

# EMPOWERING OUR YOUTH

**CAREER PROCESSES, STRATEGIES,  
AND PRACTICES THAT ENABLE  
SUCCESSFUL CAREER TRANSITIONS.**

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Education Partnership  
& Innovation Trust

**AUT**  
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY  
OF TECHNOLOGY

  
THE FLETCHER TRUST

Joyce  
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## ABOUT

**Dr Lynette Reid**, Ngāti Konohi, a career education researcher, has over 20 years' experience in the NZ careers field. A published author, Lynette's research includes areas such as employability, work integrated/related learning, professional/career/cultural identity, and career transitions.

Dr Lynette Reid holds the position of Career Education Researcher, School of Education, Auckland University of Technology | Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau.

**Education Partnership & Innovation Trust (EPIT)** is a charitable trust set up to address inequity in education through transformational, collaborative partnerships. To achieve this vision, the trust has six initiative foci: early years, youth mental health and wellbeing, digital equity, transitions (pre-school to school and school to tertiary study or career pathways), literacy and leadership. This research was designed to contribute to goals for the 'transition' initiative by centring practices, processes, and strategies of successful career transitions from South Auckland secondary schools, from the perspective of the careers and transition staff.

[www.epit.org.nz](http://www.epit.org.nz)

**The Fletcher Trust** is an independent registered charitable trust with a strong historical connection to the development of New Zealand. Through the Trust's three principal activities of Educational Philanthropy; Art Collection; and Archive, the Trust supports initiatives in education that have the potential to positively impact on large numbers of young New Zealanders.

The Trust's purpose with its Art Collection is to maintain, enhance and promote what represents a unique record of New Zealand art. [www.fletchercollection.org.nz](http://www.fletchercollection.org.nz) The Trust's purpose with its Archive is to maintain and continue to provide public access to records of an extensive number of businesses and enterprises and which provide a unique social and commercial history of New Zealand.

[www.fletcherarchives.co.nz](http://www.fletcherarchives.co.nz)

**Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust** has a commitment to make New Zealand a better place by providing young New Zealanders with opportunities that enhance their leadership skills and values, creating community role models and future leaders. The Trust's emphasis is directed toward Māori, Pasifika and disadvantaged youth, with a focus towards South Auckland.

[www.joycefishertrust.org/about-the-trust](http://www.joycefishertrust.org/about-the-trust)

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## FOREWORD

In today's rapidly changing world, the transition from school to further education or entry into the workforce has become increasingly complex and challenging, particularly for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This is evident in Aotearoa New Zealand for many of our 15–18-year-olds, but especially so for those who are Māori and Pasifika.

Māori and Pasifika are the fastest growth populations in Aotearoa and make up the largest demographic of young people under the age of 25. It is critical we ensure all our rangatahi have access to viable career opportunities for their, and Aotearoa New Zealand's, future long-term success. If we are to have an education system fit for purpose for the 21st Century, that delivers equitable outcomes for learners, and where all learners have the opportunity to thrive, then we cannot support the continuation of models in a system that allows students to leave with low or no qualifications or nowhere to go. It is simply not good enough and a sad indictment on our education system.

### School leavers

Ministry of Education research<sup>1</sup> shows that 84% of all school leavers in 2021 attained NCEA Level 2 or higher, yet in the same year, Auckland Council research<sup>2</sup> found 32,150 young Aucklanders aged between 15 and 24 were identified as not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (40%

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/18-year-olds-with-level-2-or-equivalent>

<sup>2</sup> Ting Huang, December 2021. Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in Auckland: Trends June 2011 to June 2021. Technical Report 2021/20

of the national total). Of these, 34% (11,025) were from the 15-19 age group. Māori made up 23%, Pasifika 20%, European/Pākehā 11%, and Asian 10%. One third of all NEETs in Auckland live in the South.

Recent research in South Auckland shows there has seen a slower recovery from lockdowns than most parts of the country and Covid continues to negatively impact households, resulting in greater social costs. Māori and Pasifika have been disproportionately affected with high unemployment, greater likelihood of further job losses due to current economic conditions, and disengagement from education and learning<sup>3</sup>.

There has also been much commentary and debate in the media about the educational performance of our secondary students, and their engagement in tertiary study or training. However, it is worth noting that "...the motivation to gain qualifications among South Auckland rangatahi is just as strong as anywhere else; but many learners are playing catchup after experiencing barriers to school completion or University Entrance, that have limited their pathways to higher-value tertiary qualifications."<sup>4</sup>

We also note there have been some questions raised about the suitability of the NCEA qualification framework specifically the value of Level 1. This requires further investigation.

### Equitable access to education

The Education Partnership and Innovation Trust (EPIT) was formed to address the education inequity faced by young learners, via collaborative cross-sector partnerships that drive systems change and create transformative outcomes. Transitions from school to a learner's next life stage is one of six key strategic focus areas for the Trust.

<sup>3</sup> Uptempo Te Tangi, 2022

<sup>4</sup> Auckland Council (2020). Youth in the South: A data overview of rangatahi in four local board areas

We believe that to have a healthy, engaged and productive community we must ensure that equitable access to an education is provided. Everyone must have the opportunity to gain qualifications and work/life experiences to fully participate in our society, and this is the key to achieving a thriving, equitable Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **This report**

In mid-2022 EPIT engaged Dr Lynette Reid, an experienced career education researcher from AUT, to conduct research on career transitions in South Auckland secondary schools. We were interested in understanding what career processes, strategies and practices enable successful career transitions for these students.

