

Innovative Pathways from Secondary School: Where are the young people now?

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Focus of the study

Recent international studies highlight how the transitions from school young people are experiencing today are increasingly becoming less predictable and more complex than the school-to-work transitions of the past (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). *Innovative Pathways from School* examines the models used in schools to support students to make the step from school by examining the influence, on students' career decision making and post-school destinations, of the transition support (that is, information, advice, guidance, and career development activities) that is provided to students. We targeted seven low-decile schools and focused on the non-conventional programmes that the schools considered best supported "at risk" students in their transition decision making. This study also examined how the partnerships made between schools and tertiary providers and employers influenced students' transition decision making, and assisted them in their transition from school.

Nature of the research

The *Innovative Pathways* study is a three-phase research project. In phase 1, at the start of 2002, we interviewed school staff and a sample of external providers (of course content, training, or work placements) about the development and content of the programmes, the transition support they provided, and the partnerships they made. We also interviewed approximately 17 students at each school about their past educational experiences, current sources of transition information, and current transition plans. In addition, we collected information on students' prior qualifications and attendance rates and interviewed some of their parents. The findings from this phase are written up in Boyd, McDowall, and Cooper (2002).

At the end of 2002, in phase 2, we interviewed the school staff about the transition support they provided during 2002, and the outcomes for students. We interviewed 74 of the 75 students who were still at school and 23 of the 44 students who had left school about the transition support they were provided with at school and their plans for the future. We also collected information about their qualifications and attendance, and interviewed some of their parents.

In phase 3, in mid-2004, we conducted follow-up telephone interviews with 61 of the ex-students to ascertain the longer-term impact of the programmes on their post-school destinations and experiences. This paper discusses some of the emergent findings from phase 3 of this study and refers to some of the data collected in phase 2 to provide explanations of some of the observed trends.

Background of the young people

Of the 61 young people interviewed, 14 had left school during 2002, 43 left at the end of 2002, and 4 continued with their schooling in 2003. Just over half (34) were female and just under half (27), male. Around one-third (20) identified as Pasifika, a third (17) as Māori, and just under a third (16), as Pākehā. Two of the remaining young people identified as Asian, and six as from more than one ethnic group.

The young people in this study typically had no or low qualifications before they entered the programmes in this study. Prior to 2002, most (54) had gained none, or at the most one or two, School Certificate subjects, or had less than 39 unit standard credits. Some had also received low grades in some Sixth Form Certificate subjects. By the time they left school, 33 had one or more national or locally-developed certificates or 40 or more unit standard credits, and 25 left with low or no qualifications.

What were the young people doing in mid-2004?

When we interviewed the young people in mid-2004, about half were working only, mostly in full-time jobs; about one-third were studying full-time or combining study and work; and around one-sixth were not in the paid labour force, as shown in table 1.

Table 1 **Current activities (N = 61)**

Type of activity	N
Working only	31
Working full-time (inc. apprenticeships)	29
Working part-time only	2
Studying full-time only	8
Combining study and work	12
Studying full-time and working part-time/casual	5
Working full-time with part-time study	5
Studying part-time and working part-time	2
Not in paid labour or studying	10
Work and Income/ACC benefit (inc. one working)	7
Not employed/not getting benefit	2
Looking after whānau	1
TOTAL	61

This data gives a deceptively simple picture of the experiences of these young people. In fact only about one-fifth had gone straight to a study or work activity and were still engaged in that activity, 23 had changed some of their ideas about the work they were interested in, and 12 had changed some of their study plans since leaving school. Most had two or three major changes in the activities they were doing, and one had eight changes.

The stories below give some idea of the varied experiences three of the young people have had since leaving school, and the transition support they were provided with at school.

Pele: a Pasifika student who studied a materials technology course in 2002

Situation and plans up to the end of 2002

Prior to 2002 Pele didn't think he had done very well at school, he didn't feel particularly focused, and he was getting into "trouble" outside school. At the start of 2002 he was enjoying his school course. He had plans to get an apprenticeship and then do a course to be a diesel mechanic when he left school. He had a second plan to be a bartender.

