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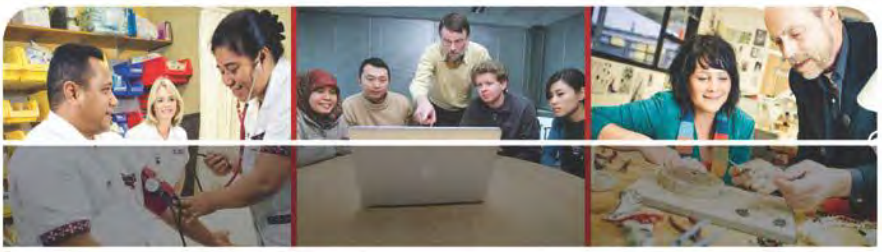

Where do they go?

The post-classroom journeys of our Youth Guarantee hairdressing graduates

Cath Fraser and Donna Waterson
Hair to Train

March, 2014

AKO AOTEAROA
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TERTIARY TEACHING EXCELLENCE

An Ako Aotearoa publication.
This project output has been funded by Ako Aotearoa through the Regional Hub Project Fund.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people who contributed to this project in a variety of ways. Our grateful thanks to:

- Ako Aotearoa Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence Northern Hub who provided funding for this project, and in particular Ruth Peterson (Regional Manager of the Ako Aotearoa Northern Hub) who guided the project and offered clear direction and oversight as we developed our proposal.

- The owners and directors of the three participating private training organisations: Hair to Train, Pacific Coast Technical Institute, and Corporate Academy Group, who supported the project and allowed us access to their staff, students and institutional records.

- The students, tutors, managers, family members, employers and school counsellors who attended focus group meetings and participated in interviews. Without their valuable contributions, we would not have been able to collate such a rich and ranging collection of experiences, comments and suggestions; in fact, we would not have had a project!

With sincere thanks to all, we hope you will enjoy the following report and our conclusions.

Cath Fraser and Donna Waterson, March 2014

Executive Summary

This research project sought to examine the longer-term benefits for the students of a Youth Guarantee hairdressing programme, and specifically whether graduates were in employment or further study. We were interested in the sustainability of the good outcomes reported over the first three years the programme has been running – both in terms of the programme's ongoing success, as well as the individual students' longer term benefits. Another area of interest was whether the student's success has had an impact on family and community.

The report begins with a summary of the Youth Guarantee scheme, and the involvement by Tauranga hairdressing academy, Hair to Train. It describes the programme, the *National Certificate in Hairdressing (Salon Support) (Level 3)*, as well as those delivered by two partner organisations in this study, the Pacific Coast Technical Institute, Tauranga and Corporate Academy Group (CAG), Auckland.

A literature review which discusses current discourse in related areas was included to provide a background to the findings from the study. The review is organised into thematic sections about the learner profile, issues surrounding transitioning from school to higher education, the need for foundational studies, the nature of vocational training, and the first national results and evaluations of the Youth Guarantee initiative.

The methodology employed was a qualitative case study design, supported by 48 interviews with students, tutors and managers from the three participating organisations, as well as parents, local employers and school career counsellors who had first-hand experience of graduates' outcomes from the Hair to Train programme. In addition, institutional reporting data and national statistics were examined. As a result of this approach, much of the evidence included here is from participant voice, in the hope that this will allow the learners, and those who work with them and care about them, to tell their own stories – as well as providing a ring of authenticity for readers.

Key findings were that the studied Youth Guarantee programmes were sustainable, and were producing positive outcomes for students in clear pathways into higher education or employment. Better yet, students describe a range of newly acquired "soft skills" such as confidence, professionalism and self-management, which will be transferable beyond the bounds of the subject content studied. A range of enabling factors are noted, including the contrast with school; the student-teacher relationship; a sense of family; language, literacy and numeracy; and cultural awareness and pride. The barriers that students and tutors find can disrupt attendance and completion are briefly considered, and some possible solutions described.

Included as an Appendix in this report, but intended as a stand-alone document which can be accessed from Ako Aotearoa's website as a resource, is an "open letter" to current and prospective Youth Guarantee providers, summarising key learnings from this enquiry.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Post-secondary education in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the Youth Guarantee scheme

The Youth Guarantee initiative started in 2010 as a national mechanism to improve the educational achievements of targeted 16 and 17 year olds by providing them with an opportunity to participate in a range of vocational courses, free of charge. It is a part of a wider youth opportunities package designed to create new work, education and training opportunities for young people (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). The overarching aim is to ensure that school leavers do not fall into the "not in education, employment or training" (NEET) trap.

Youth Guarantee offerings have a two-pronged approach: first, they offer vocational training pathways that will clarify options for students, and equip them with the skills and knowledge valued by employers in a range of industries. Second, they provide foundation education to achieve NCEA L1 and L2 or equivalent, to enable young people to transition to redress gaps in secondary education, and to be eligible for entry into further education and/or participate in the workforce. Youth Guarantee courses are usually entry level qualifications at levels 1-3 on the National Qualifications Framework in tertiary education, and are linked to clear pathways for students to progress to higher level study in the field they have chosen (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The success of Youth Guarantee in general builds on existing relationships, such as STAR (the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource by which all State secondary schools with year 11-13 students are funded to help students, especially those at-risk, transition smoothly from school to further education and/or employment) and Gateway (a programme whereby year 11-13 students undertake structured workplace learning one to two days a week across a range of industries and businesses around New Zealand, while continuing to study at school) (Tertiary Education Commission, 2013). Alongside this relationship with "feeder" secondary schools, Youth Guarantee providers also work closely with the learners' families and whānau. As the Youth Guarantee courses are fee-free and not eligible for student loans, most students will be living at home or be receiving community support. Another consideration is that Youth Guarantee courses aim to offer applied and practical learning oriented squarely towards graduating young people who are employable and work-ready: therefore relationships with employers and industry are crucial. It is for this reason that the research described in this report has sought to include the voice of secondary school career guidance counsellors, parents/caregivers and employers as informants.

1.2 The history of Hair to Train's Youth Guarantee programme

Hair to Train is one of only five Youth Guarantee providers offering the programme since 2011. The programme offered is the *National Certificate in Hairdressing (Salon Support) (Level 3)*. This is a 40 week programme which also includes the local *Certificate in Elementary Hairdressing (Level 3)*. The programme is offered at a purpose-designed training salon situated in Mount Maunganui. Students who complete this Youth Guarantee offering are then eligible to pathway as fee-paying students into the *Certificate in Intermediate Hairdressing Skills (Level 4)*, and move to the larger salon and classroom facility in central Tauranga.

Many of Hair to Train's students come from home environments in which education is not prized, and some students are from fourth generation beneficiary families. Just over 50% of the first cohort of Youth Guarantee graduates had no qualifications from school when they enrolled, some had a record of non-attendance and disengagement at school since the age of 11. Yet in 2011, the first year of running the programme, Hair to Train reported significant success:

- Twenty two students graduated from 29 enrolments
- The student roll is 53% Māori, and this ratio was also reflected in our graduation demographics
- All 22 graduates achieved the 75 credits for the *National Certificate in Salon Support (Level 3)*; 17 students achieved the 133 credits to gain the *Certificate in Elementary Hairdressing (Level 3)*
- Attendance records showed 90.6% for the entire group for the year
- Student evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, for example: "This is way better than school" and, "I love getting up each day to come to Hair to Train".

Similar results followed in 2012, and the organisation received an Ako Aotearoa Good Practice Publications Award to publish the practices that led to this success (Waterson & Fraser, 2013). A continued focus on the pursuit of excellence and achieving optimum results for learners led to the present inquiry around the impact and sustainability of these results.

1.3 Purpose and goals for this study

The project's overarching goal is to focus on student achievement – during and after attending the Hair to Train programme. The intention is to determine measurable outcomes, and from these, develop a set of principles to ensure optimal results for future cohorts of students, which will also be transferable to other Youth Guarantee programme providers. This output is provided as an open letter, included with this report as Appendix C.

Institutional records and classroom feedback suggest Hair to Train is meeting student needs and delivering an effective educational programme. However, little is known about the longer term effects on students. Anecdotally, students have told tutors that stories of their own success have encouraged friends and family to re-consider their own learning pathways. There is also the evidence of students who move into Hair to Train's higher Certificate qualifications and get jobs – but what of the rest, and do these positive graduation outcomes stand the test of time? The first objective of this research, therefore, was to gather data from a range of informants about the impact of the programme – on individuals, whānau and hapū. The expectation is that results would allow the organisation to continue to pursue even higher student achievement outcomes. It is also important as part of ongoing communication with stakeholders – the students and their families, the hairdressing industry, and overseeing agencies (TEC, Ministry of Education (MOE), Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)) that Hair to Train is able to support their belief in the value of their programme with evidence of tangible gains.