This report investigates approaches being taken in a selection of secondary schools in South Auckland. It offers valuable insights into the strategies employed by careers advisors to empower and equip students with the tools necessary for making informed decisions about their post-school pathways. It shows that structured, funded and well supported programmes, which deploy career development thinking across the whole school, are clearly having positive impact.

And most importantly, it highlights the crucial role of careers education in our secondary schools, and the need for collaboration between schools, whānau, aiga and families, employers, and community organisations.

We need to create a supportive, funded, ecosystem that fosters students' lifelong learning development and career pathways.

### **Ngā mihi nui**

Thank you to the careers staff, students, teachers and principals who so willingly shared their time, insights and experiences as participants in this research.

We would also like to thank the Fletcher Trust and the Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust for their generous sponsorship of this research, and Dr Lynette Reid, AUT, for her mahi.

### **Our future**

Our young people deserve, and need, access to a wide range of opportunities for post-school learning and working to fully participate and thrive in our society.

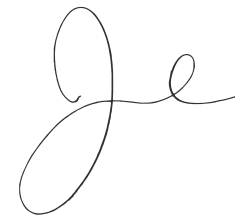
### **Kāhore taku toa i te toa takitahi, he toa takitini.**

*We cannot succeed without the support of those around us.*

### **Jane Treadwell-Hoye**

#### **Executive Director**

Education Partnership and Innovation Trust



## THE FLETCHER TRUST

The Fletcher Trust's philanthropic objective is to support initiatives in education that result in an improvement in educational quality and a reduction in inequality throughout the school system. A measure of this is that young people leave secondary school equipped to enter the work force or qualified to continue with tertiary education before entering employment. We are disturbed by published data on literacy and numeracy and falling school attendance and fearful that we (as in 'the system') are failing our young people.

What prompted this research project is that we don't actually know what the current reality is in relation to school leavers and where they go on leaving the school system let alone whether a seamless transition to employment or tertiary education is a 'pipe dream'.

The research and report provide excellent analysis of the issues and encouragingly identifies 'bright spots' where schools as exemplars have developed programs and initiatives that focus on the student and provide individualised pathways to post school employment or continuing education.

**Angus Fletcher, Chairman**

## JOYCE FISHER CHARITABLE TRUST

As part of its vision to make New Zealand a better place the JFCT has a particular interest in supporting initiatives that address the disadvantages faced by many Māori and Pasifika students in their interactions with the compulsory and voluntary sectors of the education system.

Through the operation of the Trust's Joyce Fisher Education Scholarships, the Trustees have become acutely aware of the need for quality, ongoing career guidance for students during their secondary education. This necessarily involves the consideration of continuing education and the available opportunities, which students may be encouraged to consider.

The transitions research project offers a way to gain insights into both the enablers and barriers that influence the aspirations of, and choices available to the target audience in South Auckland Secondary Schools.

**Geoff Burgess, General Manger**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Careers and transitions programmes in secondary schools are under intense scrutiny. Much has been spoken about the effectiveness of this work and the impact on young people's transitions. Few are satisfied with the current careers system in schools, yet this system is embedded and dependent on the complex intersection between the education and the economic systems. The careers system in school is vital to both systems and needs immediate attention.

This report looks at the experiences of recommended South Auckland schools that serve multicultural, and diverse income communities. The report has identified successful career transition systems and processes currently working within these schools. Furthermore, how these may be used, to inform further development and improvement between the careers system and the education system.

The areas of challenge identified by this study indicate that transition from secondary school can be multi-layered and unique to the context of each school, student, and whānau. Where there was once a singular focus on university for high performing students and an assumption of trades, or lower paid roles, for the remainder, there is now a need for supported adjustments to pathways.

Parents and whānau carry influence and this research showed many are not aware of the wide range of career opportunities now available. However, whānau dynamics are critical to career transitions, and must be included as part of this process.

For example, In the current economic climate, we see senior students pulled in two directions - education vs economic survival - with the immediate need for family economic viability often having to be prioritised over long term financial security, and post-school learning. Some students are leaving school for low paid employment, and perhaps this is the strongest signal that the support provided by many of the schools to students who have left, ought to be better resourced.

The place of career education, guidance and transition within schools is not well understood or valued; often battling to obtain resources to provide holistic careers advisory support for students and whānau. In some cases, the roles have become heavily focused on the administration of transition from school, rather than advisory and guidance roles.

### Some bright lights

Those schools with strong executive school leadership support and resourcing, enable community engagement and help shape the transition narrative.

There are instances of high trust models in action, with expansive briefs to careers staff resulting in significant levels of collaborative engagement with parents and whānau, and employers, generating community-wide lead initiatives. Positive pathways are not seen as purely linear, with creation of lifelong learning frameworks and sharing across the sector as careers staff function in an open and integrated style.

### Opportunities

**Several important opportunities have been identified by this study:**

**Active principal and senior management engagement and support of the schools' careers staff within high trust models.**

**Development of transition systems and processes which include the whole school, AND the whole community and whanau.**

**Pro-active career conversations with students, supported by a broad range of staff across the school and community.**

## BACKGROUND

A recent Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) 2022 research report *Transitions from Secondary School* analysed data on 60,000 students who leave school each year in Aotearoa New Zealand. They followed this analysis with a survey of over 500 school leavers and held in-depth interviews with 56 school leavers across the country, to understand the 'why' behind these pathways.

They found that our transitions from school is a complex policy space.

