



Best Practice Guidelines in Approaches to Secondary Tertiary Transitions for Vocational Education and Training in New Zealand



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*Kotahi ano te kohao o te ngira
E kuhuna ai te miro ma te miro
whero me te miro pango Kia
hakakotahi ai he taura here
oranga¹*

*“There is but one eye of the needle,
through which the white,
red and black threads must pass,
to unify the strands of wellbeing”*

¹ In 1858, a large gathering assembled at Ngaruawahia for the religious ceremony to proclaim Potatau as the first Māori King. The rite was performed by Wiremu Tamehana Tarapipi. During the ceremony, the High Chief of the Tuwharetoa Tribe, Te Heuheu, said: “Potatau, today I anoint you kingi for the Māori people. You and Queen Victoria are today united. Let the religion of Jesus be your mantle to protect you; and may the laws of the land be the mat on which to place your feet forever.” To this, Potatau replied: “There is but one eye of a needle, through which white, black and red cotton are threaded. Hereafter, hold fast to charity, uphold the laws and be firm in the Faith.” (University of Waikato, 2013)

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Executive Summary

Set4Life was a two-year project in Northland that aimed to identify effective ways of supporting vocational learners into sustainable employment.² It was a joint project that involved The Skills Organisation (Skills), Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), AKO Aotearoa, Primary Industry Training Organisation (Primary ITO), Te Matarau Education Trust, NorthTec, Whangarei Boys High School, and local employers.

Set4Life involved the design and trial of a suite of interventions to improve transitions for secondary school learners, pre-trade ITP (Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics) students and ITO (Industry Training Organisation) trainees. Set4Life addressed the need for learners to receive neutral support that would help them to identify suitable careers, address barriers to work, and move successfully into employment. It also recognised that success for learners means success for employers, since learners' progress is dependent on developing the skills, knowledge, and attitude that are valued in their chosen field of work. Hence, Set4Life sought to move away from the output-driven focus of the education system to focus on meeting the demands of employers and workplaces.

The project established a cross-sector network of stakeholders – including schools, TEOs (Tertiary Education Organisations), ITOs, employers, and whānau – to provide a cohesive, integrated framework of support for learners. The central intervention was the development of a navigator role. This role was funded independently; this allowed navigators to work freely in the learner's best interests and to leverage relationships formed with other players. The navigator worked with learners to help them identify and trial relevant career options, develop pathways to work, and gain relevant work experience. Learners could also gain insights into career opportunities across various industries by attending WorkChoice days. The navigator provided and facilitated pastoral care to help learners to overcome personal barriers to work and provided inductions for employers to help them provide a safe and supportive workplace for learners. The navigator also fostered information sharing and feedback loops to identify issues and ensure support could be provided responsively to learners by the most appropriate players. The navigator job description is in Appendix One.

Set4Life's framework and interventions proved successful in supporting learner transitions.

“Learners and employers benefit from facilitated guidance and support for effective navigation through this ever-changing space and an opportunity exists for a funding-neutral approach with outcomes-focused, careers guidance and a work broker approach.”

The navigator role was highly effective in integrating different parts of the system and ensuring wraparound support for the learner. All learners indicated that the project helped them to achieve positive results. Key themes included that learners significantly improved in relation to motivation, direction, confidence, and work-related skills, and that they successfully addressed barriers to work. They also benefitted from the opportunity to trial work options and change track before committing to a particular career. The navigator's relationships with employers helped to secure high quality work experience for learners, and improve the flow of information between employers, schools and providers. However, the navigator's workload

² Sustainable employment is defined as ongoing employment which the learner is engaged in and committed to, and which meets employment legislation in regard to adequate pay and working conditions.

was high and indicated a need for a networked approach and the need for a work broker role to be developed. Key themes for employers included that they found the Set4Life learners to be motivated and committed and appreciated the opportunity to try out employees before taking them on permanently. The team also observed it was critical that whānau were included in the support network in order to ensure they were well-informed and understood how best to support learners.

“Set4Life research found that of 39 learners with level two NCEA that were tested with the LNAAT tool, 59% were below the reading threshold and 31% below the numeracy threshold required to succeed in the workplace.

This supports previous Tertiary Education Commission survey results (Earle, 2010). Earle demonstrated that many adults do not have sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to function fully in a knowledge society and that the lack of these skills may be holding back productivity in the workplace.”

At the same time, the Set4Life results reflected a number of issues that require systemic change and/or action from policy makers and funders. While Set4Life effectively reduced the impact of silos between different players in the system, schools and other Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers were incentivised to work competitively and in isolation. Changes to funding and policy levers would make a significant difference in encouraging players to work collaboratively and flexibly in support of learners, so that transition interventions are incentivised by the system rather than working around it. This could also be used to encourage some schools and TEOs to focus on helping learners to achieve real-world outcomes and avoid unhelpful practices such as credit gathering and an over-emphasis upon university pathways. Set4Life data showed that many learners had an inadequate level of literacy and numeracy to achieve success in the workplace, indicating a need for greater attention to this issue in secondary school. Set4Life results also indicated the value of incorporating the needs of employers and industries when preparing learners for the workplace. Employers benefit from assistance in

understanding how to invest in staff so that their businesses benefit from providing work experience, recruiting new employees and supporting them well. Pastoral care was a critical determinant of learners' success in many instances but is presently inadequately funded in New Zealand. These issues need to be urgently addressed in order to ensure New Zealand has a workforce that is fit for employers' and industries' needs in the future.

All key findings from this project are represented in the guidelines on page 7 of this document. These are aimed at policy makers, employers, students, parents, schools, and tertiary organisations (as appropriate) to help all players identify ways they can contribute to achieving more productive and supported transitions for vocational learners.

Introduction

This set of guidelines is based on the findings of the Set4Life project. Set4Life was a skills, employment, and training programme for transition students. The project adopted a human capital approach to education in connection with the Tertiary Education Commission's (2016) stated goal to “make smarter investment decisions in tertiary education, to achieve better social and economic outcomes for learners and New Zealand”. There is substantial evidence in New Zealand that industry and employers are having increasing difficulty in gaining staff with the skills they need; a problem that appears likely to worsen as technological developments continue to rapidly transform the range of roles (and associated competencies) in vocational work. Other factors play a significant role in this shortage as well, not least funding and policy levers for secondary and tertiary education and VET, along with longstanding practices in education and training providers that are, in some cases, no longer fit for purpose³. Change is needed across multiple facets of VET in order to ensure that New Zealand has a workforce that is fully equipped and capable of meeting the current and future demands of workplaces in New Zealand. In short, New Zealand has a pressing need for a demand-led, collaborative and responsive VET system that achieves better results for all key players, and for learners and employers in particular.

Set4Life set out to contribute to this area by focusing on the critical space of transitions. Specifically, Set4Life focused on exploring ways to provide secondary students, pre-trades learners, and apprentices with the necessary support to transition successfully into the workplace and to progress. In doing so, the project provided a way to identify some of the existing challenges in the vocational transitions space with a view to testing practical initiatives to address these challenges. It also aimed to use the findings from the project to develop good practice guidelines for the key players involved in the transition between the world of learning and the world of work.

This document provides these Guidelines in the next section. They are grouped to provide suggestions for different players within the VET system. In some cases, the same guidelines apply to multiple players who would benefit from the use of similar strategies and methods; in others, guidelines are unique to a group of players and their specific role in the system.

The document then goes on to provide more detail about the project. The Background section provides a summary of the existing VET system in New Zealand and the issues that Set4Life targeted. This is followed by the Aims section, which lays out what the study aimed to achieve. The following Methods section describes the research and operational methods used in the project and outlines the roles of different stakeholders. Then the Results and Findings section highlights the key themes and results of the study and makes corresponding recommendations (which underpin the guidelines). In particular, it highlights how feedback and data from the study demonstrate the relative effectiveness of various initiatives and, in some cases, pave the way for the development of similar or modified initiatives in wider use in the VET field. This section also highlights how Set4Life observations reflected broad issues that are identified by practitioners and research in the VET field – and makes suggestions about how these may be addressed. Finally, the document offers a Conclusion, that even in the current siloed VET system interventions in the transition space can be very effective

³ See, for example, New Zealand Digital Skills Forum's recent report *Digital Skills for a Digital Nation*; Tertiary Education Commission's *Tertiary Education in a World of Changing Skill Demands*; and World Economic Forum's *The Future of Jobs*.

when they are tailored to the local environment, inclusive of local players, and individualised for each learner.

Considerably more research is needed around the structure and policy settings for the VET sector to establish the way forward and ensure that New Zealand's workforce is developed to meet real world needs in coming decades. However, as the Set4Life initiative demonstrates, it is possible to initiate well-informed change now, and to use this as a foundation for continuing development of solutions. Developing, testing, and modifying solutions are highly effective strategies in modern industry, and are a means of making rapid progress. Set4Life is an example of using a similar approach to achieve improved outcomes in the world of vocational education and training.

Best Practice Guidelines for Vocational Education and Training in New Zealand

These best practice guidelines are the outcome of the Set4Life project and research detailed in the remainder of this report. The guidelines are aspirational and serve as a recommendation and future tool for improving career transitions for individuals across New Zealand.

Policymaker Guidelines

The guidelines in this section are intended primarily for policy makers at central government level. Some guidelines may also be relevant for organisations involved in the national or local development, provision, and coordination of vocational education.

- Take a 'whole of government' approach; align policies between the Ministry of Social Development, Tertiary Education Commission, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment to produce a demand-driven, end-to-end vocational education system.
- Establish demand-led funding and investment that drives a flexible network of provision. Focus this investment on building both employee and employer capability to achieve successful lifelong learning and sustainable employment outcomes.
- Fund providers on the basis of short- and medium-term 'life' outcomes and uncouple this funding from effective full-time student accounting (EFTS). Evaluate providers on the basis of their contribution to successful outcomes using tools such as the IDI (Integrated Data Infrastructure), broad algorithms and regional socioeconomic impact.
- Establish a navigator and work broker function to facilitate coherent and effective vocational learner pathways across the transition space. Design this structure to support transitions throughout the learner's school and early career years in order to assist them into sustainable employment.
- Provide induction and support the integration of learners and employers into the transitions space through professional development opportunities such as The Skills Organisation's Building Business Ambition.
- Drive a perception change of vocational education, using information such as the BERL (2017) findings. Develop a culture in families, communities and schools in which vocational pathways are given the same validity as university-based pathways as a means to meet learner, workplace and productivity goals.

Employer Guidelines

- Undertake employer induction training before beginning placement of transition students.
- Use a transition work experience programme as an opportunity to 'try before you buy' for both yourself and the potential employee. Make this your first preference for hiring inexperienced employees from the market, using specialised employment brokerage systems to match parties.
- Learn how gender and cultural diversity can improve customer service, workplace environments and productivity.
- Develop a business ambition development and mentoring network. Use this to build small business leadership and training capacity in which staff are viewed as an investment rather than just a cost.
- Consider group employment as a way to help mitigate the risk of employment for very small firms and to provide a range of training opportunities for apprentices in an increasingly specialised trade business environment.
- Build a growth and sustainability plan around people capacity for small business operations. Focus this on hiring locally but enable learners to train outside the region if opportunities are not available locally.
- Continue learning and professional development support for the business and employees. Use this to identify and develop relevant skills in line with the business and career plans of those involved.

Student and Parent Guidelines

- Begin planning early to ensure learning decisions match career plans. Seek out a navigator who is neutral and independent to provide ongoing career information, guidance and support.
- Stay up-to-date on future work trends and consider what future employment may look like. Identify the financial impact of future changes in workplace requirements and consider the impact of this on training options.
- Look at education as an investment and consider the return on investment of each choice in the short-, medium- and long-term. Weigh up the future benefits and income from different education options against their costs.
- Consider the many non-university pathways which have been shown to provide high career satisfaction and high-income streams without ruling out university study in the future.
- Take advantage of the support available to address your life challenges as a learner. Work to remove any barriers you face in regard to developing skillsets and following career learning plans.
- Think about what you want your future to look like. Take advantage of the many online resources available and look at how career options align with your preferences, strengths, and goals.
- Seek out work experience opportunities. Build a portfolio of skills experience along with evidence of foundation skills, employability and work readiness skills, and any technical skills you have.
- Include an employment broker as part of the transition process to achieve a good match with potential employers.

Schools Guidelines

- Help staff to build awareness and understanding of workplace skill demands so they are well placed to help lay the foundations for work and support students to transition into employment later.
- Recognise that learners disengage when the learning environment and content does not meet their needs or appears to lack relevance.
- Make an early start assessing students and helping them to plan around potential careers and associated learning pathways. Consider the many non-university pathways which have been shown to provide high career satisfaction and high-income streams without ruling out university study in the future.
- Take advantage of the pastoral and social support available to address life challenges for learners. Work to remove any barriers students face regarding developing skillsets and following career learning plans.
- Work with transition navigator teams and learners' families to develop appropriate, informed, and flexible learning plans that support learners' career aspirations. Include out-of-school work experience opportunities in the plan and help individuals to learn in a way which suits them best.
- Look for ways to help students access relevant on-job workplace experience that is linked to their goals and will provide them with relevant skills for the area of work in which they are interested. Manage timetables to enable learning in the workplace.
- When students engage in work experience, seek feedback from the workplaces about the students' skill gaps and work to address these. In addition, provide feedback to workplaces about how learning experiences can be improved for learners.

Tertiary Organisation Guidelines

- Identify learners' aptitudes and goals. Incorporate relevant workplace experiences into their learning plan to help them develop the necessary skills for the career and workplace environment they are aiming to enter.
- Take advantage of the pastoral and social support available to address learners' life challenges. Work to remove any barriers students face regarding developing skillsets and following career learning plans.
- Be open to feedback from workplaces about gaps in skills (foundation, employability and/or technical skills) identified through work experience. In turn, provide feedback to workplaces about how on-the-job learning experiences can be improved for learners.
- Work with transition navigator teams and learners' families to develop appropriate, informed, and flexible learning plans that support learners' career aspirations. Ensure that these learning plans enable the development of those foundation, employability and technical skills that are best achieved in a class-room environment and that will promote successful transitions to employment, further learning and work.
- Develop, support, and utilise opportunities for micro-credentialing in the workplace to help learners become productive more quickly, thereby making it more financially feasible for small to medium enterprises to employ them. Use opportunities for micro-credentialing to respond more rapidly to changes in workplace and industry requirements.
- Create small, scaffolded credential systems using industry/unit standards that will appear on the learner's Record of Achievement and allow learners the flexibility to move between employers or across trades.

