

# Young People Producing Careers and Identities

**The first report from the Pathways and Prospects project**

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NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH  
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# Executive Summary

This is the first major report from the Pathways and Prospects research study about pathway and career-related experiences and perspectives of young people after leaving school. It investigates how young people make decisions about their careers and working life, including any part that indecision and “changes of heart” might play in that. This investigation raises some issues about the framework used in thinking about how to support young people in transition. It suggests we take more of a focus on *career and identity production*.

Pathways and Prospects is a 4-year longitudinal study that asks: How do young people describe what they are doing and what it means in their lives? How do they see themselves in relation to their pathways? And what can we learn in relation to policies and practices, and where they might usefully go from here?

The research was prompted by our interest in the way young people tend to be seen as the problem of transition through a “pathways framework” coming from three system-wide shifts in New Zealand (Vaughan, 2004)—a largely deregulated tertiary system, a National Qualifications Framework, and an increase in career development support for a wider range of post-school careers, particularly vocationally-oriented ones. It was also prompted by an interest in the different responsibilities and insecurities faced by young people than previous generations, particularly the way they are now required to engage in a continuous series of decisions, beginning at school, that will shape their lives and careers, their pathways (Vaughan, 2003).

We therefore wanted find out more about what a pathways framework meant in practice, testing the assumptions behind the policy and research approaches that typically track young people’s post-school *activities* and then draw conclusions about the state of their *transition*. We also wanted to learn about how different young people actually experience and make sense of transition. We were interested in what Raffe (2003) refers to as “the relationship between pathways and navigations”: the process and lived meaning of pathway learning and career-related things people do.

In taking this approach, Pathways and Prospects highlights that an understanding of identity production and career production is crucially missing in much transition policy and research.

## Young people and participation

We conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with 114 young people who had left school during or at the end of 2003, and had opted into one of the following recognised post-school study, training, and/or employment programmes in six major pathway organisations:

- Modern Apprenticeships (trade; public sector);
- The New Zealand Army (officers; soldiers);
- Polytechnic courses (cookery; foundation health);
- University degree programmes (arts; science; teaching);
- University bridging programmes (arts or science specialism); and
- Youth training courses (business administration/computing).

Accessing young people through these pathway organisations gave us a mix of vocational fit, fee-paying and earning-while-learning arrangements, entry requirements, course length, institutional structures, and participant living environments.

At this point in the study, nearly all participants have been interviewed twice. One hundred and fourteen were interviewed early in 2004 as they began their new programmes and 103 of them were interviewed again 10–15 months later.

The interviews asked young people to tell their stories of negotiating pathways, describe and reflect on choices and choice-making processes, and share their opinions about goal setting, being a particular age, work/life balance, and their hopes and fears for the future.

## Analysis approach

This report focuses on the processes and meaning of pathways choices. To see patterns around this more clearly, we took an innovative approach to analysing the interviews narratives. We used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the interviews in terms of the major choice themes of *security* and *exploration*. Through quantitative analysis, the dimensions of security and exploration clustered into Exploration, Contingent Security, and Secure Commitment factors, and the interviews clustered into four groups with distinct profiles.

The clusters are used in the report as a lens through which to examine different young people's perspectives, trajectories, motivations, and outlooks. The indicators, factors, and clusters are not designed as checklists to categorise young people. However, they are useful for making sense of young people's narratives and for thinking about the different pushes and pulls they experience. The clusters also challenge accepted ways of thinking about security and exploration in youth transition. They point to fresh possibilities for supporting young people in career development.

## The Hopeful Reactors: Contingent Security

The Hopeful Reactors constituted 14 percent of all interviews and were the smallest of the four clusters. There was a notable over-representation of people with few or no school qualifications who were also taking the less prestigious pathway options when compared with other clusters (just over half had no school qualifications and less than 20 percent achieved NCEA Level 2). Youth trainees and army personnel, mainly soldiers, were over-represented, as were Pacific peoples, Māori, and women. There were no university students.

Interviewees tended to be concerned about a lack of options and lack of planning leaving school, financial security, and the possibility of experiencing failure. Their pathway options tended to represent an escape from, or avoidance of, something negative or potentially damaging in their lives. They tended to describe having entered their pathway as a result of being directed into it by their school and sometimes their family and friends, after finding they had few or no real alternative pathway options. Although Hopeful Reactors had low ratings for “career identity” and often little sense of long-term purpose or interest in their pathway option, they were very committed to finding that purpose with its reward of feeling valued, at some point. They used their pathway options to engage in a (re)construction of their “learning careers” (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000), helping them emerge into a form of adulthood that no longer depended on school achievement or other people’s (sometimes limited) visions of who they were or could be. Thus “success” was in part contingent upon them remaining with the pathway, even if it was no longer engaging. Their early career development was about the development of the possibility of “career”. The Hopeful Reactors’ maxim could be: “I’m not going to end up a bum.”

## The Confident Explorers: Exploration

The Confident Explorer interviews constituted 29 percent of all interviews, the second largest cluster. They had a fairly even distribution of interviews from youth trainees, university, and bridging participants. The Confident Explorers’ combination of the Exploration and the Secure Commitment factors illustrated how particular aspects of exploration behaviour and mindsets emerge from goal-driven dispositions and a genuine commitment to following a pathway. The interviewees in this cluster expected and sought personal and career challenges and were dedicated to exploring within and beyond their current pathway option, adjusting their pathways in the direction of unfolding interests. Most saw a range of options open to them after school, and their interests often guided their decision-making, even when they were not highly successful at school.

They saw career in a wide sense, approaching it through *themselves*. They were the most short-term committed to their current pathway of all clusters on average but they did not have a clear career identity that could be mapped to a specific career. They *did* have a clear sense of purpose and made detailed plans about their current pathways and their anticipated future ones. Their overall framework was generally not attached to a particular job, vocation, or profession; it was

attached to being a particular kind of person with a range of high-level and adaptable skills. They seemed to have grasped the idea of uncertainty through a certainty that they and their jobs would change over time and that they could prepare for this—not by guarding against change but by embracing the challenge and stimulation of change. By exploring and creating linkages between different possibilities in their lives, they saw potential to “tune” their learning and qualifications to their interests, motivations, and talents, and then to the current and future labour market (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). They did not manage a specific career in the sense of vocation; they managed themselves as an ongoing enterprise. The Confident Explorers’ maxim could be: “I’m creating my self for my future.”

## **The Anxious Seekers: Exploration**

The Anxious Seekers cluster was almost as large, constituting 24 percent of all interviews. Youth trainees and bridging participants comprised the majority of interviews and there was a similar number of army interviews compared to the Hopeful Reactors and Confident Explorers. There was a small number of university interviews and a similar number of apprentice interviews to the Hopeful Reactors.

As their cluster name suggests, they were the most apprehensive and restless of the clusters. They were the most dissatisfied with their current pathway option and about three-quarters of the interviews were rated highly for seriously considering, if not actually formally committed to, a different pathway than the one they were currently pursuing. Sometimes the original pathway option was not what they had expected and sometimes they had entered it somewhat reluctantly in an effort to meet family expectations.

The Anxious Seekers were characterised by a pervasive sense of doubt about their lives and pathway choices, and they engaged in pathway costs-benefits analyses which weighed heavily upon them. Many felt overwhelmed by the decisions they needed to make or information they needed to take into account. They were concerned about losing out—either by sticking with a pathway option that was not right for them or by changing to another one that might turn out to be worse. Their doubt about choices and how to “maximise” them (Schwartz, 2004) meant they tended to avoid making detailed plans lest these contribute to expanding possibilities and further doubt. If one pathway did not lead to fulfilment, they tended to see it as confirmation of its unsustainability and sought something entirely different as its counterweight. Career was a process fraught with confusing change that they longed to “pin down” to a specific recognisable job title. Their maxim could be: “I don’t know which way to turn.”

## The Passion Honers: Secure Commitment

The Passion Honers' interviews constituted 34 percent of the interviews and it was the largest cluster. They were dominated by army participants and with a relatively even distribution of interviews from apprentices, university, bridging, and polytechnic participants. It had the smallest number of interviews from youth trainees across the clusters.

These interviewees were happy, enthusiastic, and certain about their pathway choice, and pleased with the decisions they made. Few were exploring widely beyond their pathway option, though some were considering how they might take their interest further through specialisation or into a related opportunity. The Passion Honers were largely contentedly attached to a specific vocation, having used existing, and sometimes emerging, interests to gain a foothold into a specific field or industry. They are probably the best example of success within a typical early career development model, although they also drew attention to the complexity of career development in action, showing that it is not a static thing but a dynamic process.

They tended to have a fairly coherent picture of themselves, incorporating apparent contradictions in their feelings (e.g. their reactions to difficulties) towards the greater goal of success in their chosen pathway. However, their more narrow view of career-as-vocation was to some extent offset by an emerging view of career-as-process in terms of their identities as learner-workers. Most of the interviews in the cluster were from young people who were either in options that challenged the traditional education/employment split, such as earning-while-learning apprenticeships and army careers (which included some apprenticeships), or short-term vocation-specific learning, such as polytechnic courses in cookery, health, and nursing which moved people into ongoing workplace development. Consequently a high proportion of this cluster was employed and earning National Qualification Framework credits. They were therefore engaged in career management in its most formal and traditional sense of taking opportunities, many of them structured into their jobs, to increase skill levels within a specified field. The Passion Honers' maxim could be: "I'm becoming something in a secure career."

## Rethinking security and exploration

The Passion Honers and Hopeful Reactors showed that security can come through *commitment to* or *escape from*, respectively. This suggests that when we talk about job security or a secure pathway, we might need to think about the kind of security being sought and the motivations for doing so. The low exploration ratings for Hopeful Reactors and Passion Honers were mainly driven by a lack of interest in, or commitment to, pathways other than the one with which they were currently engaged. Each cluster faced different risks and threats to particular identities—for example, the Passion Honers strived to become people who "know their stuff" and the Hopeful Reactors saw themselves as people who could "rise above" circumstance. In such a context, exploration would have been a luxury for the Hopeful Reactors whereas exploration for the Passion Honers occurred only in an intra-pathway, rather the inter-pathway, sense. The different

dimensions of security in Hopeful Reactors' and Passion Honers' narratives had a significance that squeezed out considering alternative pathways or exploring different careers.

The Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers clusters challenged some commonly accepted ways of thinking about the role of exploration in youth transition. The first challenge came through an illustration of how exploration can come from both security *or* insecurity. The Confident Explorers used existing security to build a platform for further exploration. Their previous school achievement and entry into pathway options that they found interesting and challenging provided the impetus to pursue and explore more opportunities. For them, exploration was not something they did, perhaps through school subjects or transition programmes, in order to find out their interests or aptitudes, then choose a pathway, settle down, and stop exploring. Instead—and this is the second challenge—exploration was something that *emerged from* positive experiences and allowed them to *continue* expanding, and making, choices.

The Anxious Seekers, on the other hand, were driven to explore by a Contingent Security that looked much like *insecurity*. What could they gain—but what might they lose—by changing pathways? Exploration was not a warm, exciting, activity but was instead riven with paralysing doubt. The third challenge suggested by their narratives is that exploration need not be the product of a *lack* of information about possible options, but can be about a struggle for a framework in which to *make sense of* possible options, and find *support* in order to make decisions. Finally, the Anxious Seekers illustrated that exploration could be a frightening place, prompting attempts to create security in the form of backup plans.

## Career-as-process

The clusters underscore a need to move beyond careers education and guidance to careers *management*, in line with the idea of *career development*. The distinction between guidance, which is built on models of skill matching and vocational aptitudes, and management, which addresses the role of the learner and worker, is critical. This is because vocational matching approaches are increasingly difficult to sustain in a world of “accelerated flows” (of people, ideas, money) between nations (Appadurai, 1996), fragmenting structures (Beck, 1999), and a rapidly changing labour market. As challenges for individuals shift from securing a job once to finding jobs repeatedly throughout life (Wijers & Meijers, 1996), we need to shift away from career advice being tied to existing skills and aptitudes towards management of self and skills for careers that are possibly as yet unheard of, perhaps in hybridised fields or disciplines.

This means that “career” is now a very different thing, no longer a structure but a process (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). It also means that we need to think beyond knowledge for storing up, and instead think of knowledge in terms of what it can *do* (Gilbert, 2005) because the most important form of knowledge is now ontological (Barnett, 2004), about how individuals can *be* in the world. This shift also means that workplaces will increasingly be seen as learning environments (Billett, 2006), as ongoing changes in the prioritising of workplace learning in New Zealand suggest.

The Confident Explorers, and to some extent the Passion Honers, already seem in step with career development directions. However, the Confident Explorers' approach is also the most likely of all clusters to be misunderstood in relation to existing policy because it appears to subvert accepted ideas about pathway trajectories and appropriately meaningful choices. They are perhaps the best example of what young people could be supported to do but it may be that those who support them—teachers, parents, policy makers—will not be comfortable with the new terms of the arrangement.

If we want policies to be better aligned with young people's actual priorities and needs, we do need to shift our thinking. It needs to move away from pathways and navigations within a simple model of transition-to-labour market to something that takes account of *identity production* and *career as process*. Young people's narratives across all clusters highlight that:

- careers decision making is not a single decision at a single point in time;
- differing levels of commitment to any pathway option may or may not be the same as commitment to a specific career; and
- similar orientations may be based on quite different, but equally valid, reasoning.

In other words, it is vital to look beyond the surface because measuring the face-value instances of activities is not enough to understand *the meaning that young people make* of those activities and their role in their lives. Young people emphasise *process* in transition. In doing so, they disrupt some commonly held assumptions about security and exploration motivations and behaviours. Understanding *identity and career production* is therefore not only an acknowledgement of *career as process* (Wijers & Meijers, 1996), but also an acknowledgement that career development is *for* a society where the roles of learner and worker continue to change.



# 1. Introduction

When I was just a little girl  
I asked my mother “What will I be?”  
“Will I be pretty? Will I be rich?”  
Here’s what she said to me:  
Que sera, sera  
Whatever will be, will be  
The future’s not ours to see  
Que sera, sera (Livingston, Evans, and performed by Doris Day, 1956)

This is the first major report from the Pathways and Prospects research study pathway and career-related experiences and perspectives of 114 young people in their first two years after leaving school. It investigates how young people make decisions about their careers and working life, including any part that indecision and “changes of heart” might play in that. It considers how we might (re)conceptualise the nature and role of work and learner identities for young people in transition.

Interest in, and concern about, youth in transition has intensified considerably in developed countries, particularly over the past 10 years. Concern over youth is not in itself new; many authors have explored the ways that young people have been constructed at different points in history (see Aries, 1962; Kelly, 2003; Lesko, 2001; Roman, 1996). However the focus on youth during the transition-from-school time frame and the interest in successfully integrating youth into the workforce is more recent, as is the focus on all young people leaving school, not just the ones considered to be at-risk. The transition time frame itself has “increasingly indeterminate” start and end points (Raffe, 2001), and young people face different responsibilities and insecurities during this period than previous generations. Generally we no longer say “whatever will be, will be” with any confidence and we certainly do not advise young people in school or leaving school to see things that way when it comes to their future. It is almost unthinkable, and considered quite problematic, if a young person does not become involved in a series of decisions throughout secondary school that will shape their lives and careers, their pathways (Vaughan, 2003).

The following table summarises main shifts in the way we have seen, and now see, the transition period and its issues.

Table 1 **Changing conceptions of youth transition**

<i>Earlier model of transition</i>	<i>Emerging model of transition</i>
Rigid, defined, and exclusive tracks	Linked and flexible pathways
Affects some young people, especially high school drop-outs or early leavers	Affects all young people (all high school trajectories need to be managed)
Risk of failure at school and unskilled jobs	Risk of inactivity after leaving school
Short linear step(s)	Extended linear process
Lifelong career	Lifelong learning and learning for life
No qualifications or single qualification obtained soon after leaving school; possible further professional qualifications	Possibility of multiple qualifications in different fields obtained over lengthy period of time
Adults make decisions and offer opportunities to young people	Young people make decisions, and take and create opportunities for themselves
Education solely as a public good	Education as a private investment and a public good
Learning then earning	Earning while learning
Secondary students attain fixed-design qualifications	Secondary students have greater role in designing or “producing” qualifications through choices over units and assessments <sup>1</sup>
Adulthood marked by employment after study, and marriage and parenting during the 20s	Adulthood marked by periods of combined employment and study throughout life, and commitment to marriage and parenting later in life

In New Zealand and around the world, particularly in Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, and France, policy makers are grappling with these shifts and how policies and practices can best support their nation’s economic and social wellbeing, and young people in their contribution to it. These attempts can be theorised in terms of a “pathways framework” (Vaughan, 2004) which today addresses itself to all young people, regardless of school achievement. A pathways framework forms at the nexus of the following three system-wide shifts in New Zealand (Vaughan, 2004):

1. a deregulated tertiary system (though some regulation is being reintroduced via new funding mechanisms);
2. the development of a National Qualifications Framework, designed to be flexible, credible to employers, schools, and tertiary institutions, and use criterion or standards-based assessment; and
3. an increase in career development support for a wider range of post-school careers, especially vocational ones, together with an increase in the status of vocational careers, in order to

<sup>1</sup> The idea of “producing” qualifications comes from the Learning Curves study (Hipkins & Vaughan, with Beals, Ferral, & Gardiner, 2005).

improve labour supply, alleviate skill shortages, and provide meaningful work opportunities for young people.

New Zealand's tertiary education sector in particular continues to be remodelled in an attempt to meet some of today's labour market and globalisation challenges, resulting in an explosion of tertiary education courses and new institutions. In addition to the universities, teacher colleges, and polytechnics that existed a decade ago, there are now three wananga, 41 industry training organisations, and 900 private training establishments. At the secondary level, the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework—including the NCEA and other national certificates—has allowed a far wider range of learning to be credentialed. This is presenting teachers and young people with a vast array of possibilities for school subjects, qualifications, and alignment with tertiary options (Hipkins & Vaughan, 2005).

Careers education for young people in schools or leaving school has become more prominent around the world. Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada have recently directed significant funding to career development and transition initiatives. Many countries now subscribe to cross-national groups, going “beyond policy borrowing” into “a diaspora of policy ideas now flowing globally” (Lingard, 2001, p. 14). A statement released from the 22 countries and six international organisations participating in the recent International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy (2006) confirmed that *workforce* development, particularly *workforce preparation*, was critically supported by *career* development which encompasses services assisting people at any age or point in their lives making choices about education, training, and occupation and managing their careers.

In New Zealand, the Labour-led Government's recent Budgets have directed funding and attention to youth transition, beginning with the Education and Training Leaving Age Package in 2003, through to the increased funding to boost Career Services' capacity in 2006. There remains a focus—began in 2003—on co-ordinating the activities of youth transition services and having “all 15–19-year-olds in appropriate education, training and work by 2007” (New Zealand Treasury, 2003, p. 9).<sup>2</sup> The Government also continues to develop tertiary education funding mechanisms and eradicate course duplication, and fund and promote apprenticeships and industry training. Other significant developments in resourcing and support have been put in place for vocational educational and training programmes in schools such as Gateway and the STAR-funded courses (Secondary-Tertiary Alignment Resource), and for careers information and advice, such as the Quality Career Advice for Students to start in secondary schools in 2007.

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<sup>2</sup> The Mayors Taskforce for Jobs shares this aim.

## The Pathways and Prospects study

From the outset, we have wanted Pathways and Prospects to test the assumptions in many youth transition policies and some transition research. Policies and initiatives have tended to frame young people as the problem of transition—young people need more information, are not responsible enough to make good choices, should be encouraged into areas of skills shortages, should understand student loans as an investment, should have more work experience at school, and so forth. This approach typically focuses on measuring and tracking young people's post-school *activities* and then drawing conclusions about the state of their *transition*. For example, some policies aim to ensure that young people get into, and complete, training or education courses. If young people move from these courses into a job, then both the course and young people's transitions are seen as successful.

Some studies, particularly survey-based ones, have tracked young people's acquisition of qualifications, and their education and employment status, sometimes over a long time or sometimes as part of an evaluation of a specific course. These kinds of studies typically take the status of the young person—employed, unemployed, repeating the course, studying for further qualifications—as a proxy for how the transition is going and assume that meanings are the same for young people as they are for policy makers and researchers—for example, that if studying a certain course represents a good pathway to a career for policy makers, that it also represents this to young people. This means we are unable to pick apart the assumptions involved because we do not learn anything about how different young people actually experience transition. We miss out on learning about what is arguably the most important aspect of transition for young people: producing identity.

We understand identity as something that is continually being made. Therefore it is not a stable or fixed thing that we are born with, like “the kernel within a nut shell” (Elliott, 2005). Instead we have identity because we actively construct it *and* have it constructed for us through relationships with others, experiences, and through “discourses”—sets of ideas used to talk about things in particular ways. For example, “a pathways framework” is really a discourse because it links school, tertiary education, and the labour market, in a way that articulates ideas about how young people should “do” transition successfully. Because there are different discourses operating at different times, we have multiple identities which change over time and in different contexts—for example, a young person might be a university student, but they are also a son or daughter, a sports team member, a person who lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and so on. Identity is (a continually changing idea of) who we are and how we make sense of the world. So making identity central in the research means listening to young people's narratives about pathways and what pathways experiences *mean* to the young people. This is our entry point into understanding how a “pathways framework” operates. Young people's narratives illustrate what Raffe (2003) refers to as “the relationship between pathways and navigations”: the process and lived meaning of learning or career-related things people do. So Pathways and Prospects asks: How do young people describe what they are doing and what it means in their lives? How do they see themselves

in relation to their pathways? And what can we learn from this in relation to policies and practices and where they might usefully go from here?

This focus on young people's perspectives has lent itself to making particular use of two ideas suggested by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). The first involves thinking about the "identity investments" that people make. Since people's narratives or stories are about making sense of the world and constructing the self in relation to others, their particular way of framing their transition activities and pathway navigations becomes very interesting to think about in terms of disappointments they avoid or possibilities they gain access to, and identities they develop or abandon. Some of our participants' stories have not necessarily made sense to us as adults or researchers. For example, sometimes they have made decisions that we have thought ill-informed or told us things we suspect are not quite accurate. Using the idea of "identity investments" means our analysis can focus on the investments made in explaining a story in a particular way. The term also makes a nice juxtaposition with the other kinds of investments that young people are supposed to take into consideration when making choices about pathways—financial investments, time investments, and opportunity investments or 'costs. In other words, our interviews are not "a mirror reflection of the social world" but they do "provide access to meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds" (Miller & Glasner, 1997, p. 100).

Hollway and Jefferson's second idea of "defended subjects" is also useful here, too, in that when people are produced through particular life events (e.g. shaped by their environment *and* thinking of themselves in particular ways), they might also unconsciously "defend against" some life events or ways of seeing or presenting themselves. These ideas are especially fruitful when thinking about youth transition in this study because participants' narratives are constructed within the wider context of young people often being seen as the "problem" of transition. Being a target for endless questions and interventions related to what they are doing, their plans, and "where they are going" in life is something that many of our participants appeared to be "defending against" in their narratives—sometimes by insisting they did not need any plans and could "go with the flow", sometimes by describing a heightened awareness of the expectation they will know "where they are going in life", and sometimes by detailing incredibly elaborate plans they had constructed for their life paths.

## Setting up the research

We want to do two things in this sub-section. Firstly we want to provide information about how the research has been carried out to date and discussion about the methodological basis for doing so. Secondly we want to make this account part of an ongoing discussion through the report about the challenges involved in doing research on youth pathways, particularly when using the approach that we have chosen. These challenges are closely related to the way in which researchers, policy makers, institutions, and young people variously define and think about the conception of pathways from school.

We had two fundamental eligibility criteria for young people to be interviewed in the study. One was that the young people must have already left school, up to six months before the first interview. This was important for several reasons. From our experience at NZCER, negotiating access to participants through a school can exaggerate a tendency for young people to behave in accordance with their status as school students who have been within an institution for many years and are not responsible for their “working day” in the same way as they will be after leaving school. Considering that our research focus is on negotiation of pathways and lived choice making, we wanted to engage young people at the point at which they were newly independent from the schooling system and beginning to develop their post-school work and learner identities.

We also wanted to cover as much of each young person’s post-school time as possible within the 4-year timeframe of this project. Many youth transition studies in New Zealand have only run up to the point that young people are 1–2 years into their post-school lives (or less). We wanted to use our opportunity to cover at least four years of young people’s post-school activities and lives, and well into “young adulthood”<sup>3</sup>—a particularly important goal given the ever-lengthening transition-from-school period. We were also aware that we could make use of a number of existing studies on young people still in their senior years at school. These could background our research without us “repeating” research focused on that point in time.

The second criterion for participation was that each young person had opted into a recognised post-school study or training programme, or paid work (allowing for combinations of these such as with Modern Apprentices) and as such we tried to underline the young people’s status or role as beginning trainees, cadets, students, and employees. This was because one of the initial interests driving this project was a curiosity about what a pathways framework meant in practice, and how people’s doubts or changes of heart could fit with the linear and seamless idea of pathways.<sup>4</sup> We wondered about *dis*continuity and possible complexity in career commitment. So we wanted to focus on the narratives of people who were ostensibly “following the rules” of youth transition and “doing pathways properly” in order to see how transition (and decision making) worked for young people who were engaging in it according to the model expected or set out in policy. Therefore our sample did not focus on young people who could be classified as “at-risk”, “inactive”, or, as the Ministry of Social Development has termed it, “NEET” (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).<sup>5</sup> Instead we looked to people who had made at least an initial pathway commitment to hear what they had to say about that and their lives.

However, some of our participants would fit within the Ministry of Education’s definition for being “at-risk”. The youth trainees and the foundation programme students achieved few or no school qualifications.

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<sup>3</sup> New Zealand’s Ministry of Youth Development uses the following terms: Children (0–11 years); Young people (12–17 years); Young adults (18–24 years) (Gray, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> We acknowledge that there is some scope for non-linearity supported by the National Qualifications Framework (Vaughan & Boyd, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Two years into the research, some of our participants might now be classified this way.

We decided on at least 100 participants as a good number for analysis in terms of different social patterns (e.g. ethnicity or parent's highest qualification) but not so many as to hinder our ability to still remember each participant as an individual. Our original sample also took into account possible attrition over the years of the study; we hoped we would still have about 100 participants at the end of the four years. We chose six different organisations representing career pathways, aiming for around 20 participants from each. Similarly this was decided in order to have enough participants from each organisation to be able to see patterns within the group (e.g. gender or stated aspirations). Having a group of about 20 young people from each pathway also helped us assure participants of their interview confidentiality in relation to employers, tutors, colleagues, or the organisation.

The organisations were chosen to give a mix of a range of post-school options. We took into account differences in:

- tightness of fit of study/training to specific vocation—from the loose match of Bachelor of Arts study to specific career, through to the close match of a trades training apprenticeship to career, through to the coexistence of army training with an army career;
- financial arrangements—both fee-paying and earning-while-learning options;
- entry requirements—from specific school qualifications and admission testing, to few or no entry requirements or school qualifications;
- length of study or training—from six months to more than four years;
- institutional arrangements—from the highly structured and hierarchical (e.g. army), to ones with a degree of pastoral care (e.g. youth training), to the highly flexible (e.g. university);
- likely rural and urban backgrounds of those enrolling or joining; and
- likely living arrangements—from barracks and student hostels to living “at home” or flatting.

We also deliberately sought sub-groupings within these six main pathways in order to capture a range of options, and participant backgrounds and perspectives. This takes into account some of the complex similarities and differences across and within pathway groupings. For example, there were 50 “students” but they were from three different institutions and five different programmes of study. There were 20 Modern Apprentices but their apprenticeships encompassed the traditional applied trades and the more recent cadetships designed for public sector careers. Some of the army soldiers were also undertaking apprenticeships, and would gain recognised trade qualifications through the army. Like the university students, some of the army officer cadets were also pursuing a degree. The range of pathways included in the study is shown in the following table. Course lengths are approximate only, as completion time frames depend on institutional arrangements as well as individual variation in achieving credits towards the qualifications.

