

# Learner Journey Mapping Initiative (LJM)

Tailoring Educational Services to Diverse Learner Journeys:

A Data-Driven Approach to Enhance Success for Different Learner Categories.



**FutureSkills**<sup>TM</sup>





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**SUBMITTED BY:**

**Organisation:** Future Skills

**Working Group:** Dr Waruni Hewage, Dr Asanthika Imbulpitiya, Dr Edwin Rajah, Dr Hymie Abd-Latif, Bruno Balducci, Adjunct Professor Jacqueline Whalley, Dr Karaitiana Taiuru



# Abstract

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This report outlines the results of the Learner Journey Mapping (LJM) Initiative, which was led by Future Skills as part of the 2024 Accelerating Learner Success Fund (ALSF) project (Tertiary Education Commission, 2024). With the increasing diversity among learners, this initiative sought to gain a deeper understanding of the different experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by various learner groups within the context of a Private Training Establishment (PTE) in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

This study utilised a mixed-method approach, gathering survey and interview data from 10 distinct learner groups, including Māori, Pasifika, disabled individuals, migrants, and professional learners. The main objective of the study was to create detailed learner personas and journey maps. The findings highlighted critical factors that contribute to success, including personal motivation, support from tutors and peers, and culturally responsive learning environments. However, several challenges, such as rigid timetables, gaps in digital literacy, and insufficient personalised academic and emotional support, were frequently identified as reasons for disengagement. Through Principal Component Analysis and thematic coding, the research identified two key drivers for learner progression: readiness at the beginning of the educational journey and continuous support throughout their studies.

The study provides actionable recommendations for fostering more inclusive and effective learning environments. Suggestions include enhancing onboarding processes, implementing flexible delivery models, and offering targeted wellbeing and career transition services. Additionally, the results emphasise the importance of personalised, learner-centred design in higher education. The findings of this initiative could be used to develop a scalable framework for customising services to address the diverse needs learners have, empowering education providers to collaborate with learners in designing their experiences, which ultimately enhances engagement, equity, and success for all learner groups.



# 1.0 Introduction

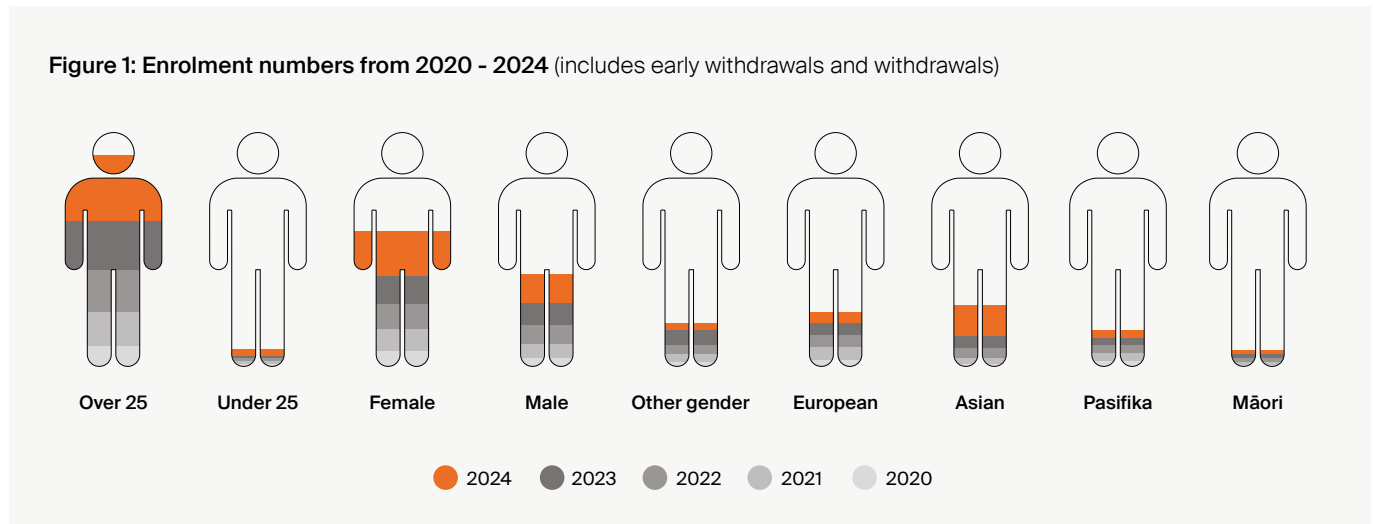
In New Zealand, Private Training Establishments (PTEs) play a vital role in the tertiary education landscape, delivering a variety of industry-aligned programmes for both domestic and international students. These institutions vary in size and scope, from small, specialised training centres to larger entities offering certificates, diplomas, and degrees at Levels 1 to 9 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF).

PTEs are recognised for their robust industry connections, practical learning environments, and focus on work-ready skills, making them appealing to students looking for employment opportunities or vocational training. The student demographic is notably diverse, with many originating from countries across Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Africa, thus fostering a rich, multicultural learning environment. This diversity enhances the classroom experience and promotes the development of global competencies among all learners. According to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), PTEs are required to adhere to strict quality assurance standards to maintain their registration and accreditation, ensuring the credibility and value of their qualifications both in New Zealand and internationally (Independent Tertiary Education New Zealand, 2023).



The data used in this research was gathered from FS, the organisation leading the study, to gain insights into student experiences, programme effectiveness, and avenues for continuous improvement. FS is a New Zealand-based PTE that offers a variety of vocational and academic programmes, typically ranging from NZQF Level 2 to Level 9. This institution provides courses in areas such as building surveying, construction, health and wellbeing, early childhood education, information technology, and several foundation-level courses.

As indicated in Figure 1, there has been a noticeable increase in enrolments across these different learner groups.



However, the increase in enrolments is accompanied by a rise in withdrawals and early withdrawals across all categories. This suggests that learners may be encountering challenges at various stages of their learner journey, leading them to disengage and withdraw from the course. A deeper understanding of these experiences is essential to identifying barriers and informing targeted interventions that support learner engagement, progression, and completion.

The LJM initiative focused on developing learner journey maps and personas that capture the specific needs, barriers, and success factors affecting different learner groups including Māori, Pasifika, disabled, and other underserved learners. Further, this project was initiated in recognition that traditional models of learner support often generalise needs or react to challenges only after they have escalated. While broad demographic indicators and performance data provide valuable insights, they do not always capture the lived experiences, motivations, and challenges that shape learner success. The LJM initiative aimed to bridge this gap by capturing qualitative and quantitative data directly from learners to understand what services contribute to their success, what barriers they face, and what additional support could have made a difference. These findings can help to plan student success strategies more deliberately, improve service design, and ensure that every learner receives support that is both meaningful and relevant to their lived experience.

In order to achieve the project aim, the project sought to answer the following key evaluation questions:

- **What support services contributed to the success of learners?**
- **What support services could have enhanced their learning experience?**
- **What support services could have enabled them to succeed?**
- **What are their distinct needs?**

The LJM project represents a foundational step toward more student-centred planning and performance improvement. It enables us to design services with learners, not just for them, and helps ensure that no group is left behind in our efforts to foster equitable and meaningful learner success.

This final report provides a narrative summary of the overall initiative. It begins by outlining the research methodology, including the design and piloting of learner experience surveys and interviews, followed by data collection and analysis. From these findings, distinct learner types, personas, and detailed learner journey maps were developed. The report concludes with a set of recommendations to inform and guide future improvements in service design and delivery.

<sup>1</sup>This data has been collected and reported by Future Skills, a PTE based in New Zealand, which is also the organisation that conducted the research.