A second objective is to contextualise organisational results within the larger, national picture. As the Youth Guarantee scheme is so new, little data has been gathered as to its longer term benefits beyond the life of the funded programme; this project seeks to make a contribution as to how students view the Youth Guarantee experience and whether or not it has made a difference to their own, and others', goals and subsequent decision-making.

1.4 Partner organisations

The main institute and leader of this research project is Hair to Train, also known as Tauranga Hair Design Academy, which has been in operation in Tauranga since 1997 and has a good reputation in the industry. It is a small Private Training Organisation (PTE) with 54 EFTS, eight teaching staff and two directors. Manager Donna Waterson has over 30 years of industry experience, and qualifications in hairdressing, education and Māori language. The organisation has two sites: premises in Mount Maunganui where the Youth Guarantee programme *National Certificate in Salon Support Hairdressing (Level 3*) is delivered to 28 students, and a salon, classrooms and offices in in Tauranga which house the First (Level 3) and Second Year (Level 4) *Certificate in Hairdressing* students.

In order to gain a snapshot of how other Youth Guarantee providers and their graduates are faring, two other PTE organisations with Youth Guarantee programmes were invited to participate in this research. The Pacific Coast Technical Institute (PCTI) is co-owned and managed by Fiona Morris and Mark Hellyer , and delivers a range of industry-oriented programmes focussing on workforce readiness and core skills, across two sites at Mount Maunganui. The Youth Guarantee programme offered is the *National Certificate in Employment (Level 1)* with NCEA Level 1 and 2 qualifications. Modules cover study and life skills, computing and financial management as well as numeracy, literacy and employment skills.

The family-owned Manukau, Auckland business CAG is run by Christine and Michael Clark and their two daughters, Kelly as Operations Manager and Alexandra part time as Gateway Manager. They offer three Youth Guarantee programmes: *Automotive Level 2*, *Early Childhood Level 3* and *New Zealand Defence Force Preparation Level 3*. (All contain NCEA Level 2 and a National Certificate) Christine is also Chairperson of NZAPEP (New Zealand Association of Private Education Providers).

Both organisations were selected on the basis of existing working relationships with Hair to Train through the Youth Guarantee providers' forum group, which offers a network for professional dialogue and sharing resources and initiatives.

2.0 Related themes discussed in the literature

Although the Youth Guarantee funding provision in this country is relatively recent, and few larger scale studies have been conducted to date, there are a number of themes in the literature which relate to this group of learners. The following offers a very brief overview of the types of current discussion which may also inform the work and programme development of current and prospective Youth Guarantee providers in New Zealand.

2.1 Under 25 learners: the "Net" or "Y" and "Z" Generations

Adolescence has long been recognised as comprising both societal and biological elements, the latter reflecting recent findings that brain maturation is not complete until well into the third decade of life and that the last functions to mature are those of impulse control and judgement (Office of the Prime Minister's Science Advisory Committee, 2011). Youth Guarantee students age from 16-19, and can therefore be seen as arriving in the later stages of this lifespan period. Indeed many have been referred from their secondary school precisely because of a pattern of risk-taking and impulsivity. One implication for providers, therefore, is the raft of support and referral options an institution will need to have at their disposal (Department of Labour, 2000). Additionally, notes a report for the Ministry of Youth Development (Whatman et al., 2010), young people are often considered by educational theorists as both more vulnerable and harder to motivate than older tertiary students, although this is likely less about physical age than it is about stage and maturity.

The so-called Generation Y (born between 1980 – 1994) and Generation Z (1995 – 2010) students are often discussed in the literature as "the first true digital natives of the Information Age" (Sternberg, 2012, p. 572) who constitute "a new breed of students with radically different learning styles compared with previous generations" (p. 575). Writers like Le Rossignol (2010) describe the net or "millennial" generation learner as someone who "is time-poor, a networker with strong inclinations towards social or community knowledge pooling and a multiple media literacy, comfortable in virtual worlds and with visual emphasis" (p. 455). She notes that the pervasive use of social networks such as MySpace, Facebook and Flickr means that today's young people are strongly connected to friends, parents, information and entertainment through such media. This, she believes, indicates a participatory culture, with a sense of collective intelligence an acceptance that everyone has something to contribute. Yet, as Sternberg (2012) notes, there are also emerging accounts of studies which suggest that except for the trappings of youth culture, students today are little different from their predecessors in terms of curiosity, knowledge, fluency, skills or worldly awareness. Certainly some of the characteristics of "Gen Y" will apply to some Youth Guarantee students, but many may not.

2.2 Transition to higher education

The move to higher education for most students is "exciting but daunting" (Cook & Leckey, 1999, p159), and entails a change of both academic and social culture. This transition can involve many areas of adjustment with unfamiliar terminology and processes, different teaching styles and workload expectations, and new types of relationships to be forged with peers and tutors (Fraser & Hendren, 2003). A report prepared by Manukau Institute of Technology's Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways (2011) finds that there is

> … international concern at the failure of a considerable and growing number of young people to make an effective transition from secondary schooling to postsecondary education and training. Disengagement is a phenomenon that is removing a group of young people from the transition process while inadequate academic preparation sees others unable to craft an effective and appropriate pathway from secondary schooling to postsecondary education and training (p. 2).

In New Zealand, a recent Teaching and Learning Research Initiative report (Zepke et al., 2005) showed that, from 1998 to 2003, 33 percent of the equivalent full-time student (EFTS) allocation was taken up by students who dropped out in their first year of study. American author Vincent Tinto (1993), a leading researcher into causes of student attrition, believes low completion and success results are primarily due to the inability of students to make the transition to higher education and become incorporated into the institution's social and intellectual life. In much of the literature, Tinto's position is widely accepted, for example, Collins (2005) notes that "every study done shows that the real barrier to academic success for tertiary students who withdraw is…[that they] have lost a reflection of who they are and why…"

So what can assist the process of learner assimilation and adaptation into, through and beyond post-secondary education? One strategy mooted to improve the experience of transition is a focus on multiple pathways with flexible options that allow students to move across path ways as aspirations and aptitudes become clearer (Manukau Institute of Technology, 2011). In this sense, the way in which Youth Guarantee programmes build on existing Gateway connections and experience is clearly an example of the principle in action. Other writers, such as Lynch et al. (2006) note the key role of induction, particularly since the first few weeks are critical, and well recognised as a "make or break" period. Again, as will be discussed at a later stage in this report, this is a dictate with which Hair to Train and their partner providers are well acquainted.

2.3 Language, Literacy and Numeracy - Foundation learning

There are strong social and economic benefits in ensuring that adults have good literacy and numeracy skills, including an association with higher earnings and increased chances of being in stable employment. The Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 sets out the New Zealand Government's long-term strategic direction for tertiary education, as well as the current and medium term priorities. The document itemises seven priorities, of which two are directly relevant to this enquiry:

- Increasing the number of young people moving successfully from school into tertiary education
- Improving the literacy, language and numeracy and skills outcomes from level 1 to 3 study (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012a, p. 16).

The Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 document describes the current position: many New Zealanders have left the education system without the literacy and numeracy skills they need to contribute fully to society. Thirty four percent of Māori will leave school with no qualification and 16 percent will become disengaged from employment education and training by age 17. This compares with 13 percent and five percent for non-Māori and non-Pasifika respectively.

Further, the Strategy cites the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey which showed that 43% of adult New Zealanders aged 16 to 65 have literacy and numeracy skills below those needed to participate fully in a modern, high-skilled economy. As a consequence, the tertiary system has, and will continue to have, an increased focus on foundation level study (Levels 1-3). The first weapon in the Tertiary Education Commission's arsenal to target this priority is the Youth Guarantee scheme, with the Government increasing funding and placements available by an additional 3,750 places over the next three years to reach targets of 8,525 Equivalent Fulltime Students (EFTS) in 2013, and 9,835 in 2014 (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012a, p. 36). A parallel strategy is the requirement for a full uptake and use of the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool by providers, with mandatory reporting of learner shifts within the Progression Steps of the Tool.

