, you know, we’re not going to give her a job”.” Aroha

There were a number of participants not retained in follow-up interviews who reported issues with alcohol, drugs and crime. These challenges had had a negative impact on their transitions, particularly on their engagement with education. We do not know whether these participants continued to experience negative effects throughout their transitions.

4.8. Longer-term impact of Youth Guarantee

The impact of Youth Guarantee varied according to each participant and their context. For survey participants, we have information on the immediate impact of Youth Guarantee, while interview participants provided information on both immediate and ongoing impacts. The immediate impact of the programme for participants was discussed in depth in the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017). The factors discussed below have been identified by participants as having a positive impact on their longer-term transition experiences.

4.8.1 Types of impacts

4.8.1.1 Confidence

For the majority of interview participants, their involvement in Youth Guarantee increased their confidence. Young people told us that they were more confident in themselves and their abilities. They reported improved self-efficacy in relation to education, employment and how they managed themselves and their relationships with others. This gave them more confidence for the future and they felt better prepared to face challenges. This sense of confidence was reflected in the exit survey data. Responses from participants indicated a high level of optimism for the future, with 93% reporting that they were well-prepared for their next step.

Interview participants told us that their increased confidence came from achieving personally and academically in Youth Guarantee. Many did not have qualifications when they enrolled in the programme and were proud to have achieved these. Other experiences and outcomes from Youth Guarantee also contributed to participants' growth in confidence, these are discussed below.

4.8.1.2 Personal change: Managing and developing self

Many interview participants reported personal development as a result of Youth Guarantee. This included changes to their attitude, behaviour, life and future outlook. Participants said that they were more self-aware, which contributed to these changes and led to improved self-management skills and better relationships with others.

Reported changes in attitudes and behaviours tended to be an immediate impact of Youth Guarantee for participants. In terms of attitude, participants said they were more positive, willing to take part in learning and other activities and had more respect for others. They also reported a reduction in negative behaviours, for example, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, truancy, fighting and involvement in crime. Participants told us that taking part in the programme had encouraged them to change as it provided them with an alternative outlook and the experience of success and ongoing support increased their motivation. For participants who were retained for subsequent interviews, these changes were sustained beyond Youth Guarantee.

According to participants, changes in how they saw themselves and their future prospects arose from experiences of success, increased confidence and exposure to a range of opportunities and pathways through the Youth Guarantee programme. These changes were the starting point for improvements in self-management and social skills. Participants reported that they were more patient, better able to manage their emotions and could communicate more effectively and understand other's perspectives which led to healthier relationships in their education, employment and home environments.

4.8.1.3 Skill-development

Skill-development was a significant impact of Youth Guarantee reported by participants. The main skills identified by participants have been discussed in detail in section 4.7.1, these are; communication, interpersonal, self-management, self-development, employment, study and life skills. As previously mentioned, these skills supported participants during their transitions into and out of employment and education and contributed to improvements in self-confidence. Developing new skills and seeing themselves improve over time was a new experience for many participants. This contributed to changes in attitude and future outlook. As noted elsewhere in this report, skills had a

significant impact on participants' longer-term transition experiences. Participants consistently identified and valued these skills at all interview stages throughout the project.

4.8.1.4 Preparation and support for the future

Upon exit from Youth Guarantee, participants said that the experience and skills they had gained had prepared them for the future and increased their motivation to succeed. Through their Youth Guarantee programmes, participants were exposed to a range of future pathways which broadened their ideas about the opportunities available to them. Participants reported feeling well-supported to take the next step after Youth Guarantee by the skills they had gained, their personal development and the support of Youth Guarantee staff. Some participants reported receiving ongoing support from staff after their departure. This ranged from personal support, like having someone to talk to or ongoing feelings of belonging, to practical support, such as information about employment or education options and support to access these.

At the exit survey and in the second interview, the majority of participants reported feeling well-prepared for their next step after Youth Guarantee. Many reported having a clear or clearer sense of direction; some had plans to continue education and others were in employment or planned to find a job. A number of interview participants told us that they thought their qualifications would help them access employment. Ongoing interviews indicated that the sense of positivity and direction upon leaving Youth Guarantee did not lead to positive transition experiences for all participants. Qualifications did not appear to help many participants access employment, although they were useful for the small number who continued in education.