Table 2 **Participant pathway options at beginning of research**

Pathway	Qualification sought	Approx. time frame for study/training	Number
<i>NZ Army recruits</i>			
Officer cadets (2 different training schemes)	Degree or NZ Army courses	1–4 years	9
Soldiers (support, combat, & apprentice specialities)	NZ Army courses, National Certificate (NC) <sup>6</sup> , or trades certificate	1–6 years	15
<i>Polytechnic students</i>			
Foundation health students	NC Level 7 (Bach Nursing)	1 year	6
Professional cookery students	Dip Level 4, Int Cert Level 3	1 year	10
<i>Modern Apprentices</i>			
Trades apprentices	NC Level 3–5	2–4 years	9
Public sector cadets	NC Level 3/4	2 years	11
<i>University students</i>			
Arts degrees	Degree (BA)	3 years	12
Science degrees	Degree (BSc)	3 years	1
Teaching degrees	Degree (BEd)	3 years	1
<i>University bridging students</i>			
Bridging Arts	Certificate of University preparation	6 months	13
Bridging Science	Certificate of University preparation	6 months	7
<i>TEC-funded youth trainees (Private Training Establishment)</i>	<i>NC level 2/3</i>	<i>Up to 1 year</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>114</b>

We sought help from each pathway organisation to find opportunities to recruit young people for the study. In each case, we needed to take an approach to recruitment suited to the organisation’s functioning and the help they were willing to give us. One organisation granted us a 15-minute speaking opportunity at the end of a particular lecture that was most likely to contain people meeting our recruitment criteria. Another tightly co-ordinated our recruitment, pre-filtering out “ineligible” potential participants and facilitating presentations from us to groups of potential participants. In one case, it was not possible to discuss the research with prospective participants as a group so we enlisted the help of national umbrella and local branches organisations, and

<sup>6</sup> NC stands for National Certificate, registered on the National Qualifications Framework.

individual employers, to variously locate and talk to young people on our behalf, using written material we provided for guidance.

After discussing the project with participants and obtaining their official informed consent, we gathered some background data about them. This included contact information, pathway information, parental occupations, school qualifications, gender, and ethnicity. Some of this information has been used in the analysis in order to see if there are different particular patterns in the data. We also took a photo of each participant to assist us in remembering them and the details of their interviews, and also to cut across any future tendency to think of the participants as an amorphous mass of “youth”.

At this point in the study, nearly all 114 participants have been interviewed twice. Nobody has officially withdrawn from the study. We were not able to do a second interview with 11 participants. We have been in contact with 6 of those 11 and are aware of their activities or whereabouts; we lost contact with four of the participants at the time of the second interviews, hopefully temporarily. Sadly, one participant has died.

The following table shows a demographic breakdown of the participants.

Table 3 **Participant demographic details**

		Ethnicity				Total
		Pākehā	Māori	Pacific	Other	
Gender	Male	34	13	8	1	56
	Female	23	17	12	6	58
	Total	57	30	20	7	114

Since Pathways and Prospects began from a premise that the perspectives of young people were missing from much policy and a lot of youth transition research and evaluation work, we focused on conducting semi-structured and unstructured interviews with young people, where they could tell their stories of navigating pathways. The interviews generally ran for between 40 and 60 minutes. All of the first interviews, and nearly all of the second, were face-to-face. They took place wherever was most convenient for the participant and at a time of their choosing. Interviews were held in whatever space was available at institutions, workplaces, homes, and occasionally, if nowhere private was available, in cars.

We designed a number of questions or prompts to elicit participants’ stories and perspectives. Some questions were very open and unstructured, along the lines of “Please tell me the story of how you came to be (enlisted/enrolled/working here).” Some of the others got at more specific information, such as “What are you learning about yourself?” The overall thrust of the interviews was about choice-making processes, reflections on choices made and not made, opinions about young people and the idea of goal-setting, the pleasures and challenges of being a particular age,

and hopes for the future—including what they never wanted to do, have happen, or become. Questions and prompts varied between the two interviews, carried out 10–15 months apart, although some were the same or very similar each time.

We included a short self-completion questionnaire as part of the second interview in order to capture some quantitative data on the participants' experiences and views on work/life balance.<sup>7</sup> These questionnaire responses are still to be analysed for future reporting. The interview discussion surrounding their answers was tape-recorded and transcribed, and as with the interviews, reveals some interesting considerations on the significance of particular work/life balance ideas (e.g. “possibility of bringing children to work” or “having high status”). We have included some of these comments and themes in our general analysis where appropriate.

## Multiple and complementary approaches to analysis

This sub-section discusses the approach we developed to analyse interview data. We began our analysis needing to reconcile a narrative focus on young people's stories with a need to “get above” individual stories and analyse the broader relations. So we took an inventive approach to narrative analysis. We used statistical techniques to build a manageable framework through which to analyse interview narratives. In essence, we built “a kind of reflexive bridge between the traditions of quantitative and qualitative traditions” (Elliott, 2005, p. 187). We describe this in the rest of this section.

### Analysis by theme

We got a cross-sectional picture of the data by conducting a thematic analysis across all the interviews. We uploaded each transcript into N6, a qualitative analysis software package, and developed a coding structure, starting with our main topics of interest and the first interview schedule and moving to our fieldwork reflections on the interviews and an initial subset of transcripts. Similar types of interview comments were grouped together, as were different comments about the same issue or topic.

Interviewers primarily coded the transcripts from the interviews they had conducted themselves. We slightly revised the coding structure used for the first set of interviews to achieve a closer fit to some new themes and issues covered in the second set of interviews. Coders met regularly to discuss unclear sections, further clarify codes, and check for inter-coder consistency.

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<sup>7</sup> Work/life balance in New Zealand is defined by the Department of Labour as “effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and the other activities that are important to people...The ‘right’ balance is a very personal thing and will change for each person at different times of their lives” (Work/Life Balance Project, 2005).

We also uploaded information about each participant, such as demographic details, school decile, parent occupations, and key information about the interviews and the young people at the time of each interview, such as their living arrangements, qualification sought, and employment status. This allowed us to create complex cross-tabulated searches of coded sections of interviews which could help us explore the data at the interface of “biography and demography” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) in participants’ lives.

## Narrative profiles and scales

Our analysis by theme was useful but not sufficient. We were aware that an over-reliance on dissecting interviews according to standardised themes could result in us losing sight of the individual’s narrative running through each interview. We also wanted to take up one of the unique opportunities presented by a longitudinal qualitative project—the ability to follow people’s stories over time. So we developed another way to think about the data that allowed us to “see” each individual and each interview narrative, but still get “above” the individual to see patterns. Although we were naturally interested in our participants’ lives:

...the uniqueness of our subjects’ biographies were not primarily of interest in themselves; rather, their importance was consequent upon the theoretical importance we attached to a biographically derived concept (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; p.105).

That concept for us was the relationship between pathways and navigations. In order to pursue this, we began to identify major themes that we could measure quantitatively to help us frame the interview narrative data.

From reading each interview and coding sections of it, we determined that there were two major themes driving young people’s navigations: *security* and *exploration*. These themes were consistent regardless of whether the young people were speaking about, for example, influences on their decision making, their feelings about decisions they had made, or things they considered to be important to succeed.

We initially thought that exploration and security might be mutually exclusive ideas. For example, one set of participants seemed to be searching for security and settling down (into a good job) and another set seemed to be exploring or wanting more opportunity to explore (and not settle down). However, as we delved more deeply into the interviews as entire narratives, rather than reading only fragments of interviews, coded into sets of themes, we found examples of young people who had chosen wide and varied pathways in order to keep their options open. These young people seemed to be using exploration as a kind of security. Following this observation, we developed our work into an investigation into the elements that characterised security and exploration and their relationship to pathways and navigations.

We decided to measure different aspects of security and exploration in each interview. To do this we developed a set of “indicators”: listed aspects of security or exploration with a 5-point (low to high) scale for each. We re-read each interview and rated it against every indicator of security or

exploration. By rating individual *interviews* rather than individual *people*, we were able to both track shifts over time for each individual as well as observe each interview as a snapshot in time of activities, feelings, and perceptions. The indicators we developed are shown in the following table. The short names that we use throughout the rest of this report are in bold.

Table 4 **Indicators of security and exploration**

(drive for)	Participant's <b>plannedness</b> in entering current option
<b>Security</b>	Availability of <b>viable options</b> (on leaving school)
	Strength of <b>short-term commitment</b> to current option
	Strength of relationship between current option and <b>career identity</b>
	<b>Family support</b>
	Importance of current option as an <b>escape</b> from past or potential future
	<b>Fear of failure</b> (as a motivator) in current option
	Importance of <b>financial security</b>
(extent of)	Importance of <b>exploration of self/own</b> capacities through current option
<b>Exploration</b>	<b>Comparisons with others</b> that facilitate imagining/exploring other options
	Thinking about <b>exploration</b> (narrow to wide)
	<b>Commitment to alternative pathway</b>
<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b> with current option
<b>and Change</b>	<b>Overall satisfaction</b> and reflections on option(s) since last interview (rated at interview 2 onwards)
	<b>Pathway change</b> from option at last interview (rated at interview 2 onwards)

There are two important things to note about our rating process. Firstly, we based these on the participants' perspectives, not ours. For example, some participants felt they had very few options for study, training, or work upon leaving school but we sometimes saw it differently, imagining a fairly wide range of options open to them. Nevertheless we were interested in the participant's point of view because their navigating and sense making lies at the heart of the project. If participants seemingly saw things differently from how we or a teacher might see it, we noted it for discussion in the report as part of the way young people understand what is available and unavailable to them.

The second important thing to note about our ratings is that they were based on the young person's experience within their "current option". At the point of the first interview, each young person's "current option" was the pathway organisation from which we selected them. However by the second interview some had either changed options or progressed to a next step in their training or studies. In these cases and because we were rating aspects of the interview rather than the person, we rated indicators in relation to their new activity or pathway. Occasionally our second interview happened to coincide with a participant's imminent or proposed change in

pathway or lifestyle—for example, receiving word they got into a particular training course starting soon. In those cases, we still rated their perspectives about their current option rather than any intended change since we could not know whether or not the change would actually happen. However we did rate their “commitment to alternative” high, and a rating for their level of satisfaction would be dependent on how they felt about the option they were about to leave. Just as interviews are a snapshot in time, so too were our ratings.

## Factor analysis

Once we had rated each interview, we performed a factor analysis against all 227 interviews (114 first interviews and 103 second interviews) and ratings. This showed us which indicators were the most similar and the most dissimilar within their overall indicator group of security, exploration, or satisfaction and change. Because we had two main interview themes—security and exploration—we expected the security indicators to group together and the exploration indicators to group together, forming two *factors*. What we instead found was more complex, and much more compelling: our indicators in fact loaded onto three factors, shown below.

Table 5 **The factors and their indicators**

Factor 1: Secure Commitment	Factor 2: Contingent Security	Factor 3: Exploration
Short-term commitment to current option	Importance of current option as an escape from past or potential future	Commitment to alternative (includes not doing it for some time to come)
Relationship between current option and career identity	Fear of failure (as motivator) in current option	Thinking about exploration (narrow to wide)
Level of satisfaction with current option	Degree of plannedness going into current option	Importance of exploration of self/own capacities through current option
	Availability of viable options on leaving school	Importance of comparisons with others
	Importance of financial security	

As the table shows, indicators within each factor grouping are associated with one another. For example, interviews with a high factor rating for Factor 1 (Secure Commitment) would have a higher level of short-term commitment to the current option and a higher level of satisfaction with that option. Factor 2 (Contingent Security) encompasses two types of indicator: the first type is about the process leading up to selecting a pathway option (“plannedness”, “viability of options”, and “fear of failure”), and the second is about what the pathway option offers to the individual (“escape” and “financial security”). Both types of indicator in Factor 2 suggest that the pathway option represents a form of security that is contingent upon retention and/or success within the option. These two factors also show that there are actually two dimensions to our initial idea of security.

Factor 3 (Exploration) mapped most clearly onto our original expectation about which indicators grouped together. The four indicators from our initial exploration set are about the amount or strength of exploration undertaken by the young person. They represent four characterisations of exploration: exploring self through current option; exploring through comparison with others; exploring through thinking about alternative options; and level of commitment to other option(s).

Three other indicators were not captured within the three factors. Two of these—“pathway change” and “overall satisfaction since last interview”—only had ratings for the second interview for each person (as they reflected changes between the two interview periods). The third—“contingency of family support”—did not use a low-to-high ratings scale and therefore could not be mapped to a factor in the same way as other indicators. One end of the scale picked out interviewees who were not being supported because the family preferred they engage with a different pathway option. The other end of the scale picked out interviewees whose family support depended on them remaining with their current pathway option. The middle part of the scale recognised interviewees with unconditional family support, regardless of pathway option.

We calculated factor ratings using factor loadings as weights so some of the indicators were more important than others in determining the value of the factor ratings. The factor ratings, like the original indicators, had values between 1 and 5.

## Cluster analysis

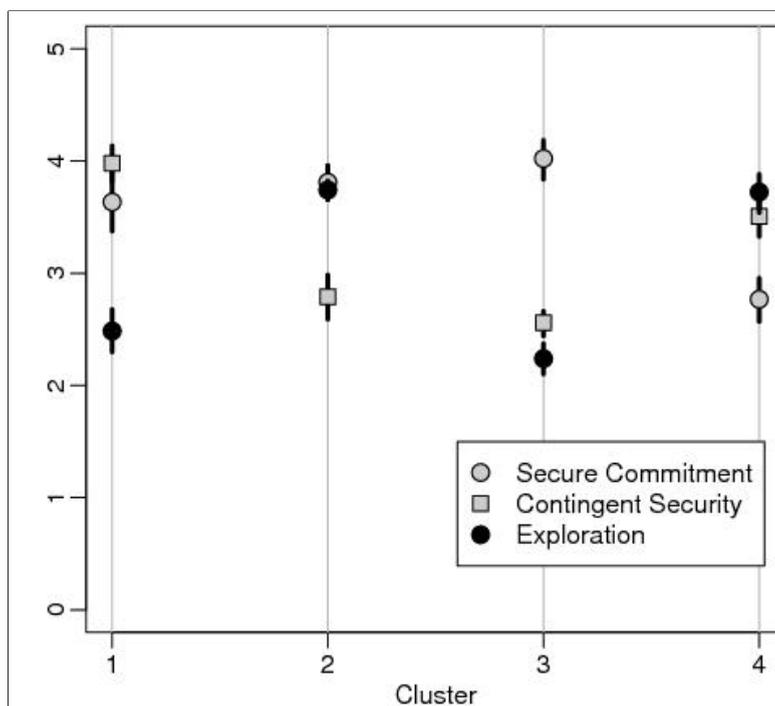
The next step in our analysis was a cluster analysis, using indicator ratings to group up the interviews. Cluster analysis is a technique that divides cases into groups, where the cases within each group will be as similar as possible to each other, while the groups themselves will be as dissimilar as possible from one another. We took each interview as a case and sorted them into four groups or clusters according to their rating patterns across the 13 indicators.<sup>8</sup>

We then calculated average factor scores for each of the four clusters. Each cluster had a distinctive profile. In the figure below, each factor is shown with a different shaped symbol, denoting the mean factor rating for that cluster. The figure also shows “sticks” extending out from the symbols, denoting the confidence intervals for the factor. By reading *across* the clusters, we can see similarities and differences in the ranges of factor scores indicated by “sticks”. For example, the range of Secure Commitment factor scores for clusters 3 and 4 is very similar. The range of Exploration factor scores for clusters 1 and 3 is very different. Some clusters had higher average factor ratings than others. For example, clusters 2 and 4 had higher Exploration factor ratings than clusters 1 and 3. Clusters 1 and 4 had higher Contingent Security ratings than clusters 2 and 3.

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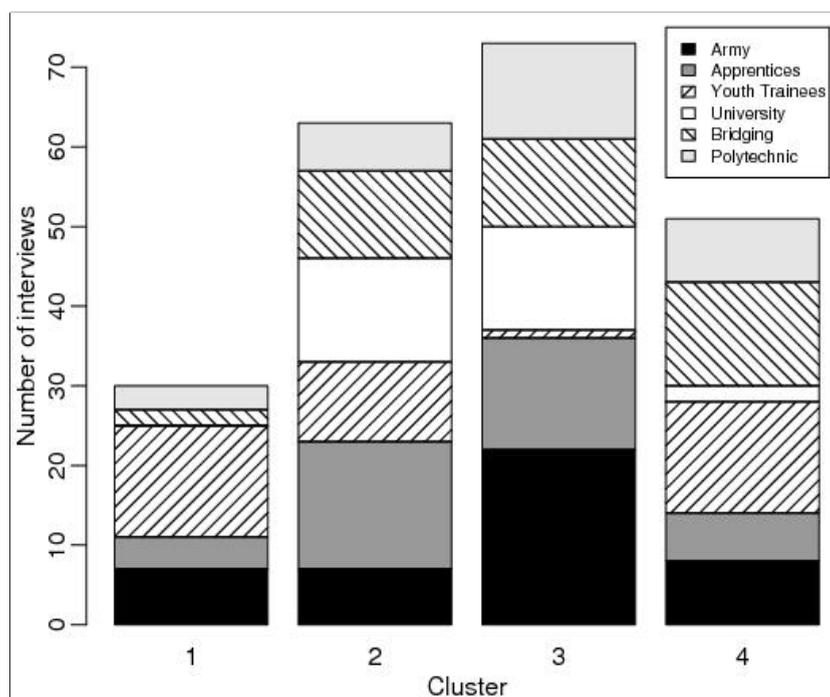
<sup>8</sup> The family support indicator was included, in addition to the 12 used to form the three factors.

Figure 1 Factors and clusters



The demographic make-up and original pathways for each cluster are presented in the following two figures. Note that figures show numbers of interviews, not interviewees, so where an interviewee was interviewed twice their details have been counted twice.

Figure 2 Pathway options and clusters



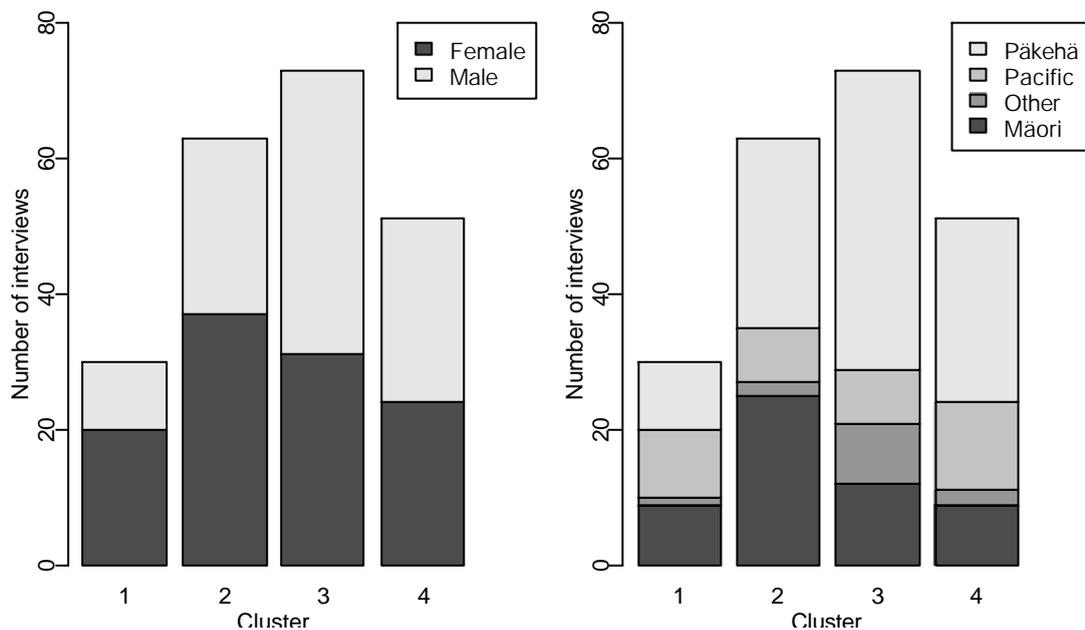
Clusters 2 and 3 comprised the majority of interviews in the sample while cluster 1 numbered approximately 20 interviews less than the next smallest cluster (4). Cluster 1 had the fewest interviews. It also had the largest representation of youth trainees of the four clusters. It was unique in having no interviews from university participants.

In cluster 2, interviews from Modern Apprentices comprised the largest single group within the cluster. There was a fairly even distribution of interviews from youth trainees, university, and bridging participants.

Cluster 3 was dominated by interviews from army participants with a relatively even distribution of interviews from apprentices, university, bridging, and polytechnic participants. It also had the smallest number of interviews from youth trainees across the clusters.

Youth trainees and bridging participants comprised the majority of interviews in Cluster 4. There was a similar number of army interviews compared to clusters 1 and 2. This cluster contained a small number of university interviews. There was a similar number of apprentices interviews as cluster 1 and the second largest number of polytechnic interviews of the four clusters behind cluster 3.

Figure 3 **Ethnicity and gender in clusters**



Just over two-thirds of the young people whom we interviewed twice had both their first and second interview captured in the same cluster. This suggests that their overall outlook was broadly similar in both interviews. The other 36 interviewees had an interview in two different clusters. Their experiences and perspectives in each interview, and our indicator ratings of their narratives, meant that their cluster status was different at different times. It is not surprising that this happened for some interviews. Indeed it is why we rated interviews, rather than interviewees,

against the indicators; young people’s perspectives and feelings about pathway choices can shift over time. In fact some changed quite dramatically in the 10–15 months between their two interviews, even though they may have remained within the same pathway option during that time. The most common change occurred between clusters 1 and 4, both of which are characterised by the Contingent Security factor. The next most common change was between clusters 2 and 3.

The cluster analysis captured sensitive differences between interviews—and thus the boundary between any two clusters could be subtle.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, for those interviews that could be described as occupying the outskirts or “edge” of a cluster, a small shift in the ratings on one or two indicators could bump them into another cluster. This underscores one of our central propositions: that young people cannot be placed into mutually exclusive categories according to a finite list of variables or activities. Cluster analysis has been a tool to help us frame the complexity of young people’s stories in a way that does not assume that their transition experiences and perspectives, or any similarities and differences between them, can be read off from their transition activities, pathway options, or from demographic characteristics. In the sections that follow we urge the reader to see the clusters as we have used them: as a lens to examine certain ideas and trajectories in young people’s “navigations”, rather than definitive categories of people.

## Four clusters of navigation

The rest of this section introduces the four clusters which are used in the rest of this report to frame our analysis of the issues and perspectives of young people in transition. Each cluster of interviews tells a story about the relationship between pathways and navigations and provides a lens through which we can examine different forms of security and exploration for young people in transition. For the rest of the report, clusters will be referred to by name rather than number.

### The Hopeful Reactors (cluster 1)

This group of interviews tells a story about being pushed, rather than pulled, towards their pathways. Most commonly the interviewees were directed into a pathway option by their school, and sometimes by their family and friends. A lack of school success meant few or no real alternatives to the pathway option they chose and, for many, the pathway represented a way to avoid troubles and particular probable life fates in their communities. They were particularly eager to gain qualifications and a sense of achievement through their new pathway, and many were seizing the opportunity to take more charge of things and make their families proud. They

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<sup>9</sup> Cluster analysis is not an exact science, particularly when there are relatively small differences between clusters. Different clustering techniques can give slightly different clusters or differing membership of similar clusters. And there can be only slight differences between “edge” members of different clusters (those that have least in common with others in the cluster).

were not necessarily inspired by the pathway option and did not necessarily have clear long-term goals within or beyond it. However, success and security, or at least the avoidance of failure and insecurity, was contingent upon them remaining with their chosen pathway option. The Hopeful Reactors' maxim could be: "I'm not going to end up a bum."

### The Confident Explorers (cluster 2)

This group was dedicated to exploring within and beyond their current pathway option, adjusting their pathways in the direction of unfolding interests. Most saw a range of options open to them after school, and their interests often guided their decision making, even when they were not highly successful at school. The interviewees were generally happy with, and committed to, their pathway option, at least in the short term. They saw refinement of their interests and skills, and change, as an exciting journey rather than a risk. They also noticed and took pleasure in learning about themselves and their interests. In fact their pathway options tended to be more important to them as a means for self-development than as careers in themselves. The Confident Explorers' maxim could be: "I'm creating my self for my future".

### The Passion Honers (cluster 3)

These interviewees were happy, enthusiastic, and certain about their pathway choice, and pleased with the decisions they made. They were following, or had discovered, a genuine interest and were generally very satisfied with the learning and pathway opportunities associated with their choice. Many seemed to be flourishing at a personal level as well as within their pathway option. Few were exploring widely beyond their pathway option, though some were considering how they might take their interest further through specialisation or into a related opportunity. Either way, their imagined alternative pathways tended to a continuation along the same general pathway, and hence the current option is understood as long-term career or as clear pathway to specific career. The Passion Honers' maxim could be: "I'm becoming something in a secure career."

### The Anxious Seekers (cluster 4)

The Anxious Seekers were generally confused, unhappy, and uncertain about their pathway choice. Sometimes the option was not what they had expected and sometimes they had entered it somewhat reluctantly in an effort to meet family expectations. Many felt overwhelmed by the number of decisions they needed to make or amount of information they needed to take into account to do so. They were driven by a need for security and this security was frequently contingent upon retention within their current option, fuelling their agonised feelings about making a decision to stay or leave a pathway option. Their explorations—in information seeking or in actually shifting pathways—were wide and seemingly unrelated to existing choices. Their maxim could be: "I don't know which way to turn."

## 2. The Hopeful Reactors

Of all the clusters the Hopeful Reactors provides the clearest illustration of an important point that a number of other youth transition authors and researchers have made: that an increasing emphasis on individual responsibility and choice in modern societies, including youth transition policies, tends to mask the way that social structures continue to constrain or enable choices for individuals or groups (Raffe, 2001; te Riele, 2005), producing an “epistemological fallacy” (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

In other words, although the idea of *choice* is generally defined in terms of *selection* and *deciding between possibilities*, career possibilities and opportunities are quite different for different groups of young people. This difference is not necessarily recognised as a structural one by policy makers, nor by the young people themselves. Instead the focus is on young people as directors of their destiny, able to select and follow options of interest over time, weighing up these options on the basis of their merits and their fit with the individual’s desires, considering the financial ‘costs against the longer-term gains. As young New Zealanders are increasingly made responsible for their choices through changing subject choice systems and careers guidance practices within schools (Vaughan, 2005), if some of them become “lost” in the process, the blame lies with the individual (te Riele, 2004).

It is this masking effect of the modern choice narrative, sitting alongside the expectant optimism in the narratives of many young people in this cluster, that led us to include the word “hopeful” in naming the cluster. There was a notable over-representation of people with few or no school qualifications who were also taking the less prestigious pathway options when compared with other clusters (just over half had no school qualifications and less than 20 percent achieved NCEA Level 2). Youth trainees and army personnel, mainly soldiers, were over-represented, as were Pacific peoples, Māori, and women. There were very few university students in the Hopeful Reactors cluster. The interviews were characterised by high ratings for the Contingent Security factor, meaning that interviewees tended to be more concerned about a lack of options and lack of planning leaving school, and the possibility of experiencing failure. They were among the most driven to achieve financial security and their chosen pathway options tended to represent an escape from, or avoidance of, something negative or potentially damaging in their lives. They tended to describe having entered their pathway as a result of being directed into it by their school and sometimes their family and friends, after finding they had few or no real alternative pathway options. However, their generally passive outlook around pathway-related decision making seemed due to a lack of guidance and self-confidence rather than a lack of interest, and many were beginning to seize the opportunity to take charge of things. While most did not experience success at school, many described a fierce desire for achievement, particularly in order to inspire

the pride of their families. Their current pathway successes tended to be based around increasing confidence and a growing sense of their own competence—in stark contrast to their previous self-image and achievement record at school. Their narratives were thus characterised by a search for security through the construction of new “learning careers” (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) as successful learners and workers. They were, in a word, *hopeful*, albeit while they were *reacting* against past experiences and hypothetical futures.

Eighteen of the 30 interviews in the cluster were completed within the first wave of data collection (16 percent of the first interview set), with the remaining 12 interviews completed in the second wave (12 percent of the second interview set). This suggests that Contingent Security is particularly powerful immediately out of school, perhaps when school experiences have a strong influence on post-school life choices. For those who had only one of their two interviews captured within this cluster, their other interview was most likely to be captured in the Anxious Seekers cluster, the other cluster with an emphasis on Contingent Security. This suggests that Contingent Security remained a strong theme across different interview periods for those with initially high levels of it.

