

# The Youth Guarantee Fees-Free scheme: A research study

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The views and recommendations of this report are our own, but we hope they are an effective response to the issues, dilemmas, hopes and aspirations of you all.

Liz Gordon (on behalf of the team)  
Otautahi/ Christchurch  
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## Glossary

AE	Alternative Education (secondary-based service)
ART	Activity Reporting Tool (MSD Youth Service)
EFTS	Equivalent Full-Time Student
EPI	Educational Performance Indicator
ITP	Institute of Technology or Polytechnic
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSD	Ministry of Social Development
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement. This can be awarded at levels 1, 2 or 3
NEET	Referring to young (usually aged 16-24), not in education, employment or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PTE	Private Training Establishment
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEO	Tertiary Education Organisation (include ITPs, PTEs and Wānanga).
YG	Youth Guarantee Scheme
YGFF	Youth Guarantee Fees-Free Scheme (a subset of youth guarantee)
YP	Youth Payment
YPP	Young Parent's Payment
YS	Youth Service

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## Executive summary

The background to the study outlines the history of continual high youth unemployment and government interventions over the past 30 years, and considers the characteristics of youth programmes in New Zealand as they have developed over time. A range of factors defined the various schemes, but most were short-term, low-skill interventions and there is no evidence that they either improved individual outcomes or the labour market as a whole.

Recently, there has been a move towards programmes that are focused on pathways and meaningful qualifications through the Youth Guarantee Fees-Free scheme.

A brief overview of the international literature examines recent European initiatives and outlines key characteristics of effective programmes. These include:

- reducing the scarring effect of unemployment
- recognising the heterogeneous nature of the youth population
- a regional/national model
- the state's moral hazard in providing programmes
- the nature of effective programmes in providing both training and work opportunities
- the question of the timing of interventions.

The core research question is: **What institutional, sector-wide and other factors contribute to achievement by former NEETS in youth guarantee 'fees-free' places?**

The term 'former NEETs' is defined and explained. The methods used are outlined and described, and participants and ethical procedures explained. The programmes: youth guarantee, fees-free scheme and youth service are discussed. Finally, stakeholder and evaluation views of the programme are briefly outlined to set the context for this study.

The YGFF scheme may not enrol the most vulnerable youth but those enrolled have a very wide range of social and educational needs. Many of the young people described a range of difficulties and barriers to learning in school, including bullying, health problems and forms of disengagement. Main screening tools are the interview and the trial period, and it is unknown how many young people are excluded (or exclude themselves) through these processes. As well, up to 40 percent of those who are enrolled drop out (this figure comes from both research data and TEC completion data), which is also a form of self-selection.

The TEOs often find it difficult to deal effectively with the problems existing students bring (which are often worked through in the classroom by the tutors), and it is difficult to imagine how educational organisations could overcome higher levels of social need in the existing model. There is little evidence of systematic cherry-picking in the sector. To an extent, the fact that there are unfilled places is a protection against cherry-picking practices.

The external factors that influence engagement on the YGFF scheme are prior school experiences and social and economic circumstances, plus local and regional factors. In terms of internal factors, students interviewed generally rated the programme well. They liked the freedom and relaxed atmosphere, the tutors, course content, especially in trades courses, an iwi-based framework and (in some cases) very strong support systems. Around four out of 10 students do not stay in the course until the end, and little is known about them. Those who do stay are likely to experience some course or programme success, and are confident about their ability to finish the year. Despite relatively low EPI indicators, tutors are under pressure to meet targets. In 2013, many PTEs in particular struggled to reach the stated targets, and fear that they will be penalised in terms of future places in a competitive market.

In 2013 in the 16 to 19 years age group there were around 40,000 young people either unemployed, and or NEET, and/or on YGFF programmes. Apart from some opportunities for 18 and 19-year-olds in work-based placements or subsidised work, few opportunities exist outside the youth guarantee programme, except in higher level fee-paying programmes. For disadvantaged youth, there are few broad opportunities, although there may be options within some regions. Agencies in this space need to be more integrated to provide a seamless service.

TEOs are not required to, and mainly do not, track students once they leave. Attempts to keep in touch are frustrated by the high levels of student mobility. At the time of interview just under 100 students who gave their views wished to continue into work, and about the same number wanted to go into employment. A small number did not know what they were going to do. TEOs acknowledged that at times pathways to further programmes were limited.

The pedagogies adopted by most of the TEOs and programmes can best be described as 'pragmatic', linked to the exigencies of the students and programmes rather than any specific theory of learning. The approaches adopted across the sector seem to have more to do with managing learning in the context of significant student need for support, than with a planned pedagogical approach. The most common model was a form of individual learning within a small group context, and was made more complex by the rolling start. There was a lot of 'reinventing the wheel' going on between TEOs, which could be improved with a clear regional focus.

The conclusion identified the need for more research with those who approach TEOs but never get into a programme, those who leave the programme before completion, the next steps for those who complete programmes and leave without progression and finally, the broader regional youth market context.

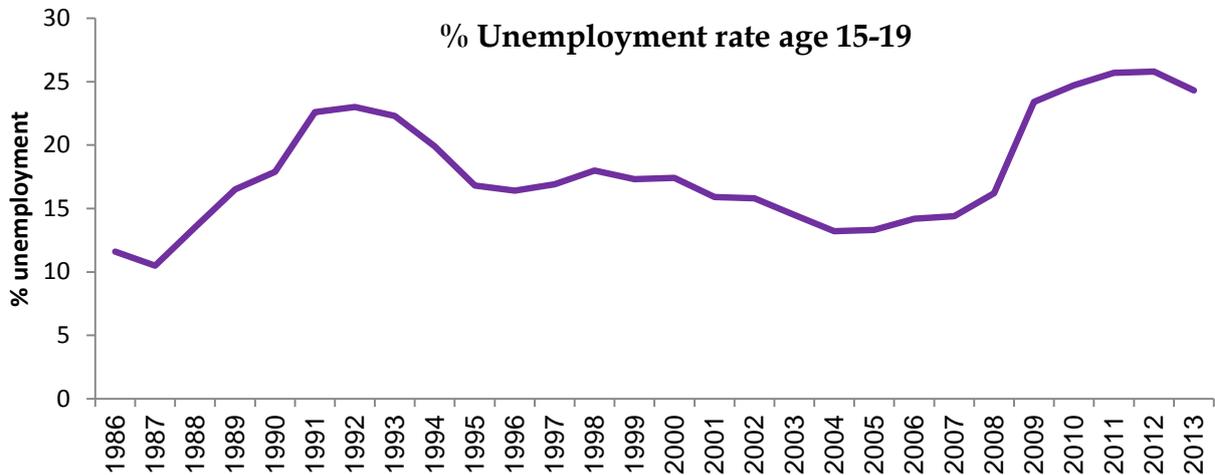
## **Recommendations**

1. That one central agency be responsible for overseeing the youth guarantee, and co-ordinate with the other agencies to provide a more seamless and appropriate model for youth.
2. A single central government agency to foster collaboration and ensure that operational policies allow for a student-centred approach and the sharing of best practice.
3. If the intent is to address youth unemployment we need:
  - a. data on student disengagement and on the shape/nature of the labour force as well as anticipate future needs
  - b. processes and funding which facilitate meetings and collaboration between TEOs, schools, regional bodies, regional divisions of government agencies, and employers.
4. Flexibility in funding and EPIs to ensure that YGFF is focused on student need, not on the ease of measuring, evaluating, or administering the scheme.
5. Recognition that 'life skills', social connectedness, and the building of 'self-esteem' in this group of young people is crucial if they are to move into further training/education, to be productive workers, and to fully contribute to their communities as citizens.
6. That there is acknowledgement of, and funding approach, which recognises that no single person can provide everything for these young people. Their complex needs means that a collaborative approach is needed to meet their literacy and numeracy needs, skills and training needs, work and life skills needs, and pastoral care needs.

7. Tutors need professional development time set aside which allows them to talk with each other, with communities, and with employers.
8. That each student be assigned a 'mentor'/'counsellor'/'guide' who will work with them to develop an individualised plan. This plan will take into consideration both the deficits of the student caused by their social and educational contexts; but also will build on the strengths and already achieved skills each young person brings with them. The support person for students should not be the tutors, who are already coping with multiple tasks and do not have the specialist skills to deal with the broader contextual issues (even though many do take this on currently).
9. That TEC and other government agencies look at the actual pastoral care needs and costs of YGFF, as the funding currently is not providing for the in-depth and long-term support of all students.

## 1.0 Background to this study

The background to this study is the high levels of unemployment among youth, aged 15 to 24 years, over the past 30 years, which has broken down the traditional pathways between school and work. The focus here is on those aged 16-19 years (with some 15 year-olds who have been exempted from school). The unemployment rate for this group in New Zealand has been high for 30 years, despite attempts to reduce it, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Time series unemployment rate in New Zealand for those in the labour market aged 15-19 years, HLFS 1986-2013.

Figure 1 illustrates what is likely to be a generational effect: that young people facing youth unemployment today are the children of those facing high unemployment a generation ago. The current period of very high youth unemployment is the result of the global financial downturn, but it is set within a context of years of high youth unemployment.

The main response to high youth unemployment in New Zealand has been a series of programmes of youth education and training, spanning the whole period since 1984. Prior to that, temporary employment schemes constituted the main response to unemployment. The development of youth training signalled a shift from demand-led to supply-led approaches to unemployment (Higgins, 2002 p. 50), with the focus on improving the opportunities for young people.

The first youth training programme, Young Persons' Training Programme (YPTP), was followed by the ACCESS and MACCESS schemes. The ACCESS scheme was intended to provide education for those 'who were disadvantaged in the labour market and for whom traditional training methods were unsuitable or unavailable' (MoE, 2010, p. 10). Persons accepted were eligible for subsidised courses from employers, polytechnics or approved groups and community organisations. It initially focused on youth aged 15-19 who were unemployed and had a history of joblessness (Gordon, 1989 p. 178). It had a regional focus and a dual focus on 'life skills' and 'work skills'. The scheme was open entry and funding for each entrant was based on the 'level of disadvantage they faced' (MoE, 2010, p. 10).