Feedback from interview participants during their transitions indicated that access to more information about education and employment pathways, and support to interpret this information, would have been useful to participants. Most participants reported that they did receive information while in Youth Guarantee, however, the point where this information was most needed was usually when participants were no longer engaged in education. A number of participants reported not knowing where to start to access information or feeling overwhelmed by the volume of information available. Participants said they did not know how to determine which information was the most valuable or relevant, so they tended to rely on information from whānau and friends, which was often limited in scope and not always accurate.

4.8.1.5 Youth Guarantee as a base for future development

For many interview participants, the personal changes, skills and support gained through their participation in Youth Guarantee provided a base for ongoing development. Increased confidence was at the centre of this and many participants used this, along with skills, self-development and preparation for the future to maintain positive momentum during their transition after Youth Guarantee.

The extent to which Youth Guarantee had an ongoing impact for participants depended on individual contexts, access to ongoing support and opportunities for further development. Participants who had good support networks and opportunities to use their skills outside of Youth Guarantee, for example in higher education or in employment, tended to report more ongoing impact. These participants reported further self and skill-development as they engaged in new experiences after Youth Guarantee. For some participants, the confidence and sense of momentum gained from Youth Guarantee encouraged them to overcome challenges that they encountered during their subsequent transition. However, others struggled to maintain confidence in the face of unexpected challenges.

These participants felt that without the support and sense of belonging that they had had in Youth Guarantee, they were unable to maintain the changes to confidence, attitude and skills. A number of these participants experienced mental health challenges and had relatively small support networks which limited their ability to overcome challenges and capitalise on opportunities.

4.8.2 How did Youth Guarantee achieve this impact?

As discussed in detail in the first report for this project, the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017), participants' positive Youth Guarantee experiences were centred on good relationships, a positive environment and opportunities for young people to achieve and take control. This section summarises feedback from participants regarding these three factors.

4.8.2.1 Relationships

Participants described positive relationships with Youth Guarantee staff, based on mutual respect and trust where they felt valued and their needs were understood and met. A significant part of this was participants feeling that staff always had time for them, to provide support for both learning and personal needs. Respectful relationships with peers helped participants develop their social skills and contributed to a positive environment at Youth Guarantee providers. Participants reported that when they experienced relationships like these, they were more engaged, found it easier to learn and were more motivated as they felt staff genuinely believed in them.

4.8.2.2 Environment

The majority of participants experienced a sense of belonging at their Youth Guarantee providers. Participants told us that this was due to the inclusive and supportive environment, which contributed to participants' skill-development. Specific practices mentioned by participants included opportunities for practical, hands-on learning, such as role plays, or real-life situations, like preparing food and drink and serving these to customers in the learning café at the education provider. Opportunities for practise, repetition and constructive feedback from tutors also contributed. It is important to note that although not all participants had access to practical learning environments as part of their regular classroom experience in Youth Guarantee, the majority reported that hands-on experiences were the most effective learning opportunities.

A number of participants reported experiences in their Youth Guarantee providers which put them out of their comfort zone. Some of these were linked to classroom learning, such as giving a speech or presentation in front of the class, while others were about confidence-building, like doing a high ropes course. Regardless of the type of experience, participants told us that being put out of their comfort zone, but within the context of a supportive learning environment, led to increased confidence.

4.8.2.3 Control

Having control over themselves and their decisions has been important to participants throughout their education and employment transitions. Participants reported that they had opportunities and were supported to take control at their Youth Guarantee providers. Participants described having more personal control, for example, control over their appearance, clothing and hairstyle. Control over learning was significant for participants, they enjoyed managing their own learning with the support of their tutor, rather than having learning dictated to them. This contributed to the development of positive learning identities and helped participants develop skills for ongoing learning, which supported continued development after Youth Guarantee.

