



**Labour Market Dynamics**  
Research Programme

*Innovative research in employment*

**Young(er) People's Conceptualisations of the World of  
Work: A Qualitative Study**

**Research Report No. 1/2007**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The 'Pathways to Sustainable Employment' (PASE) project is a five year research endeavour funded by the Foundation for Research Science and Technology. It examines the impact of diverse employment pathways on young people in New Zealand aged between 15 and 34 years, as well as the experiences of employers from a range of industries operating in a contemporary environment characterised by low unemployment and ongoing skills shortages. Over the life of the research, a range of methodologies have been used to examine the way in which individuals understand and negotiate access to employment and how employers obtain and manage labour in an increasingly dynamic labour market. The overarching aims of the project are to:

- explore the varied ways in which 15-34 year olds understand pathways into employment and negotiate their own employment trajectories;
- provide research from which tangible, relevant and user-oriented initiatives can be generated, both for the communities concerned and those agencies that have a policy responsibility in the area of employment;
- provide information on the best strategies for achieving the economic goal of sustainable employment for younger people; and
- establish the degree of alignment between labour supply and demand in relation to people within the chosen age cohort.

The PASE project comprises two major objectives. Objective One is concerned with supply-side employment issues, in particular the way in which younger people understand and negotiate access to employment. Objective Two focuses on the demand side of the employment equation, investigating both the strategies and expectations of employers with respect to an adequate supply of labour.

This report constitutes the second phase of Objective One and is a follow-up to the initial survey that gathered base-line employment and other data from 966 young people living in four different regions of New Zealand. Data for the phase one survey was collected using two different approaches. First, a Computer Aided Telephone Interview (CATI) was undertaken with a stratified sample of 866 people between 15 and 34 years old. Secondly, the same interview schedule was used in a parallel survey with 100 Maori participants. The sample chosen for the Maori component of the research was drawn from an existing longitudinal study of Maori households called 'The Best Outcomes for Maori: Te Hoe Nuku Roa', a project being undertaken by the School of Maori Studies at Massey University (see Fitzgerald & Durie, 2000). The sample of 100 Maori individuals was randomly selected from across each regional cohort of 15 - 34 year olds and subsequent interviews were conducted by trained Maori telephone interviewers. For the results from these two surveys, see Dupuis, Inkson and McLaren (2005) and Cunningham, Fitzgerald and Stevenson (2005).

At the end of the telephone interviews, participants were asked whether they would like to take part in more in-depth interviews at a later stage. Of the 966 participants, 923 (95 percent) indicated their willingness to participate in the qualitative phase of the research. These response rates suggest that the subject of employment is of real interest to young people in this country. This research report describes the face-to-face follow-up interviews conducted with 71 of those participants who indicated their willingness to take part in the second stage of the study.

The report begins with a chapter entitled “Sample Overview” in which the characteristics of the qualitative sample are outlined through the presentation and interpretation of a number of tables. The data from which these tables were generated derives from both the original CATI survey and the more recent qualitative investigation. This initial section is followed by the analysis of the qualitative data and is organised into the following sections: “Employment”; “Education and Career Planning” and “Other Factors”. The latter category includes “Gender”, “Student Loans”, “Social Capital” and “Dream Job”. In these discrete segments, the general trends of the larger group are identified and illustrated using a range of direct quotes from the interviews. Overall, the report provides a broad overview of participants’ conceptualisations of the changing world of work in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The main aim of the qualitative component of our research was to elicit participants' conceptualisations of the changing world of work and with this in mind, we decided to examine the following:

- Major changes that had taken place in the lives of the young people who had been interviewed a year earlier;
- Participants' perceptions of the world of employment, for example, how easy it was to get a job, what opportunities existed for advancement, and what barriers prevented them achieving their employment goal;
- Young people's perceptions of gender discrimination;
- Participants' views on the skills most sought by employers;
- Their views on the relevance of education and training, and whether post-compulsory education had met their own expectations;
- The impact of student loans on participants; and
- The effects of social capital on young people's study and work choices.

A qualitative investigation based on in-depth interviews was chosen as the most effective method of generating the kind of information just described. While this methodology does not produce statistically representative data, it does give us insights into the meaning of work and employment in young people's lives. We interviewed 71 New Zealanders between the ages of 15 and 34 from a range of backgrounds. Each participant had identified their main activity as self-employment, full-time employment, part-time employment, unemployment, study or at-home caring for others. During the interviews, we compiled personal histories, asking each interviewee a range of questions about their employment priorities, training and qualifications, skills, key influences, sources of support and networks. An interview guide was used to ensure that similar topics were covered in every interview (see Appendix One).

Participants from four distinct regions were identified: Auckland, Wellington, Gisborne and Manawatu/Wanganui. Prospective interviewees were initially contacted by e-mail and subsequently by telephone. Despite our attempts to obtain a sample that resembled the original CATI group as closely as possible, there are a number of discrepancies between the two. For example, while men comprise 41.9 percent of the CATI sample, only 27 percent of the interview participants are male. In addition, the interview sample contains a greater percentage of those with advanced educational qualifications and a larger number of young people in full-time employment. These discrepancies may be due to a number of factors: the amount of time that had elapsed between the first telephone survey and the follow-up interviews, making it impossible to trace many of the respondents; and the greater ability and/or willingness of certain groups of participants to take part in the interviews, for example women, the well-educated and those in full-time employment.

Despite the disparities between the two samples, however, the interviews have provided us with a rich source of data from which we have generated a number of valuable insights into the choices and constraints that influence young people's decisions about education and employment. The interviews in the Auckland region were conducted by Massey University graduate students. In the Manawatu/Wanganui

and Wellington areas, Brent Gardiner, the Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme's PhD scholarship holder, conducted the interviews. In addition to the questions asked for this survey, Brent added several supplementary questions about the way that participants envisaged and described career success. These responses have been analysed in a separate report (see Gardiner, 2006).

Prior to the interviews, participants were given an information sheet outlining the aims of the study. Their right to refuse to answer particular questions, or to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the analysis, was also included. In addition, each interviewee signed a consent form. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality and to protect the identity of the young people involved in the study. Most of the interviews were conducted in participants' homes, or at a location most convenient for them. In the case of caregivers, where it was often difficult to meet face-to-face, telephone interviews were conducted. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed in their entirety.

Transcripts were then analysed using NVivo version 1.2, a software programme specifically designed for the analysis of rich data (Richards, 1999). A number of themes (or nodes) from the transcripts were identified and coded and the relevant parts of each transcript were copied into the appropriate node. As the research progressed, further nodes were added as required. Next, the contents of individual nodes, for example, 'barriers to achievement' or 'major influences,' were summarised using the names of participants along with pertinent quotes from their transcripts.<sup>1</sup> Finally, these summaries were used as the foundation for the various sections which comprise the main component of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Where quotes are presented in this report, pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants.

## SAMPLE OVERVIEW

**Table 1: Main Activity at Time of First Interview and Follow-up One Year Later**

	Current sample – time of second interview		Current sample – time of first interview		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	No.	%	%
Self-employed	4	5.6	2	2.8	3.2
In part-time employment	6	8.5	5	7.0	10.9
In full-time employment	39	54.9	34	47.9	37.5
Student	13	18.3	20	28.2	33.0
At home caring for children/others	6	8.5	10	14.1	9.2
Unemployed	3	4.2	-	-	4.1
Sickness or invalid beneficiary	-	-	-	-	1.2
Other	-	-	-	-	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As mentioned in the previous section, the group of people who were interviewed for a second time differ in composition from the original sample in several important ways. With respect to their main activity, the current sample contains a greater proportion of participants in full-time employment (47.9 percent compared to 37.5 percent) and a smaller percentage of those who identified themselves as students (28.2 percent versus 33.0 percent).

In addition, there are also significant differences between the main activity identified by participants during their first interview and the main activity specified during their subsequent interview twelve months later. For example, 47.9 percent of participants identified their main activity as full-time employment at the time of their first interview and a year later, this percentage had increased to 54.9 percent. Similarly, during their initial interview 28.2 percent of participants described themselves as students, while in their second interview only 18.3 percent identified their main activity this way. Also notable is the 14.1 percent who described their main activity as at home caring for children or others at the first interview and the 8.5 percent who identified this as their main activity a year later. These figures suggest that change in main activity is an important characteristic of the working lives of the young(er) people in this sample.

While the above table captures changes in the main activity identified by participants, the following describes in greater detail the changes they experienced between their first and second interview. Some of these changes do not constitute alterations in the participants' main activity, but nonetheless represent significant change in the young person's life. For example, while continuing to be classified as full-time employees, 23.3 percent of the participants changed job over the course of the twelve months. Overall, 42.3 percent of the current sample experienced some kind of modification in their employment, their caring responsibilities and/or their education during the twelve months between the first and second interviews. The most common changes

included a move from one job to another (23.3 percent of those participants who experienced change during the year), promotion within the same job (16.7 percent) and the shift from study to employment (16.7 percent).

**Table 2: Change in the Last Year**

		<b>No.</b>
<b>No Change</b>		<b>41</b>
<b>CHANGE</b>	Permanent to self-employment	1
	Part-time looking for full-time	1
	Changed job	7
	Promoted	5
	Finished study going overseas (currently unemployed)	1
	Now studying but still in same job	2
	Completed study and employed	5
	Completed study but in same job	1
	Full-time employment to benefit	1
	Same full-time job & second part-time job	1
	Unemployed looking for work	1
	Working part-time	1
	Caring to full-time	2
	Caring to self-employment	1
	<b>Total Changes</b>	<b>30</b>

**Table 3: Age at Time of First Interview**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
15-19	7	10	32.5
20-24	18	25	22.0
25-29	21	30	18.9
30-34	25	35	26.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

With respect to age, there are two major differences between the composition of the original CATI sample and the current sample. Firstly, the current sample contains less than one-third of the number of 15-19 year olds present in the original sample (10 percent compared to 32.5 percent). Secondly, while the original sample contained 18.9 percent and 26.6 percent of 25-29 year olds and 30-34 year olds, the current sample comprises 30 percent and 35 percent respectively of these older age groups. This appears to be congruent with the differences between the two samples with respect to main activity (i.e. the current sample contains fewer students and more participants involved in full-time employment). Young people between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age are more likely to identify their main activity as studying while those in the two older age brackets are more likely to be involved in full-time employment. As mentioned previously, these differences are related to the greater ease with which those in full-time employment made themselves available for a second interview.

**Table 4: Gender**

	15-34		
	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Male	19	26.8	41.9
Female	52	73.2	58.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

While the original sample contained a preponderance of female interviewees (58.1 percent compared with 41.9 male), there is an even greater imbalance in the numbers of women and men in the current sample (73.2 percent female compared with 26.8 percent male). This is probably due to the deliberate inclusion of a group of carers in the current sample, a group that tends to include a majority of women.

**Table 5: Regional Location of Participants at Time of First Interview**

Region	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Auckland	42	59.2	57.7
Wellington	19	26.8	22.8
Manawatu-Wanganui	9	12.7	15.1
Gisborne-East Coast	1	1.4	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.1</b>

There are only slight differences between the current and original samples with respect to the regional location of participants. The current sample contains more participants from the two major urban centres: 59.2 percent from Auckland compared with 57.7 percent in the earlier sample; and 26.8 percent versus 22.8 percent from Wellington. Consequentially, the current sample comprises fewer interviewees from the smaller centres, 12.7 percent in contrast to 15.1 percent from Manawatu-Wanganui, and 1.4 percent compared with 4.5 percent from the Gisborne-East Coast region.

**Table 6: Ethnicity<sup>2</sup>**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Pakeha/NZ European only	52	73.2	55.5
Maori only	4	5.6	13.6
Pacific Peoples only	4	5.6	8.3
East Asian only	1	1.4	6.8
South Asian only	4	5.6	5.4
MELAA*	1	1.4	2.0
Miscellaneous**	2	2.8	1.1
Maori/Pakeha	2	2.8	4.7
Pacific Peoples/Pakeha	-	-	1.4
Maori/Pacific Peoples	-	-	0.8
Pakeha/Maori/Pacific Peoples	1	1.4	0.3
refused	-	-	.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* MELAA includes those who identify as Middle Eastern, Latin American and African. This category was introduced during the 2006 New Zealand census (Dupuis et al., 2005).

\*\* Miscellaneous is also a term that was introduced during the 2006 census and describes the category previously referred to as 'other' (Dupuis et al., 2005).

<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of the ethnic categorisations used in this table, see Dupuis, Inkson and McLaren (2005).

There are a number of important differences between the current and original samples with respect to ethnicity. Most strikingly, the current sample contains a greater number of Pakeha/NZ European respondents than the original sample (73.2 percent versus 55.5 percent).<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, the current sample comprises fewer Maori (5.6 compared with 13.6), Pacific people (5.6 percent versus 8.3), and East Asian interviewees (1.4 compared with 6.8 percent). Interestingly, however, the most recent sample contains almost the same percentage of South Asian participants as the earlier sample (5.6 and 5.4). Lastly, the current sample also contained fewer interviewees who claimed dual or multiple ethnic identities, with the exception of those classified as miscellaneous (2.8 percent of the most recent sample versus 1.1 percent of the original) and those who identified as Pakeha/Maori/Pacific peoples (1.4 percent compared to 0.3 percent). In sum, the current sample is less ethnically diverse than the original.

**Table 7: Place of Birth**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
New Zealand	53	74.6	74.6
Overseas	18	25.4	25.1
Missing data	-	-	.3
Total	71	100.0	100.0

With the exception of a very small percentage of missing data in the original sample, the proportions of those born overseas and those born in New Zealand are identical in both the current and the original sample.

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<sup>3</sup> The percentage of Pakeha/NZ European only participants in the current sample, however, more closely resembles the proportion of this ethnic group in the wider New Zealand population (67.6 percent) than does the original sample (55.5 percent) (Statistics New Zealand, 2006).

**Table 8: Highest Qualification at Time of First Interview**

Highest Qualification	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
No qualifications	3	4.2	12.6
SC (or *NC Level 1)	6	8.5	15.5
Sixth Form Certificate (or *NC Level 2)/ UE/ NZ **HSC or ***HLC/Bursary/Scholarship	18	25.3	33.6
Trade certificate/ Polytechnic diploma/teaching diplomas	19	26.7	15.9
Bachelors degree	20	28.2	16.9
Postgraduate qualification	5	7.0	4.0
Other (includes post school qualifications not specified in HLFS)	-	-	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\*NC = National Certificate

\*\*HSC = Higher School Certificate

\*\*\*HLC = Higher Leaving Certificate

As mentioned earlier, the two samples differ with respect to the highest educational qualifications of participants. The current sample contains fewer interviewees with no qualifications (4.2 percent versus 12.6 percent), School Certificate or its equivalent (8.5 percent versus 15.5 percent), and Sixth Form Certificate or its equivalent (25.3 percent versus 33.6 percent). The current sample correspondingly comprises a greater proportion of those with a trade certificate or diploma (26.7 percent compared to 15.9 percent), and either a bachelor's degree (28.2 percent compared to 16.9 percent) or a postgraduate qualification (7 percent compared to 4 percent). This is probably related to the fact that the current sample contains a greater number of participants in the older age groups (25-29 and 30-34).