Table 6 Comparing Hopeful Reactors with Anxious Seekers

		Hopeful Reactors	Anxious Seekers
<b>Secure Commitment</b>	Career identity		
	Satisfaction		Low
	Short-term commitment	Average	
<b>Exploration</b>	Self-exploration		Average–low
	Comparison with others		
	Exploration scope	Low	High
	Commitment to alternative		
<b>Contingent Security</b>	Lack of post-school options		
	Lack of plannedness		
	Escape	High	Average–high
	Fear of failure		
	Financial need		High

## Choices without options

The Hopeful Reactors generally understood their pathway choice making to be constrained by having few, if any, post-school options. Nearly two-thirds of the cluster were at the extreme end of the “viable options” scale, perceiving no other realistic options other than the current one, and no Hopeful Reactor interviewees perceived themselves to have a wide variety of options. Across

the set of first interviews from all clusters (n=114), only 23 interviewees saw themselves as having no other realistic options, and just under half of these were Hopeful Reactors.<sup>10</sup>

The more narrow that Hopeful Reactor interviewees perceived their post-school options to be, the less reliable the initial information they provided to us about their school qualifications. Some omitted this information from the document in which we initially recorded basic background and contact details. Others provided information that contradicted the accounts given later in their interviews. As research into the NCEA has indicated, it is possible that some interviewees simply did not know what qualifications or credits they had achieved (Hipkins et al., 2005). However, given the narratives we discuss throughout this section, it is more likely that interviewees were constructing themselves in such a way as to “defend” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) against the negative connotations and stereotypes frequently associated with poor school achievement. We were particularly sensitive to this possible “defence” from the youth trainees, knowing that entry to the pathway is, by definition, for young people with few or no qualifications. After discussions with the pathway organisation, we elected to approach it, rather than the youth trainees, for any further qualification details so as not to risk undermining trainees’ new and fragile confidence early in their programme.

For those interviewees across all clusters for whom we did receive reliable school qualifications data, there was a relationship between the highest qualification they had gained and the range of realistic options they considered to be open to them. For example, none of the participants who saw no alternative options open to them had achieved NCEA Level 3 or Bursary. The Hopeful Reactors saw the narrowest range of options open to them and were also the least well qualified of the four clusters. No interviewees in that cluster had achieved Bursary or NCEA Level 3 in full although some had gained some credits or had successfully completed secondary school qualifications at lower levels. “Getting Bursary” was considered the primary lever to open up options for some, and not having direct access to university was considered by them as tantamount to a lack of options:

I think most of the options that I was given was basically you have to have Bursary results to get in and that was, that was my first start of doing Bursary and then, so that [training programme] was one of the options that they gave me if I ever really need it. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

When I got my, when I got my [Bursary] results I was disgusted. I went ‘Oh my God! What am I going to do?’ So it was cool that yeah, like I said like [the bridging programme] sent the letter and ‘cos my Mum was already at school and she was like ‘Oh yeah, check the mail and stuff’ ... I was so gutted, eh, after getting my results. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

A lack of school achievement had also restricted some interviewees’ options in other ways. Some had entry qualifications which channelled them into particular streams, and cut off access to others, within their general pathway:

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<sup>10</sup> Nearly all the others were interviewees in the Anxious Seekers cluster.

My other uncle told me that if I was going to go into the service I should go into the army because they have got the best training and, but, I didn't know if I wanted to do it. So I applied and stuff for [one] trade but I didn't have the marks to get into that so my second choice was a [another trade]. (Army—interview 1)

Despite these restrictions, the relationship between school qualifications attained and the *perception* of pathways to which they gave access was relatively weak. Interviewees were generally positive about their pathway possibilities. This suggests there is an interplay of factors, of which school qualifications are just one, which produce young people's knowledge of, and confidence in, their pathway option landscape. Some interviewees claimed to have discovered a measure of flexibility in some entry requirements. Others appeared to have discovered alternative entry routes that were not well publicised:

I know someone who got two Bs that she cannot go [to university] this semester, but [can] start next semester without doing a bridging course or anything. I'm not sure why that is. You can go from 6<sup>th</sup> Form as well if you've got under, some courses it's 12 and some courses it's 16, I think. But I had 17, so...like if I had thought that I wouldn't have passed Bursary, I could have come here from 6<sup>th</sup> Form and done a bridging course from 6<sup>th</sup> Form and not wasted a whole year. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Well, I was going to go into the 6th Form at school and I got a course at [polytechnic] and then I didn't completely pass 5th Form, so I decided I would stay through as much of 6th Form as I needed to finish off my 5th Form so I could go to [polytechnic]. Then that was going to take too long, I don't know, somehow my Dad found out about this place and then I found out I could get, like, the credits I needed and at school I would be doing level 2 computing but here I can get Level 2 and 3 plus NCEA, or something like business administration so why not come here and get better qualifications and it means I can get those and I can head off to [polytechnic] and do my career. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Regardless of whether or not the information about these more flexible entry arrangements is actually accurate and complete, it is possible that one of the factors affecting young people's decisions here is a lack of clear communication from school advisers and even the tertiary institutions themselves about course entry requirements and exemptions.

The Hopeful Reactors ranged from those who had a sense of regret about their school experiences to those who were pleased to have cut ties, often before the final year of school. There is debate in New Zealand about students leaving school before Year 13 and the growth of even earlier leaving with the aid of Early Leaving Exemptions. The central challenge is how best to meet the needs of the students who leave early—those like the majority of the Hopeful Reactors who might be classed as “alienated” from school or at-risk (of educational failure). Policy makers and those designing interventions or (ex)student support must consider whether those needs are primarily educational or primarily social, behavioural, and emotional (Vaughan, 2004). But it is important to note that a sense of “knowing one's limits” and a sense of optimism were not mutually exclusive for the Hopeful Reactors. Leaving school early, potentially without any qualifications, was not necessarily a disempowering experience. Some were able to make strategic decisions on

the basis of their achievement or engagement levels, or were at least able to frame it as such in telling their story to us retrospectively:

I could have done all my subjects and done really well. I had it in me, but I just, I chose not to and therefore I was failing. I wasn't doing any of my work. What's, you know, what's better? I get to the end of the year and I've got nothing, basically nothing to show, or nothing that I *want* to show anyone anyway, and then I'm stuck. I can't get into university and what do I do now? Or, quit while I'm still okay and go and find a job somewhere else... I mean, I'm already moving up. I think, it's a bit of a sense of accomplishment especially when all my friends are starting university now and they're like, wow, and you see all these people starting these kinds of jobs and they've all got degrees and I think, yeah, it gives them an advantage in the future. But if I can get into this now and I can do this now and they're paying for me to do a varsity course, it wouldn't be something that I would choose to do myself, but if it comes with this that's fine by me and I just think that it has worked out quite well for me, so no regrets. (Apprentice—interview 1)

The flexibility of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement, the increasing status of non-academic pathways, and increased support for in-school transition initiatives such as the Secondary-Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) and Gateway mean that a greater range of student needs can be met within school. However, together with fairly recent initiatives such as the Modern Apprenticeships programme, the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Project, and a huge growth in industry training, there is also a greater integration of many forms of secondary and tertiary education and these are just as likely to pull students to pursue success *outside* the school environment (Vaughan, 2004). For young people who have not had good school experiences or achieved success at school, such as many of the Hopeful Reactors, this can be a particularly appealing prospect:

I just waggged school a lot and the 6th Form dean just told me to leave. She put me on a "Job Track", which is just like one of those things that help school leavers find jobs and stuff. They put me on that and through that the Modern Apprenticeships went out there and offered apprenticeships and I was about the only one that got one... Leaving school for me was probably the best thing I could have done because, staying at school I wouldn't have done anything. 'cos I know I wouldn't have passed 6th Form and if I stayed at school I wouldn't get any qualifications. I think it would have been a waste of time when I could be out on an apprenticeship getting qualifications. (Apprentice—interview 1)

There is certainly evidence that school students are increasingly strategic about how they handle different forms of assessment and credits towards the NCEA while they are in school, in line with their increased responsibilities around subject choice and life choices generally. The Learning Curves study showed that the interaction of students' perceptions, interests, and strategies with school ethos at the local level and the National Qualifications Framework and NCEA systems at the national level meant students could now "produce", rather than simply achieve, qualifications (Hipkins, et al., 2005). However, like some students in the Learning Curves research who were not cognitively or emotionally motivated by the NCEA and saw themselves as "collectors of credits" towards a qualification, some of the Hopeful Reactors retained an all-or-nothing mindset about school qualifications. Without an assurance of full end-of-year qualifications such as NCEA

Level 1, 2, or 3, they saw little reason for being at school. This may be a rational or strategic position to take given that the NCEA still has a way to go to balance assessment demands and learning opportunities, and positively establish its credibility with employers and parents, as well as students and schools (Hipkins, et al., 2005). Instead of remaining at school as “failures”, they saw an opportunity to alter the expected trajectory of school through to Year 13 and avoid the likely damage and waste they would incur, “re-producing” their learning identities to become achievers in post-school learning and life:

[The biggest thing I’ve learned is] coming to this course and learning heaps of different little things, like I don’t know, it’s hard to explain, like teaching new skills with computers and stuff, and giving me heaps more experience than what I was getting at school, ‘cos I mucked around a lot at school. So I’m actually knuckling down and doing the work, and passing... [I’m most looking forward to] getting all my certificates and saying that I’ve passed. Saying yeah you know I actually passed and did achieve this. Whereas at school I wasn’t like achieving much, so I was just kind of like, ‘stuff it’. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

I just want to sort out like my career option and sort my whole life out really. Yeah, I just felt it was going a bit bad for a while there while I was at school because I was getting into a bit of trouble. Just like yeah, it feels good like having it all sorted out and I’ve actually got a direction that I’m going in now. (Army - interview 1)

I’ve learned I knew I could do stuff that I never thought I could do. Back in school I wasn’t that bright. The course has just rebuilt my self-confidence and my self-esteem. Basically that—it’s like a big thing really. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

In contrast with secondary school, post-school pathways offered some Hopeful Reactors the opportunity to “walk out the doors with something rather than nothing” (Student/Trainee—interview 2). However, to place that “something” in context, the Hopeful Reactors were more likely than other clusters to be seeking post-school qualifications that were lower in status and linked to jobs with low earning potential<sup>11</sup>, making them less likely to gain work in skilled occupations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2005). Hopeful Reactors’ relative labour market disadvantage makes it all the more important to understand how “learner wellbeing” is a critical part of transformations in people’s “learning careers”, where learning experiences constrain and enable future experiences (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hopeful Reactors also tended to be in pathways with lower entry requirements such as Youth Training and soldier positions.

<sup>12</sup> We note that there is evidence that these learner identities are established earlier than secondary school age. For example, Carr (2001) argues that some learners identify themselves with low-risk performance goals as early as their preschool years.

## Pathways without plans

Our scale for rating young people's "plannedness" entering into their pathway option was part of an examination into what Ball, Maguire, and Macrae (2000) describe as two assumptions about young people upon which education and training policies tend to be founded. The first assumption is that young people are rational calculators who seek out and weigh up 'costs and benefits amongst a range of options before selecting a pathway. The second assumption is that their decision making is centrally driven by a concern about, and vision for, their future. This can easily pull research into young people's pathways towards making young people "sound more serious, organised and planned than they really are" (Ball et al, 2000). Following Ball et al.'s questioning of those assumptions, and contrary to the dominant or preferred school-based careers decision-making discourse, our "plannedness" indicator showed that four-fifths of the Hopeful Reactors had entered their current option with little or no planning. They had instead tended to "fall into" their pathway activity as a "default" option, sometimes somewhat serendipitously:

Yeah it wasn't school, it was me, 'cos I didn't balance my social with my work so. What happened was I still applied everywhere, yeah just for fun (laughs). But like [this university] was the only one that answered back (laughs). It was faster than all the rest. So I was like 'Ah yeah'. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Every country has got an army so you just know the army exists. Yeah, so me and my mate were just keen on the idea. So yeah, yeah, that's that. Then someone said to him that he should become an officer, because he's quite intelligent. And he goes 'Bro, I am going to do this'... I was like, 'What the hell, why not?' You know I just honestly [applied] because I could. Thought what the hell, I'll give it a shot. (Army—interview 1)

Many of the Hopeful Reactors had gone along with a family script or followed a directive from one key person in their lives rather than exploring possibilities themselves or weighing up guidance from a range of different people:

Yeah, quite a while before I left [school], I was in trouble. Plus [I had] the deputy principal telling me about [this course] 'cos another former student had gone. Yeah, 'cos there was trouble at school, and I was getting into trouble, then [the principal] was telling me about this other guy [saying] 'It looks like real good', things like that... Yeah, like, didn't really think twice, just knew I wanted to do it. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Both my great-grandfathers were [officers] in the First and Second World War, and my great-great-grandfather... When I was living in [overseas] it was always like [the army], sort of... Like my best friend—we've grown up together and we've just always been with each other, you know—[we're] like go to the army, army, army. This is like the natural step of our lives, just to sort of join the army together. (Army—interview 1)

Some young people in this cluster demonstrated a fairly trusting, yet potentially blinkered approach to school careers advice, doing exactly what they understood their careers teacher to be advising them to do. Their experiences at school had set them up to accept that others in positions of authority or expertise "knew best", making them "inert choosers" rather than "active choosers" (Ball et al., 2000).

Well around about August/September we came as a group from my school, came down on an open day, and I enjoyed that and I decided and got an interview appointment, and yeah, that's pretty much it... [I came to the open day because I was] sort of forced to. I didn't want to come and then I was, like, if I don't start going to open days then I'll be really lost in what to do, yeah. [I was told to come by] the career's advisor. That's how I ended up going... I was going to go to a mechanics [open day] but I changed my mind... [The decision to come here] was great...[but] art school [is really what I would like to be doing right now]. I was waiting on grades but I don't think I would have got in or anything. [I would have gone] wherever—any art school. [It could have been polytechnic], overseas, or whatever. Somewhere. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

A distinct lack of discussion about any support sought (or received) from careers advisers was apparent in several Hopeful Reactor interviews. Others who did speak about careers teachers admitted that they had disregarded their support, or felt unable or unwilling to integrate the suggested tools and planning processes into their lives:

Like we had career advisors and my Mum's a counsellor. Like I had all the stuff there for me but I just didn't utilise it to the fullest that I could have... We had a really good careers advisor 'cos she made us, you know, fully plan out what we want to do. So we were kind of forced into it, yeah. She [was] just making us concentrate on our future, but I just didn't take any [notice]. It just bounced off my forehead. It didn't even go through my ears. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

The Hopeful Reactors' narratives suggest that the benefits of careful planning may well be more obvious or immediate for people who have a foundation on which to make assumptions of success in post-school activities or pathways. Without this assurance, it could be considered strategic *not* to make solid plans beyond seeking acceptance into one desired (or suggested) pathway as part of the defence against an identity as a learning failure. For the soldier quoted below, these kinds of possibilities of failure resulted in a preference for short-term goal setting. The fact that he did not have the necessary information to make more detailed long-term plans appears to be of secondary importance in his account:

I've set a couple of goals for myself. Like my first goal is just basically getting through the course. You know just getting through it without getting injured or anything 'cos like if, if we get injured, then if it's serious, then basically you're quit out the army sort of thing, because well they can't have a soldier who can't run with the pack or something like that. You know, so, yeah, my short-term goal is just to get through this and get into as little trouble as possible. And then after that, it's just basically to do as well as I can in my apprenticeship yeah... But doing the apprenticeship, see I'm not really sure how it really works for the thing. I sort of, like, put that all into one big step, because I mean, I don't really know how the apprenticeship works. We, we haven't really been told how it works so... It's like at the beginning of the course I set a goal for each day, just to get through each day, because it was pretty hard. And like, once you've finished [the basic training]...now the next goal is just getting through the end of that second [3-week core training] so that's over. (Army—interview 1)

As the Passion Honer narratives illustrate, careful planning can incorporate a thorough examination of options, the collation of different information and advice about possibilities, a weighing up of the pros and cons associated with different paths, and the setting of short-, medium-, and long-term goals along a pathway journey. In anticipation that some interviewees might have carefully planned in this way, we initially designed the security indicators expecting that this approach would align with a high rating for (the drive for) security and that not planning or leaving things to chance would align with a low rating for (the drive for) security. However, as we discussed in Section One, the security indicators grouped into Contingent and Secure forms, and we found that high Contingent Security was actually associated with doing little, if any, planning towards post-school pathways. Given the dearth of planning by Hopeful Reactors, retention and success within the new pathway option was very important because there were no other options and therefore no planning for them. It is not surprising that low levels of Exploration also characterised the Hopeful Reactors cluster. Instead, their security was derived from sticking with, and succeeding within, the option they had “chosen” and they had little awareness of where or who to turn to in considering or choosing an alternative option.

## Emerging into security

If the ability to exercise choice can be seen as a highly circumscribed affair for many of the Hopeful Reactors, then achieving security—Contingent Security—can be understood as a high stakes enterprise involving more a *push away from* something than a *pull towards* something else. It is easy to see how a past history of low school achievement, a perception that the current activity was the only one available, and a lack of exploration and planning, might (re)produce a fear of failure. Of all four clusters, the Hopeful Reactors was on average the most concerned with a “fear of failure”.<sup>13</sup> Only one interview was rated as having low fear of failure, nearly half were rated at the midpoint, and nearly half had a high fear of failure (rated 4 or 5).<sup>14</sup> Many of the Hopeful Reactors with a high fear of failure were sticking with their current option for the sake of proving that they could do it or out of apprehension about what they might lose if they left or failed within their new pathway option. For these interviewees, the potential for failure seemed real, with much to lose and very little on which to fall back:

I’ve never had a second thought of doing anything else. I, I just, if I was to fail here I don’t have anything out there so I can’t. I don’t have a choice but to carry on with this. I like it. I don’t have a backup plan. I’ll just carry on with what I am doing. I wanted to be an officer but oh, that was, that was like going back into school again—going to university and stuff. I don’t really like school that much. (Army—interview 1)

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<sup>13</sup> The Anxious Seekers actually had the highest proportion of interviews that were scored at the extreme end of the scale, but the cluster average was reduced by a number with low fear of failure.

<sup>14</sup> Sixteen were at the midpoint indicating that they did not want to fail but were not *driven* by fear of failure.

Well there is nothing really for me in [my hometown] and if I went back to school I'd probably just like bugger around and wag and stuff, so it's best to get my life sorted out... Yeah if I didn't come in here then I definitely had to go back to school. 'Cos the whole of the 6th Form I was thinking of all these ideas of what I wanted to do but I was getting a bit worried at the end and so couldn't think of anything, but then like [I thought of] the army (Army—interview 1)

The drive to avoid (further) failure was strengthened by the desire to inspire family pride, particularly where there were explicit expectations or implicit messages about educational achievement and successful employment:

Yeah, 'cos I learnt that education is really important and that you know to get anywhere in life you need qualifications, or career wise. So yeah, I wanted to yeah do tertiary studies... My parents kind of they were a bit worried [about me coming here]. 'Cos they were like 'What if you do bad and then you want to leave?' ...I'm just really confident that I am supposed to be here. 'Cos I'm a Christian as well, and like 'cos I've been praying about all I'm going to do and how. You know I've got no qualifications. I do, but you know, not the ones that I thought I needed. Not the ones that I needed to get into what I wanted so yeah...I like the bridging course 'cos it helps with the transition. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

As the following interviewee quoted illustrates, fearing failure can also be a paralysing experience. The new expectations of herself that she had developed came with a frightening realisation of the possibility of failing to meet them:

I think that I see it as a difficult thing but it's not, you know, and I guess that I am just scared that if I make a decision that if things don't go through I won't know how to handle it and yeah I am scared of failing even though, you know, it's OK to be wrong in everything but I just don't like making big decisions because bigger decisions is like bigger consequences, bigger failure, you know, and it's not, I don't think that's something that I am ready for yet. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

On the other hand, a fear of failure can operate as a motivator when coupled with personal financial investment:

I reckon it's all about how you think. Like if you are just like 'Ohhh, you know, my Mum paid for this I am just going to go there because she wants me to', you are obviously not going to get it done. So if you want to get somewhere then you think for yourself I paid for this course and I pay more back out of a student loan. It just drives you to do it... Makes you want to do it even more because you don't want to fail it [because] then you are still paying back the money, and it is just not worth it. (Employee—interview 2)

As with many others, the young man quoted above had adopted an individualist discourse, framing failure as an individual concern, caused by personal weakness, and requiring privatised solutions. Certainly individuals have a key role to play in shaping their own lives. But in highlighting some of the wider context and structures in Hopeful Reactors' lives, it is clear that their lives and post-school choices have at least in part been shaped in reaction to past experiences and future probabilities.

The difficult past experiences and negative future possibilities for Hopeful Reactors were captured in terms of their significance as pathway drivers through our “escape” indicator.<sup>15</sup> Not only were the Hopeful Reactors above-average in “escape” ratings across the clusters, but 21 of the 30 Hopeful Reactor interviews rated at the two highest levels on the 5-point scale, with just one on the lower part of the scale.<sup>16</sup>

The Passion Honers, on the other hand, tended to have low “escape” ratings<sup>17</sup> and a comparison between the two clusters underscores their different vulnerabilities. While the concept of risk within “risk society” may apply to society at large, risk itself is not necessarily evenly distributed (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Generally speaking a risk society requires young people to constantly negotiate a complex barrage of risks and opportunities in navigating their way through life and reflexively developing their identities and accounts of risk management (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997) were certainly threaded throughout all young people’s narratives in our study. However, one interview question in particular—“Is there anything in life you don’t want to be or have happen to you?”—provided clear insight into the differential nature of these risks for different groups of young people. A comparison of the Passion Honers with the Hopeful Reactors in the following sub-section provides a good illustration of differential risk, by highlighting the kinds of “lower order” and “higher order” concerns of each group in relation to career-related activities and aspirations. The Passion Honers tended to guard against becoming a certain type of person, describing negative feelings or dispositions such as anger or stress, or simply describing the state to avoid as one of not enjoying life or not exploring their potential to the fullest:

I don’t want to be a very authoritarian person. Like if I’m a teacher, I don’t want to tell the kids exactly how to do things, like, let them have their say in what they think they should be able to do. Even just with family and stuff when I’m older. (Passion Honer, Student/Trainee—interview 1)

They also wanted to avoid trajectories towards study or work that they didn’t find interesting, enjoyable, or challenging:

I don’t want to be in a job which I hate, and which I don’t enjoy, because yeah, I have seen other people and they don’t love their job and yeah, it’s a real grind going to work and I don’t want to be in a job like that, and if I found I didn’t enjoy it, then I wouldn’t stay in ... I wouldn’t want to do something I didn’t enjoy, like, everybody enjoys different things, and I don’t think I particularly want to be a waiter for example, but some people really enjoy the

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<sup>15</sup> The “escape” indicator was a measure of the importance of a pathway option as an escape from the past or a potential future.

<sup>16</sup> Across all interviewees we found that young people from lower-decile schools were more likely to see their current option as an escape from a past or potential future, and that Māori, and to a lesser extent Pacific students, were also over-represented at the high end of the escape scale. Correspondingly, Pākehā young people and young people from high-decile schools were the least likely to be driven to “escape” a past or what they perceived to be a probable future.

<sup>17</sup> While Passion Honers had the lowest average escape score, not all had low escape scores, and nor were all interviews with low escape scores absorbed within the Passion Honers cluster.

hospitality side of things, so that's fine for them, but as long as it's something I enjoy doing, I don't mind. (Passion Honer, Army—interview 1)

Often the Passion Honers reframed our interview question to discuss something they *did* want to become, as opposed to something they *did not* want to do, and so shifted their narrative from the reactive to the proactive. Their primary driver looked more like a need for self-*realisation* than the Hopeful Reactors' need for positive *reaction*:

I suppose there is [something I want to avoid]. It's [that] I want to be a fun person and a person that isn't afraid to try something. Someone said to me at primary school, there's two people in the world, a 'sayer' and a 'doer'—and an 'I'm gonna' or whatever. And I thought gee I don't want to be a 'gonna', I want to be a 'doer'. So I have, I say to people you know that I am going to get myself a race boat and they will think whatever. A year later I've got one. Then I said I am gonna build a boat, build myself a model boat or whatever. Now I'm doing it, so they are all kind of slowly coming around to the idea that I am... So, I want to be a person who does gets out there. Don't want to be locked in a room all day... I want to be fun, I'd hate to be one of those grumpy old teachers or the old man who sits on his porch [saying] 'Get off my lawn'. (Passion Honer, Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Where the focus remained on something to be avoided it often appeared to be a somewhat unlikely or unrealistic possibility in their life, rather than being a driver in the sense of the *push away* experienced by Hopeful Reactors.

I wouldn't want to be a beautician. Like my girlfriend is doing a hairdressing apprenticeship soon and she wants to be a beautician. And every time I come home she's trying to do my nails and that sort of stuff. It drives you nuts. That's one job I wouldn't want to do. I like knowing that I have done a job where you pull things apart, fixing it and seeing it work and knowing you've done a good job and someone will comment about it. (Passion Honer, Apprentice—interview 1)

The Hopeful Reactors' narratives contrasted starkly with those of the Passion Honers. Interviewees at the higher end of the "escape" indicator scale described a range of negatives that they viewed to be a likely feature of their trajectory had they not managed to get into their current pathway option.

I don't want to be a druggie. I just don't want to get into anything too bad or stupid. I don't know, I just don't want to screw up my life really. [Like] getting into trouble again, getting back with the old crowd. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

[I most want] Most probably not to reach the bottom again. Keep high and all that. I don't want to go back [to being depressed]... Just try hard not to go back there. Try not to let my past come back, that past. Try not to think about it. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Some young people wanted to follow in the footsteps of their parents, but others wanted to avoid a similar fate and make something more of themselves:

My Dad never had goals and [has] never really gone anywhere, just stayed the same and is not really happy with how things are going, but just puts up with it. I don't think I could get

any better at all the things I want to without goals. My life would be the same [as his]. It would be too boring without any goals to change myself. (Student/Trainee—interview 1):

The place I lived wasn't the greatest place. There wasn't much opportunity there. It's a rural area and not many places to work but the local shop, pub, school. No, I didn't want to do any of that. Most of the teenagers around my area, they all dropped out of school. Roam around on the streets, dole, drinking and all that bad stuff. I wanted to get away from that. My Dad wanted me to get away from that too... I wasn't too happy when I got here at first but now I am. Probably the biggest choice I'll ever have to make in my life—my career. (Army—interview 1)

Their narratives also highlighted a concern with meeting their basic needs—a solid income and good job—and avoiding the traps that would prevent these needs being met—such as drugs, mental health issues, a lack of qualifications, or unemployment. Many cited their desire not to become a “bum”, end up on the “dole”, or get “nowhere” doing “nothing”. Although such terms were sometimes employed in a fairly off-the-cuff manner, they were clearly tangible drivers in the young people's lives, especially for the youth trainees:

I don't want to not have a job. I don't want to be a bum on the streets. I want to have money. Yeah. I don't want to end up sleeping on the streets or that. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I don't want to be a bum, staying home. I just want to go and do something. Yes, do something with myself. Get a house. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

## Beyond the level playing field

Some structural constraints, such as unequal distribution of educational qualifications and parental occupations that placed Hopeful Reactor families at the lower end of SES scales, also shaped Hopeful Reactors' vision of adulthood or independence. In making a fresh start as learners and workers, many Hopeful Reactors were eager to make their families proud of their new achievements and counterbalance earlier underachievement. Reading this alongside the comparatively high ratings for the (drive for) “financial security” indicator<sup>18</sup>, suggests that the Hopeful Reactors tended to imagine new-found worth and independence in financial terms.

Overall, young people in this cluster were cognizant of the link between qualifications and good jobs with higher incomes. The ‘cost-benefit style of decision making appeared most visible when finances were discussed. For example, many weighed up the ‘cost of a qualification or potential time out of earning against their future earning power. Likewise, the quality of a qualification was often judged on its likelihood of stepping the young person into work, and preferably beyond work that is poorly paid:

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<sup>18</sup> Half of the interviews in the Hopeful Reactors cluster were rated as having a high drive for financial security (4 or 5). The remaining interviews were split fairly evenly between those rated at the midpoint (3) and those with low levels (1 or 2).