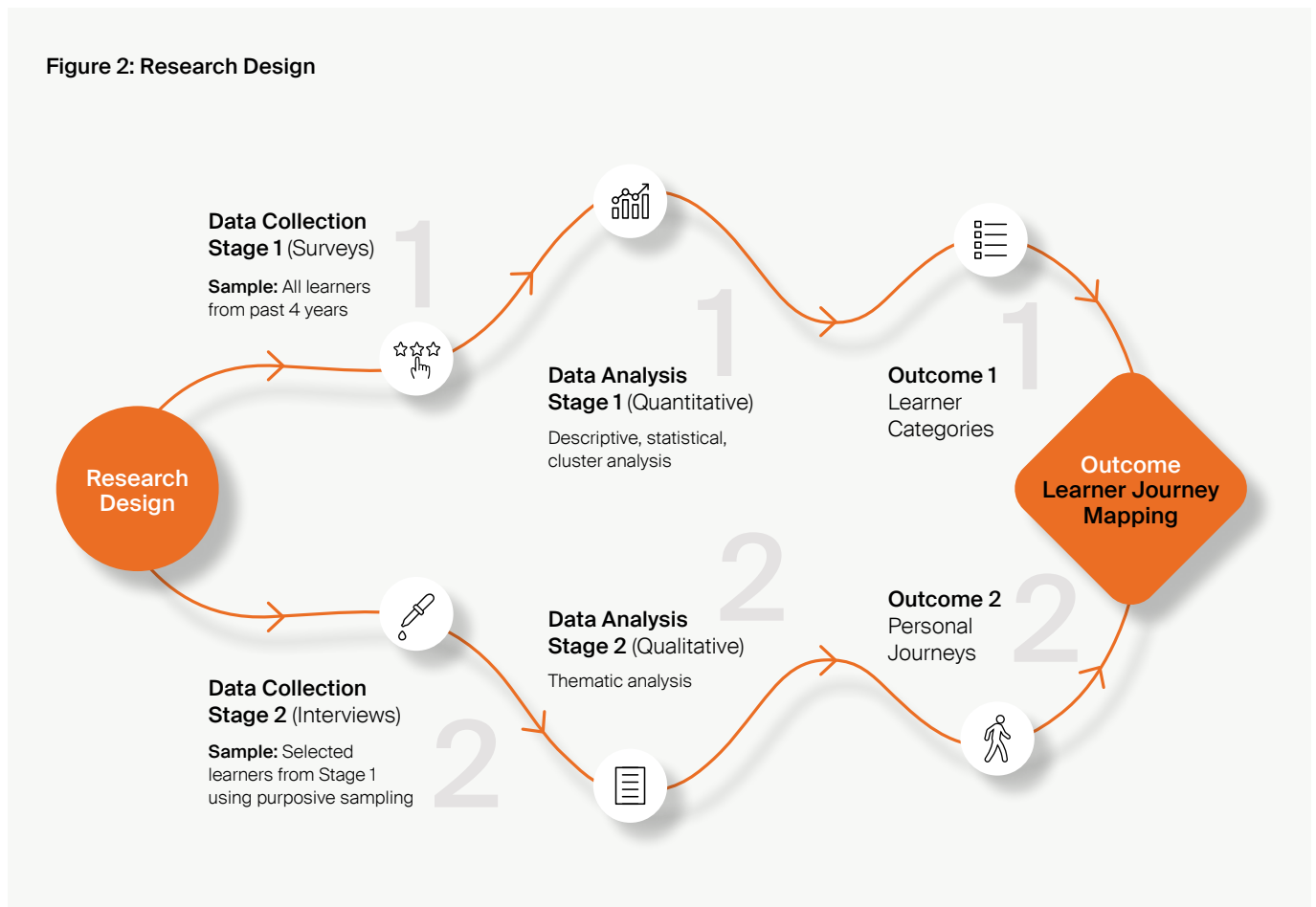


# 2.0 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method research design to develop a comprehensive understanding of learners' educational experiences. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the research captures measurable patterns alongside the nuanced, lived experiences of learners.

This approach supports data triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of the findings and ensuring they are both analytically robust and grounded in real-world learner perspectives. Central to the study is an examination of the learner journey, with particular attention to individual challenges, perspectives, and developmental milestones. This design enables a holistic analysis that values both statistical generalisability and rich personal narrative. Figure 2 further elaborates the research design.

Figure 2: Research Design





## 2.1 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in two phases as indicated in Figure 2. Phase 1 of the study involved the administration of a semi-structured online survey to domestic learners enrolled at FS across all programme levels (Level 2 to Level 7). The survey was distributed via the SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>) platform and targeted learners who had been enrolled between 2020 and 2024, including those who had withdrawn during their studies. This follows a voluntary, responsive sampling method that is typically used in collecting data through surveys. Learners were invited via email, and up to four reminder emails were sent to encourage participation. After cleaning and processing the data from 822 survey responses, a final sample of 684 participants was retained for analysis.

The primary objective of this phase was to refine and validate learner categories beyond initial enrolment-based classifications mentioned in the introduction and to gain early insights into the learner journey and academic experiences. The survey collected demographic data and explored key stages of the learning journey, including enrolment, orientation, study period, and course completion. At each stage, participants were asked about both their achievements and challenges, with a focus on the availability and effectiveness of support services. Participants were also given the opportunity to express interest in Phase 2 of the study, which involved follow-up qualitative interviews.

Phase 2 of the project involved the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Participants were recruited from those who had expressed interest at the end of Phase 1, including both successful graduates and learners who had withdrawn from their programmes. All participants were over the age of 18.

To ensure diverse representation, participants were first grouped into learner categories identified through the Phase 1 analysis. A purposive sampling strategy was then used to select four to six participants from each category. Eligible participants received an email invitation that included a study overview, consent form, and interview guide. Researchers were available via email to address any queries. Interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 15 to 30 minutes. The data collected was securely stored on Microsoft OneDrive of FS and later analysed to inform the project's overall findings.

Ethics approval for both phases of data collection was granted by Future Skills Ethics Committee.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

The Phase 1 survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended responses were analysed using descriptive and exploratory techniques, including statistical analysis, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), clustering, and data visualisation. Microsoft Excel and Orange (<https://orangedatamining.com/>) were the primary tools used for this analysis. Before analysis, the raw data was cleaned using Power Query to remove incomplete or irrelevant responses. Categorical data was then transformed into numerical formats to support PCA and clustering – for example, gender identity was coded as: Male = 1, Female = 2, Non-binary = 3, and Prefer not to say = 4. The open-ended interview responses were analysed using thematic analysis with an inductive approach, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes directly from the data. This method provided deeper insight into the factors shaping learners' experiences, expressed in their own words.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were anonymised within each learner category (e.g., PT1 to PT6 for part-time learners) during Phase 2. Background information, such as programme studied, employment status, and motivation, was also recorded to support contextual analysis. Interview transcripts were manually reviewed and coded in Excel, drawing on themes from Phase 1 while remaining open to the emergence of new insights.

Themes identified during Phases 1 and 2 were classified under three main groups, namely:

- **Barriers/Challenges – Academic support, financial assistance, study resources, etc.**
- **Enablers – Tutor support, study environment, practical/learning resources, etc.**
- **Improvements – Overall experience, suggestions, and recommendations.**

Since multiple coders were involved in the data analysis of Phase 2, all the coders were provided with the themes and definitions that were identified during Phase 1 of the analysis to maintain consistency. Lastly, coding decisions were made collaboratively through a consensus-based approach among the coders to ensure reliability and coherence in the analysis.



# 3.0 Findings

The initial phase of the analysis focused on identifying distinct learner categories emerging from the survey data. The survey was intentionally designed to enable direct classification of participants based on their responses to key questions. For example, questions related to disability status and ethnicity allowed for the early identification of groups such as disabled learners and Māori/Pasifika learners.

## 3.1 Overview of Identified Learner Groups

These predefined categories were embedded within the survey structure to highlight important demographic and support-related distinctions from the outset. In some instances, additional criteria were applied to refine category definitions and ensure consistent classification. Categories like “young learners” and “mature learners” required specific age-based thresholds to accurately distinguish between them. The complete list of identified learner categories and their definitions is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Identified Learner Categories and Definitions**

NO.	LEARNER CATEGORY	DEFINITION
1	<b>Disabled learners</b>	Learners who identify as having a physical, sensory, learning, mental health, or other disability that may affect their learning experience.
2	<b>Māori learners</b>	Learners who identify as Māori, the tangata whenua (indigenous people) of Aotearoa New Zealand.
3	<b>Pasifika learners</b>	Learners who identify with Pacific nations and communities (e.g., Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Fijian).
4	<b>Mature learners</b>	Learners aged 35 years or older who are returning to study after a career break or to change career paths.
5	<b>Young learners</b>	Learners aged between 18 and 24, who have limited or no formal qualifications since leaving high school.
6	<b>Migrant Kiwis</b>	Learners who were born outside of New Zealand and have migrated here.
7	<b>Professional learners</b>	Learners who are employed full time during their period of study and/or undertook the study as a requirement of their employment or to further their employment prospects.
8	<b>Full-time learners</b>	Learners enrolled in a study workload of 30–35 hours per week.
9	<b>Part-time learners</b>	Learners enrolled in a study workload of less than 20 hours per week.
10	<b>Dropped out learners</b>	Learners who have formally or informally withdrawn from their programme prior to completion, either by choice or due to non-engagement or academic ineligibility.