Over time, further training courses have been designed and developed to reflect different priorities and policies, but is very much within the supply-side model of training for 'jobs and life'. From 1993 the key programme was known as the Training Opportunities Programme, or TOPs. TOPs dismantled the regional focus, and also the Māori focus, that had been an important part of ACCESS in favour of a tighter focus on the unemployed:

The Training Opportunities Programme (TOPS) developed out of ACCESS at the start of 1993, and MACCESS was subsumed into TOPS later that year. TOPS retained some of the features of ACCESS, but it was targeted more specifically at school leavers and long-term job seekers with low or no qualifications. It aimed to assist them gain recognised qualifications (or credit towards them), and to move into further education and training or employment<sup>1</sup>.

This led in 1998 to the formation of Youth Training, which offered part-time credit courses mainly in the PTE sector. Benseman's, (2006) article describes one such programme, and notes a range of barriers to successful outcomes. Youth training became less popular over time. Between 2004 and 2008 the population of 15 to 19-year-olds grew by 7 percent from 299,000 to 320,000 and the unemployment rate went from 13 to 15 percent, yet Youth Training placements declined from 14,453 in 1999 to 8,309 in 2011, while those classified as NEET increased to nearly 20,000 in 2008 (MoE, 2010 pp. 15, 24 and MoE, 2013 p. 48).

It is crucial to acknowledge that these programmes have existed alongside high levels of youth unemployment for the whole period considered here. While education and training programmes for youth may have mitigated youth unemployment by removing young people from the labour market for a period, there is no evidence at all in any of the literature that these programmes have resolved labour market failings either regionally or nationally.

The Youth Guarantee fees-free (YGFF) scheme commenced in 2010 and in 2012 the Youth Training programme was abolished, subsumed into the new scheme. In 2013, the YGFF catered for approximately 10,000 young people aged 16-19 years.

Despite many changes in programme systems and settings during the 30-year history of youth training in New Zealand, some varying directions and emphases can be seen:

- There has been a variation in the focus of the policy implementation emphasising either/or employment, training, life skill development or education.
- Responsibility for unemployed youth has shifted between government agencies, as a result of policy changes, with involvement at different times from the Ministry of Education, Department of Labour, Maori Affairs, Work and Income/MSD, and TEC.
- The variation in departmental involvement noted above, plus changes in the nature of the schemes, has meant variable funding arrangements.
- Targeting of effort and funding available has variously shifted from employers (farming or business), to categories of young people (disadvantaged, alienated, seasonal workers, those made redundant, drug and alcohol dependent youth, intellectually challenged) to a general 'deficit-based' category of NEETs.
- Delivery at the interface of secondary school and the tertiary education sector has shifted from community and voluntary sector involvement, individual employers, local authorities, marae, wānanga, polytechnics and PTEs which acknowledges regional/community needs to a national scheme involving TEOs.

Overall these shifts must be seen as responding to the termination of post-16 employment possibilities in the light of business/financial pressure, declining jobs, declining sponsorship, and the decline in adult and community educational pathways for job training; a bifurcation of the job market into volatile/insecure low-skilled work in retail, personal care and services and the more secure highly skilled knowledge work which attracts employer support (Higgins, 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/80898/youth-training-statistical-profile-1999-to-2008/3.-the-youth-training-programme>

Another theme evident over time is that of integration: closing the gap between the kind of outcomes young people experience from youth training courses, and those experienced by others in school and the tertiary system. This has culminated in a requirement that all courses in the YGFF scheme shall be qualifications on the New Zealand framework. Further to this, the focus now is on 'pathways' to higher qualifications and sustainable employment (Earle, 2013).

There have been broader changes over the period, too, reflecting a reduction in social entitlements for youth, plus the loss, during the 1990s in particular, of traditional routes into trades such as apprenticeships. Higgins (2002 p. 52) notes that a number of changes impacted on the income entitlements of young people during the 1990s:

- abolition of the Domestic Purposes Benefit for those under 18 years (1991)
- reduction in the Unemployment Benefit for single people, 18-19 years (1991)
- abolition of the Independent Youth Benefit for 16-17 year olds, except in cases of family breakdown or absence (1998)
- reduction in benefits for unemployment, training or sickness from those aged 18-19 years with no dependents and living with their parents (1998).

Despite the aspirations of getting youth off unemployment lists, there are few comprehensive studies investigating the effectiveness of 'youth guarantee' approaches. Research studies such as Korndorffer, (1985) and Benseman, (2006) have described the effects of youth programmes from close in, especially focusing on the work in the classroom to overcome social and other disadvantages. There has never been, until now, a multi-site study of youth programmes in New Zealand.

## **International overview**

The problem of poor labour market conditions has been researched in Europe (Bynner, 2012; Keep, 2012; Aston & Maguire, 2012), the USA (Pemberton, 2007) and Asia (Chen, 2011), as well as Australia and New Zealand (Middleton, 2010).

The international research (as in New Zealand) notes that there is a lack of jobs for young people. Pemberton argues that the key factors in the creation and existence of NEETs within any context are: intergenerational influences, peer influence, low educational attainment, disaffection, poor labour market experience and lack of opportunities (2007 p. 247). The '2nd Chance UK' report notes the majority of young people that find themselves in this situation in much of Europe, North America and Japan are 'individuals in the lower classes', often compounded by ethnicity or migrant status (place of origin) and that they face "hostility from politicians and the public" (2<sup>nd</sup> Chance UK, 2012 p. 5). Similarly, Evans, (2014) notes that "after five years of financial turmoil, many European countries are now seeing signs of economic recovery. But although overall figures have fallen, joblessness among 15-24 year-olds across the European Union remain stubbornly high". Evans notes that average youth unemployment across the EU stands at 23.5 percent in 2014, roughly equal to the rate in New Zealand.

In 2012, the European Union developed a 'youth guarantee policy' for its member states. It was an expansive policy, aiming to give unemployed under-25 year-olds "an offer of employment or training within four months of leaving education or losing work" (Evans, op cit). Evans notes that nine out of 28 states have yet to submit implementation plans for the scheme, which includes the UK "which has indicated it will not be submitting plans". The EU plan shifted away from Scandinavian 'social' guarantees to an economic model: "Young people should be supported in such a way as to achieve a job outcome, enrolment in

continued education, in an apprenticeship or in traineeship. Depending on the individual situation the support needed will vary” (European Commission, 2012, p. 2).

Key elements of the EU policy include:

1. An acknowledgement of the scarring effects of youth unemployment. The report noted there were devastating social consequences to being NEET: “a spell of unemployment early in a young person’s life can have life long-term or ‘scarring’ effects” (Eurofound, 2012, p. 3). A UK study (Bell & Blanchflower, 2009) found that the scars of early unemployment can affect lifelong unemployment, health, wages and job satisfaction, as well as pension entitlement which may be attached to taxes paid (Coles et al 2002). Furthermore the cost extends beyond the individual to the family and society, with EU estimates of €100 billion per year or €27,500 per person across a sample of 21 European countries (Eurofound, 2011, 2012b, Valtiontalouden Tarkastusvirasto, 2007). The EU also noted that only direct costs were taken into account, so social effects such as health and crime costs, for example, were omitted but relevant (Eurofound, 2012).
2. A need for policies that cater for the heterogeneous nature of the NEET population. The report distinguished between the requirement of ‘light interventions’ and those with more complex needs, ‘often more disadvantaged young people ...will need deeper, longer and more complex interventions and the use of tangible offers in order to ensure that they too benefit from the Youth Guarantee’ (European Commission, 2012, p. 2). The overall purpose of Youth Guarantee is to ensure ‘nobody is left on their own’ (European Commission, 2012, p. 2).
3. Regional interventions within a national context. The scheme must be nationally coordinated by a lead organisation but have decentralised implementation to recognise regional disparities and local needs (op cit p. 4).
4. A recognition of the moral hazard in offering a youth guarantee. This has three elements:
  - (a) a state must recognise that it takes onto itself the burden of an effective intervention
  - (b) any programme must both motivate and educate young people to the extent that they are able to forge their own future employment pathways and also satisfy their aspirations
  - (c) the need to treat the youth as a ‘whole person’. This may include intensive levels of support across education, social and health needs to restore basic living skills. The intention is to foster an interest in further learning and maintain a “structured life”. A feature of such an approach is that the scheme may include an individual assessment plan which provides a competent case history and clear indications of what support is needed, as well as pathways to receiving that support (ibid).
5. The OECD (2014) advocates programmes that facilitate job search and work experience. The aim is to prevent the programme *reducing* the chances of job entry through the curtailment of chances for job search and produce yet more ‘scarring’. Individual countries do have preferences. Norway and Denmark prefer an educational route, Germany apprenticeships, Sweden uses wage subsidies to employers and Flanders providing flexible on-the-job training opportunities leading to employment (OECD, 2014 p. 9).

6. Timing is considered important. The EU plan requires states to provide an offer within four months of a person becoming NEET, in order to prevent alienation and scarring. An Irish plan (OECD, 2014) envisions a three-phase programme: a six-month part-time intervention for those youth on a benefit for three months (and including a training allowance) involving skills development, followed by a more intensive work skills development programme and job search, and a third phase for those with serious additional issues such as health problems.

The overall programme and policy in the Irish scheme articulates a mix of basic and advanced education to complement learned transferable skills and life skills (i.e. experience providing adequate support in learning to endure the process of finding a job, but not just any job) so young people can realise their own aspirations (ibid). The point is made that young people can easily get low paying short-term jobs but lack experience to engage in the process of getting a long-term job themselves. Youth guarantee must therefore lead to sustainable work placements or apprenticeships rather than endless courses or short-term, low-paid employment (ibid).