As noted in a major synthesis report (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, n.d.), it takes some time to achieve significant and lasting impact from Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) programmes, particularly impacts such as sustained changes in workplace practices or literacy behaviours within a family and community life. A report developed for the Department of Labour (Whatman et al., 2010) reviewed the

ways in which LLN skills are delivered. They found that in general, courses which had these skills as a sole focus met with a series of barriers (such as: lack of time, money and confidence; the negative effect of school experience; distance from classes/lack of transport; lack of daytime opportunities/reluctance to go out at night; and lack of childcare). Motivation waned easily, especially if learners were attending purely because of a lack of another alternative. Alternately, the review suggests that when LLN skill development is embedded in different course offerings this can be extremely effective, especially in contexts that have meaning and purpose for the learner. In an even stronger endorsement of the value of settings such as those offered by Hair to Train, PCTI and CAG, Whatman et al. (2010) conclude: “There is also agreement in the international literature that embedding LLN in vocational courses is effective and important” (Section 5.2).

2.4 Vocational Education

There is a widespread acceptance in the literature on learning in the post compulsory sector, that students’ engagement and motivation is more likely to be maintained if they can see the relevance of their studies to their future careers (Lieb, 1991; Lynch et al., 2006). It is equally acknowledged that at all levels within the workforce, a qualification is no longer enough to guarantee a young adult a satisfying future career, with employers looking for 'work-ready' newcomers who can demonstrate not only job specific skills but also a range of less tangible attributes, such as, team work, communication, flexibility, initiative and professionalism. To have a competitive advantage in the job market, students need to have developed their employability throughout their attendance, through exposure to learning opportunities which develop and practice these skills (Vaughan, 2003).

Two key approaches which institutions can adopt to meet this need are first, a closer interface between the classroom and industry, and second, innovative learning, teaching and assessment methods which embed the skills required to promote understanding. The first approach, involving employers in the education experience, can include placements/practicums and internships, case studies, and delivery of guest lectures, all of which can help students appreciate the relevance of their course and learn how to apply theory and knowledge in practical ways in the workplace (Fulljames, Fraser & Honey, 2006). The second approach to meeting students’ needs for employability outcomes is through embedding these skills within the curricula, and assisting students to identify growing proficiency. Both of these approaches are employed By Hair to Train, PCTI and CAG.

Enhanced employability needs to be supported by strong career guidance to keep younger learners engaged and driven, say Kirst and Venezia (2004). This needs to begin with pre-enrolment conversations to ensure students are not commencing courses they are not suited to, and then failing to complete the course. Next, organisations need to build a culture around completion in a direct link to career guidance and then job-search assistance. Young students in particular need easy access to career information, and teachers and providers who understand the bigger picture of viable career development and employability (Engler, 2011; Whatman et al., 2010). Strong local networks with industry and local agencies are therefore essential.

In addition, Vaughan (2003) notes that there is often not a distinct division for learners between study and work as separate stages in their lives. She points out that work is no longer something that happens after schooling; many young people now combine study and employment, which is likely to be partly about economic pressures and partly about the preference of young people for blending elements of the transition process and making connections for life-after-learning. Again, career planning and ‘real’ workplace exposure are characteristics of the Hair to Train Youth Guarantee package.

2.5 New Zealand: Youth Guarantee

Youth Guarantee was introduced in 2010, with funding approved for 29 Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) to deliver 2,000 EFTs, and has since grown considerably, with a target of 9,835 EFTs for 2014 (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012a, p. 36). Yet the initiative is still relatively young, with few studies to date which focus on this particular vehicle as a means to address the needs of 16-17 year old school leavers with low levels of academic achievement. Those studies that do exist have tended to focus more on how and why students enrolled, and how they responded to the experience at the time – rather than any attempt to measure the sustainability of these outcomes once the student has progressed beyond the reach of institutional data collection.

In 2010, a commissioned report prepared by Akroyd Research & Evaluation *Research on Youth Guarantee* with the sub-title *'The experiences and perspectives of learners and their influence on the variability in enrolment rates between Youth Guarantee providers'* was presented to Parliament. Forty-six students from 10 providers were interviewed, of whom seven had not completed their programme. Key attractions of Youth Guarantee programmes were:

- Youth Guarantee was a free course/government funded (36%)
- Opportunities offered – relevant job skills, education credits, employment contacts (33%)
- Expectation that it was a supportive environment/better than school (13%)
- No student loan required/don't have to repay loan (6%).

Other findings were:

- The downside of Youth Guarantee for respondents was mostly financial in nature
- The main reason why learners withdrew from Youth Guarantee was because they could not afford travel and living costs
- Most learners found their courses to be supportive and relevant, but some courses are not challenging enough/poor quality of courses.

Recommendations included:

- Providing a student allowance to cover travel costs
- Improving course structure/curriculum
- Ensure that providers are proactive about providing learner support
- Ensure that providers provide courses that are organised, achieve credits on time, and provide advanced notice of work to be covered i.e. work/subject schedule or timetable
- Providers to have more contact with learners to get their input about courses e.g. satisfaction
- Make courses more challenging
- Increase one-to-one tutoring, have more interesting projects
  (Akroyd Research & Evaluation, 2010).

A second early study from the Tertiary Education Commission (2010) called "Youth Guarantee: Setting students up for success" comprised a collation of "best practice" principles shared from sites across the country at a providers' workshop. Key items here included:

- Dedicated support
- Communication and consistency across faculties and departments
- Community involvement
- Ensuring that family / whanau are involved
- Showing students respect

- Developing career pathways
- Ensuring that expectations are clear at the outset
- Regular targeted incentives
- Employer and agency networks.

Thus far, there appear to have been few studies which investigate the experiences of single providers. One exception is the Ako Aotearoa Good Practice publication already produced by Hair to Train (Waterson and Fraser, 2013); a second is the report *Māori Student Engagement: Voices from the Margins* (Bidois, 2012) which examines factors influencing engagement in the classroom from the students' perspectives. The specific context is the *Certificate in Maritime Fishing and Technology* offered by the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic as a Youth Guarantee programme delivered off-campus. The practical hands-on course is industry focused, and has enjoyed high levels of success and completion. The study collected narratives from four participants, with five key themes identified:

> (1) the importance of cultural recognition and cultural understanding, (2) the importance of providing meaningful educational contexts, (3) ways of shifting student perceptions, attitudes and expectations, (4) the importance of encouraging a 'will to succeed', and (5) how adopting alternative classroom practices can contribute to greater student engagement (Bidois, 2012, p. 2).

A further significant point is made by the wonderfully titled section "Vocation, Vocation, Vocation: Making Learning Relevant" (p. 23). As the author points out:

> While the Maritime Fishing and Technology Course may not have been relevant to their preferred pathways at the time of the interviews, the successful completion of the course had a significant impact upon each student's confidence to succeed in further study; their attitude toward education and learning; their self-perception and the perception others had of them (Bidois, 2012, p. 24).

Many of the approaches advocated in these reports can be seen in the practices of Hair to train, PCTI and CAG, and are an intrinsic part of their success. These will be covered in a discussion of the research findings in a later section of this account.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Project design

A qualitative case study design was selected for this inquiry as being particularly suited to allow the researchers to systematically look at the specific stories of individual students, and to compare and contrast issues and outcomes when analysing and interpreting the data (Yin, 2003). Case study research was employed as a way to examine the target population of Youth Guarantee hairdressing graduates from 2011 and 2012 programmes and those with whom they relate most closely in an educational, employment, social and community context (Cousin, 2005). A tightly defined inquiry has allowed a comprehensive description of the experience, barriers and enablers these learners encountered upon completion of their programme in making effective transitions to the workforce and/or further education. Further, the case study approach allowed us to canvass contributions from a range of stakeholders and facilitate a "360 degree" overview of their perceptions of the on-going value to students of participating in the Youth Guarantee initiative.

3.2 Research methods

3.2.1 Interviews

Our primary instrument for data collection was interviews using a semi-structured schedule of questions and prompts to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and offer their contributions freely. Some of these were conducted as focus groups, some were individual – either face-to-face, via email or telephone: the choice was up to the participant.

All potential participants were identified by the manager in each organisation. The first group were students who were either currently studying, or who had graduated from a Youth Guarantee programme. These students were contacted by an email from the manager outlining the project, with a more detailed Information Sheet attached, and were invited to attend a meeting to give feedback. The Information Sheet outlined the usual ethical constraints: participation was voluntary, anonymity would be preserved, responses would only be used for the purposes of compiling this report, and all raw data would be stored securely. Those students unable to attend also had the option of filling in an email with the interview questions pasted into the body, or being interviewed by telephone.