## 3.2 Learner Readiness and Resilience: Key Drivers of Progression

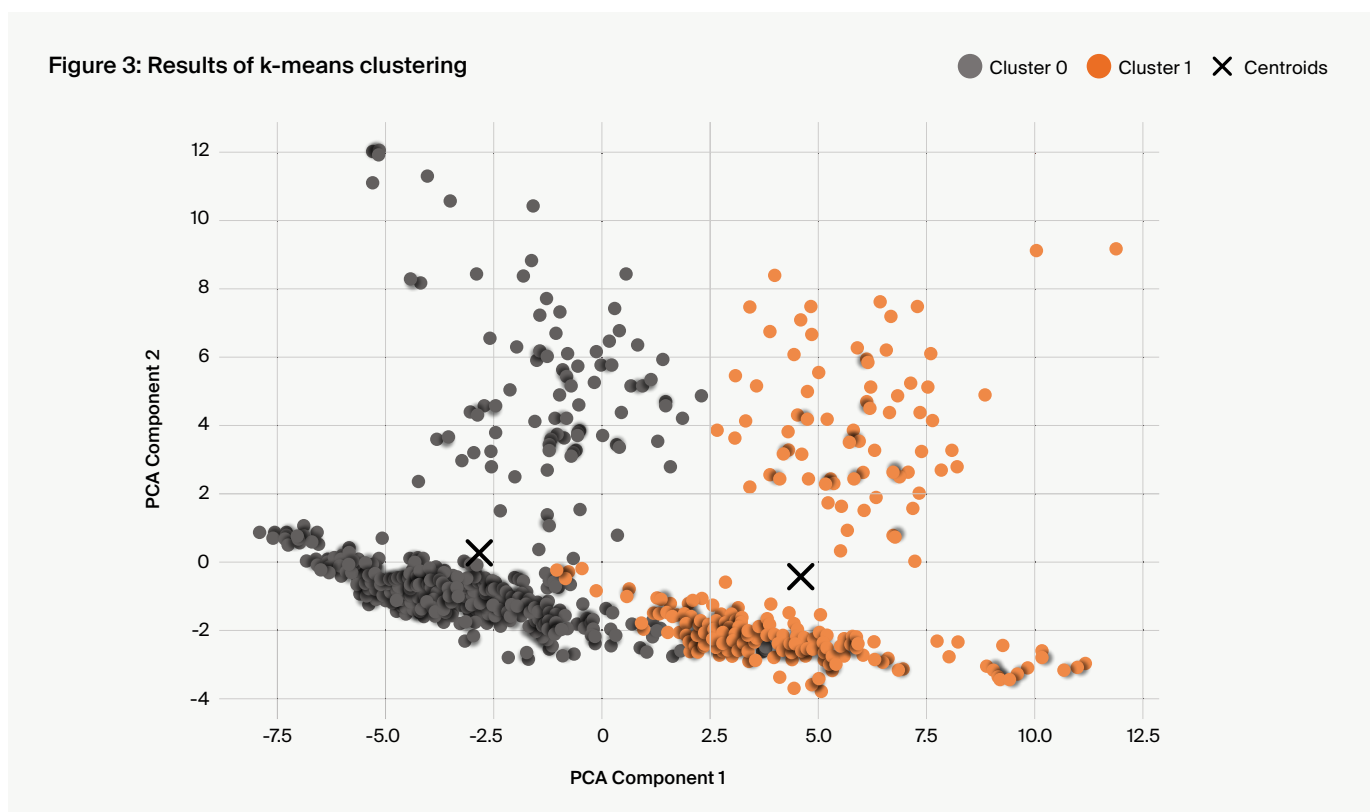
Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was utilised to identify the key factors that influence programme completion. This statistical method helps streamline large datasets by transforming them into a concise set of uncorrelated variables known as principal components, all while preserving as much variability as possible (Jolliffe & Cadima, 2016). The analysis highlighted two significant components that shed light on the experiences of learners.

- **PCA 1** pertains to orientation and early support. It indicates how well-informed and supported learners felt at the outset of their academic journey. Higher PCA1 scores signify a strong sense of preparedness and clarity during onboarding, whereas lower scores point to uncertainty or gaps in initial support.
- **PCA2** addresses ongoing challenges throughout the learning experience, encompassing academic focus, access to resources, skill development, and overall wellbeing. Learners with higher PCA2 scores often encounter more hurdles in these areas, while those with lower scores tend to cope better and benefit from adequate support during their studies.

These components collectively help distinguish between learners struggling due to insufficient orientation and those facing persistent challenges throughout their education. Such insights can drive targeted interventions at both the onboarding and ongoing support stages, aimed at enhancing learner outcomes and retention.

Following the PCA findings, k-means clustering was employed to categorise participants based on the similarities in their experiences. Two clear clusters emerged (refer to Figure 3):

- **Cluster 0 (black)** comprises learners with lower scores on both PCA1 and PCA2, suggesting they may have had limited orientation and support but manage to cope relatively well with academic demands.
- **Cluster 1 (orange)** reveals higher scores on both components, indicating that while these learners are more aware of available support, they may be facing greater challenges related to academic skills and overall wellbeing.



This analysis highlights two key learner profiles:

1. Learners who need improved onboarding and clearer guidance on support services.
2. Learners who are well-engaged initially but require sustained academic and wellbeing support throughout their studies.

These insights can inform the design of more tailored interventions, helping to improve learner engagement, satisfaction, and retention.



### 3.3 What Helps, What Hinders: Insights from Learners

The thematic analysis of open-ended survey responses revealed a diverse set of factors that significantly contributed to learners' ability to successfully complete their studies. These enablers reflect both intrinsic motivations and the critical role of external support systems. Table 2 below is a summary of the most frequently cited themes, the definitions, and key insights.

**Table 2: Summary of Key Enabling Factors with Definitions and Insights**

#### Study Period

ENABLING FACTOR	DEFINITION	KEY INSIGHTS
<b>Personal Motivation</b>	Internal drive and personal goals that motivate learners to persevere and succeed.	Driven by ambition, perseverance, and purpose. Learners linked motivation to career goals and timely completion.
<b>Tutor Support</b>	Support provided by tutors through guidance, encouragement, and academic assistance.	Tutors were seen as approachable, encouraging, and instrumental in learner retention and success.
<b>Peer Support</b>	Emotional and academic support from classmates through shared experiences and collaboration.	Classmates offered empathy and emotional support, enhancing the sense of community and belonging.
<b>Practical/Learning Resources</b>	Availability and use of learning tools, resources, and technologies that enhance skill application.	Access to modern, practical tools and technologies helped learners apply skills and stay engaged.
<b>Study Environment</b>	The physical and psychological qualities of the study environment that support concentration and wellbeing.	A comfortable, well-equipped environment supported focus and wellbeing.
<b>Financial Support</b>	Financial aid or assistance (i.e. scholarships and Fees Free) that helps reduce economic barriers to study.	Financial assistance reduced stress and enabled continued study.

#### Enrolment and Orientation

ENABLING FACTOR	DEFINITION	KEY INSIGHTS
<b>Friendly Staff</b>	Positive interpersonal interactions from staff that foster a welcoming and supportive atmosphere.	Kindness and approachability of staff contributed to emotional reassurance.
<b>Personal Contact</b>	Direct, personalised communication from staff that enhances clarity, reassurance, and engagement.	Personalised outreach (e.g., phone calls) made learners feel supported and valued.

While some learners successfully navigated their study journey, others faced significant barriers that ultimately prevented them from completing their programmes. Feedback from these learners offers critical insights into the systemic, personal, and instructional challenges they encountered. Many of them also shared constructive suggestions for improvement, offering clear guidance on what could have helped them remain engaged and succeed. These insights reflect learner-identified improvements across academic, personal, and structural domains. The following challenges/barriers in Table 3 represent the most frequently mentioned areas for enhancement, supported by direct learner feedback and key implications for future programme design.