I mean the course always talks about what skills we have, what we've all had by the end of this course to take away to the job, but it doesn't really help me... Sometimes I think I don't want a job but then I guess what makes you want a job is just the money and I just don't want to be here but I know that I will get a job probably next year, either part-time or full-time or whatever. I just don't want to work at Pak N' Save or, you know, or takeaways, I don't want to do that. I know that sounds really picky but. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Don't go there—shit trainer [organisation]. Go somewhere where you have to pay and like who cares if you have to pay for it, it is worth it. Like at least you know you are going to get it done, you know. It is like, I think, I was [youth training] since, like, January and was there for like six months and technically I really done nothing and my friend done a six months course and she got her Level 1, 2, 3 and [started] her degree. I didn't know how she done it, but she done like so much like in six months and it was only two and a half grand. (Employee—interview 2)

[The biggest decision I have to make over] the next few months, I suppose [is about] playing sport and stuff. Because last year I played [sport] for the Army team and then I made the NZDF team, and I'm just hard. I just love sport, but I lost a lot of time off work I'd been away for about a month and a half playing touch and I missed out on everything that my mates have learnt since I went, and that was pretty dumb. And like in the next couple of weeks I'm playing [sport]...for the NZDF. I like have to either knuckle down and do my work or go play sport. It's either one or the other. I don't want to be left behind, and then have to wait a whole other year to get a pay rise or something. But yeah I can't help it 'cos really like sports and I'm good at it. And like my boss and them know that I can play sports, and they'll just let me go, but...I want to make money as well, not just have fun. Hopefully I'll get some rank. (Army — interview 2)

The Hopeful Reactors tended to refer to a wish for financial independence, financial stability, and the ability to reach general goals, such as owning their own home, rather than to state a desire to be wealthy. Still, some did explicitly state that a “high salary” was important to them.

Well you wouldn't want to be in a good job, you know like a really good job, and you're not getting paid very much. I mean it just—like if you were an actor and you weren't getting paid very much, it would be strange. I dunno. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

By the time I'm 25 I want to be at 40k, because I know it's quite high. I know the average in New Zealand is something like 38,000 for 30/40 hours and stuff, and my partner's on 40,000. He's only 22, so I want to be at the same good money (Apprentice—interview 2):

Being financially secure was seen to enable the young people to have more options in their life in the future (even if studying meant they were short for cash at this moment). Earning while learning was an ideal situation for some, providing security in the present as well as ensuring it for the future:

I don't want to be financially insecure. Like I see money as an option, so I always want to have it, even if I don't use it; I want to have it there. So if you feel like going overseas or doing whatever you can. [If you] want to buy something you can. (Army — interview 1)

Army personnel and Modern Apprentices in this cluster often gave detailed accounts of the cumulative financial benefits of their pathway stretching out over the long term:

Oh there is heaps of benefits from joining the army... Like if you want to buy a house in the army, if we buy a house within 70 kilometers, I think it is, of where you're staying, the army pays I think \$270 every two weeks towards your mortgage, just for nothing. Just the cheap accommodation, cheap meals, uniform, everything like that...we get about an extra ten or twelve thousand dollars a year, paid just in benefits, like superannuation. (Army—interview 1)

Joining so young, I mean I'm only planning on being here at least, I dunno, four years at least. Or possibly more if I want to. But once the fifteen-year mark hits around, I mean, I'll get superannuation or something. And that's going to be a shit-load of money and I'll still be young enough to get another decent job and I'll just have so many good qualities and successes. (Army—interview 2)

A number of interviewees linked new-found financial security with a form of independence or adulthood. For some this meant taking the opportunity to repay the (emotional and financial) support they had received. For others it meant changed or enhanced relations within the family:

[What makes me happy is] being free, I suppose, and making my own money. I don't have to say, "Dad, can I have some money?". Just always having money and if you want something you can go buy it. Then you don't have any worries. (Army—interview 2)

When I was at course I was just constantly asking for money you know, but now I am my own person... I am not hanging over her every five minutes saying, can I have this, can I have that. (Employee—interview 2)

I am giving [my Mum] money—somebody has to. If I want money, I just ask her for some money.... [My goals are to get] a nursing job, and just to get my Mum and Dad another house, yeah. `Cos we actually need to [buy one] at the moment. I think it's just a waste of money renting, yeah. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Sometimes when I write Mum letters and ask her if she can send me up something like, and she'll send me up something like that. But like the whole of my life really I've kinda like, well my family's not that well off or anything, so we've learned how to look after ourselves kind of thing. Like with my own money—I save and stuff like that. But like Mum and Dad help us with things that you know we need help with but other than that we have learnt to stand on our own two feet. And I actually think it is a good thing `cos some girls that I know they are just like bludge of their Mum and Dad heaps and but I think it has given me a bit of heads-up, you know, for all of the future. (Army—interview 1)

These narratives about connection, role, and place within family (re)frame the “escape” indicator. Escape is not an escape from family or community *per se*, but is as an escape from the restrictions around the possibilities for life now and for the future.

## What's in a name?

As a cluster name, “Hopeful Reactors” contains a reference to the kind of tensions which have often been described in sociological terms as “structure” and “agency”. We have drawn some attention to facets of Hopeful Reactors’ lives at the level of structure—school qualifications and tertiary course entry criteria—that have limited their choices and encouraged a short-term focus more than those of other clusters. Although our clusters have not made standard demographic categories such as socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity a central feature of the analysis, we recognise the indirect effects of these categories lead to differential access and achievement levels in education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2005).

At one level Hopeful Reactors’ optimism may bear out the “epistemological fallacy of late modernity” where “the collective foundations of life have become more obscure” yet “they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain young people’s experiences and life chances” (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 109). In other words, a “pathways framework” that responsabilises young people (Vaughan, 2004) tends to highlight what people can do as individuals in choosing pathways, making any failures an issue of personal inadequacy. At the same time it de-emphasises the way in which those choices are framed, limited, and made possible, by resources beyond individual control: for example, their family’s income, the school assessment system, the labour market. This means we cannot focus on individual choice alone in our account of the Hopeful Reactors and we do need to take account of the things framing their life chances.

However, we also want to draw attention to the way in which Hopeful Reactors have made choices within the bounds of constraints and have “defended against” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) negative life trajectories and begun creating new ones. The Contingent Security factor has allowed us to analyse these interviews in a way that balances “biography and demography” and highlights the “identity investments” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) that the Hopeful Reactors had in their approaches to post-school pathways. Rather than reproducing a “discourse of disadvantage” (Jones & Jacka, 1995) where we only point out what Hopeful Reactors lack in comparison to others, we stress that what they have is an important factor in allowing them to emerge into a form of adulthood and independence that is primarily about no longer being dependent on limiting visions of who they are or can be.

### 3. The Confident Explorers and the Anxious Seekers

This section probes the forms and meanings of exploration revealed through the young people's pathway stories in the Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers clusters, which were both characterised by the Exploration factor. The Confident Explorers constitute 29 percent and the Anxious Seekers constitute 24 percent, of all interviews. In this section we examine and contrast the different forms that the Exploration factor takes, and the different roles played by exploration behaviour and outlook, for each cluster.

It's particularly important to examine the different forms taken, and roles played by, exploration in young people's lives. The layers of complexity in the exploration themes in this section show exploration to involve personal development and challenge, and the trialling of different situations and contexts as well as different jobs and training/study programmes. Most importantly we show how exploration is about young people testing identities, reconciling different aspects of their lives, and pushing the limits of who they can be. In other words, our discussion of exploration highlights the way that young people's narratives emphasise *transition as process* rather than labour market outcome. Seeing exploration in this way contrasts with the more ordered and linear vision of transition, especially the exploration aspects, as a problematic single point in time in young people's career choices and lives.

The kind of behaviours and perspectives that we have characterised under the term "exploration" are typically conceptualised as problematic in New Zealand policy accounts. The Education and Leaving Age Package targets young people who are Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) and calls for young people to be engaged in "*appropriate* education, training, work, or other activities" (New Zealand Treasury, 2003, emphasis added). It sits alongside the Mayors Taskforce stated aim of working towards "'zero waste' of New Zealanders", including its "youth guarantee" about promoting "*useful* activities" for youth in the community (New Zealand Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, 2006, emphasis added). Other policy-related concerns target young people who *are* in education or training but not following an appropriately productive or purposeful pathway. Some are taking too long in following a pathway, such as non-completers of tertiary education qualifications (Scott, 2003) and have been constructed as "aimless" (New Zealand Press Association, 2004) and a drain on resources, including their own human capital and economic independence. Others are seen as making ill-informed decisions, such as defaulting into university studies when apprenticeships or industry training might be a better option for both individual and a New Zealand economy deficient in trade and high level skills (Career Services, 2004b, 2004c).

These conceptualisations place young people's *activities* at the centre and construct those in terms of appropriate and inappropriate alignment with the labour market. Some activities fall outside the definition of what is appropriate, and generally seen as wasteful of public funds and individual potential. These activities might include things like shifting between jobs or courses to try them out, circumstances such as unemployment, or lengthy travel periods (perhaps with the exception of the "OE" (Overseas Experience) which can be seen as a New Zealand tradition and character-forming experience). Thus the financial and social consequences for being NEET, ill-informed, or aimless strike at economy, society, and individual levels. A range of government policies like the Education and Training Leaving Age Package are an attempt to structure or eliminate lack of purpose or lack of information through work experience, taster courses, and other youth transition programmes—if possible within secondary school rather than outside of it.

We are not arguing that being out of employment, education, or training is a good thing or that it is not problematic at times. However, we do want to suggest that engagement in an activity—employment, education, or training—may not always be what it seems (e.g. a "useful" activity or "appropriate"). It does not always have the meaning to young people that it might to policy makers. Similarly, *not* being engaged in employment, education, or training, or being "aimless" may not always be a bad thing. Certainly a lack of information or direction can produce confusion or anxiety, and even exacerbate financial disadvantage for individuals and groups, as we argue is the case for the Hopeful Reactors cluster in this research. And certainly the Government does have a role in promoting individual wellbeing and balancing individual needs with those of the economy. However, the narratives of Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers discussed in this section do challenge several commonsense ideas about exploration being inherently problematic during the youth transition phase or process.

Firstly the Confident Explorers demonstrate that exploration is not necessarily something which comes *before* settling down, before career-related satisfaction and stability are achieved. They instead show that exploration is something which can *emerge from* very satisfying and successful pathway experiences. Confident Explorers were the most short-term committed of all the clusters and also among the most satisfied with their current pathway choice. They scored highly for indicators of possible pathway change or thoughts about exploring other pathways because positive experiences opened up the possibility of yet more and new interesting opportunities, not because they were necessarily lacking anything such as satisfaction, information, or a sense of purpose.

Secondly the Anxious Seekers demonstrate that while exploration might occur because of a lack of information for some young people, it might also occur because of its opposite—an overwhelming amount of information about options and possibilities in the world. Anxious Seekers were particularly challenged in making sense of possibilities since many struggled to find a sense of connection between what they were doing and who they imagined themselves to be. Some also struggled to reconcile their own interests with those of their family, adding to the pressure in making pathway decisions.

The comparison table below shows the differences in how exploration played out for each cluster in terms of the factors and indicators.

Table 7 **Comparing Confident Explorers with Anxious Seekers**

		Confident Explorers	Anxious Seekers
<b>Secure Commitment</b>	Career identity	Average	
	Satisfaction		Low
	Short-term commitment	High	
<b>Exploration</b>	Self-exploration		Average–low
	Comparison with others		
	Exploration scope	High	High
	Commitment to alternative		
<b>Contingent Security</b>	Lack of post-school options		
	Lack of plannedness	Average	Average–High
	Escape		
	Fear of failure		
	Financial need	Low	High

The different approaches and perspectives of the Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers can be understood in terms of different responses to living within a “risk society” (Beck, 1999). As Beck defined it, the central feature of such a society is a shift away from a focus on industrial production and relations to a concern with unpredictability and how to manage and minimise it. Beck’s argument is that modern societies individualise risk so that people come to see their life chances, shortcomings, and opportunities as within their own control. With less obvious rules, structures, or institutions, dealing with the instability becomes more and more difficult and, as a consequence, doubt permeates all aspects of life. Many authors have developed Beck’s thesis, showing the deep instability of modern society and the way it encourages people to seek individualised solutions to problems. For example, Furlong and Cartmel argue that while young people’s life chances are still highly structured, the increasing options open to them “force them to engage with the likely consequences of their actions on a subjective level” (1997, p. 9). Rose (1989; 1999) shows individualised solutions to problems at an even broader level, studying how experts and authorities have emerged in different fields to stabilise risk by “governing” people’s “selves” so they make “responsibilised choices”. At an institutional level, attempts to deal with risk society by institutions such as the university become an “unenviable” task of “preparing people for the unknown by the means of the known” (Cherry, 2005).

Although ideas about risk and risk management can be applied to all our clusters, the Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers in particular are particularly good and contrasting examples of responses to modern doubt and individualised risk. The next part of this section addresses the

Confident Explorers who exemplify the more successful self-reflexive “choice biography” (du Bois-Reymond, 1998) by pursuing pathways in the name of their own development as people who can not only take advantage of, but also create, a myriad of opportunities. They are perhaps the most enterprising of all the clusters, maintaining a balance between pathway commitment and keeping other options open. Like all the clusters, they have particular strategies and they act as *producers* of their own lives; the Confident Explorers are the most obvious exponents of this “production” process. The following part addresses the Anxious Seekers and their approach to career development which is organised around juggling opposing possibilities with an almost paralysing hyper-awareness of ‘costs and benefits attached to every option.

The Anxious Seekers were certainly not the only cluster to feel daunted by what Career Services has itself advertised as a “veritable maze of options” (Career Services, undated), but they were the group who seem the most overwhelmed by the pathway information they have and most doubtful about their pathway decisions. It is not surprising then that they were the most dissatisfied with their current pathway options. The Anxious Seekers’ primary means for making sense of options and information overload, and for dealing with a pervasive sense of doubt about their lives, is through a series of exploratory forays into various pathways, creating risk management strategies to “bank” qualifications and experience along the way, while crafting a disposition to deal readily with change, in an attempt to take advantage of new developments and options.

## **The Confident Explorers: building the future now**

The Confident Explorers’ combination of the Exploration and the Secure Commitment factors illustrates how particular aspects of exploration behaviour and mindsets emerge from goal-driven dispositions and a genuine commitment to following a pathway. The interviewees in this cluster did not lack short-term commitment or interest in what they were currently doing. But they did also expect and seek greater challenges at a personal and career level. And they looked to use their opportunities well, including using their youth and inexperience to advantage in some areas:

You can blame all the stupid shit you do on being ‘cos I am a kid, you know... At my age I think the best thing about it is that we have options no matter how unqualified or qualified you are, there are always options for you. You just have to be made known what they are...that’s what I love about being a kid is that I can do whatever I want and be as audacious as I want. Like, for example, people walk around stressed. I don’t give a shit. I take risks and as a young person we as young people can do that ‘cos we can afford to. We’ve got the time. We don’t have responsibilities. (Army—interview 1)

I’m so keen just to learn at this stage and options are coming up more and more, as you dig deeper into the information you’re given. I know the more information I get, the more doors will open for me. The choices are endless and it’s making me really quite ecstatic. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Although the Confident Explorers were primarily characterised by the Exploration factor, they also shared some characteristics with the Passion Honers who were characterised by the Secure

Commitment factor. Confident Explorers rated highly for the Secure Commitment factor indicators, “short-term commitment” and “satisfaction”. In fact the Confident Explorers have the highest ranking for short-term commitment of all the clusters, including the Passion Honers. This might seem counter-intuitive at first. However the Passion Honers have a long-term focus and long-term commitment to a specific career. They are focused on *what* they are/can be through their pathways. The Confident Explorers, on the other hand, combine a long-term focus with short-term commitments to as yet unspecified careers. They are focused on *who* they are/can be through their current option.

### Me myself I (and a pathway, too)

We differentiated between two different kinds of exploration when we developed the security and exploration indicators. The “scope of exploration” indicator was designed to capture the extent and breadth of people’s thinking about pathways. In each interview we considered whether the young person was thinking about exploring areas directly related to their current pathway such as trade specialisations or entering professional employment after applied studies. We considered whether, for example, they were thinking more broadly about transferring skills from their current activity or whether they were thinking about moving to something quite different from their current activity.

The “exploration of self” indicator on the other hand was designed to capture the way that young people described the development of their own capacities, attitudes and habits, new life skills, and self-awareness in interviews. The distinction between this and the “scope of exploration” indicator was important since we saw that some young people’s avid interest in self-development did not necessarily correspond with broad thinking about exploration of pathway options.

“Exploration of self” was a particularly important indicator for the Confident Explorers.<sup>19</sup> From a psychological standpoint, adolescence is all about self-exploration so it is perhaps unsurprising that all young people across all clusters, and in both interviews, described various aspects of self-exploration in terms of learning and discovering things about their own interests, attitudes, and capabilities—which we in part prompted through questions about what they had learned about themselves. However, these aspects of self-exploration described by young people appeared most integral to the way in which Confident Explorers experienced and understood their navigations of pathways. Their jobs or training programmes often functioned as a mode through which they could explore, use, and develop life skills through the pathway. In some cases, the *content* of the work, study, or training seemed quite peripheral in its usefulness or interest to the person. The central usefulness or interest instead lay with a pathway option’s facilitation of reflection upon the kind of person the interviewee had been, was becoming, and might become through the pathway while opening up alternative pathway possibilities.

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<sup>19</sup> Ratings for the “self-exploration” indicator were equally high for second as well as first interviews in the Confident Explorers cluster.

Taken together with high rankings for the “scope of exploration” indicator, this offers an explanation about the combination of high rankings for “short-term commitment” with low rankings for “career identity”. The current pathway options of Confident Explorers were valuable, not necessarily as long-term careers but as vehicles through which to explore long-term careers.<sup>20</sup> In these respects, their narratives provide a good example of “identity investment” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) in career choice in that Confident Explorers tended to see careers in terms of the kind of personal qualities they could have or develop, the kind of standing they might have, and the kind of people they could be.

Their narratives variously stress the importance of their pathway options in terms of personal quests to “prove a point” about what they (or someone in their particular identity group) are capable of. They were similar to the Hopeful Reactors here, wanting to prove their worth in contributing to the community and gaining esteem there, becoming a person of means with skills and qualifications that give access to well-paid, high-status jobs and opportunities that multiply, and becoming more confident and independent generally. They also tended to have a strong sense of community or sense of themselves in relation to others. Many participated in organised sports, playing on local, regional, and national representative teams. Some contributed to the community through volunteer work with organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, Rotary Club, the Fire Service, and Youthline. Others were very involved with their marae or pan-tribal groups, or had strong interests in leisure activities outside their pathway option which they imagined one day being able to integrate into a career.

### *Becoming somebody...through a pathway*

Confident Explorer interviews emphasised a growing sense of independence and maturity achieved through pathway options. Interviewees talked about how significant this was for them. In some cases it meant disrupting existing conceptions of who they were within their immediate family or with their friends:

I think I’m a lot less dependent on my friends than I thought I was that I knew from college and I think I’ve learnt a lot more that I actually don’t need to stay in my little home town. I’m not as, I don’t need it as much as I thought I did and I think that I’m also learning that a lot of the bad stuff that has happened to me in my life, that’s put me into situations where I’ve had to deal with stuff on my own, is actually coming in handy now. Like, I’m finally realising that actually being lost in places where I don’t know what I’m doing and having to deal with it before, it is actually helpful now, so I am not quite as lost as some people which is good. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I feel more proud of what I’m doing because I’m doing everything for myself. No one is telling me to do things. It’s me, like, I’m the one who decides that I’m going to come in and go to my lectures at university and I’m doing it so that gives me that pride in the fact that I’m actually doing it for myself. I am not doing it because I have to, where, like, at school

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<sup>20</sup> We do note that some Confident Explorers at university would not regard their courses in career terms.

you go to school because you have to go to school. I'm going to uni because I want to go to uni, I want to learn and I want to get a degree. So that's kind of the thing that I'm enjoying the most. Just having that drive and that freedom about myself to kind of do what I want to do. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

In the case of the following young person quoted, the disruption of existing conceptions, and building of a new sense of identity, occurred at the intersection of family and the broader context of society. After completing her business administration course within six months, and going on to study through an online polytechnic course while working in two different part-time jobs, this (ex) youth trainee was investigating a number of further study options including a university degree:

I've always wanted to go to university because, to prove something to my family, because, like, no-one has really gone to university or anything in my family... [My learning has mostly been] not education wise, but [about] myself, about maturity and independence and that kind of stuff...like independence to make your own choices and that kind of stuff. At school you rely on your mates, where in town like because you're in a city and there's all these business people around you and all that, and you just feel independent... The best thing about being a student, probably when people ask you, because sort of, oh this is how I see it like, people think that because I'm part Māori as well, it was like, oh yeah she's Māori, she just drinks and smokes drugs and smokes cigarettes and things like that, but then they go oh what are you doing, and I go oh I'm studying, they ask you all those kind of questions...It makes me feel like they can be, oh! and they look at me different some days, yeah. Oh not like that sort of stereotype or whatever. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Other interviewees described a sense of pride developing as they rose to meet new challenges and saw new possibilities in themselves:

Every day I am pushing myself and I guess in that way I am experiencing the feeling of pushing my boundaries... I never knew I had, I could go this far. If I was to leave now, yeah I'd sure be disappointed, but I could look back on what I have done and go, 'Fuck, you've done a lot' and be proud of it. And, as a person I think, yeah, as a person... It is such a weird feeling—i hate it here, and sometimes I love it. Yeah, as they say here, the army builds character. And essentially that's how I'm learning about myself... I'm getting out of my comfort zone... (Army—interview 1)

I am learning that I can work on my own, independently. But I can also work in a big group... I think that I am really confident about what I am doing. And there is also that I think that I've got the skills and that I will be able to handle it in uni. So if this is hard and I know uni will be harder, then I know that I can make it. (Apprentice—interview 1)

I'm learning how I like to learn. I like being given the information and doing with it what I want, rather than regurgitating it. If you don't do it, that's your problem. For me, it gives me a lot more self-respect. If you do the work, it makes you happy and you hand in the assignment, it's a good feeling. It feels good that I wasn't forced the information. I did it because I wanted to. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I took part in an [outdoor leadership course] and...I sort of learnt a bit about myself at that...and now I'm sort of putting it into practice at uni. Like, just sort of the motivating

thing, trying to get myself motivated to do work and things and sort of carry on, like, once I start something, carry on doing it (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

[The most interesting thing I've learned about myself is] that I don't need to prove myself to others and stuff like that 'cos like I'm dyslexic and when I got diagnosed with that, they were like 'oh you know you probably won't do 7th Form English' you know like they've been saying 'Oh you wouldn't be able to go to uni or anything'. I got, like, a B in Bursary English and I'm at uni and I was just, like, you know, I've done it, I've proved I'm actually intelligent. Now they know I'm intelligent, I don't really care any more. But it was sort of a big thing just to prove that power can do it. You know, the brains are out there. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Interviewees also described a new sense of self developing through new relationships and networks. For some, it was quite painful to leave old school networks and routines behind. But it also opened up a new world of learning that encouraged a greater sense of responsibility and a pleasure in meeting those responsibilities and making some kind of contribution in the world:

Feel like I have grown up quite a bit. Yeah when I first came here I sort of you know didn't really know too much but you learn quite a lot working here... To manage your money is very important. That is one of the main things I have learned really. You never know what is going to be around the corner... Just with the responsibility of work and all that, and then you know, you go back home and everyone expects you to be the same old person but at work it is sort of different. (Apprentice—interview 2)

By being in a different atmosphere it's sort of, I've seen myself [differently]...I usually just hang around with my friends, I don't branch out to speak to new people or anything like that, I just stick in one group all the time. But I have started to talk with other people and yeah, sort of gaining more confidence... It was quite scary to leave school... It is just a big learning experience and moving into the real world and finding a job and meeting new people. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I've like come out of my shell a lot more. When I first started I wasn't too excited about talking—you know, giving advice to older people. I was happy that I was going to be helping people, but I was scared to help people. But now I like it, eh. I love helping out our community...I'm just surprised at myself how much people I've met, how much friends I've got now... I contact other agencies: 'Why is this? Why is that?' Just supporting my clients... I'm not that immature any more... So that's probably surprised me a lot. (Apprentice—interview 2)

I've noticed with me, if I'm able to keep on top of things, basic stuff and work under pressure now, so I've learnt a lot about that. I think that's the biggest one I've learnt is, I'm able to work under pressure now and keep on... (Apprentice—interview 2)

Well you can't exactly be a little kid when you are out of home and working, manage to go partying and stuff every weekend as we try to do and kind of succeed... Yeah well we did a whole weekend of clubbing and pubs and stuff and you get to Monday and you can't do it and Wednesday comes along and your bills come through and you have got no money left. It is kind of you know, you have got to watch it. It is not like when you are living at home. (Apprentice—interview 2)

## Keeping possibilities in play

The exploration behaviour most characteristic of the Confident Explorers manifested through their discussions of goal-setting. They saw goal-setting as important in a general sense, regarding it as a good thing and they also set their own detailed goals in relation to career pathways now and in the future. While the Confident Explorers also scored highly overall against the “commitment to alternative pathways” indicator, a breakdown of the ratings for the cluster shows their alternative commitments to be in the mid-range (e.g. mostly ratings of 4 and some of 3 as opposed to the Anxious Seekers’ ratings of 5). So while the Confident Explorers were considering other pathways, they were not doing so in any definite or immediate sense like the Anxious Seekers. Instead, the Confident Explorers focused their considerations of alternative pathways in terms of long-term goals which were usually linked to, or building upon, the experiences, skills, and qualifications they were gaining on their current pathway. Their goals were therefore more akin to plans. Some young people had researched various options and made quite elaborate, step-wise, and long-term plans. Although they were not always able to see how everything might link up, they felt confident in their own ability to realise the links at some point in the future:

I want to become a qualified chef. Life skills is one thing that’s certainly coming out of it...I’m saving my money... `cos seeing how other people do without their money and bad budgeting is definitely a good learning curve to learn from other people’s experiences. I am thinking about getting things all set and ready for me for when I leave the army which is in six years time, so I am getting all prepared for that. Sorry, no, not *definitely* in six years time, but six years time at the earliest, which is when I’ve finished my course. Yeah, so, got good friends and that and just getting to know people for the future. Just to spend time with them so I can have friends for life, that sort of thing... The army is the next five years of my life and that’s what I will be doing. Becoming a chef and doing the best I can do in the kitchen. On my spare time I will probably get into skydiving more if I can hopefully. Hoping to, while I am in the army, get my diving certificate so I can go scuba diving. And also possibly my HT licence. So I want to be able to have those open to me in the future...Becoming a chef is my lifetime goal so that is why I am in the army... If you don’t have goals you don’t know where you are going and you can’t really plan for anything. You are just lost I guess. (Army—interview 1)

I eventually want to do something higher in the department, but I also want to be a physio so I’ve got to decide and might just see how it goes...I also want to take on some Māori classes at polytech at night school so then I...[can] deal specifically with Māori clients. Because I don’t really know my background too well, so that’s my goal is to go to night school and learn Māori... I’m doing qualifications at the moment...and I’m also looking at [another qualification which] takes 18 months... I always said when I was at school I wanted to wear a suit... I don’t want to be changing jobs all the time. Before I go to university I also want to be able to afford a deposit on my own home. That’s what I’m saving for at the moment... You can’t be thinking unsure all your life, or else you won’t get [anywhere]... Well that’s my theory anyway. I want to know what I want... If I want something I will make changes in my life to be able to get there... Only since I got my job I’ve decided, yeah, I got to make something of myself, because I never knew what I wanted to do... (Apprentice—interview 1)

I have been thinking lately and there's still a few things that I want to do in the army. But at the moment I am not quite like, I definitely want to and if I was to take up a trade, like in terms of an apprenticeship, well then, I would still have to spend another four years in the army, you know...I want to get a degree or something one day. But I want to start up my own business soon and I've thought about it and I spoke with my Dad about it and he said yeah you can start up a business, but he didn't kind of like the idea I had about what I wanted to start up...he always said that you know anything can work so long as you put your heart to it. (Army—interview 2)