Eventually a focus group was held in each of the three locations, co-facilitated by the lead researcher and a tutor from each organisation. This approach was very successful as it allowed two people to ask questions and check for clarification; having someone familiar to the students in attendance also helped "break the ice" and assisted with creating a relaxed atmosphere of trust, where students felt comfortable to break in and add to one another's stories and recollections. Focus groups essentially involve a group discussion 'focussed' on particular issues, and the presence of the tutor helped to ensure the interview session kept to the topic at hand and students were not bringing in experiences from training outside of the Youth Guarantee programmes. In Tauranga, additional interviews were held with Hair to Train graduates who could not attend a group meeting as this was the focus institute; all student contact with Corporate Academy Group and Pacific Coast Tertiary Institute students took place in the group meeting.

The interview questions for students included their past schooling history; expectations of the Youth Guarantee programme; experience of, and perceptions about the programme content and delivery; enablers and barriers; intentions and actual destination; and impact on peers, whanau and hapū – if any

(see Appendix A). The focus group sessions were each approximately 90 minutes, including a refreshment break. Individual interviews with students were around 15-20 minutes.

As well as focus groups with students, interviews were also held with the managers and tutors from each of the three organisations, using the student questions as a guideline. This group were asked to comment on the same issues from their perspective.

Third, additional stakeholders associated with the focus institute, Hair to Train, were contacted by telephone or email. Groups represented here included whanau/family, employers/industry representatives, and school career or guidance counsellors. We were interested in their observations about the programme in general, as well as individual participants' progress, and used a few open-ended questions to prompt a discussion (see Appendix B).

3.2.2 Participants

The students of the first and second cohorts of Hair to Train's Youth Guarantee programmes were our primary informant group: there were 29 enrolments in 2012; 28 in 2013. Some have left the district, but we attempted to contact as many as possible; our original target was for a minimum sample size of 20, but even providing an incentive to participate, uptake was slower than expected. For the other two organisations, we had projected a target of six students from each; although the managers had invited, and expected more than this number to attend the focus group meetings, in the end, only five students were available for interviews at each location. We had set no firm target numbers for the other stakeholder groups, and feel that the number we have been able to interview was sufficient for our purposes. The total number of participants interviewed during this research project was 48, as shown in Table One.

Table One: Participants interviewed

Institution	Students focus group	Students individual	Manager	Tutors	Family member	Employer	School counsellor
Hair to Train	8	11	1	3	4	3	3
Corporate Academy Group	5	-	1	1	-	-	-
Pacific Coast Tertiary Institute	5	-	1	2	-	-	-

3.2.3 Institutional records

Institutional records, including enrolment material, assessment outcomes and end-of-year reporting from all three partner organisations were also analysed for both background context and tangible evidence of the longer term impact of the programme. Primarily discussion of these records to support research findings relates to Hair to Train, but where available, similar information from research partners CAG and PCTI was also assessed. Where relevant, national results from the Tertiary Education Commission have also been included.

3.3 Data analysis

Transcripts of all 48 interviews were reviewed for emerging themes. Distinct commonalities were noted in the responses of different stakeholder groups, who each had key concerns: for example, students felt relieved to be out of school, parents felt relief that a break with an often detrimental peer group had been achieved, tutors talked about relief when turning around a history of poor attendance and achievement, and employers cautioned against an early relief that programmes were providing one hundred percent work-ready candidates. However, it was decided that rather than report the findings according to their source, a more reader-friendly and useful approach would be for each theme would be discussed as a separate topic, drawing on the relevant contributions of all informants.

Accordingly, the following section discusses five key themes:

- Post-classroom destinations
- Sustainability
- Employability
- Enablers
- Barriers

3.4 Limitations

This study was designed and conducted as a qualitative, situated case study centred on a single Youth Guarantee provider, Hair to Train. Additional data from two partner institutions has been collected and included for comparison and interest, rather than in any attempt to suggest the findings described here are representative of a larger sample. While many of the conclusions drawn about participants' experiences may well be transferable, as, we hope, will be the principles of good practice for Youth Guarantee providers outlined in the open letter (Appendix C), these are presented in the spirit of collaboration and knowledge sharing, rather than as proven and immutable facts.

It is also acknowledged that the research has relied almost solely on retrospective self-reporting, which will always be highly subjective. It is hoped that the very positive accounts of this particular Youth Guarantee experience will be corroborated over time through both longitudinal studies, and that regional and national statistics about the numbers of NEETs begin to reduce.

The researchers would also like to submit our own learning from the project: the gathering of testimony from so many informants (48) has meant that the time taken to conduct the investigation and collate data was significantly greater than estimated. While we believe that the result has been the richer for the inclusion of so many voices, we have taken some ideas from this for future project management. The first is that people like to tell their stories, and once invited to share experiences which have been significant in their life journey, or constitute one of the more fulfilling aspects of their professional role, they need as much time as they wish to develop their narrative in their own way. The second idea we will consider is the need to maintain institutional records of graduate contact details. Fortunately the Youth Guarantee programme is still new and graduate students were only a year or two at most from having completed their study, yet already some had moved away from Tauranga or offshore. Students rely on cell phones and social media – but they change providers, close and open email accounts, block contacts or renew their online details. Many of our potential sample group were difficult to trace, and this reduces the institution's ability to track ongoing outcomes and success stories. It also limits the researchers' access to potentially valuable informants.

4.0 Findings and discussion

4.1 Post-classroom destinations

Of the 19 Hair to Train Youth Guarantee graduates interviewed, nine (47%) had progressed to fulltime study for a higher qualification; two (11%) were studying and working part time; seven were working fulltime (37%) – three in a salon and four in a non-hairdressing position; one (5%) was caring for a child fulltime. Of this sample, the four in non-salon employment (21%) reported that what they were doing now was not their first choice of occupation.

The national target for Youth Guarantee graduates entering the workforce after undertaking the programme is 38%; in 2012, 28% of Youth Guarantee students across New Zealand achieved this. However, there is a growing focus on viewing the Youth Guarantee as a path way into higher level study; from 2013, all providers will be required to report student progression (Tertiary Education Commission 2012d; 2012e), so that the above result for Hair to Train graduates is highly significant.

It is also interesting to compare Hair to Train's graduates' responses with those of other school leavers of the same age. The report *On the Edge of Adulthood* cites a longitudinal study which began in 1993, with data from 27 16-year-old school leavers in 2012 which showed 44% were in employment; 41% were studying, 22% were looking for work; 4% were looking after their own child; and 7% were doing nothing (Education Counts, 2012). The same report found that 37 % wished they were doing something different from what they were currently doing.

The standout statistic here is the unemployed/unmotivated sector of the national sample, at 29%, whereas all the Youth Guarantee graduates were gainfully occupied and demonstrated a clear sense of direction. The student currently at home with a child was also eager to share her plans for future development: she will be attending the local School for Young Parents Tauranga in 2014 to continue with NCEA. As one participant told us:

> *We found what we wanted to do* (Hair to Train graduate).

Would students have found or stuck with this pathway without having experienced the Youth Guarantee programme? Most thought not; one student who had progressed to the Level 4 hairdressing programme said:

> *There's more help at YG than [I'm getting] this year, even though they were bigger classes. We went slower, just one subject at a time. Now there's more homework. I even had to study at work! If I hadn't done YG before I'd probably have pulled out by now* (several others agreed).

The focus groups of five students each held at PCTI and CAG included current students as well as graduates, but they are certainly all as future-focussed as the Hair to Train graduates:

> *I think our whole class will carry on, or it's a waste of time being here. This is the start of your future - but at school, it's chopped off at the end* (PCTI student).

Students from all three Youth Guarantee programmes were very clear about where this sense of direction for the post-classroom journey came from. Several talked about a "tab" check by the tutor at the end of each semester: "Where are you going next? What do you have to do to get there?" Three students mentioned the need to have "a Plan A, a Plan B" – clearly a memorable classroom instruction and exercise. Other students talked about how tutors had helped with leads to part time casual jobs. At PCTI, one of the

tutors is an ex-staff member from the local polytechnic and maintains strong links with the programmes and staff there. She assists the students to identify appropriate programmes, fill in application forms, and regularly accompanies them to interviews, easing the transition to a different campus. At the CAG focus group, two of the students attending had got scholarships to assist with study costs for higher qualifications at Manukau Institute of Technology – their Youth Guarantee tutor had brought in the forms, said "have a go", stood over them to see they were correctly filled out, and submitted them on the students' behalf. Both students were excited and proud, and each said that they would never have pursued this opportunity, even if they had known about it, without the persistence and support of the tutor.