**Table 3: Summary of Key Challenges/Barriers and Suggested Improvements**

CHALLENGE/BARRIER	CHALLENGE DESCRIPTION	LEARNER SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
<b>Lack of Academic Support</b>	Inadequate academic assistance, including poorly trained tutors, unclear instructional guidance, and limited opportunities for one-on-one support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better-trained tutors</li> <li>• Personalised support</li> <li>• Clearer instructions</li> <li>• Structured lessons</li> </ul>
<b>Time Management Difficulties</b>	Challenges learners faced in managing their time effectively, especially when juggling study with work, health issues, or family responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible deadlines</li> <li>• Ability to pause/resume study</li> <li>• Time management workshops/training</li> </ul>
<b>Inflexible Timetables</b>	Lack of options, such as evening, weekend, or asynchronous delivery, limited accessibility and participation for many, which conflicted with learners' personal and professional schedules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evening/weekend classes</li> <li>• Asynchronous delivery</li> <li>• Shorter sessions with breaks</li> </ul>



CHALLENGE/BARRIER	CHALLENGE DESCRIPTION	LEARNER SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
<b>Financial Barriers</b>	The burden of tuition, transportation, childcare costs, and confusing funding information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fee waivers, subsidies, student allowances</li> <li>• Financial transparency</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Personal Support &amp; Wellbeing</b>	The absence of structured support for learners dealing with health issues, mental health struggles, and personal crises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health check-ins</li> <li>• Empathetic tutor support</li> <li>• Deferment options</li> </ul>
<b>Low Motivation &amp; Self-efficacy</b>	Learners struggle with low confidence, uncertainty about course expectations, and burnout.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help for confidence-building and goal-setting</li> <li>• Early orientation to align expectations</li> </ul>
<b>Limited Study Mode Options</b>	Issues with disjointed or poorly designed online platforms and a lack of flexible study options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved digital content</li> <li>• Hybrid delivery options</li> <li>• Better instructional design</li> </ul>
	Intensity of full-time study mode.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part-time enrolment</li> <li>• Modular pacing</li> <li>• Option to switch between study modes</li> </ul>
<b>Insufficient Learning Resources</b>	The lack of clear, structured learning materials, assignment guidance, and progress indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer resources</li> <li>• Assignment templates</li> <li>• Progress checkpoints</li> </ul>

Apart from the main challenges and barriers identified by most learners, there were some less frequently mentioned issues that still had a significant impact. These included a range of structural problems such as poor job readiness support, disorganised course delivery, IT difficulties, and a lack of family or caregiving support. Though not as commonly cited, these obstacles also contributed to disengagement and reduced learners' ability to succeed.

These findings highlight that learner success is influenced by a combination of personal drive and institutional support. Personal motivation emerged as the most prominent enabler, underscoring the value of fostering goal-setting and self-efficacy. Personal motivation aligns closely with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which says that learners are most likely to persist and succeed when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness - three psychological needs that drive intrinsic motivation. The prominence of personal motivation as a main enabler indicates the need for institutions to foster goal setting, self-efficacy and a clear sense of purpose throughout the programme delivery.

However, relying solely on personal motivation as a determinant of success risks overlooking the structural disparities that shape learners' capacities to engage fully. Motivation does not occur in isolation, it is often facilitated by the institutional environment (Zepke & Leach, 2010). For example, difficulties with time management were a recurrent issue, but these often do not solely occur from student inefficiency, but also from inflexible study structures, intensive workload models, and insufficient support for competing life demands. Therefore, offering flexible learning modes, modular pacing, and asynchronous content are not just conveniences, they are necessary measures to promote equity.

Similarly, the centrality of tutor support and peer engagement as enablers reveals the relational nature of learning. As Kahu and Nelson (2018) and (Tinto, 2015) argue, student success is deeply rooted in a sense of belonging and academic confidence, both of which are fostered through sustained human connection. Tutor support plays an important role in clarifying and achieving academic expectations, especially for students experiencing higher education for the first time. Nevertheless, insufficient training for staff could undermine the effectiveness and quality of this support service. This highlights the pressing need for institutions to focus on the professional development and adequate resourcing of educators, ensuring they possess not only discipline-specific knowledge but also the instructional strategies and emotional support required to help a diverse range of learners.

Peer support is vital in reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing academic motivation, drawing on Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which emphasises the importance of learning through shared experiences and feedback. However, such support does not emerge automatically, particularly in online or hybrid settings where casual interactions are restricted (Means et al., 2013). To guarantee that all learners can take advantage of peer collaboration, institutions need to intentionally integrate peer interactions into course design using methods like virtual discussion platforms, mentoring programmes, and collaborative assignments when operating online or in hybrid formats.

Moreover, providing access to practical learning resources such as digital tools, well-structured content, and skill-building materials is essential for sustaining academic engagement and aligns with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles that promote inclusive education through flexible, accessible pathways (Rose et al., 2013). Yet, digital equity continues to be a



significant issue, as numerous learners, especially from marginalised communities, face challenges related to consistent internet access, suitable devices, or digital competency. Additionally, often overlooked elements such as financial aid, supportive staff interactions, and personalised communication are particularly beneficial for vulnerable learners. Financial assistance helps eliminate economic obstacles (The New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2017), while staff friendliness and proactive outreach create a welcoming and engaging learning atmosphere that enhances student retention (Tinto, 2015).

These findings indicate a strong demand for programmes that are academically supportive, flexible in delivery, empathetic to personal circumstances, and accessible to diverse learner profiles. Addressing these areas of improvement identified by learners can significantly enhance completion rates, learner satisfaction, and long-term success outcomes. Creating educational experiences that anticipate and cater to the diverse realities of learners is crucial for fostering inclusive, resilient, and effective learning environments.

## 3.4 Learner journeys and personas

The second phase of our analysis shifted to a thorough exploration of the interview data gathered from participants, organised according to the learner groups that emerged in the initial phase. While the first phase provided important insights into the overall characteristics, behaviours, and motivations of the learners, this next phase delved deeper into their individual learning journeys. By examining specific experiences within each learner category, we aimed to uncover patterns, challenges, and pivotal moments that influenced their engagement and development throughout the learning process.

The sections that follow will outline the learner journey at various stages, beginning with Enrolment and Orientation, moving through Early Learning and Adaptation, then Mid-course Engagement, Assessment and Completion, and finally Post-course Experience. To tie it all together, we'll present a learner persona that embodies the typical experience for someone in each category.

### Disabled Learners

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**Disabled learners faced early challenges with documentation, navigating support services, and understanding administrative processes during Enrolment and Orientation. These were eased somewhat by clear course information and supportive staff. Improvements could include tailored onboarding, clearer guidance, and slower-paced sessions.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation stage, difficulties with academic language and digital tools were common. Supportive lecturers, structured resources, and inclusive practices helped learners adjust. Further support with academic scaffolding and blended learning would be beneficial. When learners entered the Mid-course phase, many experienced physical and emotional fatigue due to study-life balance and health issues. To mitigate these issues regular tutor check-ins and inclusive learning environments were key supports. Enhancing wellbeing communication and simplifying materials could improve this stage. During Assessment and Completion, unclear grading, lack of recorded content, and limited feedback posed challenges. Learners valued flexible deadlines and practical learning. Suggested improvements include alternative assessments, clearer rubrics, and applying universal design principles. In the Post-course Experience, learners felt uncertain about future steps due to limited career guidance and a lack of continued community. However, the majority of learners appreciated the overall experience and support from tutors and peers. To enhance this area, we suggest that strengthening alumni networks, career pathways, and recognition systems could support longer-term engagement.

**Figure 4** (page 11) presents the persona of a disabled learner, driven by recovery, purpose, and community contribution, while facing a mix of structural and personal barriers throughout their learning journey.



Figure 4: Disabled Learner Persona

## Disabled Learners

The motivation to study is shaped by lived experience and a strong sense of purpose. A transition into a new career has been driven by both necessity and a desire to contribute meaningfully to the community. Learning is seen as a pathway to recovery, empowerment, and positive change, especially for those navigating life with a disability.



### Challenges

- Difficulty in understanding course content
- Trouble with spellings and academic language
- Physical challenges due to various injuries
- Fatigue due to multiple responsibilities
- Unclear understanding of assessment and evaluation
- Lack of post-course community network



### Support

- Helpful front desk staff
- Emotional support from tutors
- Weekly check-ins
- Supportive social atmosphere



### Enablers

- Free course access
- Clear information on course expectations
- Practical knowledge and skills
- Cultural, social and physical inclusivity



### Recommendations

- Emphasise accessibility in communication and onboarding
- Offer flexible orientation to meet diverse needs
- Use varied teaching strategies and provide technical guidance
- Foster long-term connections and affordable re-entry options



“The injury made it very hard to do the course. But yeah, I managed to get through it. That’s the main thing.”