- Develop learning and teaching systems in partnership with ITOs to help the learner to transition easily into a job before programme completion. Ensure these systems allow learners to have achievements assessed and recorded as they occur and include arrangements to enable cross crediting and continued off-job learning as part of a learning plan in employment.
 - Use specialised employment brokerage systems to match learners with employers and to encourage and support learners into relevant sustainable employment and further learning.
 - Be clear about an organisation's distinctive contribution to the network of provision involved in a learner's development plan. Build synergistic, collaborative relationships and networks with other organisations seeking to achieve success for learners, employers, and the community.
- Leverage these networks to ensure learner pathways are effective, easily navigated, responsive to workplace and industry requirements, and focused on learners' needs and career goals.

Background

The Set4Life project is grounded in the recognition that the journey to employment involves many organisations who operate in isolation from each other, often leaving learner success to chance⁴. For example, information provided by TEOs often has a marketing flavour designed to attract enrolments and should be treated cautiously by learners and their advisors (TEC, 2014). It is crucial for schools, TEOs, and employers in New Zealand to work together in order to ensure that learners are supported to move successfully into productive careers. The success (or otherwise) of those transitions has far-reaching effects, with learners' choices and actions heavily influencing their ability to gain employment, their choice of career, their ability to progress and continue learning in the workplace, and the future financial wellbeing of the learner⁵ and often their family. At the same time, it affects employers' abilities to recruit staff that can meet their business's needs, their workforce planning, their growth, and their willingness to offer further opportunities to young learners.

Managed well, the transition into the workforce should ensure successful career outcomes for learners along with increased productivity and a strong supply of appropriate skills in the workplace. However, in practice, it can be extremely challenging for transitioning learners to navigate their way through training and employment in the current congested system. While some students have useful parental and/or teacher guidance, others are left struggling and disengaged at a key stage in life. As importantly, many young learners are poorly equipped for entering the workplace or the careers of their choice. In recent decades, New Zealand's VET system has become increasingly focused on outputs rather than the "outcomes (results) that employers and learners want" (VET Working Group, 2015). In New Zealand, a market-economy style funding system promotes education and training providers to compete for a limited pool of learners and to supply advice and learning solutions that maximise their funding and improve their margins. As a result, training and education programmes are often disconnected from industry and employer demand – and, accordingly, they fail to foster the competencies that learners must have in order to meet the needs of the workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2012a; Wagner, 2017). Added to this, the system contains numerous barriers and disincentives (including regarding funding and success measurement) to schools and TEOs working together.

⁴ See, for example, <http://www.Māorifutures.co.nz/who-we-are>

⁵ The term 'learner' can include those in some form of education (for example secondary school students, or current tertiary students), or anyone else potentially making decisions about engaging in tertiary education.

The inevitable result is ‘patch protection’ among players when what is needed is cooperation and collaboration (VET Working Group, 2015).

At the same time, it can be difficult for many employers to play an active role in supporting secondary school students into employment because small to medium enterprises (SMEs) often lack the capability and capacity to offer work experience and employment or apprenticeship opportunities. As one employer in this study reflected, while advancements in technology increasingly work against unskilled workers, young learners often have limited opportunities for work experience that might allow them to build their skills. This is particularly the case in more rural parts of New Zealand where a high proportion of employers are SMEs, many of which have no employees⁶ often due to the costs and business risks associated with employing new entrants to the workforce.

This systemic disconnection between players disadvantages both employers, who find it more difficult for them to access the skills they need within the workforce, and learners, who find it difficult to identify the careers they would like to move into or to gain entry into the job market. Moreover, the system is generating significant mismatches between the skills supplied and those that employers require in the workplace, making it more difficult for learners to achieve successful and sustainable careers (McKinsey & Company, 2012b). As the OECD (2019) has recently highlighted, “technological progress, globalisation and ageing populations are contributing to significant changes in the world of work, which brings the challenge of managing transitions into new job opportunities”. The OECD estimates that, in the next 15–20 years, up to 14% of jobs may disappear entirely and an additional 32% may radically change – meaning that nearly half of the world’s jobs are likely to be virtually unrecognisable in relation to those available now. Ensuring that the workforce is able to meet corresponding labour demands will require high quality adult learning and transitions support; it will also require training that is “aligned to labour market needs” (OECD 2019). An expert panel from the Royal Society Te Apārangi reported in 2017 that it had found “a growing and now significant mismatch between the knowledge and skills acquired through tertiary education to those needed in employment” in relation to employment pathways for science technicians. These findings resonate with observations in areas such as the traditional trades, describing an environment in which industry needs have significantly shifted and the existing tertiary education system has perhaps lacked the agility to keep up (OECD, 2014).

The mismatch of learner competencies and workplace demands is an issue that has attracted considerable attention in recent VET research, indicating the urgent need for a change in

“Our job-shopping infrastructure often leaves young people overwhelmed and baffled by the apparent abundance of choice available to them and the complexity of the pathways they must negotiate in the job shopping process.” (TEC, 2014)

vocational education to meet the rapidly changing needs of workplaces and industry.⁷ At various points in time, the New Zealand government has produced initiatives and programmes designed to improve secondary tertiary transitions and VET outcomes, but these have come with their own challenges. The options available for learners have become increasingly complex and lack overall cohesion and clarity of purpose. Funding streams in the transition space include dual pathways, engineering education to employment (EE2E), secondary tertiary alignment resource (STAR), employment passports, pre-trades, and Gateway – in addition to numerous

⁶ See, for example, <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/30e852cf56/small-business-factsheet-2017.pdf>

⁷ See, for example, New Zealand Digital Skills Forum’s recent report *Digital Skills for a Digital Nation*; Tertiary Education Commission’s *Tertiary Education in a World of Changing Skill Demands*; and World Economic Forum’s *The Future of Jobs*.

programmes funded by the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry for Primary Industries, and Te Puni Kōkiri. Some initiatives have significant success, including, for example, Kahui Ako (Communities of Learning). However, New Zealand research⁸ indicates that learners and whānau find it difficult to understand and negotiate the complicated range of options available at a point in time when they have not even identified what kind of career they would like to enter. Indeed, even providers appear to have difficulty understanding them; one school commented during the Set4Life project that they found the area so confusing, “we were thinking of doing a spreadsheet”.

System change is necessary to resolve this set of issues and produce a VET system capable of developing a workforce that can meet and adapt to the rapidly shifting needs of employers and industry (D2L, 2019). As the report from OECD (2019) highlights, meeting the changing demands of the labour market requires “adequate and sustainable funding, shared by stakeholders in line with the benefits that are received, as well as governance arrangements that can help ... to make different parts of adult learning systems work well together”. Education providers and other key stakeholders would be best supported to adopt a joined-up network of provision and to collaborate on pathways and support to improve outcomes for both learners and employers. To drive this, funding is more effective when more closely linked to medium- and long-term learner outcomes, and to reward skill development outcomes that are genuinely valued and impactful in the real world. At the same time, changes are also needed to the methods employed by those who work within the VET system⁹. Up-to-date, agile, collaborative, and cohesive practices are far more likely to be implemented on a wide scale in the presence of the right policy and funding levers. However, players within the existing system have the capability to develop, test, and implement effective practices and lay the foundation for further change and success.

This is the area in which Set4Life intervened. In 2013, The Skills Organisation funded a Vocational Education and Training consultant to chair the VET Outcomes Working Group, which consisted of a group of representatives from ITOs and ITPs. As a means of addressing the need for systemic change, this group liaised with several government agencies and collaborated on the development of a VET outcomes framework.¹⁰ Set4Life was one of several projects initiated as a means to test the group’s recommendations in a real-world environment. The project was established to research, develop, and test an operational framework that would support learners transitioning into employment by ‘joining up’ the systems and introducing a more collaborative and cohesive approach. Set4Life was led and partly funded by The Skills Organisation (Skills), an ITO. The project also received funding early in the project from TEC’s Joint Ventures and Amalgamation Project (JVAP) and Ako Aotearoa, in addition to support from Primary ITO, Northtec, and Te Matarau Education Trust.

The remainder of this document lays out the aims, methodology, and results of this initiative.

⁸ *Information for learners: Learner decision-making behaviours* (2014); recovered from <http://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Forms-templates-and-guides/0c2845bd85/Information-for-Learners-research-summary.pdf?r=1>

⁹ See, for example, <http://www.Māori futures.co.nz/who-we-are>

¹⁰ See especially *Developing an outcomes framework for New Zealand's Vocational Education and Training System*. Retrieved from https://www.itf.org.nz/sites/default/files/publications/VET_outcomes_discussion_document_1-2.pdf

Aims

The overall aim of Set4Life was to identify immediate, viable strategies for producing good transition outcomes while also informing efforts to shift the education system towards a 'cradle to career' approach. This set of guidelines is intended to support both goals. The guidelines seek to inform change in the way that learning, and work environments, are connected and bridged by highlighting the tension points of the existing system and identifying strategic areas for change. They also seek to identify practical steps that can be taken by players across the VET system to achieve more effective transitions. While recognising that it is exceptionally difficult for VET practitioners to achieve ongoing substantial change and success, until more supportive policy and funding settings are introduced, the Set4Life team aimed to provide tools that would enable real progress in regions where players form a willing network.

In terms of the project's direct interventions, Set4Life aimed to design and trial an effective framework for supporting young people to transition successfully from school to sustainable employment – that is, ongoing employment which the learner would be engaged in and committed to, and which would meet employment legislation in regard to adequate pay and working conditions. Specifically, the project set out to track three cohorts of learners; to identify their barriers to achievement, develop and implement solutions and interventions, and then record the results of those interventions. A successful transition was an outcome where learners had identified a career or field of employment that they wished to pursue, made progress towards developing the necessary technical, employability and other skills necessary for that career, and gained relevant work experience and/or employment.

This framework was intended to ensure successful transitions by locating learners within a network of relevant stakeholders – from schools and TEOs to employers – who would provide cohesive and integrated support. This framework was comprised of a holistic, cohesive, and integrated set of interventions which would assist learners to find and transition into work while gaining all relevant skills for their chosen career. In addition to directly assisting learners, the project team aimed to upskill employers to ensure that they were equipped to play an active role in supporting learners into the workplace, on the basis that this was likely to result in better outcomes for both parties.

The interventions that Set4Life designed and piloted were aimed at achieving the following outcomes within the trial groups:

- Enabling cross-sector collaboration and connectivity between education, training and employment players
- Trialling ways to help learners understand their career options and make sound decisions with a long-term outlook
- Identifying ways to help learners develop relevant, specific career pathways and to gain relevant workplace learning opportunities
- Identifying ways to support learners (through pastoral care and transitional support) to successfully transition into sustainable employment
- Assisting employers to play an active role in the transition process
- Increasing workforce capability for employers by matching them with appropriately prepared learners and helping them to recognise the strategic value of providing young learners with work experience and/or employment.

Methods and rationale

Setting up the project

At the start of the project, the Set4Life team conducted a literature review (as described in the background section) and gathered perspectives from learners to understand some of the barriers they faced during their learning and career transitions¹¹. This informed the design of the project and its interventions throughout the course of the project. Early research in the project highlighted that a one-size-fits-all philosophy was unlikely to be successful. Initiatives that work in one community do not automatically fit the needs of another; nor are they likely to achieve engagement from the community if they are imposed by external parties¹². Thus, the team recognised it would be critical to form a deep understanding of, and collaboration with, the local community. Accordingly, the project was designed to form connections with a range of stakeholders in the Northland community and utilise their perspectives and local knowledge to develop and implement specific interventions.

The management structure was designed to enable integrated, appropriate access and feedback to all players involved in pastoral, academic, and transition support, and to enable cooperation and information flow between them.

The Skills Organisation purchased WorkChoice¹³ as a vehicle for achieving a neutral, outcomes-focused approach for both Set4Life and future initiatives. WorkChoice is a charitable trust founded for the purpose of helping senior secondary school students to gain real-world experience and understanding of their employment options and transition successfully into careers. WorkChoice was positioned as a key stakeholder, with the WorkChoice manager providing the operational direction and management for the project staff.

At the same time, a project governance group was established to provide governance, advice, and support to the project. This group included representatives from Skills, NorthTec, Primary ITO, Te Matarau Education Trust, along with representatives from the electrical and primary industries, Kamo High School, and the Ministry of Education. The governance group agreed a set of criteria to determine how learners would be accepted into the programme, partly by identifying risk factors that indicated additional support was needed. Learners were then recruited into the programme if they fitted these criteria, which are discussed later.

The navigator role (Appendix One) was also created early in the project. This role was central to the project and was, in some respects, similar to the Whānau Ora navigator role, supporting learners to make good decisions and connecting learners to the different players that could help to meet their needs as well as directly providing advice and support.¹⁴ However, the model focused more squarely on the individual, with whānau included, but not necessarily at the centre of the intervention.

Set4Life was rolled out for one year, from 2016 to 2017. This timeframe enabled the project team to implement the Set4Life framework and track the impact of the project's full range of interventions as learners moved through various stages of the transition process. The project delivery team consisted of a full-time Project Lead and a part-time project coordinator, both of whom reported to the governance group. The Project Lead took responsibility for

¹¹ For example, see <https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/enabling-students-in-northland/>

¹² Eastwood K.C. (2016). Unpublished work. *Te Hiku Education: A study of the feasibility of options for future provision*. TEC-funded with support from MPI, MSD and TPK.

¹³ For more information on WorkChoice, see <https://workchoice.skills.org.nz/>

¹⁴ For more information on the Whānau Ora model, see <https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/whakamahia/whanau-ora>

articulating outcomes, which informed the direction of the project and allowed the team to measure its success. Project Goals, Activities and Measurements of Success are summarised in Appendix Two.

