



**Tertiary Education  
Commission**  
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua



# Transitions From Secondary School

Research report – EXTERNAL version



# Learner journeys as *awa*

The cover image of this report is a braided river, *he awa whiria*, as it nears the moana. We use *awa* to symbolise learners' journeys through education, where *awa whiria* represents what leaving school is like for many learners.




In early life, learners take journeys through compulsory education with a clearly defined path and direction of travel – similar to the early stages of an *awa* as it begins to take shape and develop.

As *ākonga* move through secondary school, the number and complexity of their journeys multiplies. Navigation towards the moana of post-school possibilities becomes more complicated.

Along the way, learners' journeys are shaped by the geography and currents, the forces of the system. The *waka* they travel in must be strong, stable and watertight. With the skills they gain in education, *ākonga* are building, upgrading and loading their *waka*, and learning to sail.

This research was conducted and prepared by the TEC Insights team: Anna Jackson, Dr Bridget Burmester, Clayton D'Ath, Sean Hennity and Zoe Barton-Howes.



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*When I began working with young people I thought they might not have much to say. Their bodies were on the upward curve. How could they break? They seemed to have few words too. And even fewer that they wanted to share with an old man. The first young person I spoke to told me how his heart had been broken. He was remarkably tender. The second asked for an asthma inhaler, then told me about his mother's suicide. After that I found it difficult not to keep on listening to what young people had to say. What has continued to pour out to me over the years has been beautiful, funny, poignant and at times difficult to hear. It has been a wellhead of our vernacular, and of all our joys and sorrows jammed together. When I add it up it very much feels as though I have listened to a modern history of my country.*

## *It is difficult to ignore the story of a young person.*

*When they are in pain that pain seems all the more demanding because they are vulnerable and because their life still lies ahead of them. When they talk they are compelling. They have not learnt to mince their words and are disarmingly honest, even when they are trying not to be. I have learnt that the most important medicine they need from me is to listen to these stories, to hold them up, turn them around, and to let each young person look back at them then. They need me to be honest, and to hold what they have told me for as long as they want me to ...*

– Glenn Colquhoun, Letters to Young People

Glenn Colquhoun is a general practitioner and poet who works with young people in Horowhenua.

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# Kia ora tātou,

Each year around 60,000 learners leave compulsory education and transition into tertiary education, training, employment, or other pathways. These young people represent the future of Aotearoa. The decisions they make at this pivotal point will impact not only the course of their own lives, but the shape of the education sector, our workforce and our society as whole for years to come. It is essential that we understand the experiences of school leavers, so that we can help to equip them with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to create successful, fulfilling lives.

I am very excited to share with you the 'Transitions from Secondary School' report which details the findings from research with over 500 school leavers carried out by the TEC Insights team. The report unpacks the context and motivations of these learners and the factors that influence the decisions they make and the pathways they take on leaving school.

This report is a fundamental step forward in understanding learners across Aotearoa and supporting learner-centric decision-making.

These last years have been incredibly tough for secondary school learners. At a pivotal moment in their education journey, learners have been disrupted by the repercussions of a global pandemic. Just like me, you'll be inspired by these learners' ability to remain resilient,

positive and adaptable in the face of constant uncertainty.

It is wonderful to hear direct from learners their hopes, aspirations, and dreams for their life. Whether it's 'following their passions,' 'supporting whānau' or 'living a crazy life!', it's exciting to know that learners have diverse ambitions and high aspirations for the future.

It is clear that deciding on the right pathway towards these dreams is hard. For many it is the most complex decision they have ever had to make, and their first opportunity to make deliberate choices about their future. This research demonstrates that timely, quality information coupled with sound decision-making skills are essential to enable learners to make pathway decisions that will help them achieve the lives they aspire to.

These learners' stories also emphasise the importance of confidence as an enabler in this transition decision. One recounted; *"and he said, 'you can do it'. The first time someone ever said that to me. And I felt good about myself, I can really do this ..."* Young people need champions to build their confidence and empower them to act.

Inequities across the system mean that some learners miss out. Whilst I am glad to read those stories of learners overcoming barriers and of the support initiatives and networks in place, I

am reminded of the progress that still needs to be made in order to ensure learner success for all.

It is the role of the TEC to shape a system that equips learners with all they need to succeed. Through development of the Careers System Strategy, initiatives such as Inspiring the Future and Tahatū, our online career planning solution, and in the way we invest in tertiary education, we are working to empower these young New Zealanders to achieve their aspirations and drive positive outcomes for Aotearoa.

To end, I would like to thank the learners who took part in this research for their willingness to share their experiences, their uncertainties, insecurities and dreams. The TEC will hold their stories as taonga, learning from them and acting on them to support the best outcomes for school leavers now and in the future.



**Tim Fowler**

Chief Executive  
Tertiary Education Commission

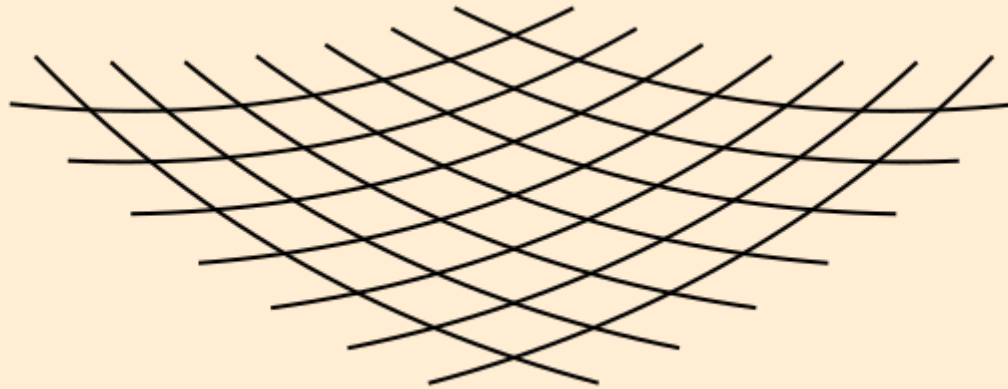


# Learners' stories are their reality

- Learners gave informed consent to participate in this research
- Names have been changed to protect their privacy
- Their stories are taonga
- Hold them with care



# *Tukua o punga*



Tukua o punga – cast your nets – is the school motto of one of the participant schools in this research. It describes the school-leaving transition, where learners are expected to take what they have learned through schooling and reach their personal potential. It also encapsulates our invitation to you, the reader, to take what you learn from this report and use it to make a difference for learners in your own work.



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# Executive summary

*60,000 school leavers transition from secondary school each year, all with unique aspirations, needs and challenges to get them to the pathway of their choice. This is the start of their journey into further education and/or work.*

*It is crucial that we understand these learners and their transition experiences, so that we can support them towards achieving successful, fulfilling lives.*

*This research synthesises findings from the Integrated Data Infrastructure, existing literature, a survey of over 500 school leavers, and interviews with 56 learners around Aotearoa, to deliver a comprehensive and rich understanding of how school leavers decide what to do when they leave school.*

## **Today's school leavers have a wide range of backgrounds and needs**

A growing proportion are Māori, Pacific or other minorities; 15% have a disability and 9% neuro-diversity; 82% have responsibilities outside school.

Forty percent of school leavers achieve University Entrance (UE) but one in five only achieve NCEA Level 1 or less. The majority of school leavers go on to tertiary study, with 36% entering foundational levels (1-3). Twenty-nine percent of school leavers go straight into the workforce.

Inequities in leaving qualifications perpetuate through to post-school pathways. For example, Māori and Pacific learners are less than half as likely to leave school with UE and to attend university. However when they are enabled to achieve UE, they are similarly likely to choose a university pathway as non-Māori non-Pacific leavers.

*A resilient, prosperous Aotearoa  
– where every person has the  
skills, knowledge and confidence  
to create a fulfilling life*

– TEC Vision

Findings are structured according to the TEC vision: learners' goals for a fulfilling life (and career), the opportunities they have to pursue it, and the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to get there.

## **A fulfilling life and career often means pursuing enjoyment and happiness**

Many learners value happiness and enjoyment most, although Pacific and Māori learners instead tend to value supporting their family. Having control over their future and financial stability is also important for all learners, as well as strong personal connections and relationships with others.

Doing something they enjoy or are interested in is important to many learners when deciding on a career pathway. The current careers system supports these learners well as it often connects learners with a pathway based on these interests. However, learners who don't value enjoyment, have competing values, or don't know what they enjoy, can often struggle to connect with a pathway.

## **Career aspirations reflect a balancing act between values and practical considerations**

School leavers often dream of creative careers such as sportsperson, actor and musician. However many are actually planning to pursue trades and community occupations such nurse, builder and teacher.

Prestigious professional careers common in the community (engineer, businessperson, lawyer, doctor and scientist) are popular as both dream aspirations and actual plans. Barriers that prompt students to pivot from a dream to other careers include perceived barriers to entry, job stability and demand.



## Five key barriers limit learners' opportunities; especially those in priority groups

- **Cost** of living and tertiary study affects almost half of school leavers, limiting options and shutting down some pathways.
- **Connections** with people already on desired pathways enables learners to experience 'what it's really like', but these are only available to some.
- **Capacity** (time and space) to engage with career planning is already at a premium in the context of a demanding academic year and extracurricular responsibilities.
- **COVID-19** was a game-changer for some, triggering a complete rethink of options; however for others (even those pursuing heavily affected industries) it did not affect their decision.
- **Systemic biases** make some pathways even more difficult: for example, streaming in schools results in less access to resources and perpetuates inequitable outcomes.

## School leavers use four types of knowledge in their decision

To make an informed decision that aligns with their idea of a fulfilling life, learners need specific types of information, ideally in this order:

- orienting (my guiding direction and values)
- focused (what pathways might suit me)
- deep (what those options are 'really like')
- logistical (practical steps to make it happen).

Knowledge comes from three key sources: people (often the first port of call), experiences (crucial in helping decisions), and static resources (careers.govt.nz is especially trusted).

## Even with a full set of information, school leavers can only use it effectively when they also have the appropriate decision-making skills

School leavers are used to making decision that have a 'right' answer which can be known beforehand, but this decision is fundamentally different and is often the first time they need to make a *complex* decision with no right answers. Complex decisions require a different set of decision-making skills, including the ability to critique information sources, set goals, and weigh different types of information, as well as an environment that makes it safe to experiment with different options before choosing. Without these skills, learners can experience unnecessary costs, lower lifetime earnings, a more distressing decision process, and pathways that are not aligned with their idea of success.

## Confidence needs affect almost half of leavers

Alongside cost, confidence was the biggest barrier to doing what school leavers wanted. This was expressed both as overwhelm about the transition because of its pivotal nature in their life, and lack of confidence in their own abilities.

A crucial enabler of confidence was a 'champion', who provides ongoing guidance and support to learners, can provide personalised information, and normalises their feelings of uncertainty and overwhelm about the decision.

## Learners have specific needs related to the type of pathway they choose

- **Apprentices** often have an easy decision and see a well-lit path ahead, but many (especially women, disabled students, and those without industry connections) are systematically excluded.
- **Polytechnic-goers** often pursue community, creative and service careers. They are not held back by potential barriers such as not getting UE or perceptions of polytechnics as 'second-rate'.
- Leavers entering **private training establishments** had extremely high confidence and felt well-informed but were prone to having their decisions more strongly influenced by misinformation, mistaken logic, and interactions with providers.
- **University-goers** can be swept along into this pathway; difficulties tend to instead be about aspects such as provider choice. Others are systematically excluded from this pathway, and financial barriers can be a deal-breaker.
- Students entering the **workforce** tended to either: find it easy to choose because it genuinely aligned with their goals; or found it difficult to choose because it was a default choice when they didn't know what else to choose or found it less risky than tertiary study.
- Although very few school leavers aspire to a pathway **not in education, employment or training**, 11% do enter this pathway. Effective interventions can have an impact, especially at crucial windows of opportunity.
- Ten percent of school leavers remain **undecided** even at the point of leaving school. Their needs span knowledge, skills and confidence, and they could benefit from our support most.

# How the report was created

This report weaves together findings from a **four-part research project** (shown to the right). Combining research approaches gave a unique view: a broad look at all school leavers, and a deep understanding of what drives their decisions.

Analysis of **IDI data** looked at the transitions of all learners who left school in NZ in 2018 (the most recent year for which full information about destinations was available).

Fieldwork for the **interviews** and **surveys** was carried out during October and November 2020. This time of year allowed the team to hear from learners as close to the decision and transition out of secondary school as possible, to get their experiences in real time.

Analysis of the fieldwork then followed. Analysis and synthesis of priority groups (i.e. Māori, Pacific, women, disabled and neurodivergent school leavers) was done in partnership with subject matter experts for each group. All findings were reviewed by TEC stakeholders and subject matter experts.

**Literature review** findings were incorporated throughout the project.

Full details of the methodology can be found in [Appendix A](#).

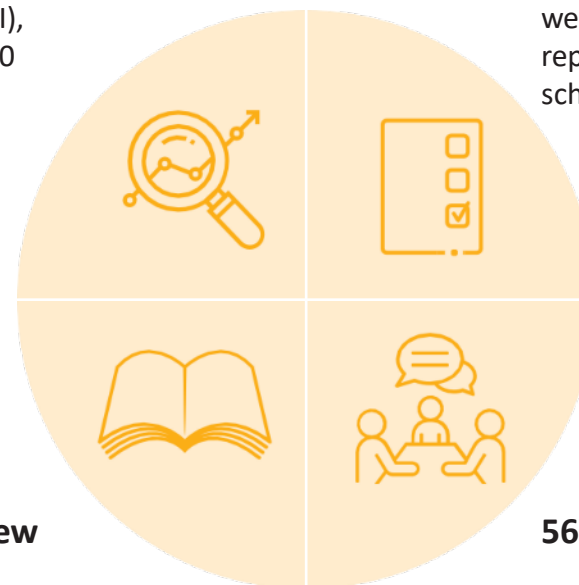
The four-part “Transitions from Secondary School” research project:

## Big data analysis

Of the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), tracking all 61,260 school leavers

## 569 survey responses

From school leavers, weighted to be representative of all school leavers



## Literature review

Of domestic and international literature

## 56 interviews

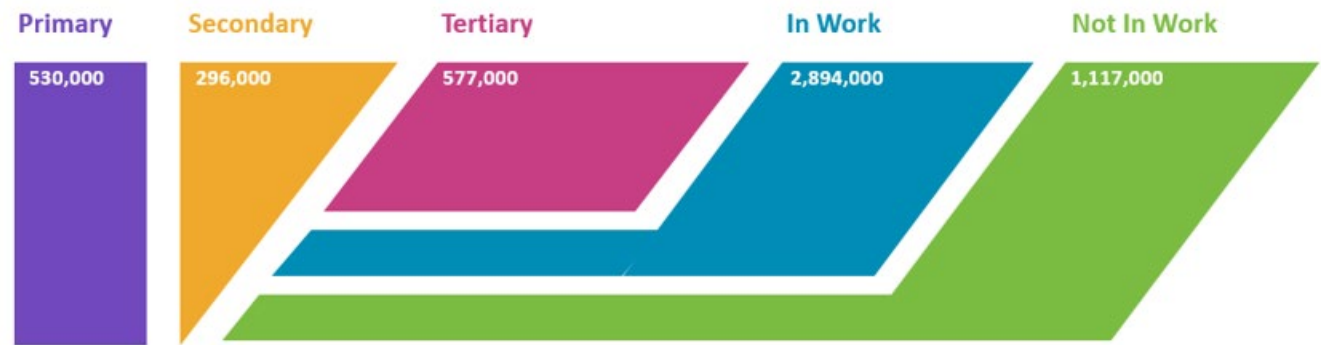
In-depth one-hour interviews with school leavers from across the country



# This research project focuses on learners within the secondary school life state

TEC's customers can be grouped into different life states, to understand common experiences and needs they may have. This project focuses on those within the secondary school life state, and specifically those about to transition out of secondary school.

School leavers were chosen as a key group for TEC to research and understand, as explained over the following pages.



*\*Note there is overlap between Tertiary, In Work, Not in Work meaning totals will not sum to the NZ population*

In this the report, particularly the Pathways section, the colours above are used to represent the five different life states. For example, the pathway profile of school leavers who enter the workforce is blue, consistent with this segment above.

## Why school leavers matter:

### 1. School leavers are crucial from an economic perspective

In the current context of extremely low immigration, school leavers are New Zealand's primary source of new workers. Their transitions have far-reaching impacts on their later outcomes and contributions to the economy. It's therefore crucial that they are equipped to succeed and choose pathways that allow them to maximise our productivity and fill skills shortages.

By having an impact on the current generation of school leavers, we can improve outcomes, not only for them, but their future generations as well.

Just over

# 60,000

students leave school in Aotearoa each year: a similar number to an entire essential workforce such as nurses or teachers.





## 2. Leaving school is a pivotal life transition for learners

The transition from secondary school into tertiary education, training, the workforce or other pathways is the first major decision that anyone makes about pathways they will travel. Until leaving school, pathways for all learners are relatively uniform: usually attending compulsory education and living as a dependent member of a family or whānau. However, at the point of leaving school, the pathways individuals take explode with variety.

*“The early years spent in compulsory schooling represent a crucial period for developing foundation skills, during which schools tend to equalise the learning opportunities to which individuals are exposed. By contrast, learning trajectories become increasingly differentiated in the years marking the transition between adolescence and early adulthood as individuals can choose for the first time to participate in different forms of education and training, as well as engage in informal and non-formal learning opportunities in the workplace.”*

– OECD Skills Outlook 2021<sup>[1]</sup>





### 3. School leavers are central to the TEC's goals

School leavers are of crucial importance to the TEC because this is the first point at which lifelong learning shifts gears. The choices school leavers make have impacts on their outcomes throughout their life, so we want to ensure they are making the highest-quality decisions possible, which are most aligned to their version of success.

Our vision:

*A resilient, prosperous New Zealand – where every person has the skills, knowledge and confidence to create a fulfilling life.*

This report examines what a fulfilling life looks like for school leavers in Aotearoa, and what skills, knowledge and confidence they need in order to create it.



01

# Ngā Tāngata

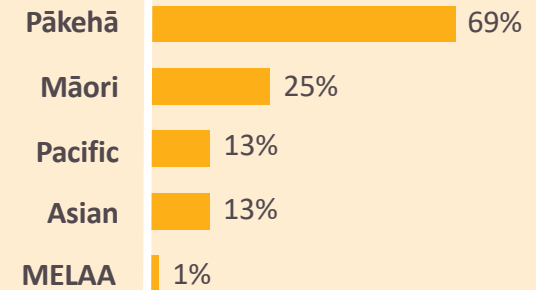
People

# WHO ARE TODAY'S SCHOOL LEAVERS?

## A GROWING PROPORTION OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ARE MĀORI, PACIFIC, ASIAN OR MIDDLE-EASTERN LATIN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN (MELAA)

25% of school leavers are now Māori, higher than Aotearoa's general Māori population proportion of 16.5%. Māori and Pacific are priority groups for the TEC; work to reduce systemic barriers will have an increasing impact as these groups grow.

### School Leavers' Ethnicities:



## 82% OF SCHOOL LEAVERS HAVE AT LEAST ONE ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

62% have paid work.

29% have caring responsibilities.

21% have voluntary work.

## 15% OF SCHOOL LEAVERS HAVE A DISABILITY

And 9% are neurodivergent (have a sensory or learning disability).



## WHEN DO THEY LEAVE SCHOOL?




### **76% OF LEARNERS LEAVE SCHOOL IN YEAR 13**

**16%** leave in Year 12.

**8%** leave in Year 11 or before.

The proportion leaving in Year 13 has increased from **71%** over the last decade.



### **40% OF ALL LEARNERS LEAVE WITH UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE (UE)**



**40%** leave with NCEA Level 2 or 3.

**20%** leave with NCEA Level 1 or below.

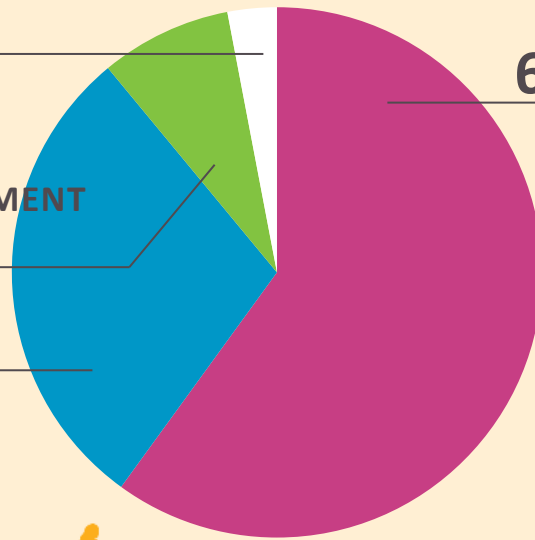
The proportion leaving with NCEA Level 3 has increased over the last decade, and the proportion leaving with NCEA Level 1 or below has decreased.

## WHERE DO THEY GO NEXT?

**3%** MOVE OVERSEAS

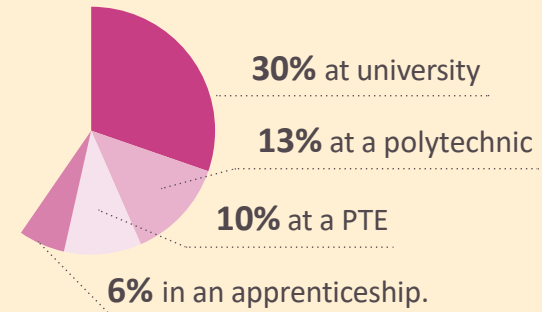
**8%** ARE NOT IN  
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT  
OR TRAINING (NEET)

**29%** ENTER WORK



**60%** ENTER TERTIARY STUDY

This is made up of:



Of all school leavers who enter tertiary:

**39%** study at Degree levels (7+)

**25%** study at Vocational levels (4-6)

**36%** study at Foundation levels (1-3).

# 02

# Ngā whakataunga

Decisions



# A framework for understanding learner decisions

Learners' decisions about what to do when they leave school are based on their **context**, their **life and career goals** and the **knowledge, skills** and **confidence** they need to achieve these.

The framework to the left shows these factors and how they connect.

In this section of the report we'll explore each in turn; the six factors make up the six sub-sections.

*A resilient, prosperous Aotearoa  
– where every person has the  
skills, knowledge and confidence  
to create a fulfilling life*

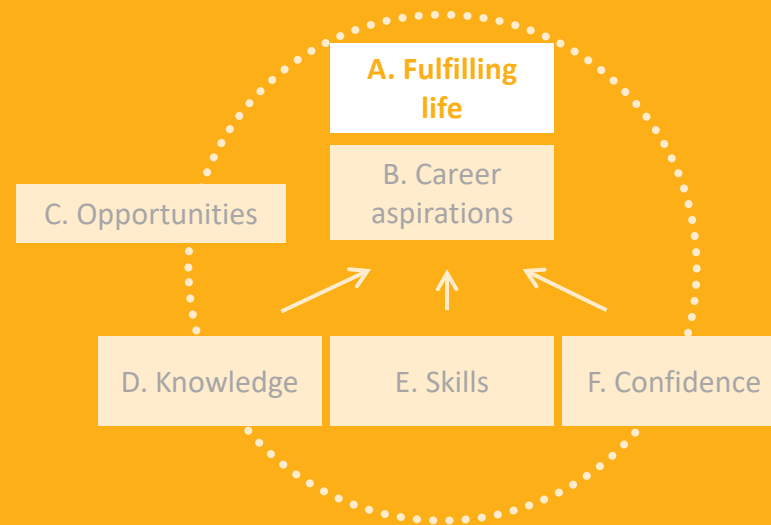
– TEC Vision



# A. The ultimate goal: A fulfilling life

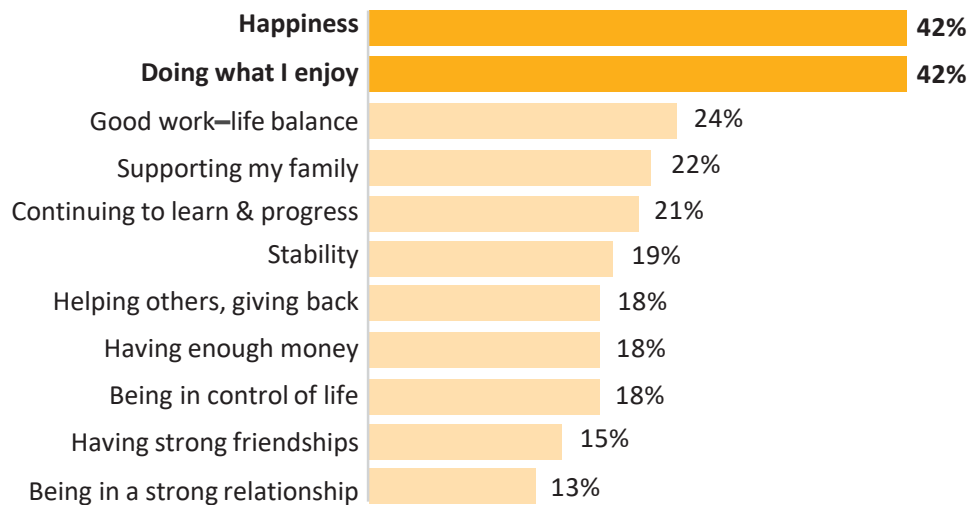
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To understand how we can support school leavers “to create a fulfilling life”, we asked what this means to them.



# Most of all, school leavers want **enjoyment and happiness** from their life

The most common definitions of a fulfilling life:



*“Who wants to do something you don’t want to do for your whole life? ... You’re making a lot of money. But what’s the point in life if you can’t enjoy it?”*

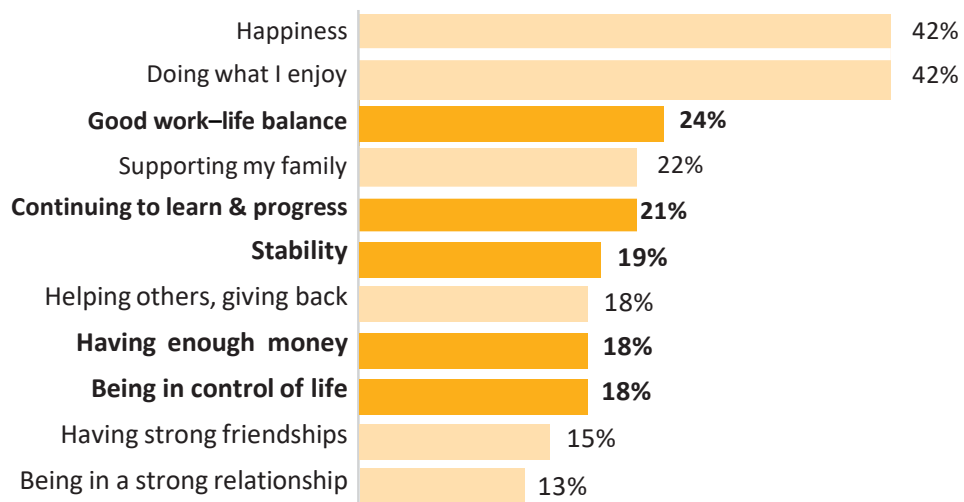
– Sion





# Having control over their future and financial security is also important

The most common definitions of a fulfilling life:



Learners valued stability and having *enough* money more than having *lots* of money, and this pattern held regardless of which decile school they came from.

Many interviewees also saw home ownership specifically as a marker of success.



*“Even though people try and make life about other things, in the end, what the world and life has turned into is all about getting your money. Without money, you’re nothing.”*

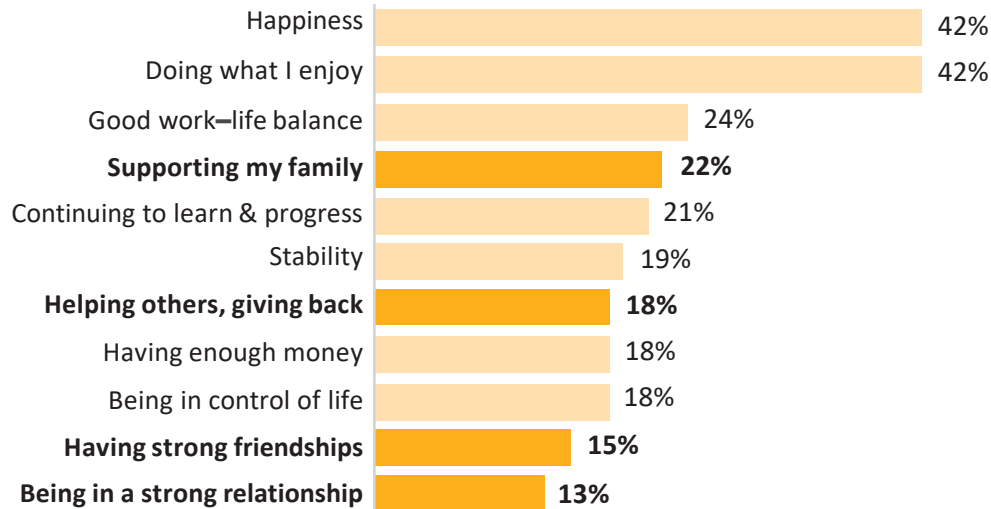
– Lachlan

*“What I see in the future, what I want in the future, is to be financially stable in a home that I can call my own.”*

– Sion

## ... as are good relationships

### The most common definitions of a fulfilling life:



For learners, supporting their family/whānau includes providing financial resources, as well as being available for emotional and practical support, making others proud of them, or fulfilling others' expectations. The value of supporting family often outweighs individual happiness and enjoyment, and is especially important for Pacific learners (50%).