At the moment really this job is just because I want to work with Māori and Pacific youth and because I needed income to come in. But otherwise I would really want to be at uni studying law and Māori business...The other thing I want to get out of the [job] is probably more knowledge so I can apply to not only [work here] but other jobs or other [related] areas... But also I want to...pass [qualification] and gain that so it's an extra step for me so, when I go to uni, I could maybe transfer those points over to my degree. But I also want to be able to get a pay rise as well and maybe get into a higher position and work my way up...I knew straight away when I left Intermediate who I wanted to be, where I wanted to be and how I was going to get there. I had decided that choice just from looking at everybody who are from different backgrounds and who didn't have all the advantages that I had. So I decided that I wanted to help the community and make them better people... And so I decided that how I was going to get there was by passing fifth form, then making it to 6<sup>th</sup> Form. Getting through 6<sup>th</sup> Form to seventh form. And then after that maybe getting a job to save up or going to uni so that once I was at uni, then I had gone through all those steps and the next steps would be to get through uni to get where I wanted to be... My definite goal would be to go to uni, do my degrees, which would probably take five years of my life. But also to dedicate time to my family and I need to get a restricted licence so that is a number one goal for me... It is very important for people my age to have goals because if you don't have goals you seem to lose sight of things and you don't sort of have the ambition of being anybody and it is important to have goals so you can sort of work towards something. (Apprentice—interview 1)

Very few did not have specific goals but, unlike the Anxious Seekers, those who did not have goals were quite concerned about it and felt they should and would develop some. They shared the general view among the Confident Explorers that goals were vital to negotiating a way through life and career that would create future wellbeing:

[I want] to pass everything at this course, pass all the assessments and another one would be to actually find out what I might become and stuff, and to achieve that. Once I find out what I actually want to do... Because without goals, you wouldn't know what you want to do: (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I don't really know what I want to do, so it makes it a little bit difficult to have any goals which is the problem... I do [think it's important for young people to have goals], that's why I'm really worried that I can't make goals... [I'm] starting to realise a lot of things that I thought I was interested in, now I'm not any more, which is good, because it means I'm not quite as worried that when I get to the end of my three years I'll be, like, I still don't know what I want to do...if I'd had something that I knew I definitely...I want to be a

doctor, I want to be a lawyer...then that would have been a lot easier. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Wellbeing was defined for these interviewees in terms of a continual sense of achievement in their lives. For them, goals served this purpose. They also described wanting to retain the ability to pursue opportunities throughout their lives. They described not wanting to “settle down” quickly, miss out on opportunities, or end up in a job they did not really like. In contrast to the Hopeful Reactors’ fears about not getting any job, Confident Explorers’ fears focused on getting “stuck” in life—particularly in a job they disliked or in a goal-less rut:

I never want to be able to say: I wish I did this, I wish I did that. [I want to] look back on life and say: I did exactly what I wanted to do. (Army —interview 1)

I’d like to be in a business job and I would also like to travel the world.... I would like to be in a business job and if I don’t like that I’d like to move into floristry and see how that is... I probably wouldn’t like to be in a situation where I’ve settled down by the time I’m 25. I’d like to be settled down after maybe 27, 28, so I’ve just got time to experience life a bit more and do the things that I’d like to do before I settle down and have a family.... Having a goal to me is like having somewhere to go. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I’m sort of looking for a new job at the moment, but it will do for now. I wouldn’t want to be stuck there in 10 years’ time... (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I’ve never really liked studying, I can’t focus that much...[but] I feel like if I leave studying then I’ll get into, like a, not a crappy job, and get stuck in that for ages... (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Some interviewees also used goals as a way to find out what they were really interested in or capable of. In these cases, goals were also a way to keep options open:

[Doing a BA is] keeping my options open because I have no idea what I want to do... When I do look at [my interests and careers], I usually just see the type of things which I know I won’t do...I think when I look at it I am more trying to figure out the ones that I won’t do, which makes you look more at the ones which you might do... What I plan to do is get like a day job, a basic day job in some psych core job, but I also want to like develop a freelance illustrator, illustrating things and possibly a freelance creative story thing...the way I see it, it will also keep me from getting irritated and bored if you’re just doing one thing... (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

...a lot of people were saying to me, it’s better to get work experience and stuff and then go to uni later on, because I’ve seen a lot of people here, people who have just come straight out of uni who come here but they still can’t seem to find work because the employers won’t employ them because they don’t have any work experience...I just wanted to have like an overall knowledge of like all [areas], so it would be really helpful for me later on, or even within this industry here. (Apprentice—interview 2)

I generalise with doing just the BA and geography and there’s heaps of ways open for me. I could go into secondary teaching, and there are plenty of other options for Geography, and there would be education papers as well sort of keeping the whole teaching thing going... [I’m] pretty much focusing on teaching primary level, but am looking at the other, like

where geography can lead me, just seeing what's there...if the teaching doesn't work out, can come back to uni or something and do a little bit more...[a BA is] a backup, if teaching doesn't work out...you never know what's going to happen. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

For some, wellbeing in life and not being stuck in relation to career choices was a response to personal or health issues:

Well, just like, I want to live my life to the fullest, kind of thing. I just want to get out there and work with children and really have a good life. To be able to go out and have fun with friends and not think about other things, like, with [illness], you think about [it] all the time and it's just, it's just getting normality back and just being able to have fun and let my hair down and do spontaneous things. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I'll probably only do two or three papers next year... Just to keep myself stress-free and hopefully healthy...I just don't know what will happen in another couple of years... I guess it's just I'm not working at [a career], I just want to be able to survive and do something I want to do. I'm not looking to a specific job field. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

## Linking confidence and exploration

For the Confident Explorers, exploration had two important and related elements: opening up and maintaining openness about pathway possibilities and developing pathway skills through strong self-exploration. These links are perhaps best illustrated by the story provided by the following Confident Explorer interviewee.

Jerry<sup>21</sup> began his Modern Apprenticeship with high hopes after experiencing a lot of disappointment in trying to secure a job after school. He was thrilled to have the opportunity for a secure job that provided ongoing training and challenges. Although he was highly committed to his job, he held on to the possibility of somehow realising his long-term volunteer work interests through a career pathway at some future point. He used his current pathway to build the confidence he thought he needed to imagine himself differently, explore other options, and think about choices and goals that, he said, "I know I can achieve".

By his second interview, he had deepened his commitment to his job by linking his skill in helping and advising others through his work to his ongoing volunteer work in the community. His growing confidence about his skills and capacity to handle the pressures of his job encouraged him to see more and more possibilities for his future. The possibilities were not simply career ones but personal ones: "I'm the guy that doesn't like to stay in one place, I like to explore... I don't know where it came from, but it's just something. I'll look at a miniMum two years [in this job], but if I manage to get something a bit higher than [my current role], then it'll be something a bit more." Having a secure job and confidence about his work meant he had also felt free to

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<sup>21</sup> Any names we have used in the report are pseudonyms.

investigate several other job options, one in a related area and another in a different industry, possibly overseas:

I'm actually going for a holiday [overseas], and I'm going to maybe look for some work over there, but it's not a final decision as such, but I just want to move into a bigger industry over there, hospitality basically, but at the moment I'm just looking, not making any final decisions as such, but yeah, it's on my mind at the moment...

Yeah, it's on my mind at the moment but that's probably a decision I'll make into the near future, as in to see if I'm going to stay over there and do much more, or stay here... [I like] creativity and meeting heaps of new people and stuff... I like to socialise heaps...

[My friend is] basically going to help me out, and see what there is too, and she has told me it has good money... She's a managing director of some bar, and as I say she's just trying to help me out and see what I can do, see if I can manage the books or something... I was [once overseas] when I was young, but I can't remember because I haven't been there for a wee while, so I might go back over there in a year, and see how things are going... I still want to be in this sort of type of work [my current job] but it's just now going to greener pastures and stuff... If it's a yes [I'm offered the overseas hospitality job] then yeah I'll take it... but I've got to make sure it's solid. Then I'll make the decision if I'll move over there or not...

One goal is most probably do about two years in [this pathway], if that's the case, if I'm still here, but eventually I want to look at something a bit, if I'm still here, look at something a bit bigger in [this pathway]... it's probably good to progress to something a bit higher, but main goal is to try and get into something a bit better that I haven't done... more proactive type things. Because with the work, you're basically working with clients... and that's one thing I like doing a lot. Not so much to do with the paper work and say yeah all done, but now something like work with the client... That's basically kind of up to them, to the client to make the decision if they go through these procedures we go through, and we try the best we can... But that's one thing I wouldn't mind doing is...working outside the community, outside the office, so working with the...local community groups... [in a role related to the one I have now]...You're in the office sometimes, but you're outside working within our community and stuff, so it's pretty good, I like that job... Yeah, so we'll see how I go...

There's a lot of stuff out there for what I want to do, but I've got to try and choose one at the moment. But I still have that at the back of my mind with [becoming a] social worker. Or counselling and stuff. So hopefully if I don't do what I want to do I'll probably leave, after two years go and do some study or something like that as well. But I'll just have to see and go with the flow, see how things are at the moment...[I'm looking forward to] bigger and better things, new people. You know, that's the best thing I love in my job, meeting new people.

For Jerry, the strong Exploration factor with a Secure Commitment factor aspect manifested as a confidence in his own ability to produce the kind of career he desired. He described a high short-term commitment to his pathway and a desire to succeed in his current job alongside a relaxed but careful investigation of other options, and a sense that he could afford, as he described it, "to go with the flow" because he was setting himself a series of achievable goals.

Jerry illustrates the way in which Confident Explorers tend to enjoy their current pathway option and feel very committed to it. That commitment is often driven by what the pathway option can provide in terms of self-development and transferable skills, as much as the pathway itself. However, the security of the pathway—based partly in being quite satisfied with it—gives Confident Explorers the tools to make a relaxed exploration of other options.

## **The Anxious Seekers: what will the future bring?**

As their cluster name suggests, the Anxious Seekers were the most apprehensive and restless of the clusters. They were the most dissatisfied with their current pathway option. About three-quarters of the interviews were rated highly for seriously considering, if not actually formally committed to, a different pathway than the one they were currently pursuing, usually because they felt unhappy with their current choice. This interest in other pathways was not confined to the initial time after leaving school or the first interview. Just over half of the interviews in this cluster were second interviews and just under three-quarters of those second interviews rated highly for “commitment to an alternative pathway” (alternative to the one recorded at the time of the first interview).

The Anxious Seekers were characterised by a pervasive sense of doubt about their lives and pathway choices, and they engaged in pathway ‘costs-benefits analyses which weighed heavily upon them. Many were concerned about losing out—either by sticking with a pathway option that was not right for them or by changing to another one that might turn out to be worse. Although like the Confident Explorers, they were characterised by the Exploration factor, the Anxious Seekers were distinguished by the secondary prominence of the Contingent Security factor. This factor was exemplified by an apprehension that drove Anxious Seekers’ outlook and approaches around exploration-related activities such as setting goals, considering other options, and making long- and short-term commitments to pathway options. Rather than making the sorts of detailed plans that Confident Explorers made in the name of creating an ideal future, Anxious Seekers tended to avoid, or feel pressured by, detailed plans and thought instead about future-proofing in more resigned terms. In other words, these two clusters seemed to have contrasting views of the glass—the Confident Explorers tending to see it as half-full, the Anxious Seekers tending to see it as half-empty.

The over-representation of youth trainees and bridging programme students (university bridging and foundation health polytechnic students) among Anxious Seekers gives a clue as to the most recent origins of their apprehension: disappointing experiences of failure at school. The university bridging students did not achieve the Bursary they required for entry into a university degree. The youth trainees and the polytechnic foundation course students did not achieve Level 1 or Level 2 NCEA respectively, limiting their options in terms of study, training, and employment. In terms of having their options limited or slowed by a lack of qualifications, they were like the Hopeful Reactors. They were also similar in that the post-school qualifications they initially sought at the

beginning of Pathways and Prospects were not high status or likely to lead directly into higher paying and more secure employment. Over two-thirds of Anxious Seekers were undertaking courses of study less than one year long culminating in National Certificates at Levels 2, 3, and 4.<sup>22</sup>

However, there is an important distinguishing feature between Anxious Seekers and Hopeful Reactors. Unlike many of the Hopeful Reactors who did not necessarily expect to do well in terms of school qualifications, the Anxious Seekers had fallen short of the expectations they had of themselves. While some achieved no school qualifications (e.g. the youth trainees), others had achieved NCEA Level 1 but not NCEA Level 2, or not the highest school qualifications of Bursary or NCEA Level 3. This came as something of a surprise for some, even a source of disappointment or bitterness, particularly where people had narrowly missed out on attaining their major school qualification of choice. Not surprisingly then, the Anxious Seekers had the highest rankings of all clusters for the “fear of failure” indicator, higher even than the Hopeful Reactors:

I was planning on doing a Bachelor of Science but my Bursary Marks weren't as good as what I thought they would be. Yeah, like how much your exams are scaled down by, you fail by... The stats one was really easy so it's scaled down a whole 5 percent, so that's how much I missed by... I almost kicked myself. I could have got the extra couple of marks and I would have passed... So I have to do [bridging course] that is going to 'cost me \$2,000... It takes longer and then more debt... You don't want to look at [your Bursary results on the internet], and then you just see the three Ds and you're like damn, you've failed. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Basically, this was the only choice that I had left, considering I did nearly pass Bursary. Two C and a D and the minimum requirement is three Cs, so I decided to do this course because, well, it's the only one left for me (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I only missed Bursary by 3 percent which was a kick in the guts. That was in photography and that was scaled down quite a lot. So this course, I think I need to keep focused and do all my work on time and I have a lot of time on my hands now, so I need to use that time wisely and complete this course. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

A [social life is] never as important as I may think it is at the time...there was one day, just before my Bursary examinations, that I thought I'd studied enough and I went down and spent the day reading by the river and I missed my Bursary by two marks. So if I'd studied that day [for] longer, I probably wouldn't be looking at spending over \$2,000 on a [bridging] course. It's one of those big kick-in-the-face [things]. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Half the teachers don't even know what they're on about in my old school... They were useless. I failed my NCEA Level 1 and it was going to take me through, coming through this year, about two months ago till I actually passed my Level 1 through [this course]. They're

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<sup>22</sup> The NCEA is one of many National Certificates on the National Qualifications Framework. See [www.ncea.org.nz](http://www.ncea.org.nz) for a fuller explanation of the relationship between the NCEA and other National Certificates.

so useless they don't even know the system. I've already finished my Level 2 here (Job Seeker—interview 2)

Some of those who did achieve the qualifications they wanted at school struggled to feel engaged or find a point to what they were doing. They described a feeling of being jaded, of being more than ready for a change, even though they were unsure as to what that change needed to be:

I pretty much gave up on Bursary. I was just sick of studying and I said to myself that I just needed to knuckle down and just go for it and I did, which is good because I would have felt bad if I hadn't...after five years of secondary school, I was sick of it. I wanted a break...[and when I left school] I felt like I had no choices really. I thought it was either go to uni or work and when I saw the ad [for this job], that opened things up a bit. So I had this option of learning and earning at the same time. (Apprentice—interview 1)

I am not happy that I didn't do well at school. You know, I wanted to go to uni, university, 'cos I thought that was the best option to get an awesome job and get a good career out of it, but I regret not, you know, doing my best in college and high school. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I regret not working hard [at school]...I remember at the end of every year, when you get your reports and stuff, your results, and it was always, like, I would just fail and I would look back and think I should have done that, and it would hurt my Mum... [This course is] actually the first time I have wanted to achieve something 'cos at school I wasn't really determined but I didn't want to leave school. Like I always thought to myself that I could do it but I never actually like put effort in. So this course is important and it is not like school...because we are treated like adults...you don't get told off. They speak to you like you're on the same level. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I didn't have the school—i don't know what you call it—the school incentive, the school mode. I didn't have the thing for school, I was past it... [I wanted to stay at school] but the school I was at was so shit. Training and education was shit. Teachers were shit. Just wasn't worth it. (Apprentice—interview 1)

## Should I stay or should I go?

Disappointments and disengagement were not confined to school. Many Anxious Seekers felt doubtful about whether their pathway option was the right one for their current or future vision of themselves and their life. Others felt sure they had already made a “wrong” choice and were in a dilemma over whether or not to leave their current pathway or just stick with it and take the qualifications, experiences, or benefits on offer. Although some were able to cite advantages and new learning from their pathway options, few were very excited about what they were doing and most had any satisfaction overridden by their worries.

A number of interviewees changed their pathway option between first and second interviews, or were on the verge of changing to something new as we interviewed them for a second time. Since we imagined that readers, particularly policy makers, would want to know how many people changed what they were doing from year to year, we attempted to measure and categorise young

people’s “pathway changes” between their first and second interviews. However, measuring pathway change is not as straightforward as it might first appear. In fact, despite our best efforts, we seemed to spend a lot of time in a persistent ping-pong between different definitions of pathway change, and then between our desire to design a robust classification system and our awareness that definitions of “pathway” (and therefore also of “change”) were always incomplete and inadequate. The reasons for this are of more than purely methodological interest. The reasons are deeply linked with how young people understand and carry out their navigations of pathways.

### *Defining “pathways”*

At a methodological level, we ran into problems devising and using a 5-point scale to rate “change from previous option” for second interviews.

Table 8 **Pathway change rating scale**

1	No change at all
2	Minor change within previous option (e.g. a different major within same degree; a different optional course within army speciality)
3	Bigger change but still within previous option (e.g. a different trade within the army; a different university degree)
4	Change beyond previous choice but still related (e.g. using army trade in civilian world; using teaching degree to teach English overseas; using case manager skills/experience to become a broker or consultant)
5	Change very different from previous option (e.g. soldier to bartending, social science student to panelbeating)

Based on this scale, we could see that almost one-third of the Anxious Seekers cluster had made a significant change (rated 4 or 5 on the scale). This was potentially misleading though. A high rating for pathway change could simply be due to completion of a training programme and entry into employment or new studies—and almost two-thirds of the cluster were engaged with short-term training or study programmes (less than one year) at the beginning of this study.<sup>23</sup> We did try to account for this by rating jobs that were related (in discipline, skills, or industry) to the training or study as a 4 rather than a 5. We also rated movement from bridging programmes into related or planned full-time study programmes as a 3 only. But of course the scale itself is debatable. For example, using a primary sector teaching degree to teach English overseas might be arguably less of a change than changing to a different trade within the army or studying a different degree. However, the scale depends on what is being measured. We were not only attempting to account for changes in training programmes or jobs but also for shifts in location or organisational affiliation because interviews underscored that these aspects of pathway change were significant

<sup>23</sup> Note also that those Anxious Seekers studying full-time dropped by half between interviews (from 75 percent to 37 percent) and that those working full-time more than doubled (from 21 percent to 56 percent) over that same time period.

in young people's lives. In other words, including young people's perspectives in a scale of "change", when "pathways" themselves are not necessarily linear or tightly framed, underscores the challenges in understanding complex influences and experiences in the youth transition process.

For all of the reasons discussed above, we did not include the "pathway change" indicator in creating the clusters of interviews.<sup>24</sup> Of the 103 people across all clusters that we interviewed for a second time, 19 had made significant changes from what they were doing at the time of their first interview and were rated at 4 or 5, the highest points on the scale. Ten of these 19 were Anxious Seekers. This highlights that the Anxious Seekers were not only exploring their options hypothetically through discussions and information gathering, but were also exploring options for real by actually enrolling in new courses, taking up different lifestyles, and quitting their jobs.

Even without using a single "pathway change" indicator in the clustering process, the other indicators used can be read together as indicative of perspectives and motivations associated with making pathway changes. The Anxious Seekers' high ratings for "commitment to alternative pathway" and "exploration scope" and low ratings for "career identity", "short-term commitment", and "satisfaction" were all indicative of pathway change strongly desired (in theory) and/or brought about (in actuality) by disappointments, confusion, and trepidation. Their narratives detail a range of reasons for, and feelings about, staying with *or* leaving their pathways. Some reasons were very personal such as wanting to get to know themselves better, find where they "fit in", prove themselves, or please their family. Some reasons sat at the practical interface where their hopes met with discoveries that their training/study course or their job was not as they had anticipated, with a lack of (useful) qualifications or skills, a dearth of learning challenges, or an absence of pleasure and engagement. Some of these interviewees had also developed other interests which made their initial choice and interest area seem unworkable. But overall their reasons were as varied as the way they were used to underpin different decisions or thoughts about whether to stay or go. As Hodkinson and Bloomer found in their study of 50 tertiary education students in the United Kingdom, it was not always easy for us to predict which people would remain within a pathway and which would change because the reasons for doing either were such a complex combination of the structural (e.g. related to the educational institution or course provision), individual, and contingent (Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2001).

It should also be noted that the Anxious Seekers in particular experienced more changes in their living arrangements than other clusters. While not all these changes were directly about career, study, or work, there was a relationship in terms of changes in how people saw themselves and their growing (financial and emotional) independence and how they aligned the practical circumstances of their lives. At the time of the first interview, 79 percent of the Anxious Seekers

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<sup>24</sup> We did not include "pathway change" in clustering the indicators themselves into the factors of Contingent Security, Exploration, and Secure Commitment either. This was because "pathway change" did not group with any of the other indicators during the clustering process as it was an indicator used in ratings for *second* interviews only (no change could be measured in a first interview).

lived in the family home, 8 percent were flatting, and 8 percent were in student halls or army barracks. By interview two, those in the family home were 48 percent, while those flatting and those living in student halls or barracks had risen to 22 percent each.<sup>25</sup>

Compare the first three of the following quotes from people who did *not* make a significant pathway change with the two immediately following them from people who did make a significant change:

I just think that it's like a big wide world out there and when you leave school, you leave, sort of, the protection of your home, your home town, and you're going to come across things that, meet people who you clash with, and who have different opinions to you... [You] come from being head prefect to just another person and you've got to prove yourself all over again...[we've been] talking about religion and ethics and what you believe in as a person, because everyone's different...so I've sort of started to think about things...and where I stand in that. So in this last year I've actually changed to think about what I do. I think I've become stronger...like at the start of year I think I might choose to change a wee bit more towards my career path...I'm always thinking now, do I want, is the army really where I want to be...I'm doing [a degree], and I'm sort of thinking I want to get out there into the real world. We are so, we're kind of isolated here... I'm thinking that I don't want to be doing this for my whole career... What sort of scares me is the army, the army life. You do what you're told...I'm thinking if I had, if I took a career in civvy street I'd have a bit more freedom... [but] things would be harder because you don't have that protection—you're paying board and, at the moment, I've got free accommodation...I like the idea of working for a company or starting up my own company where I can influence it in a bigger way. Because in the army I'm just one person... [you] can't change how the army is...I want to be able to influence some sort of company, work with people... But I'm not sure if that's what I want. (Army—interview 2)

I have doubts every now and then. I dunno, maybe I should have stayed at school. Maybe I should have had another year. But then I was thinking seventh form year is really only a year to muck around... Sometimes I think I can't believe that I actually got the position out of all the thousands of people who applied around New Zealand. Around New Zealand itself I was one of the 100 that got employed. And I'm also thinking well, what if I want to go to university? But I [also] don't want to because of the money that I am [earning now]. (Apprentice—interview 1)

It is like I don't want to waste time when I am young working, you know what I mean. I would also like to go and study and sort of have a life as a student but then again I would have wanted that. I don't know what I want. Yeah I pretty much know what I want `eh?. Just

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<sup>25</sup> Only the Confident Seekers changed to flatting between interviews to a similar extent, with 3 percent flatting at interview one and 27 percent at interview two. However, their moves away from the family home were already made, with very little drop between interviews one and two. Living in student halls and barracks went from 24 percent to 10 percent by interview two. These figures indicate changes in the proportion of interviews within each cluster (i.e. clusters are based on groups of interviews, not groups of people so first and second *interviews* within any one cluster are not necessarily referring to the same set of *people*).

sort of go day by day really...if I could see the future probably. You know, I don't know, I have got no idea. I mean I can't leave the job at the moment until I have paid off the debt that I owe but I think as soon as that was paid off I don't think I would leave anyway because I would probably find it hard going from what I am getting now to a student allowance of \$150 a week. You know I definitely wouldn't be able to live off that. No way, I have had to live off \$150 a week and I wouldn't, there's no way. (Apprentice—interview 2)

[It is] not like I really wanted it to be. I am real bored. Like I sit on the computer and I should be going hard out on the weekend, I should think 'yeah!', and I will [instead] just leave it. I get distracted very easily but it is real better here than at school. But I am going to come back next year...because I want to finish. But I do too many things and they never get completed but I don't want to do that again... I just wanted to work [in paid employment] but the thing about it is that you can't just go to work without [a qualification]. (Employee—interview 2)

The following quote from Irene describes how she changed her studies from foundation health to business administration, with a view to later enrolling in a Bachelor's Degree. However, after completing an initial certificate she took a job but was unsure about the decision or where it might lead:

[I left because] I just don't like the study. I like to get out there and do stuff. I don't like sitting down and writing book stuff. I know I probably will have to when I finally decide what I want to do [though]. Like if I want to be a nurse or whatever, I do realise I have to go back to uni for four years. I don't know what I want to do with my life. I will be happier, I think I would find it more self-satisfying if I said, yeah, I worked my way up to there. I didn't study and go straight there. I would be able to say I started at the bottom and finished at the top... [It's been hard] leaving tech I think. Deciding what I want to do this year, still trying to decide it... At the beginning of the year I thought I would stay at the contact centre for the next couple of years and work my way up to say like an investigations officer or something. But because...they treat you like a number there they don't treat you like an employee. I just don't think it is very appropriate or whatever...I don't know what I had in mind when I took the job. I think, I know I was after just more hours covering stuff. Yeah I don't what I had in mind; I just got the job. (Employee—interview 2)

Halfway through his army training, David left his position to move back home. He took on a warehouse job and was considering studying for a paramedic or outdoor leadership qualification. In the following quote he describes the decision to leave the army and how he feels about his current job:

[I left the army because] everyone else just seemed to have lived the student life, and had a bit of life experience, and then joined. Most of the people already got their degrees... So I thought I'd just get a degree and it would leave me more options if I wanted to leave the army later on down the track. I thought I was missing out on a lot going straight in. It changed me quite a lot joining the army straight out of school...I could feel myself getting institutionalised, and especially when I got back home and people would tell me that I've changed, and not as nice to be around any more... I think it took about two weeks [to decide to leave]. They decided that maybe I should be getting out, and I thought, no, it's just easier

to stay on and it's just such a hard process to actually go up to someone and say 'I want to leave'. So I tried kidding myself I wanted to stay. But then I told my guidance officer and he said "just stick out this last exercise". It wasn't a particularly hard exercise, it was just two weeks in the field, but—and we did two weeks in the field on basic training [early on], and I absolutely loved it. But this time it wasn't what I really wanted to do. So I just didn't enjoy myself, and it was just that little bit harder 'cos I didn't want to be there. I knew the rest of the year would be like that as well. If something got too hard, I wouldn't want to fight through it. I'd just want to give up. So I thought I'd leave on a good note and go back later when I'm more mature. If I do go into the army then in 10 years, 15 years, I can come out and I've got something other than the military experience... [I've been] thinking about sports and recreation leadership. That would be good for just tourism and the outdoors kind of thing... But I think the paramedics would be a better career—more fulfilling... [But] I'm a bit sceptical about the paramedics in that it's a bit like the army. Like once you're in it's a bit like tunnel vision with the career. You can't really branch off. I've got to think about it... [I'm getting] heaps better money, about double what I was on in the army for less work... But it wasn't the money in the army, that wasn't too much of a problem... [but this current job] certainly isn't anything I want to do longer. I wouldn't want to start next year. I just feel all this is getting too much like a career. (Employee—interview 2)

These Anxious Seeker perspectives underscore the challenges of defining and measuring change if their perspectives are to be taken into account. Their narratives again underlined one of the guiding principles of this study: that transition *experiences and perspectives* cannot simply be read off from transition *activities*. As the least satisfied of all our clusters, it is perhaps not surprising that a number of the young people in this cluster seemed to use our interviews as an opportunity to voice their doubts, “think aloud” about their circumstances, and weigh up alternatives. Even those who remained within a pathway option were faced with doubts. In fact this pervasive condition of doubt was the overriding and common sentiment of interviewees in this cluster, regardless of what they actually did. Although we might all be said to be living within a “risk society” and therefore risk applies to all clusters, the Anxious Seekers seemed to be the most obviously troubled by this as a perpetual condition.