**Table 9: Marital Status at Time of First Interview**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Single	38	53.5	64.7
Legally married	20	28.2	20.2
De facto/ living with partner	8	11.3	13.2
Separated	4	5.6	1.2
Divorced	1	1.4	.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Also related to the different age composition of the two samples is the disparity between them with respect to marital status. The current sample, with its greater percentage of those in older age groups, contains a higher proportion of legally married participants (28.2 versus 20.2 percent), separated participants (5.6 compared with 1.2 percent) and those who are divorced (1.4 versus 0.7 percent). Correspondingly, the most recent sample comprises fewer single interviewees (53.5 compared with 64.7 percent), and a smaller percentage of those living in de facto relationships (11.3 versus 13.2 percent).

**Table 10: Main Source of Income at Time of First Interview**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Wages/salaries	52	73.2	67.0
Family/whanau support	8	11.3	17.8
WINZ benefit	9	12.7	11.5
Other	-	-	2.1
Student allowance	2	2.8	1.0
Student loan	-	-	.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>966</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The two samples also differ to some extent with respect to the participants' main source of income. Again, these disparities are likely to be related to differences in age and main activity between the two groups. The current sample consists of more participants whose main source of income is wages or salaries (73.2 compared to 67.0 percent) and fewer whose main source of income is family or whanau support (11.3 versus 17.8 percent).

**Table 11: Industries at Time of First Interview**

Industry	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No	%	%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	-	-	3
Manufacturing	4	7.5	8
Electricity, gas and water supply	1	1.8	1
Construction	1	1.8	7
Wholesale trade	-	-	3
Retail trade	10	18.8	17
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	3	5.6	11
Transport and storage	-	-	3
Communication services	4	7.5	4
Finance and insurance	2	3.7	5
Property and business services	3	5.6	3
Government, administration and defence	2	3.7	4
Education	10	18.8	11
Health and community services	4	7.5	7
Cultural and recreational services	1	1.8	4
Personal and other services	4	7.5	5
IT	4	7.5	4
Other/unknown	-	-	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The two samples contain similar numbers of participants across a range of industries: manufacturing (7.5 and 8 percent); the retail trade (18.8 and 17 percent); government, administration and defence (3.7 and 4 percent); and health and community services (7.5 and 7 percent). Where there are disparities in the composition of the samples, they may again be explained by the larger number of older, more educated participants in the current sample. For instance, the second sample contains fewer workers in the construction industry (1.8 versus 7 percent); fewer participants employed in accommodation, cafes and restaurants (5.6 compared with 11 percent); and a larger number of interviewees in education (18.8 versus 11 percent).

**Table 12: Occupation at Time of First Interview**

Occupational group	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Legislators and administrators	5	9	7
Professionals	13	25	15
Technicians or other professionals	9	17	13
Clerks	12	23	14
Service and sales workers	13	25	33
Agricultural and fisheries workers	-	-	2
Trade workers	1	2	9
Plant and machine operators	-	-	4
Elementary occupations	-	-	4
Not specified	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The disparities between the occupations of the two sample groups can also be explained by the larger number of older, more educated participants in the more recent sample. The latter sample, for instance, contains more professionals (25 compared with 15 percent) and more clerks (23 versus 14 percent). Similarly, it also comprises fewer service and sales workers (25 compared with 33 percent) and fewer trade workers (2 versus 9 percent).

**Table 13: Satisfaction with Training at Time of First Interview**

Training received	Current sample		Original sample (n-966)
	No.	%	%
Very satisfactory	16	47	44.9
Fairly satisfactory	14	41	47
Fairly unsatisfactory	1	3	3.7
Very unsatisfactory	3	9	1.8
Neither one nor the other	-	-	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Participants in both the current and original samples reported a high level of satisfaction with the training they received. Approximately 90 percent of each group of interviewees described the training as either very satisfactory or fairly satisfactory. More members of the current sample, however, reported a greater level of dissatisfaction with training than in the original sample (9 percent versus 1.8 percent).

**Table 14: Security in Current Work at Time of First Interview**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
<b>Security</b>			
Very secure	30	56.6	54
Fairly secure	18	34	35
Fairly insecure	4	7.5	5
Very insecure	-	-	2
Neither one nor the other	1	1.8	2
Don't know	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Members of each sample reported similar levels of security in their current work. For instance, 56.6 percent of the current sample and 54 percent of the original sample rated themselves very secure in their jobs and 34 and 35 percent described themselves as fairly secure.

**Table 15: Perceived Future Prospects at Time of First Interview**

	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
<b>Perceived Future Prospects</b>			
Good	32	60	56
Average	13	25	30
Poor	8	15	13
Don't know	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Participants from both the current and original samples also reported comparable perceived future prospects: 60 and 56 percent rating their future job prospects as 'good', 25 and 30 percent as 'average' and 15 and 13 percent as 'poor'.

**Table 16: Relationship between Work and Qualifications at Time of First Interview**

How closely work is related to qualifications	Current sample		Original sample (n=966)
	No.	%	%
Very closely related	19	36	33
Fairly closely related	12	23	19
Not very closely related	3	6	14
Not related at all	16	30	29
Neither one nor the other	3	6	4
Don't know	-	-	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Participants from both the current and original samples were similar in the way they rated the closeness of their work and qualifications: 36 and 33 percent described their work and qualifications as 'very closely related'; 23 and 19 percent as 'fairly closely related'; and 30 and 29 percent as 'not related at all'.

Overall, both groups of participants were similar with respect to many of the measures previously listed, including the regional location of participants, the percentage of New Zealand and overseas-born participants and interviewees' perception of security in their present employment. The current sample differs from the original sample in three principal areas: the greater number of women, the preponderance of those with higher qualifications and the prevalence of participants in full-time employment. Other differences between the two samples, such as those related to age and marital status, can be attributed to these fundamental discrepancies.



## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **1. GETTING A JOB TODAY**

The respondents were asked the following questions:

What's it like getting a job today? Could you give me an example? How good are the opportunities today for your kind of person? Why do you think that is?

Most of the participants claimed that it was easy to get a job at the moment but a significant number nonetheless described it as hard. The main themes in each of these groups are outlined below, using a number of direct quotes from the interviews as illustrative examples.

#### **1.1 Getting a Job is Easy**

A majority of respondents stated that it was easy to get a job at present and that they had had no trouble obtaining employment themselves. While many participants did not elaborate further, those who did talked about current favourable labour market conditions (1). Others qualified their positive evaluations of the labour market in several different ways, concluding that: (2) while getting a job may be easy, getting a "good" job is more difficult; (3) although getting a job is not difficult, it still depends on individual characteristics such as motivation; and (4) getting a job is easier if you "know the right people". These four ideas are discussed in the following sections.

##### **1.1.1 Labour Market Conditions are Currently Favourable for Employees**

Most of those who claimed that getting a job was easy explained their position by referring to currently favourable labour market conditions for employees. Some interviewees referred to the quantity of jobs, stating that "*I don't...I don't think there is any lack of jobs*"<sup>4</sup> (Sophia), that "*there's lots of work out there*" (Jennifer), and that "*there's lots of jobs around*" (Melissa). Similarly, several participants described the situation using phrases such as 'at the moment', which suggest that the current positive situation was viewed as temporary. Jennifer noted that "*at the moment it's quite easy. There's lots of work out there*", while Lily claimed "*at the moment I think it's definitely a job seekers market...I think that if I were to look for a job, whether or not this would be the case, but my perception is that I would have the pick of it and almost dictate the terms*".

Other participants described the positive circumstances in their own areas of employment, stating, for example, that "*midwives are in demand so I'll have no problem getting a job and I can choose*" (Ruby), and that "*there's a shortage of doctors in New Zealand so I think it's very good in terms of doctors' prospects in New Zealand*" (Jeevan). Tom commented that "*as far as teaching goes, there are plenty of teaching jobs available. I don't know anyone who's a teacher who hasn't got a job that wants to have a job*", while Norah claimed that "*certainly in the tax field, our company is struggling to get people...there's not many people out there with experience*". Referring to the IT industry, James noted that "*it's a real employees'*

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<sup>4</sup> All quotes are presented in italics.

market. There are a lot of employers looking for good people and not many employees around”.

### **1.1.2 Getting a Job is Easy but Getting a Good Job is Hard**

Another substantial group suggested that while getting a job might be easy, getting a good job was more difficult. Amber, for example, said that *“I think it’s...getting a job...I don’t think it’s hard, but getting the one you want is hard. There is obviously a lot more people going for that one job. Opportunities are out there, it’s just you kind of always need a bit more”*. Similarly, Laura claimed that *“I never worry that I’m going to find work, it’s just a matter of the level of enjoyment and if it’s actually what I want to be doing”*, while Gabrielle noted that *“getting a job that you’re really happy in, that’s a different story”*. Obtaining employment in the location you prefer may also prove difficult, as Tom explains: *“There’s a lot of jobs around but not always where you want to work. So you might have to take a job somewhere where you’re not...for example I’m not happy about being in Auckland, but I like my job so...I want to be in Christchurch but there’s not many jobs down there”*.

### **1.1.3 Getting a Job is Easy if You Are the Right Kind of Person**

Many respondents looked at the question from the point of view of personal attributes, claiming that while getting a job is easy at the moment, it does depend on one’s experience, qualifications and other skills. With respect to experience, for example, Elizabeth noted *“I haven’t found finding work hard because I’ve worked for a number of years in the call centre area so it was easy to get a job in the area”*. Qualifications were also perceived to be important. Chelsea said *“I think once I can get my degree I should be able to get a job fairly easily”*, while Norah claimed that *“if you are one of the top graduates, then you could pick and choose”*. Finally, some participants connected getting a good job with a range of other skills, including, for instance, the ability to sell oneself. As Ryan suggested, *“the people that I’ve been talking to are saying that HR is a growth industry, that there are plenty of opportunities out there. It’s a case of selling yourself really, as much as anything”*.

### **1.1.4 Getting a Job is Easy if You Know the Right People**

A few respondents believed that finding a job in the current climate was not difficult as long as you knew the right people. Chloe, for example, said that *“my friend worked here, so she was able to get me the job here. I only got this job because my friend worked here”*. Similarly, Kyla described her situation in the following way:

*I think it’s easy to get a job these days, pretty much it’s not what you know these days, it’s who you know, to get into the swing of things. If you’ve got a little bit of history behind you with your job and stuff like that, if you know a little bit about it and then you know someone within the industry...that’s how I got my job and because of my situation at my last job was quite bad, they actually gave me a job because I knew the girl quite well because I’ve been going to her, getting things done with her for about six months and keeping to my appointments and that and because I knew a little bit of history behind her job as well, that’s pretty much basically why she gave me the job.*

## **1.2 Getting a Job is Hard**

A significant number of interviewees considered it relatively difficult to get a job at the present time. Their explanations for this difficulty fell into three main categories: most commonly, (1) job seekers' lack qualifications, experience and/or contacts; less frequently, (2) labour market constraints on the types of jobs available; and most rarely (3) other external constraints. These main ideas are discussed below.

### **1.2.1 Getting a Job is Difficult Because Job Seekers lack Experience, Qualifications and/or Contacts**

Respondents who said it was hard to find work most commonly related this difficulty to a lack of qualifications or experience, although some participants mentioned the difficulties posed by immigrant status and/or family responsibilities. For a smaller number of people, a range of circumstantial reasons were given, particularly knowing someone in the right position. With respect to a lack of qualifications, for example, Grace, an early childhood teacher, noted that *"it's hard for people getting jobs unless they have qualifications...it's definitely hard, especially now with the new laws coming out that you have to be qualified. So if you don't have qualifications in early childhood, basically you are not going to get a job"*. Similarly, Lydia explained that her *"interest is medical, but I don't have a high medical qualification, so you're quite limited in what you can even apply for. If you don't have the qualification you don't get past the letter writing stage because of the education factor and also the field"*.

Maia's lack of experience proved to be the most significant hurdle in her difficult job search.

*The thing is, she said, even though I've had interviews and things, I've somehow never ended up being the person they've hired. I'm not sure if it's a problem with being nervous in interviews or if I've just been really unlucky and other people always having the experience that I don't have, but yeah...I've seen some of my friends get jobs very easily and others, like me, have struggled for a long time. One of the main stumbling blocks I keep coming across is...I've asked them why didn't I get in and they've turned around and gone, we gave it to the person with the most experience or more experience than me, and when you've just come out of university or even seven months afterwards, if you have just been looking for work, you don't have that experience until someone hires you and it can be rather frustrating.*

Although mentioned less frequently, several participants claimed that a lack of personal contacts made their search for a job difficult. Nathaniel, for instance, noted that *"it's pretty hard. It's not easy...I've worked in about three places now and every time I had to look for a job, if I knew someone at that place, it would've been easy to get a job, but if you hand in an application without knowing anyone there, the chances of getting a job are really low"*. Similarly, Barbara maintained that her friend had *"tried all sorts of avenues, but I think it's also who you know. That sort of, who you know, who to talk to and how you get your foot in the door"*.

### **1.2.2 Getting a Job is Difficult Because of Labour Market Conditions**

Some participants noted that getting a job was difficult because of particular labour market conditions. Several pointed to the paucity of jobs in specific industries in this country. Maia, for example, claimed that *“there aren't huge numbers if you want to stay in New Zealand. There are a few places around that hire every now and then”*. Similarly, Charlotte noted that *“the area that I wanted to get into is really limited. There is only a certain number of jobs and they hardly ever come up. Publishing in general is like that...in publicity you do...you can't go much further. You can go overseas”*. Other respondents mentioned the lack of opportunities for advancement that existed in some areas of the country. Adam, for example, said *“I have the opinion that possibly I would have to move out of this area to get a better job”*.

### **1.2.3 Getting a Job is Difficult Because of Other External Constraints**

Three respondents mentioned other issues constraining their ability to get a job. These constraints included family issues, such as the difficulty of juggling work and childcare; employer prejudice against particular migrant groups; and employer prejudice against multiple piercing.

## **2. WHAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR**

Participants were asked the question:

What are the kinds of skills you think employers want in the people they employ?