A small number of learners also expressed wanting to have a good relationship with themselves, whether this was by embedding their cultural identity in their career (e.g. studying te reo Māori, whakairo, or Pacific nursing), wanting to take pride in their work, or having secure self-respect.



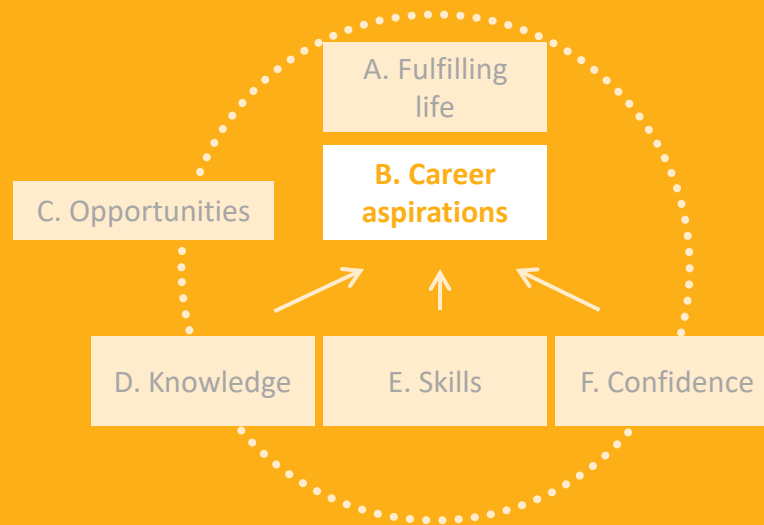
*“I want to give back to my family as well. Knowing that my family don’t have a lot of money, my dad works two jobs seven days a week and he’s been doing that for the past 30 years ... When I’m in a stable position I also want to give back ... they worked so hard trying to make it better for us that it would be cool to do that for them.”*

– Lachlan

# B. The next horizon: Career aspirations

Career aspirations shape school leavers' transition decisions (in the short term) and often form the path to their fulfilling life (in the long term).

In this section we asked learners about their dream career, and their actual planned career; and then compared these to primary school students' aspirations from Drawing the Future.<sup>[2]</sup>







## Enjoyment is also a central motivation of career aspirations

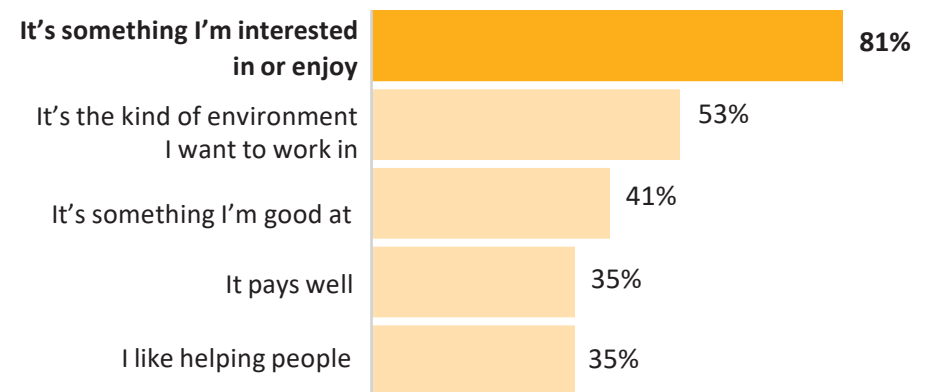
Just as **enjoyment** is a leading definition of school leavers' success in life, it is also the most common thing they want from their careers. Many learners begin their career pathway decision by thinking about what they enjoy or what interests them.

For these learners, the career system functions well in connecting them to a pathway based on these activities. For example:

*“From a young age I always liked money and working with money ... when I picked up accounting I quite enjoyed it ... When I took the [CareersQuest] quiz and then it said financial advisor, I read it and was like ‘Wow, that actually sounds really cool!’”*

– Cassidy

The most common motivations for choosing a particular career path:



# Learners with other values often feel shut out of the careers system



## 1. Those who don't make enjoyment-based career decisions:

For those learners who don't value enjoyment highly in their career (or value something else more highly), there is no 'in' to engage with career planning and decision-making. This disproportionately affects learners in priority groups because they are more likely to have other types of values. For example:

- **Pacific learners were more likely to value supporting their family over anything else (32% said it was the most important marker of a fulfilling life vs 11% of all school leavers).**
- **Neurodivergent and disabled learners were more likely than other learners to value stability in their life (32% of neurodivergent learners valued stability, vs 17% of neurotypical learners; and 24% of disabled learners valued stability vs 18% of non-disabled).**

*"Getting security ... because as a teenager you're insecure about ... how untenable your position might be, and how you might never get a job, you might fail in life ..."*

*"I just want to get past those facts, and not be like some friends I have who are breaking down mentally, in some cases about stress over 'I want to do this but it's too much work', or 'I want to figure out what I want to do but I have nowhere to start'."*

– Dylan



## 2. Those trying to meet multiple values in addition to enjoyment:

A singular focus on enjoyment does not support learners to balance multiple values, especially when these values conflict (**11%** of school leavers found that conflicting values made their decision difficult).

Other key motivators for school leavers' career choices include:

- **personal fit – for example, doing something I'm good at (41%)**
- **practical factors – for example, a job that pays well (35%) or the right kind of working environment for me (53%)**
- **impact – for example helping people (35%) and making a difference (31%).** Some learners, particularly those in priority groups, were also driven by a desire to break stereotypes, set an example for others and challenge discriminatory systems.

This can also disproportionately affect learners in priority groups. For example, Māori learners are more likely to place equal value on both enjoyment (**33%**) and being able to support their whānau (**24%**).

This can be experienced as a tension between having one foot in an individualist world focused on their own priorities, and one in their relationships and obligations to others.

*“My Mum wants me to go to Auckland, but I want to get away ... I want to go to Otago, but my Mum is scared ...”*

– Sion





### 3. Those who don't know what they enjoy:

Learners who don't yet know what they enjoy (17%) can feel that they have no touchpoint for engaging with careers and are more likely to still be undecided on their next step.

*“Miss keeps telling me to follow what I’m interested in, but I don’t know what I like.”*

– Maaka

*“I’ve always been kind of scared to talk to [careers advisors] ... If I don’t know what I want to do, how would they know what I should do?”*

– Helena

# School leavers' dream careers are prestigious professional and creative careers ...

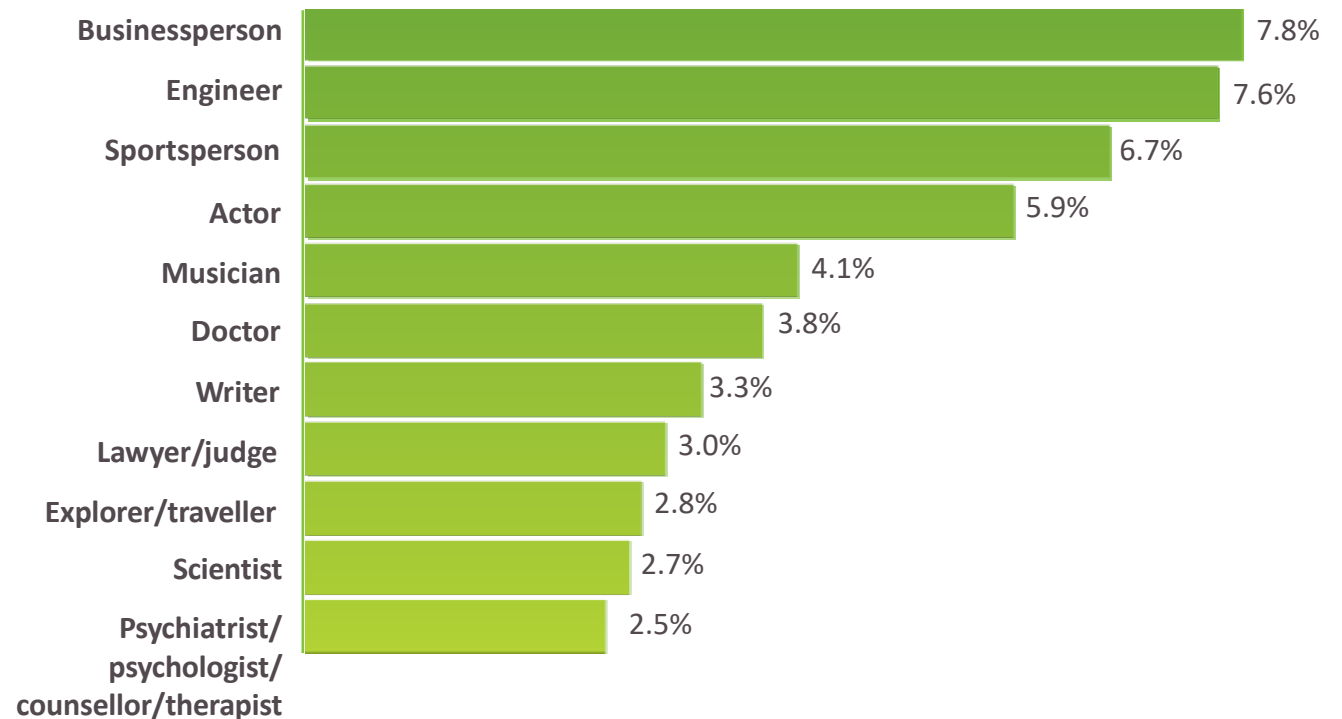
If there were no barriers to doing whatever they wanted,

# 50.3%

of school leavers want **one of 11 careers.**



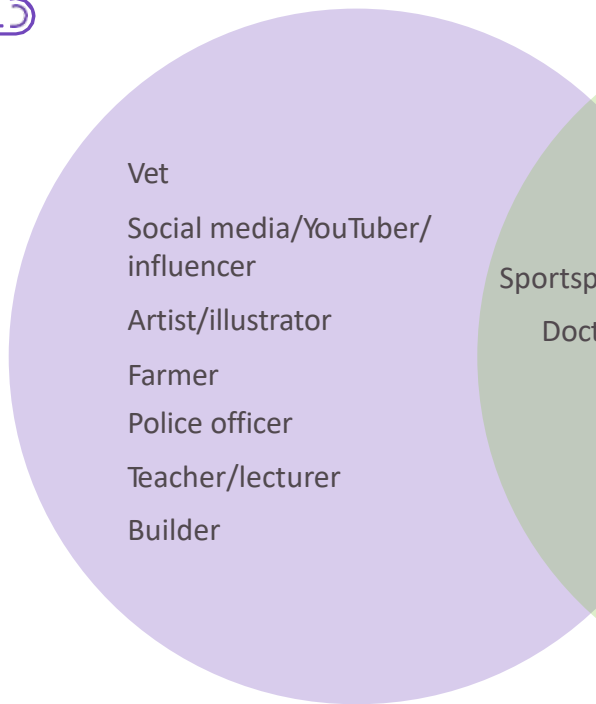
SCHOOL LEAVERS' TOP 11 DREAM CAREERS



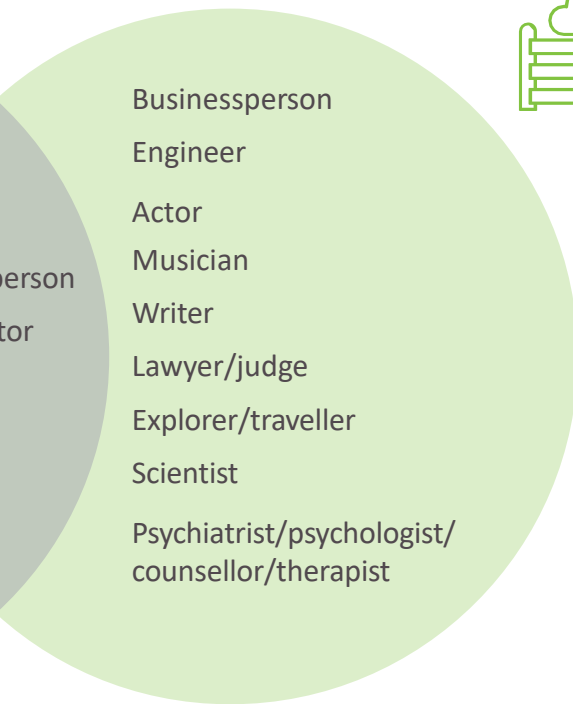
*Appendix C shows the full list of school leavers' dream and planned careers.*

# School leavers' dream careers differ from primary students' aspirations ...

PRIMARY STUDENTS' TOP CAREER ASPIRATIONS<sup>[2]</sup>



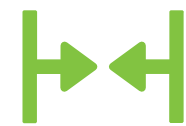
SCHOOL LEAVERS' TOP DREAM CAREERS



Sportsperson  
Doctor



Comparing the dream careers of school leavers to those of primary school students (from Drawing the Future)<sup>[2]</sup> shows a substantial change in the most popular occupations – only sportsperson and doctor remain popular among both age groups.



Both sets of dream careers are relatively narrow. Just over half of school leavers dream of one of 11 occupations, and just over half of primary school students dream of one of nine occupations.

# ... but they reflect similar thought processes

The overall patterns show that despite different specific aspirations, both groups' dream careers represent either:

- **literal translations of enjoyment-based activities, appropriate to each age group:**
  - o enjoying drawing, gaming, sports and animals for primary students translates to artist/illustrator, social media/YouTuber/influencer, sportsperson, vet and farmer careers
  - o creative, artistic, sports and travel-based activities for school leavers translate to sportsperson, actor, musician, writer, explorer/traveller.
- **prestigious occupations they are exposed to in the community:**
  - o such as doctor, teacher/lecturer and police officer for primary school students
  - o doctor, engineer, businessperson, lawyer/judge, scientist and psychiatrist/psychologist for school leavers.





# School leavers plan to pursue professional, trades and community occupations

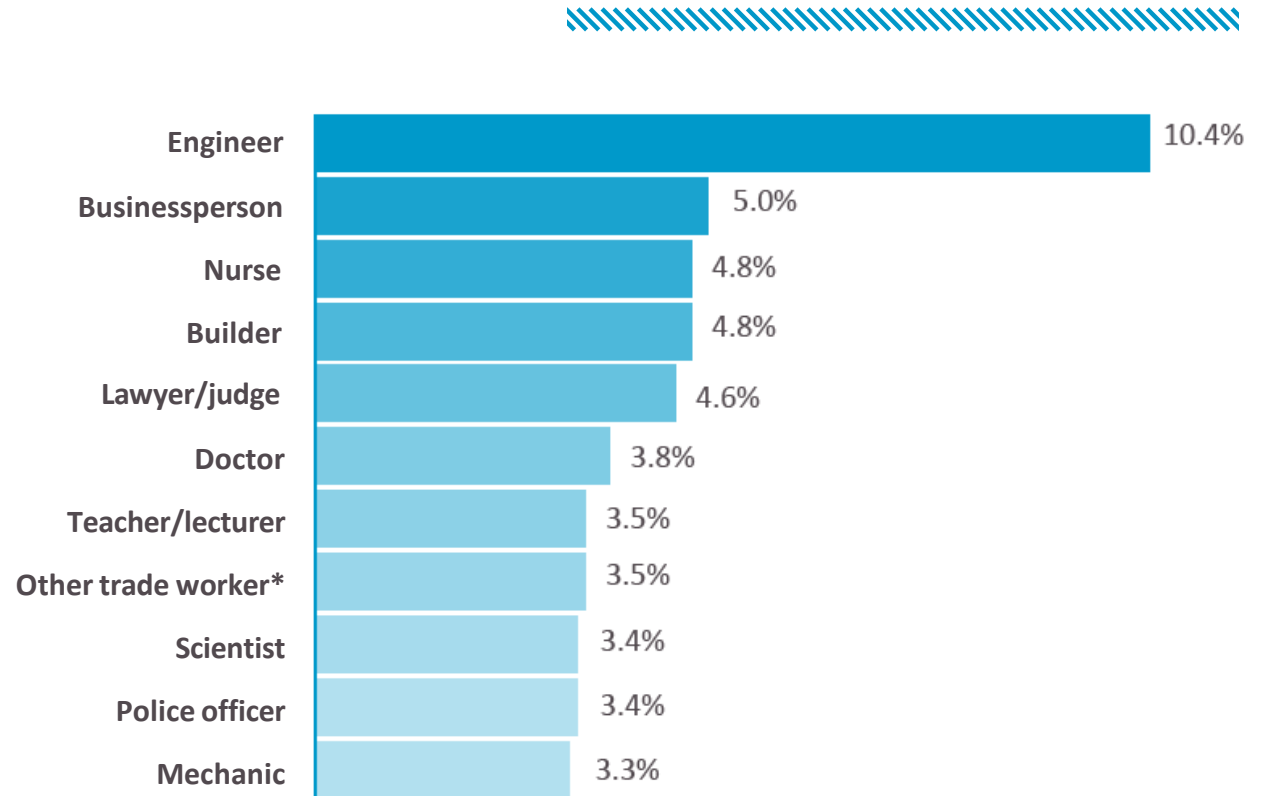
**50.4%**

of school leavers actually plan to pursue

**one of 11 careers.**



SCHOOL LEAVERS' TOP 11 PLANNED CAREERS

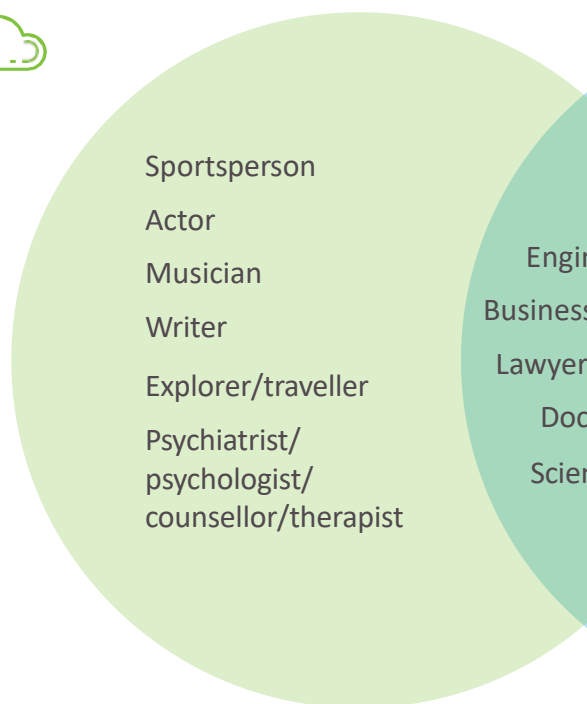


*\*e.g. electrician, tiler, etc.*

*Appendix C shows the full list of school leavers' dream and planned careers.*

# School leavers' plans reflect more practical considerations than their dream careers

## SCHOOL LEAVERS' TOP DREAM CAREERS



Sportsperson  
Actor  
Musician  
Writer  
Explorer/traveller  
Psychiatrist/  
psychologist/  
counsellor/therapist

Engineer  
Businessperson  
Lawyer/judge  
Doctor  
Scientist

Nurse  
Builder  
Teacher/lecturer  
Other trade workers\*  
Police officer  
Mechanic

## SCHOOL LEAVERS' TOP PLANNED CAREERS



# 67%

of school leavers are planning to pursue a different career than their dream.

This included

# 29%

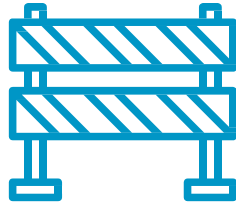
who were pursuing something in a completely different field than what they would do if there were no barriers.



Prestige and exposure remain important influences on school leavers' planned careers. Familiar community occupations that are commonly held in high regard (such as doctor, judge) are popular among their dream careers as well as planned pathways.

\* e.g. electrician, tiler, etc.

# Those practical considerations include barriers to entry and job stability/demand



**Perceived barriers to entry:** some careers that school leavers believe have low chances of success (e.g. sportsperson) or a long pathway to achieve them (e.g. psychiatrist/psychologist/counsellor/therapist) drop out of the most popular careers.



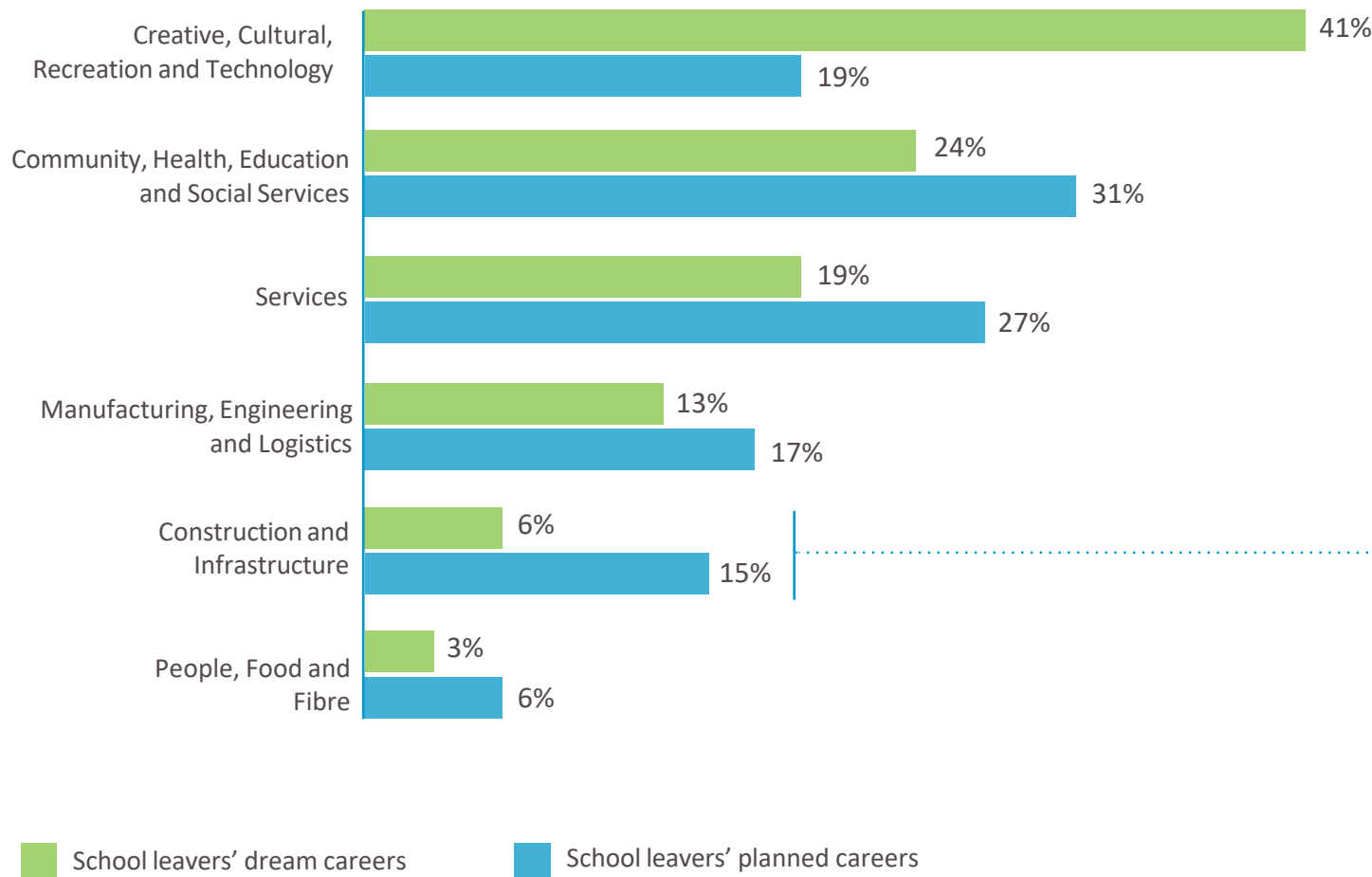
**Job stability and labour market demand:** students perceive careers in the trades (e.g. builder, mechanic, other trades workers), and health care/community-based roles (e.g. doctor, nurse, teacher/lecturer, police officer) as having stable demand and income, and these feature more commonly in their planned career pathways.

*“Obviously, you have to have a plan B.”*

– Elliot

# Looking at learners' **dream careers** and **planned careers** by WDC highlights these considerations

The proportion of learners' dream careers and planned careers that sit under each Workforce Development Council (WDC):

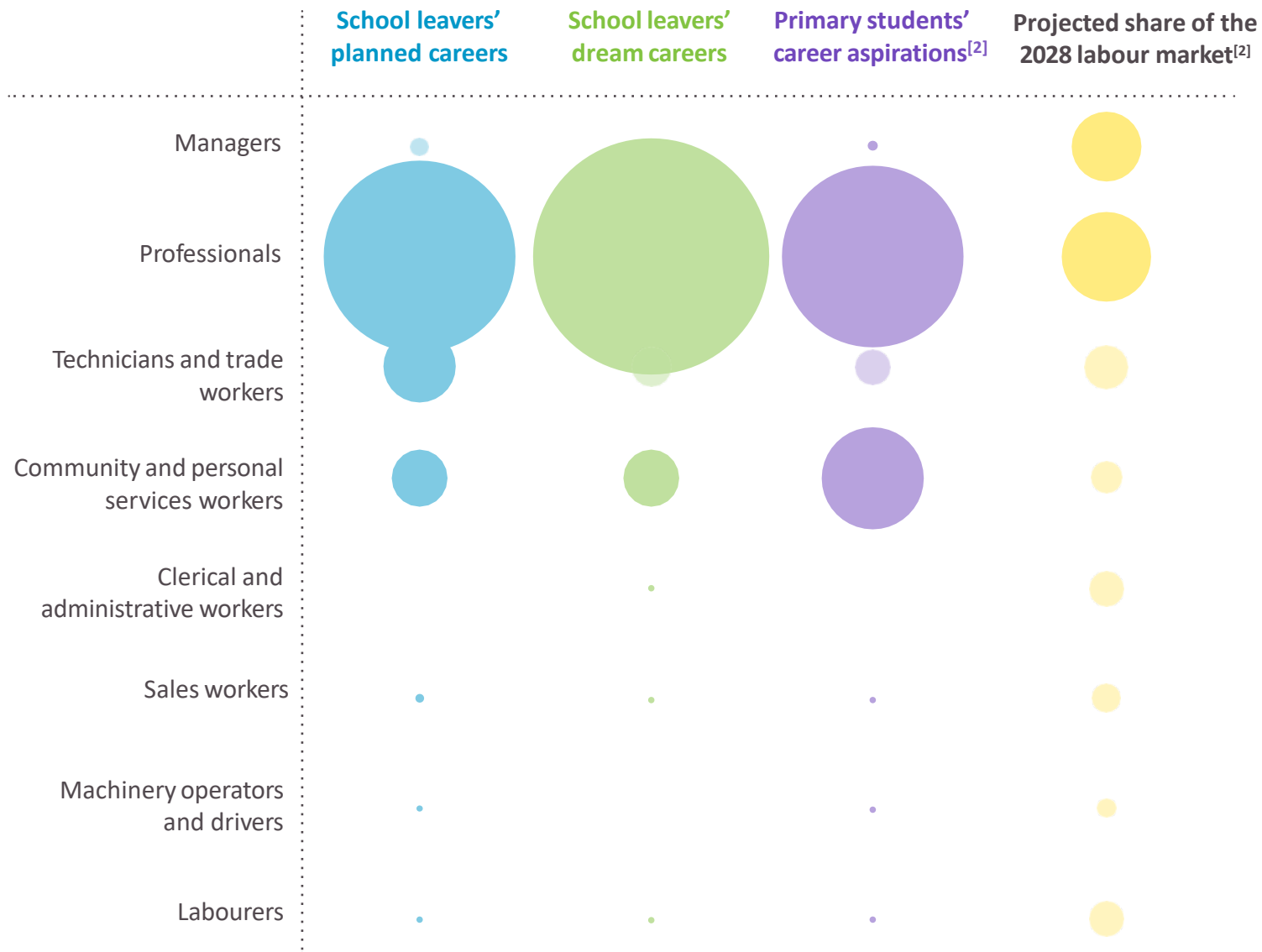


Sectors with perceived lower demand/stability are more popular as dream careers than as planned careers. **41%** of school leavers dreamed of careers covered by the Creative, Cultural, Recreation and Technology Workforce Development Council (WDC), though only **19%** were planning to pursue them. This in part reflects careers such as actor, musician, writer, explorer/traveller dropping out of the list of most popular planned careers.

In contrast, sectors with perceived higher demand/stability (i.e. health, education, construction) featured more highly in planned careers than in dream careers.