Many tertiary educators from ITPs and universities working with students at levels 5 and above will no doubt see this as an unwarranted and unsustainable level of pastoral care, and a role that goes far beyond the traditional sense of teachers' work. But, for those working in this sector, these accounts are just further evidence that this level of individual input and interest is vital to students' success. In the Youth Guarantee best practice examples report (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010) similar initiatives were noted, including "developing career pathways" (p. 5). It is the Youth Guarantee provider who best knows the students, the setting and the pathways, and as the TEC report notes: "Providers will need to use their judgement when considering whether or not this additional support is appropriate, and ensuring that this support is respected by the students" (p. 9).

4.2 Sustainability

With the Youth Guarantee scheme still only four years old, and the history of participation by the focus organisation in this study a year younger than that, it is difficult to state that either programme outcomes or student shifts in attitude and achievement are categorically sustainable. Nonetheless, both reporting data and stakeholder voice offer good evidence that the strong momentum described here, and in an earlier Good Practice e-book article (Waterson & Fraser, 2013) is highly likely to continue in future offerings.

4.2.1 Achievement statistics benchmarked against national results

Using the data about first destinations above, 14 (74%) of the Hair to Train graduates were either studying for a higher qualification, or working in a hairdressing role as a direct result of their entry-level qualification achieved through their Youth Guarantee programme. It is likely that this identification of a vocation and the skills and training required will see a good number of the participants continue with their career path in the hairdressing industry. This is clearly a very positive outcome for the learners involved, and is almost certainly linked to the strong success and completion results achieved by the organisation, as shown in Table Two.

Table Two: Youth Guarantee course and qualification completions comparing Hair to Train and national results

	All NZ Youth Guarantee programmes				Hair to Train			
	Student numbers	Course completions	Qualification completions	Average credits gained	Student numbers	Course completions	Qualification completions	Average credits gained
2011	3,597	65%	54%	24.8	29	66%	79%	
2012	8901	70%	64%	37.3	28	66%	82%	99.07
2013	8,400	-	-	-	34	68%	47%	-

Source for national figures: Tertiary Education Commission (2012d; 2012e).

Note to Table Two: Qualification completions for Hair to Train are lower in 2013 compared to 2011 and 2012 as the previous qualification was 75 credits and in 2013 it is 133 credits.

Further, based on 2011 figures, Hair to Train was sixth out of 35 providers (including ITPs, PTEs and wānanga) across the country in qualification completions, and 11th of 150 in 2012. The target for qualification completion is 60% (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012d; 2012e). With only three years' data available it is hard to argue a trend, however the early indications suggest that Hair to Train's strong performance is proving sustainable.

Comparative data for 2012 from the same source for the other two Youth Guarantee providers who contributed to this study is included in Table Three.

Table Three: Youth Guarantee course and qualification completions for research partner organisations

	Corporate Academy Group				Pacific Coast (Bay of Plenty) Technical Institute			
	Student numbers	Course completions	Qualification completions	Average credits gained	Student numbers	Course completions	Qualification completions	Average credits gained
2012	17	76.4%	76.4%	89	27	NA	NA	26.5

Note for Table Three: In 2012 PCTI did not have a qualification for students to complete (approved for 2013) and although several students gained NCEA at different levels, these course and qualifications are not what other organisations are reporting on here, and so are noted as "NA": Not Applicable.

Using national reporting data to discuss the sustainability of the shifts in students' achievement and career focus will always be a fairly artificial comparison: each of the three Youth Guarantee providers in this study offers completely different programmes and therefore attracts a different type of student. A better comparison for Hair to Train's results might be with the four other hairdressing providers who offer Youth Guarantee programmes: Premier Hairdressing College Limited, The Cut Above Academy Limited, Waikato School of Hairdressing Limited, and Servilles Academy Limited. Of this group, the first two institutes have qualification completion rates slightly above those of Hair to Train, the remaining two are lower; all are well up in the results "league table" (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012e). The inference here would be that hairdressing programmes which offer targeted vocational training are particularly suited to a Youth Guarantee offering, and students respond positively when they can see direct career outcomes. Programmes which focus on catch-up NCEA credits and literacy and numeracy development as an end in itself may find it more difficult to engage and motivate students to complete these generic qualifications.

4.2.2 Participants' impressions

The 29 students interviewed from the three participating organisations were overwhelmingly positive about their Youth Guarantee experience and the opportunity it had created for them to break out of a bad pattern and/or find a new direction and purpose in their life. When asked about their previous educational history and goals, students told us:

> *I wasn't focussed, no point going. I was on [truancy] report three times.*
>
> *I dropped out 1 month after I was 16. Just sick of changing schools.*
>
> *Sick of getting rides to school with the police [truancy].*
>
> *Too much drama at school – bullying, cattiness. I wanted to do something medical…. But suspended, drinking, swearing, drugs. Peer pressure. I don't do that here. I had to step up here… It's a second chance. Now I have more respect.*

Getting away from all that trouble. Making new friends. Not getting influenced to do bad things so much.

Two thirds of the Hair to Train students were referred by their school's Guidance or Career Counsellor; others had found out about the course themselves, or from their parents/caregivers. Three of the five students from CAG came from personal recommendations.

I did a Gateway programme at school – came here, made me want to come back.

My school (Blenheim) had a hairdressing and beauty option – inspired a lot of people.

I wanted to be a chef at school but school timetables meant I couldn't pick that option – then I saw the advert in the paper.

A cousin, friend came here first. I saw Facebook comments. Now I tell all my friends to come.

Students enjoyed their programmes and found the course content relevant, appropriate and better than expected:

I didn't think we'd get as much hands on experience.

Didn't expect to want to finish as much.

Everything I wanted it to be.

Your creative vision changes. You see something, and you think hair.

They also talked about the important life and workplace skills they learnt while attending their course and it is this feature which is arguably the greatest indicator of sustainability. Common features referenced across all three providers were confidence, professionalism, self-respect and self-belief, learning how to learn, motivation, oral and written communication, time management and organisation. Individuals also talked about the value of family planning sessions, drug and alcohol awareness, and cultural learning, with the latter point mentioned by three Māori and one non-Māori student. Representative comments included:

Everyone has something they know about that others don't. Here we get to use it. At school we were the dumb bums. Bottom streams. Not anymore.

Attendance. You have to get 90% to graduate or go to next year.

Talking to people with confidence, I was really shy. I've been more outgoing since I started. Better with clients. Better at reading people.

Professional dress. I used to wear hoodies before. Now I wouldn't do that here at all.

Māori seminar, his stories. Learned more about iwi. I learned that every tribe has different beliefs.

The students' sense of their own personal and professional development was also supported by the parents interviewed. They shared stories of delinquent and anti-social behaviour, undesirable peer group associations, police intervention, school suspensions and just plain disengagement. All four parents'

narratives expressed a similar response: they were positive, grateful and relieved. They noted improvements in the student's interest, confidence, presentation, focus and manners:

> *Working in the salon has taught a lot of workplace etiquette. A friend had been there, suggested it would be good for X (daughter) to not just be a drop out, another statistic. Plus the Police Youth Aid Officer told us it would be better than trying to keep her at school. [Now] she's got confidence, can believe in herself, she's capable of being somebody. She broke away from her peer group, it was the best thing; she had to take a different path.*
>
> *Each child has their own talent – and she got to express these. I liked that the programme covered a lot of bases: sports, Māori culture and kaupapa, work ethic. She made a lot of friends too and liked it from the beginning, was happy to go. I went in to help out as a model, so I saw the customer service and good manners in action – it's not just about hairdressing.*
>
> *She's working in Australia now. She's got a better feeling for life, out there, earning money. I'm so proud of how far she's come and who she's become. I can't express how much I owe thanks to them [Hair to Train staff].*
>
> *The programme moulded what she already had going and set high standards. If they tried to slacken off they were told that it was "not acceptable". It needs someone outside the family to do this. School wasn't focussed on where **they** wanted to be.*

4.3 Employability

As noted in the review of literature about vocational education and employability earlier in this report, students need to see the relevance of their studies to their future careers (Lieb, 1991; Lynch et al., 2006). They need workplace skills and strong career guidance, with easy and facilitated transitions into work (Vaughan, 2003). A new survey *21st Century Skills and the Workplace: A 2013 Microsoft Partners in Learning and Pearson Foundation Study* published by Gallup, drew a bold conclusion: "What works in schools is real work":

> The best type of curriculum for preparing students for the workforce is one that focuses on real-world problem-solving. It sounds simple, but for the first time, we have clearly established a link between students learning 21st century skills and future work success (as cited in Tabor, 2013, p. 2).