During 2002 he left school as a firm had contacted the school looking for apprentices and his teacher had set up an interview for him. If this opportunity had not come up he would have stayed at school. By the end of 2002 he was planning to do a diploma in engineering at AUT or AIT with a view to becoming an engineer.

Transition support provided at school during 2002

Pele commented that he'd had a lot of support from school, which assisted him in making decisions about the future. In particular he talked about the range of activities his teacher had organised, and the way his teacher supported him to get a job. He also mentioned the apprenticeship day run by the school:

[My subject teacher gave me] heaps...[He told me] the courses that Tertiary Pathways could line you into...different courses and apprenticeships. He brought in past students to talk about the options they are taking, and employers, and we visited MIT. ...People rang him [the teacher] and he would suggest some students and they would come and see you and talk and they would come back to us if they liked what they saw. [It was a] chat not a formal job interview.

[From the careers teachers I got] brochures that told you about new stuff that was going on (job experience, courses, apprenticeships, jobs).

Activities, plans, and reflections in mid-2004

In 2004 he was still completing his apprenticeship and studying part-time at MIT. He planned to continue with his job and do a Level 5 certificate and then an engineering degree. He considered his school course, and the support he got from his teacher, to be instrumental in "sorting him out" and assisting him to find work and study options which suited his interests and financial situation:

Tertiary Pathways was a turning point [towards a job]. I wasn't really wanting to go to jail, it kept me outta jail. The teachers were really good they kept on pushing me forward.

[Things are going] really good. I'm going forward – I'm going to get a qualification without paying fees. I get paid. You get advanced training for your deal. I don't want to get a loan. It's easier to learn from the older guys with 30 to 50 years' experience.

Huia: a Māori student who did Gateway in Year 13 as part of a two-year national certificate course

Plans and activities up to the end of 2002

In 2000 Huia had not passed any School Certificate subjects and described how she had been at risk of getting kicked out of school. In 2001 she started a two-year national certificate course which included Gateway placements in the second year. At the start of 2002 she had developed a plan to go to polytechnic and continue getting higher levels of her school qualifications. By the end of 2002 she had refined this plan and had decided she wanted to go to AUT to study business and to use this as a pathway to a degree and a Masters with a view to working in management or marketing. At the end of 2002 she gained a scholarship to go to AUT.

Transition support provided at school during 2002

Huia commented very positively on the transition support she had received at school which had given her a pathway to tertiary study, and assisted her to clarify her interests:

If the National Certificate [programme] wasn't introduced to me I wouldn't be here 'cause there was no way I could get into Sixth Form Certificate or Bursary. This is my only pathway.

The school careers teachers gave her information on courses and prerequisites, career options, scholarships information, and introduced her to the Māori liaison officer at AUT. Her teacher had assisted her to unpack this information and her work experience placements had helped her discover what she was interested in:

Mainly it's my teacher – she has really helped me and guided me... She pushed me to succeed. She mostly just gave me encouragement and told me what past students had done and gave me options. She wasn't telling me what to do, she just guided me.

Work experience pushed me in the right direction with tertiary study and made me decide definitely what I wanted to do.

Activities, plans, and reflections in mid-2004

At the end of 2002 Huia left school to do a holiday job at a firm she did a work experience placement for to get money to go to AUT. During her course she had continued to work part-time at this firm. She dropped out of AUT because she had been encouraged by a liaison officer to upgrade from a certificate course to a diploma course which she did not enjoy. She then started to work full-time as an accounts clerk at the same firm. She was currently enjoying her work and planning to go back to AUT to eventually do a degree in business:

It was the work experience which helped me to get to where I am now. I'd probably be in Pak 'N Save or Glassons working for \$7 an hour otherwise... I just think I've come out sort of on the top. It was me against the world. It worked out to my advantage.

Rachel: a Pākehā student who studied a sports course in 2002

Plans and activities up to the end of 2002

In 2001 Rachel had passed one School Certificate subject. In 2002 she was enjoying her sports course and had developed a vague plan to study computers in the future, but was not sure about what sort of work she was interested in. At the end of 2002 she thought she might do a beautician course at a Private Training Establishment (PTE) or be a kindergarten teacher because she liked working with people.