# Even so, some of these practical choices don't match the projected labour market



Although some learners make trade-offs from what they would most enjoy to 'safer' choices, these plans still don't always reflect the kinds of jobs that are predicted to be in demand.

For example, Professional careers are projected to make up **26%** of the workforce by 2028, and yet **55%** of school leavers are planning to pursue these careers.

In contrast, Managers are projected to make up **20%** of the 2028 labour market and yet only **5%** of school leavers plan to pursue these roles.

Primary students' career aspirations<sup>[2]</sup>

Careers involving animals (vet, farmer) were popular for primary school children, as were creative careers.

Sportsperson was a shared dream for school children and leavers, but dropped off actual plans due to perceived lower chances of success.

Doctor was the only career that remained popular across all three lists. This is likely due to being a visible/familiar role, as well as a highly regarded and stable career that aligns with learner values.

Creative careers dominated school leaver dreams, reflecting activities they enjoy.

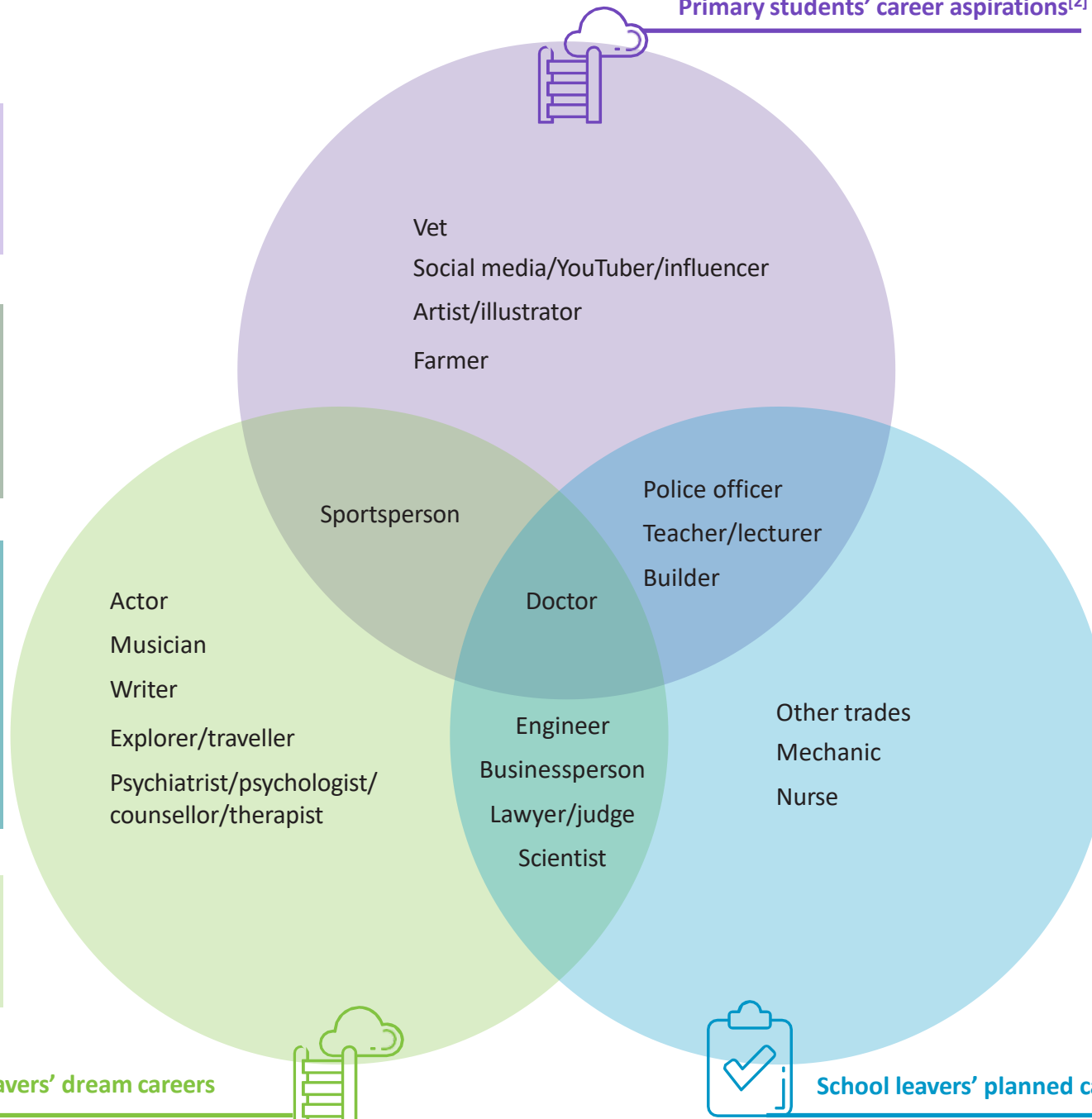
Community-based roles (police officer, teacher/lecturer) were familiar and also seen as having stable demand and income, making them popular for children and as planned pathways.

Other trades, mechanics and nursing only entered into consideration as leavers' actual plans, where they were seen as in demand.

Occupations that are held in high regard (engineer, businessperson) are popular as dream careers **and** 'accessible' planned careers for school leavers.

School leavers' dream careers

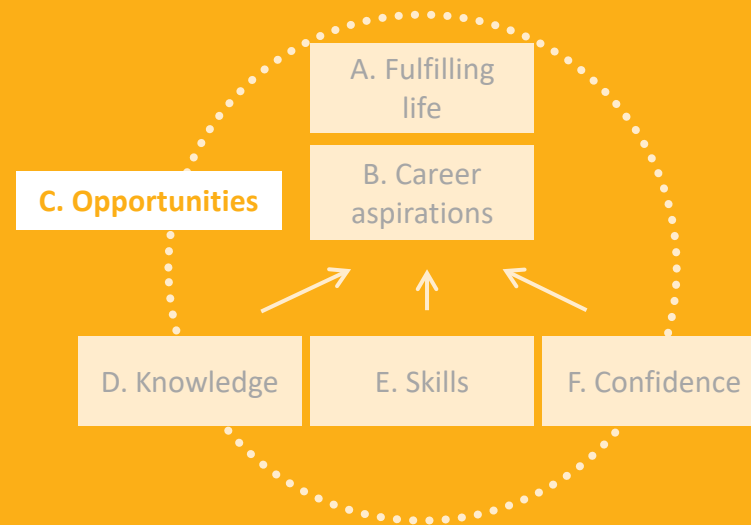
School leavers' planned careers



# C. Opportunities

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External barriers to choices



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***“We do live in a Pākehā world, Pākehā education system ...***

*"It fails to recognise that people of colour, and Pacific Islanders, and even people who have immigrated here from Asia, how their cultures and how their ancestors lived and learned and shared knowledge ... Māori they learnt visually and they didn't learn through writing, and so now bringing in this whole Pākehā system and education it's harder for everyone else who isn't Pākehā to fit into that, and to be able to reach the high standard that Pākehā people are reaching."*

– Lachlan





# External barriers can limit learners' opportunity to follow their preferred career pathways when leaving school

29% of students would choose a completely different aspiration (in a different field altogether) if there were no barriers, and a further 18% are pursuing a modified version of their "no barriers" choice. Only 33% of school leavers said that if they could have a career doing the things they most enjoyed, and there were no barriers stopping them, it would be the same career that they are already pursuing.

There are **five key barriers** that prevent school leavers pursuing their preferred career:



Cost



Connections



Capacity



COVID-19



Systemic  
biases

Crucially, they all tend to disproportionately affect learners in the TEC's priority groups.

## Cost is a barrier for almost half of school leavers

**48%** of school leavers said cost (of living and/or tertiary study) made it harder for them to do what they wanted to do when they left school.

Those in priority groups were often even more likely to experience this. It was a barrier for:

**76%**

of Pacific learners

**72%**

of disabled learners

**55%**

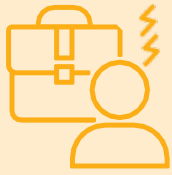
of Māori learners

**52%**

of women learners



# Cost influences choices:



## Cost increases pressure to enter the workforce or an apprenticeship

64% of learners entering the work pathway chose it because they needed to earn money.

***“I need to work and earn money to allow me to continue living in Wellington.”***

– Survey respondent

Apprenticeship-based careers such as those in Construction and Infrastructure become more popular among school leavers’ plans than they are in their ideal dream careers.



## Cost shuts down some or all tertiary pathways

The perceived cost of tertiary courses was prohibitive to many students even before they knew the exact costs of a course.<sup>[3]</sup> Fear of taking out loans discouraged many learners from tertiary study, particularly longer qualifications without a clear career pathway at completion. Living costs associated with tertiary study away from home also meant that many learners compromised on their choice of pathway so they could stay close to home.

***“I’m not getting a student loan. They scare me, they scare me so much ... I don’t want to be 40 and still paying something off for when I was 18.”***

– Nicole

***“If it wasn’t fees free I don’t know if I would have done it.”***

– Melody



## Cost forces learners’ pathways to be decided by grants or scholarships rather than learner choice

Learners who are not completely discouraged from tertiary options by cost barriers often rely on scholarships and grants to enable their choice. These are incredibly enabling for students who get them, but are deal-breakers for those who miss out. Without guidance, students (especially neurodivergent students) can be unaware of deadlines and overwhelmed by the application process, meaning they miss out on financial support.

***“Applying for scholarships would have been awful, because I tried to do it three times, and then while I’m online I would have checked my Facebook while I’m here, then I would have forgotten about it. By the time I did it, it would have been way too late.”***

– Nicole

## Connections with those on desired pathways are only available to some students

**33%** of school leavers (one in three) experience a lack of connections to their desired pathway as a barrier.

Knowing people in industries or on pathways they are interested in enables learners to experience what that career/pathway is really like and to connect directly with employers, role models and others that can help facilitate their journey.

Learners who have small personal networks, are the first in their family to take a particular pathway, or live in isolated areas are limited in the opportunities they encounter incidentally, and struggle to enter onto particular pathways as a result.

For example, Gateway classes and work experience at school are extremely enabling for learners, often facilitating employment and apprenticeship pathways. But not all learners get these opportunities in a pathway they are interested in: **two-thirds** of learners have no exposure to employers.<sup>[4]</sup>

*“I like [automotive engineering], because I did that last year in Year 12, so I was really keen. Plus the people I was with were really positive, and had a really positive outcome and knew what they were wanting to do.”*

– Meredith





# Capacity (time and space) to fully engage with career planning is at a premium for school leavers

**97%** of learners have additional responsibilities (such as part-time work, volunteering, caregiving) or extracurricular activities.

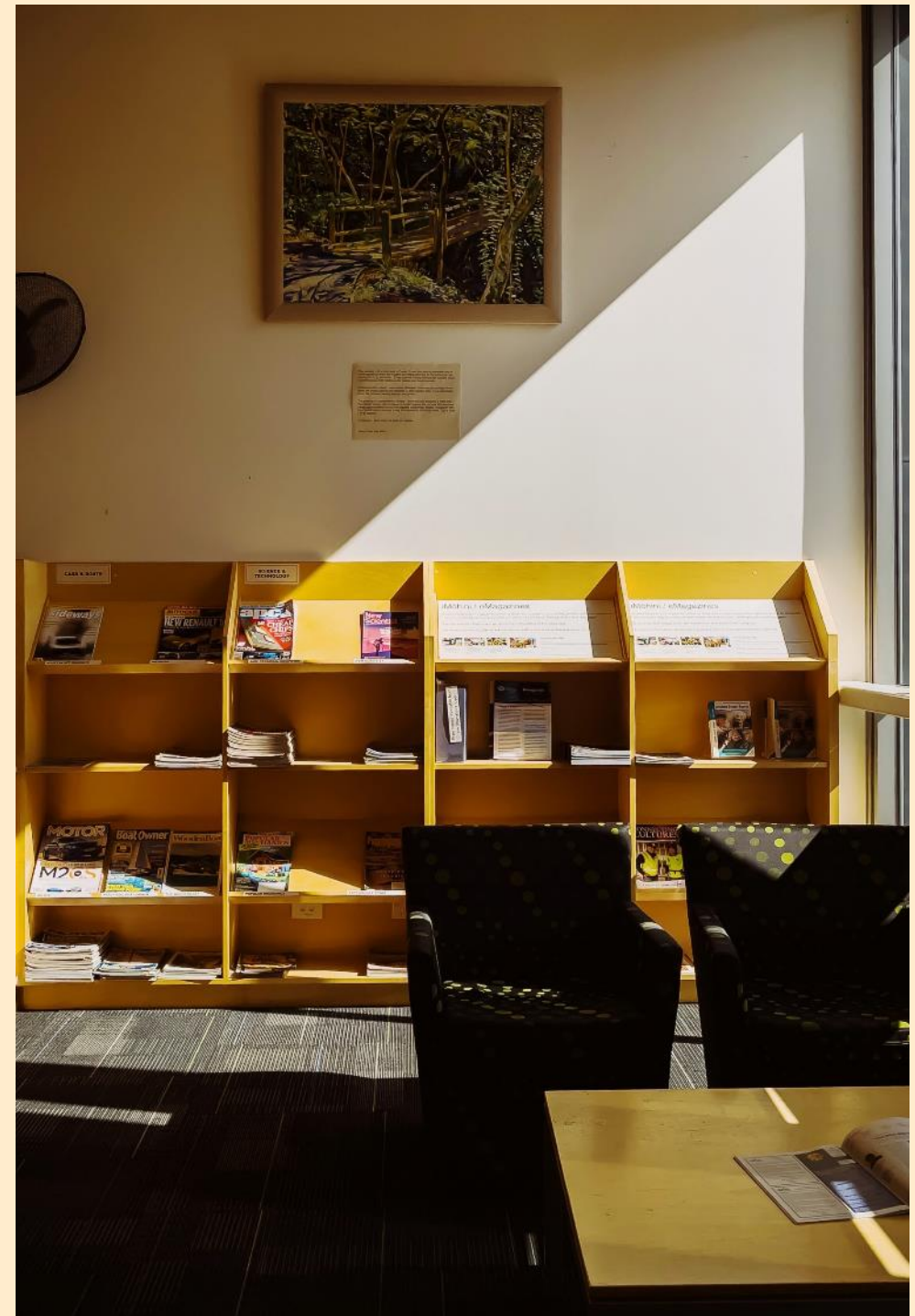
These commitments impact the amount of time they can dedicate to deciding upon a career pathway. Those who have less time to decide still have to make a decision no matter what, and this time inequity can often cause added pressure.

Practical demands on time and space disproportionately affect learners in priority groups. For example, Pacific learners and Māori learners (**84%** and **51%** respectively in comparison to **15%** of non-Māori and non-Pacific learners) are more likely to have responsibilities at home caring for family and whānau.

Learners with larger families also discussed how this sometimes affected their ability to work through their options in their own way.

*[What else is really important in the decision?] "Probably time. Because sometimes I don't have enough time to do the things that I want in one day ... Because I have a big family everyone's like 'Come on, let's go, let's go' ... I'm always busy because of them."*

– Meredith





# COVID-19 was a game-changer for some

**23%** of school leavers said their decision was affected by COVID-19.

These effects included:

- negatively impacting their mental or emotional wellbeing (**22%** of those affected)
- preventing international travel (**21%**)
- affecting the industry they wanted to get into (**18%**)
- affecting their ability to get the grades/credits they need (**11%**).

For more than one in three (**36%**) of these learners, COVID-19 had triggered a complete rethinking or change of their plan.

*“I struggled a lot more with physics over lockdown, and it snowballed and has affected me a lot this year. I now decided to drop it after this year, which means I won’t be able to be a physiotherapist.”*

– Survey respondent

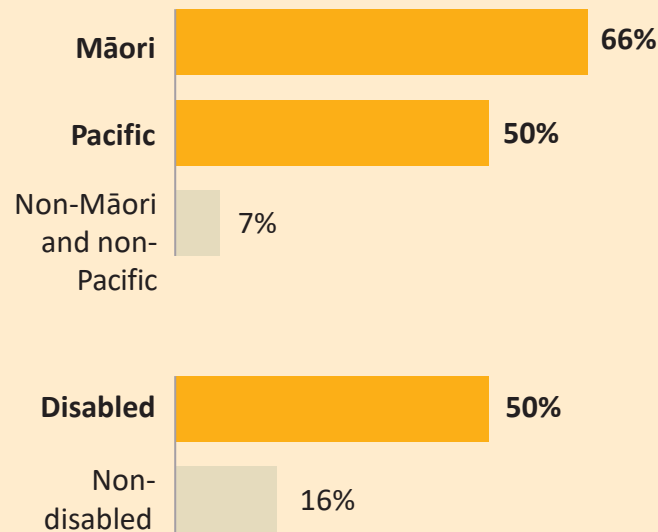


# Priority groups were more affected by COVID-19



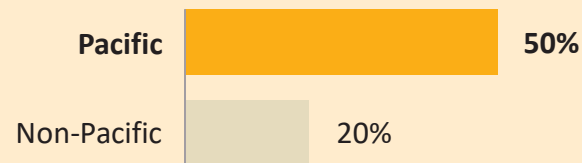
**Emotional wellbeing** was significantly more likely to be affected by COVID-19 for Māori, Pacific and disabled students.

Learners who said COVID-19 impacted their emotional wellbeing:



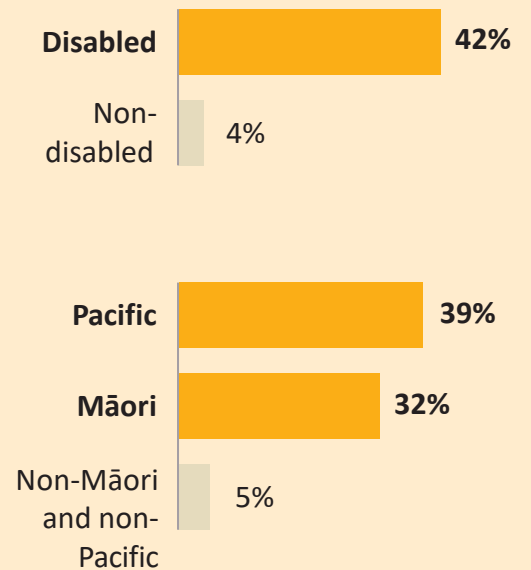
**Effects on industries and labour markets** were impactful for 50% of Pacific students but only 20% of non-Pacific students.

Learners who said COVID-19 impacted the industry or labour market of their chosen pathway:



**COVID-19 affecting grades** was also more likely for disabled, Pacific and Māori students.

Learners who said COVID-19 impacted their grades:



## COVID-19 effects were positive for some learners

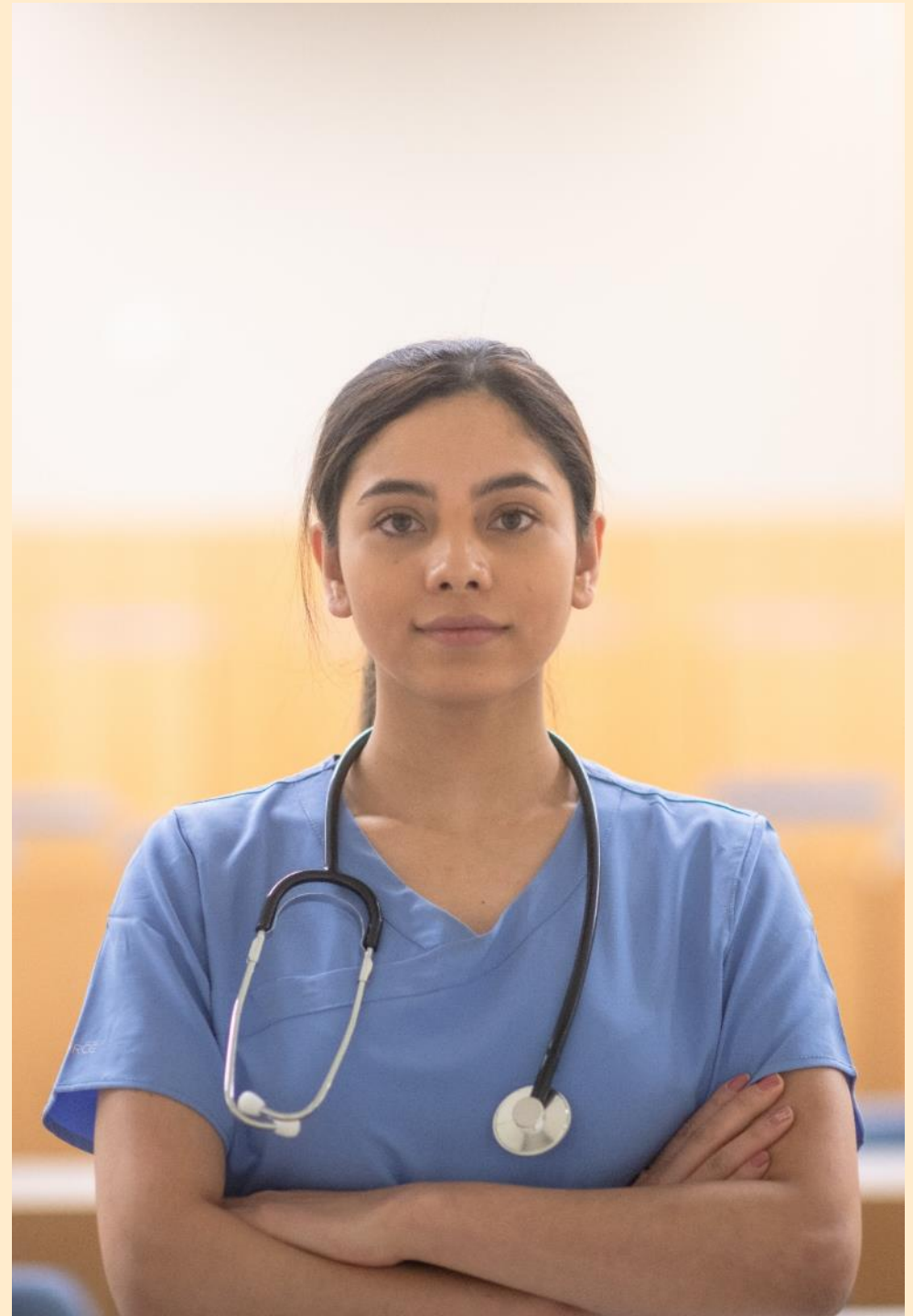
Some learners stated that COVID-19 had a positive impact or increased confidence in their decision (16%). For example, the spotlight on the essential workers during the pandemic validated choices to work in essential workforces, particularly nursing.

***“Nurses are very in demand and more recognised now due to COVID, this has given me more certainty that I will be able to get a job once I finish training.”***

– Survey respondent

***“I wanted to have a gap year but with COVID and having lockdown I realised I wanted to start study ASAP, as I don’t want to be stuck at home, I want to do something with myself.”***

– Survey respondent





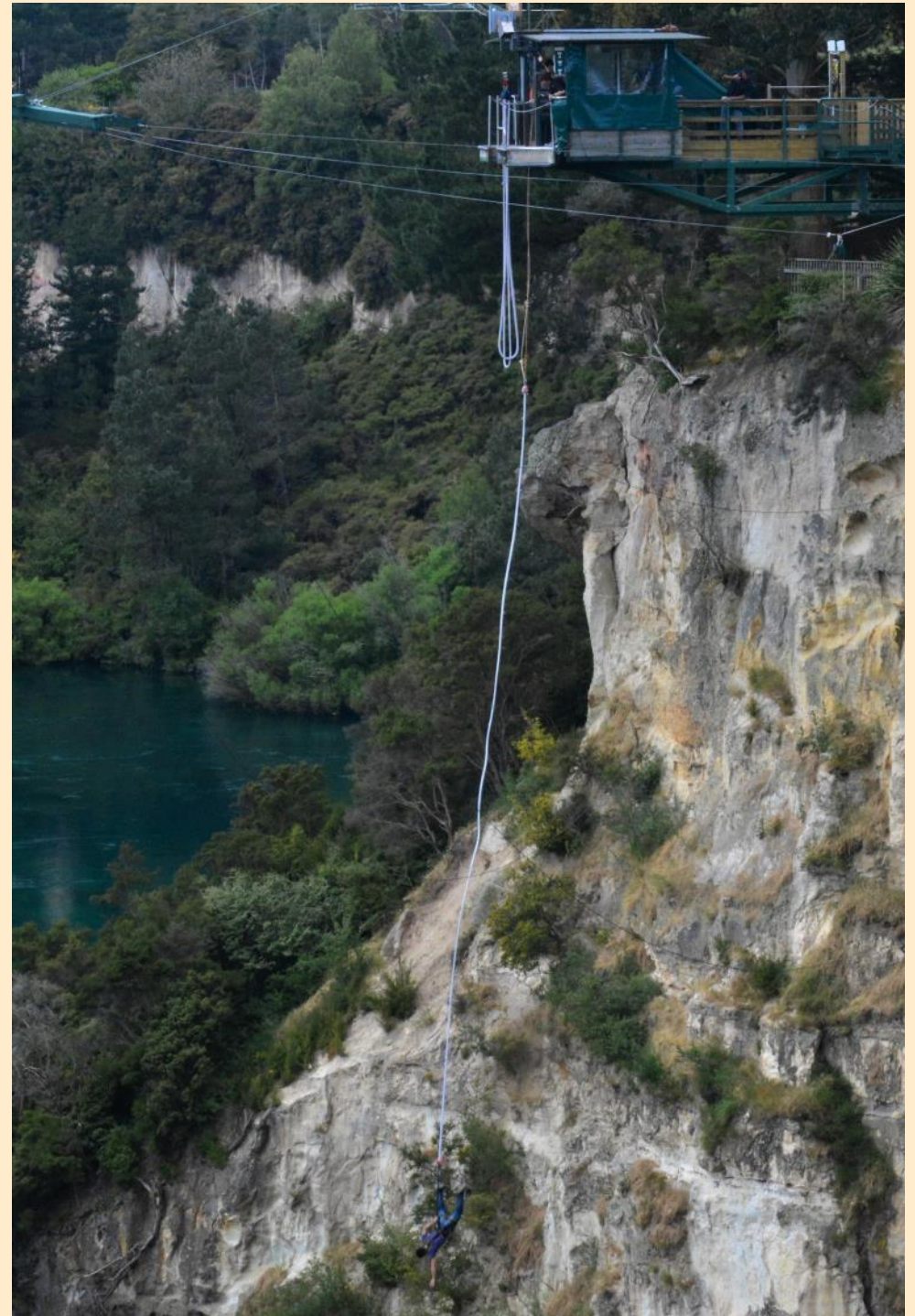
## Some did not recognise the impact of COVID-19, even if their industry of choice was heavily affected

Those who said COVID-19 did not affect their decision included many of those pursuing careers in heavily affected sectors, such as tourism and hospitality (69% of those pursuing hospitality and tourism careers said COVID-19 has not affected their decision).

*"This year, yeah, some people went over to Disneyland but had to come back because of COVID. They said that by the time that I finish getting my [hotel management] degree and scholarship and stuff, the COVID will probably be gone. Which is in a couple of years. Hopefully it's gone and everything and the US borders are really, really cool ..."*

*"If the borders don't open I can just travel around New Zealand. I can just do hotel jobs in other places like Taupō."*

– Meredith



# Systemic biases make some pathways even more difficult for underserved learners

Systemic bias leads to inequitable access to opportunities and resources, and influences pathways. This is evident in the pathways taken by different groups of school leavers:

**1. Māori and Pacific learners (20% and 23% respectively) are less than half as likely as non-Māori and non-Pacific learners (51%) to leave school with University Entrance.**

**2. Māori and Pacific school leavers are more likely to transition into the workforce than tertiary study.**

**41%** of Māori and **30%** of Pacific school leavers transition into work, compared to **23%** of non-Māori and non-Pacific learners.

**3. Māori and Pacific learners who do enter tertiary education are more likely to study at foundation levels than learners from other groups.**

**49%** of Māori and **39%** of Pacific school leavers who enter tertiary education do foundation education, versus **19%** of non-Māori and non-Pacific learners.

Māori are also less likely to enter university than learners from other groups.

**4. Women are much less likely to enter apprenticeships than men.**

Even when they are pursuing similar careers, women may be more likely to do so through provider-based study pathways than through work-based pathways. For example, women make up 8% of provider-based carpentry study; however, women are only 3% of on-the-job-based carpentry study. This can have implications for future debt, skills required and employability.