The scope of the project was kept narrow in relation to geographic location, industries and schools to ensure effective management of recruiting, supporting and tracking learner cohorts. The key location was Whangarei, Northland. This region has had ongoing challenges with youth disengagement, poorer educational outcomes, higher rates of unemployment, and challenges with successful transitions into employment.¹⁵ Northland has made significant progress in addressing these issues, with strategic initiatives such as the Tai Tokerau Growth Strategy and Northland Regional Economic Action Plan addressing skills and workforce development as an essential component of the region's ongoing economic development. Moreover, Northland has a growing demand for workers in the construction and primary industries, meaning that it has significant need for skilled vocational learners who are well prepared to move into these areas of employment. With Set4Life specifically targeting skills development in the transition space, Northland was an ideal location to run the study and was the site for which Ako Aotearoa contributed funding. A parallel project was also run in Auckland to provide an urban point of reference with larger numbers of learners. Results from the study were similar across both sites, but this report focuses primarily on the Northland project which received Ako Aotearoa investment.

In addition to the funding bodies and governance team, project stakeholders included school principals and careers teachers, tertiary pre-trades tutors, local ITO staff, programme leaders in tertiary education, and local employers. Members of the governance team leveraged existing relationships and connected with players as necessary to help form this network of stakeholders. Local government was also involved where possible, including through liaison with the Mayor's Taskforce for Jobs, an organisation that works to improve education, training, and employment outcomes for under 25-year-olds throughout much of New Zealand.

Learners entered Set4Life through multiple routes. Some students entered through referrals from their school or tutors; others entered as a result of parents seeking support for them. Some Set4Life participants entered the project as a direct result of attending a WorkChoice day (an intervention which is discussed later in the report). Since the project aimed to focus on transitions of learners into sustainable vocational employment, the group was limited to school, pre-trade ITP students and ITO trainees who were either approaching or already entering employment for the first time.

Learners were only accepted into the project if they met specific criteria. Different referral criteria were used for learners depending on which school or institution they were enrolled in, with the criteria meaning that the majority of participants were classed as being at moderate risk of leaving school or failing to progress into sustainable employment.¹⁶ This meant that

¹⁵ In 2016, 75.6% of school leavers (and 66.3% of Māori school leavers) had obtained NCEA level 2 or above in Northland, in comparison with the national average of 82.8% – although these rates have been improving since 2011. (See <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/know-your-region/region/qualifications/ncea-level-2?district=®ion=1>). Previously high unemployment rates had dropped by 2017 to 6.6% but were still above the national average of 4.6% (http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/income-and-work/employment_and_unemployment/LabourMarketStatistics_HOTPSep17qtr.aspx).

¹⁶ The differences in referral criteria were to accommodate the fact that risk factors vary from one environment to the next. To be accepted into the programme, Primary ITO trainees had to be Step 3 below on LNAAT and lack motivation to study; Skills trainees had to be lacking NCEA level 2 in maths or a science, lacking in work readiness and employability skills, with concerns about the match between employer and learner; NorthTec students had to have poor

they had (on average) some willingness and commitment to work, teamwork and self-management skills, and social confidence, but they tended to lack workplace or professional confidence, work readiness skills, and resources (such as driver's licence and transportation) and, additionally, had limited family support. Thus, they were at medium risk of disengaging from their chosen vocational pathway. On entering Set4Life, students not only enrolled but were also asked to sign an enrolment form and commitment form to ensure they were making a considered commitment to participating in the programme and were clear about what it entailed. Families were also asked to sign a commitment form, where appropriate¹⁷. This helped to ensure that all parties understood their roles.

In Northland, 32 learners participated in the project, focusing on four main vocational education pathways: electrical, plumbing, landscaping, and agriculture. These learners were from four different schools, the NorthTec pre-trades programme, and industry training (associated with ITOs). Eighteen of the thirty-two students identified as Māori, twenty as New Zealand European, and one was recorded as 'other'¹⁸. Twenty-eight of the learners were male and just four were female, which is broadly reflective of the fact that the primary and construction industries remain heavily skewed towards attracting male employees.

Information capture and use

The team used mixed methods throughout the project to collect data on learners' backgrounds, experiences, progress, and outcomes. Methods were chosen with the intention of gathering reliable and relevant information that could be used to inform and refine interventions as learners progressed. This allowed the project team to form insights into the participants' experiences of the project and their perceptions of learning and progression. All participants underwent entry and exit interviews with the navigator. Learners were also asked to carry out self-assessments of their own wellbeing, on exit. This allowed the navigator's assessment and impressions to be considered in conjunction with the experiential knowledge of the learner themselves. To help validate the exit data, an additional sample of learners and employers was also interviewed by an independent contractor.

Foundation skills (including literacy, numeracy, finance, and health and safety) were assessed using online tools, quizzes, and observational activities. Literacy tests were carried out on a sample of the learners by the Skills' literacy team to help determine if learners had the necessary literacy levels to succeed in the workplace. These tests were done with the learners' permission, using LNAAT (the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool)¹⁹. These tests provided a summative assessment of literacy that could be considered alongside other forms of information, such as feedback from the workplace on participants' literacy levels. The data (combined with that from the Auckland project) also enabled comparison of the validity of estimating literacy and numeracy competency from level two NCEA results.

Some forms of evaluation of learners' progress were conducted on a monthly basis, including reflective learner diaries and one-to-one, face-to-face meetings with the learners. The one-to-one meetings were carried out between the learner and the navigator, with the duration and content of the meeting varying considerably in accordance with the needs of the learner. In addition, the Project Lead contacted groups of learners twice monthly on average. During

attendance, a score of 25 or below on the NorthTec electrical aptitude test, and have failed to secure work experience; and school learners had to be in year 12, with no idea of their next steps, or in year 13, with demonstrable risk in relation to completing their trades academy programmes.

¹⁷ Usually younger school-based learner families.

¹⁸ Learners could select more than one ethnicity.

¹⁹ <https://assess.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/>

these meetings, she would gather information about what was and wasn't working, what the barriers were, and what interventions were being used.

The team carried out bi-monthly semi-structured interviews with work experience employers and the education and training providers of learners engaged with the project. This functioned to identify the issues being raised in the workplace and test whether interventions being put in place were working from the perspective of employers and providers. It also allowed the team the opportunity to keep employers well-informed and help them to resolve any issues. The choice of interviewer was based on relationships between team members and interviewees. Employers of school students and relevant staff were interviewed by the navigator; employers of ITO trainees were interviewed by ITO field staff; employers of pre-trades students and relevant staff at NorthTec were interviewed by an independent contracted navigator. All interviewers reported back to the Project Lead. Information was shared with relevant parties positioned to make use of it. For example, if an employer identified literacy issues for a work experience student, this information was fed back to the school to be addressed; if a learner's progress in pre-trades slowed down as a result of literacy and numeracy issues, a specialist could be called in to help address this. By connecting the players, the aim was to create feedback loops leading to effective, targeted support for the learner.

In addition, the navigator also carried out quarterly reflective reviews with each learner's whānau. These reviews differed markedly in structure and approach, depending on the particular whānau and its situation. In some cases, reviews were restricted by issues such as family violence; in others there was a more positive foundation within the family, although often accompanied by a lack of awareness of the family's role in supporting the learner. In many situations, the navigator focused on informing and negotiating with whānau, often to help them to realise their importance in assisting the learner and help them identify specific support strategies and remove barriers. For example, if a learner had difficulty in getting to work because of transport issues, the navigator might work with both the whānau and the employer to find a joint solution, in which the family dropped the learner off at a particular location and the employer then picked them up.

In this way, the project was structured to maximise the flow of information between different parties and create conditions that encouraged cooperative solutions. To reduce siloed action by different parties, the management of information and relationships sought to encourage multiple parties to find ways to work together to support the learner more effectively.

Throughout the project the governance group met monthly with the project team to discuss progress made, along with opportunities, challenges and risks faced by the project, and to offer support and advice to the operational team. The project team also made a point of regularly sharing findings from the project across Jobs and Skills Hubs²⁰ (a group of hubs that help to fast-track large volumes of employees into construction-related jobs). This enabled the Set4Life team to benefit from rapid learning, while also circulating learning to other groups that might benefit.

²⁰ See, for example, <https://corporate.aucklandairport.co.nz/corporate-responsibility/employment/ara-jobs-and-skills-hub>

Interventions

The Set4Life interventions were designed to function cohesively, so that every learner received structured wraparound support that was personalised and relevant to each individual. Interventions were customised and driven by participants' learning needs (relevant to their career preferences and aptitudes) rather than being tailored to their existing institution's offerings. Carpenter (2008) highlights that all good career decision-making depends on self-knowledge (understanding one's own aspirations, strengths, weaknesses, and motivations) and occupational knowledge (knowledge of the world of work). Since learners' employment opportunities and outcomes are integrally linked to what industries and workplaces need from their workers, interventions also considered the needs of employers in learners' preferred fields of work. Interventions supported learners to make sound decisions about their choice of career and then to gain relevant learning and experience by working within industry at the same time as studying in school and/or at a TEO. This meant that learners were supported to complete qualifications (such as NCEA) while also gaining work experience and skills, and potentially also beginning an industry qualification. Learners could not only identify but also experience and evaluate their preferred choice of career before making a more definitive choice. Thus, they would either be supported to progress in an informed and relevant way, or to discover early on that they may be better to choose a different option.

One of the key information-based interventions was the introduction of WorkChoice days, which were used to help students reach an early understanding of their options and opportunities for moving into work. The team hosted WorkChoice days in schools to inform year nine and ten students about employment and opportunities, using practitioners across various industries, and to assist them begin career planning. At Whangarei Boys High School, WorkChoice experiential learning opportunities with industry practitioners were run for two days, with 536 year 9 and year 10 students attending presentations and engaging in hands-on activities related to Horticulture/Agriculture, Health Sciences, Creative Arts, Travel and Tourism/Hospitality, and Electrical Trades. The main aim of these events was to introduce industry opportunities, what to expect from future employment, and how to ensure they choose the right NCEA subjects as part of their career plan. These events simultaneously helped learner participants to be better informed, along with project buy-in from schools, by helping them to discover first-hand what the Set4Life project was working towards.

Early research had indicated that students would benefit from a clear induction and a single point of contact for guidance and pastoral support aligned to both learner and employer need. Set4Life responded to this need with the creation of a navigator role ('kaiwhakatere'). High-quality VET has increasingly been focusing on the inclusion of relationship building in the form of mentoring, coaching, and case management (Figgis, 2009). The navigator was positioned as a centralised player to offer these functions (in part) and to help learners identify and access support from other sources where needed. Navigators need to be well-connected in the community, since the Set4Life team recognised early on that the evidence pointed to the importance of building effective links and connections between players. Therefore, the navigator was there to serve as a liaison with all parties and form a bridge between schools/TEOs, learners, and the workplace so that they could collectively work towards creating successful transitions. Since the navigator was employed independently of the other stakeholders, they remained a neutral figure who could be responsive to the needs of all key players.

There were two levels of navigators created; a Project Lead and a WorkChoice Pathway Advisor. The split role was due to an inability to find, locally in one person, all the skills required to inform system change and carry out the operational role. These roles worked cooperatively to develop a carefully managed and integrated navigation support process and to inform system change. The Project Lead took a higher level, strategic approach to plan, develop and

report on clear, and supported, flexible pathways and systems to support learners' career choices. The WorkChoice Pathway Advisor (navigator) supported the Project Lead by providing and facilitating induction and hands-on pastoral support for learners throughout their journey, working on day-to-day solutions and guidance. In addition, the Pathway Advisor used their employer networks to locate suitable work placements, pass on CVs, and ensure learners were work-ready and therefore more employable. Both navigators worked together to compare notes, with the Project Lead reporting on a monthly basis to the governance group.

The Set4Life interventions broadly followed the Kaupapa Māori Wellbeing Assessment Model²¹, with an initial assessment, (ongoing) formative assessment, summative assessment, and exit statements to follow the progress of a learner throughout their journey. When participants first joined Set4Life, they were provided with a two-day induction, assessed, and helped to complete individual learning and career plans. This included conversation to help the navigator build relationships and trust with the learner and their family²² (as appropriate), build a picture of the learner's world view, and establish a benchmark for further change and progression. Learners then participated in a monthly one-to-one meeting with the navigator involving: research questions designed to track learner development and growth; helping the learner to reflect on their progress; jointly reviewing the learning plan if needed; and ensuring appropriate support was in place for current needs. The navigator worked with learners to recognise and celebrate success. Progress was also supported using quizzes and workshops. After the monthly one-to-one meetings, the navigator updated the learners' school or provider.

Navigators met regularly with learners, mostly acting as a facilitator, guiding and enabling learners as they progressed along their chosen pathway, and by locating suitable opportunities to develop relevant skills. On average, meetings with learners were held once a month and were 34 minutes long. However, the length of individual meetings varied greatly according to need. For some learners who were progressing well, meetings could be just a few minutes long; other learners who had major barriers such as family violence or mental health issues could require two hours or more. Meetings were flexible in content and could address whichever strategic priorities and issues had the greatest current relevance. Common areas of focus included discussion of career options and career changes, feedback on work experience, assistance to gain employment and apprenticeships, and pastoral care.

One important area of focus was the development and management of an individualised career and learning plan for each learner. Learning plans are increasingly used by VET practitioners to ensure personalised support for learners and to ensure that learning programmes are aligned with the learner's prior learning and current competence (Figgis, 2009). This helps to ensure that further learning is tailored to an individual's needs and goals while preventing the unnecessary repetition of previous learning relating to an existing skillset. The Set4Life navigator involved the learner in the development of the plan to ensure they took ownership of it, while helping them to identify and address their strengths, barriers and opportunities, whether in relation to life, learning, or the workplace.

Learning plans were based on a strengths model, where strengths were focused on as a starting point for development, rather than focusing initially on learner deficits and creating a negative representation. This was carried out collaboratively with the learner and navigator and led to the learner establishing goals and development areas around each core capability (the capabilities being the Ako Aotearoa Foundation Core Capabilities, Graduate Profile Level

²¹ See, for example, <https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/maori-wellbeing-assessment-model/>

²² Usually younger school-based learners' families.