Respondents generated over 10,000 words in answer to this question, most of which comprised the simple cataloguing of generic personal qualities. In order to make sense of this data, the material has been reduced to the single table presented below. It lists the ten attributes used by the greatest number of respondents. The largest single category, by a wide margin, was ‘interpersonal and communication skills’ mentioned 55 times, followed by ‘qualifications’ (32) and ‘experience’ (23). This probably demonstrates young(er) people’s keen awareness of today’s ‘network society’ and ‘information economy’ (Castells, cited in Odih, 2002) where interpersonal and communication skills are intrinsic to employment success. The emphasis participants placed on qualifications in answer to this question is unsurprising given the current trend towards young people staying longer in school and entering post-compulsory education in greater numbers, a trend that is evident across all OECD countries (Leggatt-Cook, 2005).

**Table 17: What Employers Look For**

No. respondents mentioning this	What employers look for
55	interpersonal/communication skills
32	qualifications
23	experience
18	hard work
17	initiative/self-reliance/independence
14	being a team player
14	personality
13	adaptability/flexibility
13	competence
13	honesty

### 3. BARRIERS TO SUCCESS IN WORK

The following question was asked of each participant.

What things prevent you from doing what you set out to achieve?

#### 3.1 There are Barriers to my Achievement

Approximately two-thirds of the interviewees identified significant barriers to their achievement in the employment arena. Some overlap and interaction notwithstanding, these obstacles might usefully be conceptualised in the following ways: (3.1.1) those barriers located within the individual's emotional or physical self, such as a lack of confidence or a health problem; (3.1.2) those that are a function of a person's wider circumstances, such as their financial situation or their family configuration; and (3.1.3) those that are part of the social landscape, such as employing organisations or the labour market. Of particular note was the frequent claim that family responsibilities constituted a considerable barrier to employment achievement and success, a claim made exclusively by female respondents with children. Also of note was the significant minority of participants who identified no barriers to their achievement.

##### 3.1.1 Internalised Personal Barriers

Several participants identified a lack of confidence as a barrier to their employment success. Hannah, for example, noted that she had been held back in her working life because she is *easily intimidated by people*. Similarly, Ryan noted that

*I think the biggest stumbling block in terms of the achieving my goals, are me. I think I tend to second guess myself a lot in terms of my competence and ability to actually do what it is that I want to achieve and get plenty of encouragement from people around me, my wife, friends, people in the workplace who are sending out messages that, yes, you are competent and able to do this, so it's... generally a belief that...sometimes I think it's a case of...what if they are just*

*saying that, you know? Trying to be nice or whatever...It's a case of believing that from myself first, is the biggest stumbling block, I think I have.*

A lack of experience or qualifications was also identified as a barrier to achievement. In terms of the former, Chelsea mentioned a *“lack of experience in areas that I want to get into”*, while Gabrielle noted that she was *“a little bit behind with the technology that's around and I haven't really got up to speed with computer skills”*. With regards to qualifications, Ryan talked about the way he is trying to overcome the barrier constituted by his lack in this area: *“The other thing which I'm working towards”*, he explained *“is the tertiary qualification. I started a qualification when I first left school, but that didn't go as smoothly as I'd initially planned...and as a result haven't got a tertiary qualification...tertiary qualifications are always asked for and trying to get through that barrier of not having the qualifications and have your experience shown in a cover letter is sometimes...it's something that I don't want to have to miss out on because someone says my qualification automatically gets bypassed. That's another limited factor I guess, that I'm working to overcome”*.

A smaller number of respondents identified their lack of job-search ability as a significant barrier to their employment success. Tam, for example, said *“from the beginning I didn't apply job properly. I didn't spend much time to research about your company so I had to pay for that, nearly one and half years”*. A small number of participants suggested that the career options they had taken in the past had ultimately functioned as barriers to their employment success. Norah explained, *“I went overseas for four years and then came back and that was not necessarily the advantage career-wise that you would necessarily expect. You might find”*, she pointed out that *“when you come back you are pretty much the level that you were when you went overseas”*. Two respondents cited their health as a barrier to their achievement. Lily, for example, noted that *“I looked at the army when I was lots younger, but asthma would have prevented me from going very far”*.

### **3.1.2 Externalised Personal Barriers**

The largest group by far in this category were women respondents who identified family responsibilities as a barrier to their employment success. Hannah noted that *“I need to do things like photoshop courses and I've looked at night school courses, but finding the time to do that as a single parent is difficult ... I've tried to put my son into day care and he didn't like it. Finding someone who is affordable to care for him is a problem”*. Similarly, Heather explained that

*because I'm a single parent that can be a bit of a barrier, because I wouldn't want to leave the children on their own or to have them in care, so I made my choices around that. I would like to be in teaching now, but in that respect I put that off until the kids are a little bit older, even then... mainly the studying because it's quite long hours and while I'm at school...while I'm studying myself, and might find that I'd be coming home and bringing a lot of stuff back with me and that's the thing, is I don't want...not even at this age, I don't want to be saying, leave me alone, I've got something more important to do.*

In contrast to the large number of participants who described family responsibilities as a barrier to career success, only one participant cited the obstacle presented by being

in a dual career relationship. She noted that *“because of my husband and his attachment to Wellington, I can't look for a job outside of Wellington. I can't look in Auckland, for example. I know that there are good opportunities up there”* (Nicole). Most other respondents in this category talked about the way that money and time had proved important barriers in their working lives. Amber, for example, answered this question by saying that *“time's a huge factor”*, while Linda claimed that *“not having the money to do what I wanted to do, go where I wanted to go. That was probably the big thing”*. Least frequently mentioned as obstacles were the demands of particular leisure pursuits, *“having a social life”*; the lack of social capital, *“I didn't have the networks that other people had”*; and the constraints of geography, *“the only thing that probably stopped me is roles or positions I won't take because of the travel involved”*.

### **3.1.3 Barriers in the Social Landscape**

The majority of respondents in this category claimed that problems with their current or prospective employers constituted significant barriers to their career success. Samantha explained that *“I met someone and got a foot in the door to my absolute dream job, but the job's...the budget hasn't been approved and there's not the money so...I'm waiting and waiting, the guy still rings me and says, I still really think you'd be great and I want to get you on board, but I just have to get the money approved”*. Donna noted how disillusioned she felt at the lack of support from her employer *“that's the hardest”*, she said, *“not having the support from my [department] or whatever and I gave two and a half years to them and I did a good job for them and that's what really guts me, is a company that I was really quite proud of and I'm not, I just don't want to go back to the job and I don't really care if I lose my job with them”*.

Other participants claimed that a competitive labour market could represent a barrier to their achievement. James, for instance, feared that competition from other graduates might affect his chances of success. *“Competition”*, he said, *“basically would be the major... there is quite a few people out there finishing their degree at the same time as me. That would prevent me from getting a position that I would really like. If the job market changes and there is nothing available that...I want, that would prevent me from getting that”*. Discrimination was also identified as a barrier to career success: *“Because I'm a Muslim, and I do wear my hijab, which is the head scarf...about two years ago, I have had some issues where employers say, we can't work with that, so that's why I was thinking to get unemployed because of that. That is a major barrier...to me it's nothing, it's just... I know that to the employers it's a hard thing because some customers might be judgmental and it harms them, so I don't want to argue about that, but yeah”*.

### **3.1.4 No Barriers**

Almost a third of the respondents claimed that there were no barriers to their career success. A number of these participants, however, qualified their answers by talking about the barriers they had observed rather than personally experienced, or by identifying obstacles that they had faced in the past. Gemma, for example, began by saying that *“I think I've achieved what I've wanted to. I'm pretty adamant it's the right job that I want to be doing”*. She continued, however, *“the barriers would be, I*

*guess, internal, within the organisation". Rose claimed that "nothing would prevent me from setting out what I want to achieve. The world is your oyster really, I think you can achieve anything". Nonetheless, she noted that "it is always hard for someone starting out, but with energy and drive there is nothing stopping people". Andrew too began by saying, "I haven't been prevented yet", then mentioned, "I was on hold for a while because I got made redundant March last year so that was sort of...if you'd asked me then that would've been my hold back or whatever, yeah".*

## **EDUCATION AND CAREER PLANNING**

### **1. SCHOOL**

The respondents were asked the following questions:

Looking back over your school education, what are your feelings about the education that you had? Can you tell us a little bit about that? How well did school education prepare you for work and/or tertiary education?

Because of the interviews' overall focus on employment, and the connection made in the latter question above between school and work, most of the respondents' comments about their school experiences concerned whether and to what degree school had prepared them to function adequately in the workforce. While these comments included both positive and negative evaluations of school, there was also a group of respondents whose replies were more ambivalent. These participants acknowledged that school had provided them with a number of positive opportunities but blamed themselves for not taking advantage of them. Overall, there were more positive than negative comments about participants' school education.

#### **1.1 School was a Positive Experience**

Almost three-quarters of all the respondents made positive comments<sup>5</sup> about their secondary (and sometimes primary) schooling. These evaluations can be divided into five distinct categories: school was relevant to my tertiary study, work and later life; school provided me with a balanced education; my teachers were good; school gave me a good grounding in 'the basics' and school was a positive social experience. These five main themes are discussed in the following sections.

##### **1.1.1 School was Relevant to my Tertiary Study, Work and Later Life**

Over half of those who described school as a positive experience said that it was relevant to their tertiary study, work and later life. These responses covered a wide range of work-relevant skills and attributes, including self-confidence, the ability to meet deadlines, the acquisition of writing skills and self-reliance. Commenting on the way that school had prepared her for the workforce, Holly explained, "*if you wanted to succeed you could and they taught you how to do that and applying those to the workforce was really helpful...taught you how to be confident in who you are...prepared me quite well*". Similarly, Samantha talked about the way school had

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<sup>5</sup> Respondents sometimes made both positive and negative comments about their school experiences.

prepared her for university, claiming that, *"I had an extremely good education...the minute I hit university, I realised I was miles ahead of everybody else. You learnt to prepare for whatever was going to come up and know what was going to come up...school prepared me for work as well"*. With respect specifically to writing skills, Chelsea noted, *"I think my school gave me a very good education in academic terms...Essay writing was a big one for me at university, already coming here with good essay writing skills was really helpful"*.

Hope describes the way she developed self-reliance at school,

*I think I was well prepared, because I was forced to develop skills to inspire myself and keep myself going, because my school didn't really...was not a school that pushed you at all, so if you wanted to achieve you had to push yourself. Which is a very handy thing...skill to have at tertiary level, you kind of realise, it's you and no one else is going to help you along...self learn, self manage and because at the moment I'm studying extramural, which I find suits me very well...Yeah, I think I was well prepared because of my secondary schooling.*

Barbara also talked about the way that school, particularly in the later years, encouraged her to think for herself, *"in Form Six and Seven"*, she said, *"because there was such a jump from Form Five, where I felt we were spoon fed, into Form Six, you start using this, for Sixth Form Certificate and you weren't spoon fed so much. You actually really had to start thinking on your own feet"*.

### **1.1.2 School Provided Me With a Balanced Education**

Many participants pointed out that school had provided them with a balanced education and a good range of school subjects and co-curricular activities. Holly, for example, said that *"I think that I got a really good school education...a really well rounded education...I found my experience really positive"*. With respect to subject options, Andrew noted that, *"I was very lucky. My parents sent me to...a private school and it was a very good education there. It was really good. I was able to do all the subjects that I did in university"*. Jasmine emphasised the important role sport and the arts played in providing her with this kind of education, explaining that *"it wasn't just about school. I was lucky that I was involved with lots of...my earlier years at school, sports and stuff like that, but in my later years, particularly in my high school years, I was involved in lots of extracurricular activities and music and drama and debating and that kind of thing as well"*.

### **1.1.3 My Teachers Were Good**

Good teachers were also cited by a number of participants in their positive evaluations of school. Holly claimed that *"the teachers were really good and everyone kept going"*, while Hope maintained that *"I had a few inspiring teachers who really changed my life path, I guess you could say, yeah, overall probably positive experiences, in the way that I enjoy learning, I enjoy study, so I guess I'm lucky in that respect"*. Similarly, Barbara talked about two teachers (one from primary school) who had made a significant impact on her life:

*I can vividly remember...one particular teacher, she made such an impact and that was particularly to do with literature. We used to get taken outside on a Wednesday afternoon and we'd get plonked under this great big tree and she'd read us Enid Blyton's 'Far Away Tree', and that made a huge impact on quite a group of us. We had Famous Five stories on Wednesday afternoons, if we'd completed all our work and she really got a lot of us into reading and that was when I was Standard One, yeah...made a huge impact. And then at College I had a maths teacher that made it fun. I was very lucky, I had her at Form Four and Form Five and at Form Six, I couldn't understand a thing, but she made it understandable and I could cope with the maths and that was a big impact for me too.*

#### **1.1.4 School Gave Me a Good Grounding in 'the Basics'**

Several respondents pointed out that school had given them a good grounding in 'the basics'. As Gabrielle suggested, *"I think probably you get your basic skills that you really need"*. Similarly, Tam noted that, *"actually in my experience and from others, they are giving basic, like the foundations, but if you have foundation, you can learn anything. So that is the main thing"*. This preparation in 'the basics' was sometimes located at primary level, as Gordon described: *"I was hardly the best behaved student"*, he said, *"and because of that, my parents put me into...quite a strict religious private school and from there I would say that I was directed, in other words, I became a model student. My education become what it should be at that age, before that I was fairly low educated and then from there I went to...just a state school, state college and it was thanks to that grounding, the strict discipline on education, that I went the right way through college. I think that that primary school basis is very important"*.

#### **1.1.5 School was a Positive Social Experience**

School was described as a positive social experience by a number of respondents. James explained that *"when I left the fifth form I spent some time travelling and working and I came back to school and this time I tried...and I just had a real ball, sixth and seventh form was just a lot of fun and I think it might have been because I knew what it was like to work and it was nice just to be a kid again. I had really supportive friends and good friends, so...um...yeah, they were great years"*. Laura too viewed this part of school life very positively. She said that *"school was a social event for me, it was social and it was all about playing sport. I was in every sports team I could possibly be"*. In addition to enjoying the social side of school life, the experience of getting along with a wide range of people was also mentioned. Luke, for example, said that *"school gave me the experience of working with people, diverse range of people and getting on with them"*.