These patterns are results of inequitable access to educational and socioeconomic resources:

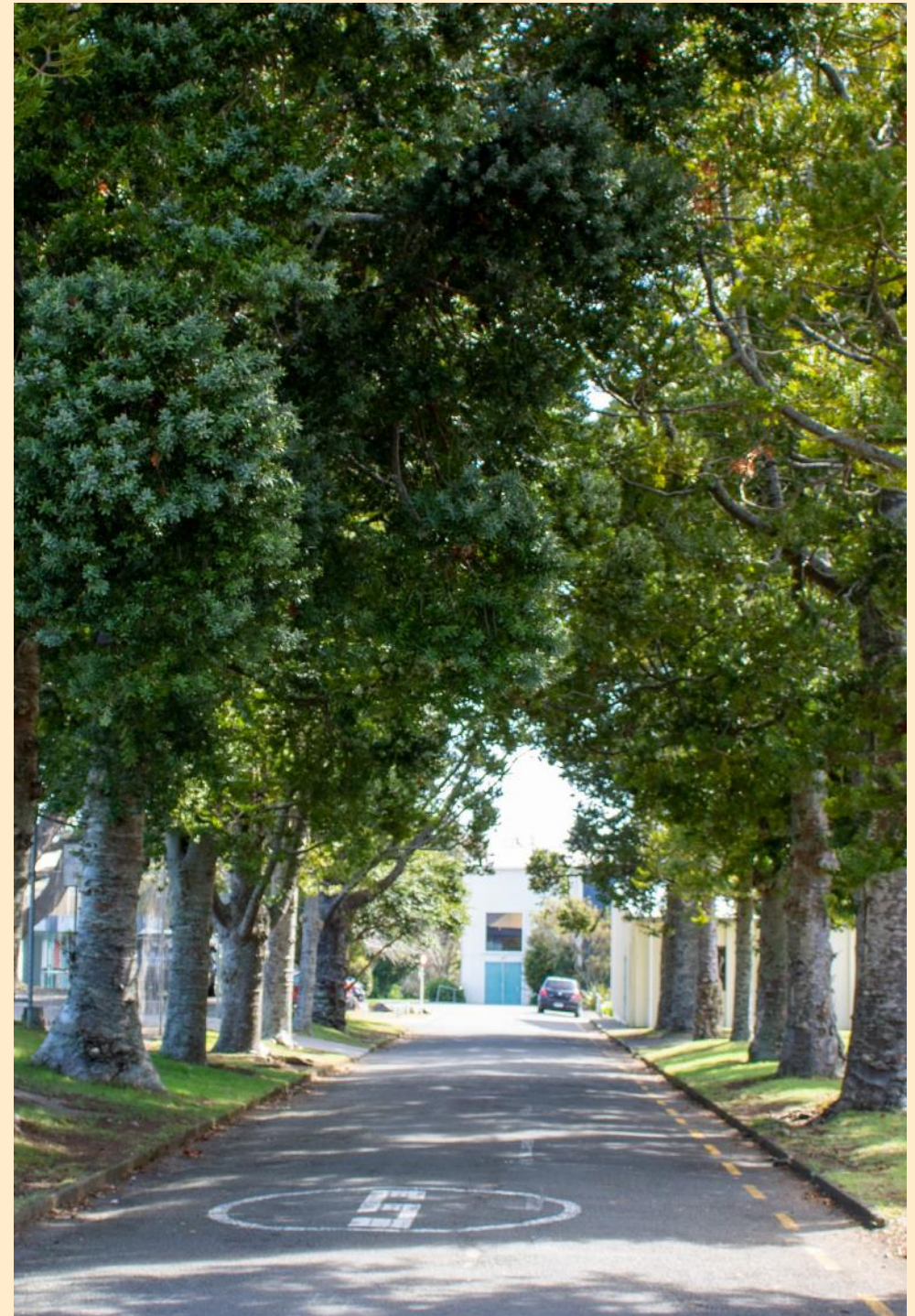
- **Streaming practices** in schools mean that Māori and Pacific learners are disproportionately streamed into lower ‘ability’ classes based on racist stereotypes rather than their actual abilities and potential.<sup>[5]</sup> Students in ‘lower’ streamed classes receive fewer resources, less teacher time and lower expectations from educators.<sup>[4]</sup> This becomes a self-fulfilling cycle where these students are less likely to succeed in the Pākehā-centric education system (resulting in pattern 1 above), are further channelled into lower-level tertiary education options and lower-paid employment<sup>[4]</sup> (patterns 2 and 3), and internalise negative stereotypes about themselves.

*“For my maths I got held back ... I clicked, I was like ‘Wait hold on, if I’m still doing the same work as Year 12s, and I was Year 13 ... wouldn’t that mean I’m only getting Level 2?’*

*“Then I told the teacher, ‘Am I only getting Level 2 credits?’ ‘Oh yeah’, and I was like, ‘What do you mean oh yeah?! I’m Level 3, I’m supposed to get this!’ ‘Oh we are going to change it.’*

*“They didn’t change it until I got my Mum in here ... And this is what held me back. I missed the first semester [university enrolment] because I didn’t get enough credits.”*

– Sion





- **Access to educational resources** such as career guidance, technology and work experience is inequitably distributed. For example, **47%** of school leavers have no exposure to career advice across Aotearoa,<sup>[6]</sup> and this is inequitably distributed (e.g. disabled students are less likely to receive advice from their school careers advisor; **22%** vs **15%** of non-disabled students). Māori students experience racism in the classroom which prevents them from participating in meaningful career pathways.<sup>[7]</sup> Students at girls-only secondary schools experience difficulties accessing opportunities to experiences and placements in male-dominated fields, where these opportunities are readily available at boys-only schools.

*"For me, I feel like I know about the [scholarship and admission] dates. It's just like not a lot of people know about them, and not a lot of people have access to knowledge about them.*

*"[Here,] the careers just call you in and they will be like 'There's this thing you have to get in by the weekend, do you want to do it?' For me I know I can because I'm focused, but for some people they need a long time to write stuff ...*

*"I think [that's] why higher decile students get a lot of the scholarships and a lot of them do go on to uni, and you don't see a lot of Pacific and Māori and those minority groups going into those spaces ...*

*"There's not the same access to them, and not understanding that the privileges or the different life experiences or the things they are going through personally that restrict them ... It's all done in the same way, which doesn't work for everyone."*

– Lachlan

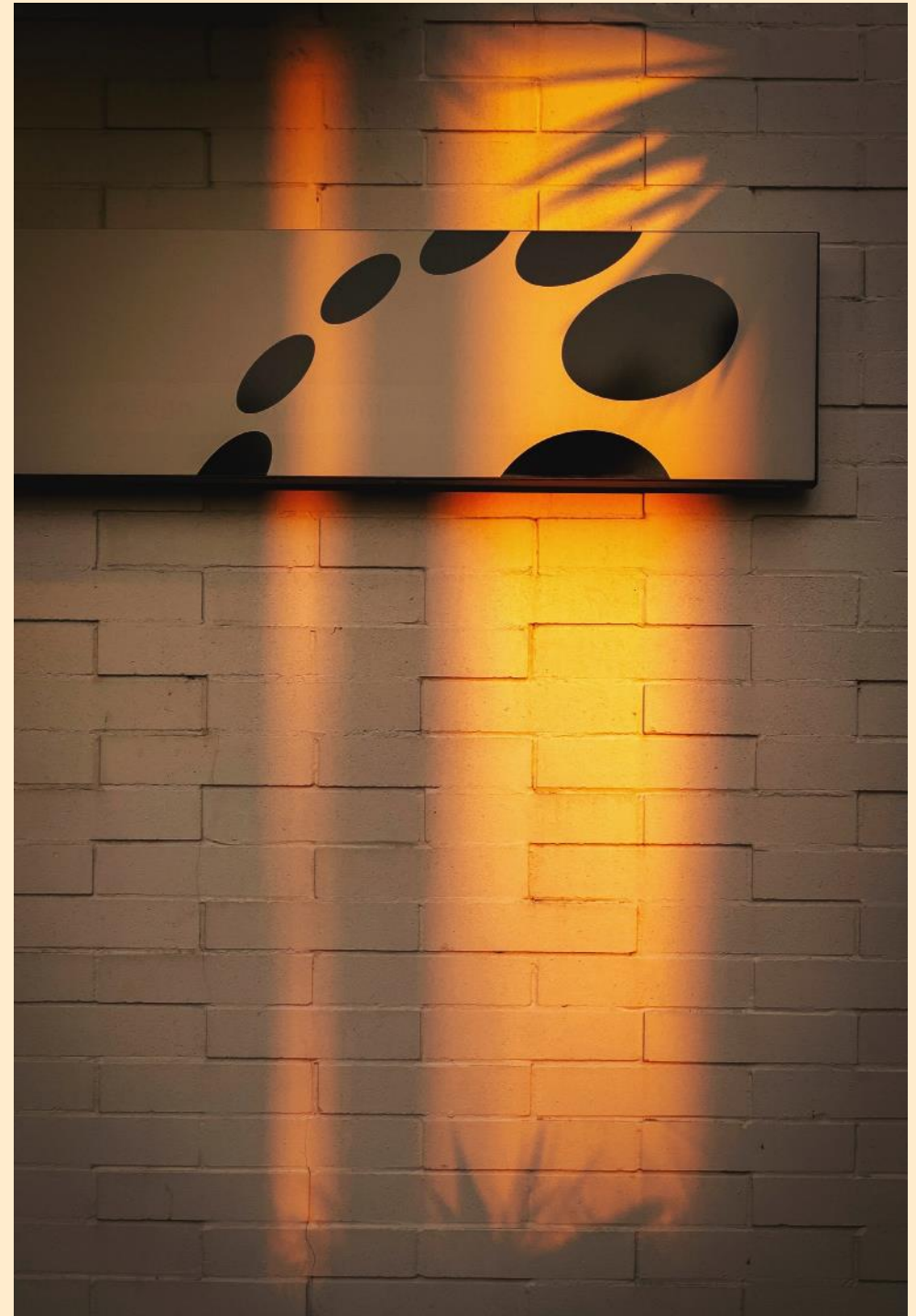


- **Socioeconomic inequalities** impact on achievement (and therefore pathway opportunities) even more than cultural, ethnic and identity issues.<sup>[4]</sup> Socioeconomically deprived learners (among whom Māori and Pacific students are over-represented) are also more likely to leave school for work in order to support their family financially.<sup>[7]</sup>

*“I know that my family has been struggling financially, and even keeping it separate so they haven’t been telling us about it. But along the years I’ve started to find out about things ... So if things go pretty bad then I’m making the decision to support my family rather than go to uni, which would be very helpful to them.”*

– Remy

- **When learners want (or need) to stay local** when they finish school, regional lack of opportunities can mean that their options for tertiary education and training are limited. This barrier may be a higher barrier for women (**28%** saw not wanting to move away from home as a barrier, vs **18%** of men).





# Learners who are fuelled by the challenge or have the right support can overcome these barriers

Despite the significant barriers many learners face due to inequalities, there are examples of good support and resilience that sometimes enable school leavers to succeed.

Some learners are motivated by the barriers themselves, which spur them on to succeed to break the stereotypes. For example, some Māori learners consciously wanted to leave a legacy of breaking out of the negative statistics about them, and women were inspired by examples of other women succeeding in male-dominated fields.

*“The best part I loved was they said ‘You can’t do that, you’re dyslexic, you’re dumb’. But I love that because when I did it, those same people come up to me and they’re just like, ‘Bro, you can make it’. The same people that said ‘You’re trash, you can’t do this, you’re this level’. When I do it, when I prove them wrong ... I love proving people wrong, I love that so much.”*

– Sion

*“Achieving Level 1, 2 and 3 NCEA. It’s something little, but the statistics show that Māori don’t succeed in that stuff. That’d be cool, like ‘I did that!’”*

– Kahurangi



*“It kind of makes me want to do it more. Because I know how cars work, and I know how to take them apart, and I know how to put them together again. That’s one of my main priorities is proving people wrong, that I CAN do this.”*

– Meredith



Where learners are in culturally affirming supportive environments, they achieve the same levels of success as learners who are not held back by systemic barriers. For example, **almost twice as many Māori school leavers in kura kaupapa (38%) achieved university entrance as those in mainstream schools (20%)**. Further, learners receiving this type of support have greater confidence in their abilities, and increased wellbeing.

***“[At a mainstream school you’re] Māori statistics, you get put at the back of the classroom, not getting focused on. But I was here [kura kaupapa] and I was top priority, ‘We’re going to make you achieve no matter what’. I had no chance of getting NCEA Level 1 or Level 2 at that school, and I came here and I smashed it like it was nothing.”***

– Kahurangi

Similarly, Pacific students who receive culturally affirming support and tutoring cite it as transformative for their success in school. Connecting with other Pacific learners who had been on the same path and who understood their experiences was hugely beneficial.

***“It’s [UniPrep programme] people who have similar backgrounds to us. It’s easier for us to connect to. It’s someone who understands what it feels like.”***

– Sela





# To change overall patterns, the system must create equitable opportunities for all

These examples are success stories in spite of inequities created and perpetuated by systems. However, in order to deliver on our purpose and vision, good outcomes need to be achievable by all learners, rather than being seen as an example of breaking through systemic constraints.



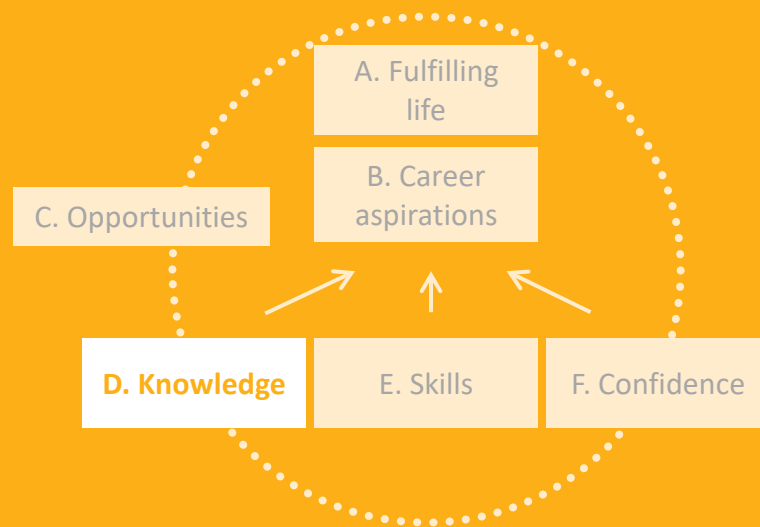
*"So given what we've done with limited resources, imagine what we could be doing if we got the same kinds of support students get at other schools."*

*"Imagine how much more we would blossom."*

*"So don't look down on us, instead, listen to all our voices and give us all the same opportunities."<sup>[8]</sup>*

# D. Knowledge

Making an informed decision



# The knowledge that learners need to make an informed decision comes from **four types of information**



## **1. Orienting information:**

Guiding direction and values



## **2. Tailoring information:**

What jobs/careers might suit them



## **3. Deep information:**

What a pathway is “really like”



## **4. Logistical information:**

How to make it happen

Without all four types of information, learners are at risk of missing opportunities, being more affected by systemic biases, and having limited progress towards their fulfilling life.

Learners who find their decision easy have typically received information in this order: orienting – tailoring – deep – logistical.



# 1. ORIENTING INFORMATION

*Knowledge about learners' strengths, what they want, and their values*

Orienting information is self-knowledge about the learner. It is the first step in pathway discovery, and often enables learners to engage with pathway decision-making. Having orienting information helps learners set their direction.

## What it looks like:

- Learners understand their values, interests, skills and needs.

## Key channels:

- This information tends to come from learners themselves and their immediate community – parents and other family and whānau members.

## Timing of information:

- Learners develop orienting information early and throughout their lives. It shapes all their decisions and strongly influences the final pathway choice.



*Inā kei te mōhio koe ko wai koe, i anga mai koe i hea, kei te mōhio koe, kei te anga atu ki hea.*

If you know who you are and where you come from, then you will know where you are going.





## When learners *have* orienting information ...

They know what their passions and interests are (**89%** of learners do). This helps make the decision easy. Of those who found the decision easy, **25%** agreed that it was because they had “**always known**” what they would do when they left school.

Of the learners who found the decision difficult, **17%** didn't know what they wanted.

Neurodivergent and disabled learners are slightly more likely than other learners to have orienting information (**91%** and **94%** respectively know what their passions and interests are). This may be due to receiving more support around understanding their interests, skills, values and needs.



## When learners *don't have* orienting information ...

**17%** of learners found the decision difficult specifically because they didn't know what they wanted.

Many learners are expected to already have orienting information and know their interests, values and skill set, and to be using these to inform pathway decisions.

For those missing orienting information, such expectations can leave them feeling **shut out of careers conversations altogether**, making it even harder to decide on their next step.





## 2. TAILORING INFORMATION

### *Knowledge about which pathways align with a learner's values, interests and definitions of success*

Tailoring information broadens awareness of pathways available to learners. It enables them to consider a range of options and decide upon which pathways to explore in further detail.

#### **What it looks like:**

- Information on a range of pathways and jobs.
- Information on what choices and pathways are a good fit for their values, skills, interests and needs. **92%** of learners want information on what choices are a good fit for their skills and interests.

#### **Key channels:**

- Personal networks and connections.
- Passive experiences, e.g. attending school, visiting doctors. **35%** of learners knew about their desired job by seeing someone doing it.
- Occupations shown in the media. **25%** of learners had seen their job in the media.
- Career advisors, career expos, career initiatives.
- Their own research. **55%** of school leavers said they know about their desired job through their own research.

#### **Timing of information:**

- Tailoring information tends to become more available as learners advance through compulsory education.
- Sometimes learners only receive tailoring information when it is given to them. Several learners mentioned that a pathway option only came onto their radar when it was suggested by the CareerQuest exercise that they had to complete at school.

*“I did [CareerQuest], they said I was good for stonemasonry. I didn't know what it was. So I did some research on where to find jobs, and I couldn't find a job, I couldn't find anywhere to study for it. Then Miss come up with [a] booklet ... so I applied for it.”*

– Meredith





## When learners *have* tailoring information ...

- They have a **broad awareness** of possible pathways available to them.
- **It allows learners to have options**, as they are able to map their orienting information onto a range of pathways. Options allow learners to pivot onto a different path. Options can often take pressure off the decision.
- It allows learners to **pursue multiple aspirations** at the same time.

*“It could lead me to teaching, who knows. It could lead me to being behind the camera as well in production and stuff like that, so I think with that acting degree it’s really versatile to shape into whatever industry I see fit. It could lead me to any sort of ‘people’ job.”*

– Lachlan



## When learners *don’t have* tailoring information ...

- They have **limited awareness of pathways** that are available to them, and feel restricted in their pathway choice.
- They **limit their career aspirations to a single option**, and struggle to find alternatives if their first option doesn’t work out.

*“I’ve struggled finding things I actually enjoy doing, that I could do as a career ... So I was kind of freaking out about it a bit.”*

– Bailey

*“I think if I had experience [of] different things I would probably choose something else.”*

– Georgia



## 3. DEEP INFORMATION

*Knowledge about what the pathway is “really like”, for them*

Deep information is specific information about a pathway. It enables learners to get a clear understanding of what the pathway is really like.

### What it looks like:

- Information about what a learner would do each day on a particular pathway, and what the environment would be like.
- Future job demand – **82%** of learners want information on what jobs will be in demand in the future.
- What the work–life balance would be like, salary.

### Key channels:

- Learners prefer to get deep information from experiences or talking to people. First-hand experience of a role (**88%**) or speaking with someone who is already doing the thing they plan to do were the **most useful** types of resource (**90%**).
- It often comes in the form of Gateway, work placements or actual employment experiences outside of school, as well as second-hand information from others. Experience-based information is often interactive and tailored to the learner and includes regular engagement.
- Reading stories of people in different jobs or education options were least useful for learners.

### Timing of information:

- Deep information tends to happen in the later years of schooling when learners are enrolled in Gateway or work experience, often in years 11, 12 and 13.





## When learners *have* deep information ...

When learners get deep information about a career or pathway, it almost always **builds confidence and brings them to a decision point.**

Learners either know it's right for them, or pivot to pursue something else.

*“As part of my Gateway experience I’ve been placed in a kindergarten centre over the last two years, so that’s mainly what’s helped me decide the career path that I’m wanting to do.”*

– Serena



## When learners *don't have* deep information ...

A lack of deep information looks like learners being aware of different careers that exist, but having little to no knowledge of what they actually involve, making it harder to feel confident in a path.

*[What's making it hard?] “Figuring out what the job will actually be like, because it's obviously going to be a lot different than what you think it is ... What it's actually like day after day, the perks and disadvantages.”*

– Brooke

Deep information is delivered inconsistently and is patchy. Some learners receive a lot (e.g. easy access to Gateway), while others are not presented with any viable options that interest them.



## 4. LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

### *Knowledge to "make it happen"*

Logistical information tells the learner what the practical steps and requirements are to get to their chosen pathway. Learners need logistical information so they can turn their plans into concrete steps. **24%** don't know what the next step is to get to the job or career they want.

#### **What it looks like:**

- Qualifications requirements for pathways.
- Cost of courses and/or training.
- Location and duration of study.
- Available financial support.

#### **Key channels:**

- Pathway websites, including tertiary provider websites and careers.govt.nz.
- Interactions with TEOs and employers.

#### **Timing of information:**

- Logistical often comes last of the four types of information.
- Learners may receive logistical information too late and it can close down pathways, forcing them to pivot.

- Specifically, information on cost of courses often comes too late, which means certain pathways are out of reach because scholarship deadlines have already passed.
- Learners can also find out in later years of schooling that a pathway they have become interested in required them to take a particular school subject (which they haven't taken, and now can't).
- Some learners can receive logistical information early and base their decision on it because the steps are clear and it feels actionable, even though it may not align with their values or interests.

***"Last year we built a house with our old building teacher. We got to learn heaps, we made a lot of mistakes but it's good to learn from them ... Every Wednesday I went with this building guy. I got a job offer from him, before New Years. [The teacher] in Careers helped me to get that ... I'll be an apprentice; it will take about four years to be qualified."***

– Damian







## When learners *have* logistical information ...

When learners have logistical information they are able to turn their plans into clear actions.



## When learners *don't have* logistical information ...

**11%** of those who found the transition decision hard say it was because they needed logistical information to turn what they wanted into an actionable plan, or because they didn't have enough information about **how** to get to their goal.

A lack of logistical information looks like being unable to action the pathway a learner wants to take.

***"[Careers.govt.nz] is good in what it says ... but it doesn't really lead you to where to get an apprenticeship from ... [There's no] 'Click here to apply'"***

– Samuel

Disabled learners might be at greater risk of missing out on logistical information, because they are less likely to know what they need to do next to get the job/career they want (**55%** vs **71%** for non-disabled school leavers). They are also more likely to need specific types of logistical information (e.g. "information on financial support available to me").

# School leavers get information from **people, experiences and static resources**



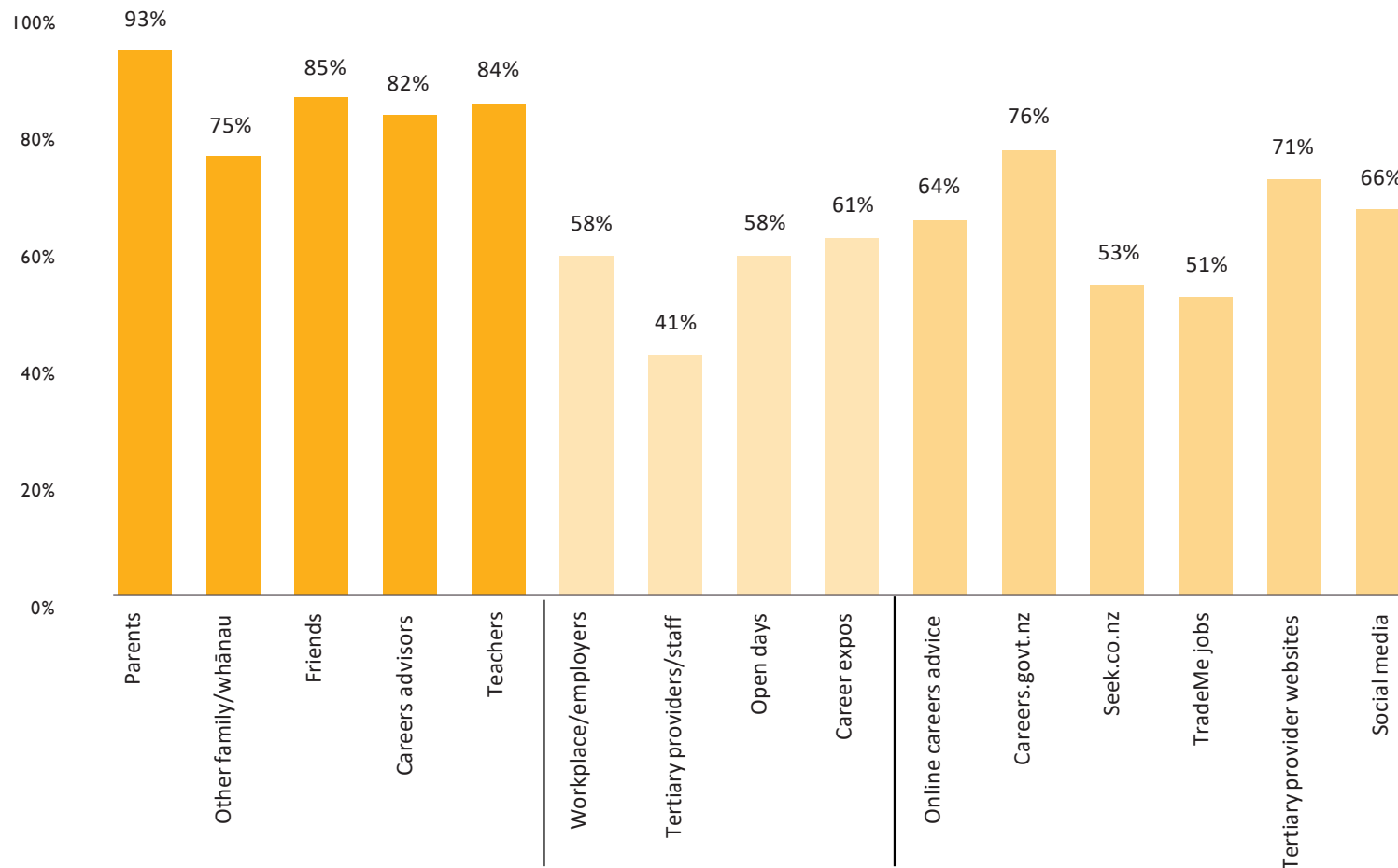
People



Experiences



Static resources



# People are often learners' first port of call

Learners typically go to three groups of people for information:

- **parents and other family and whānau members**
- **friends, teachers and school careers advisors**
- **community members** (including TEO liaison officers, employers, and careers advisors outside of school).

Parents and other family/whānau often have strong and close interpersonal relationships, which often mean they have strong personal influence.

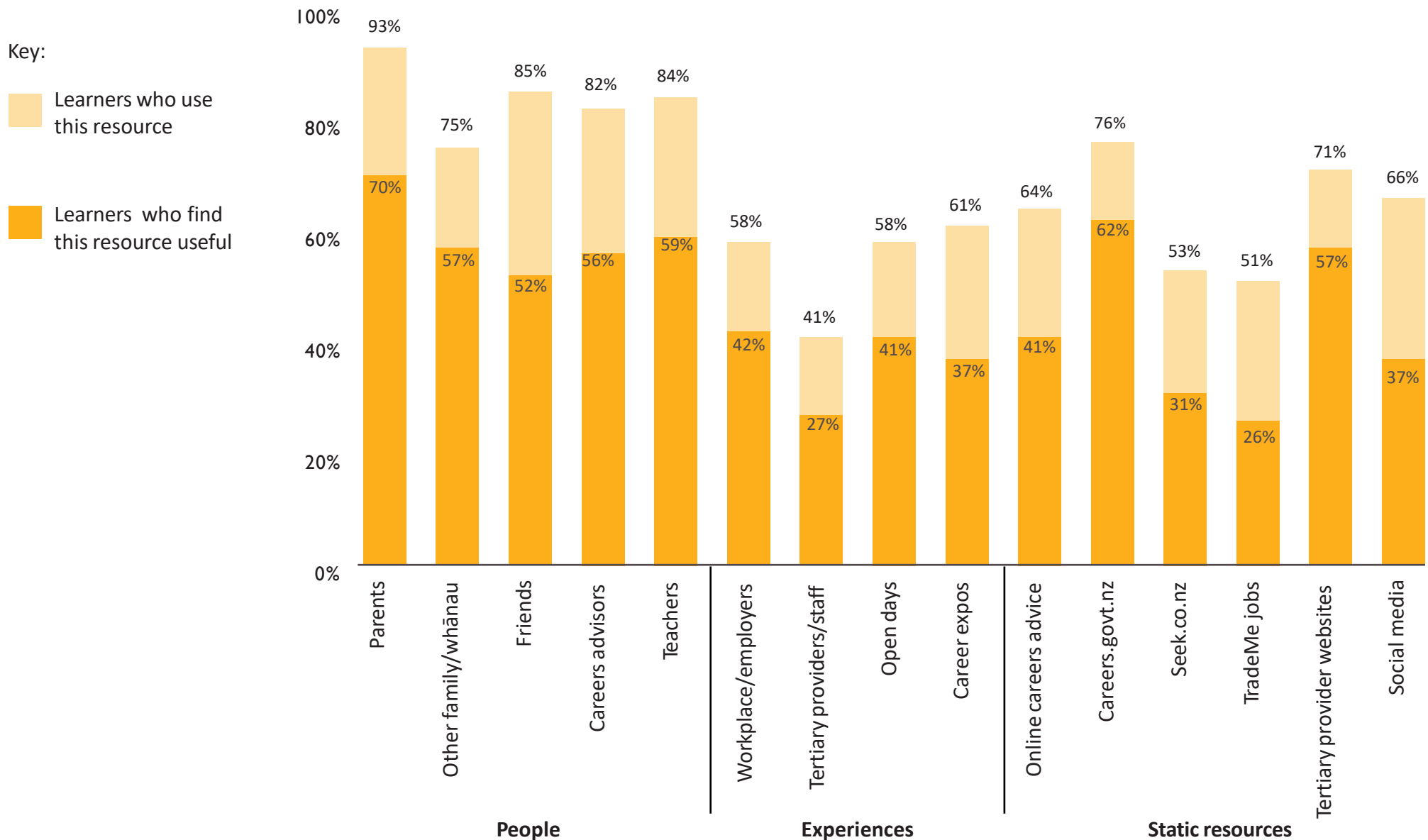
Māori learners are more likely to seek information and become aware of career aspirations through personal connections (e.g. **30%** of Māori and **39%** of Pacific school leavers knew family/whānau members who did their desired job, vs **21%** of non-Māori and non-Pacific students).