The findings from the present study discussed in this report underscore how well placed Youth Guarantee programmes are to provide just this type of teaching and learning delivery. All the students interviewed talked about work and work experience. In the Hair to Train programme, students gain first-hand experience in salon skills, including reception duties, shampooing and blow-drying, cash-handling, mixing dye and tint products and salon maintenance. The CAG students described work experience which included placements in a sport and recreation centre, public swimming pool complex, garage service centres, blood donor centre as well as activities to support Returned Services Association events: Poppy Day, and assisting veterans with household support like mowing lawns. Work experience is also an integral part of the New Zealand Certificate in Employment Skills delivered at PCTI.

Students and tutors attest to the importance of continuous career conversations. As one of the PCTI tutors said:

> *I tell them they are destined for bigger things; they just didn't know it when they started! The students don't have anything in mind; don't know where they want to go. So career guidance is a huge part of what we do, to get the students into another PTE or Poly. I'm a strong advocate for higher education. I have an assumption, I expect their buy-in, that they will be going on to another*

institution – not out to casual labour where there's no place for them, no security. I create an expectation, it's a taken, a given, that they will take what we teach them and go on: to another institution, the army, too. We use Career Quest, online. You often hear the students say things like "I didn't know I could do this, but what I really want is to be a nurse", "I didn't know I could do this, but what I really want is to be an early childhood teacher…" We can be the missing link.

The students agree with this – one CAG graduate described how his present job –and future career, he hopes – with a local radio station came about from a class exercise where students had to suggest career options for classmates. Another student from PCTI told us about her plans:

I had NCEA 1 and 2 when I left school, but no plan. Now I know what I'm going to do in 2014, I'm going to be a make-up artist [Tauranga Academy – local PTE]. I got this through careers discussion here. I was kicked out of school at 15.

However, a Youth Guarantee qualification is no silver bullet, and employability takes more than willpower and positive energy. Alongside stories of success from students, teachers and parents, there were some provisos. Several students were disillusioned about the scarcity of jobs in the hairdressing industry, and had been applying for work all over New Zealand, with mixed success: at the time of interview, four students from Hair to Train were working outside the industry, but were still looking for salon work.

The three students who were working in a salon each mentioned that there had been some need for retraining, and this was reiterated by one of the parents interviewed:

The girls come out believing they are more qualified than they are – at job interviews, they can give the wrong information; they're really still only a junior. I don't think they fully understand the gap between classroom and industry.

And employers had similar comments:

Students need to train for a commercial salon – there are different standards. X [name] was signed off as competent answering the phone, shampooing, but she couldn't really do it unsupervised, and that surprised me. She shouldn't have been signed off because that's just misleading. But she's stepped up now, doing fantastic. I do think the training helped things fall into place.

The skills are to Unit Standards, not salon standards. We had to have a few conversations early on and be clear about expectations.

X is still young; quite shy, a bit withdrawn. All her skills are on a par with other apprentices, and she's definitely good at what she does, but needs more confidence relating to clients, making conversation. It's got to come naturally – being chatty and outgoing, having a smile on your face – you can't just mope around. Perhaps it's an age thing – not necessarily to do with training.

Of course, issues such as this are not confined to Youth Guarantee programmes. As Fulljames et al. (2006) note, there is a considerable difference between the culture of learning and the culture of work. Typically students get regular feedback about their performance; their programmes are highly structured with a great deal of direction, and they have flexible schedules with few major changes. Students get frequent breaks and time off, and the focus is very much on their own development and individual efforts. Life in the workforce can often be diametrically opposed. Clearly it is advantageous to students to encounter this different culture before embarking on a career in their chosen field, so that this experiential learning provides a valuable

addition to an academic programme. It may be that Hair to Train students might benefit from time in commercial as well as training salons, as part of their learning.

4.4 Enablers

Participants mentioned a broad range of factors which had contributed to the success of individual students and programmes as a whole. The following are a selection of the most prominent themes.

4.4.1 The contrast with school

School Guidance/Career Counsellors are very aware that secondary school education does not suit all students. Close liaison between this professional group and the Youth Guarantee providers is essential: direct referrals or introduction through programmes like Gateway was the main pathway for most students in this sample. School Counsellors from four Tauranga secondary schools which regularly send students to Hair to Train as well as PCTI and other local Youth Guarantee providers were quite clear on the target learner group:

> *Some students just want to be out of school. For them, it's boring and irrelevant. They don't value the kind of education we offer, and get more out of skills and trades training. They love getting dressed up and out of uniform, and it seems to be really successful.*

> *YG programmes are seen by these students as more sophisticated than school – they've had enough, it's the next step. They want to be part of the real world, and this is the middle step, the in-between part.*

Students were equally clear about what they saw as the advantages of their Youth Guarantee programme over the school experience:

> *School is way different. You have 9 different teachers. You have to do things you don't want to do in life.*

> *What I like at PCTI is learning how to learn. Not moving every period. We do units for a whole day, maybe more. The tutors give you more attention. It's not class size, it's because we're not always moving on – they don't have so many classes to keep up with. Homework's just for one subject. Easy to get through lots of credits.*

> *We can spend 2 weeks on a subject, 1 thing at a time. At school, you just get the hang of something and you have to change – 6 subjects a day – you forget it all.*

> *More personal; classes smaller; more 1:1 with tutor. Tutors actually care.*

> *The tutors try to find the easiest way, so we understand. At school, it's just the hard way.*

4.4.2 The student-tutor relationship

Students and tutors attested to the importance of their relationship. Youth Guarantee funding includes a component for pastoral support, and from the interviews conducted for this study, it was clear that students access support from their tutors well beyond the logistics of arranging travel or assisting with agency referrals. The tutors from all three organisations spoke of holistic support, a personal connection, and creating a safe environment. Every tutor and manager had stories of students who needed food, a bed, an advocate in family disputes, help with legal issues, or just a hug. Tutors recognised that many students came from backgrounds where education was not prized, where achievement was not celebrated and where

aspirations were not encouraged. The following are representative comments to this effect from tutors from each participant organisation:

> *We have a class contract – things they can expect; things to help their learning – e.g. don't talk over each other, don't steal, respect. All the students sign this and we use it in discipline discussions. There's a big sense of family within these walls. We tell them: "We don't do this in our family..." and we are all consistent with enforcing our standards.*
>
> *We're whānau – there's zero tolerance for bullying, abuse, disrespect, negative behaviour*
>
> *Role of tutors is critical. The success of our programme is 90% the teacher, 10% the content. We have to know what they can move onto; know what they can cope with. We show our students someone actually cares; will listen. Not be judgemental.*
>
> *We started by doing what we felt was best – nurturing, like raising our children. We teach them how to make tea and coffee, we instil pride, self-esteem, get them thinking how you look, sound, smell, talk – can see a sense of progress – even how they walk – "I'm worth something".*
>
> *Students come back to tell us what they're doing "You'll be proud of me Miss…"*
>
> *Staff have to be careful to protect ourselves. Our natures mean we care, worry. It's hard to turn off at the end of the day - We are part of our students' lives. Past students stay in touch, they come back with children; they tell us when they get jobs.*

Students value and rely on this level of support, recognising:

> *The tutors are our family. A big part is the tutor coming from the same background as us – she tells stories, shares her past.*
>
> *The tutors give me confidence; I can ask them to come with me; it's okay to ask for help.*
>
> *I liked that they're not just there for the hairdressing, you could talk to them about stuff. I stress out about this course.*

4.4.3 A sense of family

Intentionally fostering a sense of "family" offers a platform for Youth Guarantee providers to equip students with the life and citizenship skills to become fully functional members of their own community, and eventually, to build successful families of their own. Many students come from fragmented home backgrounds, and the learning environment they encounter in these smaller, practically-based programmes may be their first experience of the power of whānau support. In some cases, the newfound loyalty and cohesion is a powerful motivation for students to keep up attendance and not drop out:

> *I have a rocky life, lived with my Nan, was forging her signatures (wagging), then I got kicked out. Went to my auntie. Now I'm back with Ma.*
>
> *We're with similar people now. I don't rock the boat, cos we're all in it together. It's tight. We have a close relationship when we're in class. We all understand everyone's at a different learning stage.*
>
> *When home is rocky, this is a good place to come.*

We socialise outside of school, everyone's here for one another. If someone's sad, everyone will check on them.

We had a couple of guys wanted to leave – we talked to them, got them to keep coming. 90% is what the students do for each other.