#### **1.2 School was Fine, But I Failed to Take Advantage of it**

Ten respondents, all women, claimed that although their experience of school was 'fine', they had not taken advantage of the opportunities that had come their way. Rachel, for instance, said that she had not valued her school education, *"you'd be a fool to say that it was all a waste of time, but I think looking back on it, I didn't value it enough...I don't think I valued it for what it was"*. Others in this category noted that

they had not worked hard enough. Joyce, for example, said she wished she had applied herself better at school, suggesting that *“the opportunity was there when you are young you waste”*, while Ashley reflected, *“probably I should have worked harder to be better at it... I think it would have just prepared me better and probably given me more of an idea of what I wanted to do when I was older”*. Gudrun too noted that, *“I definitely didn't apply myself at school, just made sure I passed”*.

### **1.3 School was a Negative Experience**

More than half the respondents made negative comments about their secondary schooling. In the same way that the greatest number of positive comments about school focused on how well it had prepared participants for the world of work, the largest number of negative comments also centred on how poorly school had prepared students for 'real life' and the workforce. The overall picture was of a sizable group of young people struggling with work issues who perceived their school experiences to have been inadequate preparation for adult working life. This dominant negative evaluation is discussed in the next section, followed by paragraphs which focus on two less prevalent negative themes: that school curricula and organization were inadequate; and that school didn't work for me.

#### **1.3.1 School was not Practical Enough**

The most common negative comments about school centred on the idea that it was not practical enough to prepare young(er) people for the workforce. Laura noted that *“the practical side of things...I don't know how much of that I picked up at school...I really don't see any correlation between my schooling years and working”*. Similarly, Adam suggested that *“high school is far too slow and is not practical enough for the majority of people”*. Jane, too, noted that *“school could have done better to prepare me for work. We didn't have a lot of work experience, we had one day a year but I think we could have had more”*. Gudrun framed her answer this way: *“prepared for work? Not well, obviously we learnt to read and write but we weren't taught business skills, basic communication skills, yes, but mainly they relied on what you were going to study after school for your line of work. I do find that a lot of the skills we were taught were more the reading and writing things, we weren't exposed to different strategies, the main stream, this is how you do it and make sure you understand it”*.

Several participants commented that budgeting should have been taught at school. Charlotte said: *“I think one thing that should be taught at high school is finance and personal finance. It is to easy for kids to go out of school now and be thrown out into the real world and that's... when I first left I went to university away from home and I was on the old student loan scheme where you just got huge amounts of money...you just rung up and got it. That was a government thing, but we should have been taught financial skills”*. Jane made a similar suggestion, claiming that some experience with personal budgeting would have been helpful at a later date, *“so when you were in the workforce you could deal with the money you are getting now”*.

Other respondents suggested that the things that assisted them most in the work force came from their parents or their families rather than school. Cindy noted that *“the only thing with the school that I went to that was missing was...I think me and my brother discussed this as well, work habits...we do have good work habits but we*

weren't always taught to...I don't know...be driven and finish off what we were doing. That sort of stuff came from my parents, not so much from the teachers or the actual system of school...I think that was missing". Along the same lines, Caitlin claimed that "I don't think it prepared me much at all. Most of it's from my family values, from my parents", while Laura said "I think a lot more of that was picked up at home and in a social sense, than school".

### 1.3.2 School Curricula and Organization were Inadequate

Comments that located the inadequacy of school in particular aspects of the curriculum or school organisation were also made by several participants. Ngaire complained: "that's what I hate about school at the moment, they're like, pick your subjects now and that's...there's only a few things we can take into university and let's say you didn't do physics or something and you really enjoy it, it's heaps hard to get into university and I hate having to choose because I don't know...yeah, picking subjects, I reckon we should be able to have more broader ranges. If you're into science then you could just do all of it instead of just having to pick one". Similarly, Danielle said "I wished high school had sort of pushed the compulsory side of certain subjects right the way through high school, because I think going to university, if you don't have the right subjects, you are actually...all of a sudden your limited to what you want to do and we're talking, seventeen, eighteen, you're trying to predict your whole destiny and your whole future at 17".

### 1.3.3 School Didn't Work for Me

A small number of participants claimed that school did not work for them because of personal difficulties. Sophia, for example, said that "teachers did the best job they could under the circumstances. I really didn't exactly make it easy for them". Donna explained that:

*I looked after my two brothers and then I hit fifth form so that was pretty hard for study because my parents usually dumped the kids on me all the time and I pretty much had no social life, I'd stay home all the time, up until I was about sixth form and I pretty much bombed out on all my exams. I was working part-time as well. I had to try and work enough to pay for my exams and it was a waste of time because when I did it I didn't have the energy all the time to study, so I wish I had...I wish I'd had just a bit more chance to get the qualifications that I needed. Heather noted that I just used to daydream when I was at school because I didn't want to study. I just...I just didn't really succeed in my studies and yeah...I think because I was always a poor reader, I just didn't have the vocab.*

Others complained that school did not work for them because it did not encourage learning, or because the teachers were poor. With respect to the former, for instance, Brenda said "I hated high school. There was no motivation to learn, there was...there was nothing at the end. We weren't educated on the importance of what we were meant to be learning. It was just we had to do it because it was there, there was no push to show us about the opportunities that we could have through getting high marks in Sixth Form or choosing certain subjects. It was just made to be that...show us what you wanted to do and that was just it. There was no reasoning, no

*explanation, it was just what you did". With regard to the latter, Grace noted: "I think high school is a bit of a joke, to be honest, because the teachers there are trying to accommodate for all the students and the ones that want to learn get left behind because of the children that don't want to learn and the teachers trying to deal with them".*

## **2. TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Respondents were asked the questions:

What did you get out of your course of tertiary study? What benefits did you get from it? How well did it meet your expectations? Were there any gaps in it?

More than three-quarters of the participants made positive comments about their tertiary education, slightly more than those who made positive evaluations of their school experiences. There was a significant discrepancy, however, between participants' negative evaluations of secondary and tertiary education: the number of negative comments made about the former was almost double those made about the latter. The overall picture was of a group of young(er) people who were largely positive about their tertiary education experiences. Positive evaluations fell into four main categories: (2.1) tertiary education provided me with practical skills relevant to my employment; (2.1.1) tertiary education facilitated my independence, self-discipline and self-development; (2.1.2) I gained knowledge and theory from my tertiary education; and (2.1.3) tertiary education was positive for a variety of specific reasons.

### **2.1 Tertiary Education Provided Me with Practical Skills Relevant to my Employment**

The vast majority of participants' positive evaluations of tertiary education referred to the relevant skills they had acquired during their training. These comments were generally delivered with considerable enthusiasm and energy, suggesting that respondents perceived a strong connection between what they had learned and the work they were doing.

In some cases participants acknowledged that they had acquired a set of generic skills during their tertiary education that they were subsequently able to apply in a specific workplace situation. Jasmine, for example, noted that:

*I learnt skills that have been really useful in the workforce. The whole process of researching things and having to think about things that other people have written and put your own spin on it and that kind of thing, those are skills that everybody that goes into this type of job, that goes into a professional job, uses, so that was really interesting. I could see the benefit of having studied those things right from really early on in journalism school. Cindy commented that it just went hand in hand so well because I did microbiology, we did lab work and growing bacteria and stuff. That's my job and I was like, this is just so easy. I didn't have to think, I didn't have to learn anything new, I'd already learnt it all. The only thing was that we were just testing for different strains of bacteria, but*

*whereas the core of it was exactly the same - it's universal - the methods you use are universal. I was like, this is really cool, I don't have to do anything new. This is the stuff I already know.*

A number of participants pointed out the benefits of the practical aspect of their tertiary training. Cindy said *"we had more hands on stuff, and that was really cool. That kept me at it...the practical side, big time. You get the real view of things and you're hands-on, then and there and you know what...when you see stuff on the news and you're like...I so understand what you're saying and I know that dah, dah, dah, so you sort of... it's really cool to know and know the processes behind it and to have seen it for yourself"*. Barbara, a teacher, explained that *"the best parts probably about college were the practicums. Being out there with the children and applying what you've learnt in class, what you would seek and find out for your assignments. You actually got to see what it was really all about"*.

### **2.1.1 Tertiary Education Facilitated my Independence, Self-discipline and Self-development**

Several respondents made the connection between tertiary education and independence, both in the sense of being able to work autonomously as a result of tertiary education, and in terms of the way tertiary education facilitates personal independence. Holly, for example, claimed that *"I got a good education, I got the opportunity to go on and study further and develop my career. I also got a sense of...kind of independence as well"*. Brianna too made this link, noting that *"in terms of in-depth analysis, some of the research is...they are relevant in terms of making you learn the skills to go and do independent research, online skills in other things"*. Similarly, Jack commented *"I think university was a lot more rewarding because you're working for yourself and you're achieving exactly what you wanted to do"*.

Self-discipline was also identified as a product of tertiary education. Jennifer suggested that *"getting a degree is not about learning what you need for the workplace, it's more about showing that you have the discipline to complete something...I think it did teach me discipline, because you are taken from the environment of being at school where you are kind of forced into classes and so forth, so university where you attend if you want to or not if you don't, so you learn very quickly to attend, so discipline, I think, is quite important"*. Similarly, Maria said *"I do think that that self discipline that you have to have when you reach university...you've got all these assignments, you've got stuff going on, you've got lectures you've got to get to, you have got to keep an eye on the time, all of those things, you're having to control, whereas when you're at secondary school and all that, you haven't really got a choice, you're at school, you're there. You can't leave until 3.15 sort of thing. So I think university and teachers' college is what's set me up, I suppose, to be effective in the workplace"*.

Self-development too was a common theme, mostly linked to the development of the thinking self and the confidence this inspires. The following quote from James' interview typifies this kind of response. He said:

*I guess the biggest thing was a lot more confidence in myself. I know that I can do well at particular things. I can pick something up and be able to work with*

*it...one of the courses that I had to do was persuasion in speech communication, and I'd never given more than a two minute speech in front of people and I was asked to do a ten minute speech and so that was a real achievement for me because I saw that I could do that, and so I had that confidence and that was one really big thing that I gained and also that I can make people laugh and I hadn't done that before on stage and that sort of thing.*

### **2.1.2 I Gained Knowledge and Theory from My Tertiary Education**

Knowledge and theory were commonly cited in participants' positive comments on tertiary education. When asked about the benefits of his tertiary study, Blake said "*just knowledge. So much more knowledge about [how] everything works and things that just...from what I've learnt at uni I've started to realise...just use that knowledge to go into a whole lot more stuff. All the basics of electronics or whatever and you can use that to let your mind run and just come up with ideas and stuff*". Melissa also talked about knowledge, commenting that "*it did give a lot of knowledge. It sort of introduced me to a lot of topics that perhaps I wasn't dealing with at the level I was working at. Then when you come across something in the future, I'd have some level of familiarity with it*". Grace, a teacher, claimed that "*I suppose it met my expectations, the fact that I know the theory behind childhood education and childhood learning and what you can do to include theory and stuff like that*".

### **2.1.3 Tertiary Education was Positive for a Variety of Reasons**

The social side of advanced education was cited by a number of participants as a positive aspect of their tertiary learning experience. Adam explained that "*a lot of information I got from that [university] didn't make me more intelligent. Invariably varsity helps with life skills because I found that controlling flatting and controlling a flat finances and being in that social environment was good as well*". Similarly, Hope noted that "*I think I got a lot out of it, not just in the academic, but also the social, which I think...most people should go and get a good education because you don't just learn the book learning, you're learning all the other stuff*". The value of friendship was also mentioned. Gemma, for example, said "*I came out with good friends, colleagues*", while Brenda emphasised both friendship and diversity, explaining that she had "*huge friendships at [named university] and all the camaraderie side, study groups and diverse group of people, age wise, gender...*".

Several respondents described the benefits they derived from changing courses during their tertiary training. Norah talked about this kind of transition in the following way:

*I studied music at first, because that had been an interest for me, right from my school years. I didn't enjoy that very much, I found it quite insular and limiting, which was not great. I changed my course of study to law and enjoyed that a lot more. It was a lot more expansive and I enjoyed the chance to grapple with and the process of law and the history and yeah, I think the law courses met my expectations. I think a law degree is fairly comprehensive. It is quite a general degree I suppose. It doesn't necessarily prepare you for the job that you go into, but it's equipped you with the skills to get in there and figure out how to do it.*

A number of positive comments were more difficult to categorise. These ranged in subject from the value of extramural study and the positive aspects of competition, to several contributions which were positive about tertiary education in a very general way. Josh, an extramural student, noted that *“you communicate directly with the lecturer...even though I know there are other people as well, I just feel like it's me and the lecturer and that feels quite good and the contact courses as well, which are small...it's no bigger than a normal tutorial”*. Brenda pointed out that *“competition, [which I] never learnt...at...high school. I had a strong sense of achievement to be better than everyone in my class”*. Those whose positive comments were more general stated that tertiary education was *“pretty good”* (Andrew), *“really positive”* (Holly), that they had *“learnt so much through Uni”* (Amelia), and were *“pretty happy with where it's going”* (Dylan).

## **2.2 Tertiary Education was a Negative Experience**

Almost a third of the respondents made negative comments about their tertiary study. Like the positive evaluations, the majority of these focused on (2.1) the fact that tertiary education did not prepare young(er) people well for working life. Other participants claimed that it was (2.2) boring, that (2.3) they were not given enough assistance to make major career and curriculum decisions, and that (2.4) there were problems with the tertiary institution's curriculum or organization. Lastly, section 2.5 contains a range of negative comments that do not reflect these dominant themes.

### **2.2.1 Tertiary Education Did Not Prepare Me Well for Working Life**

Most of the respondents who made negative comments about their tertiary education claimed that it did not prepare them well for working life. Hannah explained that *“after performing art school I went into photography, it didn't really prepare me for work...for me it had a lot to do with how to behave around adults, this intimidated me the most how to be in a work place and how to present yourself just wasn't covered”*. Tom, a teacher, claimed that the *“Teaching Postgrad Diploma wasn't very good at all. I left thinking oh man, how am I going to teach? I was there for a whole year studying and...I thought we'd be there 9.00 to 5.00 working every day, but it turned out some days I'd only have two hours worth of lectures and I always thought that was...I think a year to prepare you to put you in front of a class I think is pretty thin on the ground. I sort of left thinking oh man. When I went to England as well, I got thrown in the deep end. That was quite interesting. My teaching qualification I thought...could've been a lot more intense”*.

Brenda, also a teacher, said that part of her tertiary education had: *“not really [helped] at all. The teaching practice definitely prepared me for the workforce. Doing the actual papers didn't”*. Similarly, Nigel noted that *“a big part of my job is relationships with people and it didn't do such a good job of that probably and then also things like balancing lifestyle, because I think it's just the nature of the job, it's very easy for work life to infringe on personal life and it wasn't so good at helping with that...It helped a little bit but now I realise it didn't help at all”*. Adam claimed that *“a lot of information I got from [tertiary education] didn't make me more intelligent...It can be a waste of time for a lot of people unless you are doing something very specific with a specific goal at the end”*.