*“Usually ask people first, then if they don’t know I’ll go to the internet.”*

– Nicole



# People are highly influential on school leavers' decisions, but their advice isn't always useful



## People's expertise can be limited, and the advice is not always impartial

Parents, family and whānau members tend to only have deep information about their own careers rather than all the possible careers that a learner may explore,<sup>[9]</sup> and their advice may be loaded with their own goals for their school leaver.

*"I just keep getting told by my Mum 'You're not going to like that' ... She just wants the best for me but I'm saying 'No Mum, I can do this, that's really what I want to do.' She said 'There's no money in it.' I'm just like 'I don't care, if it's something that I would love to do then I would rather be broke on the street and have fun with my life that way.'*

*"She's like 'What about your kids?' 'I don't want kids.' 'You're having kids because I want grandchildren.'*

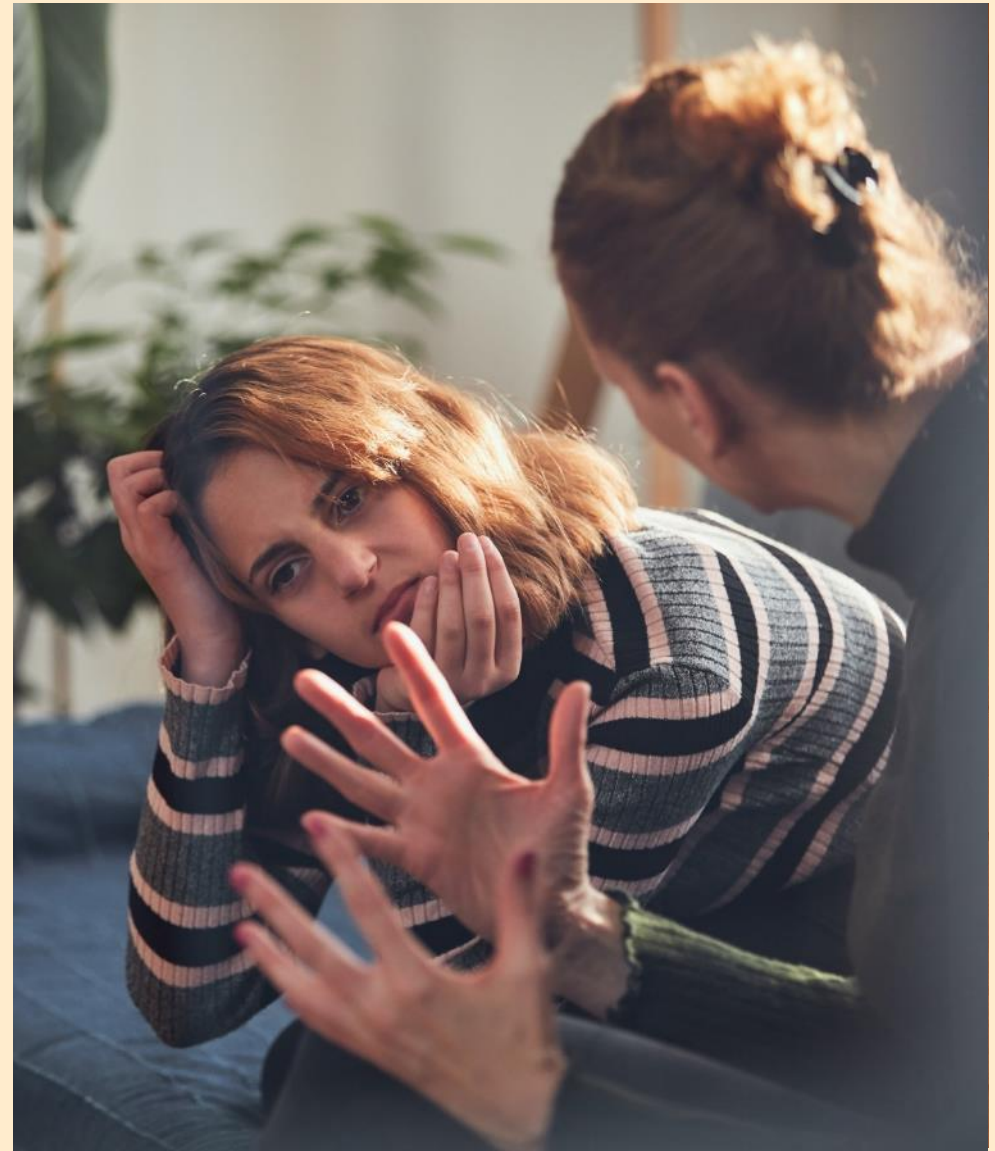
*"So it just makes you think, you can't just think about yourself."*

– Sion

*"I guess talking to your parents about careers is not the same, their own opinions get in the way of what you want to do."*

– Bailey

Advice given is not always useful to learners, as it doesn't lead them to what they are wanting to know. A total of **44%** of school leavers had received either no useful advice (**26%**) from school careers advisors, or no advice at all (**18%**). Students say that advice from school careers advisors can focus on subjects rather than skills and traits, or the information isn't on the topics that they want to know about.



*"My parents, they're lovely, I love them but they're not the most supportive of me. They want me to do something and be something that I'm not."*

– Nicole



# First-hand experiences are the most important in helping learners make their decision

When learners were asked what they wanted to receive, they rated these first-hand experiences as the most useful source of information in making their decision:

- **meeting role models (90%)** – meeting with people in the job, experts in the field
- **work-based experiences (88%)** – Gateway placements, internships, actual employment outside of school
- **study-based experiences (81%)** – taster and preparation courses for tertiary study, open days and visits to TEOs.

First-hand experiences have high levels of influence because they are interactive and tailored to the learner.

The impact of COVID-19 has meant many opportunities for first-hand experiences, such as open days and career expos, have been cancelled. **10%** of learners missed out on these first-hand experiences they needed to make their decision due to disruptions caused by COVID-19.

Virtual experiences can be valuable for learners even in the absence of in-person events.<sup>[9]</sup>



*“Lots of work experience, I find for me personally, that’s the best way to kind of figure it out.”*

– Brooke

*“If I went to the open days I would have been able to ask more about the course, and maybe I would have considered it more ... we were still in level 3 or level 2 and they weren’t allowing students to come in.”*

– Serena

# First-hand experiences empower school leavers



## Increased confidence

Experiences increased school leavers' confidence in a pathway.

***"I wanted to be a teacher then ... I realised that it was people that I wanted to work with, but not necessarily in that job [after] I did my work experience at my old primary school."***

– Josie



## Reduced uncertainty

Work-based experiences allowed learners to form expectations, and reduce uncertainty, about particular pathways because these experiences closely mirror the actual pathway itself. Study-based experiences provided certainty around pathway choice rather than career as a whole.

***"During the [personal training taster] course we did a few Les Mills gym free courses, because a few of the people who [did the full PT qualification previously] and passed actually took courses there, and ran as trainers there afterwards. It's showing where you could be."***

– Dylan



## Validation

Experiences validated learners' agency and encouraged participation in further similar experiences. For example, women as a group obtain higher grades in secondary school and are more likely to pursue further education, with higher proportions entering tertiary education over vocational alternatives. A positive experience of education to date can validate a decision to pursue further education.

## Static resources like websites are also commonly used ...



Similar to 'people' information sources, static resources (particularly Google and careers.govt.nz) were often a starting point for learners in gathering knowledge to inform their decision.

***“The first thing I did to learn about careers was go on CareersNZ and do that quiz.”***

– Alyssa

Static resources are perceived to have high expertise about their subject matter, and so also have high levels of influence. Static resources are usually provided at scale and contain all types of information.

Māori learners' aspirations were less likely to be shaped through individual research.

## ... and careers.govt.nz is a particularly trusted source



Among those using online resources, careers.govt.nz was particularly well trusted with **81%** of users rating it as useful, more than any other site.

***“I use the careers website to start with, it's like a foundation.”***

– Josie

***“That [careers.govt.nz] helped me out a lot.”***

– Kahurangi

Careers.govt.nz is unique among static resources in having greater positional influence than others because it is a government-run source of information.

## However, 39% of school leavers had not used online careers advice

Key reasons for not accessing static resources, particularly online career advice:

- Learners didn't need more information.<sup>[10]</sup>
- They feel disengaged from career resources because they are not sure what they want.
- The information they want is difficult to find online.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Neurodivergent learners expressed difficulty accessing and engaging with some online information. Samuel (who has dyslexia) described "scrolling for days" to find an apprenticeship in his chosen field, with the amount of text on websites being "overwhelming".
- There are other barriers to access such as lack of time or technology.

***"I knew what the university would provide and I knew what I wanted to do, so I didn't really think I needed that kind of third party."***

– Cedric

***"[CareerQuest] was good, but I think it's not really enough ... I think just a class about it, advertise the class better, get more students to do it, and actually getting physical work experience in places that you're interested in."***

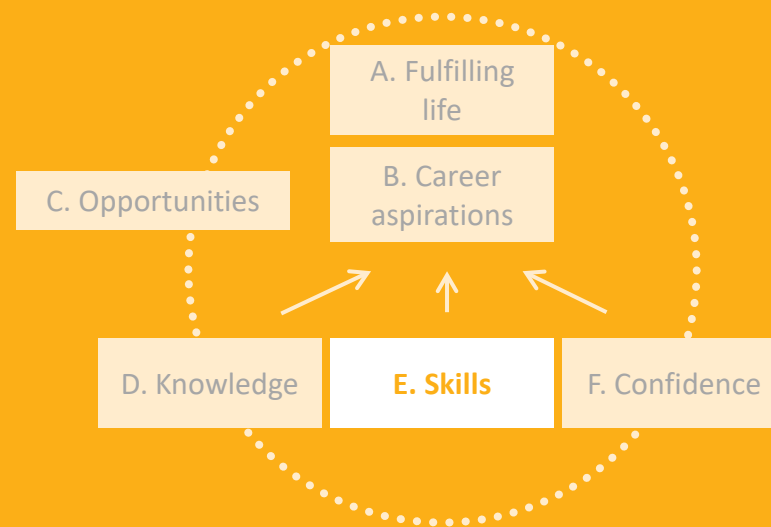
– Georgia





# E. Skills

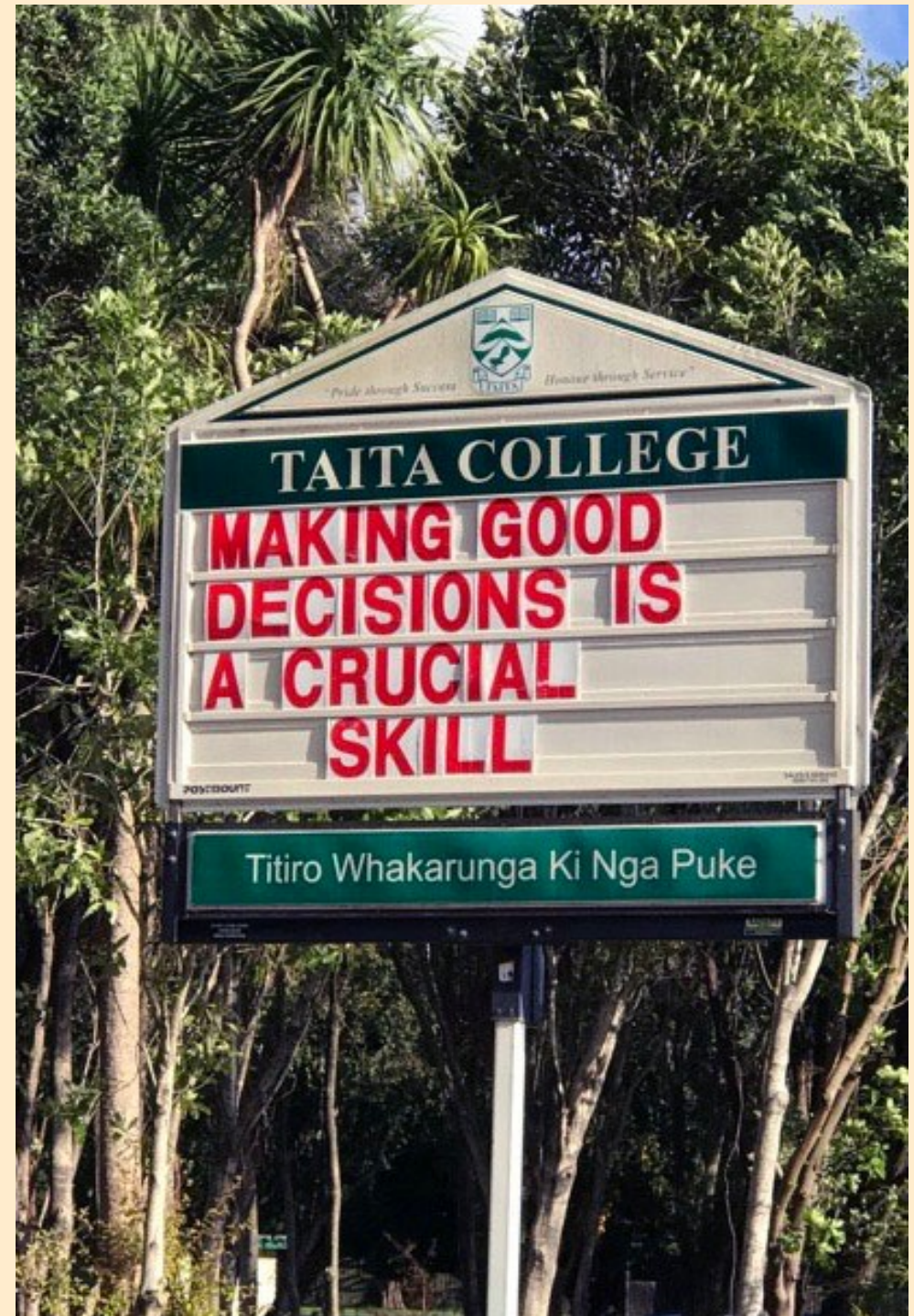
Being equipped to make complex decisions



# Having the right information is important, but **school leavers also need the skills to use it**

Despite the wide range of information learners receive throughout their lives and the variety of information sources available, even the most informed learners struggle to use information effectively without the skills required to process, understand and apply it to their transition decision.

This section covers the challenges school leavers face in the decision-making process and the skills needed to overcome them.



# Different types of decisions need different decision-making skills

The Cynefin framework<sup>[12]</sup> is a tool for decision-making: it categorises different types of decision, and describes what types of responses lead to better quality outcomes for each.

Applying the framework to the school leaver transition decision helps us to understand why this decision is difficult, and to identify the skills and support students need to make good choices.

CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK



## COMPLEX DECISIONS

Unknown unknowns (information and confidence needs both unmet). Environment is in constant flux. Can't know the right answer until after the decision, looking back.

**e.g.** "What should I do after I leave school?"

**Approach:** conduct experiments that can safely fail (e.g. work placements, Gateway, open days), gather information to move problem to complicated quadrant.



## COMPLICATED DECISIONS

Known unknowns (information needs are unmet, but can be addressed). Can find the right answer with expert knowledge.

**e.g.** "What school subjects should I take next year?"

**Approach:** gather information (e.g. school prospectus), seek advice from experts (e.g. teachers, advisors, family/whānau, other students).

**Problems:** ingrained thinking from experts.



## CHAOTIC DECISIONS

No right answer exists, the only constant is turbulence.

**e.g.** effects of COVID-19, huge life barriers to engagement

**Approach:** manage crisis first then establish what complex problems exist.



## CLEAR DECISIONS

Known knowns (information needs are met).

**e.g.** "How should I get to school today?"

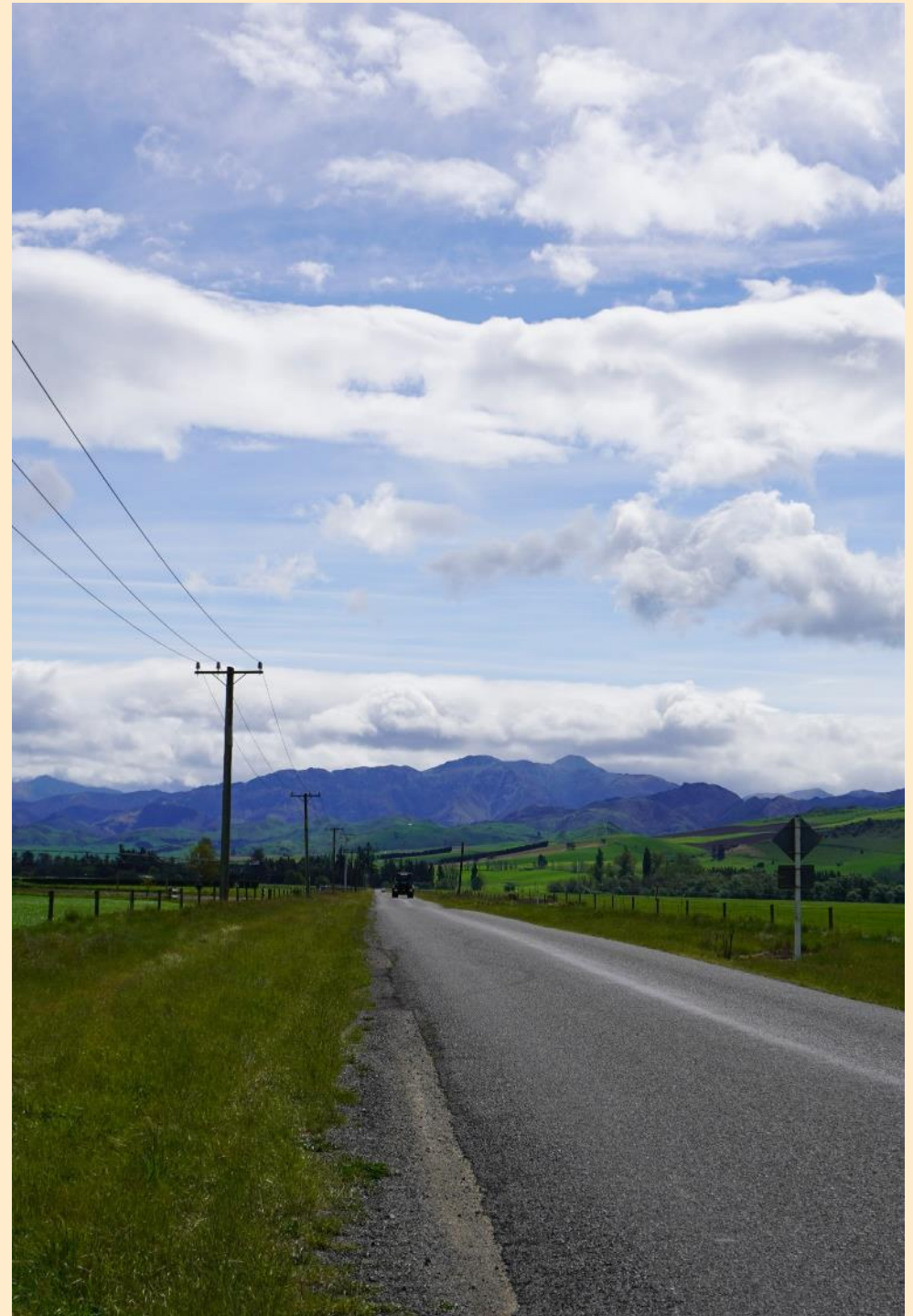
**Approach:** follow procedure (check weather, choose appropriate transport).



# School leavers are used to making clear or complicated decisions that have a 'right' answer

The typical decisions that school leavers make every day are either:

- **clear:** have a clear answer that they are able to uncover themselves by applying a set procedure
- or
- **complicated:** have an answer that can be uncovered by gathering more information about the problem or seeking advice from experts who know more.





# But for most, the transition decision is *complex*

The transition decision “What should I do when I leave school?”:

- **does not have a single ‘right’ answer** that can be known beforehand
- **is not a single event** but a cyclical process<sup>[13]</sup> made up of multiple smaller decisions
- **can only be made with imperfect information** about each option
- **can impact others** around the school leaver such as family, whānau and friends
- **is compulsory** (whether active or passive) because school must end for everyone.

For some, the decision is chaotic and other priorities must be addressed first.

The capacity to engage with their transition decision can be restricted by the need to deal with more immediate issues because they are in more chaotic circumstances.

*"[I'm] not really thinking about next year, I'm just thinking about now, what's happening right now, this year's been pretty bad."*

– Lopeti



# School leavers aren't well equipped to make a complex decision

Four patterns of evidence show that many school leavers don't have the skills to make these types of complex decisions:

1. Reasons learners found the decision difficult (48% of all school leavers) all reflected a **lack of decision-making skills**:



Not knowing how to choose an option, or weigh different types of pros and cons (44% of those who found the decision difficult).

*"I don't know yet because all of them three sound really cool and I want to do all of them. If I were to take tourism there are a couple of other students and I'd have more fun. If I were to do stonemasonry I could get paid more because you don't see many stonemasons around. If I were to do automotive engineering, it would be more for me and benefit my family because most of my family work with cars. I think I might go for the tourism one."*

– Meredith



Setting a goal for the decision-making process (38% didn't know what they wanted).

*"I don't think I have any passions."*

– Survey respondent



Struggling with the weight of the decision (23%).

*"I still think I'm a child, but I'm like, 'Damn, I'm 17. This is my last year of high school.' And I'm looking around, these people might not have the anxiety that I have, but we're growing up as adults, I'm losing my youth. I could be 30 in the click of a finger."*

– Sion

2. The decision is only easy when they **don't have to really decide at all**: the most common reason for finding the decision easy was because students had "always known" what they'd do.

*"It's just where I have always envisioned myself ending up."*

– Survey respondent

3. It's **not a need for more information or more support** (only 7% said they needed more of these).

4. With hindsight, most **school leavers (75%) say they would make a different choice**<sup>[14]</sup> and many do change their programme or provider before completing a qualification,<sup>[15]</sup> often at significant financial and opportunity cost.<sup>[16]</sup>

# Being ill-equipped leads to poor quality decisions ...

The consequences of not having the right skills to make complex decisions like “What should I do when I leave school?” is that school leavers are at greater risk of basing their decision on:

## Advice from ‘experts’ who actually have their own interests ahead of the learner’s:

*“They [tertiary provider] said that by the time I finish getting my degree and scholarship and stuff, the COVID will probably be gone.”*

– Meredith

## Incorrect information:

*“It’s like five to seven years for a degree in business ... I think, pretty sure ... I know that I’d need a business degree in order to actually own a business.”*

– Alison

## Short-term incentives or immediate rewards:

Choosing pathways similar to those of peers is maintaining or strengthening important social connections.

## Cognitive biases and heuristics:

Learners often base decisions on underlying beliefs about future events, and that their future preferences will be the same as their current perspectives.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Literal translations of enjoyable activities into career pathways:

*“I really really liked hotel management, probably because it’s in different places, and I want to go almost everywhere. Since you get to travel while you’re working and you get paid.”*

– Meredith

## Awareness of only a limited number of pathways:

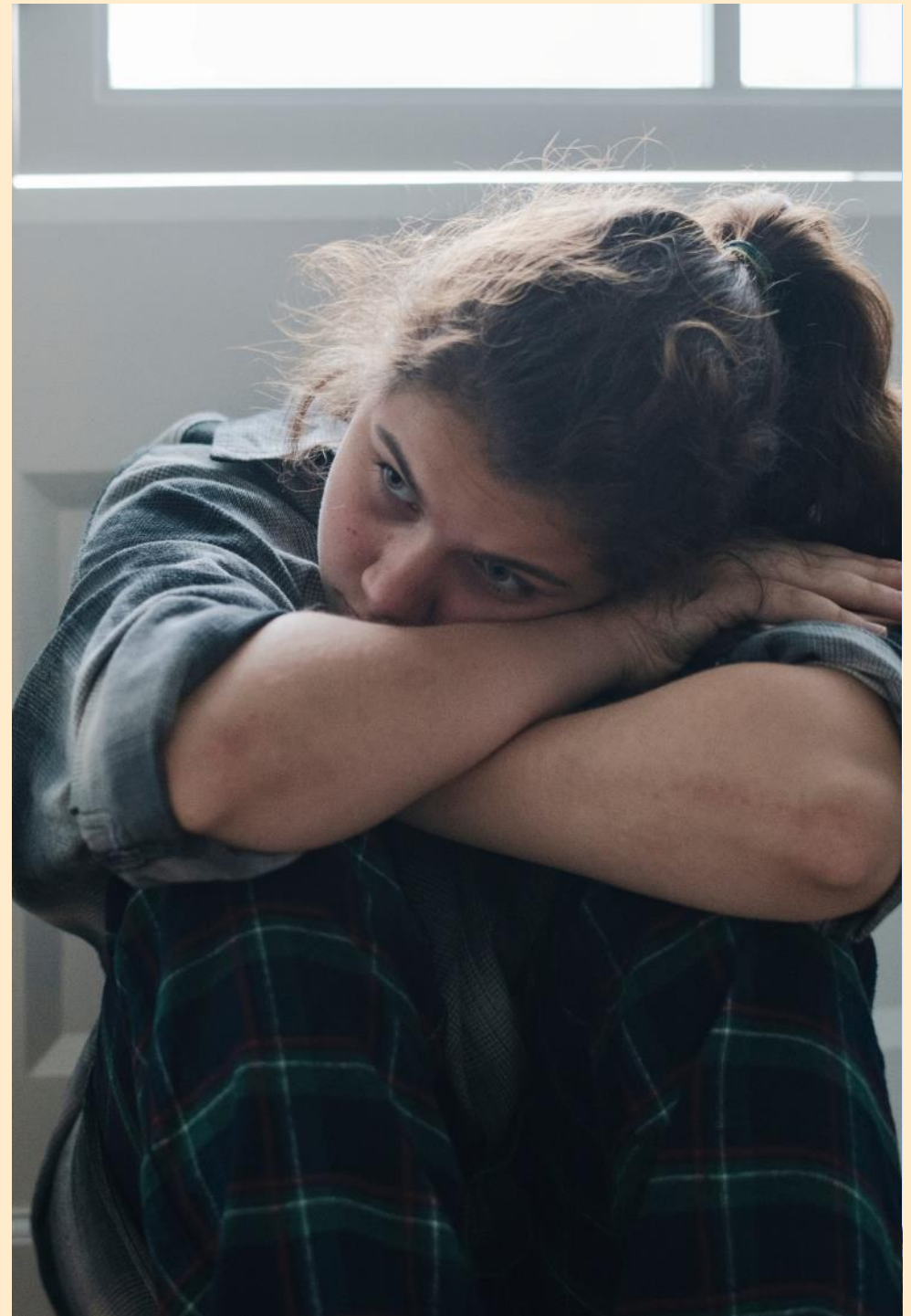
Some learners don’t realise there may be other options that meet their needs, and so don’t seek those out.

*“I don’t have a second option. And then I might become a bum. I’m just lost.”*

– Amanaki

## ... which lead to poorer outcomes:

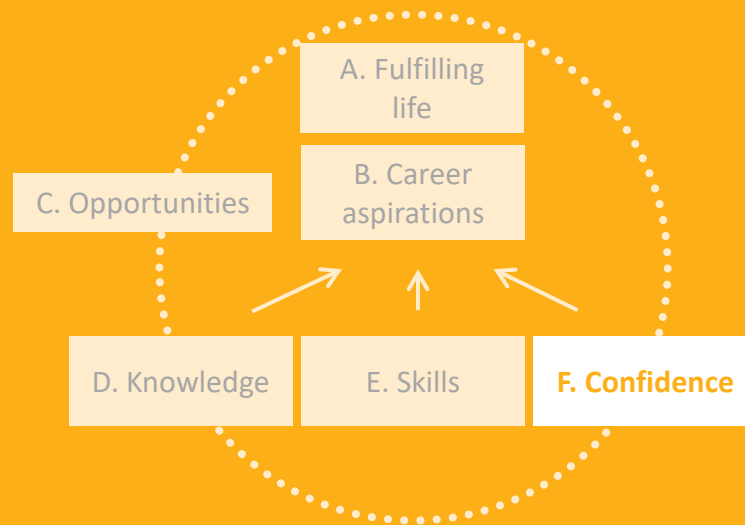
- **unnecessary costs** (both to learners and the education system) if learners then change their mind (e.g. of courses or living costs)
- **lower lifetime earnings** if learners enter the workforce and then become locked in to never achieving a higher salary via tertiary education
- **poor alignment with learners' goals** when they make a compromise based on incorrect information or avoidable ignorance
- **greater learner distress** including lower confidence in themselves and their decisions.