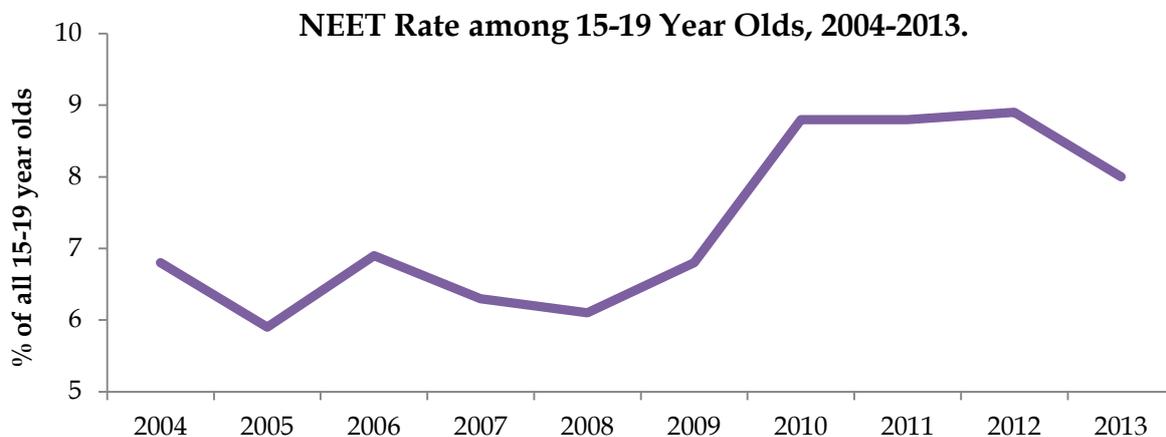
## 2.0 The scope of the research

This research focuses on the question: What institutional, sector-wide and other factors contribute to achievement by former NEETS in youth guarantee 'fees-free' places? In this chapter, the scope of the project is defined and the institutional factors outlined.

### What is a NEET?

The term NEET was coined over a decade ago in Europe, and adopted in New Zealand, and refers to young people 'not in education, employment or training'. Around 70 percent of the population aged 15-19 years were in education in 2013 and therefore cannot be counted as NEET, even if they were also recorded as unemployed (looking for work).

The definition of NEET differs from unemployed youth. The unemployed group includes those unemployed but in education (who are not NEET), and excludes those NEETs who report as not in education and who are not seeking work (and are thus not in the labour market).



**Figure 2. NEETs as % of all 15-19 year olds, HLFS 2004-2013.**

In total around 25,000 young people were NEET in 2013, and a further 10,000 former NEETs were on fees-free tertiary courses. The total increased from a low of 6 percent of the age-group population in 2005 to 9 percent in 2010-2012 and currently around 8 percent of all 15-19 year olds are NEET.

While the project started as being focused on former NEETs, very early on it was clear that we were looking at any student in YGFF places. However, using the HLFS definition of NEET, virtually all of the participants in this study were NEET. For example, none of those interviewed gave up a job to go onto a YGFF course. However, there were some students who finished school and enrolled in a YGFF course within a relatively short period of time, who may barely have attained NEET status. The vast majority described a period out of school and out of work before enrolling on a programme.

Most TEOs in this study aim to capture youth before they spend too long out of schooling. The larger the gap, according to tutors, the harder it was to get the young people back into the habit of learning in the classroom

## Methodology

The research is a qualitative study, supported by official data gleaned from the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). In total we completed 228 interviews with individuals and small groups, undertaken between May and August 2014. The participants can be broken down:

**Table 1. Number of participants in current study by category.**

Source of interview	Number	People*
Stakeholders (policy, business and education leaders)	18	32
Senior staff and youth staff	61	74
Tutors	68	87
Students	81	120
Total	228	312

*\*The estimate of the number of people is based on a count, but in some large groups, not all participants were noted. In particular, the number of students interviewed is likely to be higher than estimated.*

The stakeholders interviewed included: policy leaders, business/industry leaders, and education sector leaders. They were chosen through their involvement with the policy, or with providing organisations, or because of an analytical involvement in the policy.

Field research was undertaken in Northland (Whangarei only), Auckland (central, west and south), and Waikato/Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Wellington (TEOs and many stakeholders), Christchurch and Dunedin. Initially, 30 organisations were selected purposefully in order to capture a range of organisations. Selection criteria used were:

- the TEO had at least 30 youth guaranteed places funded in 2014
- TEOs providing trades, non-trades or both
- ITPs (seven were invited, six participated)
- a focus on Māori and Pasifika learners.

Of the 30 organisations invited, three declined to participate, including two PTEs and one ITP. The ITP was replaced with a PTE in that particular region. It was decided not to replace the PTEs for three reasons:

- they both declined very late in the data collection process
- the amount of data collected had already exceeded expectations
- the two organisations each had a 'special character' that was not easily replicable.

The completed sample therefore consisted of 28 TEOs. Ethical procedures were drawn up, which included guarantees of privacy and confidentiality, non-disclosure and withdrawal. In particular, it was decided that no personal or institutional names would be used in this report. Four separate interview schedules were developed for the research, and are available from the research team.

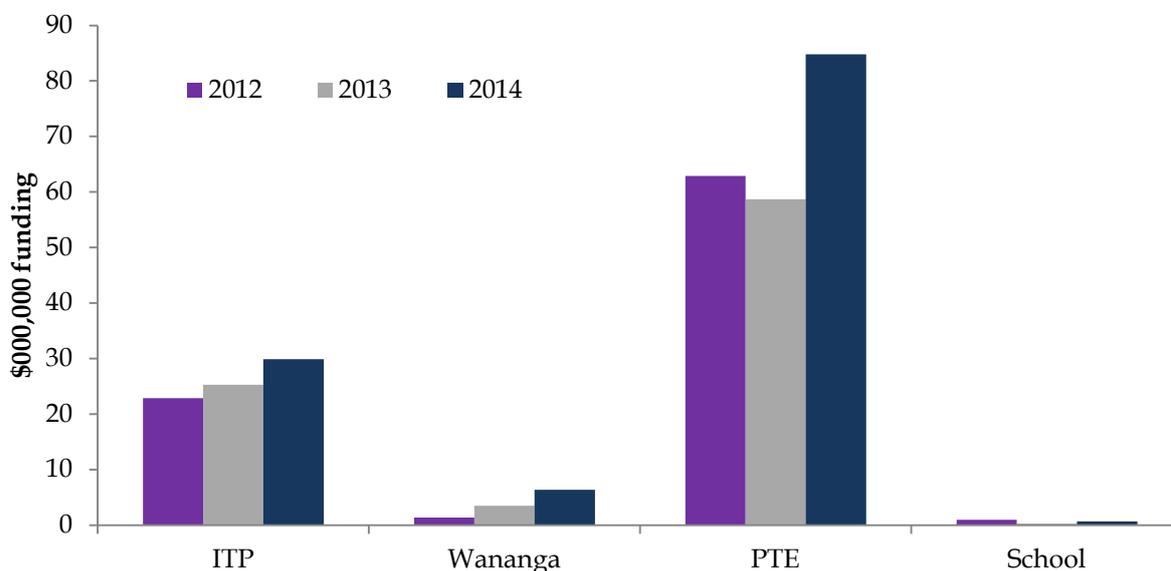
## The youth guarantee

The concept of a youth guarantee has been espoused by successive governments and government departments for a number of years. Youth guarantee programmes are expected to be attractive to young people and voluntary. It is also implied that the guarantee is universal among the target population (i.e. NEET aged 16-19 years), although in practice it is not. Finally, there is an expectation that a youth guarantee be effective by making a substantive difference to the opportunities of young NEETs. The current guarantee includes:

- Places in fees-free tertiary foundation education and training programmes (mainly Levels 1-2 but also Level 3) for up to two years for qualifying youth.
- A focus on moving participants along a series of vocational pathways (there are six potential pathways) to further education and work. The outcome aims have shifted from 'getting into work' to 'making progress along the vocational pathway'.
- Opportunities for success in NCEA Level 2 or equivalent, including enhanced (embedded) literacy and numeracy outcomes.

## The fees-free scheme

The fees-free scheme is offered at the tertiary level in PTEs, ITPs and Wānanga, in Levels 1-3 courses. It began with around 2,000 places in 2010, but expanded to 8,500 EFTS in 2013 (this includes the numbers transferred over from the defunct Youth Training programme). Initially, the scheme was for 16 and 17 year-olds only, but in 2014 was expanded to also include 18 and 19 year-olds. Those aged 15 are admitted if they have been exempted from secondary school. It initially had a one-year limit, which has now been extended to two. Increasing amounts of funding have been allocated to the scheme across all sectors except schools<sup>2</sup>, as shown below:



**Figure 3. Expenditure on YGFF scheme (actual or budgeted), 2012-2014.**

The total expenditure on the YGFF scheme in 2014 exceeds \$120 million. TEOs are allocated places to be filled, with most going to courses at Levels 1 and 2 on the New Zealand framework, and some (increasingly) at Level 3.

<sup>2</sup> Those schools funded through YG are state or state integrated schools only, that had been funded by the TEC since 2011.

Sixteen and 17 year-olds are not usually eligible for student allowances or loans but those aged 18 and 19 are (but only the living costs component). As most of the younger students therefore get no support at all, there is a travel subsidy paid to the provider, to assist the students in getting to their course. This subsidy (introduced in 2013), paid to the provider at the rate of \$800 per Equivalent Full-Time student (EFT), constitutes an important funding difference between YGFF and other fees-free foundation courses. The other funding difference is a \$500 per EFTS payment to the TEO for pastoral care.

## **The youth service**

The Youth Service (YS) was created by MSD in 2012, and the service is in most cases provided by youth organisations, many of them PTEs. The primary purpose of the YS is to assist 16 and 17 year-olds so that they do not 'graduate' to the unemployment benefit at age 18, not (primarily) to enrol young people in the YGFF scheme. However, the YGFF scheme is by far the main destination for those youth identified as NEET, and many of the YP and YPP recipients also end up on the courses.

It is a close-in, wrap-around service to mentor young people, especially those leaving school without qualifications, through the transition period and into work or education.