2)²³. These core capabilities include literacy, numeracy, learning, work, community and cultural, progression and occupational capability. The support of further learning took a number of different forms: for example, helping students to identify and participate in relevant learning programmes (such as pre-trades, literacy and numeracy), identifying and agreeing suitable workplace experiences (in discussion with the learner's school or TEO), providing study assistance, and helping students to prepare for assessments. The learning plan was also used, with navigator oversight, to help prepare learners to exit from school and ensure they had a clear induction into the workplace and tertiary learning or post-secondary programmes.

The navigator worked with employers and brokered individual learner work experience with them. They were also responsible for arranging inductions facilitated by WorkChoice staff to prepare both learners and employers for successful learner transitions into the workplace. Learners needed clear, accurate guidance on what to expect in the workplace and what was expected from them so that they were well prepared for work – thus benefitting both the learners and their new employers. Inductions included talks, workshops, videos, activities, and opportunities for students to have their questions answered. Teambuilding, problem-solving, communication, and giving and taking instructions, among other activities, gave learners the chance to further develop their employability, foundation, and other skills and to practise communication and presentation skills. This prepared students for what to expect and how to make their work experience as successful as possible. Workshops were also used to provide opportunities for learners to reflect on their progress, celebrate success and feedback ideas to improve the induction process. Inductions were also offered to employers. Small regional employers lack the time and resources to provide significant help to learners as they transition into employment, and some needed help to develop reasonable expectations of the employee and ensure learners' needs were taken care of adequately. Inductions provided this and helped to ensure that learners received a customised workplace learning experience that supported their progression into work.

During the project, navigators also informed and engaged employers in the employment of learners, but through experience it was found that the scope was too broad for one role. The project identified the role of work brokers; people who job match by introducing candidates to employers who are looking for apprentices.²⁴

The navigator's other key function was pastoral care. It is widely recognised in VET that learning is not only determined by classroom and work-based experiences; learners' progress can be helped or hindered by numerous factors in their personal lives, ranging from financial challenges to family circumstances. Figgis (2009) observes that these issues must be acknowledged even though it is often the "province of other professionals" (rather than VET practitioners) to address them. However, this comes with the inevitable risk that pastoral care may be fragmented – in that it is not aligned or integrated with the learner's intended pathway or other forms of support – or that it may be neglected altogether if other professionals are absent, unavailable, or unaware of the learner's needs. The Set4Life team recognised that learners were therefore likely to benefit from incorporation of pastoral care into the programme. While navigators could not possibly directly address every barrier that a learner faced, the pastoral care element of the navigator's role was designed to ensure that navigators helped learners to identify their challenges and, where possible, to access help from an appropriate and accessible source.

²³ <https://ako.ac.nz/assets/reports/5ca3017eb8/A-Foundation-For-Progression-Graduate-Profiles-for-Level-1-and-2-Qualifications.pdf>

²⁴ <https://skills.org.nz/employers/job-match/>

Results and findings

At the end of Set4Life, 59% of Northland learners had moved into relevant employment or an apprenticeship. Another 22% had returned to school with many noting a need for more skills and/or that they were not yet equipped for full-time employment. 13% had left school but were not studying or employed elsewhere. The remaining learners were either employed in another (unrelated) area of work or were undertaking further study.

At exit point, every learner who participated in the Northland programme agreed or strongly agreed that Set4Life had had a positive effect on their lives, that they had improved in confidence, that they had personal goals, that they had new skills that had added value, and that they were able to use the things they had learnt in their job or work experience. Fifty-eight percent of school learners strongly agreed that they were more confident in themselves and that they had set goals; and forty-two percent strongly agreed that they understood how they individually learned.

A limitation of the study design is that it is not known what the medium- to long-term outcomes were for these groups. Significant changes could, of course, have occurred after the study ended and the impact of the study may have endured for some time.

“Got me a job! Full time work at a place I love. With a good boss. And I am doing my Primary ITO Units which is cool because I can get qualified in something. The work experience I got to do because it got me interested in the job and I knew I wanted to do Landscaping after that.”
ITO learner

There were many learners that gave feedback like this learner; “Got me a job! Full time work at a place I love. With a good boss. And I am doing my Primary ITO Units which is cool because I can get qualified in something. The work experience I got to do because it got me interested in the job and I knew I wanted to do Landscaping after that”. Overall, this data confirmed that there is likely to be merit in replicating or drawing from Set4Life initiatives in order to improve transitional support in New Zealand on an ongoing basis.

This section highlights the key results and findings of the project, organised around lessons learned that may improve the outcomes of secondary and tertiary students as they

transition into careers. This includes identification of areas in which practices and strategies proved beneficial and may be directly adopted or modified for use in other transitions programmes around New Zealand. It also includes identification of key issues. Some of the challenges encountered by the Set4Life team were able to be directly addressed during the study; the findings concerning these challenges and their potential solutions is likely to prove useful when designing transitions initiatives. However, some challenges were indicative of systemic issues that can only be realistically resolved through changes in policy and funding. Accordingly, the best practice guidelines for this document include guidelines for policy makers, as well as for tertiary and secondary educational institutions, employers, parents and students.

These results and findings form the rationale for the best practice guidelines on pages 7–9 of this report.

Navigators and work brokers should play a key role in assisting learners to assess their career options and transitions into the workplace

Throughout Set4Life, the navigator role was highly effective in integrating the different parts of the system by working with a coalition of stakeholders across the transition space, including learners, careers staff, teachers, Gateway staff, Careers New Zealand staff, and employers. As a neutral facilitator, the navigator was able to act as a bridge between the different parties, working to leverage their interests and capabilities and coordinate their

support for the learner. Employer feedback reinforced that Set4Life learners were focused and engaged in their work experiences compared to other programmes where employers felt they were merely ‘babysitters’.

Feedback indicated that learners particularly appreciated the benefits of working with the navigator as a neutral and centralised point of information and guidance. The navigator helped learners to identify and move through clear, supported, and logical pathways that provided career flexibility. This meant learners were supported to engage in and test relevant and appropriate learning and workplace experience without committing to fixed career paths. As

“if we do choose a certain industry and we are not liking it, they will try to change it – it was a great thing – you weren’t stuck.” Learner

“When I first started with Set4Life, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do, but now I have spent most of the year learning about it and doing my work placement, I know that it is what I want to do.” Learner

one Set4Life learner commented, their navigator tried to ensure that “if we do choose a certain industry and we are not liking it, they will try to change it – it was a great thing – you weren’t stuck”. This provides a valuable opportunity to gain insights into their chosen career and the workplace and employer they have been matched with, before committing further. Learners welcomed the opportunity to gain some work experience before settling on a path. One student summed this up with the comment, “When I first started with Set4Life, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do, but now I have spent most of the year learning about it and doing my work placement, I know that it is what I want to do”.

Inductions were also particularly popular with learners, with feedback indicating that this aspect of the programme had particularly high impact and value. Many learners said that they were gaining ongoing benefit from specific skills they learnt during induction. For example, one learner expressed appreciation for learning communication skills, commenting that “I used to be bad at talking in front of a lot of people ... I am confident now”; another indicated “I learnt heaps – like how to go to job interviews ... what to do at work and all the skills”. One of the educators indicated that the induction had successfully conveyed that participants could “have fun and learn” and participate in teamwork while also modelling that “there are boundaries that we don’t go past”. As a result, learners became more “aware of an employer’s point of view” which was something many “teachers don’t even know”.

This connection to the employer was one of the reasons the navigator was so effective in working with other players. By developing relationships with employers, navigators were better placed, not only to locate work opportunities for learners, but also to prepare learners to understand and meet workplace requirements. Appropriate skills development benefits employer and learner alike, ensuring that the learner is more employable and finds their footing more quickly and easily once they are in the workplace. By working with employers to understand their needs, the navigator was also well-placed to ensure their voice was heard more strongly in schools and TEOs, as well as within families. This meant that these players were better positioned to assist learners to plan their careers and develop relevant skillsets that are genuinely valued in the workplace. Additionally, the navigator also offered inductions to employers. This started with an explanation of the programme and employers were reassured when they heard that learners had been through a health and safety induction programme, workshops and one-to-one training to understand more about realities in the workplace, and were focused on learning about a career they had chosen; and the employer knew that the navigator was at the end of a phone if they needed support. Navigators worked with experienced employers, who had many years of offering work experience, and were able to take learnings from these relationships into new workplaces to help them develop their

capacity and capabilities for successfully integrating new entrants into the workforce.

“The Set4Life programme has had the effect of employing youth who with their learning history may otherwise not have been offered apprenticeships.”

“Student X does have difficulty with exams and writing because of his learning difficulty. With the support of (navigator) who has set up an individual programme alongside ETCO, X has passed his end of term exams and has gained confidence in his own ability.”

Examples of this included recognition that learners often lack confidence and resilience. Tools to mitigate this were included along with discussion of the workshops and other learner induction interventions to assure employers that the journey had begun. This helped employers to develop realistic expectations of learners and make the workplace a safe and welcoming space in which learners could be integrated, supported and learn. This work has since led Skills to research ways to build business ambition in trades firms in Whangarei, and that has led to the national Business Advisor Programme²⁵ that aims to build the capability of employers so that they become more confident and build ambition for their business, and move from treating employees as a cost to seeing them as an investment to be supported.

Moreover, while learners valued the opportunity to test out a particular trade and workplace, employers benefitted from the opportunity to evaluate a learner during the work

experience to determine whether they were suited to longer-term employment. There was some concern from employers during Set4Life that they might ‘end up with the drop kicks’ or find that they are ‘babysitting’ difficult students; a perception that had arisen from experience with other transitional programmes in which students, careers, and employers were not well matched. The tendency for schools to sometimes use these programmes as a convenient way

“These ones are a step up – versus the kids that do – what’s that thing called – Gateway – better than those by FAR – the gateway ones honestly you feel like you are babysitting them.” Employer

to pass on students who are not performing well was evident in Set4Life as well, with a number of schools referring students to the programme who did not meet the requested criteria or who had no real interest in the opportunity. These students were not accepted into the programme. Subsequent evidence indicated that Set4Life was likely to increase the employers’ willingness to provide further opportunities for learners in the future, both because they could test out students’ suitability before

offering ongoing employment and because they were being matched with more suitable potential employees.

As an example, one Set4Life pre-trades learner, who was previously “struggling to find an employer willing to give him work experience”, was offered a job or apprenticeship at two different employers as a result of the help he received from his Set4Life navigator. The navigator had used their employer networks to locate and secure opportunities suitable for that student. Another learner with learning difficulties lacked the relevant school qualifications to be accepted by an employer for the role that he wanted. With help from the Set4Life team, the learner took a pre-trade course and returned to the employer, emphasising that he was committed to getting into the trade. The learner then successfully progressed through a customised learning programme with the assistance of a navigator and a TEO, while the employer indicated that they had “benefitted from a hard-working young man who practically is absolutely up to the job”.

²⁵ <https://skills.org.nz/employers/business-advisor-programme/>

These results indicated a positive spiral. By enabling different players to work in a coordinated and collaborative way to assist learners to transition into further learning and employment, the navigator was able to benefit employers as well as learners. Helping learners to test their compatibility with a career and an employer appeared beneficial to learners' attitudes towards work placements. Some employers signalled an early concern that they didn't want to be involved if it meant employing "the naughty kids from school", which stemmed from negative experiences of other vocational education initiatives. Later in the project, however, employers were indicating that the quality of student they were dealing with was a "step-up" and better "by far" than students they had encountered through programmes such as Gateway. The students were "obviously keener – they have it in their mindset this is what they want to do for a job, versus the other ones [who think] I don't know, I'll just give this a go". The customised attention dedicated to preparing and supporting learners not only improved the experience for them but also provided higher value to their employers, thereby improving the sustainability of the project for both. The evident motivation and enthusiasm of Set4Life participants was almost certainly the result of a combination of factors, including the emphasis upon flexible, unique pathways and high-quality pastoral care (which will be addressed in more detail shortly), along with the fact the navigator matched learners with appropriate work opportunities and also had them well-prepared. It seems likely that ongoing involvement with such a project could lead to a greater number (and potentially quality) of work experience and sustainable employment for students.

Nevertheless, the project also identified a challenge with scale. Feedback from both the team and the navigator over the course of the project indicated that the navigator was overloaded and could not realistically carry out all their intended functions on an ongoing basis. This would be a distinct problem when rolling out a similar project on a larger scale. For this reason, it would be both more effective and more scalable to create a dedicated work broker/job matching role to work alongside the navigator. The object of the work broker would be to focus on matching learners with employers, ensuring that employees have the appropriate competencies, attitudes, and career aspirations for the roles and employers they are matched with. As the primary source of contact with the employer, the work broker would also take on the role of managing the expectations of all parties in a transparent and relevant way and carrying out inductions for employers. Using a dedicated work broker should prove more effective than reducing the ratio of navigators to learners because a work broker would have greater opportunity to form relationships with employers and to develop expertise and in-depth knowledge of negotiating work placements and matching learners with employers. Brokering in this way should improve the outcome for both learners and employers and pave the way for employers to invest in creating further opportunities for young learners in the future. At the same time, the navigator would continue to work directly with learners while being informed by the support network (including the work broker) on the learners' experiences and progress in the workplace.

This system could integrate employer access to suitably skilled local workers by supporting learners to develop their competencies and careers through a locally responsive system. This may reduce the requirement for employers to look outside the region, reducing costs and increasing productivity. Given that the role of a work broker technically sits outside of the core role of the education system – at least, in its current form – it is unclear as to where its funding or operations should be located. It is possible that such a role may instead be best funded through a government agency such as the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment or the Ministry of Social Development. Like a navigator, a work broker should not logically operate out of schools or training providers which stand to benefit from channelling learners in directions that best support their own institutional targets or preferences. It may

be better suited to placement within ITOs, which already possess a close relationship with employers and industry. The funding source and location of the role should reflect the need for the work broker, like the navigator role, to remain neutral, funded and measured according to the achievement of demand-driven outcomes that serve the needs of learners and employers alike.