The Hair to Train manager offered a story which epitomises the sense of family they aim to create from the first "open days" at the start of the year. A student who had been involved in destructive behaviour at home and had a range of social difficulties was initially unruly and uncooperative in class. The manager described how her entire teaching team made an effort to focus on what was good. The student was given "pats on the back", and he started to think about the impact of his behaviour on his own peace of mind. As the manager says, "Early in the year, he had his hood on, but over time, opened up – his hair got shorter, off his face and he got happier. He got some work experience in hairdressing and gained friends – he was lonely". Recently the manager noticed the student on Facebook, announcing he'd been off drugs for three months, "There were 25 comments – well done! – all from his classmates from YG".

A tutor from a different institution gave an example of a student from Tuvalu "who came with nothing". When he got an interview for the army everyone helped supply clothes and get him ready – and then celebrated when he was successful. This highly supportive relationship between student and the organisation has continued well beyond graduation: as the tutor noted, "He's in East Timor now, but still comes back to talk to the new students when he's here".

These stories, and a number of others shared with the researchers throughout this study, affirm Hattie's (2009) dictum that before we can enable growth and learning, we need to develop and maximise self-esteem, a sense of caring for one another, and mutual respect. When students haven't found this at school or at home, it is easy to see the impact that a learning environment that fosters a sense of family and belonging can have.

4.4.4 Language, literacy and numeracy

Like all Youth Guarantee programmes, a major focus of programme delivery in each of the three participating organisations is the achievement of NCEA credits and improving baseline literacy and numeracy competence. Using the National Assessment Tool to pre and post-test students has allowed the lead organisation in this study, Hair to Train, to demonstrate that over the three years of operation, every student who has completed the qualification, progressed within the step, or improved at least one step by the end of the study period. A key enabler to "sell" this learning to the students is using tasks which fit within the real-world context of a commercial salon, such as, creating calendars, making appointments, calculating travel allowances, budgeting, price schedules, measuring and mixing products, timing treatments, taking payment and stock taking. A fuller account of some of these strategies can be found in Waterson and Fraser's (2013) good practice article.

Each organisation also offers the chance of learners to re-sit assessments or catch up with credits missed, whether it's "Catch up Mondays" or "Mop up Tuesdays". As the tutors note, this is good for one-to-one time with students who have particular needs, or to cover a late start or classes missed due to illness, but generally students learn to avoid the need for extra study: "They don't like to give up free time".

Students like learning and succeeding, especially when they've come from a history of underachieving:

Best thing that's happened? Achieving credits.

I always wanted a higher qualification – knew I was smart enough. I have learning difficulties, but it wasn't diagnosed till after school. Now it's official. I couldn't write on a straight line. After Youth Guarantee I did CIC [Certificate in Computing] and Level 5 Computer Science. Now I'm thinking about Victoria University next year.

4.4.5 Cultural awareness and pride

Despite recent increases, Māori and Pacific students are still recording lower qualification rates than their non-Māori and non-Pasifika counterparts (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012a). Closing this gap to parity is also a key tertiary priority and part of the current TEC Tertiary Education Strategy. Poor educational performance for Māori has repercussions, not just for the individuals, but for their families and society in general: qualifications are linked to job status and incomes. There is a large, and growing body of literature including the seminal work of Russell Bishop (2003, also Bishop & Berryman, 2009) and Alton-Lee's (2003) 'best evidence synthesis' *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling* which emphasises that for Māori students (and students from other non-mainstream ethnicities) what they need to succeed is a culturally responsive context for learning, knowing that their background and the experiences they bring to the classroom are valued, and learning which is relevant.

Tutors and managers from the three study providers all referred to the need for students to know themselves, and where they come from before they can see ahead to where they might be going. All agreed that a learning environment which encourages students to embrace their culture, so that their sense of who they are underpins their learning and their aspirations, is essential. With Māori students comprising more than half of the roll at each institution in the study, recognition of Māori heritage and culture was an integral component of every programme. Representative comments from tutors and students show the impact of this:

I'm really strong on Māori –I always have the date on the board in both languages, I use simple instructions in class, like "e tū" – stand up. I've done Level 2 Te Reo [Māori] through the wānanga. At the start of term, I include karakia, hīmene – then some students were asking for it every day, so I discuss this with the class – for example, I might bring it in on Tuesdays with our shared breakfasts.

A lot of Māori kids don't know their iwi, so [guest speaker] comes in the first term, speaks at graduation too. This often starts the students on a journey; they can go home and ask questions. We get students to put together their own pepeha (an introduction of themselves): where you come from, who you are. So many don't know where their grandparents came from.

I live with my white family. My Māori family are down south. I don't know much about them.

4.5 Barriers and solutions

Naturally things don't always go smoothly, and this group of students are often already presenting with a host of problems and complications. During the course of conducting this study, we heard stories of dysfunctional families, abuse, mental health issues, learning special needs, alcohol and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, social isolation and bullying, homelessness and criminal behaviour. Some students can't and don't fit in, say the tutors and managers, but such a conclusion is a very last resort and the organisations work tirelessly to find solutions. Examples given were supporting family members to bring in infants for students to breastfeed during study days so they could complete the end of a year or credit assessments; attending family conferences as a support for the student; accompanying them to agencies such as

Foodbank to access support, or professional services like doctors, lawyers, family planning; and creating and enforcing class contracts to keep all students safe.

Students said they liked knowing where they stood, what the expectations were, and what the consequences were for non-compliance:

> *What I like here – [they] communicate with us as adults, and they kick our arses. It's about time. And discipline.*
>
> *Two of our tutors weren't strict enough at first. It's good to know what you can't get away with. They motivated us.*
>
> A*t school, you're sent to the Dean if you're a bit late, but here, they know we want to learn, maybe the car was out of gas, or couldn't get a lift – it's not soft, there are still consequences – like 10 press-ups in front of the class for every minute late – even after breaks. You soon learn.*
>
> *We got pushed quite a bit – they knew we could do better.*

The Corporate Academy Group have issued students with uniforms for some classes, especially those studying on the New Zealand Defence Force Preparation programme, as a way of instilling a standard of dress and presentation for those representing the organisation at public events. The students who attended that focus group all said they liked having these:

> *We looked the part. So we don't look like a pack of hoodlums.*
>
> *It's about "Class not arse".*

Managers, tutors and parents also talked about how many of the Youth Guarantee students had not experienced a lot of success in the past, and noted how important recognition was in building a sense of self-identity and self-esteem. The three providers all make a point of celebrating milestone achievements and offering incentives to help with motivation. One example is Hair to Train's system of awarding vouchers students can use for salon treatments for themselves or family members (see Waterson & Fraser, 2013 for further examples). Students were enthusiastic about this aspect of their Youth Guarantee experience:

> *Like if you were at work, you'd be getting a pay check – we get certificates for everything we do.*
>
> *Rewards for coming*
>
> *Graduation is really important. My closest mates came, they were still at school, and were so impressed*

4.6 Gathering momentum: The snowball effect

Just as parents' educational attitudes and behaviours have been shown to have a significant impact on children's educational attainment (Feinstein & Sabates, 2006), so too can learners' achievements affect other family members. Some of our student informants talked about how they had heard about the Youth Guarantee scheme from friends, and several described how they were passing on the word:

> *All my cousins have copied me. They live in Auckland; they were playing with hair; they're good at it. I said there must be a (YG) course there. Now they go to Cut Above.*

Two from my class at school are in YG programmes in other hairdressing schools – they got the idea from me. Otherwise they would have just been on the dole.

I talk to a couple of girls doing work experience in Auckland, they just do floors; I tell them they have to stick with it. I've been telling them they should come and have a look at here.

During the year I was at CAG, X [past student] used to come into my class and talk to us about MIT and being in a much bigger programme doing harder levels of study for a degree –now I'm there and I come back with her to talk to this year's students at CAG.

This type of testimony and endorsement is invaluable marketing for the scheme's success, and particularly so in 2013 when Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment Minister Steven Joyce has just announced the extension of fee-free Youth Guarantee funding to 18 and 19 year olds from January 2014 (beehive.govt.nz, 2013). The Government's rationale is the sort of success experienced by the three providers profiled in this report, as the Minister notes: "The Youth Guarantee has been very successful at encouraging 16 and 17 year olds to stay engaged in education, completing Level 1 and 2 qualifications instead of dropping out and going on a benefit."

And on an individual level, one of the parents interviewed expressed a similar view:

This is a great opportunity for some of these young ones: there should be more programmes like this. Better they should be in some sort of training till 18. Otherwise they're not learning anything. It's a far better use of these years between 16 and 17: if they're going to jump off the tracks, that's when it would be.