Through data-sharing legislation, the names and other details of school leavers are sent to MSD on a fortnightly basis, where they are filtered by target characteristics, which include level of need, demographic characteristics and age. Youth Service providers are expected to contact the young people and, if they are NEET, engage them in education, training or employment. The main advantage is that, in principle, the YS has access to the most at-risk young people, and can encourage them into the YGFF scheme.

At a stakeholder meeting, MSD staff informed the project that the YS programme received \$30 million in funding in 2014.

The Youth Service plays only a peripheral role in this study, although significant data was collected on how it works in relation to the YGFF programme. Four YS providers were visited during the fieldwork, because their service was attached to a training provider who participated in this study.

## **Issues around the policy settings**

The 32 stakeholders interviewed had diverse views on the YGFF and YS policies. There was reasonably strong support for the policy in the context of what had gone before: "the best there has been". But there was also widespread critique of the policy overall, as a purported solution to the problem of NEETs. Indeed, one person pointed out that "Youth Guarantee... is a really strange name for this. It really doesn't guarantee anything", especially because there are places for less than one-third of young NEETS in the programme.

One set of comments were critical of the way the policy had been developed and implemented. Overall the policy was considered to be "ad hoc", "chaotic", "a long history of missed opportunities" and not well designed:

It's building an aeroplane in the air. It has been about continual clip-ons/add-ons. Continuous policy change and continuous catch up ... we continuously have to catch up with a group that we left out in the first place.

While there is support for policies that provide a pathway to jobs for disadvantaged young people, there is a gap between the foundation courses offered under youth guarantee and

the certificates and diplomas that have effective application in the workforce. These are generally seen to commence at Level 4 of the qualifications framework. Whether studying at a foundation level is more likely to encourage enrolling at Level 4 and above has not yet been proven. A number of the students are loan-averse, and this may act as a barrier for some. But this progression is described as a key success factor of the policy. One stakeholder outlined:

Get the core basic NCEA level 2, then translate this into a qualification at Level 3. Then on to Level 4 – a higher level of skill with a longevity up to 10 years, leading to improved outcomes for the next generation.

Another stakeholder noted that the imposition of tertiary fees in 1989 led to an explosion of courses at a lower level (and generally fees-exempt). There has been little sign that this had improved access to the labour market for youth. And yet another noted:

The policy problem is that it is not easy to measure the relationship between the youth guarantee experience and subsequent jobs. People have been wrestling with the problem, trying to devise a form of measurement that is statistically valid. When do you measure it? Six, 12, 18 months after? Also, there are a variety of variables that can influence the relationship.

The supply side nature of labour market policies and productivity in New Zealand mean that, after their courses, these young people have to struggle for jobs along with all others in the labour market. The youth guarantee provides a springboard effect, but only to a point. Its adequacy is questioned by some stakeholders: “there are still no jobs out there for them”.

Some stakeholders note that the policy is about meeting the NCEA public service target: that 85 percent of 18 year-olds will have achieved NCEA Level 2 by age 18. The policy relies on the view that this qualification is a clear gateway to opportunity for higher learning, but this may not be correct.

The 2013 monitoring report on the YG policy clarifies these matters. The core findings (Earle, 2014 p. 3) are that participation in YGFF improves completion rates for NCEA level 2, but does not improve retention beyond the YGFF course nor progression to higher levels on the qualifications system. The report notes that employment outcomes will be evaluated separately.

Responses to specific research questions follow in subsequent chapters.

### 3.0 The most vulnerable youth

*Given the social characteristics of the (former) NEETs group, are fees-free places being accessed by the most vulnerable youth? And...*

*What roles do the different agencies play in the referral process and how do different providers attract enrolments of NEETs?*

The research project investigated whether the most disadvantaged youth were gaining access to the YGFF programme. This question was tackled by examining four main themes which will be examined in this chapter:

- What are the characteristics of the students?
- What recruitment systems are used?
- What constraints operate to limit opportunities for the most vulnerable? And
- Do TEOs cherry-pick the best NEETs?

#### **The characteristics of the students**

The students in this project bring a range of difficulties and problems with them including extreme disadvantage in the areas of health, education, and employment. In regions like Northland, East Coast and the Waikato, a majority of families are supported by those on low wages or benefits, there is lack of qualifications, and they are predominately Māori living below the poverty line (Boston, 2014). There is no question that most of the young people on YGFF courses have significant unmet needs.

Most experienced barriers at school, ranging from bullying by students or by staff, mental health problems, poor attendance, suspension and exclusion, early leaving because of “dramas”, “having a baby”, “got into trouble” or being in “the naughty class”. During the course of this study at least one student at a study TEO committed suicide, and many TEO staff commented that “there is significant suicide in this space”. Some did not attend school, but were home schooled. This group often had good abilities but no qualifications, and sometimes lacked social skills. Other students were just invisible, neither seeking nor receiving any assistance. Some thought that teachers “only cared about the smart students”.

Apart from these issues, student critiques of school covered a range of areas. They didn’t like learning, or writing, or their teachers, or their fellow students, or they were bored, or never really integrated into high school. Sometimes they felt school had given up on them, or things were going on at home. The research team did not pursue personal matters such as life at home, abuse, the effects of poverty and the like with students. However, tutors had a lot to say on these matters.

Tutors discussed the social situation of young people on the courses: “A lot come from very difficult backgrounds (about half). Life has been very hard for them. A lot don’t live at home, but with other people. One is on the youth benefit, one has been in foster homes and has attended many schools. Over half have no NCEA credits. One was so badly bullied he felt like committing suicide. A few with health and mental health problems”.

Tutors describe a student population that is living in reconstituted whānau, socially at risk, with mental health problems, drug and alcohol use and abuse, and a lack of self-esteem. Many recounted problems faced in the classroom, especially in the first period when students have to ‘learn to learn’.

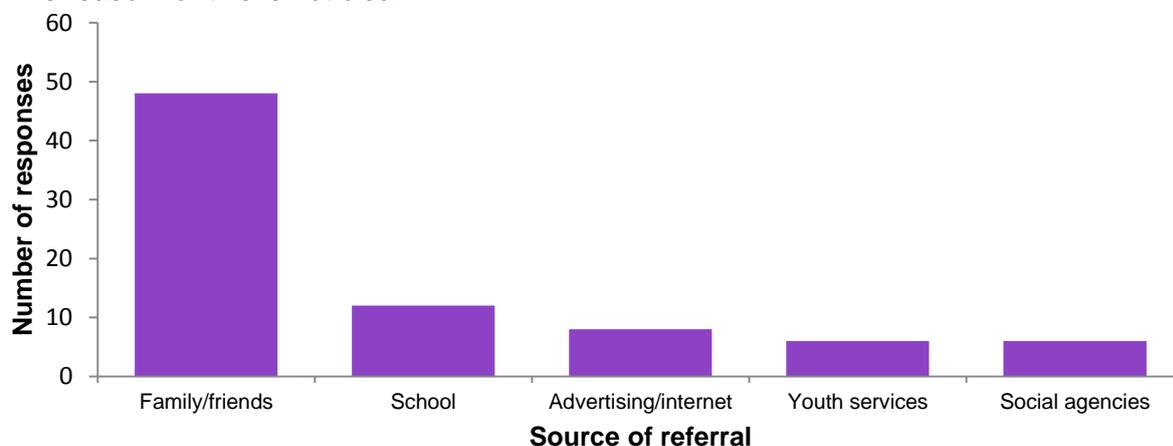
Most use fairly light discipline models, on the basis that many of these students expect to be punished. Often it is noted that the students come into the courses with preconceived notions of themselves as naughty or incompetent: self-esteem is low overall. Tutors work to alter the attitudes that cause the behaviour problems. But “we do cut out some people for, for example, stealing, but we try and help them onto other courses”.

It is easy to talk about these young people using a deficit model. However, students were also described as “diverse”, “bright kids”, “interested in learning”, and: “intelligent, worldly, immature, nil work ethic, generally good kids”. Many tutors talk about the students as being challenging to deal with, some with behavioural issues but, ultimately, fun to be around.

### The recruitment systems

It was important to establish how the young people made their way into the YG scheme. Most (60 percent of responses) cited family, and especially parents, siblings and cousins. Schools referred 10 percent, and three of these referrals included the need for formal exemption from school because the students were aged under 16 years. Other sources include advertising or internet browsing, Youth Services and social agencies including social workers, counsellors and police.

Results are reported in Figure 4. Many of the recruitment approaches adopted in the sector assume that whānau are not aware of youth guarantee options, but this study highlighted that there were quite strong whānau networks in place, even in the most disadvantaged areas. Youth Service recruitment figures are much lower than expected from the YS evaluation report, which indicated that 7,100 enrolments were achieved in ‘programmes’ in the 18 months from January 2013 to June 2014 (MSD 2014). Assuming, conservatively, that only half those enrolments were made into YGFF courses, around 25 percent of enrolments in this sample should have come from the YS, whereas the actual figure is a third of that. The reason for this is not clear.



**Figure 4. Sources of referral, as stated by students, n=80.**

Many of the organisations use multiple methods to recruit students, including advertising, events, making links with schools and other organisations and direct recruitment on the streets. In many of the smaller TEOs, tutors are required to recruit. Some tutors describe “driving around [region], cold calling, finding taura that are not in school” as part of their job. Many tutors are under pressure to recruit and, in turn, encourage students to bring in their friends and whānau to enrol.

All eligible students are considered for enrolment, and, in the TEOs that recruit throughout the year, there are few barriers to entry. It is essentially an open entry system, but modified.

The recruitment system of TEOs can act to screen out the most-needy students in two ways: by failing to engage with them, or by screening them out through recruitment processes. Entry procedures include interviews and trial periods. No figures are kept on the number who approach TEOs but do not get enrolled into programmes. Recruitment factors noted by TEOs include: “we can’t have too many with high needs, such as those who are highly violent”, “we are looking for the desire for achievement”, “If they say they smoke drugs all the time, have violence, beating someone up, mental health issues, literacy and numeracy, we try and redirect them to other services such as mental health. We have had some awful experiences with kids, like head through windscreen. We don’t have the support to deal with this kind of kid”.