### Alone in a world of choice

Many of the Anxious Seekers had their initial post-school options limited by low school achievement and a lack of guidance from school and family. But some of these interviewees, together with those who did achieve at school and whose options were fairly wide open, were confused and overwhelmed by *the very idea* of making choices about study, work, and career:

I don't want to be disappointed and I don't want to make a choice and then be wrong about what I've made. Like I don't want to go for a job—interview and then come back with a bad result, like, you don't have the something quality that we expect from you. I don't want to be struck down or rejected, but I guess that's the way it goes. It is hard but choices are really good. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

You're used to having your parents making your choices for you. It's kind of a bit scary because you don't know if you're making the right one. It's just thinking you could probably get away without making one, but in the end you have to. It all just comes down to what you think is the best one. Hopefully it's the right one. You're stressing if it is the right one. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

These sentiments are not surprising in the context of the increasing responsabilisation of young people to make more and more decisions and choices within the compulsory education system and their life and career pathways beyond. As we have already discussed, the high-stakes nature of decision making has been intensified. There have been assertions from Government Ministers such as the one that people should consider “what's at stake”, approaching tertiary education decisions “with the same degree of care and preparation that they would apply to any other major life decision, such as buying a home or travelling overseas” (Steve Maharey, Associate Minister of Education (Tertiary) cited in Career Services, 2004a, p. 12) and the ongoing development of careers guidance material and programmes in secondary schools. Currently the 2006 Government Budget is increasing funding for Career Services to become a one-stop shop of information and “ensure better decisions are made” by job seekers and people considering tertiary education. Certainly, help with making decisions cannot come soon enough for some of the Anxious Seekers:

Because now I've left school I am kind of like struggling and I still don't know what to do, but like, other girls at school, they knew what they wanted to do, knew what courses, where to go to, you know, and me, being lazy, I just thought, whatever happens, happens. If I come here, I come here, but you know, now I've actually thought about it and I kind of regret it, eh. I reckon they should start young before it is too late [and you are] lost and confused. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I applied [to be a police officer]...and got turned down because my eyesight is too bad...Originally I [also] wanted to be a vet but I faint at the sight of blood and needles. [I considered becoming] a criminal psychologist [too]...or counselling because I volunteer at Youth Line, and I like doing that as well. And gym instructor—i thought about that for a while because I like going to the gym, but I haven't been for awhile. But I used to like it... I used to be a swim teacher and stuff. (Apprentice—interview 1)

Some were clearly quite overwhelmed by the amount of information they had to process in order to make decisions:

Because there are so many choices and options, like, it's like, I don't know, where to go. Like, my family thinks, oh, she'll do a hairdressing course and she'll be really good at it, and then my friends are like, nah, you should do something in computers, and then like, other people, are like, you should do something else, you know, do something on TV...it's good that they're supporting me but it's just like, I don't know what to choose. And I'm scared if I choose one thing and that doesn't work for me, and then I have to kind of like, start again from the start and do something else. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Oh I didn't have a clue what I wanted to be or do... Well I definitely thought I was going to do Communications and then, not any more. I'm pretty lost. I didn't like uni...and I don't really want to stick around for three years at the moment... My Mum really wanted me to

come here into university, I think that's why, but I came to [bridging programme], before I failed Bursaries, but like, 2 percent was pretty stink, but I am, yeah, I really want to get involved with people, like yeah, I am not too sure though really. I wanted to do communications, but now I am really confused, so, I don't know why. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

We had guides help us at school. They helped us with finding whatever we wanted to do. But I don't think they made us aware enough of the fact that, like, applications close so soon and stuff, like that is a major thing, like, you know, I missed out on so many applications I could have actually, you know, might have been interested in, and like, that [other] one ended later, but they accepted me anyway, and I didn't have to do much for that one, and kind of just go through trying to get your exams done, and then like end of the year you know, you've got nothing to do if you haven't, if you've missed all the applications. That would be the thing that I thought was the worst...it's all very well looking at books and blah blah blah, you have to actually be there and look at the stuff and you know, like, and so I think the sort of Open Days and stuff, maybe there should be more of them more available and accessible. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Well the careers advisor at school was really helpful. I got along really well with her. It was really a big decision to make, eh...it took me a while just to go through the options...the time came and I said, 'Look, I'm going to have to choose something and this looks like it would suit me best.' (Army—interview 1)

The high-stakes venture of exercising and maximising choice, of making the self an enterprise, was made even more difficult for Anxious Seekers by virtue of their relative isolation. Anxious Seekers had more extreme ratings for the “family contingency” support indicator than any of the other clusters.<sup>26</sup> Most interviewees across all clusters rated in the middle of the scale and their narratives specified fairly unconditional support from family, regardless of pathway possibilities or choices made about study, work, or career. At least three-quarters of the interviewees within each cluster had unconditional family support with a mid-rating of 3 but only half the Anxious Seekers enjoyed similar levels of support for their choices. The remaining half of the Anxious Seeker interviewees were distributed between the four “outer edges” of the scale, indicating strong family preferences for different options or for the interviewee to remain within the current option.

Some interviewees felt isolated and their families showed little interest in them, regardless of their pathway choices:

I don't think they [my family] really think about it [what I do]...I feel, like, isolated a lot of the time and it's really, really bad for me. Like I said, the holidays were really boring and well, when I get, when I have nothing to do, I get depressed and stuff, you know. Especially when I'm isolated, which is why I like to come to uni, because there's lots of people around and stuff, even though it's just to be around people. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

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<sup>26</sup> The “family contingency” indicator was not included in the clustering process used to generate factors or interview clusters. Unlike the scales for the other indicators, “family contingency” had extremes at either end of the scale, each indicating a lack of support but for quite different reasons.

I don't think they [my family] know [that I'm thinking of switching to a programme of study at a polytechnic]...they're only interested in what I'm doing at the time, not what I'm planning to do and stuff...they kind of just, you know, 'You've got your own life and you just do whatever you want'...we don't really talk that much. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Eighteen percent of the Anxious Seekers reported family support that was actually conditional upon what pathway they chose. This highlighted another aspect of the pressure felt by Anxious Seekers. A lack of support over specific choices or pathway options is illustrated by the following quote. This interviewee was coerced into university by a parent whose own aspirations for university had been thwarted, only to find the parent had no faith in the interviewee's ability to succeed there. When the interviewee decided to refocus on her own aspirations, the parent withdraw support completely:

My mother was pressuring to go to university. I'd been offered a full-time job [but]...I made the decision to do the [bridging programme]: one, because it meant living at home [but away] from home and two, because it was, I don't know, it was probably what I wanted to do, in order to take, do my degree, so yeah, that's why I made the decision to come here. And because Mum told me that if I made the decision to do it, she'd pay for it, so yeah...I'd much prefer to be doing a mechanic's course but yeah, that's what happens. I've been told...that I'm not allowed to do that. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

[Mum] did the pushing me into uni because she thought that would be, I suppose, what I wanted...[then] Mum said that I couldn't do it... I said, halfway through, I was having trouble and she said, oh you can't, I don't think you should do it, I think you should just drop out because you're not going to finish it are you. It was just, stuff you, I'll finish my six months...[when I left uni], Mum chucked a fit and hasn't talked to me since... (Employee—interview 2)

Other interviewees were in situations where parent support for a particular option including paying fees or offering free board and the possibility of leaving a particular option presented very real financial disadvantage. Others had attempted to organise their pathways to suit what they thought their families wanted for them. They conceded that this placed them under extra pressure to succeed:

I haven't talked to [my parents]. I have talked to my sisters. They are still living down there. I said, 'Do my parents talk much about me?' And they go, 'no', not to them... [I am really] worried about what my parents think of me, and worried about my studies because now that study has already started, I am way behind. (Job Seeker—interview 2)

I just took it upon myself [to do] something that I was good at, but my Dad didn't really want me to become a cook or a chef `cos we have got too many cooks in our family. (Employee—interview 2)

My Dad wasn't too sure about computers, but he likes the fact that I'm trying ecology because he also agrees the world needs conservationists to save the world. All he cares about is whether there's a job available after university. He's just checking I'm taking the right courses [to get a job]. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Even though my parents don't say it, they somewhat expect me to do really well so I will pretty much have the challenge, not just to pass, but above average pass. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

I didn't [consider not coming to university] 'cos my parents really wanted me to come, and when I was really young, they set up a scholarship for me, where I only get the money if I go to university. So that's been a big pressure... [Mum] will just have to accept the fact that maybe I am not meant to be at uni. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

It was hard thinking like what are my parents kind of going to think when I was going to tell them [I was leaving university] and stuff...[it was my idea to do polytechnic and] Mum pretty much, like, knew I wanted to go to Tech and do, like, a quick course, and she said [this particular course] would be the best one. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Mum threatened that if I failed it I have to pay her rent for six months... So she's got that hanging over me so I'm not tempted to go out at all, just stay home and studying. She kind of like made me study for hours on end for Bursary and I was in my room for hours and it was, like, boring as...my friend [changed her course and] her Mum was happy because it was like a year off her study because it fits like a three- as opposed to a four-year study, so her Mum was alright with it. My Mum would have had a hissy fit, saying, 'Oh, you've changed your course! You've already decided on it, so why change it?' ...I don't think [my father] has asked me yet how it's going. He just assumes it goes alright unless I moan or something. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

The pressure and isolation experienced by Anxious Seekers seemed to be exacerbated by the kind of non-work and non-study activities they gravitated towards. The Confident Explorers were involved in activities like organised sport and volunteer work that anchored them within a community. However their sense of being located somewhere did not come through in Anxious Seekers' narratives. Instead, Anxious Seekers reported leisure activities such as "hanging out" with friends, playing video games, "driving aimlessly". They tended to favour solitary fitness regimes such as jogging alone or attending the gym alone rather than team sports. While the Anxious Seekers were not the only cluster to cite feeling overwhelmed by options and the imperative to make choices generally, they were notable for the way this frequently seemed to play out as paralysing doubt about choices they had made and intensify their sense of isolation.

## Managing risk with the backup plan

To cope with the constant doubt about increasing possibilities or changes foisted upon them by disappointments or limited possibilities, the Anxious Seekers employed a particular form of risk management: the declaration of the backup plan.

Earlier disappointments and failures may be part of the reason that financial concerns and constant doubt loom large for this cluster. It could be why so many interviewees in this cluster described following pathways by constructing a series of backup plans and fall-back options along the way. The Confident Explorers explored by creating links between current and possible future pathways—linked sometimes by interest area, sometimes by skill sets across areas, or sometimes

by creating a sort of hybridised job ideal. In contrast the Anxious Seekers tended to explore different options that varied widely. Instead of making a cognitive link between different options, they tended to see them as either/or pathways, often specifying what shifts they might make if one option did not work.

It is here that secondary factor of Contingent Security that characterises the Anxious Seekers really comes to the fore. Anxious Seekers' ideas about the future did not involve combining activities or interests or skills but instead involved taking up one option while holding another in reserve. Their security in life meant stringing together disparate possibilities as backup plans, with the possibility of needing to remain with a pathway even when dissatisfied in case leaving outweighed the possibilities presented through "Plan B". Interviewees described plans and backup plans as diverse as moving from public service work to teaching or to business studies, moving from army officer to paramedic work, and moving from performing arts to business studies or psychology. Having failed once, they felt they might fail again, so they saw contingency plans as a good idea.

Backup plans were common to all clusters but in this cluster the plans were quite distinct from the current pathway. If one did not work, they instead imagined turning to something quite different. They considered and accepted defeat or failure in a way that Confident Explorers did not.

Some interviewees could not see their preferred interest translating into a career—one with engaging and meaningful work, a workable lifestyle, and financially worthwhile. They used backup plans to counterbalance the fragility of their passion or interest in the real world:

I didn't want to do it [before] 'cos they do a lot of travelling and I am so, like, don't like travelling...with performing arts, it is that I just don't want to go and do just one thing. I want to have something to fall back on. Like, I want to have qualifications that I can do something else if I am sick of doing this, some sort of backup. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Psychology is just, I just want something to fall back on, in case you know, because [acting] would be the coolest thing to do you know...because it's really fun. But I just want to fall back on something in case, you know, don't make a living out of it or whatever. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I'd really like to be a musician and travel the world, 'cos as I said it, big passion for travelling, so yeah, that's my main dream, my biggest dream is to travel the world with my music, but [chef work] is a little bit sort of a backup thing, because it's so hard to get anywhere with music in general; sad but true. But I am just going to stick at my music, and stick at [chef work], see what happens. (Employee—interview 2)

Others wanted to develop backup plans as a strategy to manage possible failures. These failures were conceptualised in terms of the study or training demands associated with the chosen career or job, or in terms of the security achievable through entry into the labour market in the chosen career or job:

Because I had no plans about what I wanted to do after it and what I want to do after this isn't computer related, like it's not related to computers but it is just if I have achieved the computers, it's just like a backup to what I want to do next year. I don't want to do a life job in computers, I want to do something that I want to do... If I get qualifications in computers, it's just a backup for me and I can then go and do what I really want to do...next year I am going to a hairdressing college. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I'd like to get my store or something like that, but like if I don't well I don't, yeah it depends on how well I do, I mean if I did real well I'd definitely, definitely want to get my own store and do that sort of thing, but if I didn't do so well maybe I'd think about doing something else...like office work, I don't know...I suppose you can branch into other things and sort of, I mean even as a fashion designer I don't suppose you have to do, I mean you either do really well or I mean you could work in any store or, I don't know, whatever. Yeah, I'd prefer to be getting my own store but if that didn't happen then it didn't happen. (Employee—interview 2)

I don't think I'll probably be here in five years 'cos thinking about overseas and thinking about at the end of this year getting out and see if I can get into the police force. Just get something more long term that will get me some quals and that. The job I'm doing now doesn't really give me a profession. (Army—interview 2)

Some simply felt overwhelmed by various choices. They were unsure which ones could be made a reality for their lives and be meaningful to them. Without the confidence that might allow them to pursue “just-in-time” opportunities for qualifications and experience, they imagined backup plans could provide “just-in-case” security (Vaughan, 2005):

I didn't do my apprenticeship which I was, like, going to do, but then I was thinking I don't want to be stuck at the apprenticeship all my life so I'll do something before I do it so I just came and did this... I want to do [the apprenticeship] straight after I do this, after I have finished it... I came here to do this because I might get bored with plumbing and think, oh, no, just flag it and then I can just go and do that so then I've got a backup just in case (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I will do this course and then, I will do chef like I go out and do the job and be a chef for a while, and then I am going to do, I thought to myself electrician's course, or do something completely different...the mechanics course...I will do that next when I get a car and a licence, so I might go up there and do it. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

### *Avoiding goals*

Anxious Seekers' tendency to focus on backup plans that were quite distinct from their current pathway option dovetailed with their general tendency to avoid making goals and detailed plans. Although they were driven by a need for security, they seemed less able than Confident Explorers to identify how to go about setting that up for themselves, often describing very real concerns while commenting that they would therefore “see what happens” or “go with the flow”.

Some interviewees associated goals and goal-setting with “settling down”, becoming old, or a closing down of options:

At my age, no, I don't think it is [important to have goals] They have plenty of time left, but I think young people get more opportunities, so they should use those opportunities while they're there. I think it's easier for them to do it when they're young. I don't know why because I'm not old, so I don't know. To have goals is about the individual. I don't expect it from anyone. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I just think planning is stupid. I just think that living life is what you've got to worry about. If you plan your life, you don't know what is going to come in between it. Anything could happen so I just understand whatever sounds good, whatever I think looks good, sounds good, whatever, I just go for it. I wouldn't say [that goals are] important and I wouldn't say that [they are] not important because there are people out there that are pressured to get where they have to be, like from family, there are people out there who have to get there and if they don't, you know, something bad goes wrong with them. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I plan my life as it goes. I don't just plan for the future 'cos lots of stuff comes up unexpected eh and ruins lots of plans. Sometimes stuff do go to plan but not all the time so I like plan like weeks and then see what happens from there. Don't have a plan too biggy. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

For others, goal-setting was consciously avoided since it would mean having to deal with interests that they had trouble linking with careers or a workable future. It's not clear whether some were buying time in the hope of being able to see work connections later or whether they were unable to face the disappointments that they felt sure would come their way if they attempted to pursue a dream:

I did think about thinking about doing something to do with sport, like be a manager or a coach, but I think I shied away from it because I didn't think it was a career as such. They're always just a manager because they were in the team or something. You don't really hear about doing it as a career. If you're a rugby player and you retire, you either coach or do a degree... [I like having choices]...so that, you know, I can still study them and if I don't make it into what I want to do, I'll have something to fall back on. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I have ambitions, like, I want to do this, but I never really plan it. Like, tomorrow I'll maybe do this or do that, if it happens, it happens. Just see how it works out because normally when I plan, stuff just goes wrong. It's like: stop planning! (Student/Trainee Interview 1)

So, like the Hopeful Reactors, dreams were seen in terms of simply gaining a job, "anything better than McDonalds is good" (Student/Trainee—interview 2) and not being "stuck in a supermarket for the rest of my life" (Student/Trainee Interview 1). However, perhaps the most telling aspect of goal-setting (or goal avoidance) was that the few Anxious Seekers who did have clear plans did not have clear goals based on their own interests associated with these. Instead their engagement with a particular pathway programme of study/training was based on the achievement of security itself via later employment:

I could cross-credit all my papers so apparently I can go straight into the 1-year [Vet Nursing] course after I do my degree here... So if I decide after a while I just want to do it, I

can do it. I've had a friend who's just graduated and she can't find a job anywhere, which is the downside to it. You can get the degree and all the stuff but there's no guarantee of a job...[But] I should have decided by then. I would give up uni and go to polytech...but I'd rather stick it out for another few years at uni and see. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

My friends thought I was going with them to uni and then I told them [about this job] and they were happy for me and were supportive. I told them uni doesn't guarantee you anything. It just gives you a foot in the door. Just because you have a degree doesn't mean you can turn up for a job and get it automatically...in the work force, they value experience, and if I can get that it maybe would be to my advantage. (Apprentice—interview 1)

I want to pass the qualifications that I am doing at this time and then after that I am probably going to move on to do a Diploma in Business Management and then probably after that go to Broadcasting School or whatever comes first... I had a lot of original plans, as you do. I wanted to be a journalist, I wanted to be a pilot, I wanted to be everything, but because the student loan was so big and I know that as soon as you start employment they take money out of your wages and I don't want that... I used to always set goals but I just don't really care about goals to tell you the truth. I mean, I know you have to have goals to get anywhere in life but I am the kind of person who just goes through and, just, what happens, happens, kind of thing. (Apprentice—interview 2)

One interviewee discussed orienting his studies to conform to what he thought would put him in the best position to obtain a good job later:

I'm only really good at things like computers and [environmental studies], and polytech doesn't really have much to do [with environmental studies]. It's more to do with the technical side of things. Here, they have ecology and other subjects that interested me, so I decided to come here. If the computers in the future fail, then we have to save the planet... I'm leaning more on computers than environment, but that's going to be my other subject to rely on if my other one fails... There's always the option of going to Japan and teaching English... It's a backup if I get older...I think of it as my last chance, so I'm going to have to do well or else there isn't much left... High school was all just taking the subjects about what I could do and not caring about what I couldn't, but I've kind of figured out what I should do after this is over—which is just trying to find a suitable job for the subject I've studied. I've heard that even though computers are the future thing, everyone has computer skills. That was pretty much my first option. I didn't really think about ecology. All I had planned was anything to do with IT, but then I kept hearing that IT won't be much of a big job thing in the future, so I turned my interest to ecology and realised that they need more people for conservation, so I should get a job there. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

By his second interview, he was still focused on aligning his studies with job prospects but had also added a third backup option:

I still actually have to think, like to see after I do my degree, what kind of jobs are available and from there I will choose which ones that sounds the most interesting or appealing to me because my course is very broad...But once I get interested in one subject, I should be able to find, like, specific jobs for that thing, but yeah this course is cool...the thing is that the courses I am doing, the conservation and all that, as much as it is in demand, there is still the chance that you might not score the job or there is someone better than you... [There is also]

work experience from the shop my parents own so in a way I am kind of prepared even if I don't get a job. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

A final narrative illustrates the different ways the Exploration factor is delimited by the Contingent Security factor. In the first example, Ruth explains her approach to her youth training programme in terms of maximising her available options *within* the parameters of her family's situation:

I'm trying it out because my Dad told me try lots of options and then choose from what you have and take the best pick, and so I am trying out computers, business admin, and then maybe I'll do something else next year...I don't know what I really want to do in life...I don't want to really be like my Dad. Not his personality or anything, I just don't want to be what he is doing and because every day he never, he's such a hard worker but he's always on the road and he just looks [like it's] really wearing him out lifting bags and just sitting in a car driving. I don't want to go there. And my mother too, because we've got many kids and they always have to provide for us. And I don't want to be like my Mum because she's a teacher but sometimes, if, like, we have to pay some bills and we don't know where to get money, she applied for a cleaning job, and getting two jobs at one time really frustrates her. She acts like it's alright. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

By her second interview, Ruth was about to finish her training programme and come face to face with the challenge to really make her life different from that of her parents'. She claimed that although she was now more independent and would not just "chicken out" if nobody was around to help her with things, she wasn't sure if she was ready for a job yet and would prefer to do more study:

I have to decide what I'm going to do next year... I have to figure out how I'm going to use the units that I got this year. And put it into work for next year. And I have to look for work too... I'm not ready for work because I haven't got enough experience. I haven't had a real job yet... I've moved onto Level 3. And I've, like, passed Level 2. And after Level 3 it's postgraduate and wait for a job... Like 'cos I really didn't want to do office work. I wanted to do hospitality. So yeah the careers advisor's helping me make—take hospitality courses and I come back here and doing it... I want to be out of here. Getting a better job like I mean...[I'm most worried] that when I finish this course, I won't be anywhere. I'm worried that I like might be a bum and I don't want to. And people might not take me in the job that I really want... I was really excited to start [this course] but I was, like, at the same time scared, 'cos I had just left school...you're always following orders. And I was scared that now that I'm out of school like, I'm on my own and I've got to get somewhere... But now it's like really good, it's boosted my confidence. I'm independent. I'm really open-minded, I know what I'm doing. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

## Exploring the role of exploration

In many ways, the Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers represent the old and new, or the traditional and emerging ways of thinking about pathways and exploration. Exploration is not the inherently problematic behaviour or attitude we might have expected from policy accounts. It is

not simply the opposite of a drive for security and it is not something that happens at one point in time before things have settled or been reconciled. However, it is something that plays out in different ways with the potential to be a reactive strategy against risk or a proactive strategy that embraces risk.

The Anxious Seekers struggled with information overload and a lack of connection to make sense of it—connection to others who might provide guidance, sometimes a connection to a place within family and community, and connection to a sense of purpose about their learning and their lives. Without any explicit linkages, they tended to see study and training courses as being about different things and leading in different directions. So their outlook was a responsive rather than proactive one. It seems more aligned with the sort of exploration behaviours and attitudes that concern governments and youth agencies around the world, such as “milling and churning” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2000), studying “aimlessly”, dropping out of tertiary education, or being of “NEET” status.

However, exploration in these terms is not necessarily irrational. Many of the Anxious Seeker narratives we have cited show young people to be thinking deeply about who they are and the kind of person they want to be. Their responses to particular situations—the need to earn money to support family or not waste any more money on tertiary fees for courses they feel are unsustainable—are rational and honest responses within the context of their own lives and that of a society facing instability and rapid change. Their somewhat reluctant exploration of varied options and search for a secure pathway is one with which we might all have identified at times.

The Confident Explorers tended to meet those changes head-on, not only looking for when and where opportunity might “knock” but actually knocking on the doors themselves. Their outlook is more attuned to a knowledge society that values lifelong learning and just-in-time approaches to education and work. Confident Explorers appear likely to succeed within a world of “supercomplexity”, where educational tasks are no longer epistemological (about knowledge or knowing a lot) but are ontological (enabling individuals to prosper amid instability) and involve dispositions such as being adaptable and self-reliant (Barnett, 2004). In other words, when Confident Explorers emphasise *what kind of person* they can *be* over the pathway option itself or a career that is knowable in advance, they are probably on the right track. They seem the most likely of all the clusters to show an understanding that the jobs of the future are likely to become more hybridised, emphasise flexibility and work/life balance, and require transferable lifelong skills.



## 4. The Passion Honers

At first glance, the Passion Honers cluster provides the best illustration of dominant careers decision-making discourse within a pathways framework. There is an expectation that young people draw on a range of information and advice about their post-school possibilities, and that interests and achievements can function to “match” young people to appropriate pathways. It also assumes that commitment to and enjoyment in a pathway is an indicator of a good match, and that once established the pathway should offer a transparent and/or linear path towards a set career (or a constellation of known and related career options). Interviewees in this cluster tended to focus on having “made the right choice”, doing something they “have always wanted” or been interested in, and even realising a “childhood dream”. Even though not all were highly successful at school, most had perceived a range of “viable post-school options” to be open to them, and tended to do a fair amount of “planning” towards their pathway. Many continued to show this active and thoughtful disposition in crafting their pathway in an ongoing manner, sometimes exploring specialisms within or related to their pathway. Considering the high level of satisfaction expressed, it is perhaps heartening that the Passion Honers form our largest cluster comprising just over a third (73) of the 217 interviews.

On the whole, the Passion Honers cluster was notable for having the lowest ratings for Exploration<sup>27</sup> and Contingent Security<sup>28</sup> of all four clusters. Few of them were interested in exploring options beyond, or very different from, their current pathway (as distinct from the Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers). Their lack of exploration was not motivated by concern about external reasons for staying nor potential losses in leaving (unlike the Hopeful Reactors). Instead they were simply content with what they had chosen and saw a future for themselves aligned with the pathway—hence their high scores on the Secure Commitment factor.

The Contingent Security and Secure Commitment factors juxtapose two forms of security evident in our study and are characterised by the Hopeful Reactors and Passion Honers clusters (see table below). The Hopeful Reactors’ sense of, or drive for, security within their pathway was primarily derived from external pressures, which act to “push” the young person into an option and “prevent” them from leaving (hence the term Contingent Security, where the need for security within a pathway was a *reactive* stance against *negative* histories and imagined futures). In contrast, Passion Honers experience a “pull” towards a particular field, branch of learning, trade, or profession. The skills, craft, lifestyle, and subject matter involved seemed to fit well with their interests, skills, and their life intentions. This sense of commitment is what produces security for

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<sup>27</sup> Three-fifths of the interviews are in the lowest quartile, and none are in the highest quartile.

<sup>28</sup> Over two-fifths sit in the lowest quartile and none sit in the highest quartile.

the Passion Honers. Secure Commitment, then, speaks to an *active* and *positive* relationship that a young person has with their choice-making and pathway navigations.

Table 9 Comparing Hopeful Reactors with Passion Honers

	Hopeful Reactors	Passion Honers
<b>Secure Commitment</b>	Career identity	
	Satisfaction	High
	Short-term commitment	Average
<b>Exploration</b>	Self-exploration	
	Comparison with others	
	Exploration scope	Low
	Commitment to alternative	
<b>Contingent Security</b>	Lack of post-school options	Average–low
	Lack of plannedness	
	Escape	High
	Fear of failure	Low
	Financial need	

In delving into the narratives of the Passion Honers in this section, we highlight the ways in which this cluster exemplifies what “doing pathways well” might look like. However, while the Passion Honers seem the most aligned with dominant careers management discourse of all our clusters, they also complexify that discourse. Their narratives disrupt the opposing nature of categories of good and bad, or positive and negative, in relation to navigating pathways. We also suggest that concepts such as commitment and satisfaction might not be discrete categories, as they have tended to be seen in some youth transition research which focuses on narrow predictors of retention, completion, or success within a pathway.