## Māori Learners

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**During the Enrolment and Orientation phase, Māori learners frequently encountered challenges with digital literacy, experienced low representation of Māori role models, and often depended on their peers to help them through the enrolment process. The absence of cultural signals sometimes caused reluctance in reaching out for assistance. Nevertheless, a friendly atmosphere, the inclusion of te reo Māori, and approachable staff members contributed to a sense of belonging early on. Increasing the visibility of cultural elements and improving communication clarity would be beneficial during this stage.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation phase, learners struggled to juggle their studies with parenting, job responsibilities, and community obligations, especially during lockdowns. They valued environments that respected their culture, access to both physical and digital resources, and the support of tutors. Suggested improvements include offering early academic assistance, customised pacing, and enhanced digital access. Mid-course Engagement was impacted by emotional pressure and decreasing motivation, along with external challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic. Strong peer networks, classroom collaboration, and face-to-face sessions helped sustain engagement. More regular contact from tutors and organised assignment support would benefit this stage significantly. During the Assessment and Completion phase, learners faced issues with misaligned assessments, a lack of resources, and inconsistent access to learning materials. The flexibility shown by tutors and administrative staff allowed many to achieve their goals. Key areas for enhancement include aligning content with assessments and improving work placement opportunities. In the Post-course Experience, Māori learners valued culturally significant graduation ceremonies and strong friendships but encountered limited exposure to industry opportunities and vague career pathways. Continued cultural support, more defined employment routes, and structured guidance after study would enhance long-term success.

**Figure 5** (page 13) presents the persona of a Māori learner, whose journey reflects cultural resilience and the need for visibility, relevance, and responsive support throughout the educational experience.



Figure 5: Māori Learner Persona

## Māori Learners

The motivation to study was inspired by a deep commitment to whānau, a desire to be a positive role model, and the aspiration to uplift the community. The journey was driven by the hope of creating better opportunities both for future generations and for contributing meaningfully to collective wellbeing.



### Challenges

- Managing family commitments
- Difficulties in online learning and other digital platforms
- Disruptions to learning structure by external factors (e.g. Covid-19)
- Broad course content and misaligned assessments
- Limited industry exposure from tutors



### Support

- Strong peer support
- Financial support from the institution
- Emotional encouragement from tutors



### Enablers

- Clear, easy and welcoming enrolment processes
- Easy access to study materials
- Graduation with cultural elements
- Flexibility with deadlines



### Recommendations

- Develop targeted Māori outreach and recruitment strategies
- Offer flexible study structures to support life balance
- Ensure access to devices and online tools for all learners
- Improve bicultural competency among staff

“I think as a Māori learner we don’t find it easy to reach out for support even though we know it’s there.”





## Pasifika Learners

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**The educational experiences of Pasifika learners highlight various distinct strengths and challenges throughout different key stages. During the Enrolment and Orientation phase, Pasifika learners encountered difficulties in accessing email systems and using digital tools such as Microsoft Teams. These challenges were alleviated through effective communication, financial assistance, and friendly staff. Improving outreach efforts, highlighting Pasifika success stories, and making the relevance of courses more apparent would benefit this stage.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation stage, many faced the challenge of balancing their studies with childcare responsibilities, along with limited flexibility in their schedules and gaps in digital literacy. Supportive instructors, hands-on teaching approaches, and flexible strategies contributed greatly to keeping learners engaged. Offering printed materials, digital resources, and initial IT support would further enhance the learning experience. Mid-course engagement was characterised by emotional strain and decreased motivation due to personal and familial challenges. Nonetheless, culturally relevant tutors, strong peer networks, and flexible arrangements were essential in helping learners remain on track. Incorporating culturally appropriate wellbeing support and structured, family-oriented learning options could improve retention rates. In the Assessment and Completion stage, learners faced time and technology pressures while managing external responsibilities. Despite this, they benefited from one-on-one tutor help, constructive feedback, and a supportive assessment environment. The minimal negative feedback suggests current support systems are largely effective. The Post-course Experience was mostly positive, with increased confidence, improved communication skills, and successful job placements. Ongoing informal support from peers and staff aided the transition. To support long-term success, institutions could strengthen career services, introduce structured post-study support, and maintain culturally grounded learner connections.

**Figure 6** (page 15) presents the persona of a Pasifika learner, characterised by resilience, strong community values, and a need for culturally relevant, practical, and sustained support throughout the educational journey. Much like Māori learners, Pasifika learners benefit most when their cultural identity is reflected in the learning environment, and when support systems are responsive to their lived realities both inside and outside the classroom.



Figure 6: Pasifika Learner Persona

## Pasifika Learners

The motivation to study was strengthened by the genuine encouragement from tutors and the sense of belonging within a supportive learning environment. Being welcomed without judgement helped build confidence and inspired deeper engagement, especially as a Pasifika learner seeking to grow both personally and for the benefit of the wider community.



### Challenges

- Difficulty in accessing resources via student email
- Difficulty balancing class attendance with childcare
- Emotional stress from personal situations
- Challenges in time management due to external commitments
- Lack of motivation during mid-course stage



### Support

- Active tutor engagement and support
- Financial support from the institution
- Constructive feedback from tutors



### Enablers

- Accessible staff during induction
- Innovative teaching methods
- Active tutor engagement
- Collaborative study environment



### Recommendations

- Promote courses more actively among Pasifika community
- Offer IT support and training to improve digital skills
- Improve peer interactions and shared learning experiences
- Encourage returning learners through ongoing engagement



“As a Pasifika person, we’re often judged for how we look or speak but in here everyone was welcoming. It made me feel like I belonged and want to be more involved.”



## Mature Learners

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**The journey of mature learners highlights a range of recurring challenges and enablers across the learning lifecycle, shaped largely by their complex responsibilities and prior life experience. During Enrolment and Orientation, mature learners often missed scheduled sessions and struggled to access clear course information, with digital literacy issues and unexpected tutor changes adding uncertainty. However, they valued clear admissions processes and staff support. Improvements could include recorded orientation sessions and clearer communication around course structure.**

Balancing study with work, family, and personal responsibilities was a major challenge for mature learners in the Early Learning and Adaptation stage. They mainly had time management issues, digital skill gaps, and language barriers. However, support from the tutors and flexibility of attending class online helped many to overcome these challenges. Targeted digital support, consistent tutor communication, and adaptable learning formats would strengthen this stage. Mid-course engagement created academic challenges, particularly concerning writing assignments often since many started their studies after a long gap. Inconsistent teaching methods also influenced their engagement. However, learners gained from hands-on resources, tutor support, and interaction with peers. Standardising teaching approaches and fostering peer connections could enhance the learner experience. During the Assessment and Completion phase, some adult learners perceived a disconnect between the course material and their career objectives, while others found the material relevant. Support from tutors and a collaborative atmosphere were crucial factors. Aligning evaluations with industry requirements and clarifying learning pathways could improve results. In the Post-course Experience, numerous learners felt uncertain about their future pathways, partly due to overlooked emails and vague guidance on progression. Nevertheless, most expressed pride in their accomplishments and a desire to continue their education. Improving communication, providing post-study direction, and offering ongoing learning options would aid their continued success.

**Figure 7** (page 17) presents the persona of a mature learner, balancing multiple life roles while returning to study. Flexible formats, career-aligned content, digital literacy support, and clear communication are critical to enabling long-term achievement.



Figure 7: Mature Learner Persona

## Mature Learners

The motivation to study was driven by a desire to upskill, remain relevant in the changing job market, and achieve personal growth. Despite initial challenges with digital literacy, the opportunity to engage in flexible, accessible learning reignited confidence and a belief in lifelong learning.