Transition support provided at school during 2002

Rachel considered the experiences she had through her sports course had assisted her to develop her ideas about her future work options. Her sports course had got her interested in how bodies worked, and the coaching she did at a local primary school had given her team work and communication skills which had prepared her for life outside school. Her teacher had motivated her and had arranged for her to go on an employment course. School careers staff provided her with information about beauticians' courses and organised visits to local polytechnics.

Overall, however, she seemed to have less access to transition support compared to the other two young people mentioned above.

Activities, plans, and reflections in mid-2004

Rachel left school at the end of 2002. She started working at McDonalds because she needed money to live. She then changed jobs a number of times to find work which gave her more money. Most of her jobs she got through friends or family friends except her last job which she got through a temping agency.

First she did soldering and cutting at an engineering firm. Then she made brushes at a brush making company. She received a head injury from an accident and stopped work to go on an ACC benefit. She was not meant to work but started another job for an electronic firm making up thermostats. She left this job to recover from her head injury and was on an ACC benefit when we interviewed her.

From her physiotherapist experiences as a result of her head injury she has become interested in being a physiotherapist. This related to her interests in how bodies work and her enjoyment of working with people. She had developed a plan to do NCEA work related to a physiotherapist qualification and then do a physiotherapist diploma and then degree. She was finding her recovery period frustrating as she was keen to start her new plan.

These journeys highlight the individual nature of the young people's post-school pathways and the different experiences their decisions around career and study options are based on. In the international literature the individualised nature of this experience for today's young people has been contrasted to the set pathways of the past (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Smith, 1999; Bye, 2000).

Some such as Pele are taking the first steps on what may well be a set pathway; others such as Rachel are engaged in a period of trialling different options. The OECD (2000) has coined the term "milling and churning" to refer to the increased tendency for young people to spend an extended period of time during which they move between various activities such as full-time work, part-time work, unemployment, or other endeavours such as overseas travel.

In the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY)* the first year out of school has been shown to be pivotal in setting a pattern for young people, especially for those who do not obtain tertiary qualifications (Lamb & McKenzie, 2001). Internationally there is evidence to show that youth unemployment, especially in the first year after finishing formal education, can have a negative effect on young people's subsequent job prospects and earning power (Ryan, 2001). In the *LSAY* study those who spent their first year out of school in full-time work, study, or training were more likely to use these experiences as a "stepping stone" to a "successful" transition (which is defined as three or more years of continuous full-time employment). Starting out unemployed or in part-time work could be a "mill-stone" which did not lead to a "successful" transition. The assumptions underpinning this definition of "success" are being debated given the growth in part-time or short-term employment options and the increasing desire by young people to balance various commitments such as their leisure pursuits or family relationships with their work or study goals (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Ryan, 2001).

As most of the young people in this study were currently engaged in full-time work or study it appears that in the short-term at least they were experiencing a "successful" transition using the traditional definition of success. Another indicator of "success" which should be considered is the views of the young people in this study, most of whom considered that their life was going relatively well for them at this point in time, and that they were doing the things they wanted to when they left school.

How did the young people find work?

All but six of the young people had done some form of paid work since leaving school. For the 44 who were currently working, their jobs were mostly in three areas: trades, service and sales, and clerical. Work was important, and those who were not employed talked about how they did not want to be a "bum". As shown in Table 2 there were three main ways the young people found work: through advertisements, through their family, and through school contacts or work experience placements.

Table 2 How did the young people find work? (N = 55)

Source of work	N
Application	
Applying from an advertisement/Internet	21
Asking at places interested in	2
Social networks	
Family/family friends	18
Friends	9
School networks	
School work experience	10
Teachers/school careers service	8
Tertiary providers and careers staff	7
Non-school work experiences	
Workmates/jobs when left school	3
Part-time/holiday/casual jobs	2
Agencies	
Work broker/WINZ/Career Services	4
Employment agency/ITO co-ordinator	2

This data shows the importance of social capital or family networks in finding work. Although family were the most common networks used, around one-third had also been directly assisted to find work through school contacts. Rosenbaum, DeLuca, Miller, and Roy (1999) found that minority students in the USA who got assistance from schools or relatives to find jobs had better earning trajectories than those who found work through government agencies or their friends. In this current study there is some evidence to support this finding in relation to school assistance. The jobs the young people got through family members or friends tended to be unskilled work such as cleaning. In contrast, the types of jobs sourced from school connections tended to be more highly-skilled such as apprenticeships or office work.