Interviews range from a brief handing over of relevant documents to long (one hour plus) in-depth discussions. Trial periods range from a few days to five weeks. One organisation was forthcoming about its trial period:

25 percent of those who come in have very low literacy and numeracy – Level 1, and we won’t even look at those. Level 2, we will take for a five week trial and they must show some progression during that period to be enrolled on the course... Our overall retention rates are over 85 percent, but without the trial period they would be 50-60 percent. We are losing approximately half in [the] trial period.

The trial period can screen out people who would otherwise drop out of programmes, but can also be used to select for success.

### **Constraints on enrolling most vulnerable students**

Both internal and external factors constrain the enrolment of most vulnerable students. TEO staff provides a range of descriptions of these young people. Externally, the most vulnerable youth tend to live in transient circumstances, be associated with street gangs, have significant addiction problems, have a diagnosable mental illness, and have little interest in education, training or employment. They became alienated from school and may be the children of those affected by high youth unemployment in the 1990s (EAG, 2012). A form of intergenerational scarring (or a miasma) may be present (EU, 2012). Alternatively, members of this group may have significant physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities that prevent them completing school qualifications. Many of these young people are likely to have been in the bottom 15 percent of school achievement, and are the group that are not expected to achieve the NCEA Level 2 under the Better Public Service target (which focuses on an 85 percent achievement rate). They are 75 percent male, 25 percent Māori and 35 percent Pasifika (Gordon, 2013). It is likely that most of this group (a) do not attempt to enrol on YGFF courses, (b) or attempt to, and do not get through interview or trial, or (c) enrol but do not complete.

A diverse range of students enrol on YGFF courses, and many of them have one or more of the characteristics discussed above. The conclusion of this study, from talking to students and staff as well as the YS, is that the students within the YGFF space are the ‘next group up’. At least half of them bring a social, personal or educational barrier with them, but they are able, with support, to maintain enrolment in YGFF.

## Cherry-picking in the sector?

In interviews with various stakeholders, it was noted that there were significant incentives for TEOs to enrol students who were less-needy and more likely to achieve success, even though the goal of the scheme was arguably to educate the most-needy.

It is argued by these stakeholders that the completion, progression, and retention targets mean some providers are 'cherry-picking' to ensure they get students who will complete, leaving other providers struggling to get enough students or struggling with perceptions that they are for the 'hopeless cases'. The 'cherry-picking' is essentially incentivised in the performance system (the EPIs). Those holding this view say that the result of 'cherry-picking' is that young people most in need do not have access to the best courses.

This study found that TEOs that are over-subscribed at the beginning of the year have the ability to select students, but these are few and far between, and most note they select on a variety of characteristics, not just ability to achieve.

Most TEOs have unfilled places, and many seek to recruit throughout the year on a rolling basis by taking on students as they appear. Some will take virtually anyone who seeks to attend, but most have a selection process of interview or trial period. Some use the formula that students must have a reasonable chance of success.

A small number use the results of literacy and numeracy assessment tools as the basis for enrolment. A very low score on this tool indicates a learning 'gap' that is unlikely to be overcome during the programme.

The research team became aware of a 'hierarchy of providers' which was set by the 'market' and defined by the population that enrolled with a TEO. In general, those who were prepared to take on and support more difficult young people were 'at the bottom', finding it more difficult to attract students and were often struggling to survive, despite often superior services such as pick-up, free counselling, meals and well-qualified tutors. The TEOs became defined by the characteristics of their students rather than by the quality of their services.

There was agreement on two fronts that TEOs may be missing some of the most disadvantaged students. A number of stakeholders and tutors noted the existence of groups of young people in their areas who chose not to participate in these (voluntary) courses. In interview, it was commented that participants saw these young people around in shopping malls and other places, but were unable to engage with them. These qualitative experiences were backed up by the Youth Service figures for the first 18 months, with 7,364 out of a total of 15,944 high- and medium-need youth either unable to be contacted or not wishing to participate in education and training<sup>3</sup>.

Some are in youth justice, although police in some areas refer young offenders to YGFF courses. In general, young people with disabilities do not attend YGFF courses, and providers express reluctance to accept them if they do apply, due to a perception of inadequate resources. TEOs indicate that some students not only have complex social and health problems, but can cause disruption in classes by influencing the behaviour (e.g. drugs, alcohol use) of other students. Such students are likely to be excluded.

Finally, there is the question of the high drop-out rate across the sector, with 40 percent not completing any courses or qualifications. The qualitative evidence points to between three

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<sup>3</sup> OIA request – response from MSD, op cit.

and four out of every 10 enrollees leaving before course completion. An uncounted further number do not even get through interview or trial periods.

## **Conclusion**

YGFF courses are being accessed by NEETs, many of whom combine low school qualifications plus additional areas of often significant need. There are more needy young people, but these either do not engage with YS or YGFF, or do not enrol, or do not pass the trial period, or drop out early in the courses. Many are highly transient and need expert help with a range of problems. Arguably, YGFF is not targeted at these students, but at the group above the 'bottom 15 percent' identified by PISA (Gordon, 2012). In general, those students enrolled are a reasonable fit with the services that are offered in the YGFF space. An unintended consequence of the 'quality and efficiency' drivers in the YG policy arena – such as the drive for progressions, completions, and retention – means that some organisations have set about in varying ways to 'pick' students who have a chance at success.

The level of disadvantage and diversity of needs represented within this category of young people is pitted against a performance framework that shifts a portion of funding from low performing provision to higher performing provision. There is a consequent impetus to select only 'motivated' students. There is also pressure on tutors to recruit, care for and retain students, adding further pressure. These elements structure and define the YGFF programme in practice for providers, communities, and students.

## 4.0 Engagement

*Using existing educational data, what external factors are most likely to influence engagement in education and what internal/external factors are most likely to influence their a) achievement and b) their retention?*

There are a wide range of factors that influence engagement in education for these students. By their own account, they have a range of health and social issues, experience bullying and alienation at school, and have few ambitions on entering the programme. Added to these are broader factors around the effects of child poverty (Boston, 2014), the deep engagement problems of New Zealand's poorest learners (Gordon, 2013) and the political and economic context, especially high youth unemployment.

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the scheme is probably not intended to attract the bottom 15 percent of students. These are the ones who, through disability, social and economic disadvantage and other factors are not expected to gain school qualifications (Gordon, 2013). The YGFF scheme appears to be aimed primarily at the next group up – those who have disengaged from or failed at school, but have the capacity (with some assistance) to achieve NCEA Level 2. More specifically, in terms of the Better Public Service targets, one key target group is roughly 10 percent of all young people (aged 18 years and under) who currently do not attain NCEA Level 2 by other means.

Engagement with these youth therefore involves a complex process of going out and attracting them. The qualitative data indicates that getting messages to 'Mum' may be the best way to get students enrolled in a programme: word-of-mouth through whānau is by far the most common route to a provider in this study. In many of the smaller regions, there is a reliance on iwi and other networks, social service networks, and whānau engagement. At the same time, in those regions, there is a high count of hard-to-reach young people, and youth providers at times resort to close-in work such as door-knocking to engage young people.

The project produced significant data on retention, but by the time of year when this study was undertaken, many of the earliest dis-engagers had already left. Some had gone to other courses, but many simply disappeared. It is not really known why this happens, and a recommendation of this report is that a significant qualitative, possibly longitudinal research study is needed to follow students through, to examine both engagement and success factors.

As noted in the previous chapter, there is also an unknown number of young people who are interviewed for places on the programmes, or attend a trial period, who do not end up enrolling in a course.

Different characteristics of TEOs attract different students, but some overall characteristics were seen as important. Students were asked to rate what they thought of their programme and to give it a ranking and the majority gave a five out of five<sup>4</sup>, with nothing lower than a three. In the interviews, the participants were probed on this, and challenged to provide a 'more realistic rating', but many reiterated they considered the course was the "best thing they had ever done".

The most important thing from the student perspective is the relative freedom they perceive: "no restrictions on you", "you can just walk out of the gate", "laid back". It is ironic that having no restrictions on freedom of movement can lead to students staying put in the classroom.

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<sup>4</sup> Where one equals the 'worst thing you've ever done', and five equals the 'best thing you've ever done'.

The second theme was the support the students got from their tutors. This support extends to personal things: “Are half-parent, half-counsellor and half-tutor”. It also extends to learning, where students made a number of comments:

- the tutors are good teachers and go into detail
- the tutors explain the work individually and makes sure you understand, and:

“My kaiako<sup>5</sup> is really awesome to be honest, because he teaches us what we want to know and need to know in a way that we can understand clearly about what they are talking about”.

The third theme was course content. It was notable that the trades’ courses generated most enthusiasm. Students enjoyed “engineering” and “the radio industry” and “hands on stuff, becoming more knowledgeable about how to make things out of bits of wood”. They generally loved hospitality and in particular food.

The fourth theme was tikanga Māori. Working within a Māori framework was important for both students and tutors. Also, some of the iwi-based courses offered pick-up, breakfast and lunch, as well as indigenous models of engagement.

A fifth and final theme was wrap-around support. A number of mainly community-based TEOs provided places for young people with specific vulnerabilities. These often included volunteer staff, or staff paid for by other parts of the organisation. One organisation, for example, picks up all its students in the morning, with trained counsellors driving the vans and offering a listening ear before the course starts. The organisation also provides breakfast and access to counsellors at other times. But this organisation was very under-subscribed, possibly because it was seen to take a more complex client.

TEOs report that young people have got the message strongly that they need the NCEA Level 2, and that they are clear they have come to “get the qualification”.