# F. Confidence

Feeling good about the decision

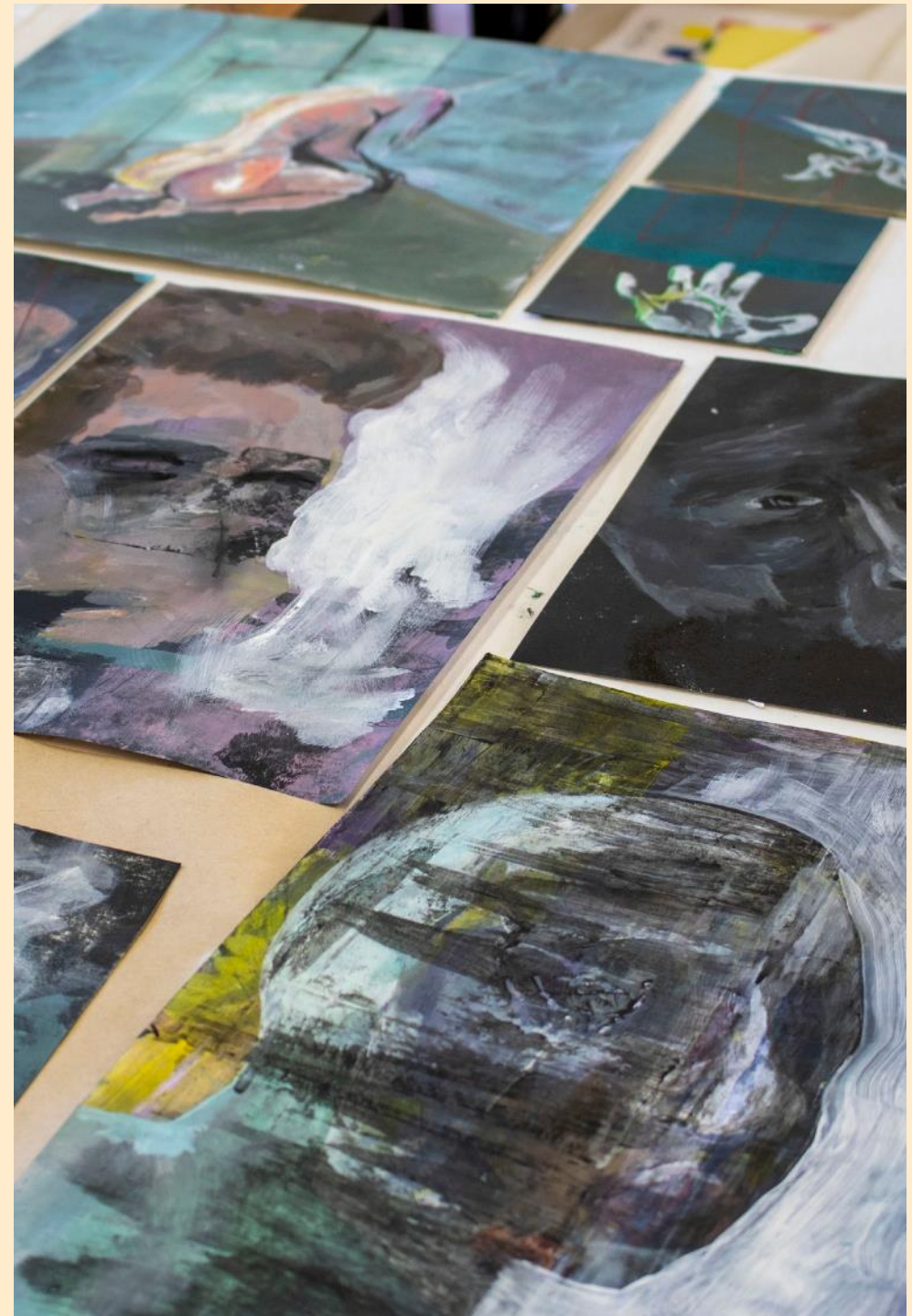


# Emotions (especially confidence) influence learners' decision-making

Behavioural science tells us that most decisions aren't made on a rational evaluation of information alone; emotional needs also play a big role.<sup>[10]</sup>

For school leavers, confidence in particular impacts the decisions they make.

Support for school leavers has also been found to be more effective when it meets emotional needs (including confidence), even more than when it meets informational needs.<sup>[18]</sup>



# Superficial expressions of confidence can be a mask for school leavers' fears and uncertainties



In a survey context, school leavers expressed fairly high levels of confidence in the short, medium and long term:

- **78%** said they are confident that they're making (or will make) **the right decision** about what to do when they leave school.
- **71%** said they are confident that they will be able to **get the job they want** when they finish school or further education/training.
- **77%** said they are confident that they will be able to **achieve the three things that are most important to them** in life.

Despite these expressions of overall confidence, almost all learners we spoke with in depth said the decision-making experience was dominated by other types of emotions instead.

When given the chance to discuss emotional challenges, learners instead talked about finding the decision experience **intense and overwhelming, loaded with high stakes and uncertain outcomes, and unlike any other decision** they have made to date. Learners might feel pressure to project confidence, until given space to do otherwise, which could explain this difference.

Importantly, it suggests that learners showing broad confidence in the future doesn't necessarily mean they are experiencing a straightforward or confident decision in the immediate term.



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***“I’m fearful. I fear the future so much, it’s hard to describe it.***

*“I fear that I won’t be able to make a life for myself. I fear that I won’t get the grades I want, that can lead me towards that field. I don’t know if I have what it takes, the potential to study science or engineering. I’m not naturally smart. Not at all. Every grade I get is rooted in that fear. So I try my absolute best, so it ends up hurting even more when I don’t get the grade.*

*“I want to do well, I want to be able to look at my life and say that I did it. I found a dream, I turned it into a goal, and accomplished it. I want to succeed, but I’m scared. And this fear has held me back and continues to do so.*

*“I’m scared of finishing high school, so damn much. I’m scared of university, of choosing what to study. I’m scared. I’m so scared.*

*“So yeah, it’s been extremely difficult.”*

– Survey respondent

---



# Lack of confidence is a barrier for almost half of learners

## 48%

of learners said lack of confidence was a barrier to doing what they wanted when leaving school.

Alongside cost (also **48%**), this is the most common barrier that learners face.

A lack of confidence was also a leading barrier for priority group learners: Māori (**57%**), Pacific (**52%**), women (**61%**), neurodivergent (**56%**) and disabled (**60%**).

Past school leavers have also said if they could change their experience, the biggest thing they would do (alongside having better information) was to be more confident.<sup>[19]</sup>

Lack of confidence takes two forms:

1. learners can lack confidence about the transition overall because it represents an overwhelming change, and
2. they can lack confidence in their own abilities, questioning whether they have what it takes to succeed.

Most learners experienced at least one type of lack of confidence, with some experiencing both.



# Learners aren't confident about the transition because it feels overwhelming ...

While for some there is excitement about the possibilities ahead, the more dominant emotions are overwhelm, uncertainty and pressure.<sup>[11]</sup> Even the best things about leaving school, such as having individual responsibility and the chance to begin establishing a career, are also the hardest.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Learners experience this decision as a make-or-break point in their life

The stakes have never been higher and they feel they must choose the right' path. They do not have the hindsight of older learners, which would take pressure off the choice. The weight of the decision was the third-biggest reason school-leaving decisions are difficult.

***"It can be really scary. Probably determines basically what you're going to do with your life."***

– Gabby

## Leaving school is a sharp and sudden transition<sup>[13]</sup>

It also often coincides with other transitions such as leaving home, living independently for the first time, changing friend groups, and perhaps moving cities/regions.

***"It is hard to move on from this place. Especially with all the help from the teachers as well as my friends ... they've all been there for me."***

– Serena

## The school-leaving transition will happen whether they are ready or not

This leads some students to choose 'something' over nothing, and others to be paralysed and unable to choose anything at all. Year 13 students can experience a dump of information which further overwhelms them by being too much, too late.<sup>[9]</sup>

***"[Next year] is coming whether I'm ready or not."***

– Nicole

## They feel limited by earlier choices

Learners as young as 17 described feeling it was "too late" to change their study/career plans, even though they might want to, because they were locked in by earlier school subject choices.

***"You have to choose all the subjects that you do really carefully since year 10. If you decide you want to do something later on and you can't do it ... the education system, not a particular person, puts a lot of pressure from a young age that I don't think is necessary, to decide what you want to do."***

– Georgia

## ... and they question whether they can do it



In this context of an overwhelming change, learners often also lack confidence in themselves, questioning whether they have what it takes to make a pathway work.

This can hold learners back from following the pathways which align with what they want for their life.

***“I didn’t think I could do that, there’s that stereotype of Pacific Island boys dropping out of school.”***

– Vaea

***“What is a good way of telling an employer that this would be my first job ever?!”***

– Nicole



# Information is a key way to build confidence

Information plays an important role in building learners' confidence, as we also heard in the [Knowledge](#) section.

In particular, [deep information](#) from experiences like Gateway, 'taster' courses and open days are good at building confidence. This is because they:

- **reduce the unfamiliarity of a pathway.** Learners can get a feel for what it will really be like, rather than stepping into the unknown
- **reduce feelings of not being capable.** Experiences can provide learners with a chance to prove to themselves (and others) that they can do it
- **reduce how 'sharp' a transition feels.** Instead of such a sudden switch from school to their next step, experiences can create a more gradual transition over time.

[Tailoring information](#) also builds confidence, because it reduces the stakes of any one pathway. Having a set of options and/or a back-up plan gives learners the assurance that they can pivot if a first choice doesn't work out.





## 'Champions' are critical to building confidence

The biggest enabler of confidence we heard was the role of a 'champion'. Champions are people who provide guidance and support, and let learners know that they have someone in their corner who believes they can do it.

As information is so key to confidence, providing information is also part of a champion's role. Importantly, champions integrate external information with what they also know about the learner.

Many champions are people who have known the learner for a long time, such as a parent or family figure, or in some cases a teacher. They could also be someone 'like me', such as a student who is a couple of years ahead of them on their chosen pathway. Champions are trusted, and have an ongoing and dynamic relationship with the learner, rather than a one-off interaction.

Positive relationships with champions uphold learners' mana and confidence, and engage them with learning and their next steps.<sup>[7]</sup> They can help learners overcome systemic erosions of confidence.



*"I have a lot of times where I'm like 'No I can't do this' and then somebody's like 'Hey, you're doing really well', without knowing that I'm knowing I can't do this ... and it just boosts my confidence without them knowing, which is cool."*

– Meredith

*"My favourite teacher is hands down the one you just picked me up from. She's such a lovely teacher. First year she took me to Auckland to do poetry writing ... She could have picked anyone else, but she told me to come ... She showed me I could do this and showed me I could live here, I could be this. That really opened up my mind."*

– Sion

## Some groups experience different emotional needs and enablers of a confident transition

- **Māori and Pacific:** For many Māori and Pacific students, their choices represent outcomes for others as well as themselves, and some might be the first in their family to transition to tertiary education or university in particular (**65%** of Māori and **71%** of Pacific university students are the first in their family to enrol in a degree compared to **58%** of non-Māori and non-Pacific). This can be motivating, and can also increase the stakes of their decision. Cultural confidence and identity also drive overall confidence for these learners.
- **Māori:** Māori are more likely to find the decision difficult (**56%** vs **43%** for non-Māori) and their experiences of the transition can also reflect a balance between wanting to honour their Māori values while simultaneously trying to succeed in a Pākehā-dominated world. They have a foot in each world, and negotiating this duality as part of their decision is important for upholding whānau mana and avoiding whakamā.





- **Women:** Women show slightly lower confidence than other genders in getting the jobs/careers they want (**67%** vs **75%** for other genders) and this aligns with a general pattern of feeling relatively more confident/comfortable in education settings than employment.

Women do better in school (**75%** self-rated their most common grade as Merit or better, compared to **60%** of other genders; they achieve university entrance at higher rates **47%** vs **34%**). They choose tertiary pathways at higher rates than other genders (**58%** of women enter tertiary within the year versus **48%** of men). Women choose (paid) provider-based pathways to a particular career rather than (paying) work-based pathways or apprenticeships (**5.4%** of men enter apprenticeships, versus **1.4%** of women).

- **Neurodivergent and disabled learners:** neurodivergent learners are less likely than neurotypical learners (**70%** vs **80%**) to express even initial outward confidence in their future, and that they will get the things most important to them in life. Neurodivergent learners (especially those who have had a poor school experience), often don't feel smart enough for some pathways and therefore these are taken off the table early.

*"[I would want to be a doctor but] I'm dyslexic and I really can't do that."*

– Melody

Similarly, disabled learners are less likely to feel confident than non-disabled learners in both the long term (getting what's most important to them in life, **69%** vs **80%**) and short term (making the right decision, **70%** vs **78%**).



- **The undecided:** Being undecided about their next step so close to the point of transition was almost universally associated with negative emotions including anxiety, sadness and confusion. When learners are unable to decide, the indecision itself compounds negative emotions and adds to the pressure they feel. See the [Undecided](#) pathway analysis for further insights.
- **Those experiencing systemic inequities:** Experiencing racism, sexism and other types of discrimination in the education system can drain learners of the will to continue to engage positively with formal learning, and erode personal confidence over time. See the [Opportunities](#) section for more on systemic inequities.

*"I feel like I'm fine, because I know how the system works here and I haven't let it eat me up yet ... Otherwise I wouldn't be at school, I wouldn't be here right now."*

– Witi

*"All my other schools, [the teachers] were mean to me. They just looked at me like, 'He's going to be nothing when he's older'. They didn't need to say it, it's just the way they look at you. Makes you feel stink. And then you start to believe these things."*

– Sion





03

# Ngā Huanui

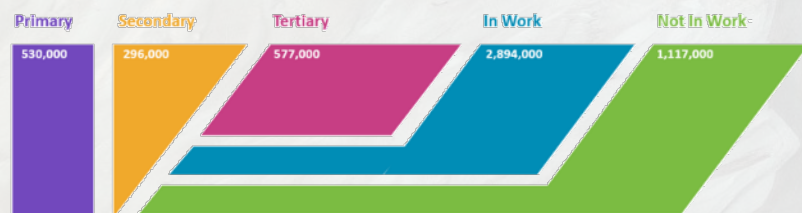
Pathways

# Pathways

This section looks at the characteristics of school leavers who take particular pathways. It covers seven potential options, based on whether they have made a decision yet and where they plan to go (including tertiary provider type\*):

1. **Apprenticeship**
2. **Polytechnic**
3. **Private Training Establishments (PTE)**
4. **University**
5. **Work**
6. **Other pathways** (including those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training [NEET], but excluding those who leave New Zealand)
7. **Undecided** (those who had not yet decided on their pathway at the time of survey and interview data collection)

Colours used in the following pages reflect the palette used across reports on the TEC's customer segments as shown below.



\* Wānanga are not included as a pathway here because no survey or interview participants planned to enter wānanga. IDI data showed that less than 0.5% of school leavers go on to study at wānanga as their next step.



# Pathway 1: Apprenticeship

**3,900 (6%)**

Number (percentage) of school leavers who become apprentices

**64%** leave in Year 13

**42%** leave with NCEA Level 3 and/or UE

**75%** men

**25%** women

Women are heavily under-represented

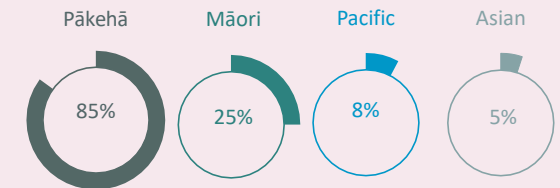
**0.7%** receive learning support

**40%** neurodivergent\* (over-represented)

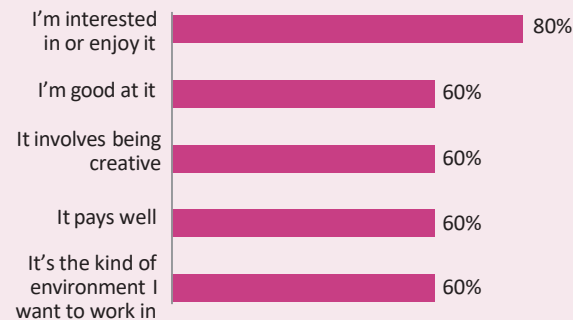
**0%** disabled\*

\*TFSS Survey data

**Māori representation reflects the population; Pacific and Asian students are under-represented**



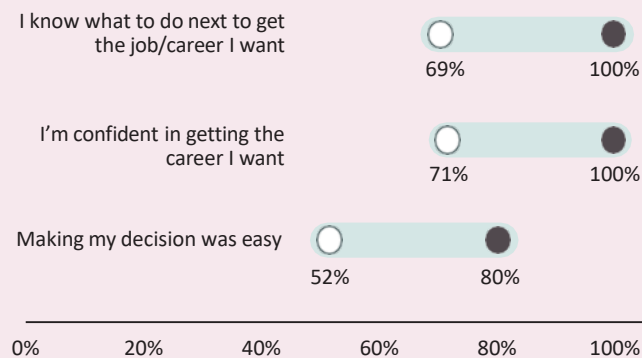
## Apprentices are driven by skills, enjoyment, pay and environment



*"Just standing back after you built something and saying 'I built that' and it being there for years, having something to show for your efforts."*

- Adam

## Apprentices see a well-lit path ahead (more than school leavers in general)



Key: ○ All leavers ● Apprentices

## The decision is easy because:

- Apprentices have a long-standing feeling about this pathway: it **feels right (86%)**.
- Apprentices feel **well-prepared (43%)**: lived experience of the pathway through Gateway or work experience enables students to test out the path, check if it's something they enjoy, and validate their strengths (especially for neurodivergent learners).
- Apprentices are often already **engaged with employers (70%)** have found them influential on their decision, **30%** have found employers' advice "very useful" vs **10%** overall); the path ahead is clear.
- Learners are aware of **financial support (80%** knew of Free Trades Training vs **36%** overall).

*"Last year was a good opportunity for me, we had a classroom out the back we were building ... That was a real good experience."*

- Elliot

## But it's not an accessible pathway for everyone

**Women are conscious of entering male-dominated industries.** Some are motivated to "prove they could do it" anyway, but others instead opt to study the same career pathway at a provider (at additional cost) or enter a different industry altogether.

**Disabled learners are less likely to participate** and achieve in industry training, which could enable them to have more work readiness.<sup>[21]</sup>

**Training opportunities at school are limited,** especially for women aspiring to male-dominated industries. Learners who weren't offered Gateway or other work experiences through school often struggled to find an apprenticeship.

**Opportunities rely on industry connections.** Without an offer from their Gateway employer, learners struggle to know how else to secure an apprenticeship. Even the most proactive students don't have the networks to unearth the opportunities they seek.

# Pathway 2: Polytechnic

**8,030 (13%)**

Number (percentage) of school leavers who go to a polytechnic

**66%** leave in Year 13

**42%** leave with NCEA Level 3 and/or UE

**54%** men

**46%** women

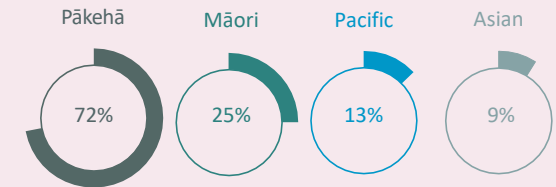
**0.3%** receive learning support

**22%** neurodivergent\* (overrepresented)

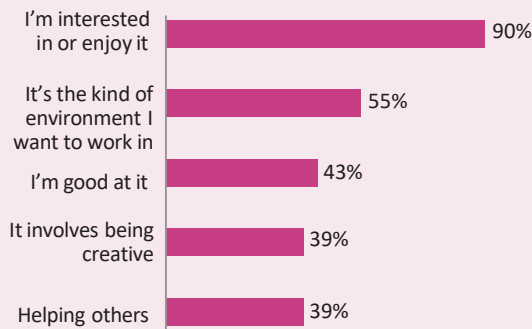
**12%** disabled\*

\*TFSS Survey data

Mostly representative of the population; slight under-representation of Asian learners



## What they want from their career is similar to all school leavers



## Polytechnic-goers found it relatively easy to decide on their pathway, but barriers still persist

A slight majority (61%) found it relatively easy to decide on their overall pathway:

- Many had “always known” the things they wanted to do.
- They feel well-prepared and ready for the transition.

*“It was easy because I knew I was ready to leave school and start my life, I knew what I wanted to do in the future.”*

– Survey respondent

Those who found it difficult (39%) were hindered by:

- not knowing what they wanted to aspire to
- finding it hard to choose just one thing
- the weight of the decision, feeling pressure to choose “correctly”.

Overall, the most common barriers to doing what they wanted were lack of money (58%) and lack of confidence in themselves (54%).

## Uniquely, polytechnic-goers are more likely to consider other types of tertiary providers

Half of polytechnic-goers consider going to university, but most (70%) still find it easy to choose polytechnics, which offer the subjects they want to study and are located close to home.

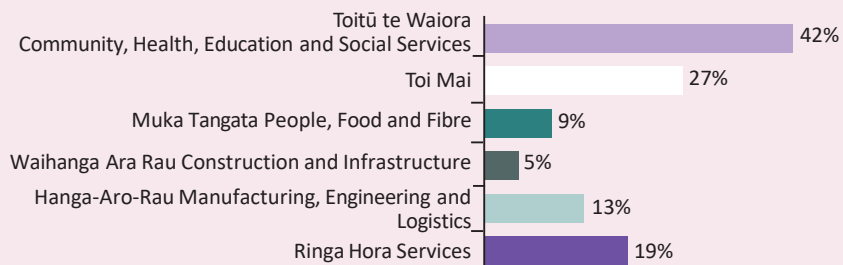
*“It’s close to where I live, has the course I want and it’s cheaper.”*

– Survey respondent

*“Close to home and offers a more practical based course which I am more interested in.”*

– Survey respondent

## Polytechnic-goers aspire mainly to community, creative and service careers



## Polytechnic-goers are not held back by:

**COVID-19:** only 10% of polytechnic-goers’ decisions were negatively affected by COVID-19 – even though some sectors were highly impacted (e.g. Ringa Hora and Toi Mai).

**Not getting UE:** only 18% of polytechnic-goers said not having enough NCEA credits was a barrier to what they wanted to do. Polytechnics are active choices rather than ‘backups’ for universities.

**Perceptions of polytechnics as second-rate choices**<sup>[21]</sup> – instead, they feel more personal, practical, job-oriented and flexible than other provider types.<sup>[21]</sup>

*“I have found the place where I feel wanted and the learning is right for me unlike [school].”*

– Survey respondent



# Pathway 3: PTE

**6,280 (10%)**

Number (percentage) of school leavers who go to a PTE

**52%** leave in Year 13

**29%** have NCEA Level 3 or UE

**39%** have Level 1 or less

**44%** men

**56%** women

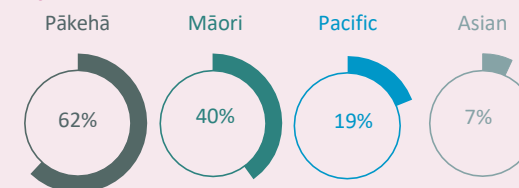
**1%** receive learning support

**11%** neurodivergent\*

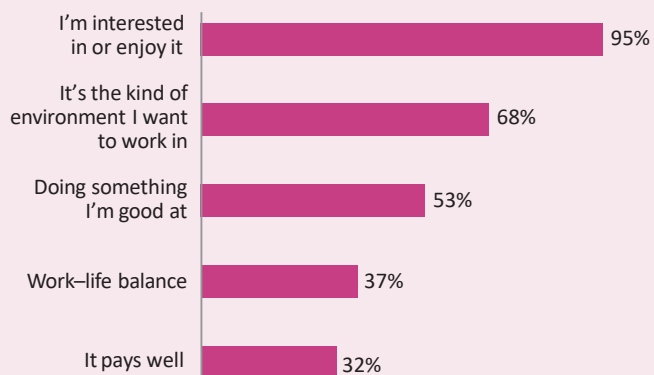
**11%** disabled\*

\*TFSS Survey data

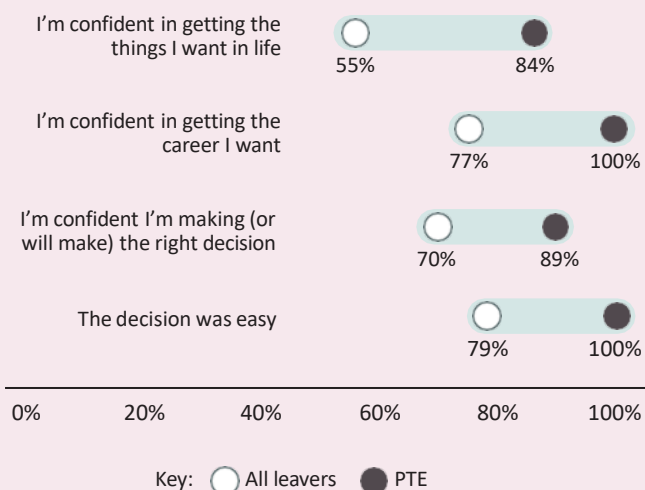
**Māori and Pacific learners are over-represented**



## PTE-goers' aspirations are driven by:



## PTE-goers have extremely high confidence compared to all school leavers ...



## ... and feel well-informed ...

- More likely than other groups to say that sources like open days (**36%**) and career expos (**26%**) influenced their decision.
- More likely to factor institutional reputation of providers into their decision (**25%**).
- High rates of visiting Fees Free website (**63%**).
- More likely than other groups to find careers.govt.nz useful (**84%**).

## ... but still show evidence that decisions are influenced by misinformation, mistaken logic, and strong influence from providers

- They had higher rates of missing out on useful advice: **11%** didn't receive any from parents, **26%** didn't receive any from other family and whānau, **21%** didn't receive any from teachers.
- **80%** of those pursuing aviation or tourism said their decision was **not** affected by COVID-19.
- Some directly translate their life goals into a career and don't realise that, for example, careers in tourism may not involve any travel.
- **31%** of PTE-goers have either "never heard of" PTEs or only know "a little" about them.
- Enrolments can hinge on small but immediate incentives, e.g. \$500 vouchers for getting a friend to enrol.
- Choices were sometimes based on incorrect assumptions and information:

**"I know that I'd need a business degree in order to actually own a business."**

– Alison

- Among interviewees, PTE-goers tended to be enrolled in their course earlier than other groups, to have had enrolment facilitated by the provider, and to have decided soon after an in-person visit:

**"A person came from there to talk to people at my school about the courses and opportunities that they offer. I just know that that is where I wanted to go after that."**

– Survey respondent

## Career aspirations of PTE-goers:



# Pathway 4: University

**18,600 (30%)**

Number (percentage) of school leavers who transition straight to university; largest pathway group

**99%** leave in Year 13

**58%** are from decile 8–10 schools

**44%** men

**56%** women

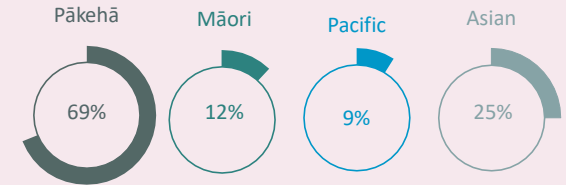
**0.4%** receive learning support

**8%** neurodivergent\*

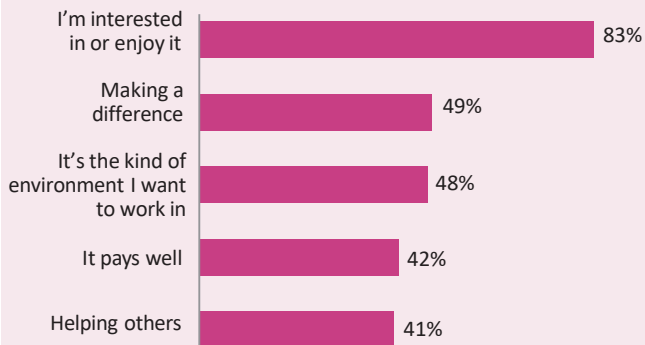
**6%** disabled\*

\*TFSS Survey data

**Māori and Pacific learners are under-represented; Asian learners represent double their population as a whole**



**They are driven by enjoyment, wanting to help others, and practical factors**



**Many university-goers are swept along with the current into this pathway**

- The decision is easy for a majority (**61%**), mostly because of long-standing assumptions (**43%**). University feels like a natural extension of school.  
*"I just sorta always knew I'd go to uni."* – Survey respondent
- Other pathways do not enter students' awareness or consideration (**60%** had not considered any other pathways or provider types). *"If I don't go to university, don't know what my other options would be."* – Helena
- Even global disruptions have little effect: university-goers' decisions were the least likely to be affected by COVID-19 (**19%**).