- A growing proportion of school leavers are Māori, Pasifika or other ethnic minorities; 15% of school leavers have a disability and 9% are neurodivergent; 82% of leavers have work or caring responsibilities outside school.
- Forty percent of school leavers achieve University Entrance (UE), but one in five only achieve NCEA Level 1 or less. The majority go on to tertiary study, with 36% of those entering foundational levels (1-3). Twenty-nine percent of school leavers go straight into the workforce.
- 8% of school leavers were not in education, employment, or training (NEET)



**To make successful transition from school the following conditions need to be met;**

- Learners need an environment that makes it safe to experiment with different options before making a decision and need to be connected to those opportunities. First-hand experiences show learners what a pathway is like and build learners' confidence in themselves and their decision.
- Learners on different kinds of pathways have specific needs. For example, apprenticeship pathways are less accessible to women school leavers, but can be very enabling for those who can access this pathway. Those entering private training establishments tend to have high confidence, but some can be influenced by misinformation and mistaken logic, where skills for complex decision-making could help. Learners who are still undecided on their next steps when they leave school showed needs across the spectrum of knowledge, skills and confidence, and need our support the most.
- School leavers need to be equipped with decision-making skills for complex decisions. Even with a full set of information, school leavers can only use it effectively when they also have appropriate decision-making skills for this decision, which is usually the first complex decision they have had to make in their lives. These skills include the ability to critique information sources, set goals, and weigh different types of information.
- Confidence is a common barrier to school leavers doing what they want to do when they leave school, affecting almost half of all school leavers. 'Champions' who provide

guidance, support and personalised information, are instrumental in normalising feelings of uncertainty and overwhelm, and enabling learners to take a next step.

The rate of Māori and Pasifika students who leave schools in South Auckland with NCEA 3 or UE lags behind the rest of Auckland. As the table shows, the number of more of Māori and Pasifika needing to be completing NCEA 3 or UE, required in 2020 is significant.

“While South Auckland youth were not even a third as likely to have a degree as other young Aucklanders, they were about 86% as likely to have a student loan, averaging over \$17,000 per loan”.

Māngere-Ōtāhuhu (state schools only)			Ōtara-Papatoetoe		
		% increase required)			% increase required)
54	Māori students	98% ↑	81	Māori students	112% ↑
104	Pasifika students	27% ↑	152	Pasifika students	41% ↑
Manurewa			Papakura		
		% increase required)			% increase required)
168	Māori students	163% ↑	104	Māori students	209% ↑
160	Pasifika students	82% ↑	61	Pasifika students	186% ↑

Source: Auckland Council (2020). *Youth in the South: A data overview of rangatahi in four local board areas.*

The TEC identified the following risk factors for those transitioning to NEET as:

- Educational factors such as lower leaving qualifications
- Lack of work experience Transitions from Secondary School
- Lack of soft skills
- Feeling as if school is “not for me” – even while staying at school through Year 13. (TEC 2022, p102)

Furthermore, the TEC identified that up to 10% of all school leavers were still undecided upon leaving high school. 68% of these undecideds were men, and 32% were women.

Of the undecided many reported as having a ‘poorer experience of school. (TEC, 2022, p 103)

Clearly the transitions from school to study, training or work is an area of challenge for our system,

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This research focused on what is working in career education and guidance in South Auckland secondary schools from the perspective of those directly involved in the successful transitions of their students. In other words, what successes have careers and transition staff experienced amidst a pressured, cynical, and uncertain environment? The aims were to develop a process of co-creating clear meanings and understandings of career education and guidance systems and processes in schools related to successful career transitions.

The study was approved by the AUT ethics committee in 2022.

### Participating Secondary Schools

The five schools who participated in this study were from each of the following districts based in Auckland as identified by [Education Counts](#):

Auckland-Maungakiekie-Tāmaki (1)

Auckland-Howick (2)

Auckland-Mangere-Otahuhu (3)

Auckland-Otara-Papatoetoe (4)

Auckland-Manurewa (5)

# 1. THE CONTEXT OF SUCCESSFUL CAREER TRANSITIONS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The transition of school-to-work has been described as one of the first major transition's individuals are likely to face (Sullivan & Arris, 2021). School-to-work transitions have been redefined to also include educational transitions, as the need for young people to be trained, qualified and job ready, continues to be an expectation of labour markets. More recently the transition from secondary school has been referred to under the broader category of career transitions (Lipshits-Brazil et al., 2018), which supports young people to make decisions as they move through school towards life and a future beyond school. This shift is in response to how individuals now view and enact careers over their lifetime.

## Macro systems of career transitions

The education and employment systems contribute greatly to the quality and effectiveness of transitions (Bibbee, 2013). Institutional linkages between these systems, and flexibility of pathways between the two (Müller & Gangl, 2003) may impact the successful outcome of the transition process. In New Zealand, the desire for a better coordination between education and the labour market is reflected in a policy goal that aims at achieving a coherent transition system, including better coordination of services for young people at risk, and alignment of services, institutions, agencies, and policy frameworks.