What influenced decisions about jobs?

We asked the young people what had made them decide to do the jobs they did. Their responses are categorised in Table 3.

Table 3 Factors underpinning job decisions (N = 55)

Factor	N
Pragmatic	
Wanted money/saving for study	29
Took the job that was offered	14
Couldn't do first choice of job	3
Planning and exploring	
Related to interests or plans	17
Wanted to try something new/challenging	8
Wanted experience in that area	4
School experiences	
School work experience helped clarify choices	11
Job related to school qualifications/study	6
Post-school experiences	
Post-school work helped clarify plans	6
Other jobs or courses didn't work out	2
Other	
Family or friends worked there	6
Working environment/conditions good	6
Continued part-time/existing job	2
Other	7

Getting a job and financial security was very important to the young people, and most had made pragmatic decisions about work based on their need to earn a living and have a social life. Many did not seem to perceive their employment choices to be a “decision” as this implied they had options to choose from, indicating that the concept of “choice” can be a luxury that does not necessarily apply to school leavers. A smaller number noted they had taken factors such as their interests and plans into consideration. Some had used the career-exploration activities they did at school such as work experience as a decision-making tool.

This pragmatism or “making do” has been described as a response to balancing different commitments such as study and a social life, and as a response to an uncertain employment market (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). Dwyer and Wyn note, that for the young people in the Australian *Life-Patterns* project, establishing a happy working life had been harder than establishing a happy social life. They suggest that one of the reasons for this is an “ambition paradox” in that young people have post-tertiary study aspirations which are not met.

At this point in time, as the young people in this current study were just starting out in their working lives, or had not yet finished their initial tertiary study options, most had not yet faced this situation. There is evidence though that some were experiencing difficulty in finding work which matched their aspirations, or were noticing other young people having this difficulty:

(Unemployed for 6 months after finishing a hospitality course at a PTE and working as a waiter for 4 months)

Being a [music] technician was my original goal... I knew the extent of the industry and I knew I didn't have anywhere near enough skills to get a job...

(Working full-time as a plasterer with plans to go to MIT to do engineering)

I wanted to be an architect. I did pick the subject [design] but there was too much stuff going on with sports etc [at school]...I got told to do English and maths. I always wanted a scholarship to MIT. I got one but didn't take it [as it wasn't in the area I wanted]. I saw a friend get heaps of qualifications and end up in a factory. He's brainy – he didn't want to end up like that.

Many of the young people in this study came from families whose members were unemployed or working in unskilled occupations. This may have shaped their expectations. Some had assumed it would be difficult to find a job and were pleased that they had found any type of work and were able to support themselves.

Where and why had the young people studied?

Almost three-quarters (44) of the young people in this study had started some form of study since leaving school. Some (12) had done two courses and a couple, three courses. The institutions they studied at are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Institutions studied at (N = 58)

Institution	N
Private Training Establishment (PTE) (inc. Youth Training)	22
University (mostly AUT/Waikato University bridging course)	13
Polytechnic	11
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	3
Returned to school/night school	2
Other (e.g. army)	7

A number who planned to study at a polytechnic in fact ended up at a PTE. Some of the young people studying at PTEs were unsure if they were getting a qualification from their course or the nature of the qualification they were gaining. This suggests that they were not fully informed about the nature of the course they were studying or how it could potentially benefit them in the future. This raises questions about the quality of some PTE courses which is also being reported by lobby groups and in the popular press (Quality Public Education Coalition, 2004).

The young people were well aware of the importance of tertiary study. Overall, only one had not yet studied or was not planning to study at some point. Many were planning to work up to higher-level qualifications. A few were doing more than one thing to give themselves a range of options. A small number had swapped courses as they found their first course did not meet their needs.

We asked the young people how they had decided which courses they wanted to do and their responses are categorised in Table 5. Unlike decisions about work, the decisions young people made about study enabled them to continue to follow their interests and plans.