A network of provision and support is required for navigators and work brokers

The Set4Life team found it was challenging to recruit staff who were capable and competent to work as navigators in this transition space. Managing a project in alignment with a strategic objective is a quite different skillset from building relationships and directly supporting learners. Accordingly, it was difficult to recruit a navigator who could do both. Added to this, in regional communities, personal networks can be a key factor in success – something that was reflected in the fact that many of the stakeholder relationships during Set4Life either already existed or were based on previous connections between work or family. Being well-connected was an essential attribute of the navigator role, given that the navigator needed to form strong working relationships with a broad range of players. Well-connected navigators are better positioned to find and develop work opportunities through existing relationships. However, at times, the nature of navigators' existing connections drove the direction for learners, which had the potential to limit learners' options. Moreover, it was equally critical that navigators had strong skills and knowledge in a range of other areas: for example, facilitating successful transitions and inductions, delivering pastoral care, being culturally aware, identifying and facilitating solutions for literacy needs, understanding employment options and pathways, and understanding employers' needs. This skillset was not easy to locate, given the limited pool of candidates available in the study area. In addition, navigators faced a lack of support at times due to conflicting duties within the schools. Support by the schools' senior leadership team is critical, as it results in workplace learning being better accommodated in schools, as timetables and other support mechanisms are put in place to enable learners to better integrate classroom and workplace learning. It takes a significant investment of time by a capable navigator to build enough understanding and trust between all parties to enable effective vocational learning pathways to be built and supported so that learners can gain the skills they need both in classrooms and in workplaces.

This problem was partly dealt with by using the existing strengths of the project team. This included the Project Lead, who worked to bring schools on board, and the WorkChoice Manager, who worked to establish relationships among key stakeholders, including ITOs and local employers. Key stakeholders themselves contributed to building the network as well, with a senior NorthTec manager and ITO managers working to develop pre-trades and ITO relationships. Other relationships with the wider range of stakeholders were then developed further by the navigator.

The strength of relationships between the navigator and those directly involved in supporting learners and employers was found to be key to creating and supporting opportunities for individual learner success. To build an effective navigator system throughout the country will require strong and appropriate advisory and management support. It will involve navigators with professional competencies within the world of work and the world of learning that have an ability to develop and facilitate effective networks of willing vocational education professionals across the education system including those effective in the development of employer ambition and capability and in job matching. This navigator-facilitated network underpins the opportunities they can access for learners. It may also help to ensure that competent staff are retained. There were several changes in personnel during this project as

staff found the challenge of changing managers, and related differing approaches, too demanding. Enough support is necessary to ensure the navigator role is manageable and rewarding within a system that supports learners along their learning pathway into sustainable employment and progression.

Literacy and numeracy must be prioritised for all learners

Of the 39 learners with level two NCEA that were tested with the LNAAT tool during Set4Life (in both Northland and Auckland), 59% were below the reading threshold and 31% below the numeracy threshold required to succeed in the workplace.²⁶ These figures correlate with wider research into workforce literacy, which has shown that 43% of adult New Zealanders have less than the minimum level of literacy necessary to succeed in the workplace and in daily life, and less than 51% have the necessary level of numeracy (Industry Training Federation et. al., n.d.). The government itself has acknowledged in its recent NCEA review that “students often come out of NCEA with inconsistent levels of literacy and numeracy”, which means that many are not equipped to “engage with the community, further education and work”²⁷ Combined with a lack of focus in schools on other work readiness skills, the gap in required workplace literacy levels suggests that many secondary students may be poorly prepared to secure and succeed in their chosen careers²⁸. Although those that remain at secondary school and achieve NCEA Level 3 will raise their literacy further, there are a significant number of students who are unlikely to do so. Reasons for this can range from personal aptitude and inclination (with some students simply unable to relate to the school environment) to family reasons and financial imperatives. As one Set4Life employer commented, “The whole school system is designed a certain way and there is a whole bunch of kids that don’t fit that model” even though “they are really capable”. This is supported by Ngāi Tahu findings that “our education system does not work for many Māori”.²⁹

These students must be supported in their literacy and numeracy development as they

“Set4Life personnel supported ITO apprentices not progressing satisfactorily and found that the reason was often a lack of numeracy skills. Apprentice progress improved markedly when appropriate support using specialised staffing was arranged.”

proceed into the workforce. Business and education leaders highlight that a good level of literacy and numeracy is essential to improve career options, produce a highly skilled workforce, lift workplace productivity, support economic growth, and ensure personal, financial and social wellbeing (ITF et. al., n.d.). When learners transition into the workforce without the necessary levels of literacy and numeracy, it is likely to result in poorer outcomes for all involved. During the Set4Life project, the team found that many of the ITO apprentices who failed to progress satisfactorily were lacking numeracy skills. When these learners were given specialised support to improve these skills, their progress improved markedly as they achieved credits that they had been

struggling to gain. Thus, Set4Life reinforced wider research indicating that achieving minimum literacy and numeracy levels is essential for learning progression and that learners do not

²⁶ Learners were tested in both Northland and Auckland to ensure an adequate sample size.

²⁷ <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-review/change-package/strengthen-literacy-and-numeracy/>

²⁸ See, for example, <http://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Reports/3198200d93/Alignment-research-paper-Summary.pdf>

²⁹ https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5a81d9daa7e787000152855e/5abad1a154d3df0155104492_Māori%20Futures%20Collective%20-%20Rewiring%20the%20System%20Online.pdf

always have the necessary levels at the point they exit the school system. Ensuring that learners are assessed for literacy and numeracy and provided with any necessary support as they transition is essential to supporting their ongoing learning and ability to succeed in the workplace.

Schools and TEOs must become more responsive, flexible, and focused on demand-driven outcomes

One of the key challenges faced by the Set4Life team was an apparent disconnect between the aims of the project and the perceptions and/or operational preferences of schools. Some schools were resistant to the introduction of Set4Life as a project that appeared to simply add to the already confused and congested range of transition options for students. Other schools saw value in the career and support for more integrated classroom and workplace learning that the project offered. As an example, Whangarei Boys High School staff all worked hard to collaborate with project team members in support of its students, and some staff in other schools welcomed the opportunity for students to receive a level of support that they were not equipped to provide. Nevertheless, the fact that there was some resistance among

***One Northland principal said
“When I came here as a principal, I entered what seemed like the Eton of the North because staff and many parents saw success as learners continuing into a university programme while other pathways were seen as a lesser option.”***

schools was reflective of the fact that the transition space lacks a coherent, coordinated, and focused approach to VET.

There are several reasons for schools not embracing supported vocational pathways for learners. Many schools tend to focus on university pathways, promoting certain types of qualification at the expense of vocational education and other pathways into employment. On average, apprentices have almost identical financial outcomes to degree holders at the end of their careers (Berl, 2017), having developed essential competencies early in their careers through workplace learning. Yet

stakeholders within vocational education frequently report that many schools are still positioning non-university pathways primarily as options for those who have had poor outcomes at school. As one employer in Set4Life commented, the “education system is not geared to people who like to work with their hands”. Those who do not engage well with more traditionally academic approaches effectively receive less support to locate and achieve the skills and careers to which they are suited. This may well contribute to the high level of disengagement of learners at young ages in Northland.

Another issue observed during Set4Life was that schools tended to focus on credit gathering for NCEA with a limited appreciation of the relevance of those credits in the workplace. The navigator identified that in some instances students would benefit from prioritising level two unit standards, associated with important workplace skills, in order to support their transition into employment. However, if the learners had already achieved their minimum level two credit quota through achievement standards, schools were often reluctant to support students working towards these credits, even if they were highly desirable to employers. This lack of preparation was reflected in employers’ experiences of new employees, with one employer commenting “we are not starting early enough with giving them real life learning ... now, they are just doing their standard topics”. At present, schools are sometimes measured on non-vocationally related NCEA success and it will take a system change to overcome this form of skills mismatch.

The inclination to prioritise credit gathering and to focus heavily on university pathways are related problems. Both can be linked to policy and funding drivers which encourage schools to focus on a series of minimum outputs; in particular, the achievement of NCEA levels 1, 2, and 3, and associated achievements such as University Entrance and scholarships. While these achievements are genuine accomplishments for the students involved, they do not always set students up for a successful transition into further training and employment after secondary school. If students have an opportunity to move productively into a vocation – whether through direct employment, work/study or apprenticeships – schools must be placed in a position to support appropriate skills development rather than block it. This may require a different credit ‘outcome’ or pathway to those which are currently the standard. Hence, policy makers may need to revise expectations for schools around NCEA to support optimal

“Keep going with the programme – I think it can only improve – and I think it’s a great opportunity for the young kids – it doesn’t affect our business in any way and if I can help one kid decide that that’s what he wants to do – you are on a winner. We want to encourage kids to get into trades.” Employer

ways of working, rather than leaving education providers to work around structural barriers. This includes the need to incentivise schools to support all students in achieving the most useful selection of NCEA assessment standards for their future career options, rather than focusing on achieving the minimum number of credits to pass.

At the same time, it is important that schools engage meaningfully with initiatives to open students’ pathways into employment, rather than focusing on outdated models of what it is to be ‘successful’. Schools need to enter closer relationships with employers, assist students directly to transition into employment, ensure they are up to date with what employers’ needs are, and locate

opportunities for students to gain relevant work experience. Careers staff in schools also need to be well-supported by senior staff to ensure they support the full range of career options for students – including vocational career options – and are equipped to understand and use all of the available tools, resources, and opportunities available to their students.

“ERO found that students often had to cope with their ‘Trades Academy’ work in addition to a full timetable of schoolwork. This proved especially difficult for many as the school curriculum continued even when the students were away from class attending their tertiary programme.” (Education Review Office 2015)

Schools, as part of an integrated system, may need to look for ways to move beyond the use of traditional fixed timetables that make it difficult for students to learn in both the classroom and in the workplace during school hours. Throughout the project, rigid timetabling limited the opportunities for flexibility that enabled workplace learning and training for some school learners. Some students needing to attend an external course at a TEO were then severely limited in their subject options at school because of timetabling; other students found that their school resisted their participation in work experience because it created timetabling issues. Some students also had difficulty keeping up with their overall workload because their school still expected them to do five subjects while also undertaking work experience. Hence,

in many instances, school timetables acted as a barrier for students attempting to undertake the most appropriate mix of learning for their career path. It takes buy-in by the senior leadership team to have timetabling that enables learners to be out of the classroom learning in a workplace as part of an agreed learning pathway.

On the other hand, some schools saw the importance of incorporating work experience and

“Some schools ‘get’ the need to include the world of work as part of the world of learning and have creative ideas around timetables and linking learning in school to support work experiences and potential employment.”

used more creative approaches to timetabling and creating links between learning and work. The benefits of supporting more personalised pathways in this way include, but also extend beyond, the management of time and workload. As noted by Figgis (2009), ‘authentic’ learning tasks that have real-world relevance and an appropriate level of complexity are highly motivating for learners. Schools using such approaches are likely to keep at-risk learners engaged by seizing opportunities to link structured work experiences with classroom learning in a

way that is logical and interesting to the students themselves (OECD, 2014).

Collaboration and cooperation need to be embedded within the system

The results and findings of Set4Life outlined thus far demonstrate the value of cooperation and collaboration between players. The benefits experienced by both learners and employers were clearly derived, in large part, from the development and leveraging of relationships between players, cooperative solutions, and the coordinated circulation of information (including feedback loops). In effect, Set4Life interventions brokered an integration of the skills, knowledge, and capacity of different players to produce solutions that would not be possible in a siloed model.

Nevertheless, Set4Life also exposed the difficulties of achieving such an approach in the current system. At present, the extent to which schools are willing and able to collaborate with other players in the transitions space is heavily dependent on the management and resources of the school – factors that vary widely between schools. Schools and TEOs are not generally required to work cooperatively or collaboratively in order to deliver their required outputs and, accordingly, are often not set up to do so. Rather, they are encouraged to focus on competitive behaviour and routine outputs rather than the achievement of real-world outcomes. This was reflected in stumbling blocks such as some schools’ reluctance to find timetabling solutions for learners seeking work experience, attempts to channel learners into the Set4Life programme that did not meet the entry criteria, and in the lack of attention to preparing learners to meet the needs of employers and workplaces. It is also reflected, more generally, on the fact that funding promotes the use of rigid pathways that do more to support individual institutions than the learner. It is critical that learners are easily able to move through a system that enables the achievement and formal recognition of skills valued by employers, regardless of the nature of their chosen pathway or changes. As an example, at present, if an electrical student enrolls in a qualification with a TEO, but then moves to an apprenticeship through an ITO, the student may lose the programme fees they have paid towards the rest of the qualification and, at the same time, will be required to pay ITO programme fees towards the same qualification. Yet the pathway through TEO study and into an apprenticeship may be a productive one that suits that individual student’s progress. A joined-up VET system should enable a seamless pathway between pre-trades and apprenticeship programmes that rewards the TEO and ITO appropriately for their contribution to the skills developed, without disadvantaging the learner.

Solutions to these problems should focus on ways to reduce systemic tensions and incentivise and support schools and TEOs to take a more responsive and flexible approach. Challenges are to be expected in introducing cooperative models of assistance. It takes time and effort to gain buy-in and build the partnerships and trust necessary to achieve truly effective collaboration between schools, employers, and other partners. It also requires schools to be willing to implement the practical changes necessary to allow a more flexible and individualised approach to helping students transition into employment. These changes are not easy to achieve, particularly in schools where resources are stretched, and teachers are already working with a high administrative and teaching workload. However, the system would

be greatly assisted by redesigned funding levers to promote, rather than disincentivise, cooperative support of learners with a view to helping them more easily transition into careers that meet learners' personal needs and aspirations. This means moving "beyond BAU by supporting partners to create new solutions, innovate and adapt".³⁰

It is likely that funding a vocational education system would be more effective if linked to short- and medium-term 'life' outcomes – such as successful employment outcomes and financial and social wellbeing – rather than effective full-time student accounting (EFTS or STMs³¹). These outcomes may be measured using tools such as the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), which contains the extensive data necessary to address complex questions at a systems level about outcomes for New Zealanders. Data mining with this kind of tool could enable measurement of longer-term impacts from interventions to determine their effectiveness and return on investment.