4.8.3 Perceptions of the role of Youth Guarantee Fees Free

The third research question in this project asks how young people and service providers perceive the role of Youth Guarantee Fees Free in meeting the education and employment needs of young people. Understanding needs and how to meet these is at the centre of this question. Over the course of this project we observed that although young people's needs were addressed through Youth Guarantee programmes, Youth Guarantee as a funding and delivery mechanism was not based on student needs. In addition, participants tended to report that they were ultimately responsible for meeting their own needs and it was up to them to find the right environment.

4.8.3.1 Young people's perceptions of need

In our conversations with young people we found that most had a good understanding of their own education needs and a mixed understanding of employment needs. Participants' understanding of their education needs was based on their past and current education experiences. These helped participants identify education environments and delivery models which suited them. Although gaining qualifications was an important educational need for many participants, they tended to disengage if the environment and delivery style did not meet their learning needs. For most participants, their Youth Guarantee programmes met their needs, which was why they continued to engage with the programme and education provider.

Participants' understanding of their employment needs varied according to their engagement with employment. Many participants used information from friends, whānau and education providers to shape their ideas of what employment might be like. This could result in a mismatch between participants' perceptions of what they needed for employment, and what they actually needed. Feedback from participants indicated that many of their employment needs were met by their Youth Guarantee providers. As noted elsewhere in this report, a number of participants expected that gaining NCEA Level 2 would provide a path to employment; however, it was the skills they gained through Youth Guarantee and other experiences which were most useful in gaining and remaining in employment.

4.8.3.2 Young people's perceptions of the roles of Youth Guarantee and education providers

The majority of the young people we interviewed did not see Youth Guarantee Fees Free and their education provider as separate entities. This is understandable as most participants' interaction with Youth Guarantee Fees Free was through their education provider rather than with government agencies responsible for the programme. Participants reported a strong sense of personal responsibility for meeting their education and employment needs, particularly in terms of education. They felt it was up to them to find an environment where their learning needs would be met.

In general, when participants encountered environments that did not effectively address their needs, this was not perceived as a failure of the system to fulfil its role. Instead, participants understood this as a matter of individual fit and incompatibility. This provides insight into participants' perceptions of their sphere of control. While they felt responsible for meeting their own education and employment needs, this was limited to choosing whether or not to attend a particular institution or be employed in a particular workplace. Most participants did not indicate that they felt they could have any input or control over the wider education or employment systems. Overall, they accepted the environment as it was and attempted to adapt to it. When they were unable to adapt or find a fit, this was interpreted as a personal failure rather than an issue of systems which are not fit for purpose.

4.8.3.3 Education providers' perceptions

In general, we found that feedback from education providers aligned well with young people's perceptions of their needs. Staff understood and met students' education needs and provided young people with the skills that met their future employment needs. However, there was tension between staff perceptions of the role that Youth Guarantee should play in meeting student needs and the capacity of staff to meet student needs within the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework. The main challenges raised by staff were discussed in section 4.5; these include inflexible delivery timeframes, narrow definitions of achievement and a lack of ongoing support for young people.

Overall, this tension comes down to a desire by Youth Guarantee staff to focus on broader outcomes for young people, while the Youth Guarantee Fees Free framework focuses on the achievement of narrow outputs. Education providers believe their role is to equip young people with the skills needed to navigate future education, employment and transitions. It appears that the policy behind Youth Guarantee Fees Free assumes that these skills can be provided through the delivery of a one-off programme within a defined timeframe; an approach which does not adequately account for the varied education and employment needs and iterative transitions of young people who engage with Youth Guarantee Fees Free.

5. Discussion

This project has attempted to capture young people's experiences of transition during and after engagement in a Youth Guarantee Fees Free programme. The research questions sought to understand more about those who accessed this programme, what impact it had in the short and longer-term and how those involved in the programme perceived its role in meeting young people's education and employment needs.