### Challenges

- Challenges in managing study and work
- Digital literacy gaps and change of tutors
- Disconnection between course content and professional goals
- Lack of pathway advice regarding future job opportunities



### Support

- Tutors' guidance throughout the study
- Financial support from the institution
- Family support to balance work and study
- Peer support



### Enablers

- Transparent admission process
- Online study flexibility
- Clear assessment instructions
- Relevant and contextualised content of study



### Recommendations

- Address digital literacy gaps with beginner-friendly onboarding
- Support learners managing work, family, and language challenges
- Use contextualised, industry-relevant assessment scenarios
- Recommend advanced or follow-up learning opportunities

**"In the beginning I struggled as an older person cause I didn't have regards to computer literacy skills, and I knew how to work a table fine. But to actually have to use a computer was a whole other set of skills."**





## Young Learners

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**The experience of young learners is influenced by their shift into adult education while often balancing work commitments, mental health, and developing career aspirations. During the Enrolment and Orientation phase, learners typically experienced a seamless onboarding process, aided by a technology-driven enrolment system and thorough assistance from staff. Nevertheless, some uncertainty persisted regarding the withdrawal process and its potential impact on future enrolment choices. To enhance this phase, educational institutions should improve communication concerning withdrawal policies and offer early clarification on how enrolment decisions influence long-term study opportunities.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation phase, learners faced challenges in balancing their studies with weekend or full-time jobs, while strict attendance requirements added to the pressure. Supportive instructors, weekend classes, and flexible access to resources proved beneficial. Raising awareness of wellbeing services and strengthening connections with health services would further enhance support. Mid-course engagement was hindered by the challenges of balancing work and study, along with difficulties in navigating online platforms. Peer support, respectful environments, and accessible materials helped maintain engagement. Continued development of flexible, digitally supported learning models is recommended. During Assessment and Completion, tight deadlines and academic stress impacted mental wellbeing. While industry-relevant content was engaging, learners called for more self-paced learning options and greater flexibility in assessment timelines. In the Post-course Experience, securing relevant work placements was difficult despite improved confidence and recognised learning. A structured placement programme and early employer engagement would help ease the transition into employment.

**Figure 8** (page 19) presents the persona of a young learner, whose success depends on culturally responsive, flexible, and well-structured support tailored to the pressures of early career and adult learning.



Figure 8: Young Learner Persona

## Young Learners

The **motivation** to study came from a desire to build a strong foundation for future career opportunities and personal development. The chance to learn in a supportive, flexible, and inclusive environment helped ease the transition into higher education.



### Challenges

- Lack of clarity around withdrawal process
- Difficulty in balancing study with full-time/weekend work
- Mental health stress due to study pressures
- Lack of career opportunities



### Support

- Emotional support from peers
- Supportive and flexible Tutors
- Inclusive and culturally responsive environment



### Enablers

- Clear onboarding instructions
- Easy access to study materials
- Saturday/additional sessions with tutors
- Relevant and up-to-date course content



### Recommendations

- Communicate re-enrolment options early and accessibly
- Offer more flexible attendance
- Review and update course content regularly to reflect current industry practices
- Provide internship opportunities



"I do know that a lot of my peers really struggle to complete the course because they couldn't find a work placement."



## Migrant Kiwi Learners

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**The journey of migrant Kiwi learners was shaped by initial cultural differences in peer interactions, but overall reflected a positive educational experience supported by inclusive environments and responsive teaching practices. During Enrolment and Orientation, learners appreciated smooth processes, scholarships, and inclusive communication, though clearer course fee information and strengthened outreach could improve this phase.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation stage, limited English proficiency, unfamiliar digital tools, and peer interaction challenges emerged. Weekend classes, tutor check-ins, and accessible resources supported their transition. Flexible schedules and additional learning materials would further support progress. Mid-course engagement was impacted by the demands of balancing work, study, and family, along with some platform usability issues. Practical teaching methods, one-on-one tutor support, and peer collaboration helped maintain engagement. Learners suggested expanding lecture formats and introducing more advanced content. During Assessment and Completion, inflexible deadlines and time constraints posed challenges, but tutor feedback and classroom support were strong enablers. More flexible timelines, milestone credentials, and pacing options would better align with learners' responsibilities. In the Post-course Experience, learners reported positive skill development and increased employability but called for better alignment with industry needs and expanded regional access to learning.

**Figure 9** (page 21) presents the persona of a migrant Kiwi learner, defined by resilience, cultural adjustment, and career focus, requiring inclusive, flexible, and career-aligned learning environments to thrive.



Figure 9: Migrant Kiwi Learner Persona

## Migrant Kiwi Learners

The motivation to study was rooted in a desire to adapt, grow, and contribute meaningfully in a new country. Gaining locally relevant skills, improving English proficiency, and building confidence in a welcoming and inclusive environment were key drivers.



### Challenges

- English proficiency and adaptability to digital technology
- Difficulty in connecting with peers due to cultural differences
- Hard to manage with other commitments
- Rigid assignment deadlines



### Support

- Financial support/scholarships
- One-to-one learning support and additional support sessions
- Peer support and collaboration



### Enablers

- Clear and inclusive communication
- Practical examples for study
- Positive study atmosphere
- Feeling of inclusivity and accessibility



### Recommendations

- Continue offering financial support
- Ensure cultural inclusion and improve peer connectivity
- Introduce elective courses for advanced learners
- Leverage alumni feedback to improve future offerings

“Our teacher... always explain full process from the beginning to the end... our environment is very good... we always have the teamwork.”





## Professional Learners

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**Professional learners balance full-time jobs, personal commitments, and study often while managing cultural or language differences. During Enrolment and Orientation, challenges included limited academic guidance and unclear programme expectations. Still, the process was smooth overall, supported by approachable staff. Tailored communication and written assignment guides could improve this phase, especially for older or returning learners.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation stage, limited study leave, emotional stress, and juggling the work-life-study were common. Supportive tutors, structured learning tools, and peer support helped ease the transition. Maintaining flexible schedules, improving online interaction, and sustaining tutor engagement are key to supporting this stage. Mid-course Engagement was affected by rigid class schedules, isolation from online only delivery, and low motivation. Peer discussions, blended learning, and flexible study options helped maintain momentum. Continued hybrid learning and more in-person opportunities, especially for complex topics, were recommended. During Assessment and Completion, securing time off from work and language-related concerns, particularly for oral assessments, posed barriers. Personalised tutor support, admin flexibility, and study continuity after breaks were strong enablers. Better alignment of course content with assessments and tailored programmes for specific sectors like business and local government would add value. In the Post-course Experience, learners appreciated the personal and financial benefits of study but noted weak support in transitioning to new roles. Strong employer backing and personal motivation were evident, but clearer career pathways, mentorship, and structured post-study support are needed for sustained success.

**Figure 10** (page 23) presents the persona of a professional learner, defined by the need for flexible, career-aligned learning and robust support structures to accommodate working life. Ongoing guidance and employer engagement are essential to their progression.



Figure 10: Professional Learner Persona

## Professional Learners

The **motivation** to study stemmed from a commitment to career development and the desire to stay competitive in a changing professional landscape. Balancing work, personal life, and study was challenging, but the flexibility of blended learning and strong support from tutors and employers enabled continued progress.



### Challenges

- Lack of academic advice during early stages
- Language barriers and cultural adjustment difficulties
- Balancing full-time work/study and family/relationship pressures
- Inefficient class scheduling and limited flexibility to reschedule assessments



### Support

- Strong and reliable tutor support
- Support from the employer
- Peer support and motivation



### Enablers

- Smooth and concise enrolment process
- Clear communication from staff
- Mixture of online/offline learning



### Recommendations

- Enhance academic advising and tutoring availability early in the course
- Improve online engagement strategies to boost interaction
- Maintain hybrid learning models
- Continue to accommodate extensions and flexible deadlines



**“There’s just a whole lot going on. Work pressure, family pressure, relationship pressure. It all adds up and affects how much I can focus on study.”**



## Full-time Learners

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**Full-time learners generally experienced a smooth enrolment process, supported by clear orientation and government funding. In the Early Learning and Adaptation stage, many learners struggled with balancing childcare, navigating technical English, and using tools like Microsoft Office. Responsive tutors, printed materials, recorded sessions, and email support helped manage these challenges. Targeted IT and language support, especially for ESOL learners, would further ease the transition.**

The Mid-course Engagement phase highlighted the ongoing challenge of managing work, study, and personal commitments. Inconsistent tutor support in some programmes and technical vocabulary created barriers, for some, were highlighted. But small class sizes, team projects, and access to tools like Power BI and GitHub supported engagement. Greater scheduling flexibility for caregivers and consistent tutor presence were suggested improvements. By the Assessment and Completion phase, most learners felt confident and well-supported, citing structured homework and motivation to finish. Integrating real-world data and applied tasks was recommended to strengthen practical skills and industry alignment. In the Post-course Experience, learners gained confidence and communication skills, but many struggled to secure jobs due to limited hands-on experience. Expanding internships, project-based learning, and career services would better support their transition into employment.