### **2.2.2 Tertiary Education was Boring**

In addition to the majority of young(er) people in the study who claimed that their tertiary education was irrelevant to their subsequent working lives, several participants complained that tertiary education was boring. Brianna explained that *“the lectures could be made more interesting with more real life practical things. I think that’s the main thing that’s missing. We as students are not encouraged to come to lectures. We are left as...no one’s taking the roll or anything, that’s all right, but we should be encouraged and there should be an incentive to go more to the lectures and that could be done by making it more interesting, rather than a blatant one hour, two hour, monotone lecturer, going on and on”*. Along the same lines, Danielle claimed that *“the actual varsity stuff [was] boring. A lot of it you just do it because you have to do it”*.

### **2.2.3 There was Insufficient Assistance Given to Make Major Curriculum and Career Decisions**

Other respondents maintained that they did not receive adequate assistance to make major curriculum and career decisions. Charlotte’s comment is typical of these responses. She said:

*I can’t remember getting any career counselling at school. I thought I was going to be a chef and three weeks before university started I decided I was going to go to university. I don’t know if that was a problem with me or just a problem with the support that I had up until then through the education system. I was so set on being a chef. I thought on reflection that is quite strange... And I find when I did [go to university]...it was great to go and study but when you are that young, you don’t look at the bigger picture and I had flicked between different majors and took on different subjects which I didn’t need and more recently I got a whole lot of different information from [named] University. I have ended up with a wad of paper, absolutely huge numbers of booklets and I don’t even know where to start.*

### **2.2.4 Tertiary Curricula and Organization were Inadequate**

Several participants experienced problems with the curricula or organisation of their tertiary institution. Amelia, for example, explained that *“the problems I have would be just the system itself. Things that can’t be really fixed but there are too many students and the time of lectures, there is no feedback on my assignments and I think that is appalling. How can you advance when you don’t know where you are going wrong? Things like this. I have got a few grudges against [named university] because it’s not student focused and I find that really difficult”*. Samuel also experienced problems with the university system, claiming that *“I’d start qualifications and then the criteria would change and it’s happened through secondary education and through university education...When I went to look at going back to university, because of the bulging number of students in the university system at that time, there was no real direction being given or available to be given and we just had to make our own way through...That got revamped through the NZQA network and that was established and I ended up having to do...I had to look at doing another 12 months*

worth of education to get to the same status that I would have been in if I'd started the year ahead”.

### **2.2.5 Tertiary Study Didn't Work for Me Because...**

The negative comments made by participants in this category fall into three main areas: those who claimed that tertiary education did not work for them because they had not applied themselves; those who said that their student loan was a problem; and those who maintained that tertiary education was generally a negative experience. Danielle's comment is indicative of those in the first area. She said *“I was one of those students that like to party most days of the week, and always left stuff to the last minute, so it taught me to basically take shortcuts where necessarily...do the bare minimum, do what you need to do to pass and keep people happy and you get your degree and diploma at the end of it all without too much stress”*. Charlotte's comment falls into the next category. She noted that *“the only regret I have is the huge amount of debt which no one is helping with”*. The final category contains comments like Jeevan's. When asked what he had got from his education, he said *“at the moment no, nothing”*.

## **3. CAREER PLANNING**

Participants were asked:

To what extent have you consciously gone about planning a pathway to work?  
Please elaborate.

The disparate responses to this question suggest that participants had widely varying ideas about what constitutes career planning. Despite this fact, however, most respondents claimed that they had planned (or attempted to plan) their working lives in some way.

### **3.1 Those with Some Consciousness of Career Planning**

The most common conceptualisation of planning amongst these interviewees involved (3.1.1) making educational and occupational choices based on interests. Almost as numerous were statements that conceived of planning as a (3.1.2) strategy of acquiring qualifications and experience in a deliberate way. Next were those who defined planning as the (3.1.3) setting of some kind of direction in their career, even if it was vague and those who limited planning to (3.1.4) something you do more as you get older. Other respondents used planning in the sense of (3.1.5) setting long term goals; as a (3.1.6) networking exercise; as the act of (3.1.7) arranging work and domestic responsibilities; as (3.1.8) an activity performed in consultation with one's employer; and finally, (3.1.9) in terms of unsuccessful attempts to plan. In the following segments some examples of these major themes are provided, before moving on to the two main groups of non-planners (3.2): those who (3.2.1) prefer to 'go with the flow' rather than plan and those who (3.2.2) do no career planning whatsoever.

### **3.1.1 Planning is Making Educational and Occupational Choices Based on Interests**

Most of the comments that fall into this category do not involve the use of any formal assessment tools, but rather an intuitive matching of self and opportunities. Amber explained that *“I have always wanted to go into IT and go into project management. I started that late and I travelled and worked from home a few of the years, but finally got there, but then I guess my first job was just anything in IT to get, again, a foot in the door”*. Blake took a similar approach, saying *“well I just like building stuff and making stuff and there is a lot of things, so I just sort of thought engineering would be the way to go, you know? Good job, you get good money out of it. There's quite a range you can go into with engineering, so that's what I thought. As long as I'm designing and making something, I'm happy”*.

Nigel, a youth pastor, noted that he planned his career *“quite consciously. I was at a school in Texas for two years before I went and did my degree out at Bible College and while I was there...even before then I knew where I wanted to work with youth and with young people in some kind of aspect and then while I was in [the U.S.] it became more defined that being a youth pastor was something I wanted to do and I specifically came back to New Zealand to go to Bible College to get a degree so I could get the qualifications and become a youth pastor”*. Ingrid was similarly conscious of her own career planning. She said *“I'm a very focused person and I've always known where I want to go and I've developed this passion for...statistics and I've also...always had a passion for teaching and inspiring and motivating others, so I guess those two together have set the path for me of where I want to go and what I want to achieve”*.

Only one participant mentioned receiving professional advice. Stella talked about her experience in the following way.

*I went to a careers advisor and they told me I should look at civil engineering or surveying and I sort of found out a bit about them and ended up working casually for a surveyor in Christchurch and applied to survey school and got in, into the second year, which was really good, so I needed another three years to do and then in that time I also worked part-time in the holidays as a surveyor for the government in Rotorua and really liked it, because I was working outside and it was sunny and...you know, and then I wanted to come back to Wellington, because of my partner at the time, husband, was moving here, so I had a friend that was working here and I got an interview and had another interview and had a job offered sort of the next day.*

### **3.1.2 Planning is a Deliberate Strategy of Acquiring Qualifications and Experience**

This group of respondents talked about a deliberate choice of career path based on the acquisition of relevant skills and experience. Maria told this story about her developing career as a teacher.

*When I first started teaching I wanted to get a grip on what it was about, for the first two, three years, and sort of feel comfortable with that, so I got that and I*

*felt comfortable and then...I did a few years in the senior school and then I moved down a little bit and then I took up a position of responsibility, a team leader position, which was just a temporary thing, we had a staff member leave. I thought I'd try that out, a leadership role, more responsibility, but decided it wasn't for me, not because it was too hard, but just because of the time and energy needed in that role, I felt was taking away from what I wanted in my job, and that was I wanted to be with the children...so I declined that the following year and then headed down into the junior school, so for me that was my path, dabble in a bit of management, see how I felt, and then moved down and do different levels and that's what I've done.*

Samuel described a long-term approach to career planning. He was, he said:

*still working towards that and I've chosen the relevant qualifications, relevant block courses and so forth, that give me the skills to take me in that direction. I feel comfortable that I'm moving in that direction...I'll be looking at divesting into equity or capital type ventures and also probably going more on the contracting route of operating and that's where directorships, CEO type roles, senior management type roles, looking at those, in line with probably a family and given my partner is on a higher education level than I am, she'll probably be the staple breadwinner in the family. So that's what I envisage. In ten years time I'll be looking at hopefully a lot more consultancy type work at senior management level, giving strategic focus on organisations on a contractual basis plus investing in and to pick up small directorships, type work.*

### **3.1.3 Planning is Setting a Direction, Even if it is Vague**

Gabrielle's comment about career planning exemplifies many of the responses in this category. She said *"I've been making plans, really only in recent years I'd say, everything else until now has been fairly haphazard. It's really only been in the last six years that I've started looking at my options, thinking what I really want to do and even if I get this job in Wellington that I'm looking at, it's still in sales and marketing, it's still in the same area, but I've only done, sort of serious planning, in recent years. I'm still not sure, I'm still uncertain"*. Melissa's contribution is also typical. *"The only conscious things I've done is start to talk to a few people and really just scan over the paper looking at what's around and sometimes there are supplements about study, tertiary study and I've read through them, but I haven't really done any more than that"*.

### **3.1.4 Planning is Something You do as You Get Older**

These respondents all indicated that they had only begun to plan their careers as they got older. Nicole noted that *"I guess now I'm 30, the ripe old age, I'm a little bit more focused on what it is I actually want to do and how to go about that"*. Ryan made a similar point, explaining that *"in the past year well the last three months...three to six months, would be considerable. It's a deliberate effort now, whereas I think my career path previously has sort of...almost an accidental tourist. I just happened to be in a situation and my roles have evolved as opposed to me deliberately going out and saying this is where I want to go...I thought that that's where I wanted to be a while back, but this was part of this wafting around, but now that I've had a taste of it,*

*there's...I'm a lot more coconscious and going ahead with that and being deliberate in that planning".*

### **3.1.5 Planning is Setting Long Term Goals**

This group of participants said little about the planning process itself, but were looking several years ahead in terms of their career goals. Samantha said *"I'm a journalist, but it [a job she had taken] was in communications, so I took it, thinking, well it's where I wanted to go in five years anyway"*. Using the same time frame, Jack noted *"I intend to work for the next five years without any real commitment to career and then after that I'm looking at either doing teacher training, which is another year, with my degree, or possibly starting a business in terms of cafes, bars...with my mates. Basically I'm just giving myself five years of working anything and then get down to serious careers"*. Lydia too is setting long term goals, explaining that *"I enrolled for my extramural study to get my degree. So that's a long-term goal because it'll be in total about 12 years"*. Overall, the comments in this and the previous category suggest that for a significant group of young(er) people, career planning becomes important only after several years in the labour market, during which time they take up opportunities as they arise.

### **3.1.6 Planning is Networking**

Meeting the right people and getting valuable guidance from them exemplified the notion of career planning for several respondents. Charlotte, for example, talked about how she obtained the job she wanted in the book trade by following the guidance of various important contacts. She said, *"I think contacts is one of the key factors in employment today. It really is. I had...I was actually working in a bookstore. I had to get book trade experience. Without that I don't think I would've got into this job. But contacts, absolutely and doing research towards the job I found...I actually went for the job as a book publicist and the first time I missed out and I was told I need to get more media experience, which I did and then got an interview six months later. I had really good support from the owner of the bookshop who knows everyone in the book trade...It was certainly a career path"*.

### **3.1.7 Planning is Balancing Work and Home Life**

Participants whose replies fell into this category found it necessary to plan their work lives around their family responsibilities. Diane explained that *"I always wanted to be a teacher in sports, but I'm not sure what I want to do now. It's a real quandary about whether I want to work or not...The plan I had was to have my baby, go to Uni for a 3 year degree, work for a couple of years to establish my career then have another baby and go back to work. But another baby came unexpectedly. I get bored with courses, I did some secretarial/admin courses and I just got bored with them"*. Interestingly, the respondents in this category were not all female. Samuel noted that he would be organising his career differently in the future, *"in line with probably a family and given my partner is on a higher education level than I am, she will probably be the staple breadwinner in the family. So that's what I envisage. In ten years time I will be looking at hopefully a lot more consultancy type work at senior management level, giving strategic focus on organisations on a contractual basis plus investing in and to pick up small directorships, type work"*.

### **3.1.8 Planning is Achieved in Consultation with an Employer**

Several respondents conceptualised career planning as something that could be achieved in direct consultation with an immediate superior or with someone in another part of the employing organisation. With respect to the former, Adam claimed that he planned *“to stay with and talk with my immediate manager about things I want to do and achieve within my role, that’s very short term planning within 6-12 months”*. In terms of the latter, Tane said that internal coaching played a central part in his career planning. He noted that *“we’ve got a business coach here and we’ve got my date plans and procedures and systems to follow and after each milestone that we achieve we have a reward and so it’s kind of stepped out”*.

### **3.1.9 Unsuccessful Attempts to Plan**

Participants’ career planning was not always successful. Brenda explained that:

*yeah, that was carefully planned out to go into my degree. Of course things veer off in other ways. I did my honours year thinking that that would...because I did early childhood training, did my honours year thinking that that would help me get into a primary school, obviously didn’t read the fine print fine enough, and that wasn’t the case. So I will probably have to go back and do more study to get into a primary school. Yeah...I know what I need to do and I’m just figuring about whether I stay at my job and get my registration, because that’s going to benefit me, being a registered teacher, I’m going to get the job over someone who has only just left. Even if it is experience in early childhood, it’s still experience and they don’t have to spend more money on me to get registered, so that’s carefully planned out, but I just have to work out when I’m going to do it.*

## **3.2 Those who Reject Planning**

A minority of respondents rejected the idea of planning, either because they preferred to ‘go with the flow’ rather than plan, or because they had not planned their career paths at all.

### **3.2.1 I Prefer to ‘Go With the Flow’**

An aversion to career planning specifically, and a laissez-faire attitude towards employment issues in general, were reflected in the comments of these interviewees. Jennifer’s contention is typical. She maintained that she had not planned her career, and noted *“I’m kind of a ‘take it as it comes’ person. I don’t have a five-year plan or a ten-year plan, or anything like that, so...I tend to fall into roles, more than plan”*. The comments of several other participants contain identical sentiments: Lily has never been a *“big ‘sit down and set goals’, type person”*; Tom hasn’t *“really thought about any conscious plan”*; and Emily has *“just gone with the flow”*. Gudrun explained that *“I haven’t gone and consciously thought this is what I want to be. I think it just comes. I’ve ended up in teaching, it’s just sort of evolved and been drawn to education. I would never have said when I was studying that I’d be doing this”*.

### 3.2.2 I Have Not Planned my Career

Some participants claimed that they had not planned their careers at all. Danielle, for example, explained that she “*just kind of got told along the way that I'd make a good sales person, just because when I am really passionate about something...and just in life in general, like whether it be a new product that I've bought as a consumer and stuff...if I really like something, I really push it onto other people*”. When asked to what extent they had planned their careers, Chelsea and Chloe made similar statements, the former answering “*to no extent...I've got another two and a half years to figure that out, to work out what I like and what I don't like*”, and the latter saying “*not really, no, I don't know what I'm going to do when I'm older*”.