Throughout this project our analysis has been guided by what we heard from participants about their transition experiences. For these young people, transition was an iterative process of change and development. This interpretation of transitions has influenced how we have addressed the three research questions. Participants did not perceive Youth Guarantee as the start or end of their transitions. It was one experience, for some a very important one, which contributed to their overall development. As a consequence, we have chosen not to assess the impact of Youth Guarantee within a linear transitions model. Instead we have looked at the broader experience of participants and the role of Youth Guarantee alongside other factors which influence young people's transitions.

The first area of focus, addressed in the Interim Report (Reid et al., 2017), was the profile of young people who engage in Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes. The salient message from this report was that it was not possible to capture the diverse experiences of participants through the creation of a profile, or even a series of profiles, of young people based on characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, school decile or prior educational achievement. We found that young people and their experiences were more accurately described through other factors which influenced their pathways, choices and identity development during and after their Youth Guarantee programme. These were explored through the development of five main themes; self-development, control, fit, networks and support, and direction and stability.

The short-term impact of Youth Guarantee was overwhelmingly positive for participants. Most reported increased engagement in education, gains in confidence and skills and changes in their future outlook. In the longer-term, the impact of Youth Guarantee was mixed. While most participants continued to regard it as a positive experience, participation in the programme did not lead to sustained engagement in education or employment for all participants, with a number reporting NEET status at the final interview. Despite this, the majority of participants noted ongoing impacts on their confidence and self and skill-development as a result of their participation in Youth Guarantee Fees Free.

The third area of interest was perceptions of the role of Youth Guarantee Fees Free and education providers in meeting young people's education and employment needs. As expected, most young people we spoke to did not distinguish between Youth Guarantee Fees Free and their education provider. They felt that their education provider and, by extension, Youth Guarantee, met their needs, particularly in terms of education. Of interest was the finding that young people see themselves as responsible for ensuring that their education and employment needs are met.

The core concepts and findings of this project are well-supported by the literature. The central role of identity development in young people's transitions has been a focus of research for over 20 years and is now well established (Furlong, Woodman & Wyn, 2011; Higgins, 2002; Phillips & Mitchell, 2012). This literature links identity development to notions of multiple and iterative transitions and emphasises the importance of context. Many researchers have long argued that transition is not a linear move from education to employment (Higgins, Vaughan, Phillips & Dalziel, 2008; Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2011) and involves young people negotiating changes in other areas of their lives including

family, housing and wider relationships (Wyn & Dwyer, 2000; Wyn, 2013). This view is supported by New Zealand research which has shown that identity development plays a key role in young people's perceptions of transition, which they experience as a process rather than a linear series of events. (Higgins, 2012; Vaughan, et al., 2006). The context in which young people live, work and learn has a significant influence on transition experiences and the meaning which young people make of these. This has been demonstrated in New Zealand studies which examine young people's post-school experiences (Patterson, 2011) and the backgrounds of young people on Alternative Education programmes (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2009). The role of family and of ongoing supportive relationships has been shown to have a significant impact on young people's decisions and experiences during transitions (Munford & Sanders, 2015; Zepke & Leach, 2005). In terms of wider context, other work has drawn attention to the impact that the multitude of tertiary education and training options in New Zealand, the reduction of clear pathways to employment and changing notions of career can have on young people and their transitions (Higgins, 2012; Vaughan, et al., 2006).

The impact of the wider context in which young people experience transitions was evident in interviews with participants, particularly in relation to individual responsibility. The concepts of individualisation and risk proposed by Beck (1992) contend that the responsibility for managing risk has moved from the family or community to the individual. This is largely seen as a result of neo-liberal policies, which have created an environment that requires young people to navigate and make judgements on the value of a multitude of education and training options (Higgins, 2002; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012). Although it is clear that transitions are not linear and future careers are unlikely to follow a clear trajectory, the idea that education should lead to sustainable employment in a step-by-step manner was common amongst participants. This was observed in participants' initial expectations that NCEA Level 2 achievement would smooth their path into further education or employment and in their perception that it was ultimately up to them to ensure their education and employment needs were met. Most interview participants did not follow what they saw as the expected transition trajectory. They were keen to counter presumed negative perceptions of this through providing examples of control, personal development and engagement in meaningful activities to demonstrate their success in transition. Some participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the weight of decisions which could affect their entire futures and became disengaged or reluctant to move beyond their current activity. Overall, participants reported that their success or failure would ultimately be decided by their personal motivation and determination. This aligns with France and Haddon's (2014) contention that neo-liberal discourse has influenced young peoples' acceptance of self-responsibility to such an extent that it has limited their capacity to question the structures which restrict them.