**Figure 11** (page 25) presents the persona of a full-time learner motivated, goal-driven, and balancing life responsibilities. Real-world learning, consistent support, and strong employment pathways are essential to their long-term success.



Figure 11: Full-time Learner Persona

## Full-time Learners

The **motivation** to study was driven by the goal of improving career opportunities in New Zealand and gaining practical, job-ready skills. A structured learning environment, team-based projects, and clear support systems provided a strong foundation for personal and professional growth.



### Challenges

- Difficulty in navigating the student portal
- Managing childcare responsibilities
- Limited tutor engagement in some classes
- Difficulty in using technical vocabulary and tools
- Difficulty in securing employment after the study



### Support

- Financial support from the institution
- Clear and detailed explanations
- Friendly learning environment



### Enablers

- Insightful orientation session
- Printed study materials
- Team-based project work
- Better job prospects in NZ



### Recommendations

- Continue strong orientation sessions with clear course details
- Support learners managing childcare with flexible learning options
- Develop structured internship and hands-on project opportunities to improve employability



“Because my English is limited, I sometimes struggle with professional words. But the teacher explains the whole process from beginning to end, which helps me understand the main ideas.”



## Part-time Learners

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**Part-time learners balanced work and study while facing challenges related to digital literacy, fatigue, and limited hands-on experience. The Enrolment and Orientation process was generally smooth, though some learners struggled with digital skills and course prerequisites. One-on-one onboarding and basic computer training were suggested to ease entry.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation stage, long class sessions and assignment confusion were common, but helpful tutors, relatable teaching, and accessible resources supported learners. Shorter sessions and better tech support were recommended to enhance flexibility. Mid-course engagement was affected by isolation and reduced motivation, especially in self-paced online formats. Weekend tutorials, peer collaboration, and tutor check-ins helped maintain engagement. Learners suggested more live support, real-world projects, and industry exposure. During Assessment and Completion, time constraints and reduced tutor availability added pressure. Learners valued hands-on projects and skill building but requested easier access to materials and better content navigation tools. Aligning content more closely with industry needs would add relevance. In the Post-course Experience, learners struggled with job placement due to limited practical training, despite strong motivation and a desire to contribute meaningfully. Structured internships, job support, and inclusive services, including cultural and IT literacy support, would strengthen outcomes.

**Figure 12** (page 27) presents the persona of a part-time learner who is purpose-driven, balancing multiple roles, and best supported through flexible, inclusive, and industry-connected learning experiences.



Figure 12: Part-time Learner Persona

## Part-time Learners

The **motivation** to study came from the need to balance ongoing work commitments while gaining relevant skills for career growth. Flexible learning options, supportive tutors, and collaborative classroom experiences encouraged continued engagement. The goal was to upskill without stepping away from employment.



### Challenges

- Difficulty managing full-time work with part-time study
- Extensive course content packed into a short timeframe
- Difficulty in meeting deadlines due to work conflicts
- Lack of employment opportunities due to minimal practical learning



### Support

- Responsive lecturers
- Collaborative and supportive peers
- Weekly tutor check-ins for additional support



### Enablers

- Informative orientation session
- Easy access to study materials
- Insightful course content
- Relatable teaching styles



### Recommendations

- Provide flexible learning methods
- Maintain weekly tutor check-ins and weekend tutorials
- Increase practical nature of the courses to provide hands-on experience
- Provide better support for job placement



“...A lot of communication in the class. We could talk about the course, we can raise the questions in the class anytime. So yeah, that’s good.”



## Dropped-out Learners

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**Dropped-out learners generally experienced a smooth Enrolment and Orientation process, supported by inclusive spaces and approachable staff. However, early tutor changes and limited scheduling flexibility led to disengagement. Clearer communication on enrolment, withdrawal, and re-entry processes is needed.**

In the Early Learning and Adaptation phase, competing family, health, and work demands were difficult to manage, especially with limited remote learning options. Positive learning environments, weekend tutor availability, and financial aid helped some learners stay engaged. More hybrid and flexible practical sessions would offer better support. Mid-course Engagement was impacted by low online engagement, time management challenges, and continued tutor transitions. Course recordings and accessible staff were helpful, but greater tutor continuity and early support for at-risk learners are essential. During Assessment and Completion, rigid deadlines and shifting tutor responsibilities caused confusion and stress. Consistent tutor involvement and flexible assessment timelines would better support learners during this phase. In the Post-course Experience, minimal structured support was reported. Some withdrawals, such as for medical reasons, could have been mitigated with clearer re-entry pathways. Personalised follow-up and flexible re-engagement options could help reduce long-term learner attrition.

**Figure 13** (page 29) illustrates the dropped-out learner persona, emphasising the importance of stability, flexibility, and targeted outreach to re-engage learners who leave prematurely.



Figure 13: Dropped-out Learner Persona

## Dropped-out Learners

The **motivation** to begin studying came from a genuine desire for personal growth and improved job opportunities. There was a strong hope that study would provide a better future, despite existing work, family, and health challenges.



### Challenges

- Frequent tutor changes
- Lack of flexible class times and lack of flexibility around assignment deadlines
- Family and health issues
- Less engaging classes due to online learning



### Support

- Tutor availability on weekends
- Financial assistance from the institute
- Positive atmosphere in classrooms
- Helpful feedback from tutors



### Enablers

- Well-supported and inclusive learning environment
- Course recordings and email support
- Hybrid learning model



### Recommendations

- Provide clear information on enrolment processes, withdrawal impacts, and future study opportunities
- Proactively reach out to learners to prevent dropouts
- Provide flexible timetables/self-paced learning methods
- Develop support systems to facilitate smooth transitions back into study

“After working a full eight-hour day, it became really hard to keep up. It honestly felt like a mission impossible. There wasn’t much flexibility for self-paced learning. In the end, I had to make the tough decision to withdraw from the programme which was really unfortunate.”





# 4.0 Recommendations

Drawing on the findings, Table 4 presents general recommendations to support learners across key stages of their learning journey.

**Table 4: Recommendations for different stages of the learner journey**

STAGES OF THE LEARNER JOURNEY	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Enrolment &amp; Orientation</b>	Strengthening onboarding processes would significantly benefit learners across all backgrounds. Key improvements include clearer communication of course objectives and expectations, accessible and flexible orientation resources (such as recorded or online materials), and stronger support for digital access and technology use. Tailored onboarding approaches are also essential to meet the needs of diverse learners, such as slower-paced sessions for Disabled learners, as well as culturally sensitive and tech-readiness support. Furthermore, outreach efforts should be enhanced through targeted marketing and meaningful community engagement. Early tutor interaction and clearly defined enrolment pathways are also critical to building learner confidence and ensuring a smooth start.
<b>Early Learning &amp; Adaptation</b>	There is a clear need for greater support in digital literacy, mental wellbeing, and flexible learning formats to help learners adapt and thrive, particularly in the early stages of their programme. Strengthening access to language and IT support, along with better promotion of available services (such as health and wellbeing resources), can ease the transition and reduce learner stress. Offering a range of diverse learning materials, whether printed, digital, visual, or more advanced, ensures inclusivity across different learning styles. In addition, flexible scheduling and the availability of hybrid or remote learning options are essential for accommodating personal, work, or caregiving responsibilities and increasing overall accessibility.
<b>Mid-course Engagement</b>	Midway through the course, learners benefit most from clearer assessment expectations, interactive and hybrid learning formats, and flexible scheduling. They also benefit from real-time support, UDL, community building, and practical learning methods (e.g., hands-on or face-to-face sessions). Further, engagement can be increased through clear assessment guidelines and flexible scheduling. Maintain tutor continuity and provide timely emotional and personal support.
<b>Assessment &amp; Completion</b>	To enhance relevance and learner outcomes, course content should be more closely aligned with current industry standards and assessment frameworks. Updating materials to eliminate outdated practices and integrating real-world tools, technologies, and datasets will better prepare learners for the demands of the workplace. Learners place high value on courses that clearly connect to career pathways and offer content tailored to specific job roles or sectors. Additionally, flexible completion options such as manageable deadlines, modular learning, and recognition through partial or stackable credentials can improve retention and support diverse learning needs.
<b>Post-course Experience</b>	Stronger career transition support is essential to help learners move confidently into employment or further study. This includes access to internships, job placement services, and clear, actionable guidance on next steps. Learners benefit greatly from structured connections with industry, as well as practical pathways that enhance their employability after graduation. To support long-term success and reduce dropout rates, institutions should also offer flexible re-entry opportunities and ongoing follow-up processes that keep learners engaged and supported beyond the course's end.