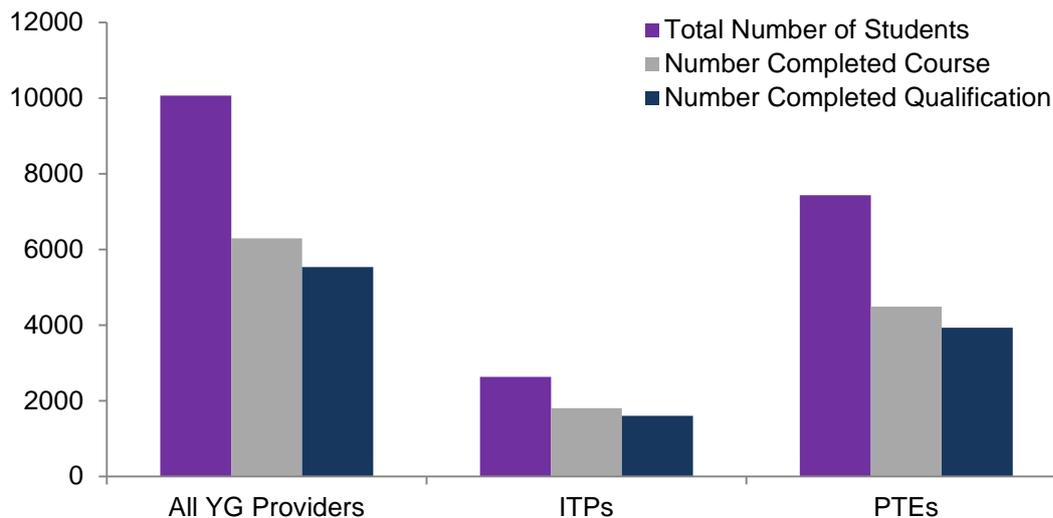
## **Retention**

It has already been noted that an unknown number of students do not get to enrol in programmes because they do not get through an interview process or a trial. Overall, in 2013, 10,000 students enrolled in YGFF courses. Of that number about 6,000 completed a course. A course essentially involves a group of unit standards achieved, but is less than a qualification. Most of those (around 90 percent) who completed a course also completed a qualification, whether this was NCEA levels 1 or 2, a trades certificate, a foundation course (e.g. National Certificate in Employment Skills or Vocational Studies) or other.

Tutors believe that those who stay until the end of a course will gain qualifications, and that view is emphasised to the students. The pattern outlined in Figure 5 largely bears this out.

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<sup>5</sup> Teacher/tutor



**Figure 5. Number of students, course completion and completed qualification, YGFF 2013.**

This study was unable to shed significant light on the non-retained group, but did collect good qualitative data on those who were headed for qualifications.

For those who are retained in the programmes, there is an expectation, tinged sometimes with anxiety, that they will pass. “I have found my feet”. “Yes I am because I am willing to achieve and move onto something else when I am finished”. “With some hard work I’ll finish it”.

## Completion

The TEC stakeholders noted that the policy environment gives the providers the option of enrolling students for courses that will earn them 40, 80, or 120 credits. However, during interviews with TEO managers and tutors they usually stated that 120 credit programmes are the only real option as that means they are getting a full EFTS (not a partial EFTS). This misreading of the policy funding environment has real world effects for tutors and students. There was also recognition that for many students it would be better if they were not enrolled for a full qualification. This view was represented by many TEOs but just two comments will be quoted here:

We are being asked to do something in 42 weeks that cannot be done. The only way we can do it is enrol the people twice for the course, and then they can complete – but this chops our achievement rate in half. The kids are very eager and keen but there are lots of barriers to achievement.

120 credits is far too many – even high schools don't do 120 credits! It should be 60 one year and 60 the next. I haven't got any of mine through 120 credits in a year. Tutors are under extreme pressure.

Tutors are placed under significant pressure to get their students through as many credits as possible, with TEOs concerned that there will be repercussions if their performance dips below the minimum expectations of performance required by the TEC. The minimum requirements are measured across four areas of performance, known as Educational Performance Indicators, or EPIs. These are published by the TEC, and do not require the completion of 120 credits per year. The rate of qualification completion is EFTS weighted, so that if all students complete NCEA Level 2 (at 80 credits, where 120 credits is an EFT), the completion rate is 66 percent, well above the standard required. The retention rate refers to

those remaining in a TEO from one year to the next, while the progression rate is the proportion that move up to a higher level of study or work in the following year.

	Course completion	Qualification completion	Retention	Progression
Level 1	55%	40% (for levels 1 and 2 combined)	50%	40%
Level 2	60%		45%	35%
Level 3	70%	60%	55%	35%

**Table 2. Completion, retention and progression rates by NZQF level, Youth Guarantee performance framework.**

TEC stakeholders note that the required performance is far less than the 120 credit ‘squeeze’ described by TEOs in this study. How policy is interpreted on the ground is important. Another area where there may be a need for conversation and clarification is around the completions, retentions and progressions. The TEOs often feel they must well exceed the published EPI rate in order to maintain funding for subsequent years. This leads to pressure on tutors to ‘perform’ to get results which are not reasonable.

There are also other factors involved, including the four-out-of-10 students that do not complete any courses but whose enrolment counts towards the bottom line, and a range of other partial completions, for example:

Last year the completion rate was 62 percent. Eighteen students enrolled, six withdrew and one failed.

In practice, many of the TEOs performed in 2013 only slightly above, or in some cases below, the expected EPI standards, thus putting pressure on for better completion rates in the classroom. There is pressure on those organisations that are not performing to standard: “[the rate] has to rise for us to complete our contractual obligations”.

## 5.0 Pedagogies

*Are there different pedagogies used to help retain former NEETs in learning?*

Few pedagogical principles were articulated by TEO staff in interviews. The pedagogy appeared to be largely driven by three elements:

- The constraints on timing and the need to ‘get students through’ the courses (noted by some as “stuffing the turkey”).
- The need to provide significant individual pastoral and learning support to students.
- The nature of the course content, course context and institutional processes.

While many tutors had completed a Level 5 course in tertiary teaching, a number commented that their qualification did not offer much to meet their needs in educating YGFF youth. They had a very practical view of pedagogy as settling the students down, getting the knowledge into them (and skills, in the trades’ area) and getting them through the assessments. The students interviewed thoroughly understood such methods and supported them.

### **Getting students through the courses**

The process of getting students through the course requires a careful mixture of support, pastoral care, “learning to learn” skills, patience and tolerance by tutors. Many of the students enter the programmes with poor learning experiences at school (with resultant low self-esteem) and a range of other barriers as well.

A number of tutors stated the first few weeks of programmes are very difficult, with most students needing to learn how to work effectively in a classroom or workshop. Some noted that little educational progress was made in the first eight weeks. Attendance is often poor at the beginning. One student explained that she took a lot of time off ‘sick’ at the beginning of her course, but her attendance improved dramatically when she realised she could do the work.

The slow start means that there is less time to get students through their courses. Most students enrolling in PTEs are keen on getting their NCEA Level 2, and TEOs who offer NCEA also provide a 40 credit ‘certificate’ course in foundation studies, employment skills or other to make up one EFTS. In the trades’ areas, most study for Trades Certificates rather than NCEA.

TEOs respond to the need to get students through the courses in different ways. Some have extended class hours, the longest we found being 8.00am-4.00pm Monday to Friday. Some opt for much shorter hours plus ‘catch-up’ opportunities for students who are getting behind. Some plan for classroom work only in the mornings, stating that students are unfit to sit in the classroom in the afternoons, and they try to organise a range of activities. Class sizes vary dramatically from 10 (a course that relied on an 11-seater van to get the students out for field study) to 25 (when a course is full), with the modal size being 14-15.

Some tutors in the more generic courses indicated that they sought the easiest combination of standards to achieve NCEA credits. Others indicated that in the trades’ areas, the skills required in these ‘foundation’ courses (up to and including Level 3) were relatively low, and it was not until Level 4 that more complex work took place. If this is the case, then it is likely that there is a ‘gap’ between Levels 3 and 4, which may at least partially explain the findings of the 2013 monitoring report.

## Support

The need to offer ongoing pastoral as well as learning support dictates the pedagogical approach to an extent. A constant message in the study was that students have low self-esteem and need to be supported. Tutors described two kinds of strategies. The first type is to create a classroom and organisational environment that:

- is friendly with an absence of bullying
- fosters good relationships with respectful tutors who treat them as adults
- has a good whānau environment with kaupapa Māori in some iwi-based organisations
- is able to offer help when they need it
- provides food (very important where it is provided – both breakfast and lunch) and other supports; whether it be access to the tutor's 'stash' of goodies or something else.

A lot of work goes into ensuring the TEOs are accessible and friendly, and not punitive environments. Punitive approaches do not work in this space, the team was informed on many occasions. One TEO that decided to lock its doors at 9.00am to encourage timeliness found itself with few students inside, and the rest outside knocking to be let in.

As well as organisational arrangements, the support needs of students require significant individual assistance with both pastoral and academic 'sides'. Some of the tutors develop individual plans for their students, while others just work with them in this way. Some of the international literature sees individual planning – not only within courses but more broadly within 'life plans' – as a key to overcoming youth disadvantage. In a sense it is a default setting for these students.

## The programmes

The pedagogy within programmes is also defined by external factors. Most of the programmes run in PTEs are only for YGFF students, as that is all they are funded to provide. This dictates the course approach, which focuses on youth. In a number of larger agencies and most of the ITPs, YGFF students fill places in adult programmes. These are fairly low-level foundation courses, so the adults tend also to come from educationally-deprived backgrounds (and are often immigrants), and most note the combination works well. One tutor thought the YG students at times had better skills than the adults, and the adults have fewer pastoral problems.

One ITP deliberately runs a youth department for fees-free students. It runs a highly structured 'foundations' course over a year. In the first semester, young people get a taste of six different areas of trades' education, and in the second half the students 'choose' one of the strands for the whole semester. The location inside a dedicated unit, plus two full-time youth support staff, ensures wrap-around support for the young people. One interesting aspect of that programme was that the tutors identified more as 'youth tutors' than as tutors in 'hospitality', 'outdoor education' or other areas.