This project has sought to understand young people's contexts and experiences of transition from the view point of the young people involved in this process. This contrasts with other New Zealand studies (Earle, 2016a, 2016b; 2018) which have looked at a young persons' employment and education status over time and drawn conclusions about the success of their transition and the activities they have engaged in. Such macro-level analysis is useful for understanding broader patterns; for example, how many young people engage in certain education or employment activities, but cannot tell us much about how young people have understood and experienced these activities (Vaughan et al., 2006). As it is well established that identity development and transitions occur simultaneously, gaining insight into how and why young people perceive and value transition experiences is vital to gauging the efficacy of programmes such as Youth Guarantee Fees Free.

In the current project, this approach has allowed us to identify not only factors within the programmes which work well for young people, but also the importance of external factors, such as ongoing support and skill-development. In addition, tracking young people's perspectives and experience over time situates the value of Youth Guarantee Fees Free to young people within the broader context of transitions.

In the longer-term, the aspects of Youth Guarantee Fees Free that continued to have an impact for participants were those related to support, skill-development and feelings of success. These were enhanced by ongoing support from others, continued self and skill-development and participants' sense of future direction. An examination of literature regarding successful post-school education programmes and post-school transitions indicates that these findings are unsurprising. Support, belonging and the feeling of security which comes from these is consistently found to be an important factor in positive transition experiences (Davies, Lamb & Doecke, 2011; Munford & Sanders, 2015; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Researchers have demonstrated the connections between self and skill-development and the importance of these in re-engaging young people in education and promoting self-efficacy and ongoing skill-development (Dweck, Walton & Cohen, 2014; Farrington et al., 2012). Finally, having a future plan or direction has been shown to be valued by young people within education programmes and in transitions more broadly (Higgins et al., 2008; Polidano, Tabasso & Tseng, 2015).

The project findings in relation to aspects of Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes that were valued by young people will be of interest to education providers seeking to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of the young people they work with. The longer-term benefits of engagement in Youth Guarantee as reported by participants suggest that education providers had a good understanding of their students' needs and were able to meet some of these within the Youth Guarantee framework. However, this project has demonstrated that this was not simply a matter of providing skills which could be employed in a uniform manner along linear pathways. Education providers, to some extent, anticipated the iterative nature of young people's future transitions and attempted to cater to this. The challenges reported by providers and by young people indicate that this approach is not well-supported by the current Youth Guarantee framework. The Youth Guarantee programme and the achievement of NCEA L2 do not meet young people's needs. Education providers address these needs as well as they can while also meeting programme funding conditions, which are not well aligned with the reality of young people's post-school experiences.

This highlights a key issue with current policy regarding youth transitions. Policy often views young people and transitions as a problem to solve. As a result, when interventions do not achieve the objectives set by policy-makers, either the interventions or the young people themselves are deemed to have failed. An alternate view, supported by this project, could be that the policy assumptions upon which the intervention and expected outcomes are based have failed to respond to the reality of young people's transitions. In the context of Youth Guarantee, a further issue is the assumption that an educational intervention has the capacity to address the issue of NEET young people. The young people we spoke to for this project reported a range of social, health and financial challenges, which Youth Guarantee is not designed to address. While the self and skill-development gained through Youth Guarantee did help participants manage some of these challenges, they certainly did not eliminate them. The expectation that a programme like Youth Guarantee could solve these issues indicates a lack of connection between policy and the reality of young people who are NEET.

Policy which approaches NEET as a simple issue of engagement, naturally assumes that the solution is to provide education programmes and qualifications. Once again, this fails to account for the wider context of young people's transitions.