Table 5 Factors underpinning study decisions (N = 44)

Type of influence	N
Related to interests or plans	
Related to skills and interests	14
Compulsory (part of apprenticeship/army training)	8
A starting point leading to a job/range of jobs	5
A starting point leading to higher level courses	3
School or tertiary influences and connections	
Career/school teachers recommended/gave information	10
Progression from school qualifications/courses	9
Contact with tertiary staff/liaison officers	6
School work experience helped clarify	2
Family influences	
Family/family friends recommended	7
Friends/relatives also studying at institution	3
Other	
Factors relating to institute (reputation/local)	4
Post-school work experience helped clarify	3
Did not have the qualifications to do first choice	3
Other	8

The importance of the role of family in students' decision making is highlighted in many New Zealand and overseas studies (Andres, 2002; Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Boyd, Chalmers, & Kumekawa, 2001; Wilson & Young, 1998). In longitudinal studies of Canadian (Andres, 2002) and

Australian (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001) students' post-secondary educational choices it has been found that high school teachers and careers counsellors do not have a strong influence on young people's post-secondary educational choices. In this current study, however, subject teachers and in some cases careers staff, appeared to have more influence. There are a number of possible reasons for this difference. One is that this study focused on vocational courses which emphasised the provision of transition support. Another possible reason, which has been shown in other studies, is that the influence of school staff is likely to be stronger for students from low-income communities who do not have tertiary-educated role models in their families (Boyd, Chalmers, & Kumekawa, 2001).

The impact of tertiary alignment

The role schools can play in supporting students to develop and act on tertiary study plans is clearly shown by a closer examination of the data from two of the schools in this study. These two schools aligned their courses with local tertiary providers. One was part of the Manakau Institute of Technology (MIT) curriculum alignment project and the other offered National Certificates which could be taken to a higher level at local tertiary institutions. We interviewed 24 of the young people from these two schools. Their planned and actual activities over 2002 to 2004 are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 The impact of secondary-tertiary alignment (N = 24)

Activity	Plan at start of 2002	Plan at end of 2002	Post-school study activities
	N	N	N
Study at institution supported by school	7	21	13
Study at another institution	1	2	7
Vague study plans	13	-	-
No study	3	1	4
TOTAL	24	24	24

Of these 24 young people, 16 had plans to study for higher qualifications in a related area and some had already started this study. This data gives some indication that secondary-tertiary alignment can support young people to continue to tertiary study, either at the institutions supported by the school or at other institutions, and potentially can lead to study for higher qualifications.

Building relationships with tertiary providers

At both schools course alignment was supported by extensive programmes, designed by subject teachers or careers staff, which offered students information about, and connections with, tertiary providers. Teachers and careers staff provided students with information and advice about tertiary courses and institutions, in particular, information about how students could staircase themselves to higher qualifications or access low-cost tertiary options. Careers staff offered students support to gain scholarships and complete enrolment forms. Teachers also set up opportunities for the young people to research the courses they were interested in and organised opportunities for the exploration of tertiary options in a "hands-on" way, such as through Secondary-Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) courses. In particular teachers and careers staff organised opportunities for students to develop "real" relationships and connections with tertiary providers and other people in the tertiary environment such as ex-students. This tended to be done by targeting individuals who could act as support people for students such as Māori liaison officers, or people in departments students were interested in. Some teachers set up more than one meeting to give students time to get to know these people. This combination of course alignment, information, experiences, encouragement, and opportunities for relationship building seemed to assist in "demystifying" the tertiary environment for a number of the young people as shown by the quote below:

[The careers teacher] made phone calls to AUT so I could get a scholarship. I got a scholarship, and if it wasn't for her I wouldn't have got one. She helped me fill out enrolment forms for the scholarship and AUT... She got brochures, it helped me to see what courses I could do... The flow chart at school about career paths helped me to know where I was going – that fully helped. Ex-students came back

to [school] to say what they're doing now. They gave us ideas. I am one of those people now, I could go back and say what I've been doing.

What supported the young people's initial transition from school?

We asked the young people to reflect on the experiences, advice, or information they had found useful in supporting their future decision making as shown in Table 7. The most frequently reported things they found the most useful were the assistance they got from their subject or careers teachers at school and the work experience opportunities they had (these work experience opportunities were mostly arranged through school but some were post-school).

