

## 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 [www.ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/where-do-they-go-the-post-classroom-journeys-of-our-youth-guarantee-graduates/](http://www.ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/where-do-they-go-the-post-classroom-journeys-of-our-youth-guarantee-graduates/).

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.

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

Cath Fraser: [fraser.cath@gmail.com](mailto:fraser.cath@gmail.com)

Donna Waterson: [office@hairtotrain.co.nz](mailto:office@hairtotrain.co.nz)