Employers should be assisted to understand how to invest in staff

One of the challenges that Set4Life addressed was that of supporting employers to offer work experience and jobs that are appropriate for transitioning learners. In general, Set4Life navigators found it relatively easy to find good employers who were willing to engage in the programme. These employers were located through the navigator's own connections or through the ITO network provided by Skills and Primary ITO staff. However, several employers declined to participate because they didn't feel they could spare the time to take on the young person or to engage with the project team when 'time is money'.

One facilitator reported that some plumbers and electricians had "specifically said they didn't want girls" as employees because of "potential harassment" and management issues that might result.

Small-to-medium businesses (SMEs) often lack the resources to support new learners into the workforce³². This can be an issue in rural areas such as Northland, where the majority of employers are SMEs. It is common for these businesses to have limited knowledge of the business benefits of offering work experience and hiring inexperienced staff such as apprentices, and they often lack awareness of how to help learners' transition successfully into the workplace. One issue that emerged

strongly throughout Set4Life is that many smaller employers are also unaware of how hiring a diverse range of staff can work in their favour to improve customer service, workplace culture, and productivity. Discrimination was evident in several instances during Set4Life. One navigator reported that some plumbers and electricians had specifically said they didn't want girls as employees because of "potential harassment" and management issues that might result. This matched some student's experiences at interview; for example, one female student reported that interview questions with employers had "revolved around my gender – not about my skills" and that she had subsequently lost motivation. Yet evidence clearly indicates that a more diverse workforce and better gender balance provides a competitive advantage to

³⁰ https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5a81d9daa7e787000152855e/5abad1a154d3df0155104492_Māori%20Futures%20Collective%20-%20Rewiring%20the%20System%20Online.pdf

³¹ Equivalent Full Time Student (EFTS) and Standard Training Measure (STM) are supply driven measures each based on 120 credits or 1200 nominal hours of learning and are currently used as the basis for tertiary funding.

³² See, for example, <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/90fcb52f9f/small-business-development-group-2016-report.pdf>

employers (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). Thus, learners and employers are both likely to benefit from employers recruiting a more diverse range of employees.

Set4Life went some way towards addressing these issues by having the navigator develop relationships with employers and work with them to understand the benefits of hiring learners and developing a diverse workforce. The navigator was able to leverage off other Skills ITO staff that play an active role in working with employers and encouraging more women into the trades including a Facebook group where women in trades can speak frankly about their experiences³³.

“With the additional, on-going support provided for Set4Life learners, it appears that employers are more receptive to taking on students for work experience, knowing that they have the additional support of a Coordinator who can not only ‘match’ them with a suitable ‘apprentice/employee’, but also provide on-going support for any issues they may face when taking on a new, young employee.”

Navigator

The employer inductions were particularly valuable in helping employers understand how to play an active role in ensuring that learners integrated well into the workplace and became valuable employees. A navigator reflected “employers are more receptive to taking on students for work experience, knowing that they have the additional support of a Coordinator who can not only ‘match’ them with a suitable ‘apprentice/employee’, but also provide on-going support for any issues they may face when taking on a new, young employee”. The Set4Life structure also allowed employers to realise the value of trying out new employees before they hired them permanently, thereby reducing the risks of recruitment. As this experience suggests, navigators and work brokers are ideally positioned to contribute to this kind of development, given their knowledge of, and connections with, all the key

players in the system. However, it is likely that many businesses would benefit from more dedicated help to develop a planned business approach that treats staff as an investment rather than a simple business cost.

While initiatives such as Set4Life form a logical part of the solution, it is likely that deeper and more enduring change requires the intervention of policy makers. Employers need support in developing leadership and business acumen, which is likely to depend on improved awareness of, and access to, mentoring and professional development opportunities³⁴. Businesses that identify and develop relevant skills within their workforce in line with the business needs, including by helping employees to develop their career plans in alignment with these needs, can greatly improve the utilisation of skills in the workplace. Employers who understand how to utilise all skills as part of increasing business productivity are more likely to invest in recruiting and training new entrants into the workforce, as well as providing learners with work experience prior to recruitment. They are also more likely to begin to understand the benefits of hiring a more diverse range of employees to broaden the capability and contributions of their workforce. Very small businesses are also likely to benefit from help to arrange group employment³⁵ in which they share employment arrangements; for example, by establishing multi-employer apprenticeships that enable an apprentice to work with different hosts and thus gain a broader range of experience. This can reduce the employment risks for these firms, while helping new employees develop both role-specific and generic competencies. Spreading

³³ See, for example, <https://skills.org.nz/community/women-in-trades/>

³⁴ See, for example, <https://skills.org.nz/employers/business-advisor-programme/>

³⁵ See, for example, <https://www.att.org.nz/about-att>

the risk of employing young apprentices may also go some way towards improving employers' initial willingness to welcome gender and cultural diversity in their workforce.

Regardless of the specific solutions offered, the Set4Life experience demonstrates that barriers to workforce entry cannot only be solved by assisting learners alone. Employers' needs and capabilities must also be brought into the equation to ensure that employment opportunities are maximised in a sustainable and productive way.

Learners should be helped to plan and prepare early on for building their careers

The Set4Life team gathered a range of narratives over the study that suggested many students were unsure or unaware of available pathways and opportunities. It was a common theme throughout Set4Life that learners particularly benefitted from help in identifying and experiencing potential careers and related work opportunities. In some cases, one of the key benefits for learners was the realisation that they would benefit from staying at school longer to develop life and learning skills before transitioning into work. While this meant that these learners did not transition within the timeframe of the Set4Life project, it is quite possible that they benefitted from the discovery of what they did *not* want to do. By staying at school another year, they were allowing themselves the opportunity for further skills development and/or the time to identify a more suitable career than the one they were exploring during Set4Life.³⁶ More commonly, learners benefited from gaining knowledge and work experience that helped to confirm or clarify their career preferences. One young learner summed up the latter with the comment: "I never thought about being a plumber as a job before this but when I got to see what they do and go out doing the jobs with employer, I was happy as. I don't want to do anything else. I know what I want to do now. I didn't know before; I was just going to do anything".

"Set4Life has helped me get into this Plumbing apprenticeship with employer, I don't think I would have got it if I didn't get help working on my time management and being responsible and acting a bit more mature, because when I first started I was really immature and got told off a bit." Plumbing apprentice

This finding appears to support Industry Training Federation data that shows nearly 30% of new apprentices in 2017 had previously gained degrees and associated debt before deciding they really wanted to pursue a career in trades (Williams, 2017). Although this does not necessarily mean that previous education was not valuable for any of these individuals, it does highlight that many individuals invest in often expensive pathways that are not a good fit. It seems likely that a lack of early access to the right information, experiences, and opportunities might be one of the reasons that individuals invest time and money in career paths that are not the right fit for them. This was manifested during Set4Life when two learners changed what they wanted to

do over the course of listening to two guest speakers at an induction. In other cases, learners who attended WorkChoice days went on to pursue careers that they had found out about specifically as a result of their attendance. Learners require good role models and exposure to career opportunities, workplaces, and the job market while they are still at secondary school. They also need to test out their capabilities and preferences in a real workplace before they

³⁶ It was outside of the scope and funding of Set4Life to carry out longitudinal surveying of these learners' outcomes after the completion of the project. However, these examples suggest it would be valuable to carry out further research into the medium-term outcomes of a programme such as Set4Life to determine whether learners who choose not to transition immediately still experience benefits.

make longer-term decisions. The right support for developing a career path should ultimately reduce the waste that can arise from pursuing the wrong career paths.

In addition to helping learners to make sound career decisions, early, relevant work experience can play a significant role in helping learners develop the competencies almost all employers value, including work readiness and foundation skills. The Ministry of Education's (n.d.) Employability Skills Framework identifies that employers particularly want workers with skills and behaviours such as a positive attitude, communication, teamwork, self-management, willingness to learn, thinking skills, and resilience. Set4Life employers added to this, indicating that they also valued a sense of direction, confidence, common sense, willingness to work, 'get up and go', punctuality, and reliability. In general, Set4Life learners made significant progress in filling skills gaps and developing the right approach as a result of working with a navigator and developing a learning plan. In many instances, learners also undertook training that provided them with a specific skillset that was essential or desirable to employers in their chosen field; for example, the majority completed Site Safe and some additionally completed courses such as Working at Height and Working in Confined Spaces – thereby acquiring important industry-relevant skills that would be valued by employers from the beginning. Though employers generally had lower expectations as reflected in this employer's feedback "be good if they knew how to pick up an electrical drill and know what a chisel or hacksaw is, and I know we struggle with woodwork classes being pulled out from schools".

Some of the important employability competencies appeared to develop in Set4Life learners simply as a result of being supported to apply for jobs, experiencing work and being treated as a valuable adult for the first time. Several learners indicated that this experience had resulted in heightened confidence and motivation. One learner commented, "the navigator helped me feel confident to apply for jobs in the electrical field that I didn't think I would get"; another observed, "now 'I feel sweet' to go to different workplaces for work 'cos I know I can do a good job for them". British work indicates that students are 25% less likely to be NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) if they do 4+ activities through employer engagement whilst at school³⁷.

Family members need to be informed and engaged with learners' career decisions.

Evidence from the Set4Life project highlights the critical role that families play in influencing students' career development and planning. As one teacher commented, educators must remember that "we are in the system and we understand the system; but for the parents coming through, it's a novelty, and we have to keep communicating (as their) understanding keeps evolving". Many families may have limited knowledge of some of the options for their children; for example, it is common for families to understand the benefits and costs of university pathways, but to be relatively unfamiliar with the advantages of apprenticeships and other vocational options. Family members may also have limited awareness of the rapid changes taking place in the workplace and the effects they are soon likely to have on different careers.

Yet, these family members will form one of the major influences on learners' choices and will in turn be affected by those choices. Over the course of the project, the Set4Life team

³⁷ 5th International Conference on Employer Engagement in Education and Training, 5&6 July 2018, London, United Kingdom. Retrieved from <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/5th-international-conference-on-employer-engagement-in-education-and-training-2018/>

encountered numerous instances in which learners' career choices were directly influenced by their family's perceptions and/or by family responsibilities. In some cases, families changed or even halted students' progress along their chosen pathways. For example, one young learner was keen on an electrical industry apprenticeship and her navigator arranged work experience that subsequently led to a job offer. However, she withdrew when a family member persuaded her that she must follow the family norm of studying at university. Another learner, who was doing very well in his programme, was withdrawn because he was needed at home to babysit while his mother worked. In other cases, schools reported that families played a key role in supporting students' progress into careers through the Set4Life programme. Some parents were initially unconvinced about students' choices but changed their minds about career paths when they realised that the programme was setting those learners up for success. One learner commented that his parents "didn't want me to leave school" at the start of the programme because "they wanted me to get an education", but were "happy as" once it became clear that the student was transitioning into stable employment: "I am the first kid in the family with a job and I am the youngest".

These examples demonstrate that career transitions must be undertaken in a way that recognises that learners live and succeed as part of a family, and that whānau play a critical role in influencing and supporting their career choices and progression. Project findings are in line with the results from the TEC's Learner Information Needs survey which showed the importance of family and community considerations when Māori and Pasifika youth make decisions on tertiary study (TEC, 2014). It is not that family preferences, educational 'traditions', and responsibilities should be treated as a potential impediment to learners' progress; rather, that the two are inseparable. The learner and family function as a single (albeit complex) unit and must be supported together to achieve the best outcome for their unique circumstances and aspirations. In addition to involving whānau in the initial sign-up and regular discussions, the Set4Life navigator achieved this by providing appropriate advice and information to families. This was designed to ensure that families understand and play their part in supporting the learner effectively. One educator observed that Set4Life addressed this with "constant communication, including with parents ... the network was there, helping them. Pasifika parents need to see it, hear it, and be affirmed to see that there is something at the end of the tunnel – then they understand that".

About half of the Northland project learners identified as Māori and Navigators noted little difference between them and NZ European learners in terms of progression from work experience into sustainable employment or further study. Given that the learners enrolled were at risk of disengaging from learning, having only 13% of them not employed or in further study at the end of the project was a successful achievement, especially for Māori learners that make up the bulk of Northland's NEETs. There was not a 'one size fits all' approach and while school learners' whānau were kept informed, generally Māori learners' whānau were hard to engage with, or to gain support for learners through the school to employment process. With the high proportion of Māori involved, the work indicated that in selecting the skills of navigators we should also be selecting on knowledge of a Māori world view. As a governance member put it "Māori cultural knowledge, which will in most cases come from Māori, and for whānau and students alike, there is potentially more connection to be made, more empathy for the likes of big topics like intergenerational trauma through unconscious bias etc., that allow a navigator that is Māori, working with Māori learners, the ability to go deeper and support more connected outcomes".

Nevertheless, Set4Life could only address this at the stage the project started, which was close to the point of the transition into work. The influential nature of family relationships and decision-making suggests that families should be informed and directly involved earlier than

this – early in secondary education, if not sooner. British research involving 20,000 children has shown that learners have fairly set ideas about careers by the age of seven³⁸. Early intervention would help families to develop a culture of supporting career selection, understand all the options and help students make well-informed NCEA subject choices that provide them with an appropriate and flexible career pathway later. Families and learners both need easy access to high-quality information and assistance to look at education as an investment and to weigh up the costs, suitability and benefits of different career options (TEC, 2014). This would support families to work alongside other key players, including industry, helping learners to work out what kind of future they would like and how to choose learning and employment options that align with their personal aptitude and aspirations. The navigator role can play a major part in helping families to develop this capability, but the full benefits of this kind of support cannot be realised if the support is confined to the transition period alone. It takes time, along with information and communication, to fully involve families and ensure they understand how to help learners weigh up their options in a balanced way. Schools, employers, and policy makers should therefore also look for ways to ensure that this support occurs in a timely and effective way.