While many of the themes are consistent across groups, each category has distinct needs that warrant targeted support. Therefore, a few key, high-level recommendations are outlined per learner category, capturing critical areas such as onboarding, academic support, emotional wellbeing, and cultural inclusion. Additional recommendations and insights tailored to each learner category are summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5: Tailored Recommendations by Learner Category**

LEARNER CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATIONS
<b>Disabled learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer slower-paced or follow-up orientation sessions.</li> <li>• Use varied teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles.</li> <li>• Promote inclusive practices (social, physical, and cultural).</li> </ul>
<b>Māori learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen Māori-specific outreach and recruitment strategies.</li> <li>• Provide academic and digital literacy support early.</li> <li>• Encourage peer collaboration and offer in-person study options.</li> <li>• Celebrate learners through inclusive graduation experiences.</li> </ul>
<b>Pasifika learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer additional emotional support, particularly for learners managing family responsibilities.</li> <li>• Provide early training on digital literacy skills.</li> <li>• Maintain contact with withdrawn or paused learners to encourage re-engagement.</li> <li>• Support informal peer and staff networks.</li> </ul>
<b>Mature learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address digital skill gaps with beginner-friendly onboarding.</li> <li>• Clarify assessment requirements and provide academic writing support.</li> <li>• Offer structured guidance on career and study progression.</li> </ul>
<b>Young learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce onboarding to ensure clarity around expectations and processes.</li> <li>• Build peer networks and provide emotional support.</li> <li>• Review and update courses regularly to meet industry standards.</li> <li>• Emphasise the value of formal qualifications in career development.</li> </ul>
<b>Migrant Kiwi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure scholarships and inclusive communication remain available.</li> <li>• Offer targeted support for learners with limited English proficiency.</li> <li>• Ensure cultural inclusion and improve peer connectivity.</li> <li>• Provide hands-on Moodle orientation or resolve platform issues.</li> <li>• Introduce modular credentials or exit points for partial completion.</li> </ul>
<b>Professional learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support those balancing work and study with mental wellbeing resources.</li> <li>• Align course content more closely with assessment requirements.</li> <li>• Maintain hybrid learning models and provide flexible assessment deadlines.</li> </ul>
<b>Full-time learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify onboarding with clear access to key tools and information.</li> <li>• Offer flexible learning options to support those with caregiving responsibilities.</li> <li>• Keep course lengths short and manageable.</li> <li>• Provide structured internships and practical projects to enhance employability.</li> </ul>
<b>Part-time learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer basic digital literacy classes for those unfamiliar with technology.</li> <li>• Continue hybrid delivery models with shorter, focused sessions.</li> <li>• Maintain regular tutor check-ins and weekend tutorials.</li> <li>• Increase practical nature of the courses to provide hands-on experience.</li> <li>• Provide better support for job placements.</li> </ul>
<b>Dropped-out learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear guidance on enrolment, withdrawal, and re-entry pathways.</li> <li>• Proactively reach out to learners to support engagement and prevent dropouts.</li> <li>• Provide flexible re-entry options for learners withdrawing due to medical or other reasons.</li> <li>• Provide flexible timetables and self-paced learning methods.</li> <li>• Encourage learners to return and offer follow-up support after withdrawal.</li> </ul>

The findings underscore the significance of tailored support strategies that cater to the various needs of learners. For instance, disabled learners would gain from flexible orientation sessions and diverse teaching methods that address different learning styles and accessibility requirements. Māori learners benefit from early academic assistance, targeted outreach, and inclusive



recognition at critical milestones, such as graduation. Pasifika learners may need extra emotional support and culturally relevant assistance to help them reconnect with their studies. Mature learners often require help with digital literacy and clearer academic guidance to confidently understand course expectations. Furthermore, younger learners typically thrive on opportunities to establish peer connections and reinforcement of essential onboarding information. Migrant Kiwis might necessitate focused language support, more thorough technical orientation, and access to financial resources like scholarships.

Overall, professional, full-time, and part-time learners all appreciate flexible learning models, targeted academic and wellbeing resources, and structured pathways that lead directly to job opportunities. Lastly, for those who have withdrawn, proactive outreach and flexible re-entry options are vital for re-engagement and long-term success. These insights highlight the necessity of a learner-centric approach that is both inclusive and adaptive.

Collectively, these suggestions create a comprehensive framework for developing more inclusive, flexible, and responsive learning environments. By incorporating learner feedback into programme design and delivery, providers can enhance retention and achievement while fostering greater trust and engagement among diverse student populations. Focusing on equity, personalisation, and real-world relevance ensures that learners are supported throughout their educational journey and empowered to thrive beyond it. Ongoing evaluation, collaboration with learners, and a commitment to continuous improvement will be crucial for translating these insights into a lasting impact.

# 5.0

## Limitations and Next Steps

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The findings offer valuable insights informed by rich data and diverse learner perspectives. However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting or attempting to generalise these findings across the wider tertiary education sector.

Firstly, the insights are drawn from a specific type of tertiary education provider, with particular programme offerings, learner demographics, and support structures. These contextual factors are likely to influence both learner experiences and outcomes. As such, the findings may not fully apply to providers with significantly different educational models, learner profiles, or operational approaches. For example, many of the learners in this study entered their programmes with limited prior academic qualifications or experience in formal education. In contrast, university learners typically have stronger academic and language foundations. Recommendations such as enhanced English language support or foundational literacy assistance may be less relevant or necessary in those settings. Similarly, institutions that serve primarily international, postgraduate, or academically advanced learners may face different sets of challenges and support needs.

Secondly, some of the recommendations, such as regular one-on-one tutor engagement, personalised emotional support, or flexible hybrid delivery, are more easily implemented in small to medium-sized institutions with lower student-to-tutor ratios. These strategies may not be scalable or practical in larger organisations with higher enrolment volumes, fixed timetables, or limited resources. In addition, the capacity of an institution to implement learner support interventions is strongly influenced by available funding, staffing levels, infrastructure, and digital capability. Providers with constrained budgets or limited access to technology may find it difficult to adopt more resource-intensive initiatives, even if they are effective in smaller or better-resourced contexts.



Lastly, the recommendations in this report are grounded in the specific processes, policies, and support services offered at the provider where the study was conducted. Differences in organisational structure, enrolment systems, and learner support frameworks across institutions may affect the feasibility and relevance of these strategies elsewhere.

In summary, while the findings provide important insights for improving learner outcomes, they are most relevant to providers that share similar characteristics in terms of programme offerings, learner cohorts, and institutional capabilities. Any broader application should carefully consider local context, resources, and learner needs to ensure appropriate adaptation and impact.

In the short term, the findings from this study will inform targeted improvements to the organisation's internal systems and processes. These may include enhancements to onboarding procedures, learner support services, and digital tools, ensuring they better meet the specific needs of different learner groups. Notably, the learner journey profiles developed through this research will be integrated into the At-Risk Student App and the Just-in-Time (JIT) Extension workflow. This will allow Student Success Teams to reference structured learner profiles during intervention planning, using key insights based on learner type, progress stage, and common challenges.

Over the longer term, the insights gained will help shape the organisation's strategic policies. This may involve refining learner engagement frameworks, strengthening equity-focused support mechanisms, and aligning institutional priorities with the changing needs of learners. By embedding evidence-based findings into broader planning efforts, Future Skills will continue to build an inclusive, adaptive, and forward-thinking learning environment. This ongoing cycle of reflection and improvement will ensure that both internal practices and sector contributions remain relevant, impactful, and centred on the learner experience.

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0800 550 410  
info@futureskills.co.nz  
www.futureskills.co.nz



**Manukau Campus** Level 4, Westfield Manukau  
**Royal Oak Campus** 665 Manukau Road  
**Auckland Campus** Level 1, 350 Queen Street  
**Takapuna Campus** 51 Hurstmere Road  
**Youth Campus** 10B Earl Richardson Avenue, Wiri  
**Postal Address** PO Box 76-549, Manukau