## OTHER FACTORS

### (a) GENDER

Male and female respondents were asked the following question:

You are a young woman (young man) working. What's it like for women (men) in the working world? Is it any different for men (women)? Could you give me an example?

Interestingly, the proportion of women and men who believed either that gender *was* an issue in the contemporary labour market, or that it *wasn't*, were very similar. Seventy-five percent of women and 68 percent of men maintained that gender was an issue in the employment arena, while 25 percent of women and 32 percent of men claimed that it was not. In the following analysis, the views of women and men who believed that gender was an issue with respect to paid work are examined in more detail. Their perspectives are discussed in turn, beginning with women's views on the influence of gender in the workplace followed by the comments made by male respondents on this issue.

### 1. Women's Views

#### 1.1 Gender is an Issue: Women are Discriminated Against in the Workplace

Three-quarters of the female respondents involved in the research believed that women and men are treated differently in the workplace. Discrimination against women was the dominant theme.

##### 1.1.2 Women are Discriminated Against in Terms of Career Advancement

Many of the female participants claimed that women in the workforce experience discrimination in terms of career advancement. Ruby, a midwife, claimed that “*I think it's true that males do go up the ladder a lot quicker than females, especially in charge positions. We've got a male charge midwife at [named hospital] and I think male gender does play a big part*”. Norah made a similar comment about the legal profession, saying “*we don't even have any female partners and even in the other firms that I've worked in...Yeah...I think if you want to make it to that level, you*

*probably have to act in a different way to what you would naturally, and then you have considerations whether or not you want to have a family and taking career breaks and things like that and that certainly is a factor that affects you in your career. Yeah, it's different".* She also maintained that *"in my field it's very male dominated at a senior level...At a junior level recruitment would be similar for men and women...but as you move up through the firm, women want to drop out to have families and...yeah, don't seem to progress as much"*.

Ingrid says of her workplace,<sup>6</sup> *"out of all [the] executive leaders, there's only one woman. Out of all the senior leaders, the majority are men...I think we speak different languages and they don't hear what we're saying, in the same way they hear what another man is saying. Sounds like I'm getting a bit deep but..."* [laughs]. With respect to the publishing industry, Charlotte noted that *"although it is about to change here, all the CEOs are men, however it is the females who are the biggest book buyers and who dominate the book trade"*. While Linda believed that discrimination against women in career advancement was slowly changing for the better, Caitlin was more pessimistic, explaining *"I can't get a management position being a woman. We're a huge worldwide company and we've got maybe one woman manager out of the whole lot. It's very sexist, it's hard...it's a bit sad"*.

### **1.1.3 Industries and Occupations are Male-Dominated**

The male dominance of certain industries and occupations was also a frequent comment. Stella described surveying as *"a male dominated industry. I think that that's kind of like what's happened in the past, but people coming through...in surveying, the numbers of women are still quite low, but in engineering the numbers of women have risen quite a lot and I think that over the next 20 years or whatever, it will start to become a little bit more balanced, if you like, and in that time I think there will be issues that will be worked through in terms of career paths for women who want to have families and stuff"*. Danielle made a similar claim about the sales and grocery industry, saying *"I think women are perceived very differently in the workplace. I still think it's very, very male dominated, particularly in sales and the grocery industry...very much a boys club, yeah"*.

Various participants referred to the strength of masculine networks in the world of work. Chelsea noted that *"some work seems to have masculine type networks that men can very easily fit into and have a blokey laugh with someone, and that puts them on side straight away. I think...some men have more extensive networks...their family and people like that. I think that there's still an attitude that men are more respected and the decisions they make are more authoritative"*. Similarly, Hope maintained that *"there are still more opportunities for men. I think it is a lot easier. I think women have to work harder to try and get halfway to where men are, as much as I hate to say that, but it's just I think a reality, unfortunately...I just think about my husband. He just seems to have a hell of a lot easier time of trying to...stumbling upon positions or stumbling upon...you know, networking with other men who say, oh, you know...recommending so and so or... it just seems to be a lot more...maybe it's more the fact that there is an established pattern of that kind of thing with men, more so than there are with women"*.

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<sup>6</sup> The industry is not identified here in order to protect her anonymity.

#### 1.1.4 Women: Home and Work

The widely held expectation that women focus their energy on home rather than paid employment was also mentioned by many respondents. Gudrun said *“women in the working world - the main difference would be if they have a family just trying to juggle your responsibilities, keeping the house in order and running like a machine. For men they can just get off to work and concentrate at work and not worry about if the kids are ill or if the washing [is] going to get done. Even when I'm working I still have other things going on at home, I know the washing is out early in the morning and it will be dry when I get home. When I've been ill it has been a problem”*. Lauren also points to women's greater focus on home life, saying *“I think for women career is important but so is family and since I've had children I've changed what I want. If your child is sick you need to take time off work to look after them. A man is less likely to do that, it would be left up to the women. It is easier for men to arrange their lives around their working life than women. I don't want it to be, but it is”*.

Melissa and Isabella both presented examples of male family members who are able to focus exclusively on their paid employment because their wives take care of family responsibilities. Melissa claimed that her husband is able to forget about his family life *“because he knows I'm doing it all at home”*. Women, on the other hand, sometimes put pressure on themselves. *“When you go to work”*, she said, *“you can't just forget about the other things that you're organising in your life”*. Similarly, Isabella noted that her brother is *“quite a young father, he's got two children and it's like, I go to work every day, why should I come home and look after the kids? That's wrong. There's some inequality there. Oh yeah”*. In contrast, she said, *“women will go...have children, make sure the husband's sorted out and then go to work”*.

#### 1.1.5 Women and Men are Treated Differently

According to some respondents, women are disadvantaged by differential treatment in the workforce. Donna maintained that *“it is very different for men. I think men have pretty much got the upper hand. The way we get looked at, we are not superior to the guys in our industry, we actually have to go out and get the qualifications in order to be recognised”*. Diane suggested that *“it is harder for women in labour or trade jobs because women are underestimated. Office work isn't perceived as a hard job. My partner and I used to argue about this because he thought his work was harder than mine but my work also included looking after the kids, cooking, cleaning and my work. He is old fashioned and doesn't think he should help with these things”*. Amelia perceived it to be a generational issue, noting that *“I think when you come up to 'old school' that generation, males, 50, white man, you... you come up against things like that and there is that guy feeling in there”*.

Several respondents in this category mentioned that both age and gender disadvantaged women in the workforce. Gemma recalled *“initially when I started...a male psychologist really had no respect for your opinion and they'd make decisions without involving you and what you do, planning for the children in your area of expertise without asking you anything, which is really difficult. They were only like that until they realised I was competent and knew what I was...but initially because of being young and a female, I think that's why they were that way”*. Similarly, Sophia

said *"I have a feeling from time to time with my current employer that he thinks I'm a little bit stupid and I don't know whether that's an age thing...I don't know whether it's an age thing because I am only 22, or whether it's because I'm a female"*.

### **1.1.6 Men and Women are Suitable for Different Jobs**

A number of participants suggested that women and men were different and were therefore suited to different jobs. Ingrid, for example, said *"I think that's a natural thing that we will have a different way of connecting with each other, even woman to woman, but I definitely think that men and women speak different languages"*. Elizabeth claimed that women *"are more suited to the face to face and customer service jobs. Men can a little abrupt on the phone; there will always be those jobs more applicable to men like electrical and plumbers. I find as a manager females are more organised than men"*. This 'difference' was also identified at secondary school. Ngaire explained that *"for the guys it's more sports orientated and the girls are more the academic. We have a few girls that do well in sports but it's mainly if you're a guy you try and get into the first 15 or you get into the basketball team or something like that, and then all the girls are more like, oh well, I may as well stay in class"*.

### **1.1.7 Men are Paid More than Women**

The responses in this category can be divided into those who suggested that men in general are paid more than women, and those who claimed that men were paid more than women within specific industries. In terms of the former comments, Grace said *"I know that generally males earn more than females in other sectors"*, while Gabrielle said *"I know for a fact that women still get paid less for the same qualification, hours worked and the same job they do"*. With respect to the latter responses, Emily explained *"nobody talks about pay but I know that I don't get as much as the men. But they all treat me really well. I can't complain about how they treat me...they just don't think a woman can do the job as well. That's my perception anyway"*. And Heather, a teacher, said *"because they are normally the main breadwinner, to stay within a school, they will get offered more. They have their pay scale, but you hear that men will get offered, as an incentive to stay...but I would say that the men definitely get paid better"*.

### **1.1.8 Women and Childcare**

According to several interviewees, women are disadvantaged in the labour market because of the perception that they will leave paid work in order to care for their children. Stella's story is particularly pertinent.

*My boss might have said to another colleague, that he thought I would leave and have children and I was quite pissed off at the time about that, and did confront him to say, that's not fair, you don't know anything about what I'm going to do and maybe I can't have kids and all that sort of carry on, and he did realise that that was totally the incorrect thing to kind of have said...so I think once that was out in the open, it was quite clear that I was going to keep working towards furthering my career and family, that was...well they weren't going to consider it an issue, but it's a very male dominated industry that I work in, so once I did get my promotion the New Zealand manager actually spoke to me about that*

*and had heard that I had concerns that I might not get promoted if I had taken off work to have a family and I still think there possibly could have been that, you know... So I think possibly, that whole family thing, it could have...I think it could have slowed down my career, if you like. I don't know if that's real or perceived.*

### **1.1.9 Gender and the Education Sector**

Women employed in the education industry noted that the dominance of women in the sector made it a special case. The comments in this category fall into two main groups: those who claimed that education is dominated by women and that this is probably a bad thing; and those who maintained that women are disadvantaged by the predominance of their gender in the education industry. In terms of the former, Heather said *"I'm looking at a female dominated environment in teaching...it is and that's really, really sad because not all men are predators, just like not all women aren't predators. There's always the exception to the rule"*. Brenda's comment provides an example of the latter group. She claimed that *"it's a lot easier for males in education because there is a lack of them, to get a job. So generally if I'm up against a male with the same education as me, and experience...yeah, it's more likely that they will...a definite advantage, that they will get the job over me"*.

### **1.2 Women are Treated More Favourably**

Several female participants noted that women sometimes received more favourable treatment than men. Gabrielle's story exemplifies this category.

*Years ago I used to work for a company and I was their marketing manager for New Zealand and when it came time for me to leave, I was involved in doing some of the interviews for the new...employees, but I was just doing the preliminary ones, and then the company director who was based in Australia was coming to New Zealand to do the final interviews and he was very apprehensive about employing a man, even though the people that I'd talked to...there was a man there that I thought would be more appropriate than the other people, and in the end it turned out that the...my employer really wanted to have female staff because I think he saw them as being more pliable and he assumed that a man was going to be more likely to stand up to him if he didn't agree with how something was being done in the work place and I felt...the feeling that I got from him and some of the things that he said, it was that women could be more easily manipulated than men, which was pretty shocking.*

## **2. Men's Views**

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, almost 70 percent of the male respondents in the research believed that gender was an issue in some areas of the contemporary labour market. 32 percent, in contrast, maintained that it was not. Interestingly, the advantages for men that women perceived in terms of promotion and leadership positions are apparently invisible to men, only one of whom noted that they were favoured in career advancement relative to women.

## **2.1 Gender is an Issue: Men are Advantaged**

### **2.1.1 It is Harder for Women to Obtain Employment**

The comments in this category fall into two main groups: those who claimed that it was generally more difficult for women in the labour market and those who referred specifically to their own workplaces or industries. In terms of the former, Blake's comment is typical. He said *"I'm guessing it's probably harder for a female to get a job"*. With respect to the latter comments, Nathaniel noted that *"because I've only got...out of 100 guys, there's only one girl. I think it's a huge impact for females in that section"*. Similarly, Nigel explained *"traditionally women are seen...especially when it comes to pastors and ministers, women...they help their husbands or whatever. Things are changing but there's definitely a bias towards men and there's just a whole lot more men out there"*. Although he suggested that the gender balance was much more equal amongst youth pastors, he acknowledged that *"with ministry and with church positions, like with pastors and ministers, men outnumber women quite significantly. It's probably 80 percent or 90 percent of ministers of all types are men"*.

### **2.1.2 Men and Women are Treated Differently**

A number of gender-related employment issues were identified by respondents in this category. The common thread in all their comments, however, is the differential treatment of women and men in the workforce. James claimed that women experience discrimination in terms of their opportunities for advancement within the computer industry. *"I've worked in a help desk environment and there I've found that the fix between men and women is about 50/50, but then when you get onto higher levels like desktop support and network administration, it's always predominately male. The second level support, desktop support team that we had at [named company]...there was one woman out of about ten and then in the third level, like the networking and sort of engineering side of things, that was all male"*.

Jack acknowledged that women do not get paid as much as men, while Luke maintained that women and men are treated differently in his workplace. *"At the bar I work at the women are treated differently. The women get different attention than the men. It borders on sexual harassment. For women both work mates and patrons harass them, but for men, only the patrons"*. According to Josh, women and men are suited to different jobs. He said *"I think it's way different for men and women. Some jobs are easier for men and then some jobs are easier for women"*. Similarly, Dylan suggested that women's career behaviour is different from men's. *"I have noticed that in my year [photography diploma] there's perhaps one man to every six women, I guess...I've sort of noticed that men have a tendency to jump into the workforce sooner these days. Women tend to want to get more educated. Well I suppose it's the same, essentially. So in the area you're studying, you notice there is a lot more women studying than there are men"*.

## **2.2 Gender is an Issue: Women are Advantaged**

Only two percent of male respondents claimed that women were sometimes treated more favourably than men in the workforce. In contrast to the comments some women

made about the gender-related disadvantages they experienced in the teaching industry, Tom claimed *"I think women have a bit more of an advantage over guys. I definitely know it's the case at primary school. I know a lot of male primary school teacher friends who struggle to get jobs and they get... women are hired over them"*. Luke felt disadvantaged by his gender in the hospitality industry, claiming that *"I found when I was looking for work I couldn't get quite a lot of jobs because I couldn't make coffee!"*

## **(b) STUDENT LOANS**

Participants were asked:

Do you have a student loan? What sort of impact does it have on you?

A quarter of all the interviewees in the study reported that they did have an outstanding student loan and that it had some impact on their lives. These respondents fall into two main groups: those whose loans made a large impact on their lives and those whose student loans affected their lives in only a minor way.