Pastoral care involves a big investment with the potential for an equally big return

“To help young people pursue the links between school, tertiary education, employment possibilities and labour market realities, more systematic processes are needed.” (TEC, 2014)

The pastoral care in Set4Life was a critical part of its effectiveness, receiving the most positive feedback of any of the project’s interventions. As one educator reported, transitions are ‘a fragile space’. Pastoral care is often treated as a supplementary form of support when in fact it can often be the critical determinant of whether students transition successfully. This was reflected in Set4Life by the fact that learners were more likely to achieve good outcomes if pastoral care was in place early in employment

when learners are least likely to have the confidence to seek help for literacy or other learning issues. The Set4Life team also recognised that pastoral care must be undertaken in a way that identifies learners’ needs – whatever they may be – and builds appropriate solutions around those, rather than falling back on whatever forms of support a provider (or other player) happens to have expertise in. While some of the challenges that learners face will often revolve around learning and work, in many cases they are broader in origin. This was reflected in the fact that Set4Life navigators found that many learners needed help in building resilience and addressing social issues, requiring a broad-based solution that involved social, educational, and work-based agencies working in a connected way.

Navigators worked with learners to address individual barriers and issues in the way that made most sense for the problem. These problems ranged from financial challenges to family violence, and all had the potential to impact significantly on the success of the learner’s transition into work. Overcoming social and personal barriers was a significant theme, with one student commenting “I got help with my mental health ... I would not have done that stuff by myself. I’m happier because I have support from people who didn’t even know me. I have work and I am confident at work. I focus more and I try to achieve more and before I didn’t really care what I did”. This feedback sits in marked contrast with feedback from some learners who had previously found their schools or other support sources unwilling or unable to invest in

³⁸ 5th International Conference on Employer Engagement in Education and Training, 5&6 July 2018, United Kingdom. Retrieved from <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/5th-international-conference-on-employer-engagement-in-education-and-training-2018/>

their development. One learner commented “I was on a building course with Gateway but the school couldn't really afford to pay for it because we were all the bad Māori boys in class – we did it for one year and we were going good but they didn't want us in it”. Such feedback illustrates the downstream impacts of investing – or failing to invest – in learners.

“Set4Life has helped me heaps, navigator has gotten me back on track with focusing on my goals and getting back into trying to get work. I've had help studying for my licence and applying for jobs; I wouldn't have got my building job if it wasn't for the navigator keeping me motivated. I got help with my mental health too because I was set up with Te Roopu Kimiora and Rubicon. I would not have done that stuff by myself. I'm happier because I have support from people who didn't even know me. I have work and I am confident at work. I focus more and I try to achieve more and before I didn't really care what I did.” Student

Not only are gaps in support likely to reduce a learner's ability to develop the skills and knowledge to transition successfully into the workplace, but they may also directly impact upon the learner's identity as someone who does or does not have value in the world – which is surely likely to impact in other ways, including socially.

In general, educators welcomed the extra support of their roles that the Set4Life pastoral care provided, while students felt seen and well-supported through their journey. As a school staff member commented about Set4Life, “they had modelled that there are boundaries that we don't go past – but let's have fun and learn and the team-work element – competing, problem-solving – made them aware of an employer's point of view – and teachers don't even know that view and their job is not to get them ready for employment”. Pastoral care was designed to be enabling; as one educator on the project put it, it was “about hand-holding, but knowing how tight to hold on and when to let go”, while another said “It was so good to see them treated like adults and they acted like adults, which would be needed in the real world of work”. This was reflected in the fact that learners often expressed greater confidence as a result of the project. As observed earlier, simply acquiring work experience played a significant role

in helping some learners gain confidence; but accompanying pastoral support was also essential in helping learners to feel supported and develop personal strategies and tools for succeeding in the workplace. One learner summarised a common thread of feedback when talking about how the project had improved their confidence with the comment “I am not as shy to speak up ... I am not scared to go to work and do what people ask me to do”.

In some cases, navigators needed to focus more on practical and physical barriers to success. For example, some students required help to obtain personal protective equipment (PPE) or

“I've had help studying for my licence and applying for jobs – I wouldn't have got my building job if it wasn't for the navigator keeping me motivated.” Student

relevant training such as Site Safe, while others needed help with transportation. One of the key barriers to work in rural Northland (especially in the trades) is the need to drive. Learners often need a restricted or full licence and access to a vehicle in order to get to work, but the requirements and costs of acquiring a licence, along with the costs of vehicle ownership, can be prohibitive for students in low socioeconomic communities. Set4Life

navigators identified this issue and, in many cases, helped students to acquire a licence. Students directly associated this with the ability to access work, with one commenting, “I've had help studying for my licence and applying for jobs – I wouldn't have got my building job if it wasn't for the navigator keeping me motivated”. Some voluntary organisations are now

helping learners to gain their driver's licence³⁹ and system players should learn to connect with these organisations to help learners access opportunities to gain essential skills wherever possible. However, typical issues vary from one area to the next, as does the available support. For example, in the parallel project run in Auckland, Set4Life staff found they needed to support a young learner, not to drive, but to understand and feel confident in using public transport. Thus, the solution must fit the problem.

It should be acknowledged that pastoral care for learners does not, in general, automatically "require a special program" (Figgis, 2009). It is commonplace for best practice educators and trainers to carry out some pastoral care when required. However, leaving pastoral care up to these players alone carries an inherent risk. Unless pastoral care is planned carefully and built in as a significant component of their roles – and they are allocated enough time to attend to this with specialist support as and when required – it is likely to be carried out with variable quality, skill, and frequency. It can be difficult for even the most dedicated and skilled practitioners to allocate significant time to this area in the face of significant time-sensitive demands relating to measurable outputs such as assessment, teaching/training hours, and administration. A collaborative approach to mentoring learners has been developed by Downer New Zealand, Connexis, and the Primary ITO (Johnson, 2016) for ITOs and employers that can improve learning outcomes in a cost-effective way for employers and this work supports the navigator function.

The variability in issues that learners faced during Set4Life indicates that pastoral care must provide support of whatever kind learners need and must be adequately resourced to do so. The Set4Life budget was \$400 per student, but this excluded induction and project costs. In the present system, it would be challenging to find this level of funding for a Set4Life approach to pastoral care to become scalable. The critical role that pastoral care plays in learner success is not well reflected in its funding in New Zealand. As one governance member observed, "outside of JVAP, there is little funding available for pastoral care in other contexts". Moreover, funding for transitions does not adequately follow the student. Transition funding is largely channelled into secondary schools, PTEs, and ITPs, with ITOs unable to access funding for programmes such as Youth Guarantee or Dual Pathways; yet, ITOs train more people than universities and are well-placed to aid in the transition space through their broad connections with both education and employer players and their expertise in both learning and industry/employment needs. Policy development may need to consider how funding for pastoral care is allocated, so that those who are best placed to provide pastoral care are resourced to do this. In connection with this, any cost-benefit analysis should be broad, including recognition of the government's obligations regarding social welfare and addressing skills deficiencies that arise from failures in the compulsory education system.

Transition arrangements must have built-in continuity

One of the biggest challenges in the Set4Life project was maintaining continuity in the face of staffing changes. Over the course of the project, several key staff (including management) either changed roles within their organisation (either The Skills Organisation or one of its partner organisations) or left altogether, resulting in significant disruption. This included the Project Lead, who left the organisation at a critical stage. Since the loss of staff often results in the loss of a certain amount of project knowledge and alters or discontinues relationships; this posed a threat to the project's cohesion and continuity. It also made it more difficult to

³⁹ For example, see the community organisation Far North REAP <http://www.farnorthreap.org.nz/services/road-safety-education>

track the management and progress of the project as the project team's understanding of the project altered over time due to the changes in staffing. The problem was somewhat mitigated by the existence of the governance group, which remained constant in the face of other changes and retained strategic and operational oversight of the programme. However, it would have been helpful to have robust data policy and succession planning in place to help safeguard against the disruption caused by these changes.

Parties seeking to set up similar initiatives in the future would do well to plan for how they can maintain continuity in the face of similar events. For those parties who are heavily involved in the operational running of a project such as this, it can be challenging to step back and consider the strategic requirements of a project, particularly when workloads are high, and learners are at times in exceptional need. It is therefore important for those parties in the most strategic roles to work together to identify certain risks and mitigate them wherever possible. Strategic and operational oversight should be held by a group to mitigate against the loss of key members, and all aspects of the project should be thoroughly documented to ensure that new project members can rapidly reach a thorough understanding of the project, if required. Documentation and data must be labelled clearly and held in a central location that is easily accessed by other project members (as and when appropriate). Although it is difficult to safeguard against the loss of relationships that can occur when a key team member leaves, this can be mitigated to some extent by ensuring that no team members operate in isolation. All players involved in a project should have sufficient communication with other players to feel comfortable and confident in connecting with others in the event that their main contacts become unavailable.

Closing remarks

The Set4Life project provided a revealing glimpse into some of the barriers to successful vocational transitions for young learners in New Zealand, along with identification of some valuable interventions. The Northland environment for learners is locally specific, in its challenges, resources, vocational environment, and community; yet, in many respects, the barriers and challenges faced by Northland learners are representative of similar issues around the country. Inadequate preparation and support for learners transitioning into vocational work are commonplace, as are lack of work experience opportunities and inadequate support for employers and families. The negative impacts of existing policy levers and funding, and the corresponding siloes in the vocational education and training system, are nationally determined and nationally experienced. Moreover, those impacts are not isolated to secondary school and pre-trades students. An increasing number of learners transition into new careers at different points in their lives and for a broad variety of reasons, whether they are school leavers, NEETs, adults changing careers, new immigrants, or other cohorts altogether. All these learners need access to appropriate support to successfully identify and move through their own pathways into appropriate, sustainable employment.

Set4Life demonstrated clearly that, even within the existing system, interventions in the transition space can be very effective when they are tailored to the local environment, inclusive of local players, and customised for each learner. One of the key strengths of Set4Life was that its interventions formed part of an overarching framework, with dedicated high-level governance and management, while allowing for individualisation and flexibility whenever it was required. This meant that solutions were cohesive and consistent, while also focused on meeting specific, individual problems. Crucially, these solutions were designed to draw together and utilise the strengths of all the players. This meant that the Set4Life team identified what kind of support or involvement would make a difference and sought to provide this in the most effective way possible, rather than simply focusing on what resources were

readily available in a setting or organisation. Solutions were therefore tailored rather than retrofitted, and players were encouraged to work collaboratively and cooperatively in support of the learner. In many respects, this was the key benefit of the navigator role that formed the central figure in Set4Life. The involvement of the navigator was invaluable in providing a human interface which integrated and addressed the needs of learners, employers, and the workplace while remaining politically neutral. Set4Life navigators were able to leverage the resources available by informing and coordinating the efforts of all involved, identifying and facilitating opportunities for learners and employers, and removing barriers to learning and employment.

At the same time, the navigator figure required substantial investment of time and labour – and, therefore, funding. By the end of the project, it was also apparent that the navigator could not sustainably manage the workload of such a programme on a long-term basis, and that the addition of a work broker would also be necessary to achieve maximum results. However, it seems likely that the investment required by such an approach is justified, given the potential financial, economic, and social consequences of having young learners fail to transition successfully into sustainable work or move into education or training for careers that they do not ultimately wish to pursue. The immediate costs of this kind of project must be weighed up against the very real long-term costs of failing to provide transitions support that is effective and achieves meaningful outcomes. At a minimum, more research is needed into the interventions used in models such as Set4Life in order to measure their real-world benefits and outcomes and benchmark these against the cost of other forms of transitions support. Further studies are required into the medium- and long-term impact of transition programmes such as Set4Life to assess the return on investment. Collecting high-quality data in this area could play an important role in informing and shaping transitions programmes and their funding in the future.

Transitions support must be scalable so that it is accessible for all, but it must also be effective. This means that funding must be adequate and structured in such a way to ensure effective, coherent, joined-up support. It must also be demand-driven; while learners need assistance to choose, prepare for, and move into the right career for them, employers need to be confident that they are investing in new employees with the competencies to meet their changing business needs. This means that transitions support – and, indeed, the education and training system as a whole – must be geared towards identifying and achieving outcomes that have real value in the workplace.

The Set4Life guidelines have been developed to identify effective, targeted actions that key players may take in order to improve transitions support in New Zealand and to contribute to the growing body of research on achieving positive improvements in the transition space. However, productive change across the country will require revision of existing policies, funding, and practices at a national level. We must work towards a system in which all players adopt a connected and coordinated approach, leveraging their various strengths to provide wraparound support that genuinely meets the needs of learners as they move towards permanent employment. Such an approach has the potential to transform the future of individuals, business, and communities alike.

A poster summarising the Set4Life findings was presented at the *27th National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference 'No Frills'* in Sydney on 15–17 August 2018⁴⁰ and won the people's choice award for best poster (Appendix Three).

⁴⁰ <https://www.ncver.edu.au/news-and-events/events/past-events/past-events/27th-national-vocational-education-and-training-research-conference-no-frills-2018>

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Appendix One: Job Description for Northland Navigator/Facilitator

Position Title: Northland JVAP – Navigator/Facilitator

Role Purpose: To provide support to the Northland JVAP Project Manager and Governance Group (GG); to work with industry, schools, employers, ITPs, ITOs, other support agencies, learners (trainees) and their communities to support successful transition into sustainable employment.

1. Identify students'/trainees' individual learning needs as part of the student selection and induction process.

This includes:

- Programme Induction
 - Employability Skills Training
 - Career and Industry knowledge about work placement
 - Appropriate work-place selection
 - Assessment Tool delivery for the Five Elements of Literacy
 - Identifying learner knowledge gaps
2. To provide exceptional communication and support for the learner and their family about the programme, its services and outcomes.
 3. Facilitate support services giving continuity for trades learners (students/trainees) between School, ITP and/or ITO training.

This includes:

- ensuring connections between learners, their community and stakeholders;
- preparation of career plans and mentoring learners;
- pastoral care as required;
- supporting work readiness programmes and accrediting achievement;
- assist with securing appropriate work experience placements and maintaining productive and professional key stakeholder relationships.

It is envisaged that 80% of the brokerage services will be dedicated to the early stages of a learners (students/trainees) journey to a certified career – from recruitment to employment plus six months. The remaining 20% will be to support learners post six months alongside ITO Relationship Managers, ITO Training Advisors and/or employers who seek additional assistance to deliver successful outcomes.

Reporting to The Skills Organisation Workforce Capability Manager with a functional relationship with the GG.