Such accounts indicate there is plenty of support for Youth Guarantee training opportunities at both the grassroots and the policy level. An improved attitude to education by previously under-served learners at the lowest levels of tertiary education (Levels 1-3 and bridging/foundation programmes) is likely to have a longer term benefit to society as these learners become parents and foster a greater respect for, and engagement with, education. The findings discussed here suggest, therefore, that Youth Guarantee offers an effective framework for a long-term and sustainable shift in learner achievement.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

This research project sought to examine the longer-term benefits for the students of a Youth Guarantee hairdressing programme, and specifically whether graduates were in employment or further study. We were interested in the sustainability of the good outcomes reported over the first three years the programme has been running – both in terms of the programme's ongoing success, as well as for the individual students' longer term benefits. Another area of interest was whether the student's success has had an impact on family and community.

A situated, qualitative case study like the research reported here was intended to provide a snapshot of a specific context: the Youth Guarantee programmes offered by Hair to Train – with perspective provided by examining similar offerings by CAG and PCTI. The objective has been to combine reports from a range of stakeholders to get as full and rich a view as possible of what is happening here and why it is working so well. Data from interviews with Hair to Train's students, tutors, manager, whānau, school careers advisors and employers has been supplemented with the provider's academic reporting records, as well as with accounts from two other Youth Guarantee programme providers, the PCTI, Tauranga and CAG, Auckland. This mix of qualitative and quantitative data, as well as institutional and national data has informed the project and allowed us to substantiate claims of strong learner outcomes and effective strategies. In addition, the collaboration with two other providers as partners has provided valuable insights regarding generic and context-specific challenges, enablers, barriers and solutions.

Our findings indicate that:

- these programmes appear to offer a strong likelihood of sustainability into the future
- that students are focused and moving forward with study and/or career
- that word-of-mouth is spreading back to schools, communities and families
- that the uptake for Youth Guarantee offerings will continue to grow.

It is hoped that this account will be useful for other Youth Guarantee providers, and may provide a benchmark for future planning and goal-setting. The key principles for success and sustainability as identified through this project are:

- A strong personal connection between individual tutors and students
- A learning environment that fosters a sense of 'family', so that students learn to support one another, to work collaboratively and to develop a team spirit
- Setting high expectations and ensuring these are clear to the students
- Cultural awareness and inclusivity
- Real-world relevance
- Respecting and growing maturity
- Development of "soft skills" such as confidence, professionalism and self-management, as well as embedding opportunities to enhance language, literacy and numeracy proficiency, alongside programme content
- Plenty of celebrating and acknowledgement of incremental achievements.

These key principles are outlined in more detail for easy dissemination in Appendix C.

All good research projects open the way for further development and for others to build on the work that has been done. We identified two areas in which future research could develop the work included in this report: (1) collating longer term results for individual organisations against levels and types of pastoral care services provided; (2) evaluating the awareness and application of the principles outlined in the open letter across all Youth Guarantee providers as a national evaluation in 12 to 24 months' time. In the meantime, the authors welcome comments and feedback from readers, and are happy to provide further information on request.

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Appendix A Interview questions for students / Guide for tutors

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS / GUIDE FOR TUTORS
Where do they go? The post-classroom journeys of our Youth Guarantee hairdressing graduates

1. Are you currently:
- Studying full time? / part time?
- Working full time? (salon or other?) / part time?
- Looking for work?
- Looking after a child?
- None of these?

2. Is what you are doing now your first choice of occupation for now?

3. Before you came to Hair to Train, what were your plans / goals? (work/study/independence?). How likely do you think it was that you would achieve these?

4. What was your secondary school experience like? NCEA qualifications?

5. What sort of life / workplace skills did you have?

6. What messages did you get from your family – what do they value?

7. What were you expecting of the course?

8. During the YG programme, what were the most important life / workplace skills you learnt?

9. What made it easy to attend and achieve? (Relationships, culture, LLN). What did you enjoy?

10. What made it difficult? What did you dislike?

11. After graduating, how do you think you are better off? (Employable? Confidence? Social/soft skills – presentation, professionalism, responsibility, work ethic etc)

12. With hindsight, can you see any gaps that should have been covered or would have helped prepare you for higher study/employment?

13. Have your attitudes about education changed? Have you talked about this with other friends or family members?

14. Have your life plans changed at all from completing this course? Do you think the impact will be short term or long term?

Appendix B Interview questions for other stakeholders

Whānau / Family

- How did you hear about the YG programme at Hair to Train? What factors contributed to your, and your daughter's (son's) decision to enrol?
- What was the pattern for the student's behaviour/attendance/achievement at school? How did this change with the YG programme?
- What changes have you seen in the student's behaviour, attitude, demeanour?
- What skills do you think they gained?
- How do you think they are placed now regarding employability? Future pathways? Life direction? Would they have got there without YG?
- Given the outcomes for the student, with hindsight, was this the best option? Has it made an impact on others in the (extended) family? Student's peer group?

Employers

- How much do you know about YG programmes?
- How well has your employee fitted into your workplace?
- How do her workplace skills compare to other employees in her position? What was their pathway? When you are recruiting new staff, what is your preference for training provision?
- What strengths or limitations do you note regarding what is covered in the YG programme? What gaps need to be addressed?
- A longer term pathway for the employee – how feasible is a career in hairdressing? Are there opportunities for her to continue training / career progression?

School career / guidance counsellors

- What sort of students do you refer to the Hair to Train Youth Guarantee programme, and why?
- What do you see as the key differences between what they offer, and the schooling experience?
- How significant a factor is your school's association with the Gateways programme and familiarity with hair to train as a provider?
- What feedback do you get from past students directly, or do you hear about indirectly, regarding their future pathways beyond the YG programme?
- Any suggestions for improving any aspect of the liaison/transition/reporting process?

Appendix C Open letter to Youth Guarantee providers

Dear colleagues

We have recently completed a research project titled "*Where do they go? The post-classroom journeys of our Youth Guarantee hairdressing graduates",* available on the Ako Aotearoa website https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/where-do-they-go.

We hope that the following principles identified from our own experience in delivering Youth Guarantee programmes, and from researching the sustainability of outcomes for our learners, will be of assistance as you plan, evaluate and revise your own programmes. Working with young school leavers who come with a record of educational under-achievement has significant challenges that the wider tertiary sector may not face, but the rewards can be all the more fulfilling for being so hard won!

What we have found that works:

- A strong personal connection between individual tutors and students. Students need to feel that this person, who represents the face of the organisation, is interested in their wellbeing and cares about their success. This means regular and ongoing conversations about progress, and assisting the student to overcome any barriers that are restricting their ability to achieve. It means knowing the learner, their background, their aspirations, their learning preferences and their passions. Pastoral care is a large part of the package, and is where the tutor "walks the talk" of their commitment to their students.
- A learning environment that fosters a sense of 'family', so that students learn to support one another, to work collaboratively and to develop a team spirit. Not wanting to let classmates down is part of the persistence/completion equation for many.
- Setting high expectations and ensuring these are clear to the students. Enforcing standards with fair, transparent and consistent discipline, but remaining flexible and considering each case on an individual basis.
- Cultural awareness and inclusivity. Students need to develop their own sense of identity, belonging and pride alongside learning vocational skills, and for many, especially as Youth Guarantee programmes have a high proportion of Māori and Pacific learners, this begins with understanding and valuing their heritage.
- Real-world relevance. Students are looking for direction and authentic preparation for the workplace. They value language, literacy and numeracy alongside subject knowledge, and find the learning sticks most readily when contextualised in practical tasks which relate to their field, rather than as a free-standing academic subject – they have tried that approach at school, and it didn't stick then!
- Respecting and growing maturity. Youth Guarantee students are attending from choice: they have left the compulsory secondary school system and are looking for a very different experience. They want to be treated as adults, and although the student-teacher dynamic still exists, they want to be consulted about key aspects of their programme (areas like timetables, re-sits, learning contracts and milestone rewards can all be negotiated), they want their prior knowledge and cultural identity recognised and they want to be independent and autonomous in managing their study.
- Plenty of celebrating! Students who may not have enjoyed a lot of success or recognition in the past thrive on the positive reinforcement that certificates, open days, exhibitions of work, competition entries and graduation events offer. Students enjoy opportunities to represent their institute and be acknowledged as part of the wider organisation's success.

Further ideas can be found in the full report, or in the account of good practice produced earlier in 2013 by the authors: http://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/ako-hub/good-practice-publication-grants-e-book/resources/books/hairdressing-and-the-youth-guarantee-scheme

If you have any questions or would like to comment on your own experiences, we would love to hear from you!

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