

Boosting outcomes for young learners in tertiary education: 2015 research findings



Introduction

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) commissioned research to build its evidence base on what works for youth learners in tertiary education settings. Initiatives like Youth Guarantee and Trades Academies are key to success, enabling young learners to stay in education and providing the basis for progression onto higher levels of study, training or employment.

This research highlights what works for youth learners in tertiary education, and the programmes available to support ongoing opportunities.

The Youth Guarantee Fees-Free Scheme: what works

*The Youth Guarantee Fees-Free Scheme: A research study (2014)*ⁱ identifies what institutional, sector-wide and other factors contribute to achievement by former NEETs (those younger learners not in employment, education or training) in Youth Guarantee fees-free places.

The study focused on interviews with individuals and small groups, supported with data from the Ministry of Education, TEC and the Ministry of Social Development.

The data suggested strong support for the Youth Guarantee policy from the 32 stakeholders interviewed, but there was room for improvement when responding effectively to the learning needs of young NEETs.

More research is needed on learners who do not go into a Youth Guarantee programme; learners who leave without completing; what happens to those who complete programmes; and the broader regional youth market context.

Learners who had engaged on a Youth Guarantee programme commented on what worked well for them:

- the relative freedom of their courses
- the support they got from their tutors, including personal things tutors “are half parent, half counsellor and half tutor”
- the enjoyment of course content, particularly “hands on stuff” such as engineering and hospitality
- working within a tikanga Māori framework and various other forms of support (transport, counselling, food).

Supporting young learners in tertiary education

Through a series of focus groups for students, lecturers and support staff *Younger Students in Institutes of Technology Undertaking Youth Guarantee Programmes* (2014)ⁱⁱ identified:

- the learning needs from a senior secondary student perspective, when learning in a tertiary adult learning environment
- instructional areas for attention when tertiary lecturers teach younger students.

Key areas for tertiary lecturers to focus on when instructing younger students

- Have high behavioural expectations – expect students to rise to the occasion and work in an adult setting.
- Teach theory in bite-sized chunks in the morning, and link it to the practical session in the afternoon.
- Pastoral care is a critical part of what the tutor (or other support staff) does.
- Explain to students the relationships you have with industry, to connect them to work in the future.
- Have energy for what you are teaching – this is central.
- Praise good behaviour.

Youth learning needs in a tertiary environment

Most young people want to know what they need to know in order to pass their assessments, rather than focusing on underpinning theories.

Young people benefit from the facilitator playing the role of a motivator, and guide them – giving direction and a relational level of understanding rather than abstract thinking.

Younger students are open to new ideas and learn quickly, accepting assurances that what they are learning will be of benefit in the future.

Adult students are motivated intrinsically while younger students are motivated extrinsically.

How to effectively engage young Māori and Pasifika learners

Research found that the use of Sir Mason Durie's model, *Te Whare Tapa Wha*, supported effective engagement with young people studying in a tertiary environment. *Te Whare Tapa Wha* is a well-known model used in Māori health practice as a holistic philosophy for assessing and focusing on the development of a person's overall wellbeing. Learners' progress and engagement in Youth Guarantee is positively affected by holistically assessing, developing and supporting their overall 'wellness'.

Effective engagement with Māori learners and their whānau, for example through induction interviews, helps them to understand the standard expected when studying at a tertiary level.

Having dedicated learning support staff supporting Māori learners to meet academic requirements, leads to improved learning outcomes for Youth Guarantee learners.

Pasifika youth could particularly benefit from academic counselling that is strategic and linked to transitions in secondary school. Interviews with Pasifika students found there is variable and sometimes opportunistic (rather than systematic and planned) advice from the schools. This is particularly important as students often do not see clear links between their secondary education and employment until they undergo further education or training in a tertiary setting.



“My kaiako is really awesome to be honest, because he teaches us what we want to know and need to know in a way that we can understand clearly about what they are talking about.” **Young student in a Youth Guarantee Programme**

Barriers for young learners

A summer study of young people who were enrolled in Youth Guarantee fees-free in (2014)ⁱⁱⁱ examines the barriers to Youth Guarantee learners progressing on to higher levels of study, training or employment.

The study followed 73 learners in five regions during the summer of 2014/15 to see what they were doing post-study and determine their aspirations for the future. The findings indicate that tertiary providers could do more to:

- encourage pathways into further training or education to Level 3 or beyond
- support learners into further training or education at other TEOs, or into the labour market via more proactive career advice.

Pathways needed to be clearer and work should be done with employers and/or communities to offer at least a period of employment.

While the identified barriers affected learners' progression, overall they expressed confidence that they would be able to achieve their goals.

Having the support of a kaumatua

Having the support of a kaumatua, someone who is well-known and respected, can help with matters of tikanga. For example, a kaumatua can lead ceremonies around food and learning processes and extra-curricular activities, all of which are important to the success of these organisations.



“[Pathways Awarua is] a gentle way to turn their brain on. They're learning but it's not “blah, blah, blah” and someone up the front. ... students aren't necessarily here right on nine. Pathways allows that flexibility if they're late ... it's brilliant, it's absolutely brilliant.”

Trades Academy Tutor

Approaches for using literacy and numeracy assessment tools

Case Study Research: The Implementation of Pathways Awarua in Trades Academies (2014)^{iv} identifies effective approaches for utilising Pathways Awarua and the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Tool for Adults in Trades Academies.

Learners tend not to be self-motivated or independent in their approach to literacy and numeracy. Many learners have negative dispositions about their literacy and numeracy skills, so they need to be motivated and encouraged to use Pathways Awarua.

Recommendations for the successful integration of Pathways Awarua into teaching practice include:

- supporting learners to understand and appreciate the relevance of literacy and numeracy to their lives as adults: that it will impact on their work, their opportunities for further learning and the roles they play in the home and community
- integrate Pathways Awarua with the trades components of trades academy programmes (this requires a programme structure in which literacy and numeracy are embedded)
- include Pathways Awarua in school and Trades Academy programmes.

“Absolutely I hated school, didn’t do very well... having support from tutors ... we were all there because we wanted to be and changed our lives ... I was absolutely stoked that I got to go into the programme and wouldn’t be where I am today without it.”

Former Youth Guarantee learner

This summary sheet is part of a series the TEC has published to contribute to the evidence on boosting outcomes for priority learners in tertiary education, including Māori, Pasifika, Youth Transitions and Adult Literacy and Numeracy.



Tertiary Education Commission
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua

i Gordon, L., Sedgwick, C., Grey, S., & Marsden S. (2014). *The Youth Guarantee Fees Free Scheme: A research study*. Christchurch: Pūkeko Research Limited

ii Middleton, S. (2014). *Younger Students in Institutes of Technology Undertaking Youth Guarantee Programmes*. Wellington: Manukau Institute of Technology

iii Gordon, L., & Marsden N. (2015). *A summer study of young people who were enrolled in youth guarantee fees free courses in 2014*. Christchurch: Pūkeko Research Limited

iv Thomas, G., & Ward, J. (2014). *Case Study Research: Implementation of Pathways Awarua in Trades Academies*. Dunedin: Maths Technology Ltd