Career education and guidance has also been proposed as a means for improving the efficiency of education and helping to ensure an appropriately matched supply of young people to meet labour market needs (Schultheiss, 2005). Students develop the requisite knowledge and skills to enable them to plan, make decisions about and manage their lifelong career journey beyond school (Yates & Bruce 2017). Services can include a variety of different kinds of support, such as advice, guidance, information, education, training, career management, careers learning, work experience and job training and preparation courses (Bibbee, 2013). Services can take different forms across the world, and more locally, and may change over time in response to shifting political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. One example can be found in the lifelong learning discourse, which has prompted

a much broader mission for career education and guidance in secondary schools becoming more than a one-off conversation about courses and a career. Students now seek a more personalised approach, supported by small group activities that act to explore and strengthen decision making (Savoly & Dost, 2020). Well-resourced career education and guidance in schools should be a priority as a lasting investment in the younger generation, and a country's future, and is deserving of dedicated time and attention from policy makers and governments.

Successful career transitions beyond secondary schools have been linked to academic and social engagement and outcomes, curricular trajectories, and socio-economic success. (Ministry of Education, 2011; Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), 2022). Therefore, careers work in schools and government led career strategies for young people should reflect a country's political, economic, social, and cultural conditions and aspirations.

## The Aotearoa New Zealand context

Government driven career strategies serve as a strong influence on overarching theoretical models and frameworks of practice adopted by those engaged in successful career transitions in schools. The New Zealand Careers System Strategy has been in place since 2019 (TEC, July 2022). TEC has generated two initiatives since the release of the strategy; the first is a programme titled 'Inspiring the Future' which targets 7-to-13-year-olds with the intention of broadening students' horizons about future work possibilities (TEC, 2021); and the second is a new online career planning solution, Tahatū (TEC, 2022). Currently, work is underway to 'refresh' the Careers System Strategy to focus more broadly, and encompass, all New Zealanders and other related strategies such as the Tertiary Education Strategy. The National Careers System Strategy in NZ includes a vision, purpose and principles but does not yet outline guidelines related to what successful career education, information, advice, and guidance may look like.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, each secondary school has a degree of autonomy to define the form, and resourcing of career education and guidance services. The responsibility of these decisions is shouldered by school leaders, yet the accountability of the outcome of these services, often rests solely with careers staff in schools. There have been claims from members and leaders from career professional associations in New Zealand that robust career systems have been in place in schools for some time now but have never been fully resourced with appropriate levels of time and funding, to do what they were intended to do. The conclusion has been to get it right in schools first and foremost, as an absolute priority.

A summary of career transition literature indicates that career education and guidance is identified as essential, in order that all individuals reach their full potential, and the policy environment continues to place a high priority on the service. Yet, career education and guidance in schools continues to exist within systems that do not appear to adequately support those directly involved in the work. Furthermore, despite the ongoing interest in career transitions, there remains insufficient research which has created a significant impact on the politics, practice and prospects of career education and guidance in schools. The voice of careers advisors, educators, counsellors, and leaders appear to remain largely on the periphery of policy makers and relevant government entities. This has perhaps contributed to the role of the career advisor in schools attracting a blame-culture rhetoric, now evident in policy discourse.

Much is needed to reconnect policymakers and careers and transition staff in schools, and it is hoped that this research may provide some impetus for this.

## 2. WHAT WORKS WELL IN YOUR SCHOOL TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL CAREER TRANSITIONS?

### Collaborations in relationship with others

Participants from all schools agreed that successful career transitions would not be possible without the support and collaboration amongst people. Some expanded on their relationships and described these as generated over a lengthy period and forged by visionary past Principals, career advisors, and teachers from their schools. Their goal was to continue to work and develop this vision.

Another participant also included collaborative relationships formed with whānau through siblings attending the school. Each sibling beginning at the school had been told to contact her, and she had reciprocated by encouraging older siblings to introduce her to younger siblings in the school. She went on to describe these experiences as follows:

‘whānau will listen to me because they know me from before, if I did right by the last kid, and the kid before that, they trust I will do right for all of them’ (School 1)

A further participant described collaborative relationships built over time from processes such as consistent messaging about career transitions, showing face and demonstrating high levels of professionalism. She recalled the first time when this work was realised with curriculum leads in her school:

*‘we always knew we couldn’t do it all here, and then just like that, I’m listening to every single learning area talking about pathways and how they are infusing pathways into what they do. I was like, that’s it, I’m out of a job (laughing)’*  
(School 5)

Being in collaboration with others requires the ability to lead strong robust and sometimes challenging, conversations with employers, parents, and senior leaders in school. One participant commented on the strategy of constantly reiterating the shifting nature of career transitions, to profile the ongoing need for additional resources for career transitions:

*‘Policy makers and school leaders, consider successful career transitions from the perspective of pathway frameworks, system-wide shifts, and reported data. I like to remind them that we (career and transition staff) place an equally high value on the personal attributes, individual personalities, whānau dynamics, and personal and whānau resources, of our students, as critical indicators towards successful transitions as well’* (School 4)

It is difficult to ignore the value of networks and relationships, and they should never be underestimated in the sway they hold towards shifting and transforming career education and guidance in schools. In these schools what was central to successful career transitions were authentic relationships, a commitment to visionary strategies and processes and consistent messaging of what it takes to attain successful career transitions. One person summarised this as:

*“it is like when an idea whose time has come. If you have an idea, and the time is now, and you have willing people, grab all of it with both hands”* (School 1).

While it has been argued that successful career transitions are more evident in a comprehensive whole-school approach. This study confirms this indeed the case, but perhaps the style is better described as a model of a whole-community approach. This approach requires an intentional regard for strong, positive and long-lasting mutual relationships.

## Student support “No one left behind”

This caption aptly describes student support as another example of a strategy that was hugely successful with career transitions. The type of support to students varied across each school, but the overall outcome remained the same.