Table 7 Useful forms of transition support (N = 61)

Form of support	N
School teachers/careers staff	21
Experiences of work	18
Peers and friends	10
Family and family friends	8
Particular school course	8
Visiting companies/employers	7
Tertiary tutors or liaison officers	4
Doing tertiary courses	3
Visiting tertiary institutions	2
Other	7
Not sure/no useful things	12

Work experience

Having “real” experiences of the world of work while they were at school was one of the main ways the young people felt supported in their post-school decision making. Work experience gave them the opportunity to explore their interests and new options and change their mind in a low-stakes environment which allowed them to take risks and learn from choices which did not work out. This environment was not available once they left school.

All of the schools in this study had some form of work experience. Some work experience opportunities were structured placements during which students gained credit towards National Certificates. Others were more traditional “taster” work experience placements. Most were off-site placements, but some students did work experience at school. Students who attended tertiary or STAR courses also saw the practical components of these courses as work experience. Most schools attempted to match placements as much as possible to students’ interests and organise more than one placement for each student.

Watts (1991) describes how the aims of work experience are multifaceted. The aims identified by Watts link with the benefits of work experience mentioned by the young people in this study as listed below:

- **Expansive:** It offers a range of options and broadens horizons.
- **Sampling:** It allows for the exploration of interests.
- **Investigative:** It promotes understanding of the realities of work and gives increased access to advice and information.
- **Enhancing:** It gives opportunities to try out the “theory” learnt at school.
- **Motivational:** It shows the links between school work and career plans which can function to re-engage students with their school work.
- **Maturational:** It provides opportunities to develop social skills.
- **Preparatory:** It provides opportunities to develop practical skills and gain qualifications.
- **Anticipatory:** It gives opportunities for confidence building.
- **Placing:** It gives preferential entry into the workforce.
- **Custodial:** (It transferred the responsibility for students. This aim was not mentioned by the people in this study.)

In Australia there is debate about the value of work experience given increasing evidence that today's students commonly have access to the workforce through part-time work or more structured work placements (Green & Smith, 2003). Smith and Harris (2000) discuss the paradox that work placements may be under threat but that they have considerable potential to provide authentic learning and assessment opportunities. Evidence for this can be seen in this current study which highlights how work experience can function on many different levels. Work experience, whether it was through structured placements such as Gateway, or activities such as on-site catering for school functions, gave opportunities for some of the students to have authentic learning experiences linked to their school work.

It also provided opportunities for career exploration and clarification. Although most of the young people already had part-time or casual jobs while still at school, in only two cases did these jobs lead to full-time work. School-organised work experience provided the young people with access to new experiences and networks which they may not have been able to source for themselves. The value young people place on the career and tertiary exploration opportunities they have through school, and their enjoyment of the new relationships these opportunities provide them with, are also reported in relation to STAR courses (Vaughan & Kenneally, 2003).

Support from subject teachers and career staff

In New Zealand and internationally, researchers have suggested that the proliferation of tertiary providers and courses, and changes to the workforce, have made the transition environment, and therefore the role of teachers and careers staff in providing information and guidance more complex (Carpenter & Inkson, 1999; Elkin & Sutton, 2000; Krei & Rosenbaum, 2001). Krei and Rosenbaum (2001) suggest that consequently students are relying more on vocational teachers as sources of information about careers.

This reliance was also observed in this study, with a number of the young people considering their teachers to be instrumental in supporting their transition from school. Krei and Rosenbaum (2001) suggest that the "straightforward" approach used by most of the vocational teachers in their study was more effective in supporting young people to make career decisions than the approaches some careers staff use; for example, a "college (university) for all" approach. The main emphasis of the straightforward approach is on giving realistic advice in relation to each individual's skills and interests, and integrating career exploration opportunities into the curriculum. There is growing agreement that similar types of individualised approach work well with young people who are "at risk" (Watts, 2002).