4. To be a support liaison to the Project Manager and between:
 - a. the School/ITOs/North Tec and The Skills Organisation Workforce Capability Manager and the GG;
 - b. external stakeholders and the ITOs/North Tec/School; and
 - c. as a point of contact for learners and staff within the School/ITOs/North Tec.
5. Work with a range of informed businesses⁴¹ to:
 - Gain work/study experience placements for trades pathway school students and for North Tec pre-employment students including M&PTT⁴² focusing on

⁴¹ Electrical, construction, engineering, plumbing and primary industry peak bodies will also be involved along with groups like the local Chamber of Commerce

⁴² The project will endeavour to work closely with existing activities such as M&PTT and Careers NZ Work Inspiration

employment outcomes (working in combination with ITO field staff, Careers Advice and Transition staff and others as appropriate)

- Gain “working scholarship”⁴³ placements for students (funded by willing employers) that have demonstrated employability and work readiness skills either at school or in a pre-employment programme
- Have Trades business staff (ideally young staff or apprentices) engage directly with schools and North Tec informing about their needs and contributing ideas for use in teaching resources and methods
- Gain new work positions with training agreements for transitioning school leavers, pre trades students or others
- Work with ITO field staff to develop mentoring skills in workplaces to supplement the ITO pastoral support offered to the employee and workplace
- Encourage constructive feedback to Schools, ITOs, North Tec around what is working well, what needs improving, what the business can do to better assist the process etc

Key responsibilities

General

- Assist the Project Manager in research projects as required⁴⁴
- Assist the Project Manager to inform and gain buy-in from all stakeholders (businesses, learners, influencers, providers, schools, industry peak bodies etc) to the value of a coherent and joined up VET system in helping achieve well understood outcomes
- Plan and ensure effective pastoral support for learners using existing networks including ITO, North Tec, and High School staff
- Record and catalogue the learning journey for all learners
- Use the data and experiences to help develop a coherent learner support network
- Work with partner ITOs, North Tec and partner schools to develop and improve VET programmes for industries for a range of learner cohorts e.g. school students and pre-employment programmes
- Use the risk matrix approach and other appropriate methods to assess the attributes of both learners and workplaces to best match the two and apply appropriate pastoral support systems to optimise outcomes

Communication and relationship management

- Establish and maintain relationships with relevant teams
- Liaise with and maintain positive relationships with existing work broker services in industry and relevant agencies
- Maintain connections within both the Electrical Trade and Primary Industries
- Maintain positive working relationships with ITOs and North Tec around learner transitions and learner support
- Work collaboratively with ITP and ITO Relationship Managers to provide an end-to-end contact point for learners
- Mentor learners throughout their engagement, irrespective of the training pathway
- Work with Project Manager/ITO and North Tec Relationship Managers and staff to assess learner training needs and identify appropriate pathways into employment and further learning
- Counsel learners from the point of recruitment in order to match labour demand with skill supply to ensure that employers’ and their subcontractors’ business objectives can be efficiently realised

⁴³ Working scholarships are paid workplaces supplied by willing employers – for example, for year 12 school students that have demonstrated that they are low risk candidates for work placement during the vacation before year 13 Youth Guarantee study

⁴⁴ Ako Aotearoa is interested in partnering where appropriate around any research needed.

- Ensure that learners have a clear understanding of work expectations and co-ordinate delivery of work readiness programmes
- Work with ITO/North Tec Relationship Managers and School staff to screen students for work readiness with appropriate support for those not yet work ready
- Engage with ITO staff and their employers to identify apprentice placement opportunities
- Coordinate employer interviews with ITO field staff as appropriate
- Work with ITO Account Manager and employer to develop training agreement for Apprentice with an appropriate training plan
- Fulfil any monitoring and reporting requirements including identifying trends in employer uptake

Administration, Monitoring and Reporting

- Maintain learner data in relation to enrolment, retention and progression to employment
- Keep all data and record keeping current in order to meet the needs of the dynamic industries covered by the ITOs and complex educational environments
- Be a positive advocate always for the programmes and initiatives of project stakeholders
- Work collaboratively with PM to maximise efficiency and minimise duplication of effort
- Support the implementation of any new initiatives as planned by The Skills Organisation's Workforce Capability Manager
- Work with ITO/ITP Relationship Managers and Brokerage Services staff to support recruitment to the project
- Meet periodically with The Skills Organisation's Workforce Capability Manager and other Relationship Managers to share good practice, plan and organise initiatives, discuss and resolve issues, and evaluate performance
- Escalate any issues between employer and apprentice to ITO staff to provide support and guidance, monitoring and reporting
- Maintain learner performance data

The facilitator/navigator will need well-developed skills and experience such as:

- A passion for optimising learning outcomes for learners and employers
- Knowledge and ability to implement learning plans that are focused around the five embedded elements of literacy
- Ability to keep learners at the centre of the project while balancing this with the interests of stakeholders
- A good knowledge of compulsory and tertiary education systems and adult education
- Knowledge of Northland's specific landscape in terms of learners, the challenges and the differences
- An affinity with workplace learning and understanding of the world of work from both a learner and employer perspective
- An ability to relate to learners, educators and business people and their staff
- An ability to work in and with Māori and Pasifika communities; including knowledge of tikanga
- A willingness to work to grow the involvement of women in the industries including being measured by aspirational targets
- Excellent communication with all partners, including Māori and Pasifika, with culturally and business-appropriate oral and written skills
- Ability to work collectively in a shared office situation
- Relationship-building capability and able to operationalise those relationships
- An ability to achieve outcomes in a timely manner
- Self-management and time management capability
- Full driver's licence and reliable transport

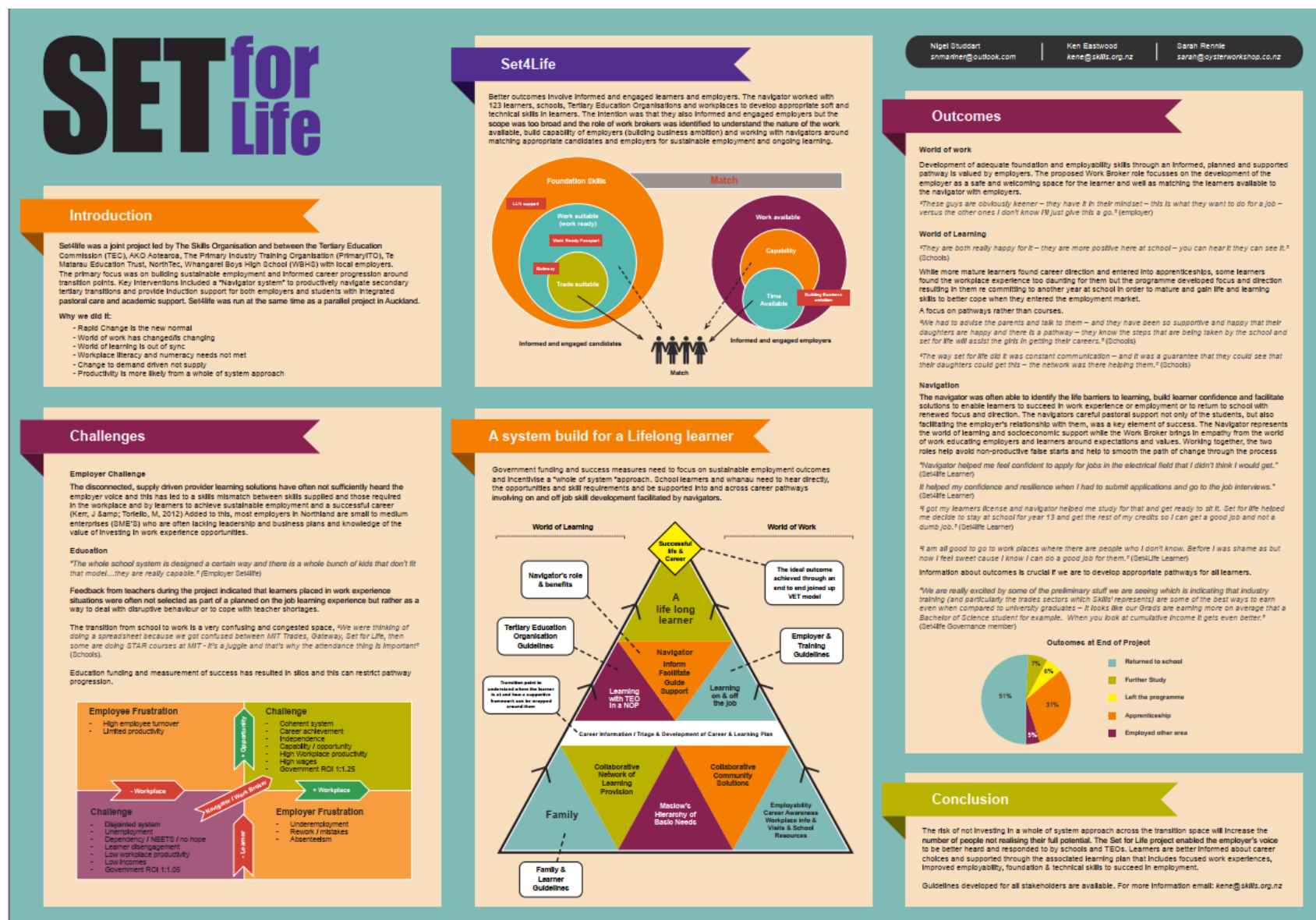
Appendix Two: Set4Life Goals, Activities and Measurements of Success

PROJECT GOALS	PROJECT ACTIVITIES	HOW DO WE MEASURE SUCCESS?	TOOLS/RESOURCES TO GATHER EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS
Enable cross sector connectivity and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-monthly meetings with regional ITO staff to share employment & industry information. • Monthly updates from Project Lead to relevant ITO and ITP staff on learner progress, issues and learnings. • Regular meetings between local industry and Project Lead. • Hosting information evenings/events with ITO & ITP local staff and employers. Project Lead to share relevant learnings and information gathered through meetings with businesses, learners, and service and education providers. • Project Lead to proactively link with community organisations around Northland including – Northland Inc., MSD, Careers NZ, industry bodies, local government, charities. • Develop a business advisory group. • Consistently build industry and community relationships even if they are outside the electrical/primary industries. • Collaborate and work with Te Matarau Education Trust and others to better understand Māori and Pasifika Trades Training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track and log on the business database industry engagement in the projects' initiatives measured through attendance at events, number of meetings with Project Lead, and also reporting strategies to maintain information flow between stakeholders. • The development of a business/industry advisory group. • The development of a local business directory. • The information flow through targeted and specific monthly reports and updates from the Project Lead to the Northland Governance Group. • The information flow through targeted and specific monthly reports and updates from the Project Lead to the ITO, ITP, Te Matarau, Kamo High School. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building and maintaining a business database. • Project team's bi-monthly reflections on effectiveness of project operations and how cross-sector connectivity and collaboration is developing. • Project teams monthly report to governance group covering self-assessment of project operations, industry feedback/engagement and learner progress.
Effective pastoral care and support for learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner-centred approach to pastoral care. • Use of holistic models of development to understand the individual (Te Whare Tapa Whā) • 1:1 monthly check-ins with the learner and Project Lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive feedback from learners on the impact of the programme on their overall wellbeing. • The development of the Set4Life mentor initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly 1:1 Check-In Resource. • Summative Assessment Document.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Lead linking learner to specific pastoral care support, relevant to their needs; e.g. MSD, charities etc. • Access to mentors for each learner. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner Exit Interview Document.
Increased support and workforce capability for employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project support to employers on employee selection, interview support and skills. • Develop links to business development resources and mentorship opportunities for business owners. • Project research and information gathering on industry growth and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive feedback from employers on learners' employability skills. • Project Lead to include industry feedback and information into monthly reports to Governance Group and use to inform overall end of project reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Impact Questions for Employers.
Transitional support for learners entering the world of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for a learner from entry into the workforce and into their new role. • Development of an Individual Career Plan with clearly identified goals to achieve work readiness and achieve their employment. • Learner participation in the Youth Employability Passport. • Authentic learning experiences through the programmes' workshops, through motivational/industry speakers, and opportunities to practise employability skills. • Work experience opportunities, gaining exposure to professional organisations prior to employment. • Job brokerage support from the Set4Life project team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of learners who gained employment during the programme. • Number of learners who sustained their employment during the programme. • Positive feedback from employers on the employability of learners and the value-add to their business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Impact Questions for Employers. • Learner Exit Interview Document.
Assessment and support in the development of foundation skills for all learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic and observational assessments of learner's foundation skills. • Tailored individual learning plans with links to relevant and specific learning tools. • Integrated learner reflections on their learning and achievements. • Use of the Kura Kaupapa Māori Model of Assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive feedback from the learner on the impact of foundation programme as part of a regular self-review process and on completing the 18-month programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner Exit Interview. • Monthly Learner Check-in Documentation. • Diagnostic Assessments. • Ako Aotearoa's Foundation Core

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to literacy tutors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on individual learner progression on specific foundation strands and skills. • Report on individual achievement of Ako Aotearoa's Foundation Core Capabilities for Graduates Level 2. 	<p>Capabilities for Graduates Level 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Learning Plan. • Pathways Awarua.
Increase in qualification completion rates for learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1 support from the project team throughout their study. • Access to a mentor. • Organised study groups. • Development of a community of learners, matching learner needs. • Project team to link with training advisors and teaching staff to address issues and risks and proactively identify solutions for learners before they escalate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of learners who completed the qualifications they were enrolled in on entry to the programme. • Number of learners who completed their school pathway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner database, comparison of entry and exit information.
Identify specific information to inform TEC investment plans for Northland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing and coordinated stakeholder research throughout the duration of the project. • Ongoing analysis of the programmes' delivery across each learner pathway of entry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Best Practice Guidelines from project learnings and outcomes. • Review and analysis of current system gained from ongoing stakeholder meetings and learner conversations from inside and outside of the projects' cohort. • Populate a document of all the vocational education models and projects currently being trialled and implemented. Identify points of difference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational Education Models and Projects Currently Delivered. • Stakeholder Research Questions. • Monthly 1:1 Check-In Document. • Summative Assessment Document. • Learner Exit Interview Document.

Appendix Three: SET for Life Poster presented at the 27th National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference 'No Frills' in Sydney on 15-17 August 2018.



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