A number of organisations base their pedagogies on kaupapa Māori: the use of te reo and tikanga Māori to provide an indigenous community within which learning can occur. For these organisations, which offer a wide range of trades and non-trades courses, the framework and systems that define learning are as important as course content. The existence of a kaumatua who is well-known and respected, the application of ceremonies around food and learning processes, and extra-curricular activities such as kapa haka are important to the success of these agencies.

Most courses are not full, and many TEOs allow for intake on a rolling basis. In some, students sign up, have their interview and attend, while others schedule intake events on a regular basis throughout the year. The rolling state also constrains the pedagogy to a more individualised approach, with students working on individual materials within a wider plan. In trades' courses, students must both 'catch up' with core tasks and participate in group instruction sessions. While the rolling intake is a reaction to inadequate enrolments, it also provides an important service to disengaged youth.

Other programme features include the nature of unit standards as individual 'chunks' of learning. In the non-trades and more generic courses (e.g. foundation studies), the research team observed students selecting and working on a wide range of standards without reference to much of an over-riding theme. Unit standards provide an excellent basis for individual learning in the rolling environment. However the downside of such an approach is that students may have little coherence in their learning overall, unable to link together the unit standards achieved into a coherent whole.

### **A shared pedagogy?**

There was little evidence of a single model of good practice across the 28 TEOs. Because of the constraints described above, quite an individual learning approach was in place in most classrooms, but this was generally not organised around a model of learning. Tutors told the research team they had little or no contact with tutors in other organisations, and therefore were unable to share practice, although they supported each other within particular TEOs. Organisations also often had little knowledge of what other TEOs were doing in the region. One region had recently had a TEC-sponsored meeting, but this was about receiving information from the funding agency, not sharing between agencies. The only sharing between agencies out of 28 TEOs was one where some literacy and numeracy expertise was purchased by one TEO from another.

## 6.0 Alternatives

*What alternatives (provided/supported by MSD/Youth Services) are there for young people in the target group who have in theory, a youth guarantee?*

The YGFF scheme is a large scheme and is the only national 'transition' scheme available to those aged 16 and 17 years at the tertiary level. Alternatives for youth are: stay at school in the mainstream or alternative education, attend a Tertiary High School, Trades Academy or STAR (secondary/tertiary programme) or complete schooling via correspondence. There are no funded work experience programmes currently for this group. Certainly those young people who move into YG places are not in a space to take up modern apprenticeships as they lack even the most basic life, education, and training skills.

The Youth Service, which only caters for 16 and 17 year olds, offers access to YGFF courses and what it calls 'work-based learning', which appear to be small part-time programmes offered by particular industries for young people, but few details are provided online. In short, there are few alternatives for those aged 16 and 17 years who are out of school and not in work. The YGFF scheme is by far the largest and most popular, and offers a wide range of foundational courses around the six vocational pathways.

The Ministry of Social Development used to offer a wide range of programmes for job seekers (those aged 18 years and over), but these have been consolidated into one main employer subsidy scheme: Job Streams<sup>6</sup>:



If you are looking for staff, we have motivated jobseekers with a range of skills.

Job Streams offers employers a quick, easy, no-cost recruitment service. It's a tailored, flexible package covering wage subsidies, training and in-work support.

Job Streams can support jobseekers most at risk of long term benefit dependence into work; for example, young jobseekers and sole parent jobseekers with work obligations.

The amount of the subsidy, level of training or in-work support depends on each client's needs and where the gaps are in the current labour market. It also provides room for flexibility in terms of how, when and what the money can be spent on. Combinations of wage subsidies and training can be considered, although some may only need one or the other to start working.

### Two Job Streams

There are two parts to this package:

**Skills for Industry** – short industry-focused training for specific employment opportunities: funding is dependent on the needs of the client.

**Flexi-Wage** – two types of wage subsidy:

- Flexi-Wage Basic – a wage subsidy for those at highest risk of staying on benefit without support
- Flexi-Wage Plus – a wage subsidy with the option of using some funding for other assistance that employers need such as training, mentoring or in-work support.

Those aged 18 or 19 years thus have some alternatives to YGFF in either industry-based training or in subsidised work. One provider stated that MSD (Work and Income) never referred young people to YGFF programmes. But stakeholders noted that, in two regions, the Youth Service is being run out of Work and Income offices as a trial, which may provide improved linkages between the two systems.

There is a lack of operational policy that allows consistent articulation of social support, employment and educational opportunities available through YGFF through whichever government departments are involved. Despite being run from the same providers, the

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/business/develop-your-workforce/industry-partnerships.html>

support offered by the YS is ring fenced from the needs of the young people in YGFF courses. A small number of TEOs have sorted out ways to work with youth coaches, but most have little idea about how to do this. For example, two TEOs in our sample require youth coaches to attend 'office hours' at the training provider on a regular basis.

As noted above, the YS were the source of referral to providers in only 8 percent of our sample, but many sign the students up retrospectively to get them some support. The official view on this process is that any young person "already participating in a Youth Guarantee programme [is]... not eligible to access the Youth Service as they are already supported".<sup>7</sup> Thus the official view is an 'either/or' approach. But in practice, many providers welcome the additional support a youth coach can provide to students to guide them through their course. It appears that the policy settings that divide the students into 'those supported by YGFF' and 'those supported by YS' is not effective in practice, and that the two strands could be more effective if intertwined. Further policy work needs to be done in this area.

The view from the sector and from the students is that there are few alternatives available to them. One tutor noted that some went back to school after completing a course, but this is a rare pathway. Once in YGFF, the options appear to be drop-out, complete and go to further study or complete and search for work. The YG monitoring report (Earle, 2014) indicates that YGFF students are no more likely than others to go down the training/further education pathway, and there is little known about the other groups.

The lack of alternatives exposes some of the problems with the youth guarantee policy settings. First, it is not a youth guarantee – there are not enough places or options to cater for the 32,000 young people who are out of work, nor the 35,000 (including those already in YG courses) who are potentially NEET. Second, while the aspiration is for pathways through higher learning into well-paid jobs, there is surprisingly little infrastructure in place, beyond the YGFF and some YS assistance, to facilitate such outcomes. Third, this remains a supply-side policy, with little evidence of demand side requirements including the articulation of work experience and job possibilities in each region.

What flexibility and choice there is in the YGFF space occurs within the variety of providers, their size and the courses offered. There is high variability in pastoral care services due to a range of factors.

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<sup>7</sup> Letter from A. Jones, National Manager, Partnerships and Programmes, Work and Income, to Pūkeko Research Ltd, 23 October 2014.

## 7.0 Progression

*What kinds of tracking is used (or is intended to be used) to know what happens to (former) NEETs after their fees-free course is complete? And, what is known about whether they are able to get jobs in the area of training/education covered in their courses?*

Despite the YGFF policy stressing pathways to higher education, TEOs are not required to track the progress of their students beyond the end of a programme. TEOs do enrol some students beyond one year – for example in Level 2 then Level 3 programmes, or in order to complete an existing level qualification. But only a minority offer Level 3 courses, although a number of PTEs noted that they sent their students on to a local ITP to do Level 3 programmes.

With the exception of one Māori TEO, which had been tracking its students from 2011, no TEOs formally tracked students once they finished a course, or even left without completing. Some noted that they attempt to track students but that this was complex: people left town, got part time work and many were just lost in the system. “Six out of 10 complete... not sure what happens to the rest. They move around a lot”.

The students in the study outlined their aspirations for a future training pathway. A number outlined their plan to “study at a higher level”, “get as much NCEA/NZQA as I can – Levels 4, 5, 6”, “go to the next level of this course”, “Level 3 engineering” and some (doing Level 3) were keen on Level 4 courses. One Pasifika student had come through two years of fees-free courses and was now taking a Level 5 course as well as pursuing her dream of professional sport.

Quite a few of the students were planning to go to a polytechnic, university or other PTE. One is “going to enrol at Sir George Seymour Tourism School”. One will “study at the Pacific Institute of Performing Arts in Manukau”. Another will be taking Level 3 hospitality:

NZMA will be coming to see me. Hoping to do something which is free, then after you finish you get a job.

Four are interested in degree study at university: “Massey study, making music. Do a degree”. “Look after my baby. I want to be an early childhood teacher, want to try and get into university”. “...family want me to do a degree in computing”. “...off to Melbourne at the end of next year for the degree<sup>8</sup>”.

Many of those wishing to continue in trades’ education want to study at local polytechnics, “MIT automotive”, “move to MIT”, “then to UNITEC”, “trades and computing”, “mechanical engineering”, “Level 4 then 5 cheffing”.

Some students just enjoy learning and want to continue in education without having any particular vocational aspirations at this stage: “Study anything and everything that I enjoy doing”. “Yes I have [considered further study], but don't know what!” “I want to go overseas and study.”

### **Students wishing to get into employment**

Many of the students have, or have had, some kind of low paid and/or part time job in the past, including retail, farming or labouring. A few have done volunteer work with groups like the Salvation Army. Half of those who gave an opinion wished to go into the labour market

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<sup>8</sup> One specialist PTE has a pathway that includes a degree at a Melbourne University.

on completion of their course. Many of these mentioned work opportunities in the area of their study: "I imagine I would like to do engineering work, metal fabrication". "I want to finish my study, but if offered a catering job I would take it on".

Quite a few students did not specify what work they would do. Some had already found a job, or were currently looking. This included one student who had already been given an apprenticeship. Despite finishing school with NCEA Level 3, he had rejected a university education and had enrolled in a YGFF course in automotive engineering. A highly articulate and well-qualified young man, he had been snapped up into an apprenticeship at the end of his first semester in the course. He would now continue his study paid for by his employer, thus not incurring any student debt (which was his aim). Several other students were looking for apprentice positions. Others thought they would get work experience positions before moving into work.

A popular choice among the students was an ambition to move into the Police, Army or Navy. One was headed for a military training school, another to Police College, and several others wanted to join the Forces.

Most of the students were optimistic about employment possibilities and their ability to gain good work. One struck a different note, commenting wryly: "I will probably get a job with a boss saying, do this, do this".