## Complexifying the traditional

The term “passion” suggests blindly following one’s heart. It could be located on the right-hand side of such common binaries as head/heart, mind/emotion, and rational/irrational. However we include the term “honors” in Passion Honers, to disturb such oppositional thinking. While “honing” can be defined as “sharpening” (Deverson & Kennedy, 2005), we have extended it in this context to refer to an active and methodical process to perfect a task and advance toward a target or goal. The Passion Honers’ narratives are good examples of a career development discourse where feeling is merged with thinking, and emergent discovery merged with careful planning:

I had the little ambition of being an astronaut when I started [school]. Every little kid has that. Then I moved on to a pilot because it was more realistic. And yeah, when [aviation training] declined my medical [results] I thought ‘wow’. So I had to sit down and think long and hard about it and we came up with a big long list and went for pros and cons of everything, and in came teaching. So I just kept on thinking about it, and the more I thought about it, the more it grew. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

The Passion Honer narratives also merged enjoyment with struggle. Although they received the highest average score on the “satisfaction” indicator, their narratives showed that a high level of satisfaction was not necessarily equivalent to continuous enjoyment. Many interviewees presented a more even-handed account, offsetting rich descriptions about what they loved about a pathway with details of the tough times they had experienced. It was clear that struggles over particular issues or practices did not reduce overall enjoyment nor short-term or long-term commitment to the pathway. In some cases it appeared that the “real-world” character of the difficulties actually assisted the young person to really pursue their passion wholeheartedly, knowing it was not based on a false understanding of what the pathway entailed. In these instances, difficult times acted as a “pinch-test” to show young people that their childhood dream or avid interest had become a reality:

Some of the extremes you go to get a job done—you just get down in a hole in a coal pit or something. You wouldn’t normally do it but you’ve got to get the job done and so you get in there and do it. Forget about everything else. (Apprentice—interview 2)

I’m certain [about the army training]. I’ve never had any doubts. When we were in [training], it was pouring down with rain, it wasn’t particularly nice, but I never thought of quitting or anything like that. So yeah, I love doing it, so it’s great... I’ve always really just thought that this is the only way for me really, and this is what I intend to do, and hopefully make a vocation of it. (Army —interview 1)

There are interesting inter-relationships between the three Secure Commitment indicators of “satisfaction”, “career identity”, and “short-term commitment”. Consider the difference between the following two quotes—the first from a young man who saw his level of short-term commitment to be a sign that it was the right path for him to commit for the long-term; the second from someone whose clear long-term goal enabled him to increase his short-term commitment:

I don’t know, I don’t really mind it eh. Like I don’t mind getting up at 4 o’clock on Monday morning and going to work, it seems pretty good. I’m in the right field if I can get up that early on a Monday morning and not worry about going to work. (Employee—interview 2)

[In the bridging course] I did the bare miniMum that was required...[but in the teaching course] I’m more motivated...I can see I’m going to be a teacher and that’s where I’m going. Now I sort of do the readings and I’m studying more, and I’m planning when I’m going to do assignments—on which night, and that kind of stuff. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

The Secure Commitment indicators did not generally play out as discrete concepts in the young people’s narratives. For this reason, in the remainder of this section we explore the complex

meaning of Secure Commitment, and while we sometimes bring one indicator more to the fore all are interwoven.

## Finding the passion: thinking and feeling

The Passion Honers had the highest cluster average for the planning indicator.<sup>29</sup> Their stories demonstrated the relations at work in the planning process, highlighting the way in which it was a shared activity rather than a solitary one. Passion Honers' plans were constituted in reference to other important individuals and groups in their lives such as careers teachers, family members, friends, or role models.

Although New Zealand schools are required to provide formalised career support to all students in the senior secondary school (Ministry of Education, 1997), there is evidence that the nature of that support varies considerably across schools (Vaughan & Kenneally, 2003). Correspondingly, young people's impressions of the quality (and quantity) of the careers support they received also varied noticeably across all of our clusters. The Passion Honers generally saw their experiences of school careers support in a fairly positive light. Whereas the Hopeful Reactors were often given fairly directive advice about what they *should* do, the Passion Honers were more likely to be given advice about what they *could* do. Not only did Passion Honers tend to be presented with a range of possibilities to choose from but they also received support to make sense of the options. Thus they were able to integrate options into their biographies (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002) in relation to *where* they had been, *who* they were, and *where* they saw themselves in the future—a process that was much more of a struggle for the Anxious Seekers who tended to struggle with the relationships between various pathway options and between those options and their own interests and skills. The Passion Honers, on the other hand, seemed more empowered to take charge of their own futures and make good use of assistance from others:

We had a really good careers advisor and every Friday she would print us out a whole lot of things with what was happening in the universities all around New Zealand and what course application dates were closing... And if we wanted information booklets, you'd just make an appointment with her and just go up and see her, 'cos our form was quite small. So she made an effort to see us at least like twice or three times a year. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Our careers advisor was always pretty mellow. Like, I'd sit in there and chuck down things, that I had a view on, and, like, make a choice. [He'd say] 'There's your future sitting on the table, grab a pen'... [He'd say] 'You've got to sit down at the computer and plan out everything'... He'd be like, 'You know, [if] you really want to become a teacher, you do this, come on.' And sometimes on days [when] I'd be really low on motivation, he'd be like 'What's wrong with you?' [I'd say] 'I've had to move again' and he'd be like, 'I'm sorry' and be really supportive. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

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<sup>29</sup> Three-fifths of the Passion Honers had engaged in a high amount of planning (rated as 4 or 5).

[I found out about the youth trainee programme] through school. You know, school always tried to promote tertiary education and [people] came to school to help us out and stuff. It was basically [at] a career's day [that I found out about it]. You know, all the schools go down to the main centre and take a look at what is available. So it was basically through school, and just looking around at what I wanted to do. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

The careers counsellor [helped me]. When I went up there I was like, 'I don't know whether I should just go to a polytech course or something because I really don't think I will get into university.' And she would say, 'Well, you could do this [bridging course], I think you'd really enjoy it.' I was like, 'Yes, okay, I think that will be a very good idea.' So I enquired and yeah, the [university] said 'If you fail Bursary and you're enrolled and had been accepted into [the university] you would automatically get into the [bridging] course.' And I was like oh, yeah, I've got a backup and if I pass I'll get in anyway for my course. So that was a win-win situation, which was really neat. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Interviewees also drew on other support even when careers support at school was not forthcoming:

I talked to the careers advisor at school a bit but they were not very helpful. They talked more about what you could do rather than all the different choices that you [personally] have and what would be better for you individually, type of thing. But I talked to an auntie who is doing some sort of Masters in counselling and education, and she's a teacher. I talk to her quite a bit. What she does really interests me. And I talked to my parents. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

[I got information] from the universities, sending away for prospectuses or course information. Or just, you know, going on the net, going to my careers advisor at school, or just anywhere I could try to figure out what I was going to do. So I even had a person suggest to me to become a surgeon or something. 'Cos I'd spent so much time in hospital that I had kind of got myself familiar with it. So I went up there and spoke to a couple of people and actually talked to them and watched them work for a day sort of thing you know. And, that was enough to put me off. So yeah, I was getting [information] from everywhere, which was actually pretty good. There wasn't a lack of information. And all the universities are more than keen to come and show what they could offer. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

I'm doing a Bachelor [degree]... The way I got to be here, I guess I got interested in the army a couple of years ago, and I came over to [the university] and I met with some of the staff [for the] degree I wanted to do at that point, and met with [the person] who was in charge there and just got really enthused on the scheme. (Army —interview 1)

However, for many, planning was as much based on personal experience and accumulated knowledge about an interest area as it was influenced by other people's advice. Some had established their interests within school (e.g. one young person's interest in becoming a chef was inspired by his home economics class), whereas others had discovered them within extracurricular activities (e.g. many army trainees had attended military cadet programmes). Where passion for the pathway or career was pre-existing, planning was often focused on finding the best access route into the pathway and deciding between options *within* it:

Well it started back when I lived on the farm. I was forever breaking things and wanting to weld it up and fix things and I found out through the school that there was an engineering block course on. So I decided to go and do that. I really enjoyed it and my parents said to try it and go get a trade just in case. It gives me a trade at the end of it and I can go do other things and come back to my trade. (Apprentice—interview 1)

I've always wanted to join the army ever since I can remember, 'cos when I was young my Dad was in the army for a while. That's what got me onto it, so ever since I've been waiting to join. Yeah, just couldn't wait. So I went through school and did seventh form, which I didn't really want to do but I knew that I had to if I wanted to do the [training programme]. So, yeah I decided to do [it], and so I stayed at school. [I didn't consider any other options outside of the army but] when I was 16 and 17 I started to look at it in more detail. (Army — interview 1)

I've always wanted to join the army and in 6<sup>th</sup> Form an army recruiter came to my school and he said to stay at school another year, get the grades, and go [through the selection process] next year... And I turned up [there] the following year with the grades and I was selected. (Army—interview 1)

I was in cadets for four years... And I was on base quite a lot, and got staff courses, and just was a bit eye-opening. I got to learn their kind of lifestyle and stuff like that. And then just decided I want to go in the forces. (Army —interview 1)

It is somewhat paradoxical that young people who have already established general post-school preferences are better equipped to make sense of the diversity of careers advice and information presented to them (Hipkins, Roberts, Bolstad, & Ferral, 2006). Certainly for many Passion Honers, it seemed that a strong interest in one area helped young people to navigate their way through a complex array of career or pathway choices. These choices might have otherwise been overwhelming (Vaughan, 2005), as it seemed for the Anxious Seekers who attempted to compare and “maximise” choices rather than meet their own set criteria (Schwartz, 2004). Passion Honers were not only guided by their own interests but in some cases seemed to use them strategically to resist, rather than seek, information and advice:

I had all the choices under the sun. The careers advisor at my school, she was, the year before, she said that I could do whatever I wanted to do, 'cos in her eyes I was intelligent. And yeah, she believed that if you put your mind to it, whatever you wanted to do you could do it... The new [careers advisor], she was kind of pushing me to go into tourism or something like that. Something that wasn't the army... I kind of had a personality clash with her and I didn't really get along with her all that well and I just said to her, 'No, I want to join the army, so that's what I'm going to do.' And still she was, like, 'Oh why don't you go into tourism? Why don't you go to catering?' And she'd set things up for me like work experience to go to hotels and do waitressing and stuff. And I'd go and do them and I'd enjoy it, but I didn't want to not join the army. I just wanted to have a little bit of experience behind me with waitressing and just get a taste of different things. But I still wanted to come here. Yeah, and I still had lots of choices. I was constantly doing assessments and stuff for different things and getting handed pamphlets and there was people coming around and 'You could go on this course and that course, and you could be this and that, and this is how

much you will earn and this is how much it 'costs', and I was just surrounded by opportunities. Different universities to go to, everything. (Army—interview 1)

Interestingly, not all young people in this cluster had selected the most direct route towards their career goal. However, unlike the Anxious Seekers' thirst for backup options, the Passion Honers' desire for a solid foundation to build towards a single career motivated their apparent pathway detour. This makes sense alongside the long-term approach evident in many Passion Honers' descriptions of plans that stretch far beyond their initial entrance into a pathway:

I thought of doing [one kind of] training but I decided I would do a few years [in this kind of training] and get to know the ropes and then maybe apply for [the other training]. (Army—interview 1)

I did a couple of months of seventh form and then I just decided that I'd give up and do [another] course. I was going to join the army then, but then I thought that I would want to come out with something instead of just going in [with nothing]. I was going to join as an infantryman first of all, but then my recruiting officer tried to change my mind, so I joined [in the same speciality as the course I did]. So I did a diploma in [that] before I came in. But I'd always wanted to join the army for a long time. (Army—interview 1)

I am doing psychology to become a police officer so that would include the behaviour part in it... I mean, I don't have to get any of this degree to do that but I thought it'd increase my chances. It's just like everyone's getting a university degree. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Even in a context where young people accessed helpful careers guidance (formally or informally), and were guided by their interests and experience, some young people still had to make difficult choices in order to reach their pathway goals. Such difficult choices were balanced against opportunities provided by the pathway. The opportunity 'costs and reality of following through on a dream was not always easy:

It gets real confusing sometimes. Yeah, especially about girlfriends, like breaking up and stuff. Like I just thought about that before I came here... Just it [staying together] would be too hard—like me being in the army and we are both young, and you don't want to make that kind of commitment. We thought it would just be best if we broke up. So, it was real hard and, you know, but just at the end of the day, I suppose it will probably be better. (Employed—interview 2)

I keep in touch with my school friends, but they don't go to [this university] so I've had to make new friends here, which was really hard because the first semester was kind of really lonely. It was really, really hard, because they all go to the same uni. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Luckily, for most of the young people the work they put into finding and following through on a desired pathway had paid off. Many narratives highlighted a "rightness of fit" between themselves and their pathway, often entwined with a sense of self-belief that they could succeed in their pathway. While confidence might initially stem from seeing the pathway-relevance of their pre-existing abilities and interests, positive experiences within the pathway acted to confirm the

Passion Honers' earlier judgements and solidify their position as capable decision makers in the pathways milieu:

[A decision I am pleased with is] choosing to do that course. Choosing to be [in this trade] at this firm. (Apprentice—interview 1)

So far everything I've seen I've totally enjoyed. Staying fit, or that I'm getting paid to be fit. Paid to do new skills, all that type of thing, and doing the hands-on type of job. You know, that's all convinced me this is where I want to be. (Army — interview 1)

[I'm most looking forward to] the education papers at the moment, just because they seem a lot more interesting. You kind of see how the school system works, and it's just really interesting learning about how people view kids and how they should be taught like reading and studying and writing. It's really good. I'm looking forward to those papers. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Although emotions tend to be overlooked in career management theory (Law et al., 2002), it seems that the Passion Honers were driven by their heart as much as their head when navigating pathways beyond school. Their approach suggests that, although schools may tend to operate *as if* reason and emotion can be separated (Sfard, 1998 in Hipkins, 2005), we might think more about school's potential to engage more consciously with students' identity development so that students are enabled to “participate in the knowledge age with a sense of wellbeing that allows them to contribute positively to a diverse and rapidly changing society” (Hipkins, 2005, p. 82). In other words, the Passion Honers' narratives suggest that a strong “sense of self” can guide pathway decision making.

## Knowledge and experience

Just over half (39) of the Passion Honer interviews were rated at the higher end of our “career identity” scale (receiving 4 or 5). This distinguished them from other clusters, none of which had more than a quarter of their interviews rated this highly.<sup>30</sup> Ratings followed a definition of career identity as “the structure and network of meanings in which the individual consciously links his [*sic*] own motivation, interests, and competencies with acceptable career roles” (Meijers & Wesselingh, 1999, p. 233) and were therefore based on our reading of the extent to which interview narratives had integrated a pathway-relevant “career” into their sense of who they were in the present and who they saw themselves being in the future.

Passion Honer narratives tended to move between a state of “being” and a state of “becoming” in relation to career. Some had a sense of already “being” firmly located in their (lifelong) career and so pathway participation was an enactment of this identification:

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<sup>30</sup> Of the remaining Passion Honer interviews most, 26, were given a median score (3) and only 8 had low career identity.

Oh it was just the uniform, it was looking at the uniform and I got all my boots and my pants and that...in a year I was promoted [several times]...and then I went on some big courses and that and that was pretty good because I enjoyed all the courses and we had some inter-course ones with [club] and cadets and it was good. And then come back from those courses and get promoted again...it feels different and you come back here, you're, like, looking at all these guys in uniform. If this was cadets, I would be able to take you fellows off the team... I get asked eh, 'What's it feel like going from a rank to nothing?' Feels bad but being you got to remember cadets are only 12 to 18. Army is from 17 to whenever you want to get out. (Army—interview 1)

Other narratives suggested a journey of “becoming”, where pathway involvement enabled them to build a more detailed image of what a career for themselves might look like:

After this it's possibly going and getting my own troop like with real soldiers who know what they're doing and stuff. That will be a good one... I haven't done enough to really say I'm an officer yet really. I'm just someone who's graduated and has become one. (Army—interview 2)

Both concepts—being and becoming—were factored into the “career identity” indicator since we took long-term commitment to a pathway-relevant career to be a crucial element. This meant that, for example, a young woman who was doing a psychology degree to scaffold her intended career with the police was rated as having a high sense of career identity even though she was not yet a police officer because, in her mind, she was on a clear journey toward joining the police force and was tailoring her university study towards that specific goal:

I did psychology because I want to join the police force and they said it is helpful for that. Most of my courses are in freedom, rights, and justice, or introduction to ethics, which all help out. Yeah, so that is why I did my subjects. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Distinctions between short-term commitment and long-term commitment, and between learner and career identity, appear somewhat arbitrary for many interviewees. Passion Honer narratives suggest that career identity does not emerge only after people build knowledge and experience of the industry or occupation (including study and training). Instead, career identity is the product of an interweaving of theory and practice. Identification emerges as young people are presented with opportunities to test themselves in a role and adjust their journey according to their accumulating knowledge and enjoyment, ability to cope with certain demands, and feedback from others.

In an environment where the boundaries between a learning/training environment and a job/career are becoming more “seamless” and “flexible”, developing an affinity with a particular career or general sector can be an essential part of the pathway experience. About two-thirds of the Passion Honer interviews involved a fairly snug pathway-vocation-employment fit. Either the pathway itself was transparently linked with a specific line of work (e.g. being a chef), or the young person intended to use the pathway to move into an identifiable career (e.g. police force). Army personnel and Modern Apprentices dominated the cluster, both of which are earning while learning pathways. University degree students were also slightly over-represented, in particular those studying towards a particular vocation as the next two quotes illustrate:

At the moment I'm just doing a BSc... I've already done two education papers, and I'd like to do the child psychology (education core) because I would be able to do anything like clinical psychologist or a school psychologist. I'd like to do that paper, and I'd also quite like to do a Māori paper because I took it all through school, and I really liked it. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

I don't know [why I might not go straight to physiotherapy training]. I think I'll probably get a broader range of things to do with the [Bachelor of] Science. I've always liked science and always done sciences right through high school... I'm really enjoying the biology, that's awesome, so I'm not unhappy with doing the Bachelor of Science, and then I sort of think well I could do this, and then afterwards go do physio as well. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

University was not the only place where different but equally compelling career identities could be tested and built within the same pathway option. In the following three quotes from army trainees, the first strongly identified with being a “career” soldier, the second identified as a budding tradesman who could easily transfer his skills to life beyond the army, and the third was enjoying a balance between army identity and student identity:

I want to be commissioned. I want to turn into an officer in the New Zealand Army. That's generally the ultimate goal of everybody here. Myself, that's important because it's just been my ultimate goal since way back. (Army —interview 1)

Living out of camp, it doesn't actually feel like you're in the army; it feels like you're just going to work every day. So the only time at the moment when I feel like I'm in the army is when we go in the field or if I'm in the green uniform... But other than that, it just feels like I was in a civvy job. (Army —interview 2)

You lead a military lifestyle so you abide by military law. Have drill in the mornings, sometimes we have PT all the time, and you're keeping physically fit but you are also a student. When it comes out that you are still a student at university, just like any other person... That's probably the best part about [my programme]...you get all the aspects of the student life and the best part of the army as well. (Army —interview 2)

The fluidity of identity in the previous quote contrasts with the following where the young person was concerned that embracing army culture had irreversibly altered the sense of who he was and where he fitted in the world:

The only thing that I'm a bit worried about is going back home to my old friends and all that, and seeing if I would fit back in with them or what would happen there. (Army —interview 1)

Traditional models of career development assume that a stable sense of self, according to set interests, skills, and abilities, can be matched against a range of known career options where the links between study/training and work/vocation are stable and cumulative. Here the environment (in the form of a careers landscape) is understood to be external to, and distinct from, the individual (Collin, 1997). While the Passion Honer narratives reflected this perspective on one level, on another level their narratives demanded a more “contextualist” (Collin, 1997)

interpretation. Even though the Passion Honers tended to refer to “known” careers and selves, a deeper examination of their narratives revealed that careers are not discrete entities that exist independently for young people to enter into—instead careers are constructed by young people, and in turn participation and interpretation shape their sense of self.

## **Footholds for career identity: absorbing and constructing**

Career development has always been concerned with identity development, however what has changed more recently is the extent to which identity development has become a reflexive self-driven project rather than being dictated by prescribed social/vocational roles (Law et al., 2002; Woods & Jeffrey, 2002). Arnett suggests that a core characteristic of “emerging adults” is that their “choice of work is primarily identity based” and hence they “wish to find a job that is an exploration of their identity, not just a way to make money” (Arnett, 2006, p. 118–9). The Passion Honers were to some extent perched between older and newer models of identity development—they felt aligned with—even co-opted into—particular “roles’, while at the same time they thoughtfully negotiated what was on offer—taking some things and leaving others in constructing an original and fulfilling position for themselves.

On the one hand, their narratives suggest that some pathways have the potential to absorb young people’s lives more fully than others. For example, army cadets and some apprentices become steeped in their pathway through long hours, extended training/study programmes, and work intensity. The Passion Honers tended to embrace the process:

Outside the camp [we were] in the wop-wops doing what soldiers should be doing. And we spent...five weeks doing regimental army stuff. Learning drill, general points about the weaponry systems, first aid, and different stuff... [There were] heaps of good people. [We were] learning the way of army life pretty much and I just really enjoyed it. (Army—interview 1)

On the other hand, Passion Honers were not just absorbed *into* certain careers; they also utilised what we term “footholds” *out of* which they were able to construct some form of career identity. Many Passion Honers provided rich descriptions of participating in “real” situations and/or doing “real” work, drawing attention to the authentic nature of their pathways experience. Even where “authentic inquiry” (Hipkins, 2005, p. 82) operated within a training or study environment, it enabled insights into the actual working environment that a young person might expect to encounter post-training:

I thought for [the course in] physical education they’d just teach us games you know, and the sort of games you can play...but they’ve actually got a curriculum...it’s quite a challenge to try and link ball tag to the curriculum and stuff, but I mean that was a good course. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

At the moment I'm in charge of 44 guys who are of my own age, and I'm their boss. I've got a platoon sergeant with me, and four corporals...all the guys put together have about 50 years of experience. (Army—interview 2)

It's a bit of a shock to be in the real world...like having a job and having to get up and commit yourself to everything. You can't be slack or anything. [You have] to do what people say and just keep up with everybody else...you can't just be a bit slack like at school...`cos you could lose your job... [You have to do what's expected] straight away pretty much and look at the job sheet and when they need it by and make sure you get it done so other people can do their jobs and stuff. Getting it cut and stuff and packed away. (Apprentice—interview 1)

A range of social interactions featured in Passion Honer narratives about their work, study, and training. These details highlighted the way that “a sense of self is acquired, refined and re-transmitted through community interaction” (Law et al, 2002, p. 434). Many discussed themselves in relation to their trainers or lecturers, work colleagues or seniors, experts or mentors. These people were directly engaged at the teaching/learning nexus, or they modelled skills or traits that Passion Honers recognised as important for pathway success. Some young people also looked to their pathway peers or colleagues for empathy and support, developing a more collective identity along the way:

[The things that help you to be a good leader are] being loyal to your friends and your superiors... [Also] having good communication and being able to communicate well with your peers... [And having] respect for other people and things like that. You can see that around the barracks—those are the things we want to be displaying. (Army—interview 1)

I've got a lot of respect for people [in the organisation] and the knowledge that they've got about a trade. I actually step back and think hey this guy knows what he's on about. You start taking a lot of time to listen to him—if you've got that respect then they've got the same sort of thing back for you, you get a lot of help from them...if you get stuck or a problem or anything, you just go and ask one of the older guys and they'll sort you out. It's really good actually. (Apprentice—interview 2)

If something happened you can go and talk to any one of the boys really. Or you've got your N`cos and troop sergeants which you can talk to if something happens. So there are people out there if you need anything. (Army—interview 2)

You have a good relationship with the workers out there. That keeps you going. Like wanting to come to work. Sort of seeing the guys. It's sort of like a big family. (Apprentice—interview 1)

With a team I learn a lot from people. I can't just work by myself you know. I can sometimes work by myself, but with a team you have company...like you can have a support group and if something goes wrong, you know there's someone else who can help you out. And anyway you learn a lot from one another. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

Certain symbols were also a key part of the “footholds” used in developing career identity. Not surprisingly, army uniform was seen as an important marker for social identity in terms of situating the Passion Honers as social objects (Snow & Anderson, 1987 in Woods & Jeffrey,

2002, p. 90), as well as personal identity where meanings could be “attributed to the self by the actor” (Ball, 1972 in Woods & Jeffrey, 2002, p. 90):<sup>31</sup>

It’s quite surreal...the first day I was in uniform and I had finally got to where I wanted to be. It’s kind of, it’s been something I’ve been planning for a couple of years and I always thought, ‘that’s what I wanted to do, I want to be [in this programme].’ It’s actually quite amazing—the first day, I was actually there, in uniform, and I had finally got to be where I wanted to be. (Army—interview 1)

I get really into my biology. I feel like a bit of a geek. We get to have lab coats and do science experiments. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

One young woman saw the particular form of language she was using as part of her studies to be a symbol of student identity. She approached her studies as a means for accessing and testing out particular markers of being a student and as a first step on the journey to becoming a teacher:

I’ve never really used big words and stuff like that. You’ll notice at the beginning of the tape I was trying to use big words but I thought I’ll just stop now before I make a dork of myself. So everything I think I’ll learn I’ll carry it on in my [teaching] courses. I mean, I’ve never set foot in a library since I was about eight and it’s like, how do you use one? So that will be good, good for studying. It just really helps you to go into your university courses with libraries and how to set things out. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

In some cases, narratives referred to initiation-type rituals where pre-defined scripts enhanced identification with a desired career. Male apprentices tended to describe this as going through a period of being “the boy”. One commented that he “just kept getting shit all the time” but felt that in time people would “talk to you with a bit more respect because your skills are better as well and you’re not useless” (Apprentice—interview 2).

A key part of building a strong career identity, or at least the commitment to a career, was the willingness to tolerate a degree of hardship. Short-term stresses were put into perspective with a long-term view. Some of the Passion Honers framed their unpleasant experiences as a constructive part of their development within the pathway:

[The best thing about being an apprentice is] the fact that you get better. All the shit [the tradesmen] gave me—now I can give back to my apprentice when I can get one. So it comes back... I mean I am going to be a tradesman in four years and be on that kind of salary. I am still learning as well, and I am still enjoying what I am doing. (Apprentice—interview 2)

Throughout the year there were times...where you wouldn’t want to be here, and you’d think to yourself, ‘it sucks’ and stuff. Yeah but I think once you get past those times, like [when you go] out with your friends and your classmates and stuff, you realise how much you enjoy being there. And on graduation night that was a prime example of my year. [I

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<sup>31</sup> In this section we have tended to collapse concepts of social identity and personal identity, similar to Dikie’s (2003) study on worker identity in craft work which uses “the word identity to include both one’s personal sense of being a worker and a socially negotiated and experienced identity recognised by family, friends, fair promoters, other crafters, and customers”.

thought] ‘this is what it was all for’ ... Looking back at all the times you thought you were going to give it away, and you’re just thinking ‘Why did you even think about it?’ [It was great] just being up at the Officer’s mess saying ‘Oh this is where it is’, and seeing like the smile on my parents’ and my family’s faces was just awesome. Yeah it was worth it. (Army—interview 2)

Young people who have a general sense of self-confidence and assurance in what they are doing are more “resilient” and able to experience difficult times in a positive way. Anxious Seekers may have experienced this sort of thing as evidence that they were in the *wrong* pathway; Passion Honers tended to see it as evidence that they were on the *right* pathway, enhancing a sense of achievement for them.

While certain pathways may offer more or less “footholds” for the development of career identity it is not “fait accompli” that a pathway offering more of these footholds will produce a young person with a stronger career identity. While university bridging programme students, Modern Apprentices, and army personnel all had the highest average level of career identity, this pattern was not consistent across all of the clusters. This suggests that career identity (often very much like long-term commitment) is not a pathway-dependent idea. Some young people simply invested more of themselves in their pathways suggesting that there is a distinction between young people with “stable” identities and young people with “fragile” identities (Ball et al., 2000). So the Passion Honers’ identities can be seen as:

... a part of a stable, if not totally predictable transition and related to an imagined future which is often long-term and sometimes vivid. Such young people, while they are aware of risks and competition, have few real doubts about ‘becoming somebody’ (Ball et al., 2000, p. 150).