For example, one participant spoke of being guided by the philosophies and values of the school traditions and coined the phrase “no one left behind” (School 3). How this was enacted in their school was evidenced in their efforts to follow-up on the plans and activities of all students, both at the beginning of the year and again, after the school year had ended.

The language when discussing this strategy often reflected the high level of ‘care and support for their boys and whānau’ (School 3). This level of student support appeared to underpin all other processes for successful career transitions in this school centring the true value of getting to know their students and whānau. For example, it was important that each student and their whānau felt that the school would always be open and be there for them, and students were encouraged to return whenever they needed help or support. Another example was the importance of how contact with students should be made. Often this process was via text, or phone calls in the evenings,

and it was vital that all contact used positive, open, and inviting tones and language. Furthermore, it was expected that helpful advice would be provided, rather than an interrogation of what their plans were. Often staff in this school saw this as an act of service to their students, whānau, and community, while also fulfilling reports required by the Board of Trustees on the destination of their students. Engaging in acts of service for the greater good was crucial to the spiritual wellbeing of their students and whānau. What this strategy supports are schools as the hub of a measurable-whānau centred approach, created by valuing relationships with parents, addressing and acknowledging the unique needs of their students, and serving something greater than the self.

Three other schools also described one of their most successful career transition strategies as ‘conversations’. These included one-on-one conversations with students and with parents, local providers, employers, and senior school leaders. Both also described this strategy as the best way to get to know their students, what they were planning and ideas they were considering. As described by one school:

“Good conversations where we all work together, not just with the student, but the parents, local provider, employer, whoever is important in a student’s pathway. There is a lot of pressure in understanding and identifying a pathway. As a group we can push the student to think, give parents and employers options and food for thought” (School 4.)

Another school provided a specific example of where meaningful conversations were urgently needed:

*“subject choices is a time where we should be conducting meaningful conversations, but it is a point where a lot of issues converge and take over! There is the curriculum, pathways, student’s needs, whānau expectation, available rooms, teachers, what is being offered, it is crazy time for everyone!” (School 3).*

A third school also shared their value of career conversations as a place for students to get to know themselves, and their ‘why’ rather than ‘what’, in relation to pathways. This school were also very keen to shift out-dated images and perceptions of career roles as a strategy towards raising the profile of careers in the school. Ongoing conversations within their own team, teachers and senior leaders were essential towards shifting past assumptions of the role and purpose of careers in the school. For example, rather than an image of career roles as ‘administrative’, viewing the role as requiring specific skills and knowledge sets. One further example also highlighted these points and why staff were keen to change their image. One participant wanted to change the way students described coming to the careers area:

*“I was told to come to see the careers lady” (School 2)*

From this school’s perspective, regular career conversations as a strategy, provided the platform to advance their intentions to lead one-on-one conversations with all students, and their profile as a skilled and professional career team capable of supporting other’s involved in pastoral care in the school.

Quality conversations can be viewed as a strategy for career’s staff, to connect the personal dimensions of their students, and whānau, with daunting and uncertain economic transitions within the workplace and society. Considered conversations support insights into how career transitions occur and what they feel like for their students, whānau, and the local community. Equipping adolescents with small incremental ‘transitional’ steps, such as getting to know yourself, knowing people care about you, the school as a place you can turn to for help, and your needs matter, is always going to be ideal preparation for coping with further life transitions, and building resilience when overcoming challenging situations.

## Moving targets

To sustain successful approaches to career transitions, staff from all schools have moved away from the more linear approach to career transitions. For example, careers and transition staff have developed and are implementing, more contemporary models of career transitions where short term decisions and choices are made, and action from this creates growth, but the future path, or direction may not be immediately clear, or settled or identifiable.



One participant describes this process further:

*“we deal with students who are failing, have failed and feel like failures, and if they can achieve Site Safe, their driver’s license, or forklift license here they are successful, regardless of what they do next and where it takes them” (School 1).*

This study has highlighted the environment in which careers and transition staff serve two systems; the economic system; and education system. Each have pre-determined measures, targets, and outcomes, and often label the career transition score card as achieved or could do better. For example, nearly every school referred to the pressure to report strong data on university entrance results.

One participant was particularly passionate about this bias, declaring:

*“Don’t measure my success, the measure is the student’s success – how many have we found true pathways for; are they happy; do they feel good about their choices; are they confident. Where do we report this data?” (School 4).*

*“students can always go to University later, some parents are surprised to hear this as an option” (School 4).*

Another agreed with a similar comment emphasising that her work is always done with the students best interest in mind:

*“are students happy and leaving as lifelong learners?” (School 1).*

Many participants felt the focus on university entrance diminished the value of students who had secured employment or who were beginning skill-based employment such as apprenticeships.

Two participants from the same school had experienced alternative pathways towards successful career transitions:

*“Work is seen as low key, low profile and not appreciated or recognised, but it should be talked about and is a dream being fulfilled for some of our students and their whānau” (School 1)*

*“there is a stigma attached to leaving school before year 13, ‘oh they have dropped out’, or ‘they are a losers’, but they aren’t, they are either in a job or on a course! (School 1).*

Participants were also aware of the impact of teachers closing pathway options for students. For example, one participant recalled a student sharing with her that he was told he, “can’t study (academic work), and he should join a trade”.

Another participant also commented in support of this perspective:

*“many students and some teachers are unaware credits can be gained from Gateway” (School 2).*

Both made the comment that this was happening much less frequently in their schools.

Most schools were thankful for the support shown by senior school leaders to also focus on targets such as employment and skill-based programmes and diverse pathways.