The approach to the provision of career guidance and education taken by the subject teachers in this study tended to be similar to the "straightforward" approach described by Krei and Rosenbaum (2001). This support was often organised and provided in conjunction with careers staff. Underpinning the guidance teachers gave was quality student-teacher relationships which supported students' learning (Boyd & McDowall, 2003). The main practices and roles of the teachers and careers staff in this study were:

- **Organisers of access to information:** School staff organised opportunities for students to access information relating to a range of job and course options and pathways they were interested in. This information came from a range of sources, such as visits to employers or Career Expos.
- **Organisers of exploration opportunities:** School staff organised hands-on career exploration activities, such as work experience or optional STAR courses, which related as much as possible to students' interests.
- **Providers of opportunities for the development of self-management skills:** Teachers integrated goal setting and career planning activities into the curriculum by, for example, setting up career research activities which introduced resources such as the KiwiCareers website.
- **Providers of individualised coaching and guidance:** Particularly important to the young people were the discussions they had with teachers which supported them to consider their options and unpack the information they had received. Teachers offered encouragement and emotional support, discussed individual's options and offered advice in an honest manner (often in class time). They acted as role models and discussed their own choices and pathways.

- **Providers of alignment with, and connections to, tertiary study.**
- **Providers of support to practise or take the next step:** Teachers set up situations for students to discuss job advertisements, practise mock job interviews, and develop CVs. Some teachers and careers staff used their contacts to place students in apprenticeships or jobs, supported students at job interviews, or assisted students with enrolment forms and scholarship applications.

The quotes below give an indication of how the relationships the young people formed with their teachers, the discussions they had, and the activities the teachers organised assisted many of the young people to find and explore their options and make the step from school:

My “dad” at school...[helped me] come up with the right choices, and take my time to make a choice...

[Using the KiwiCareers website with teachers] they sort of went through with you and looked at all your interest areas and helped you see if you were interested in it, to see where your interests were.

I’d rather have their advice than reading it from handbooks because it is more relevant and they’ve had their own experiences.

We got on really well with [the teacher], he set up work experience and talked with the bosses. He made it easy, real easy. We tried different firms and they’d come back at the end of the year and ask us to be apprentices.

Particularly important to the young people was the provision of career information and advice in combination with “real” experiences like work placements and contact with tertiary providers, along with discussions which supported them to “unpack” this information. In a review of the transition literature, Watts (2002) concludes that it is not enough to just present career information; having someone to discuss this with enables young people to make personal sense of this information. Vaughan (2003) also comments on the need for young people to have relationships which guide them through transition.

What support did the young people not get?

On the whole the young people were satisfied with the transition support they got at school. A few (12) made suggestions about extra support. Most suggestions concerned being offered more work experience either related to their interests, or in a range of different areas. A couple of suggestions centred around a need for more guidance earlier on, and more opportunities to develop career self-management skills:

We could have done more work experience – we only did it once for three days. At the start of the year they could have asked you what jobs you were interested in...

The careers advisors were always busy. We needed more help choosing a suitable course that met our needs at the beginning of Gateway. The Gateway course I did didn’t really meet my needs as well as another might have. They gave us a huge booklet about scholarships but we needed help reading it. It was too big and I didn’t understand which parts to read. I needed help to find the information about the scholarship I could go for.

They didn’t help me about researching anything about jobs or help me look for work experience.

Goal setting for your future. Set your self up to succeed, etc... provide guidance earlier.

Looking to the future

Most of the young people commented positively on their current study and work activities. They valued the autonomy they had and the new challenges they were experiencing. Some were setting goals for the future:

(Working as a back-up foreman for a furniture company after leaving a panel beating course to get money to buy a car)

Just being able to make my own decisions. I've reached the goals that I've set...it's time to set new goals. I've overcome the transition of the first few months... I'm happy with my decisions and enjoy my job. I've got direction and am on my way to a career I enjoy.

(Working as a DJ on a Māori radio station)

It's good. Everything is alright, it's going cruisey. My work on radio – I'm getting heaps of good feedback about my job... I enjoy it. I think I'll be here for awhile. This is definitely what I want to do.

At the time of the interviews most felt optimistic about the future even though some were unemployed. Most were confident that they would find work:

(Unemployed for 3 months after doing a business certificate at AUT)

It's pretty good. Every time I go looking for jobs it's always about computing and I feel confident because I know a lot about computing because of what I have learnt at school [school and AUT]. It's motivating knowing that I can get that job...