The findings of this project should be of interest to policy makers who are responsible for the funding and accountability mechanisms that determine the extent to which education providers can respond to young people's needs through the delivery of government-funded programmes. It appears that the current structure and measured outputs of Youth Guarantee Fees Free are based on two assumptions, which this project has found do not reflect the reality of young people's experience. First is the focus on a single transition, from education to employment, or education to higher education; second, is the assumption that the transition is linear. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that neither of these assumptions are true for the Youth Guarantee cohort involved in this project; a conclusion which is well-supported by youth transitions literature. This is not to say that Youth Guarantee is not an effective intervention; feedback from participants indicates a high-level of satisfaction with the programme, particularly in the short-term. However, the capacity of Youth Guarantee Fees Free to have a longer-term positive impact on young people's transition experiences is limited by its current structure. A focus on skills and personal development, rather than on course and qualification completion, would result in a programme which is better aligned with young people's needs and future trajectories. In addition, ensuring that young people have access to ongoing support beyond Youth Guarantee and that they have the skills to access and interpret information about education and employment pathways, would provide young people with additional tools to navigate post-school transitions.

5.1 Final comments

This project has described the education, employment and transition experiences of young people who were engaged in a Youth Guarantee Fees Free programme in 2015. Data collected through quantitative and qualitative measures emphasise the importance of support, development, skills and having a future direction throughout transitions, and highlight the diversity of participants' experiences. These findings are consistent with literature on youth transitions and the impact of educational interventions for early school leavers.

Overall, participants reported positive experiences of Youth Guarantee and found that some impacts of the programme were sustained in the longer-term. The extent to which the programme had an ongoing impact for young people was mediated by factors in their individual contexts, for example, access to ongoing support and opportunities for continued development. The longer-term transition experiences of participants highlighted tension between the view of transitions on which the Youth Guarantee policy is based and the narratives of participants. The policy is informed by a linear view of transition in which the educational intervention sets young people on the 'right' path for the future. We have found that our participants' transition experiences are not linear and, in many cases, involve young people trying out multiple pathways as they search for a route which matches their current needs and ideas about who and/or what they want to be. This finding, combined with the complexity of the challenges faced by participants, indicates that it is unrealistic to expect a one-off intervention, such as Youth Guarantee Fees Free, to produce a sustained positive outcome. The young people in this project experience Youth Guarantee as part of their own process of self-development rather than as a one-off event which determines their future direction. This does not change the overall findings in relation to what helps and hinders young people in their transitions and the impact of Youth

Guarantee on these. However, it does indicate a disconnect between policy and the experiences of our participants, which should be addressed if future programmes are to have a more sustained impact. Information from this project suggests that policy settings which allow programmes the flexibility to take a holistic approach to educational delivery and which support collaboration to meet student needs will be better aligned with young people's experiences.

6. References

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7. Appendix 1

The bullet points below cover the main messages from the project in relation to the provision of Youth Guarantee; these are closely related to the core concepts. These messages may be useful to education providers in assessing how well they are meeting student needs.

Content

- While participants valued the opportunity to gain qualifications, the skills they gained through education were what helped them during their subsequent transitions through education and employment.
- In the longer-term, generic skills, like communication and self-management, were more useful to participants than vocationally-specific skills which could not be transferred to different contexts when participants changed pathways during transitions.
- Participants received information about future pathways while in education, however, they struggled to recall this information and interpret new information later on in their transitions.

Delivery

- Participants valued hands-on, practical learning opportunities as this increased engagement and added relevance to their learning.
- Opportunities to practise and refine skills, and receive feedback, supported skill-development and provided techniques for ongoing development beyond Youth Guarantee.
- Participants reported increased engagement and learning when they felt well-supported and had control over how they learned.
- Education providers working within Youth Guarantee cannot meet all needs of all students due to lack of flexibility in programme structure.

Environment

- Young people value supportive and trusting relationships and holistic support which addresses both learning and personal needs. Participants reported that these types of relationships at their Youth Guarantee providers contributed to their engagement and learning.
- Education programmes which provide inclusive and respectful learning environments were reported to enhance engagement and support positive identity development.