As an interesting outcome to the search for diverse pathways, schools spoke of expanded opportunities to explore localised and fresh solutions to complex problems experienced in their communities and amongst their students. Much of this work has seen the image of school's change, the visibility of career pathways and transition staff enhanced and more attention and awareness of often unstated social contexts, and attitudes to contexts, within which students make career transition decisions and choices.

The response across each school has been a lean towards sharper attention to the social mechanisms and anchors of their local community and networks as another major strategy towards successful career transitions. One school described their local connections as:

*“schools are like a fast flowing river, and people in the community are keen to get onboard” (School 1).*

Another participant commented on how local training providers drop by on a regular basis and are always available to meet with students and their families. Her final comment was:

*“we can be immediately responsive to our student's needs, especially if they have been sent to us by teachers” (School 4).*

An external provider to one of the school's recalled her own experiences, and commented on the connections that can be made between schools and their local community:

*“the local community is full of untapped potential, there are people who want to help, but don't know how and who to approach in the school. They also don't know what they could do in the school! Our programme co-ordinate's trades people to come into schools and work with students. These are white men coming into schools and working alongside students for a finite period, because they believe in young people and want to give back” (School 1)*

What these narratives have revealed under this successful career strategy is the emergence of organic transition models, unique to the context of students and the school, which grow and develop positive attitudes toward career transitions, by affirming ongoing, and supported adjustments to pathways, based on an ever-changing work environment, and changing dynamics of families, whānau, and communities.

There has been a significant move towards opportunities that create career transition strategies which replace single processes. One example are strategies which are multi-layered, connected and collaborative. Targeted outcomes considered by some as forms of compliance and surveillance, are making way for collective moving targets, which schools and the community can oversee and govern towards an expression of broadened community interest, and care.

Successful career transitions are seen as a collection of strengths and attributes that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

To understand targets, we need to be aware which may be losing or gaining more relevance over time.

## The changing role of those involved in successful career transitions: “going beyond their brief”.

The challenge for careers and transition staff in schools is the constant necessity to adjust to a changing world. Careers and transition staff in this study have had to develop new and innovative approaches to supporting students. The role is no longer based on distributing career brochures and locating suitable training providers! The landscape of career education and guidance is changing considerably and rapidly, leaving careers and transitions staff to find their own way in the new world.

Here is how one participant describes her role:

*“we find students for Gateway, enrol then and manage them all year, crisis’s crop up every day, we are face to face with students and whānau issues every day, we see the need, and we have to be ‘real’ with our students. I love it!” (School 4).*

Attention was again on the singular focus of university entrance rates as a measure of successful career transitions by parents and students. Attempting to propose new perspectives and equally credible alternative options, continued to be challenging and required more one-on-one time, particularly as students were seeking more personal agency in determining their pathway. This at times, placed stress on whānau relationships, which careers and transition staff must navigate. The impact of context on successful career transitions requires a holistic approach to appropriately contextualise the meaning of work, pathways, and transitions for each student.

One participant described her role as:

*“giving the student and parent all of the options because transitions can occur at any time, not only at year 13” (School 2).*

This participant continued with the following point of view:

*“parents want students to finish high school at year 13, when the reality is that the education system has changed and if the opportunity exists outside of school, students can transition into their next phase of life” (School 2).*

Another participant described their role as:

*“we are checking in to see if the student is comfortable with the plan, if their academic skills are sound, they are also comfortable culturally, and that the whānau are on-board” (School 5).*

Career transitions are part of a school and community wide responsibility, who play a crucial role in supporting students with career decision making, choices and process. Subject teachers are also collaborating with careers and transition staff towards the common goal of success for their students.

One participant described what this was like in her school:

*“We have academies and teachers can see the impact of those sort of pathway intensive programmes, and they start to ask, ‘why can’t we have these business partnerships in our subject areas too’? (School 5).*

Another participant reinforced the role an external organisation had in mentoring her students in the classroom:

*“schools are not staffed or resourced to do this sort of thing, I couldn’t pull this off just like that, there’s no way! (School 1).*

The skill set of careers and transition staff was also highlighted by participants in other roles. Careers and transition staff have created an enabling environment which enhances individual, whānau and community agency and capacities through collaborative cooperative strategies and processes.

One subject teacher shared this comment:

*“our school has very experienced careers staff working beyond their brief” (School 1).*

Another participant from the same schools described how when she doesn’t know what more she can do for a student, she reaches out to careers staff and says help!

Successful career transitions may be defined by university entrance achievements, participation in employment and tertiary education. However, the time taken to discover, develop, nurture, and manage school and community relationships, needs and expectations are not accurately quantified or resourced. Furthermore, resourcing has perhaps been quantified based on changing student behaviours in the

face of insecurity, and uncertainty, yet changing wider conditions to address these insecurities, remain an unknown factor for career education and guidance funding.

For the participants in this study, working beyond their 'brief' has become the norm, and innovative practices have emerged as a result. There has also been a recognition by other staff in schools of the skill in bringing together cross-functional teams to drive student potential and decision making.

School senior leaders are acknowledged for supporting the time careers and transition staff invest in achieving broader goals and aspirations. However, it may be that continuing to work beyond their brief, does not enable an accurate and effective quantitative measure of this contribution in order that it be critically understood.

### 3. WHAT ARE THE SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS IN YOUR SCHOOL WHICH HAVE ENABLED THESE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES?