**Difficulties are instead about aspects *within* the pathway**

- Choosing between providers (**25%** found it difficult to choose their provider), courses or subjects (the leading cause of difficult decisions for university-goers was "choosing just one thing").  
*"There are so many different things I want to do and it's been very hard detangling what I want to do for fun, from status, from money, from what I'm good at and from what others want me to do."* – Survey respondent
- Not wanting to move away from their family or home town (**27%**).
- Lack of confidence in getting the job/career they want when they finish studying (**30%**), especially when it comes at a high cost.

**Others are excluded from university pathways**

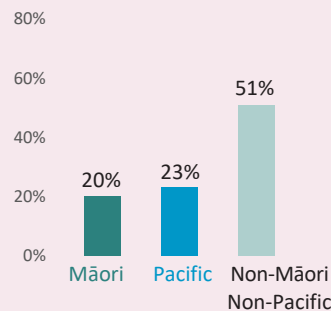
**1. Māori are 25% of all school leavers but only 12% of university-goers. Similarly, Pacific are 13% of school leavers but only 9% of university-goers.**

The barrier to entering university is achieving UE: **20%** of Māori and **23%** of Pacific school leavers get UE compared to **51%** of non-Māori non-Pacific leavers, due to racist practices in school such as streaming.<sup>[5]</sup>

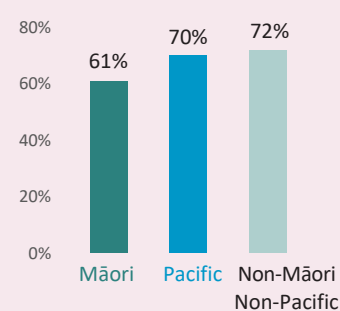
Once they do gain UE, the rate of entering university is much more equitable: **61%** of Māori and **70%** of Pacific school leavers who get UE choose the university pathway compared to **72%** of non-Māori and non-Pacific.

Culturally affirming support in secondary school can address these inequities.

**School leavers who get UE**



**UE-getters who go to university**



**2. Financial barriers are a potential deal-breaker.** Despite high awareness of Fees Free among university-goers (**84%**), many students rely on scholarships.

*"I would try to find a solution ... but if not, then it would definitely stop me, make me feel lost and disappointed."* – Josie

Course fees, the cost of living and fear of student loans all loom large in students' minds when considering university.

# Pathway 5: Work

**17,870 (29%)**

Number (percentage) of school leavers who enter the workforce; second-largest pathway group

**73%** leave in Year 13

**57%** don't have NCEA Level 3 or UE

**54%** men

**46%** women

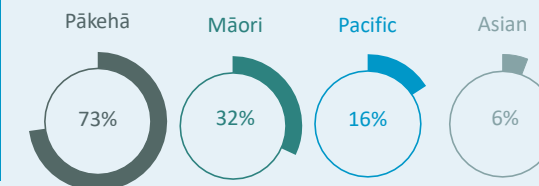
**0.6%** receive learning support

**16%** neurodivergent\*

**12%** disabled\*

\*TFSS Survey data

**Māori and Pacific learners are over-represented**



## Workers are driven by the opportunity to earn money

69% of those entering work did so to earn money, for one or more of the following reasons:

- to support themselves (33%)
- to fund future study (31%)
- to support family (9%).

Other motivations for entering work were:

- they couldn't, don't want, or don't need to do tertiary education any more (17%).
- It's an opportunity to get the experience and skills needed for their next step (14%).

## School leavers who enter the workforce represent two distinct groups – those who found it easy to choose the pathway, and those who found it difficult

I'm confident in getting the things I want in life



I'm confident in getting the job/career I want



I'm confident I'm making the right decision



Key:

- Work-going school leavers who found it difficult to decide
- Work-going school leavers who found it easy to decide

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

## 63% found it difficult to choose this pathway, and either saw it as

- a less risky option than tertiary study:

*"Because you feel like whatever you chose has limited you to that area, maybe people are sick of school or don't like it, therefore wanna get what they do right the first time so they don't have to go back."*

– Survey respondent

- a default when they didn't know what else to choose:

*"Because I don't know what I want to be in the future."*

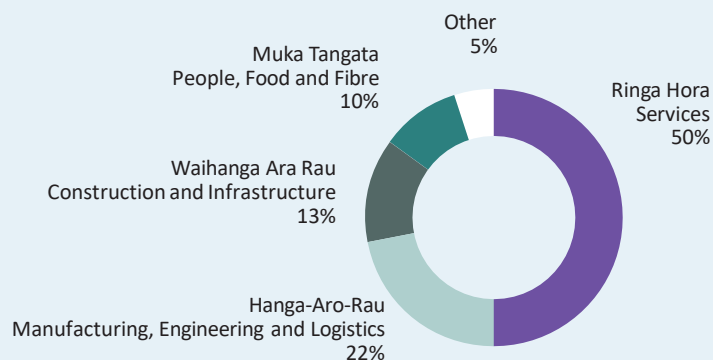
– Survey respondent

## 37% found it easy to choose this pathway, and are actively choosing to follow their passions

*"I know what I love doing."*

– Survey respondent

## Career aspirations of workers



# Pathway 6: NEET and other pathways

**6,620 (11%)**

Proportion of school leavers who don't transition to education, employment or training (including going overseas or other paths)

**59%** leave in Year 13

**51%** only have NCEA Level 1 or less

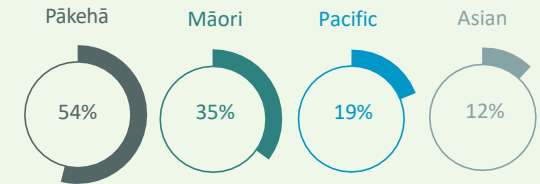
**4%** of school leavers go straight onto the benefit

**52%** men

**48%** women

**1.1%** received learning support

**Under-representation of Pākehā learners; over-representation of Māori and Pacific learners**



## Only four school leavers in our sample intended to take NEET pathways

This pathway includes all school leavers not transitioning into paid employment, education or training. In our sample, only four school leavers anticipated following a NEET pathway.

Some on NEET pathways may be making active choices to care for family, travel or volunteer – as were two of our respondents. However, the TEC's role is to support those who may be NEET due to other factors. Two participants in our sample may fall into this group. They:

- were both in Year 13 and expecting to get at least NCEA Level 3
- said they planned to claim government benefits after finishing school
- did not know what their passions and interests were, what they wanted to do when they left school, or what to do next to get the job/career they wanted
- were not confident in achieving the things they most wanted in life (which included "lots of money so I could buy whatever I wanted" for both), but were somewhat confident in getting the job they wanted when they finished school, and that they had made the right decision
- had not received useful careers advice from their school careers adviser or teachers, or from careers.govt.nz (however both rated TradeMe Jobs as very useful)
- already had paid jobs.



One chose to claim government benefits because it meant they could stay home, it was the easiest option, and they needed more time to decide what they wanted to do. They found their decision very easy, because "my whole whānau [are] on the benefit". They faced multiple barriers including health issues, lack of confidence, lack of connections in the field they wanted to get into, wanting to stay close to home, and having plans to travel overseas be affected by COVID-19.



The other found the decision difficult. They had planned to later enrol in tertiary education but wanted more time before doing this, and found a lack of available courses in their area a barrier.

## Risk factors for NEET pathways

- Educational factors such as lower leaving qualifications<sup>[22]</sup>
- Lack of work experience<sup>[28][29]</sup>
- Lack of soft skills<sup>[23]</sup>
- Wider barriers and demands including having children, not having a driver's licence, area-level deprivation<sup>[4]</sup>
- Feeling as if school is "not for me" – even while staying at school through Year 13.<sup>[30]</sup>

## Effective interventions

- Secondary-Tertiary Programmes such as trades academies, especially when there are strong partnerships between the school and the tertiary provider<sup>[23]</sup> and/or community-based operation models.<sup>[24]</sup>
- Active labour market programmes such as job search assistance and work experience<sup>[23][24]</sup> (although there is some evidence of underperformance here too<sup>[27]</sup>).
- School and other programmes that develop independent living skills, perseverance, curiosity and communication.<sup>[18][24][27][25]</sup>
- Financial support for transitions to tertiary education.<sup>[18][26]</sup> We saw cost was a primary concern for all school leavers, but this lessens once students are on a tertiary pathway.<sup>[27]</sup>
- Effective careers advice and information: students who end up on NEET pathways receive the least advice and least experiential information,<sup>[24][28]</sup> and don't always know their own areas of personal interest and goals.<sup>[29]</sup>
- Education on decision-making strategies.<sup>[28]</sup>

**There may also be crucial windows of opportunity where interventions can have a greater impact. These do not necessarily coincide with traditional transition points:**

- Year 10<sup>[26]</sup>
- Becoming a parent, getting a cluster of job application rejections, leaving foster care, losing and starting key support relationships in education, the settling-in phase of a new job.<sup>[23]</sup>



# Pathway 7: Undecided

up to **10%**

Proportion of school leavers still undecided on their transition when finishing school\*

**89%** expect to leave with University Entrance\*

They have had a **poorer experience of school** (average 5.1/10 vs. 6.4/10 for decided students)

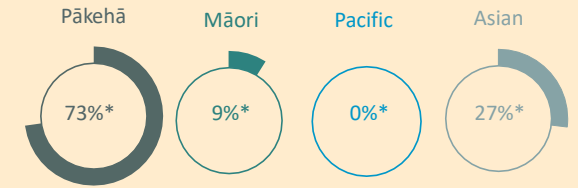
**68%** men\*

**32%** women\*

**14%**

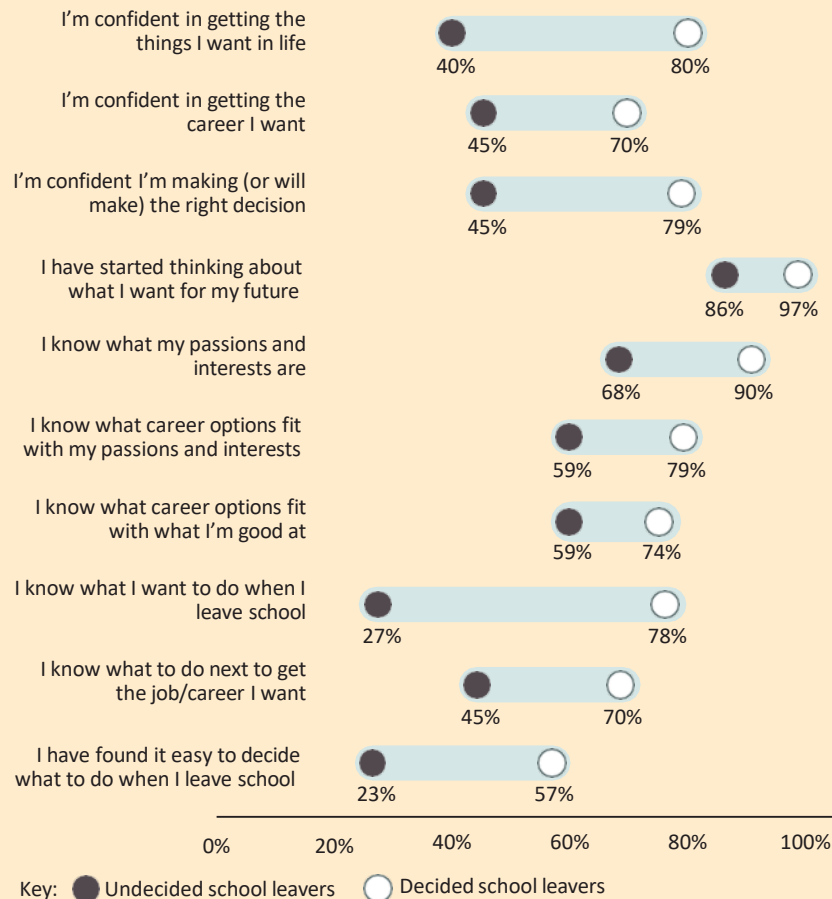
neurodivergent\*

**14%** disabled\*

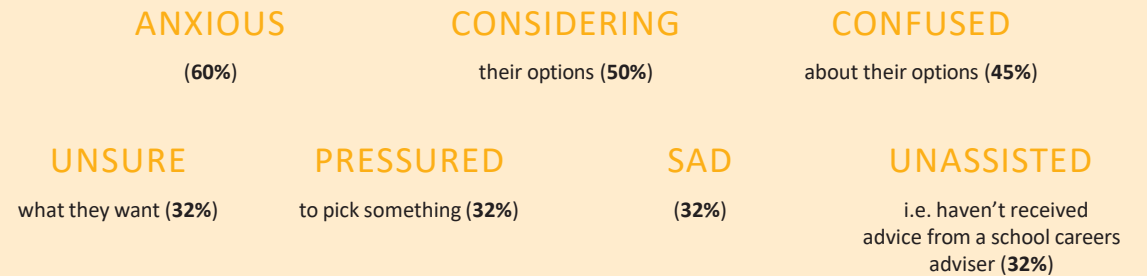


\*TFSS Survey data

## Undecided school leavers feel less confident and less knowledgeable than other school leavers



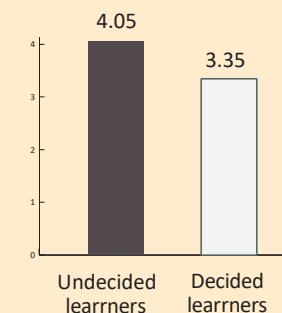
## Undecided learners described themselves as:




## Undecided learners experience more barriers:

- unsure/confused about what I want to do (64%)
- lack of self-confidence (59%)
- lack of money (55%)
- lack of connections in the field I want (45%)
- availability of jobs in my area (32%)
- COVID-19 (32%)
- not wanting to move away from home town (27%)
- friends doing different things (23%)
- travel distances (23%)
- family not supporting my choices (23%)
- not enough NCEA credits/experience (23%).

Average number of barriers experienced by **undecided learners** compared to **decided learners**





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*... I have learnt that the most important medicine they need from me is to listen to these stories, to hold them up, turn them around, and to let each young person look back at them then. They need me to be honest, and to hold what they have told me for as long as they want me to.*

*Working in medicine can be deeply intimate at times, not only because intimacies are discussed, but because intimacies are also created. Being a doctor has made me give up on clever answers to things, although there is always an instinct in me to blabber one out. When time is short we can say the silliest things, especially when we are right. At times, **much of what is useful though involves coming to sit simply, like a stone,** beside someone in pain. And to keep sitting there. And to keep sitting there.*

*It can feel sometimes like we are waiting for a train to arrive. Our young person sits beside us then, their suitcase at hand. We kick a can along the platform. We crack jokes. We pack and unpack. One day the whistle sounds and the brakes hiss. Our young person stands up then, fumbles a smile, and disappears into the haze, looking back at us from what their life is about to become as they move slowly away. We can see at that point what our waiting has meant to them. I think they like knowing someone is there. After a lifetime in medicine it has come to this. I look for a station. And I wait there for as long as I can.*

– Glenn Colquhoun, Letters to Young People

Glenn Colquhoun is a general practitioner and poet who works with young people in Horowhenua.

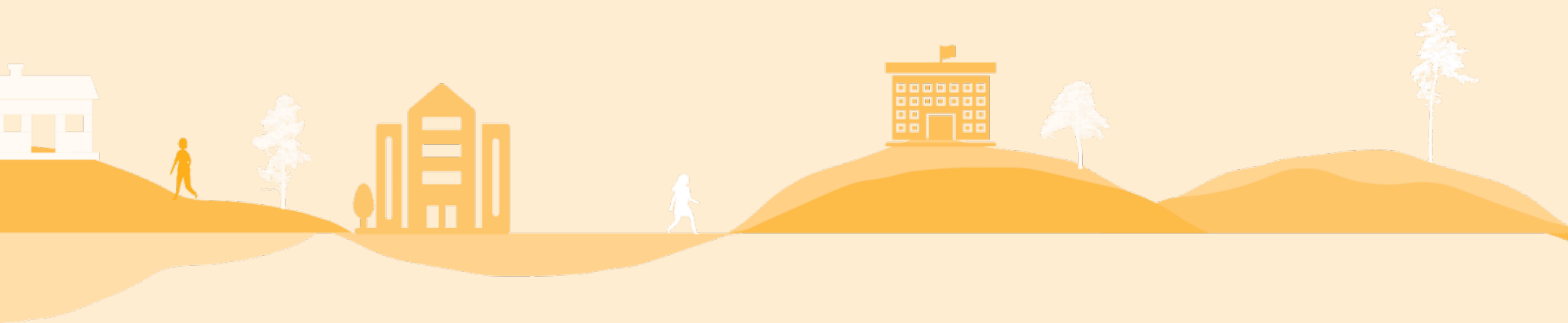
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# Ngā mihi nui

To the learners who shared their stories; the careers advisors, schools and Ministry of Education staff who connected and hosted us; and TEC colleagues who supported this work. Thank you.





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# Appendices

# Appendix A: Methods

This project synthesised evidence from four key types of data sources to understand both the broad quantitative patterns of school leaver pathways and the rich qualitative experience of these pathways.

## Administrative data

Quantitative data about Aotearoa's entire population of school leavers was sourced from both the TEC's internal data and Stats NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI).

The IDI is a large research database containing de-identified microdata about people and household, from government agencies, Stats NZ surveys and non-government organisations (NGOs). Data for each individual in New Zealand is linked together, enabling understanding of the different pathways people take across a range of areas (e.g. from schooling to work, rather than being just limited to education data) without identifying any individual person.

Our population of study were domestic school leavers in 2018 (the most recent year available). Pathways were defined by school leavers' activities in the year after leaving school. Tertiary enrolments were derived from the Industry Training Register (ITR) and Single Data Return (SDR) and took priority over work-based activities from the IRD Employer Monthly Schedule. Overseas movements were taken from the Stats NZ-prepared overseas spells dataset with spells of at least six months. These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the IDI which is carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>.

**The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Stats NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994 for statistical purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes, and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.**

## Survey

### DESCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION

An online survey was sent out to schools across Aotearoa via regional offices of the Ministry of Education. The survey was open to all students planning to leave school in either 2020 or 2021, regardless of age, year level, qualification or reason.

The survey contained a mix of multiple-choice, free-text and other types of questions about school leavers' experience of making their decision about what to do when they left school, and included sections covering:

- identification and screening questions
- definitions of 'success' and aspirations



- experience of school and their expected transition pathway
- specific questions for particular pathways:
  - tertiary study (including apprenticeships)
  - work
  - other pathways
  - undecided learners
- experience of making the decision and barriers encountered
- information and guidance used in the decision
- demographic information.

Survey respondents were offered the chance to win one of ten \$100 Prezzy cards as a token of appreciation for their contribution to the project. Contact information for the prize draw was stored separately from their survey responses to maintain anonymity of the data.

The survey took approximately 14 minutes for participants to complete, was in the field for four weeks in October and November 2020 and received 945 responses. Of these, 580 provided complete analysable responses. A further 11 were excluded due to not meeting the screening requirements (e.g. being outside of New Zealand).

### SAMPLE

The final sample of 569 school leavers included (unweighted) representation of the TEC’s priority groups (weighting procedures are described later):

- 23% Māori
- 13% Pacific
- 47% women
- 9% disabled<sup>1</sup>
- 13% neurodivergent.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Defined as answering “Yes – a lot of difficulty” or “Cannot do at all” to one or more questions on the Washington scale, e.g. “Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?”

2 According to learners’ self-selection of any of: dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism spectrum disorder, sensory processing disorder, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, non-verbal learning difficulties, oral/written language disorder, ADHD, or other learning difference or support need.

# Interviews

## DESCRIPTION

Fifty-six school leavers across Aotearoa participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews during October and November 2020. Interviews were approximately one hour long, covering:

- general information about the learner such as their school subjects, background, demographics and life context
- their intended transition pathway
- what motivated them to choose that pathway
- what a fulfilling life meant to them
- what other alternatives they had considered in their transition decision
- what had influenced their transition decision
- what had got in the way of particular options or made their decision harder
- what support would or could have helped them in their decision.

Learners were volunteers, recruited through contact with regional offices of the Ministry of Education, which facilitated connections with interested schools. As for the survey, interviewees needed to be leaving school in 2020 or 2021. All interviewed learners received a \$60 Prezy card koha as recognition of their contribution to the research.

## SAMPLE

The 56 interviewees included:

- 19 Māori ākonga
- 13 Pacific learners
- 24 women
- 6 neurodivergent learners
- 10 learners from 3 schools in Te Tai Tokerau
- 8 learners from 2 schools in Tāmaki Makaurau
- 8 learners from 1 school in Taranaki

- 8 learners from 1 school in Manawatū
- 13 learners from 3 schools in Te Whanganui-a-Tara and Wairarapa
- 9 learners from 4 schools in Ōtautahi
- 3 ākonga from a kura kaupapa
- 2 learners from an alternative education provider
- 22 learners from 6 lower decile (1–3) schools
- 16 learners from 4 medium decile (4–7) schools
- 18 learners from 4 lower decile (8–10) schools
- 15 learners from 4 schools in rural, minor urban or secondary urban areas.

## Literature review

Existing journal articles, book chapters, media reports, research reports and presentations that related to the needs of school leavers and the transition between school and post-school pathways were reviewed and summarised. Literature was sourced via Education Library, Google and Google scholar searches, and consultation with TEC and MoE stakeholders. A total of 133 sources were included in the review.

## Analysis and synthesis

The survey sample was statistically weighted to represent the actual population of 2020 school leavers (as shown in the IDI) in terms of gender, ethnicity and leaving qualification. All instances of data for the whole sample are therefore weighted. However, data for any survey subgroups (e.g. specific pathways or priority groups) are not weighted because some subgroups were too small to be reliably weighted, and larger subgroups were not weighted so that results are presented consistently. Therefore all subgroup findings should be interpreted as descriptive only of the learners who responded to the survey and not necessarily representative of all school leavers in the group.

Findings in this report represent synthesis of the information contained within all data sources. Different sections lean more or less on different types of data depending on where information of this type was available. For example, describing who takes particular pathways is sourced from administrative data wherever possible, but description of the reasons for those choices rely more on survey and interview data. For contextual and historical information and understanding of groups not well represented in the survey and interviews (e.g. NEETs), literature more heavily informs the findings.

Analysis and synthesis of priority groups (i.e. Māori, Pacific, women, disabled and neurodivergent school leavers) was done with subject matter experts for each group. All findings were reviewed by TEC stakeholders and subject matter experts.

# Data strengths and limitations

## STRENGTHS

- Intentional sampling of interviewees to over-represent priority groups, those with potentially greater needs, and those less understood in existing literature or via survey respondents.
- Sampling of interviewee regions to gather representation from different geographic and socioeconomic areas including main centres and rural regions.
- Use of mixed methods to understand subjective experience of the transition as well as objective observation of patterns.
- Weighting of survey sample to represent population.

## LIMITATIONS

### Survey and interviewees:

- don't represent early leavers
- may not represent rural students as well as others
- are likely to represent individuals who are more engaged with school in general and careers advisors specifically.

### Survey:

- over-represents respondents in the Wellington region.

### IDI:

- has no accurate marker to identify neurodivergent learners, instead reliant on marker of receiving learning support.



# Appendix B: Supplementary analysis

Here we present a supplementary analysis of school-leaver data from the IDI. This analysis builds from the data presented in '[Who are today's school leavers?](#)', providing specific breakdowns of leaving qualification, school-leaving destination, and tertiary study level for Māori, Pacific and non-Māori non-Pacific learner groups.

Overall, the analysis shows that **inequities in school-leaving qualifications for Māori and Pacific learners perpetuate through to their school-leaving destinations.**

The starting point for this analysis is the data for the overall school-leaving cohort, where:

**40%** of all school leavers attain University Entrance (UE).

**40%** leave with their highest qualification being NCEA Level 2 or 3.

**20%** leave with their highest qualification being NCEA Level 1 or below.

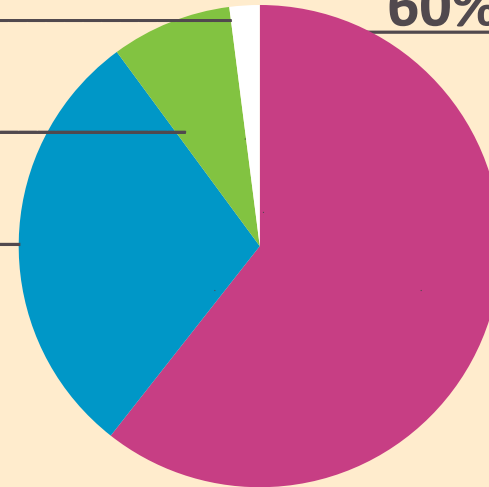
For the full cohort, as their next step after leaving school:

**3%** MOVE OVERSEAS

**8%** ARE NEET

**29%** ENTER WORK

**60%** ENTER TERTIARY STUDY



Of school leavers who enter tertiary:

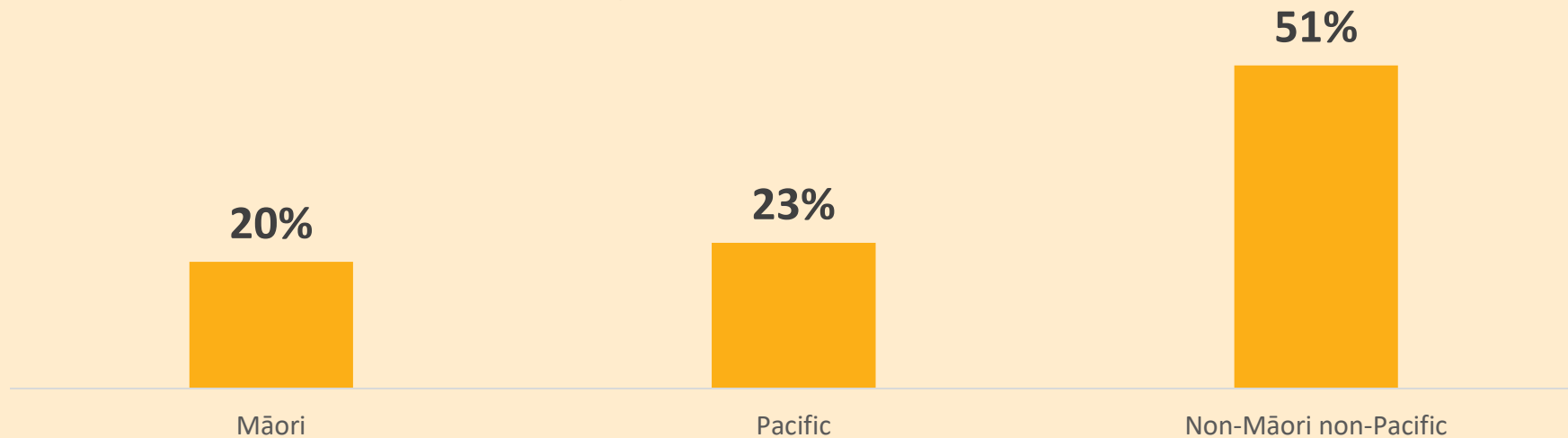
**39%** study at Degree levels (7+)

**25%** study at Vocational levels (4-6)

**36%** study at Foundation levels (1-3).

# Māori and Pacific learners are less than *half as likely* to leave school with University Entrance (UE)

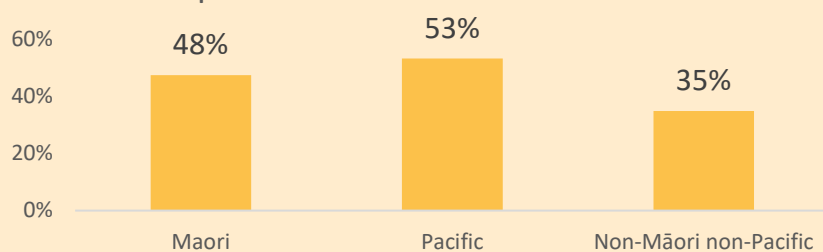
Percentage of school leavers who attain UE



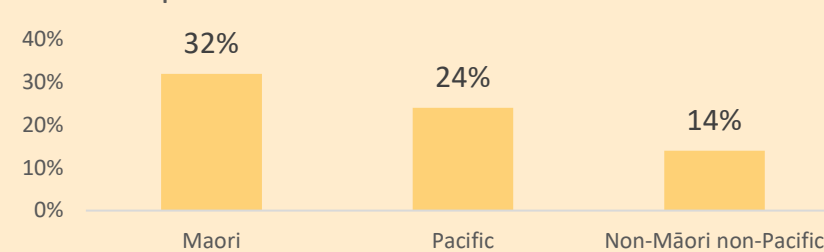
And correspondingly, are *more likely* to leave with either NCEA Levels 2 or 3 ...