## **Pathways**

Some students are less sure about their future pathways, and see some hurdles in the way. One of these is student debt. The research team was made aware of concerns by staff and students alike that the adoption of a 'pathway' approach in the youth guarantee space almost inevitably led to a point where students had to pay fees, mostly by taking out loans. Thus, it was "a pathway to debt". "I don't want to carry on studying because I have some issues at home and would not want to be taking on debt at the moment."

Staff are very aware of the need to promote 'pathways' to students. Some note that the courses in TEOs are not always well set up to promote a clear path through to industry qualifications: "But there are problems, for example Level 2 beauty therapy. The next course is a Level 4, so there is no way through. We are looking at this". "They can move onto other courses e.g. automotive, patisserie. But we do not have enough mid-year pathways".

## 8.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Drawing together all of the comprehensive data from students, tutors, TEOs, and stakeholders, there are a range of key operational, implementation, and funding issues that have become evident to the research team. These are discussed and possible ways forward recommended in this section.

There is an identified need for some 'deep dive' research into (a) young people who attend trial periods or interviews but never enrol on a course, and (b) young people who enrol on a course but leave it before completion. This research should engage providers to collect base data (including contact details) and a research contractor to collate and follow-up, to discover 'what happens next' for these young people.

There is an identified need for research into those who leave YGFF with qualifications, to discover their next steps and any barriers to pathways towards higher qualifications and skilled employment.

Finally, there is a need for more research into regional youth labour markets in areas with above-average unemployment, with high Māori unemployment and high youth unemployment. Such research should be the basis for action to improve opportunities for youth, probably at the regional level.

### **National level operations**

YG policy was reviewed in 2014. However, there is evidence that at the 'chalk-face', within TEOs, there are difficulties with some of the policy boundaries. In part, some of the issues noted in the policy implementation realm relate to the complex administration of the policy arena nationally.

Given the above we recommend:

1. That one central agency be responsible for overseeing the youth guarantee, and co-ordinate with the other agencies to provide a more seamless and appropriate model for youth.

### **Regional approaches and collaboration**

To meet the needs of the young people at the heart of this policy there is a need for collaboration both within and beyond the education sector.

The model of competition between TEOs, even at a very regional or local level is not the most efficient use of resources and counter to good practice. There is a strong need for organisations to work together to solve problems that face them all, and they need a funding model that facilitates cooperation and collaboration without jeopardising their current funding streams. TEO staff need to inform one another on good practice, problem-solving approaches, dealing with specific regional issues and ensuring a good range of courses that serve regional needs and use the strengths of each institutions. At the moment TEOs generally, and especially small ones, tend to feel quite disempowered.

There must be collaboration between schools and TEOs. The focus should be on student centred approaches to learning in diverse settings, rather than 'holding on to' or 'poaching' students to get funding.

There is also a need to go outside the education sector and work more effectively with employers, local authorities, social agencies, health providers and others to try and find integrated solutions to NEETs, and more broadly disengaged and unemployed youth within the regions.

Regional provision is central to success in this area, if the aim is to promote effective pathways for all young people and resolve the underlying issues. It is communities that know their young people (their needs and strengths) and the types of labour market opportunities available.

TEOs and other multi-sector should be encouraged to work together and attend professional development together, preferably on a regional basis and across sectors. The sharing of regional experiences may subsequently lead to more effective, planned regional and community solutions within a national framework.

The YGFF and Youth Service could improve overall practice by working more closely together and with other agencies at the regional level. The aim should be a wrap-around service.

Given the above we recommend:

1. A single central government agency to foster collaboration and ensure that operational policies allow for a student centred approach and the sharing of best practice.
2. If the intent is to address youth unemployment we need:
  - a. data on student disengagement and on the shape/nature of the labour force as well as to anticipate future needs
  - b. processes and funding which facilitate meetings and collaboration between TEOs, schools, regional bodies, regional divisions of government agencies, and employers.

## **TEOs and their programmes**

Issues around course content, useful knowledge, coherent learning opportunities and similar matters have been raised at several places in this report. However, the major area where there is need for action is the connection of the YGFF places to 'real jobs' (be that in terms of work simulations, very short placements and work experience, longer training periods, or finally full-time jobs).

The importance of alternative education and workplace learning (through field trips, work placements, simulations, competitions, employers going into learning spaces) was raised by a range of participants in this project. With a range of difficulties of getting young people into work experience placements and full-time employment, work should be integrated into the learning space. This may be achieved through connections between the provider and the local communities, businesses and local bodies and must be allowed in the programmes and courses available.

There needs to be flexibility in funding to ensure that whatever form of learning is best for the student can be pursued. This includes a genuine commitment to life-long learning. While for some students a full-time programme is important for ensuring they are able to build their knowledge and skills, for others a pattern of a short course, work experience, a short course, and more work experience and so on may be more useful and still offer a pathway model. The way the rules of the current system are interpreted works against movement in and out of tertiary institutions.

There is a need to ensure that tertiary education provision has at its heart 'the learner in context'. For most students going into YGFF, their learning and their jobs will be located in the region/community where they live.

Currently the provision is driven by what programmes exist – that is we are building the YGFF provision around programmes not designed for this group.

There is an opportunity currently, given the mixed success of the YGFF scheme to provide effective pathways to higher learning, to review again what a more flexible and effective youth guarantee spanning education, training and work, might look like. A youth guarantee might effectively include solid work opportunities and a range of pathways for NEETs.

The shape of the policy, by ignoring the 'soft' needs of young people, necessarily devolves those needs down to the YGFF TEO and often the classroom, where tutors work hard to manage them effectively. The message that these students are scarred and have considerable problems was universal and ubiquitous in the research project, from stakeholders, TEO staff, tutors and the students themselves. Provisions which might mitigate these problems over a sustained period need urgent consideration and change. The four out of 10 students who leave the courses early may stay, if a more effective service were developed.

Given the above we recommend:

1. Flexibility in funding and EPIs to ensure that YGFF is focused on student need not on the ease of measuring, evaluating, or administering the scheme.
2. Recognition that 'life skills', social connectedness, and the building of 'self-esteem' in this group of young people is crucial if they are to move into further training/education, to be productive workers, and to fully contribute to their communities as citizens.

## **Tutors**

There are very good staff working in the institutions providing youth guarantees places but they are at the heart of the collision between social deficits and the need to promote learning. This is because the policy approach is too centred on 'individuals' who are 'good sorts' fixing gaps in provision. The qualitative research presented the model of the dedicated and able tutor, going out and finding the students, recruiting them, teaching the class how to learn, dealing with social/individual issues, teaching the curriculum, managing attendance and retention and fostering successful outcomes, often on a salary of only \$40,000.

There is a need for research into, and discussion around, what constitutes good practice models, and what works best, in the teaching and learning areas of the youth guarantee and it is important that this is supported by extra funding and not just an add on to existing job descriptions.

Given the above we recommend:

1. That there is acknowledgement of, and funding approach, which recognises that no single person can provide everything for these young people. Their complex needs means that a collaborative approach is needed to meet their literacy and numeracy needs, skills and training needs, work and life skills needs, and pastoral care needs.
2. Tutors need professional development time set aside which allows them to talk with each other, with communities, and with employers.

## Students in context

The Youth Guarantee must be part of a genuine pathway for students, with the right level of skills at the right place and over the right time period.

Looking at the European policies, the key themes are individual programmes and a range of pathways offered in a timely manner to all NEETs and all young people who define themselves as unemployed: currently 24 percent of 15 to 19 year olds.

This idea of a guarantee as 'offer' has some clear advantages in a situation where there is very high youth unemployment. First, it is an offer from the state to a young citizen, rather than an attempt to solve a series of individual problems. It moves beyond a deficit model towards a 'social right'.

Any provision for this group of young people must also address their needs beyond the classroom, including family/whānau issues, drug and alcohol addictions, mental health and poverty.

Much of the work that is needed in foundation courses as outlined in this report, is the building of social skills and self-esteem, and teaching the young people that they can learn and work effectively. This work involves connecting students to each other and the staff, and in doing so the programmes are preparing them to interact with employers and other workers. There needs to be a way in which policy and funding regimes acknowledge the promotion of social skills as vital elements of individual success, and to promote citizenship and employability.

All of the stakeholders, indeed nearly everyone interviewed, including students, acknowledged the importance of the context as a basis for an effective youth guarantee. The intangible elements, those not measured by the programme, are nevertheless crucial to the success of it. Options might include differential funding based on needs (as with the Youth Service and many international models), an enhanced pastoral care payment or the funding (possibly cross-sectoral) of regional co-ordination or brokerage.

There is a need for individual mentoring and pastoral care, not just in getting students into foundation courses, but during their programme of study and into the first months of their working life. One stakeholder noted that getting these young people to stick at a job for six months means that "then they are workers for the rest of their life".

Given the above we recommend:

1. That each student be assigned a mentor/counsellor/guide who will work with them to develop an individualised plan. This plan will take into consideration both the deficits of the student caused by their social and educational contexts; but also will build on the strengths and already achieved skills each young person brings with them. The support person for students should not be the tutors, who are already coping with multiple tasks and do not have the specialist skills to deal with the broader contextual issues (even though many do take this on currently).
2. That TEC and other government agencies look at the actual pastoral care needs and costs of YGFF, as the funding currently is not providing for the in-depth and long-term support of all students.

## **Is there a better way?**

High youth unemployment has now continued in New Zealand for more than a generation. From the European literature it is clear that the scarring effects of the first generation now consolidates into the second. What is to be done? Thirty years of a variety of youth training schemes have not worked, and the latest data (Earle, 2014) raises questions about whether the YGFF scheme is effective as well, even though it was well-valued by the students interviewed, and their own aspirations had been significantly raised.

The YGFF and Youth Service policies are expensive (although significantly under spent due to lack of take-up). Both schemes have high rates of attrition and non-completion, but also notable successes. Is the funding being spent the best way to achieve the outcomes?

Issues include the funding model, the lack of incentive for engagement of students, the outcomes focus, the separation of the various agencies working in the space, the lack of involvement of employers and regional agencies and more.

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