#### Senior leadership team

There was resounding agreement from most of the schools regarding the support they have experienced from senior leaders. Two aspects of this support were significant in this study.

#### High trust model

Most participants shared that high trust models had been initiated by senior leaders in their schools. Here are how some participants described this, in relation to their work:

*"I'm a bit of a maverick and I run my own ship, I am allowed to which is really good" (School 1).*

*"when my students are away from school, it impacts our funding. Senior leadership trust me and support my decisions" (School 2).*

*“we are included in processes AND actually see every student, we can sign-off changes, and individualise and change a student’s timetable, no questions asked, because they (senior leaders) trust us” (School 4).*

*“we have solid relationships with our Deans, who value our input and trust us” (School 5).*

### Leadership style

Two schools identified specific leadership styles which have supported their work. For example, one participant described a ‘solution-focused’ model:

*“the school doesn’t put up barriers and is only interested in solutions, everything is considered so long as you have a solid justification for what you are proposing” (School 1).*

Another school went into more detail on the leadership style at their school:

*“we have a Principal willing to try new things and has created a team around him with the same goal, and with a range of different skill sets. A great example is the stall he set up at the (name of suburb) markets, so that the community could just ask questions, any questions about the school or education in general” (School 5).*

One school also noted their representation on several senior committees in the school. From their perspective, this was a clear message from senior leaders as to the value they placed on the skills and knowledge of careers and transition staff in the school.

Managing and leading a secondary school requires strong leadership capabilities, clarity on the strategic direction of the education system, understanding the dynamics of industry sector’s, foresight regarding future trends, and a strong capable management team.

It also requires a fair amount of agility to react to ongoing change and unanticipated disruptions in the school’s local community, and national and global contexts.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

**This section summarises key findings about successful career transitions across five secondary schools in South Auckland and potential areas for improvement are discussed as recommendations. Each recommendation appears under three levels: macro, meso and micro levels.**

### Macro level

**The macro level focuses on ways in which individuals can work to influence the political system. For example, this influence may be carried out by intervening with the system if necessary for the greater good (Sultana, 2014).**

What this study has highlighted is the need for a commitment to new policies and resourcing of career education and guidance in schools which recognises and accounts for the complex and dynamic space of successful career transitions. One school described careers and transition staff as 'receivers' of policy. This recommendation would like to centre policies which are formalised within strong partnerships and collaboration with staff as 'generators' of policies, as well as implementers of policy.

It has already been acknowledged that career education and guidance exist within two critical systems, which have an enormous influence on

the kind of society we live in. Yet, both fail to appreciate is that the career education and guidance profession is a significant partner in their relationship.

The termination of the crown entity, Careers NZ, which served as a representative for the profession, has created a major gap between policy makers and career practitioners. The organisation supported a space and structure for regular debate and critique of pragmatic perspectives of careers within the education and employment systems. Currently, this space has perhaps fallen to the career professional associations in New Zealand, who are largely a group of volunteers and funded mainly from membership subscriptions!

*A practical recommendation from this study is the need for a forum to co-ordinate the debate on a very fundamental question, if career education and guidance is part of a solution for the employment and education systems, what is the problem?*

This study has evidenced successful solutions for maximising school-community wide potential, developing flexibility, and enhancing awareness and understanding of the diverse ways in which life-careers might be constructed (Irving, 2018). If there was a clear understanding of what the problem is that career guidance and education is a solution for, the work could be appropriately resourced, and regulated, and be conducted within a system created and led by career education and guidance professionals.

## Meso level

**The meso level focuses on ways careers and transition staff have the opportunity to work for or with clients, to change structures and practices. For example, influencing pedagogical practices or curricula (Sultana, 2014). What this study has identified is evidence of this already occurring in schools who participated in this study. So, what more is required?**

To a large extent, the findings towards successful transitions are not new. What is most relevant, are the conditions under which they occur. For example, attention to the unique context of each school, the attitude of staff and senior leaders to change and their ability to foresee opportunity in the local community, nationally and globally, the way staff are valued and appreciated, and understanding and engaging with career education and guidance in schools. These are attributes which are difficult to replicate or develop as a checklist. Therefore, what support could be in place to provide more time for careers and transition staff to explore and understand conditions in their schools which might support successful career transitions?

A second practical recommendation from this study is the creation of a funded role working alongside the south cluster (a group of South Auckland careers and transition staff who meet on a regular basis for PLD and networking) and the Kaiārahi CATE NZ role, to provide support and a safe environment to South Auckland schools working towards successful career transitions.

Recommendations from the findings in this study suggest further support may be defined as, but not limited to:

- To connect with external organisations in South Auckland interested in volunteering in schools to determine clear processes and guidelines.
- To research available funding (local and national) targeted for career education and guidance resources in schools.
- To access up to date information on project resources and initiatives provided by government bodies for career education and guidance in schools.
- To research resources available for career education and guidance, and initiate feedback on resources.
- To disseminate all researched information via the South cluster and CATE NZ.



## Micro level

**The micro level focuses on supporting individuals to navigate social structures.**

This study has evidenced bespoke approaches schools have implemented as drivers towards successful career transitions. Students across schools in this study continue to be exposed to different pathways, and experience opportunities for self-expression based on their aspirations and that of the whānau. Career pathways are viewed as meeting both an economic and social contribution for whānau and the local community.

However, one role that was consistently raised across all school participants as one of the most successful strategies towards successful career transitions was conversations with students, staff, senior leaders, parents, and local community groups.