### **1.1 Student Loans have a Big Impact**

Almost three-quarters of those who had a student loan claimed that their debt had a significant effect on their lives. Interviewees' comments about this impact contain three main themes: the negative effect of the student loan payment coming out of individual pay cheques; the burden and consequences of debt; and general problems with the student loan scheme itself. In addition, the participants' observations on student loans are characterised by the strength of the sentiments expressed and the use of very direct, powerful language. The four main ideas associated with this category are discussed in the following segments.

#### **1.1.1 The Negative Impact of Student Loan Payments**

Several participants talked about how they felt when regular payments came out of their wages. Samantha said *"it bothers me every time I see my pay and a third of it has gone to student loan"*. Similarly, Brenda noted that *"when you get your pay packet and \$90-odd dollars comes out on a regular basis and you don't make a dent in it, in your loan, it's definitely something I think about every time I get my pay cheque"*. And Donna explained that *"it was really hard to try and work 40 hours a week, look after two children and try and pay all the bills and just to see \$100 go out of your account"*. Their feelings were exacerbated by the fact that their payments often didn't cover the interest on their loans, so that in effect the size of their debt was increasing rather than decreasing. Tom explained *"I'm paying about \$60 a week and that's not covering the interest so it's kind of money that's just going up against the wall"*. Charlotte had the same experience, explaining *"I pay off the minimum payment at the moment and my loan is increasing every year...I am not even touching the interest"*. She concluded *"I would be happy if they just stopped the interest so that I could start to make a dent"*.

### **1.1.2 Consequences of Debt**

One of the main consequences of student loans, according to a number of participants, was an inability to enter the housing market. Tom noted that if he paid as much as he could afford into his student loan, he would still be 35 or 36 by the time he had paid it off, and would be unable to save for a deposit on a house. Hope claimed *"I don't imagine us ever being able to buy a house or if we do...through winning Lotto or somebody rich dying and leaving us money, I really can't see how that would ever happen, because of the level of debt that we have because of student loans and student life"*. Jeevan pointed out that his student loan would stop him spending money on other things and prevent him from doing certain *"stuff that I wanted to do"*. Donna, on the other hand, identified the emotional consequences of her loan, saying *"I think that's when I started to get a bit depressed in my job"*.

### **1.1.3 The Student Loan Scheme is a Problem**

Some participants believed the student loan scheme itself to be a problem. Tom said *"I have...studied for five years to get a reasonably well paying job and if I want to start making serious dents in [the loan] I'm going to have to start paying \$150 per week, at least, just to...pay about \$3,000 or \$4,000 off a year...if I hadn't gone to uni I could've been earning the same money working in a service station. So it's kind of a bit pointless...You're doing a job for the country, more or less and there's not any incentive"*. Charlotte too believed that the system was at fault, explaining that she entered tertiary education at the age of 17 and was too young to make sensible decisions about the money she borrowed. She concluded that *"it is a government scheme, they screwed it up and they need to start acknowledging it and the sooner they do it the better"*.

### **1.1.4 Strong Sentiments**

The comments in this category are characterised by the strength of the sentiments participants expressed and by the direct and powerful language they used. Tom, for example, said *"I've quite strong feelings...it's crippling people in my generation. If I'm going to have kids that are going to go to school and university, I'm not going to be able to afford to put them through. I don't want them to go through what I've done"*. Stella described her loan as *"a killer"*, while Adam called his *"an anchor"*. Charlotte claimed *"I feel really bitter about it. I hate the fact that I was in this scheme for five or six years that lets you ring up and get out as much money as you have available. I was 17 and I would ring up and they would say you have \$3,000 available, how much would you like and I would say all of it...I hate the fact that it is there"*.

## **1.2 Student Loans have a Minor Impact**

Of the participants who claimed that student loans had an impact on their lives, approximately 25 percent indicated that although their debt did affect them, it did so in only minor ways. Laura said *"I do...yeah, it was at [named institution]...I have to pay it off every month. I should be finished in a couple of months"*. Tam claimed *"I want to pay it as soon as possible and [in as] short [a] time as possible"*. James noted *"yeah I had a student loan last year ...Yeah, when I sold my business, I was able to*

*pay my student loan off, so that was just at the beginning of this year". One respondent was positive about the impact of the student loan system, explaining "I was using the student loan to offset my living costs by gearing myself in such a way that I didn't...that I was actually using the lesser interest on the loan. I could have afforded to go to university and pay the fees, but I was better off using the student loan to do that".*

### **1.3 Student Loans Have Virtually No Impact**

A quarter of all the interviewees claimed that their student loan made virtually no impact on their lives; approximately the same proportion as those who identified the impact of student debt as either major or minor. These comments fall into three main categories: those who are making only minimum repayments of their debt; those who are not repaying their loans at all or who have received financial or other assistance during their tertiary education; and those who experience no impact despite the fact that their loans are being repaid from their wages or salaries every week. Each of these categories is discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### **1.3.1 Minimum Repayments**

Many respondents claimed that they experienced little impact from their student loan because they made only minimum repayments on their debt. Grace's response is typical. She said *"it really doesn't have that much of an impact on me because I'm one of these people who will only pay back the minimum that I have to"*. Similarly, Blake said *"I plan not to repay it back in a hurry. I'll be putting it off as much as I could. I look at it as an investment. It doesn't worry me really. The loan doesn't...I don't even think about it"*. Nigel too maintained that he paid only the minimum off his loan every week. Lastly, Danielle explained *"I'm one of those funny people...maybe I get this from my dad because he had this attitude...I sort of worked out, I'll be dead before I've paid off my student loan. It doesn't bother me. To me it's just...it hasn't stopped me from doing anything. I can still get a mortgage, I can still do whatever. It hasn't really impacted me at all"*.

#### **1.3.2 No Current Repayment**

Luke is not repaying his loan at the moment because he does not yet earn enough to meet the threshold for compulsory repayment. He explained he hadn't *"been earning enough to begin paying back yet. No practical impact on my life so far"*. Diane is in a similar position, claiming *"yes I have a student loan but I don't have a job so I'm not paying it right now"*. Others noted that their loans made little impact on their lives because they were helped out by their families, either because their families covered their living costs while they were studying, or because their families were taking responsibility for their loans. In the former category, Brianna said *"because I was working part-time before, I had a student loan in my first year and then I paid off my second and my third year from my own savings. It's a benefit by living with your parents. You don't have to worry about other expenses, food or anything. So that's really good"*. In the latter, Chelsea reflected that *"my student loan won't have any impact at all because my parents are going to pay it off. I get the income statement...I get the student loan thing coming all the time, but...I see it racking up...but to me it won't impact because they're putting that money aside"*.

### **1.3.3 Repayment with Little Impact**

Several participants noted that, although their loans were being paid off with regular repayments from their wages or salaries, they nonetheless made little impact on their lives. Jade, for example, said that *“because it comes straight out of your salary, I’ve never really noticed any impact”*. Nicole claimed that her loan made little impact on her life, even though her repayments constituted a considerable proportion of her income. *“It’s a significant portion out of my pay packet each month. That said, I don’t really notice it. It’s been there my entire working life, so it’s not a huge issue, it’s not a great burden on us. It hasn’t stopped us getting a mortgage”*. When asked about the impact of his student loan, Nigel explained that it did not affect him *“much at the moment because I’m just flatting and things like that. I’m at the moment just paying off the minimum and it goes out of my pay before I even see it anyway. I suppose that’s the one thing about student loans, it goes straight from the government to the university or whatever and you never see it”*.

### **(c) SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Respondents were asked the following question about social capital:

Can you tell me who has had a significant influence on your study and work choices? Can you tell me how they helped you – please give examples? How did that work out?

Participants identified (1) their families, (2) their partners<sup>7</sup>, (3) their teachers or tutors, (4) their employers and (5) their friends as major influences on their study and career decisions. These categories are presented in the following sections.

#### **1. Family Members Were a Major Influence**

Almost half the total participants said that their family was a major influence on their study and work choices. Of these, most claimed that their mother (66 percent) was their principal influence, followed by their father (53 percent), siblings (19 percent), uncles (less than one percent), grandparents (less than one percent) and various other extended family members (all less than one percent). While it is interesting to note the frequency with which mothers and fathers are named as important career and study influences, it is nonetheless important to recognise that these percentages are not indicative of the proportions in each category because participants often mentioned more than one family member as an influence on their work and study choices.

Family members were an influence on participants’ choices in the following ways: (1.1) they gave general support and encouragement; (1.2) they acted as role models; (1.3) they offered information, advice or guidance; (1.4) they helped to find work, or mentored the participants in their working lives; (1.5) they ‘pushed’ participants; (1.6) their expectations or pressures had a negative effect; and (1.7) family who influenced

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<sup>7</sup> This term includes husbands and wives.

respondents in various ways, including providing financial support. Each of these categories is discussed below.

### **1.1 Family Members Provided Support**

More than a third of those who claimed that their family were a major influence on their work and study choices maintained that family members gave them general support and encouragement. Luke commented *“my mother has had quite a big influence on me, she has always supported me in what I wanted to pursue...has given me a lot of confidence”*. Ruby said *“my mum and dad have always been there and encouraged me, but never pushed me to the degree where I kind of wanted to rebel at all”*. Linda explained *“my dad has motivated me a lot because he didn't like us sitting at home so he was forever telling us to go and get a job or...we weren't allowed to leave school until we got a job and my mum, because she sort of focused me on doing something I'm going to be happy doing, not just doing it because it's there and it's a job and pays you money, my mum and dad, definitely. I think they would be the only two”*.

### **1.2 Family Members Acted as Role Models**

A number of participants identified their family members as role models. Blake named his twin brother as a major influence, saying *“he's a year ahead of me. He's doing exactly the same course and he told me what it was all about, the first year, so before I came down I sort of...oh, yeah, this sounds all right. So I jumped in there...yeah, yeah, he just gave me that much more insight into what it was all about”*. Lauren saw several family members in the teaching profession as role models, explaining *“probably my mother, because she was a teacher and also more recently my husband's mother who is also a teacher and his sister is a teacher too...saw how teaching was for [them] and the satisfaction they got and [how] they can make changes in children's lives”*.

### **1.3 Family Members Offered Information**

Family members also offered participants study and career information, advice and/or guidance. Kyla described the advice and guidance she received from her father and sister, saying *“my dad has always said to us, you just have to be hard and that was the only thing that he used to say to us all the time was that you just have to be hard and it doesn't matter what you do or where you are, just stay hard. That's pretty much the only thing that I learnt from my dad. And my sister, she always says to me, don't take shit from no one”*. James talked about the importance of his mother's advice *“I think a lot of my decision making isn't always decided by my mum but I always accept her advice and most of the time I take it. She'd be the most important influence in my life at the moment”*. Gemma's mother too was important, providing her with information *“I'd never heard of speech therapy and my mother suggested it”*.

### **1.4 Family Members Helped to Find Work or Mentored in Work**

Interviewees described how family members helped them to find work or mentored their development in particular industries. Ngaire's mother helped her find paid work,

while Gudrun's uncle, a food writer and restaurateur, gave her work while she was studying. As a consequence she had "*extra experience...that other students didn't have*". Hannah explained her elder sister's influence, "*I think I did better at school than my siblings, but she has worked her way up and now works as an advertising producer and started her own company, it has always helped getting some work in the TV industry*". Lauren's mother-in-law, a teacher "*gave me opportunities during my training for experience in her own classes*".

### **1.5 Participants "Pushed" by Family Members**

The phrase "pushed" was used by several participants in their comments on the influence of family members. Both Stella's parents "pushed" her into tertiary education "*my mother has always pushed me to...she never worked or got...she stopped her education because she got pregnant and my dad ended up taking over his father's business and didn't do what he wanted to do, so they were quite kind of...I don't know...definitely encouraged you or pushed you towards tertiary education*". Kyla's mother also "pushed" her, "*my mum is real creative and she always pushes me. She always pushes me that much that we end up crying and laughing together. We have arguments because she...sometimes, I feel she pushes me a little bit too hard. And sometimes she thinks I'm still like 12...or just 16*".

### **1.6 Family Members' Expectations Had a Negative Effect**

Sometimes family expectations or pressures had a negative effect on participants. Maia explained

*one of the main problems is if I give up completely and go and reassign myself somewhere else I have to deal with Mum, and she will be very disappointed in me. I don't think I'm ever going to convince her that I really do need to find a new track...she'll see it as...it took me four years to do a degree, this degree, never failed anything, did fine through university, but that was four years and a lot of money...I can see where she's coming from...when I mentioned to her these other jobs I'm going for that are not science, she always gets this kind of disappointed tone in her voice because in her mind I'm basically wasting that time, but she doesn't see that. My parents, especially Dad, who pretty much decided I was going to university, I was the first person in my family to have got into university...in New Zealand anyway...and because I'd already done well at school, he thought I should go to university. It was up to me what I was doing, but I was going.*

### **1.7 Family Members Influenced Me in Various Ways**

Some families influenced their children's career and work decisions by providing financial support. Jasmine noted that "*from when I was young, mum and dad were involved in a savings scheme, for when my brother and I went to university*". Ruby's father was also financially supportive. Laura's great grandparents' attitude to life influenced the way she works. They believed "*that life is about having fun and you're only here once, make the most of it. I do that. I have a lot of fun and that's evident in my work*". Melissa's parents' belief in the importance of life experience, she claimed,

made a large impact on her study and work choices, particularly in the early stages of her career.

## **2.0 Partner a Major Influence**

Eighteen percent of the total number of participants identified their partner as a major influence on their study and work choices. Their impact falls into three different categories: those partners who gave encouragement and support; those who acted as a sounding board for discussions on study and work; and those whose influence was non-specific. These three categories are discussed in turn in the following paragraphs.

### **2.1 Partner Provided Encouragement and Support**

A number of respondents claimed that their partners gave them encouragement and support in their study and work. Stella noted that her husband was *“really encouraging”*, as was Danielle’s partner. Maia explained that her partner is *“very supportive of me, but he knows I’m not going to be happy until I find something that I can enjoy. He’s probably - more than influenced my work choices - he’s influenced my sanity”*. Maia described the influence of her ex-husband, saying *“what led me into IT project administration was my ex-husband was an IT project manager and he was employing people that he was paying quite well and said that I could easily do that...Not possibly acknowledge that to him, but yeah...if it wasn’t for his encouragement, I guess, in suggesting it, I probably wouldn’t have contemplated it specifically and would probably still be in a general admin environment”*.

### **2.2 Partner Acted as a Sounding Board**

Other participants talked about the way their partners had acted as a sounding board in discussions about study and work. Jennifer’s ex-husband, for example, performed this function while they were together. James’ partner also influenced him in this way. She had been, he said, *“quite a good influence and I take on board the advice that she gives me. It doesn’t always solve the problem but it always offers another perspective that I can think about things better”*. Nicole claimed that *“these days, it’s more about me and my husband and what we want to do. I discuss things with him”*. Melissa described her husband as *“a really good person who likes to have a challenge in his career. She often discusses things with him”*.