... or with Level 1 and below

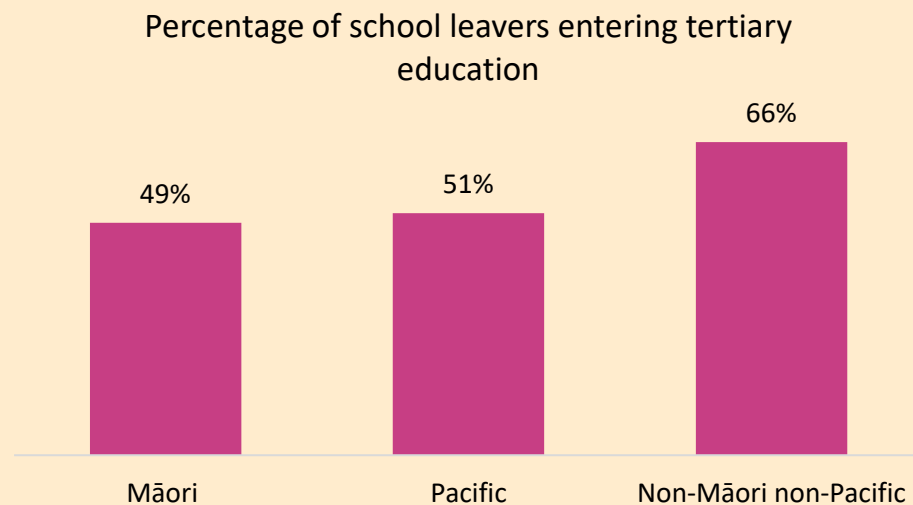
Percentage of school leavers whose highest qualification is NCEA Levels 2–3



Percentage of school leavers whose highest qualification is NCEA Level 1 or below



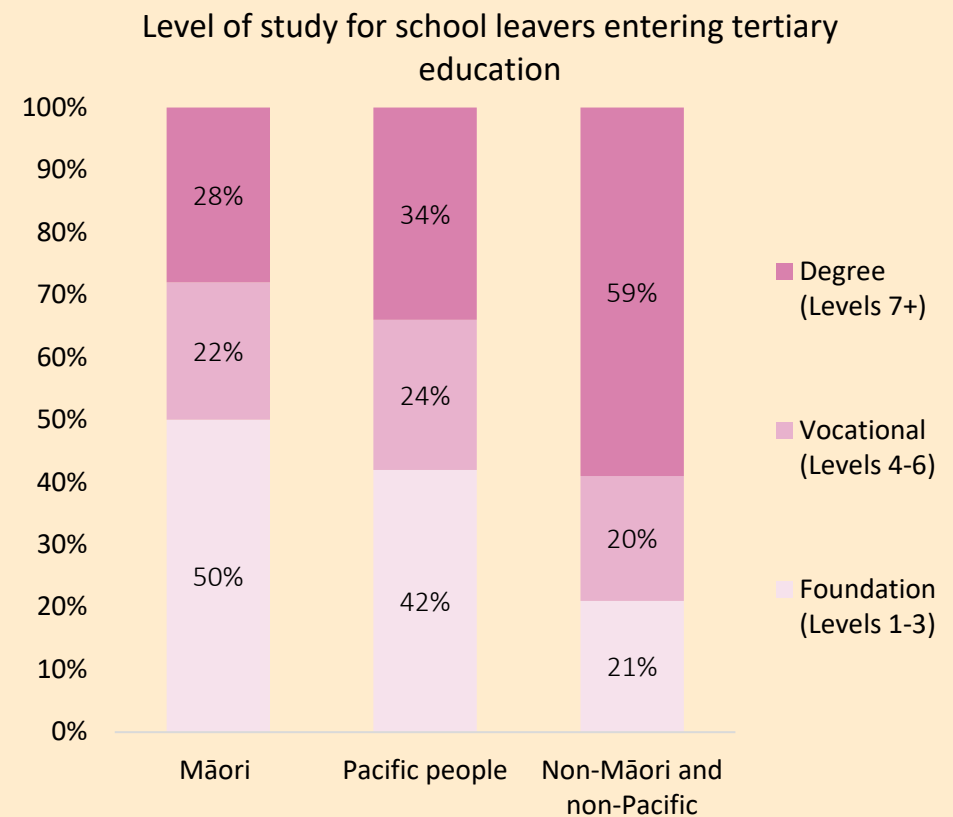
## Māori and Pacific school leavers are also *less* likely to enter tertiary study ...



Correspondingly, Māori and Pacific leavers are **more** likely to:

- enter the workforce (**36%** and **34%** respectively compared to **26%** for non-Māori non-Pacific leavers)
- not enter education, employment or training (NEET) (**13%** and **11%** respectively compared to **7%** for non-Māori non-Pacific leavers).

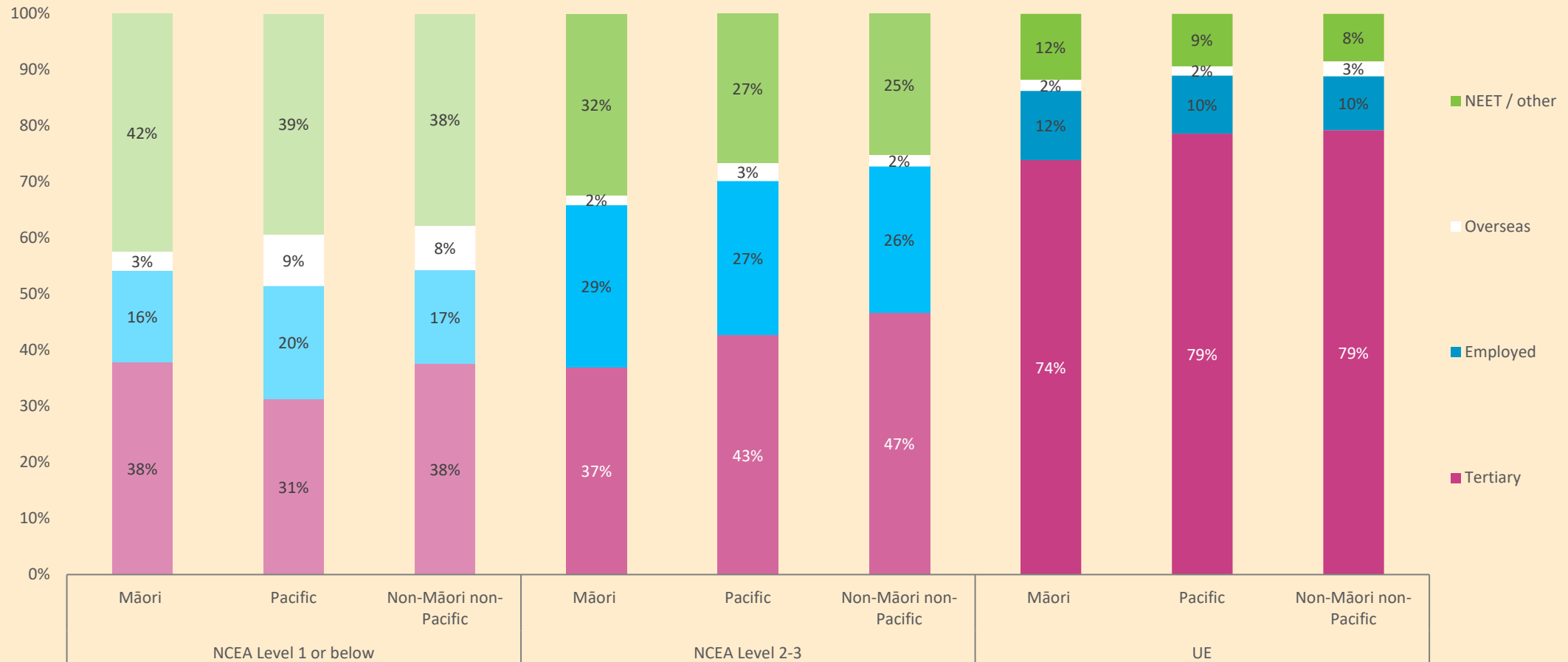
## ... and when they do enter tertiary, it is *more* likely to be at foundation levels



# When learners have equivalent qualifications, they choose similar leaving pathways

Once school leavers gain UE, they are similarly likely to enter tertiary education. They are also similarly likely to study at levels 7+ (**82%** of UE-getters for Māori, **80%** for Pacific, **90%** for non-Māori non-Pacific; not shown below).

School leaver transitions by leaving qualification

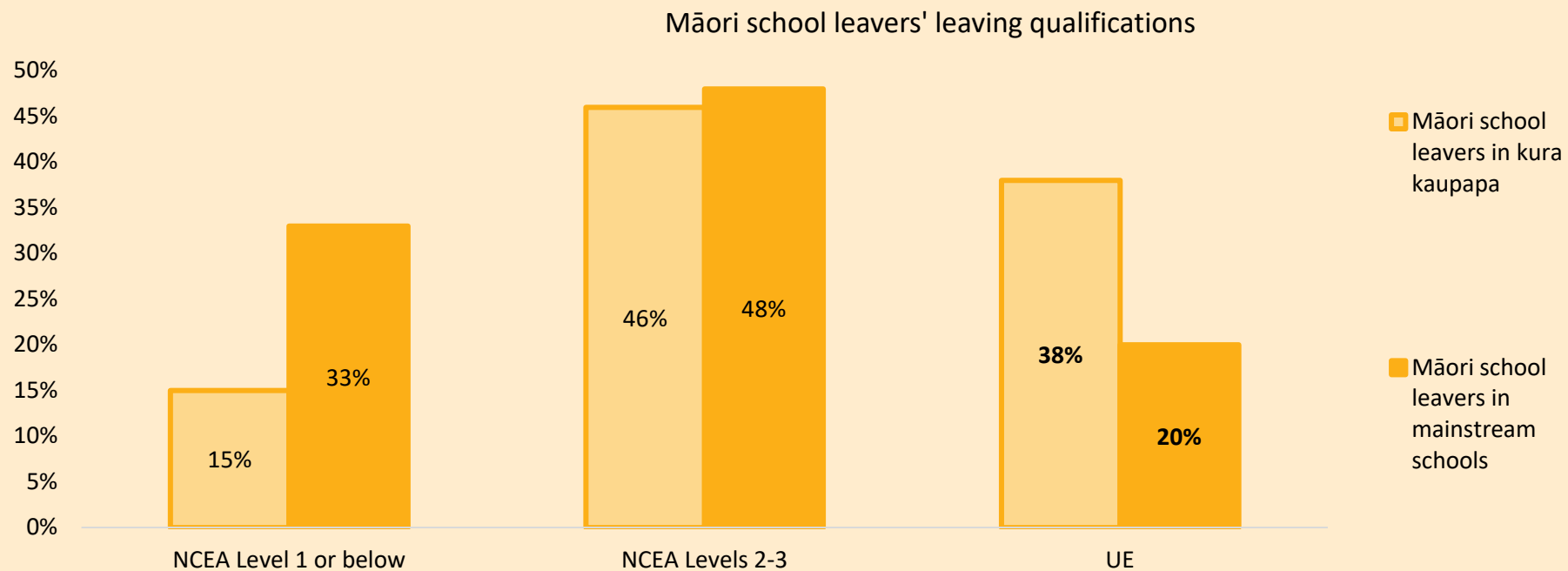




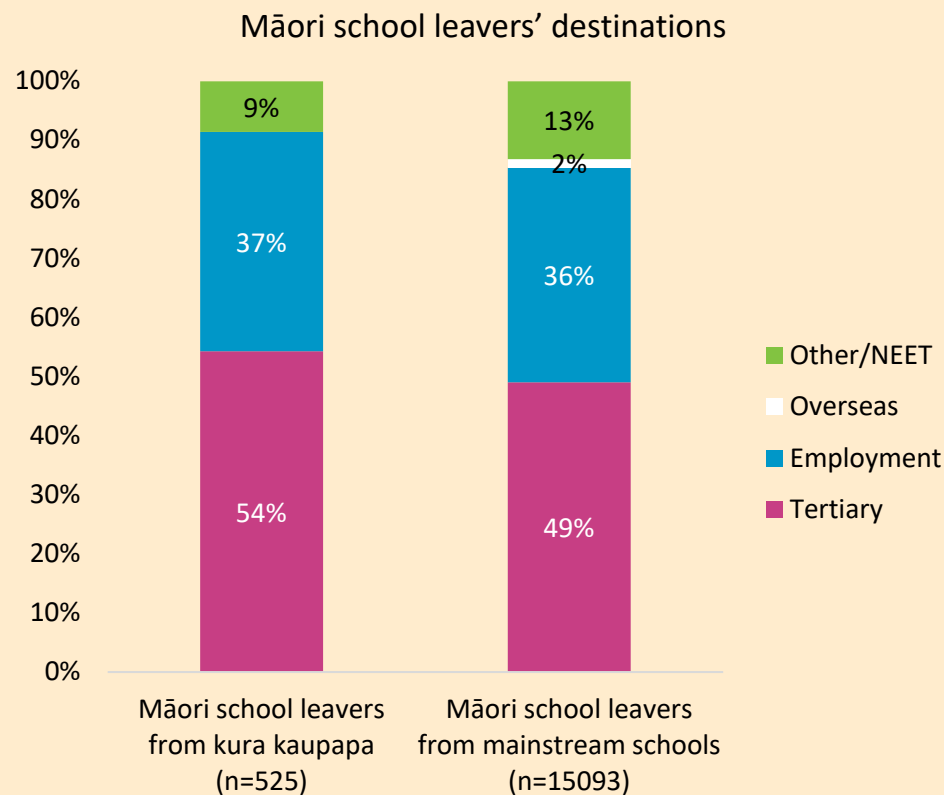
# For Māori learners, kura kaupapa enable success

**Almost twice as many Māori school leavers in kura kaupapa achieve UE (38%) as those in mainstream schools (20%)**

Note Māori ākonga in kura kaupapa also achieved NCEA level 3 at a significantly higher rate than those in mainstream school (28% vs 17%; not shown below).

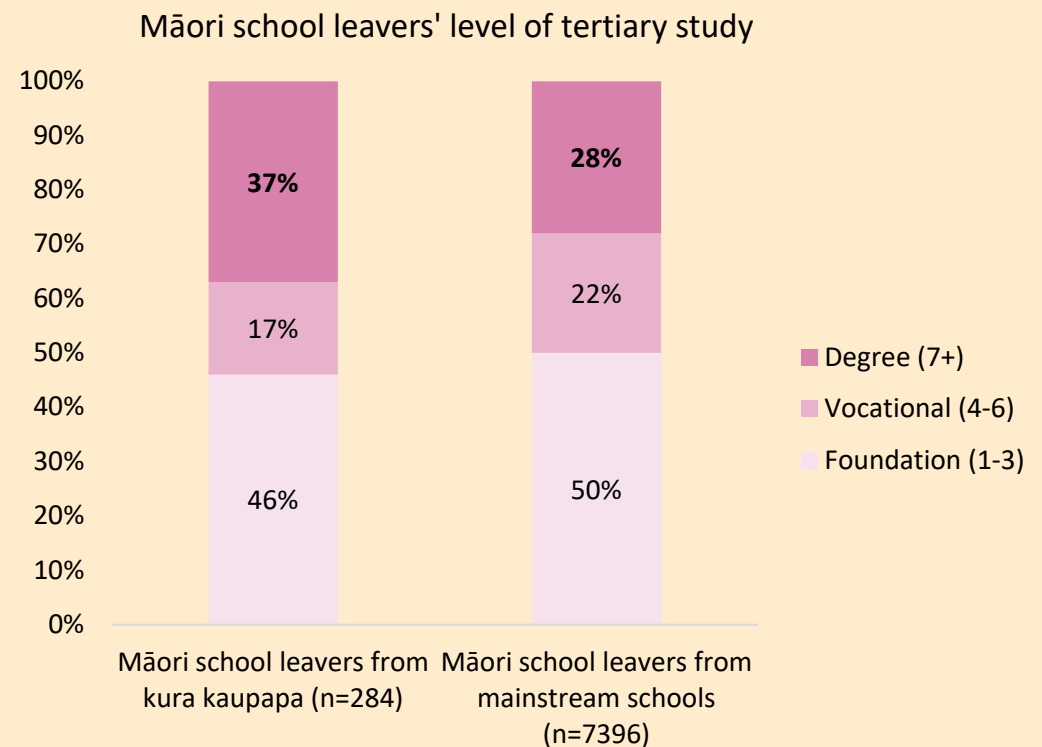


Māori school leavers from kura kaupapa (54%) are slightly *more* likely to transition into tertiary education than Māori from mainstream schools (49%)



Māori school leavers from kura kaupapa are also *less* likely to enter NEET/other pathways (9%) compared to Māori from mainstream schools (13%).

Māori school leavers from kura kaupapa (37%) are *more* likely to enter degree level study than ākonga from mainstream schools (28%)



# Appendix C: Full list of school leavers' planned careers

Careers used here are based on those used in Drawing the Future.<sup>[2]</sup> Asterisks (\*) denote careers that school leavers mentioned which were not specified in Drawing the Future. Careers from Drawing the Future that were not mentioned by any school leavers are not listed here.

ASPIRATION	Planned career		Dream career	
	Rank	% of respondents	Rank	% of respondents
Engineer (civil, mechanical, electrical)	1	10.4%	2	7.6%
Businessman/woman	2	5.0%	1	7.8%
Nurse/Health visitor	3	4.8%	21	1.5%
Builder	4	4.8%	17	2.1%
Lawyer (barrister/solicitor)/Judge	5	4.6%	8	3.0%
Doctor	6	3.8%	6	3.8%
Teacher/Lecturer	7	3.5%	13	2.3%
Other trade workers e.g. *electrician, tiler, butcher etc.	8	3.5%	70	0.3%
Scientist/*Data scientist/*Sports scientist/*Food technician/*Researcher	9	3.4%	10	2.7%
Police officer	10	3.4%	26	1.3%
Mechanic	11	3.3%	12	2.4%
Work with children e.g. daycare, babysitter, early childhood	12	3.3%	41	0.9%
Army/Navy/Airforce/Firefighter/*Military medic	13	3.2%	19	1.6%
Artist/Illustrator	14	3.1%	15	2.2%
Manager e.g. in an office, factory, shop, hotel	15	2.9%	27	1.3%
Psychiatrist/Psychologist/*Counsellor/*Therapist	16	2.8%	11	2.5%
IT e.g. consultant, programmer, technician, designer	17	2.7%	32	1.2%
Photographer	18	2.6%	16	2.1%
Sportsperson	19	2.5%	3	6.6%
Actor/Actress	20	2.2%	4	5.9%
Plumber	21	2.1%	22	1.4%
Fashion/jewellery/shoes/handbags designer	22	2.1%	49	0.7%
Musician e.g. pianist, guitarist	23	1.9%	5	4.1%
Midwife	24	1.9%	76	0.2%

## ASPIRATION

	Planned career		Dream career	
	Rank	% of respondents	Rank	% of respondents
TV work (not presenter)/*Film producer/*Director	25	1.9%	18	1.8%
Hairdresser/Barber	26	1.8%	96	0.0%
Marketing/*Communications/*PR/*Event planning/*Editor/*Content creator	27	1.8%	54	0.6%
Carpenter/Joiner	28	1.8%	89	0.1%
Physiotherapist	29	1.6%	38	1.0%
Social worker (incl. *Youth worker)	30	1.6%	28	1.3%
Accountant	31	1.6%	84	0.1%
Retail sales assistant	32	1.5%	95	0.0%
Flight attendant	33	1.4%	40	0.9%
Cafe worker/Barista/*Bartender/*Hospitality	34	1.4%	77	0.2%
Coach/Instructor/Trainer	35	1.4%	42	0.8%
Other medical professionals e.g anaesthetist, oncologist, *dietitian etc.	36	1.4%	20	1.5%
*Vet nurse	37	1.4%	71	0.2%
Other designers	38	1.3%	39	1.0%
Chef/*Caterer	39	1.3%	31	1.2%
Glazier	40	1.2%	96	0.0%
Financial services e.g. advisor/*Economist	41	1.1%	68	0.3%
Architect	42	1.1%	58	0.5%
Vet	43	1.1%	14	2.3%
DOC worker/Conservationist/Environmentalist	44	1.1%	44	0.8%
Farmer (incl.*agriculture/*forestry)	45	1.0%	56	0.6%
Airline pilot	46	0.9%	24	1.4%
Biologist/Marine Biologist	47	0.8%	33	1.1%
*Tour guide/Recreational instructor e.g. SCUBA guide	48	0.8%	47	0.8%
Sales consultant/*Real Estate agent	49	0.7%	88	0.1%
Truck driver	50	0.7%	96	0.0%
Journalist	51	0.7%	61	0.4%
Animal worker e.g. trainer, groomer, breeder, keeper	52	0.6%	35	1.1%
Beauty therapist/artist	53	0.6%	73	0.2%
Graphic designer	54	0.6%	59	0.5%
Surgeon	55	0.6%	29	1.2%
Pharmacist	56	0.6%	74	0.2%



## ASPIRATION

	Planned career		Dream career	
	Rank	% of respondents	Rank	% of respondents
*Policy advisor	57	0.5%	79	0.1%
Politician/*Diplomat/*Ambassador	58	0.5%	46	0.8%
*Nutrition (not dietitian)	59	0.5%	96	0.0%
*Youth worker	60	0.5%	90	0.1%
Animator/Cartoonist	61	0.5%	23	1.4%
Paramedic	62	0.4%	30	1.2%
*Ministry/Pastor	63	0.4%	60	0.4%
Zoo keeper	64	0.4%	65	0.3%
Writer	65	0.3%	7	3.3%
Fast food worker	66	0.3%	96	0.0%
TV/Radio presenter/DJ	67	0.3%	75	0.2%
Performer e.g. comedian	68	0.3%	79	0.1%
Author	69	0.3%	45	0.8%
Zoologist	70	0.2%	90	0.1%
Banker	71	0.2%	96	0.0%
Dog handler/trainer	72	0.2%	71	0.2%
NASA/Astronaut	73	0.2%	55	0.6%
Interior designer	74	0.2%	67	0.3%
Dentist	75	0.2%	82	0.1%
Singer	76	0.2%	34	1.1%
Baker	77	0.2%	37	1.0%
Game designer/developer	78	0.2%	62	0.4%
Care worker	79	0.2%	96	0.0%
*Music producer	80	0.1%	53	0.6%
Miner	81	0.1%	82	0.1%
*Sound engineer	82	0.1%	96	0.0%
Explorer/traveller	83	0.1%	9	2.8%
Detective / Forensics	84	0.1%	36	1.1%
Social media/YouTuber/Influencer	84	0.1%	43	0.8%
Dancer	84	0.1%	52	0.6%
Archaeologist	84	0.1%	79	0.1%
*Historian	84	0.1%	78	0.2%
*Philosopher	84	0.1%	90	0.1%

## ASPIRATION

	Planned career		Dream career	
	Rank	% of respondents	Rank	% of respondents
Factory worker	90	0.0%	25	1.3%
Gamer/Professional gamer	90	0.0%	48	0.7%
Sailor/Maritime	90	0.0%	51	0.6%
Waiter	90	0.0%	57	0.6%
Office admin./Receptionist	90	0.0%	64	0.3%
Model	90	0.0%	66	0.3%
Fisher person	90	0.0%	84	0.1%
Hunter	90	0.0%	84	0.1%
Astronomer	90	0.0%	90	0.1%
Dance teacher	90	0.0%	90	0.1%
*Librarian	90	0.0%	50	0.6%
*Activist/Humanitarian	90	0.0%	63	0.4%
*House wife/Trophy wife	90	0.0%	69	0.3%
*Gardener/Horticulture	90	0.0%	84	0.1%
<i>Don't know</i>	-	3.6%	-	4.4%

# Appendix D: The Cynefin framework for decision-making

The Cynefin framework is a tool for decision-making: it helps people decide what to do by making sense of their situation. Using a framework like this describes what types of responses lead to better quality outcomes for the kind of decision that school leavers are making.

Since its development out of cognitive science, complexity science, computing and anthropology, the Cynefin framework has been successfully applied to fields including policy, management, organisational strategy and emergency response. We apply it here to school leavers' decision-making about their transition from school because it is learner-centric, being built around personal circumstances and history.

The framework is named for the Welsh word *cynefin*, describing the 'sense of place' from which someone views their decision-making environment. This sense of place includes their history, connections and context, and is similar to the concept of *tūrangawaewae*.

## COMPLEX

Unknown unknowns (information and confidence needs both unmet)

Environment is in constant flux

Can't know the right answer until after the decision, looking back

"What should I do after I leave school?"

Approach: conduct experiments that are safe to fail (e.g. work placements, Gateway, open days), gather information to move problem to complicated quadrant

## COMPLICATED

Known unknowns (information needs are unmet but can be addressed)

Can find the right answer with expert knowledge

"What school subjects should I take next year?"

Approach: gather information (e.g. school prospectus), seek advice from experts (e.g. teachers, advisors, family/whānau, other students)

Problems: entrained thinking from experts

## CHAOTIC

No right answer exists, only constant is turbulence

e.g. effects of COVID-19, huge life barriers to engagement

Approach: manage crisis first then establish what complex problems exist

## CLEAR

Known knowns (information needs are met)

"How should I get to school today?"

Approach: follow procedure (check weather, choose appropriate transport)

The framework describes five domains of decision-making, divided into ordered and unordered:

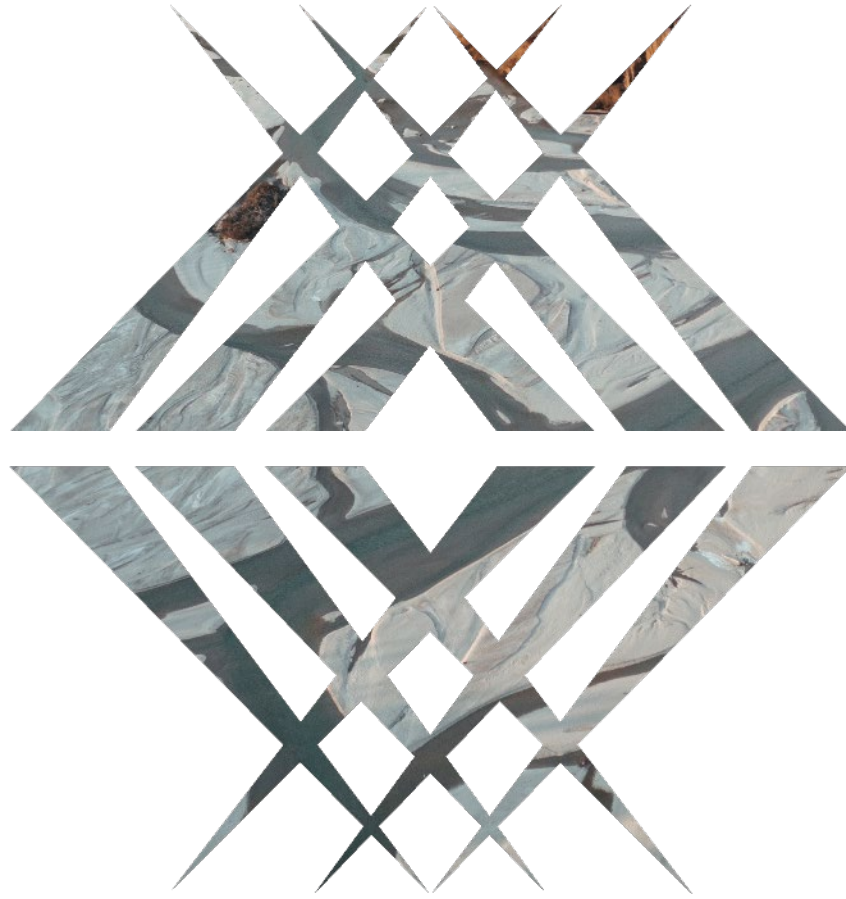
**ORDERED DOMAINS:** In both clear and complicated decision environments, there are one or more right answers, and these answers can be known.

1. Clear: decisions in which there is a simple relationship between cause and effect. The ideal approach to making such a decision is to follow a standard procedure.
2. Complicated: there is a relationship between cause and effect, which can be uncovered with sufficient knowledge or expertise. Decision-makers can choose the correct course of action by using judgement and expertise to assess the range of options.

**UNORDERED DOMAINS:**

3. Complex: knowing the effect of their choice (e.g. pursuing a particular career) can only be known after taking action and looking back with hindsight. In complex situations, the recommended approach is to gather information about potential options by conducting 'experiments' that are safe to fail.
4. Chaotic: there is no clear relationship between cause and effect because the environment is constantly changing. In these situations, knowledge is irrelevant because the environment is so turbulent, and the only effective response is to take any action that helps establish some order (e.g. finding a stable place to live), before then attempting to understand where there might be pockets of complex decisions to make.

A space of 'Disorder' is sometimes also shown in the centre, when the decision-maker does not know which of the decision environments they are operating in.



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