The ability to conduct a conversation and influence the receiver, is a skill on its own. Some participants referred to 'career' conversations, and we could ask what do you mean by this? Others questioned whether conversations are acceptable within a pastoral care role, or does this require a different skill?

Many saw the value of conversations, including senior leaders, but remained hesitant to provide full funding for the service to be carried out across the school.

The final practical recommendation based on findings and interviews with a broad range of people directly involved in successful career transitions, is the development of a professional learning development programme for careers and transitions staff on the influential craft of conversation.

Based on the findings of this study some background to such a programme might begin with:

- What is the purpose of conversations?
- What does 'conversation' mean in career education and guidance in schools?
- How might conversations influence and empower?
- Is a conversation the same as career advice?

## 5. CONCLUSION

Successful career transitions in this study have been anchored by context rather than an individualised vision. There is a strong awareness by careers and transition staff that a student's career or pathway are shaped and informed by the place and communities in which they live, including whānau and family influences.

The broader context of South Auckland features strongly for each school by a commitment to diverse pathways and employing innovative models of career transitions. For these schools, career transitions represent the intersectionality of personal and whānau goals and aspirations, the meaning of work, and the purpose of learning. Bespoke strategies and approaches have been shared by schools, as well as insight into why these are important, and the value to students, staff, and the school community.

Careers and transition work in schools continues to be underfunded and under-resourced despite the advocacy and lobbying of career professional associations. Yet, necessary work is still being done by professional people. What this study has revealed is that this is a hybrid body of career education and guidance educators, teachers, youth workers and leadership, professionals.

This study can concur that this hybrid body of knowledge will continue to influence the micro and meso levels of career transitions. We can look forward to a wider network of professionals to also having a similar impact at the macro levels.

# APPENDIX 1

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focused on what is working in career education and guidance in South Auckland secondary schools from the perspective of those directly involved in the successful transitions of their students. In other words, what successes have careers and transition staff experienced amidst a pressured, cynical, and uncertain environment? The study aims were to develop a process of co-creating clear meanings and understandings of career education and guidance systems and processes in schools related to successful career transitions.

The study was approved by the AUT ethics committee in 2022.

### Research questions

The central research question for this study was, what career processes, strategies, and practices enable and constrict, successful career transitions for South Auckland secondary school students?

The study focused on the experiences of career advisors and specialists, school leaders, relevant teachers, and external organisations working with careers and transition staff in the school, who are viewed as having a shared responsibility for the delivery of career education and guidance services to students and whānau.

### The two research questions guiding this study were:

What is working well in your school which has increased successful career transitions for your students?

What are the supportive conditions in your school which have enabled these positive experiences?

## Recruitment

To locate secondary schools to be invited to participate in the study, an email was sent to relevant staff from organisations at the forefront of career education and guidance in NZ such as:

- Ministry of Education – staff in Auckland office
- Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) – staff in Auckland office
- ACATE – Auckland branch of Career Advisor and transition education (CATE)
- Auckland Chamber of Commerce
- Comet Auckland
- Youthtown

Staff were asked to recommend secondary schools in South Auckland whom, from their perspective, had consistently achieved successful career transitions for their students.

## Participants

A total of twelve secondary schools were recommended by the organisations. Every school's career advisor was emailed by the researcher, inviting them to participate in the study. The email included the reason they were being contacted and detailed information on the study. Using this recruitment method ensured there was a diverse perspective on what successful career transitions meant and looked like.

An email reminder was sent to participants who had not replied to the initial invitation after three weeks. Some career advisors asked to meet with the researcher online to ask further questions about the study.

A total of five schools agreed to participate in the study. Four schools declined by email and personal communication noting either, new careers staff recently appointed, other school priorities in 2023, and hesitancy regarding the research criteria of successful career transitions. One school was unable to gain agreement from staff and school leaders to participate, within the timeframes of the research, and two schools did not reply to emails from the researcher.

The five schools who participated in this study were from each of the following districts based in Auckland as identified by Education Counts (<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/home>):

### **Auckland-Maungakiekie-Tamaki (1)**

### **Auckland-Howick (2)**

### **Auckland-Mangere-Otahuhu (3)**

### **Auckland-Otara-Papatoetoe (4)**

### **Auckland-Manurewa (5)**

One school was a single-sex and four co-educational schools. Two schools had school rolls under 1,000 students; two other schools, rolls of between 1,170 – 1,370; and a single school with a roll of over 2,000 students.

## Method

Semi-structured interviews were held with thirteen people involved in successful career transitions, over a period of four months in late 2022 and early 2023. Interviews were held online (via Teams or Zoom) and in-person, on school premises. The length of time for each interview was between 30 and 90 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and analysed seeking repeated and common themes.

Those who contributed to this study were interviewed either as individuals or in small groups, and all gave permission for each interview to be audio-recorded. Those involved in the study identified as either a career advisor/co-ordinator, Pathway co-ordinator, Gateway co-ordinator, chair of a youth mentoring organisation, and subject lead teachers. Three interviews were conducted with each school, over a period of four months.

A copy of the themes and sub-questions for the interviews is attached as Appendix 2. In this report, participants comments are identified based on the districts they are located in and the numeric code assigned to each.

## APPENDIX 2

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW THEMES AND SUB-QUESTIONS

#### What is working well:

What is working well and why?

Which have been your major successes?

#### Potential future goals:

Do you have a vision you want to get to for career transitions?

What more needs to be done?

What areas need improvement?

#### Root causes of success:

What values do you bring to the role?

What do you value about the school?

## APPENDIX 3

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