### **2.3 Partner Influenced Participant in Non-Specific Ways**

The comments of several participants were less specific about their partner’s influence, but nonetheless named them as important factors in their decisions about work and study. Amber, for instance, said that her husband was an important influence because she *“met him at the beginning of [her] degree”*. When asked who had influenced her study and work choices, Kyla simply claimed *“actually, my husband”*. Emma maintained that her husband had an influence on her because they had been together since their teens. Jade described her husband’s forceful impact on a particular career decision, saying *“I suppose that my husband had an influence in a job that I took once, pretty much, because...I suppose the influence was more...do it or else”*.

### **3.0 Teachers or Tutors were a Major Influence**

Of the total number of respondents, one in five mentioned the influence of teachers or tutors on their study and career choices. Participants frequently told stories where teachers or tutors had had quite a specific effect on their lives (an almost exclusively positive one) and where they had given their students not just advice and guidance but often friendship and/or inspiration.

Hope's narrative is typical of stories about teachers.

*My sixth form German teacher [was an important influence]. If I had never encountered her, I think I would be in a very different place. She inspired me to keep going and keep...my first degree was in German language and literature, because I travelled over to Germany a couple of times and that was a huge learning experience that I never would have had. Personally and educationally it was very...a huge impact...Well she was just a really good positive teacher, a very quiet woman, but very encouraging in the way that she taught. She was young...closer to our age. I suppose she would have been in her twenties, if I think about it now. It's hard because they always seem so much older when you're younger, but she was just young and starting out and enthusiastic for her work and...that had a huge affect on me, the fact that somebody could be so enthusiastic about what they did and encouraging and trying to encourage her students to do well and...yeah, that had a huge impact.*

Gabrielle's story is indicative of others that focus on the positive influence of tutors.

*My tutors I found really quite inspiring... yeah, tutors have been really good...One example would be one of the tutors that I had at [named tertiary institution]. This probably sounds a bit corny, but she was very, very encouraging and I always...I guess like a lot of other kiwis, sort of struggle with self esteem and confidence around work and she really inspired me to continue to study, because for a while I was a bit apprehensive about even continuing, I didn't think I'd be any good and she actually...because she was objective, was able to point out how I could...what area I could work in in the future and areas of study that I could pursue, so she was really quite practical in that way, as well as being really quite emotionally supportive. So yeah, it's probably just getting good advice and encouragement from the tutors.*

### **4.0 Employers were a Major Influence**

Employers were identified as an important influence on study and career choices by 15 percent of the respondents. Employers, like families (see section C1 above), were said to provide advice and to act as either mentors or role models.

Amelia described the way her employer influenced her career. "When I was working in an engineering firm in London, my role was...it was a new role...to assist different engineers for different things... a lady pulled me aside and she was talking to me, she said, have you thought about going to University and I said, oh, I couldn't, I would never pass, too hard for me, it isn't me. She influenced me because she said...you find it so easy, you seem to know what you're doing, you would be so capable of going to

University, so she was a big influence to me". Melissa explained how two different bosses had influenced her career. "When I first started work I worked for a...it was a partnership and both the men were really good but one of them, he's become a life long friend and he's always been really supportive, in my personal life as well, so he's had a big impact...when I went to Wellington, [my employer] at the time was another really good person and it was just a really dynamic place to work and he's one of those people...you always employ somebody who's bigger than yourself so they can add more to the work place. So that's two employers that I've had and they've played major contributions into my working".

## 5.0 Friends were a Major Influence

Friends were cited by one in ten participants as a major influence on their career and study choices. Rose's story is typical:

*I have this friend who, she just amazes me, she is very, very confident, she has gone from being a school teacher to an air hostess and now a mother. She said to me you can't just stay here and be a receptionist what are you going to do with your life and those words just haunt me. We probably did the same things through school, her determination to do things, she has a similar personality to me and she can basically just do things and I think she hasn't got brains or anything but she has done so much with her life, she has influenced me and she wouldn't even know that.*

### (d) DREAM JOB

Finally, participants were asked:

What would your dream job be?

Their answers fall into the following categories: (1) my dream job would be to advance in my current job or course of study (2); my dream job would be to follow a personal interest outside my current job or course of study; (3) my dream job would be to own and manage my own business; (4) my dream job would be to be rich, do little and have a lot of leisure; (5) my dream job would be to be a celebrity; and (6) my dream job would be to provide a service to the community. Each of these categories is discussed in turn.

### 1. Dream Jobs and Current Jobs

Almost half the participants identified their dream job as a continuation or advancement of their current job or course of study. These dream jobs revolved around a variety of motivations, such as challenge, status, and social service. In this section, these themes are illustrated using a selection of quotes about participants' dream jobs.

Gordon's dream job contains a strong element of challenge. He works in graphic design, and is the editor of a magazine in this area. He would like to be

*a designer in the game industry. So I'm obviously [working with] very similar elements, but working with character concepts, many of them movies...so drawing characters, coming up with artistic direction...that would be great...would be sensational, yeah...I would probably have to travel...That's an extension of what I do, but that I don't actually have any more skills in, so maybe I could revisit that in ten years time and do a course in 3D animation and combine my two skills and do something completely different if I get bored with what I'm doing. The total design work I do at the moment is very static. We are talking logos, print...I do some sign work, but not very much. So that could be a nice diversion for a couple of years if I can get into it.*

The notion of status is a component of several participants' dream jobs. Josh, a law and defence student, said that his dream job would be "*Commanding Officer, Land Courses, Australia. First one on my mind, there are others. I can't progress to that position because there's an amazing person in it already and I can't go there, I mean...doesn't matter because I wouldn't mind going and becoming a diplomat*". Nicole, a PA<sup>8</sup> to a CEO<sup>9</sup>, claimed that "*at the moment I'd be PA to the Chief Executive of the New Zealand Stock Exchange in their flash new buildings down on the waterfront. I'd work 9.00 to 4.30, get home while it was still light and they would pay me exorbitant amounts of money...yeah, that's probably it*". Jeevan, a medical student, described his ideal job as "*9.00 to 5.00, five days a week, where I can actually...where I'm in the position to take leave or not come to the job in circumstances...a fairly powerful position*".

Gemma is a speech and language therapist with pre-school children. Her dream job is based on the idea of service. She said "*I think my ideal job would be working...alongside the paediatricians but not for Health...I don't know, a charitable trust or something, who provides me with transport and resources and pay to get by on, I guess, and working with those families who can't afford to go privately, for those children who'd be sitting on a wait list, if I could pick them up. I think there's a huge gap out there. That'd be my ideal job. I could work with them until they could get picked up by Special Education*". Heather's dream job also revolves around the notion of service. She is a part-time teacher aide with a Down's syndrome child, and would like to work with those children who don't get the support they need in the education system.

## **2. Dream Jobs and New Careers**

One in five participants described their dream job as following a personal interest outside their current job or course of study. Hannah, who combines part-time work in administration with caring for her child at home, said that she would like to be a portrait photographer. Jennifer, who does both technical writing and business analysis, would like to work "*with animals, training animals, particularly dogs who are badly behaved, shall we say, and rehabilitating them. Completely different to what I'm doing now*". Maria, a primary school teacher, would like to be a vet, while Emily,

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<sup>8</sup> Personal Assistant

<sup>9</sup> Chief Executive Officer

who works selling car parts, dreams of hosting a travel programme. Norah would like to write feature articles for the Guardian Newspaper rather than work as a tax lawyer.

### **3. Dream Jobs and Owning a Business**

Owning and managing their own business was also the dream job of one in five respondents. Some participants, such as Danielle, wished to own a business related to their personal interests or current employment. A sales representative in the confectionery industry, she described her dream job in this way:

*I would love, and I think I've been playing with this idea for ages, I would love to own a really successful café, but one where I don't have to...have it run so good that...I employ a really good manager, so I'm like a silent partner and just pop in whenever I feel like popping in and work whenever I feel like working and it turns over really good money and it's something unique and it's something that people will kind of...I guess, remember me for. Just something...that would give me satisfaction, to know that people who got pleasure out of something I'd created.*

Gudrun's dream job is also related to her interests. She works part-time with a special needs child and would like to own and manage a "small kind of day care play land place where kids could come and learn arts and crafts and their parents could have a coffee if they wanted or just chill out and the kids would be entertained in a 2-3 hour workshop". Other participants' dream jobs revolved around the idea of owning and managing a business in general, rather than one which reflected some personal interest. Jack, who has a BA/BSc<sup>10</sup> but is currently unemployed, said "I think I'd enjoy owning my own business because I'd like working for myself. I think if you're working for yourself you've got a lot more motivation to make it work. I think I could do it pretty well. I don't know about dream job but I think that'd be pretty satisfying".

### **4. Dream Jobs, Wealth and Leisure**

Ten percent of respondents identified their dream job as being rich, doing little and having a lot of leisure. Caitlin, who works for a corporate, said her dream job would be "no job at all. I'd like to have a life of leisure and have heaps of money". Similarly, Ngaire, who is still at school, claimed that she would like to be rich and do nothing. Elizabeth, a primary school teacher, described her dream job as being a "stay at home Mum and not having to worry about anything, not having to do any housework, just staying at home and entertaining the kids, having someone to do the housework and cooking for me, being financially viable so I can go out and get my hair done without having to worry about the housework being done and dinner is getting made".

### **5. Dream Jobs and Celebrities**

The last category comprises the seven percent of participants whose dream job was to be a celebrity, such as a sports star or an entertainer. Jasmine, a Strategic Plans and Positioning Advisor, would like to be a jazz singer, while Tom, a Physical Education

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<sup>10</sup> A conjoint Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degree.

teacher, would like to be a “*professional sports person...I think a professional golfer would be the way to go. You could travel the world, get to play in the summer all the time and you can play until you're really old, so you don't have to...your body doesn't give out and break on you. I reckon that'd be the way to do it. That'd be my dream job*”.

## **Concluding Comments**

This report serves as a preliminary overview of the qualitative data collected as part of the 'Pathways to Sustainable Employment' (PASE) project. The principal aim of this report was to elicit young(er) people's underlying conceptualisations of the world of work and employment in contemporary New Zealand society. The analysis of the qualitative data strongly supports our initial contention (Dupuis et al., 2005) that 'pathways to employment' encompasses highly variable and complex trajectories. In addition, the data reinforces our initial perception of the **diversity** of participants' employment experiences, the enormous amount of **change** individuals experience in both their work and study lives during these years, and the **non-linear** development of their careers. More specifically, the results of this analysis provide further support for a number of issues identified in the previous quantitative analysis.

1. The apparent lack of planning involved in young(er) people's career and self-development was identified in the quantitative analysis and this is also a strong theme in this report. The latter analysis has extended our understanding of this issue, and provided us with some insight into the varied ways in which participants' conceptualise the idea of career planning.
2. Related to (1) above, the family was identified in both reports as having considerable influence on participants' career and study choices. As we said at the end of the quantitative study, questions must be asked about the ability of family members to act as effective career guides and counsellors, particularly in the absence of additional professional support. Interestingly, Granovetter's (1995) notion of the strength of weak ties, which would predict the greater influence of more distant ties on participants' careers, does not appear to hold for this group of young(er) New Zealanders.
3. Lastly, both reports identified a relatively large number of young(er) people who believed that their secondary education had prepared them inadequately for the rigors of tertiary study, paid work and/or everyday life. This trend is both of great concern and reflective perhaps of a more generalised dissatisfaction with secondary education.

Also of interest, although not identified in the quantitative part of the study, was the tendency of a number of participants to consider themselves solely responsible for their success or failure in both study and the labour market. This was apparent in the significant minority of respondents who identified no barriers to their achievement in work and/or study and in the similarly significant minority who claimed that gender was not an issue in the workforce. Future reports will examine each of the issues outlined here in greater depth, making sense of them within the larger context of the dynamics of the contemporary New Zealand labour market.



## **APPENDIX 1**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

(Questions to be asked according to main activity, employment history etc.)

Setting the Scene .....using biographical material from CATI interview as appropriate.

- Have any major changes happened in your life since we spoke to you last June?

#### **Perceptions of the world of employment**

- What's it like getting a job today? Could you give me an example?
- What is it that you want out of work?
- How good are the opportunities these days for your kind of person? Why do you think that is?
- What things prevented you from doing what you set out to achieve?
- To what extent have you consciously gone about planning a pathway to work? Please elaborate.
- You're a young woman/man working – what's it like for women/men in the working world? Is it any different for men/women (the way in which this question is asked is dependent on gender). Could you give an example?
- What are the kinds of skills you think employers want in the people they employ? (probe for things like interpersonal skills, practical skills, work ethic, qualifications)
- What attributes do you bring to your employer?
- If you could determine the working life that you most like to have, what would that look like? How do you see yourself arranging your working life so that in the future you get what you want in work, at home or both?

#### **Education**

- Looking back over your school education, what are your feelings about the education that you had? Can you tell us a little bit about that? (prompts e.g. general knowledge, practical skills) Can you give an example?
- How well did your school education prepare you for work and/or tertiary education?
- And subsequently, for those having studied further – did your course of study meet with your expectations?
- What did you get out of your study? (benefits, gaps)
- (If relevant) How well were you prepared for your work and do you think your preparation meets/met your employers' needs?
- There is a common idea that people go in and out of study and training throughout their working lives. How important do you think this is/will be for you personally?

- (Ask only if a student not working) You're a young woman/man studying/at school – what's it like for women/men at school/polytech/university? Is it any different for men/women? (The way in which this question is asked is dependent on gender...) Could you give an example?
- Ask these questions only if participant has a student loan. What impact has the repayment of your student loan had on you? (Interviewer, if possible, please find out how much participant owes)

### **Social Capital**

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about people. Can you tell me who has had significant influence on your study and work choices?

- Can you tell me how they helped you? Please give examples
- How did that work out?
- Who are the most important 'contacts' in your life now, and what will this lead to?

### **Aspirations**

- When we talked a year ago we asked you about what you would be doing in 2 years time. You said xxxxxx . What do you think of that now?
- What do you envisage or hope for in your life in, say 10 years time? (prompts if necessary "what about travel, employment, family" etc.).
- If you look back on your career in years to come, and you could then describe it as 'successful', what might it look like?
- In order to achieve that, what skills or competencies do you think you might need to acquire?
  - How will you do that?
  - Where might you turn for assistance with this?

One final question, what would your dream job be?

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