This optimism in the face of an uncertain job market has been noted internationally (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001).

A few felt constrained by a lack of jobs available in the area they were interested in, their lack of qualifications, or their family, financial, or personal circumstances:

(Unemployed for 3 months after finishing certificates in travel and business at a PTE)

It's stink because everybody else is making decisions for me, instead of me making my own choices – pushing me in one direction but I want to go the other direction. I want control over my choices. I want to move out, and prove my parents wrong.

Implications for policy and practice

This study provides some insights into the information and support needs of young people as they leave school. Some of the key message which emerge are:

- School was the main place the young people had gained transition support and advice.
- What they found most useful was information, experiences, and advice tailored to their interests and which gave them hands-on experiences that enabled them to explore their options.
- Information provision is not enough: the life coaching they received and the discussions they had with school staff and other people assisted them to unpack this information and make choices.
- People-based sources of information seemed to be valued more highly than websites and written information.
- Experiential learning opportunities such as work experience and STAR courses were one of the key factors which supported career decision making.
- Schools have the potential to provide opportunities for career exploration in a low-stakes environment that are difficult for young people from low-income communities to access from their own or family sources, or once they leave school.
- A combination of curriculum alignment and relationship building, with an emphasis on staircasing supported many of the young people to firm their tertiary study plans and act on these plans.

Balancing information provision with educating individuals to self-manage their careers

The experiences of the young people in this study have highlighted a number of areas for future consideration. In a review of career guidance literature for Career Services, Smith (1999) notes that the two main purposes of career guidance are to provide career information and to educate individuals to self-manage their careers. Although schools provided both, the weight seemed to have been towards the provision of information, and this appears to be reflected in the activities of some of the

young people when they left school. Only half had accessed new information about courses and careers, and some reported referring back to the information gained, or plans developed, at school. There appears to be a need to further emphasise the self-management side of career guidance to ensure that young people are aware they are developing skills they could apply as they re-evaluate their goals.

The tension between a pathways model versus an exploration model

As many young people are unlikely to find set pathways such as those which existed in the past, the career literature suggests that the kind of guidance needed for the future should emphasise versatility rather than specialisation (Carpenter & Inkson, 1999). School staff experienced a tension between supporting students to be on a set pathway versus providing opportunities for choice exploration. A number of the schools used a pathways model which formalised the connections between school courses and employers or tertiary providers, such as through pre-apprenticeship courses, in order to staircase students into jobs and courses. This type of staircasing was very effective for the young people whose interests related to the school pathway, but not so effective for those who decided part-way through their school course, or once they had left school, that they wanted to explore other areas.

Other schools provided students with the opportunity to sample a range of different areas. Models which supported student-driven exploration of options could be very helpful for some young people in assisting them to clarify their likes and dislikes and future options, but did not necessarily support students to gain qualifications. Some teachers balanced this tension by trying to incorporate both models into their programmes. Some of the ways they did this were by providing as many choices as possible within a pathways model or by providing students with opportunities to learn transferable generic skills.

Variation in the amount of transition support offered to young people

Related to the tension between a pathway or choice model is the need to offer young people equal access to transition support. The amount of assistance each young person got varied within and between schools. Some had substantial assistance; others did not feel that school provided them with enough experience in, or information about, their particular interests, or enough opportunities to develop the skills they needed to function in the workforce.

Variation in the level of collaboration between schools

Another variation between teachers and schools was the extent to which collaborations between subject teachers, careers staff, tertiary providers, and employers were organised which enabled the knowledge and skills of each group to be fully utilised. Some subject teachers linked closely with careers staff and integrated the support provided to students into class time; others did not. This relationship seemed to be most effective when subject teachers and careers staff worked in a close partnership with each other, alongside tertiary providers and employers.

Summary

School staff had developed different ways of addressing these tensions and were engaged in ongoing reviews of their programmes to ensure they were improving the support they provided to students. Higgins (2003) notes that countries with strong institutionalised systems, such as apprenticeship programmes, are better at preventing early unemployment than countries which have less structured systems. This current study provides evidence to show that these connections, when provided in conjunction with guidance and support which assists young people to consider their options, can be effective in establishing new networks and opportunities for young people which assist them to make the step from school.

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