## Following pathways and creating careers

Identification with a career pathway has the powerful ability to raise perceptions of future security (and stability). As one young person said, to get a trade was a sure way to “get a future”:

[As a qualified tradesman] I’ll probably be worldwide qualified. So I’ll be able to go overseas and get a job overseas or something and travel. (Apprentice—interview 1)

[The best thing about the apprenticeship is] pretty much just knowing that you’re going to have a trade at the end of it really. Just the sense of security you get when you know you’re actually going to [do it]. You’ve made your decision and you’re actually getting somewhere. (Apprentice—interview 2)

The Passion Honers with high career identity ratings had a fairly clear vision of themselves in the future, generally in the form of an end career goal that clearly matched with their current pathway choice. In contrast to the Confident Explorers, the Passion Honers were generally progressing towards the “known”:

Basically once I finish my degree I'll do the year up [at camp]—[it's a] kind of practical year of training—and then I'll be a [higher rank]... From there, again, your career is fairly well mapped out. I'll just progress up in the ranks, and hopefully be in for life. That's what I really want to do. Whereas [there are] other people who only want to be in the army for four or five years and then they want to get out. But for me it's a vocation I think. It's a fairly easy career goal. It is mapped out. (Army—interview 2)

Through embarking on a pathway towards a long-term—even lifelong—career they took pleasure from a sense of having found a career they could “follow”. The Passion Honers had the lowest average ratings for “commitment to an alternative option” of all four clusters. Three-quarters had no commitment to, or interest in, another option. The remaining quarter were *considering* an alternative but were not committed to it. And all but three referred to an alternative option *within* their current pathway:

[Army training is] very important because it's something I want to make my lifestyle and I want to make it the career I follow until my 50s or 60s or whenever they want to get rid of me. (Army—interview 1)

A lifelong career, I think that's important, [although] probably not for me now in my part-time job but later on. Once I start [work as a psychologist] I'd probably want to be there for a long time, and just build my career on that. I'm just one of those people who won't really change their job. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

No [I'm not trying out engineering]. I'm definitely there... [The apprenticeship is] pretty important. It's the rest of your life really...I want to be doing that so [I'll] stick at it. (Apprentice—interview 1)

For some, setting their sights primarily on the future meant that they had not made decisions or plans for the short term. They knew where they were going, but had not fully considered or decided how to get there:

I definitely want to be in the SAS [within the next five years]. But I'm not really concerned at the moment. But yeah to get through this course will be pretty hard. Yeah I just set myself [a goal for] this year. My goal throughout the year is just to do as best as I can. But [I have] nothing [set] really past this year because I am still deciding what I want to do after this year. (Army—interview 1)

I have no idea [what I want to get out of university study]. I have no idea whatsoever, except for learning more things, meeting new people. I just want to get into the [police] force, so yeah. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Nevertheless, this was not the case for most. In pathways with a clear structure, in a series of steps, young people often talked about commitment to particular short-term tasks, that upon completion would lead to another “level” of steps or goals. At the same time this step-wise approach provided the opportunity to further “hone” their future goals within a specific pathway, perhaps testing their suitability and adjusting their pathway to head towards one area of specialisation rather than another:

I mean like first year nursing they're just teaching the basic of introduction to nursing and the second year you're building up your confidence and then third year you are more in the diversity area. [That's] where you are independent and you can do the whole thing. You can work in the hospital. You know the terms to use. You know how to talk to a patient. You know how to handle a patient. You are pretty much a nurse. Once you pass your exams you can go out and get the job you want... I'm just going to go step by step and see how this year goes and if I pass go to the next level. Then just keep going to see where it ends. Once I get my degree, [I plan to] work full-time for about a few years and see what the future holds. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

The really good [non commissioned officers] make it to Corporal in about four years or so. So I want to do my best and see if I can make it... It is something to be like proud [of]... One of the [other] reasons [for it] is more money. That's an incentive... (Army—interview 1)

I want to finish my apprenticeship. I want to pass every credit or unit standard that I am allowed to achieve. I'd like to specialise in welding, then travel overseas. (Apprentice—interview 1)

So while their general career area was a known, the exact form it would take was partially dependent on the process of getting there. In other words feeling committed “for life” did not involve a fear of being “stuck” as it did for the Confident Explorers. And it did not exclude the possibility that a Passion Honer's relationship with their career pathway could change over time. Far from being a static position, career identity continued to be developed or streamlined as experience increased and specialist training became possible:

[The hardest decision I have had to make since the first interview was] what I wanted to do as a career. I knew I wanted to stay in cooking but [I wasn't sure] what area I wanted to go into. I decided that I want to go into the catering side after I get a bit more experience... School home economics never was really what I thought it was [going to be]. I thought it would be heaps of cooking and that, but it wasn't. So the [training] courses were more what I wanted. I learnt sort of all of the basics... So my general knowledge of cooking has got a lot bigger. [I decided I was interested in catering] after working in a restaurant. I realised that I don't like [restaurant] speed 'cos you can't put in the detail into the meals that you want. With catering you get a bit more time to put in all the detail and make it look good. (Employee—interview 2)

Primary [school] is good. The class that I was in was a Year Two class, which is sort of 6-7-year-olds... They've still got that carefree attitude that's always good. But I'm actually thinking I might teach Standard 3 or 4 kids, because that way the intellect is just a little bit higher. They're still kids and they're still learning and they don't really care what other people think about them just yet. Because the minute you hit Intermediate [school] it's all, you know, 'The Fonz', which I hate. (Student/Trainee—interview 2)

After I've got my trade it branches into heavy diesel mechanics, fitter/turner, mechanics for on the boats [etc.], it gives me three or four options. Whatever path I decide to go it will be a good choice I think. (Apprentice—interview 1)

If you pass [your courses] you can take it further. Like you can go into the trade side of things as a field engineer. You can go to different teams, [for example a] specialist search team. (Army—interview 2)

Developing careers in this way means that Passion Honers could not just be described as “following” pathways, but also as creating their careers. Most young people in the cluster had embarked on gratifying learning journeys, where reaching key milestones punctuated an ongoing deepening of knowledge and skills. Many had a sense of becoming more skilled, confident, and self-reliant, as (learner) workers and as individuals in their own right, often through being “scaffolded” through apprenticeship and trainee programmes so they could “develop the habit of learning at and through work” (Smith, 2004, p. 31):

I don't know, I've learnt so many things that it's unbelievable really. Everything's just gelled into one. It's like I've progressed from knowing nothing in the kitchen and into being able to work here by myself. (Army—interview 2)

I have actually been able to do it myself, not lean on anyone to push me through it. And do some good things and make some people proud. (Apprentice—interview 2)

I've just boosted my confidence, starting a new job, starting a new career... Leaving a steady job [was a hard decision but I left because] I'd sort of learnt everything at that place and it got a bit more of a routine... In my job now I'm learning every day and I can continue learning, and once I've learnt everything on that section I can go on a different one like pastry or banquet kitchen. (Employee—interview 2)

## The future in focus

Although the Passion Honers are oriented towards the known, many were able to accommodate some level of “knowing-in-and-with-uncertainty” (Barnett, 2004). The following quote illustrates this known-unknown tension:

My brother: he doesn't even know what he wants to be. He's been doing so many different courses and I don't see how I could possibly do that. I mean, I want to be a teacher, I have always wanted to go and be a primary school teacher 'cos I just love little kids and stuff like that. He used to go, I'll do chemistry here or I might start a law firm paper thing or something... He's had a huge mix of things, so... Yeah, I do [like having choices in my life]. I hate being told what I have to do and when I have to do it. You have to do assignments all the time, but it's left up to you. I mean, I'm just loving the university life and the fact that you have these options and stuff like in the [course]. (Student/Trainee—interview 1)

Even with this known-unknown tension, the Passion Honers' narratives were characterised by a focused attitude towards what they were doing and where it would get them. Their pathways provided learning environments in which the purpose of their activities was obvious (a feeling that was not always forthcoming at school). At the same time the Passion Honers' pathway experiences were embedded in their wider lives. Most were genuinely enjoying life both within

and outside their learning/working environments. They wove together accounts of personal, academic, and professional selves.

The Passion Honers are probably the best example of success within a typical early career development model. However they do also draw attention to the complexity of career development in action. They show that it is not necessarily useful to consider “indicators” like satisfaction, commitment, and identity as discrete or predictive entities. Nor is it useful to draw hard lines between ideas like enjoyment and struggle, short-term commitment and long-term commitment, or career and identity. The Passion Honers appear to sit at a point located at the edge of traditional thinking about youth transition and careers development. Their stories are mainly focused on career goals, structured and stepped progression, and the mastery of knowledge. But there are traces of newer ideas about complex societies and unknown futures or at least the possibility of space for concepts like “lifelong learning”, “flexibility”, and “uncertainty” that are suggested in the Confident Explorer narratives. Above all, Passion Honers demonstrate that a “career” is not a static thing but a dynamic process that occurs where identity, occupation, and learning meet. They illustrate that career identity is something to be actively constructed, allowing for change over time.

## 5. Taking it further: transition and career as process

The previous three sections have investigated the navigations specific to our four clusters. We have examined the feelings, dispositions, and decisions detailed in young people's interviews with a view to understanding the major themes of exploration and security that drive and organise their narratives and navigations. This final section addresses the themes of security and exploration at a broader level. This section considers what the dimensions and expressions of each through the clusters can usefully tell us about how to understand young people and their transitions. It also consider the implications of these ideas for careers education and guidance and career development.

We began our analysis by identifying security and exploration as the two major themes driving and organising young people's narratives. In order to better conceptualise these themes and understand how they worked to produce people's trajectories, we looked to statistical techniques that might help us re-read the interviews as unified entities within an overall framework for discussing the ideas. We developed sets of indicators under each theme which helped us re-read the interviews as unified entities. As we identified and refined the different aspects of security and exploration in people's narratives, we used a 5-point scale to measure the strength of each. A factor analysis allowed us to further refine our conceptualisations of security and exploration by effectively grouping together the indicators that were most alike. In addition to revealing a single Exploration factor, two kinds of Security factors emerged: Contingent Security and Secure Commitment.

We used a clustering technique to group up the interviews that were most alike in terms of their indicator ratings. This produced the four clusters examined in detail in previous sections: the Hopeful Reactors (1), the Confident Explorers (2), the Passion Honers (3), and the Anxious Seekers (4). When we calculated the average factor scores for each cluster, we could see the distinctive profile of each. These profiles formed the mainstay of the report structure. By analysing the data in terms of the factor profiles for each cluster, we have been able to show up the particular concerns, intentions, and trajectories described in interview narratives belonging to each cluster.

### Using and "reading" clusters

The clusters allowed us to go beyond summarising main interview themes to show the richness and depth in distinct trajectories of youth in transition. We mapped out four unique factor characteristics, encompassed in the maxims of each cluster, and shown in the following table.

Table 10 **Clusters with maxims and factor trajectories**

Cluster name	Maxim	Factor characteristics	Factor type
The Hopeful Reactors	"I'm not going to end up a bum"	Contingent Security	Security
The Passion Honers	"I'm becoming something in a secure career"	Secure Commitment	
The Confident Explorers	"I'm building my self for my future"	Exploration with Secure Commitment	Exploration (in conjunction with Security)
The Anxious Seekers	"I don't know which way to turn"	Exploration with Contingent Security	

The clusters and maxims are not intended for use as mapping devices for classroom teachers or careers educators or advisors. Nor are the indicators and factors intended for use as checklists. We would not expect or want, for example, indicator lists or cluster names to be used to categorise young people for the purposes of support or other interventions. We are not proposing any of the facets of our analysis be used in these ways. In fact we hope what our analysis really shows is that there are no hard and fast rules about young people in transition. There are already enough lists of factors and aptitude tests being used in the vocational matching forms of careers education (and these are not likely to be the way of the future anyway).

However, we would encourage people to use this research to think about the different pushes and pulls experienced by young people. This has implications for the way we can support different young people. Our indicators, factors, and clusters have been useful as an overarching framework for making sense—in broad brush strokes—of what young people have been telling us, against the backdrop of existing youth transition research, policies, and practices. And what they are telling us about, what their narratives make clear is crucial to career decision making and navigating pathways, is an understanding of *identity production*.

Young people's narratives of competing decisions made, option possibilities, feelings, rationalisations, and strategies are so complex that being able to really *hear* the stories required us to pay attention to context as well as individual stories. That is what we have attempted to do, seeing the apparent contradictions in stories, and the agendas of our participants, as an indication of where we need to theorise from the narratives to wider social patterns. A major theme in Pathways and Prospects is the role of identity in career development, but interviews alone do not mean that identity simply reveals itself (McLeod, 2003). Without explicitly intending this at the outset, we have moved to some extent into the "third space" of youth research where the social, the cultural, and the psychic are researched together (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2002). In some ways, we have had no choice. As Gadd (2004) has pointed out in paraphrasing Mills (1970), how can any study of relationships between private troubles and public issues—in this case, between pathways and navigations—be anything but psycho-social in emphasis? If we want to understand transition for young people, in particular the way they deal with a proliferation of

choices demanding more and more reflection (du Bois-Reymond, 1998), we are effectively also trying to understand the workings of a globalised marketplace, local labour shortages, and an emerging knowledge society. In other words, the research sits in a tricky space within a policy context where:

...there is always the danger...of primacy being attributed to the psychological in order to negate the overwhelming and variable impact of social processes. When unemployment or migration are explained through reference to individual character traits instead of global social, political and economic processes this danger is most evident...Hence deciding which bits of interviewees' narratives to convey the complexities of experiences, as opposed to socio-cultural imperatives, is a perennial problem for biographical researchers (Gadd, 2004).

We particularly liked the concept of “identity investments” suggested by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) for two reasons. Firstly we wanted to emphasise *identity* in understanding youth transition. This addresses a key gap in policy and research which takes an activity-tracking or aspirations-to-destinations approach. In these instances the emphasis falls on *what* young people are *doing* in terms of their education or labour market status. This tells us about but it does not tell us much about *how* and *why* young people choose particular options, stay with or leave them, and grow into or beyond them in particular ways. By thinking in terms of identity, we can get a better understanding of how young people *make sense of* transition—by focusing on transition as a process as much as an outcome. In other words, our general approach and use of clusters has been to move beyond questions that begin “Do people...?” to questions that begin “*How* do people...?”

Secondly we wanted to emphasise *investment* because this underscored the motivations involved, and effects of, making particular choices. For example, one young person explained leaving her initial pathway option as being about a decision to follow some other emerging opportunities. However, we happened to know that she was not doing well in the pathway option and had been invited to leave. The way she framed her story makes sense if we think about the way she was constructing herself in relation to others, and to us as researchers. She had an *investment* in an *identity* as an adventurous opportunity-taker. And she got to sidestep any possible identity as a failure—a sidestep that could be very helpful. Thinking in these terms also draws attention to the sorts of investments that tend to be neglected in policy (and some research) in favour of other investments such as financial ones (e.g. do people consider education fees against future earning capacity?) or time investments (e.g. do people consider opportunity ‘cost against future earning capacity?). We suggest that taking a broader view of investments might yield a better return on understanding young people’s choices and accounts.

## Security and exploration

Our analysis has also been able to destabilise some of the taken-for-granted ideas about how a drive for security or a desire for exploration might actually function in young people’s lives.

## Two dimensions of security

Early on in our statistical analysis, we developed factors to group the indicator ratings of interviews. We found that our concept of security, captured in our set of security indicators, was not a single entity after all. Instead it had two specific dimensions: Contingent Security and Secure Commitment.

Two clusters in particular showed up these different dimensions of security. Moreover both of these clusters were notable for low ratings against the Exploration factor. This made security, in its different dimensions, a distinct orientation for each cluster.

The Hopeful Reactors' interviews rated highly for Contingent Security. The interviewees' stories described their reactions to three major related challenges in choosing options on leaving school: low school achievement, a lack of viable options, and little planning beyond general optimism and a desire to do well in their chosen pathway option. They were concerned with current and future financial security, and with avoiding further failures or disappointments. They tended to define their life possibilities by what they could escape from and by the "bum" class of people they hoped never to join.

The Passion Honers' interviews exemplified Secure Commitment, an almost opposing form of security. The interviewees were rarely concerned with financial needs or escaping other futures, and instead focused on their interest in becoming better at their chosen pathway. They were the only cluster to rate highly for both "short-term commitment" *and* "career identity". Interviews contained detailed descriptions of pathway practices and experiences, including new learning that was seen as directly relevant to a current and emerging trade, profession, or set of skills. In being excited *and* challenged by what they were doing, these interviews highlighted a sense of "becoming something" with a specific career designation.

The two dimensions of security raise some interesting issues about the idea of security in youth transition generally. The Passion Honers and Hopeful Reactors show that security can come through *commitment to* or *escape from*, respectively. This suggests that when we talk about job security or a secure pathway, we might need to think about the kind of security being sought and the motivations for doing so. The low ratings for exploration for each cluster were mainly driven by a lack of interest in, or commitment to, pathways other than the one with which they were currently engaged. There was little discussion of self-exploration or development in their narratives. Each cluster faced different risks and threats to particular identity investments—being people who "know their stuff" for Passion Honers and being people who could "rise up" for Hopeful Reactors. In such a context, exploration would have been a luxury for the Hopeful Reactors. Exploration for the Passion Honers were intra-pathway rather the inter-pathway forms on which we focused. Issues of security in Hopeful Reactors' and Passion Honers' narratives simply had a significance that squeezed out considering alternatives or exploring careers, pathways, or selves very far beyond what was immediately relevant or engaging.

## Two expressions of exploration

Our statistical analysis confirmed our initial thinking about exploration in that there were four main exploration ideas that we could capture through the indicators: “exploration scope (of other pathways/possibilities”, “comparison to others”, “commitment to alternative (pathway)” and “self-exploration”. However, our clusters highlighted the very different ways that exploration played out. These differences can partly be understood through the intersection of the Exploration factor with different dimensions of security.

The Confident Explorers were as highly committed short-term to their current pathway option as the Passion Honers but were distinct in that they did not have a similar level of career identity and did not necessarily have a long-term commitment to the option. Instead pathway options were often seen as a means to an end and their long-term commitment became a commitment to themselves. Interviews described exploration of, and new learning about, their skills, interests, and aptitudes as well as exploration of future possibilities achievable by “creating selves”.

Like the Confident Explorers, the Anxious Seekers rated highly for exploration but they did so for quite different reasons. The Anxious Seekers were generally very unhappy with their pathway options and not committed in the short term, long term, or in terms of career identity. Many of their interviews were like decision-making explorations in themselves, where interviewees talked through the pros and cons of what they could or should do. Interviewees were generally very apprehensive about their place in the world and their future, and did not know “which way to turn”.

The Confident Explorers and Anxious Seekers clusters challenge some commonly accepted ways of thinking about the role of exploration in youth transition. The first challenge illustrated by the clusters is that exploration can come from security *or* insecurity. The Confident Explorers used existing security to build a platform for further exploration. Their previous school achievement and entry into pathway options that they found interesting and challenging, provided the impetus to pursue and explore more opportunities. For them, exploration was not something they did, perhaps through school subjects or transition programmes, in order to find out their interests or aptitudes, in order to choose a pathway, settle down, and stop exploring. Instead—and this is the second challenge—exploration was something that *emerged from* positive experiences and allowed them to *continue* expanding, and making, choices.

The Anxious Seekers, on the other hand, were driven to explore by a Contingent Security that looked much like *insecurity*. What could they gain but what might they lose by changing pathways? Exploration was not a warm, exciting activity but was instead driven with paralysing doubt. The third challenge suggested by their narratives is that exploration need not be the product of a *lack* of information about possible options, but can be about a struggle for a framework in which to *make sense of* possible options, and find *support* in order to make decisions. Finally, the Anxious Seekers illustrate that exploration can be a frightening place, prompting attempts to create security in the form of backup plans.

Overall, by using the clusters as a lens, the different dimensions of security and expression of exploration can be understood in terms of pushes and pulls. The Hopeful Reactors were *pushed* into their pathway options as the only viable options and way of becoming successful, moving *away* from unwanted possibilities. The Passion Honers were *pulled* by their dreams and interests, and moved *toward* something tangible in career terms. The Confident Explorers were *pulled* to explore pathways in the interests of building opportunities, and imagined or moved *towards* possibilities. The Anxious Seekers were *pushed* back and forth, exploring out of a sense of instability, moving *away* from “bad” choices and *towards* imagined better ones.

## **Orientations to the future: implications for career development policy and practice**

The various themes and trajectories highlighted through the clusters are important pointers to how we might think about careers education and guidance for young people in transition. Most significantly they support thinking about careers guidance in terms of careers *management*, in line with the overarching idea of *career development*, which addresses people of any age and throughout life, as they make education, training, and occupational choices and *manage* their careers (Third International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, 2006, emphasis added).

The distinction between guidance, built on models of skill matching and vocational aptitudes, and management, addressing the role of the learner and worker, is critical. This is because vocational matching approaches are increasingly difficult to sustain in a world of “accelerated flows” between nations of people, ideas, images, money, and media (Appadurai, 1996) and fragmenting or unstable institutions and structures (Beck, 1999). In New Zealand “it is estimated that every year 200,000 new jobs are created and 150,000 disappear or are transformed” and therefore “a reliable and enjoyable career cannot be left to chance” (Career Services, undated). The challenge for individuals shifts from securing a job at one point in time and then keeping it to finding jobs over and over throughout life (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). Similarly, this would mean a shift away from being advised on an appropriate career for your existing skills and aptitudes that you can use in the current labour market. Instead there is a shift towards managing your self, perhaps with expert direction, for careers that are possibly as-yet unheard of, perhaps in hybridised fields or disciplines. The latter would not occur before you secured a job but alongside securing a number of different jobs.

This not only means that *management* makes more sense than guidance today; it means that “career” is now a very different thing. Career is no longer a structure but a process (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). Seeing career in this way requires us to think beyond knowledge for storing up towards knowledge in terms of what it can *do* (Gilbert, 2005) because the most important form of knowledge is becoming ontological (Barnett, 2004), about how individuals can *be* in the world. This shift also means that workplaces will increasingly be seen as learning environments (Billett,

2006), as changes in the prioritising of workplace learning in New Zealand suggest—the recognition of Industry Training Organisations as Tertiary Education Institutions, increased funding and support for industry training, apprenticeships, and the Gateway programme in schools, further development of work-based literacy programmes, and union Learning Representatives.

These things certainly mean that we need to include an analysis of identity in any discussion about youth transition because it is so vital to being able to conceive and *manage career*.<sup>32</sup> If we want policies to be better aligned with young people’s actual priorities and needs, we need to be thinking about pathways and navigations, and about *career as process*, rather than the more simple model of transition-to-labour market. Young people’s narratives in all of our clusters highlight the importance of people’s identity investments, and current and future self-concepts, in the perception of possibilities and ability to make career decisions. They show that careers decision making is not a single decision at a single point in time, that differing levels of commitment to any pathway option may or may not be the same as commitment to a specific career, and that similar orientations may be based on quite different, but equally valid, reasoning.

Each cluster engaged in a version of career management. The Hopeful Reactors engaged in the (re)construction of “learning careers” (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) in ways that allowed them to emerge into a form of adulthood that no longer depended on school achievement or other people’s (sometimes limited) visions of who they were or could be. Satisfaction with the pathway itself depended more on achieving success and becoming successful learners and workers than it depended on the specific pathway learning and work content. So although Hopeful Reactors had low ratings for “career identity” and often little sense of long-term purpose or interest in their pathway option, they were highly committed to finding that purpose, with its reward of feeling valued, at some point. That is why some continued to stick with options that were no longer very engaging. They were managing their careers in the widest possible sense, seeing “career” as a process of rewriting earlier ideas about their capabilities and place in the world. Their optimism about finding a job, and in some cases, perhaps even a job they could find fulfilling, suggested that their early career development was about the development of the possibility of career.

The Confident Explorers saw career in an even wider sense, approaching it through *themselves*. They were the most short-term committed of all clusters on average but did not have a clear career identity that could be mapped to a specific career. However they did have a clear sense of purpose and detailed plans about their current pathways and their anticipated future ones. Their overall framework was generally not attached to a particular job, vocation, or profession; it was attached to being a particular kind of person with a range of high-level and adaptable skills. They exemplified the idea of career-as-process, seeming to have grasped uncertainty in the certainty that they and their jobs would change over time and that they could prepare for this—not by

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<sup>32</sup> We note that identity has been part of other career fields such as vocational psychology and career counselling.

guarding against change but by embracing the challenge and stimulation of change. By exploring and creating linkages between different possibilities in their lives, they saw potential to “tune” their learning and qualifications to their interests, motivations, and talents, and then to the current and future labour market (Wijers & Meijers, 1996). They did not manage a specific career in the sense of vocation; they managed themselves as an ongoing enterprise.

The Anxious Seekers and Passion Honers had a narrower sense of career insofar as it was tied to particular vocations. The Anxious Seekers looked to settle on something but could not find it; the Passion Honers had found it and were happily settling into it. The Anxious Seekers seemed to have the most trouble getting to grips with rapid change and expanding possibilities. Their pervading sense of doubt about their choices and how to “maximise” them (Schwartz, 2004) meant they tended to avoid making detailed plans lest these, too, contribute to expanding possibilities and further doubt. When considering different options they focused on what was different about each, rather than what could be linked together. If one avenue did not lead to fulfilment, they tended to see it as confirmation of its unsustainability and sought something entirely different as its counterweight. Career was a process fraught with confusing change that they longed to “pin down” to a specific recognisable job title.

The Passion Honers were more contentedly attached to a specific vocation, having used existing, and sometimes emerging, interests to gain a foothold into a specific field or industry. Like the Confident Explorers, they tended to have a fairly coherent picture of themselves, incorporating apparent contradictions in their feelings towards the greater goal of success in their chosen pathway. However their more narrow view of career-as-vocation was to some extent offset by an emerging view of career-as-process in terms of their identities as learner-workers. Most of the interviews in the cluster were from young people who were either in options that challenged the traditional education/employment split, such as earning-while-learning apprenticeships and army careers (which included some apprenticeships), or short-term vocation-specific learning, such as polytechnic courses in cookery, health, and nursing which moved people into ongoing workplace development. Consequently a high proportion of this cluster were employed and earning National Qualification Framework credits. They were therefore engaged in career management in its most formal and traditional sense of taking opportunities, many of them structured into their jobs, to increase skill levels within a specified field.

In each cluster’s own way, navigating pathways and career decision making necessarily involves issues of identity—how people see themselves now and in the future, what “investments” they make to open up and close down different possibilities, and how their choices (or lack of) situate them within community, family, and society. Some young people, particularly the Confident Explorers and to some extent the Passion Honers, seem already in step with emerging directions in career development. However, the Confident Explorers’ approach is also the most likely of all clusters to be misunderstood in relation to existing policy because it appears to subvert accepted ideas about pathway trajectories and appropriately meaningful choices. They are perhaps the best example of the kinds of things young people could be supported to do but it may be that those

who support them—teachers, parents, policy makers—will not be comfortable with the new terms of the arrangement. The challenges thrown up today are such that:

Individualisation of life situations and processes thus mean that biographies become *self-reflexive*; socially prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self-produced and continues to be produced. Decisions on education, profession, job, place or residence, spouse, number of children and so forth, with all the secondary decisions implied, no longer can be, they must be made. Even when the word ‘decisions’ is too grandiose, because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present, the individual will have to ‘pay for’ the consequences of decisions not taken...the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on (Beck, 1999, p. 135).

This context does throw up a challenge to consider what other theories or ideas we might take seriously with regard to career development. For example, Gladwell (2005) makes a case for harnessing the power of the “adaptive unconscious” in decision making, as it is often used by experts. Careers theories have focused on decision making and how to help people with that through a range of tools which we continue to develop in New Zealand. If people become experts in their own lives, might there be a place for ending the mistrust of rapid cognition or decisions that cannot easily be explained or broken down into constituent elements? Could we move beyond a reification of calculated rationality in career decision making?

Pryor and Bright’s (2004) work on “the chaos theory of careers” (2004) suggests seeing randomness and unpredictability, not only as consequences of the limits of human knowledge, but as integral to human knowledge. Mark Savickas’ work on the “construction of careers” and “narrative” theory in careers focuses on seeing careers and relationships together, people fitting work to their lives rather than the other way around (Collin, 2001).

Schwartz’s (2004) ideas about becoming “satisficers” rather than “maximisers” of consumer choice might also be useful, given that “market modalities have moved into many areas of life once understood as commerce-free” (Kenway & Bullen, 2005, p. 34). Those modalities and ways to deal with them are certainly relevant for young people in New Zealand who face making education, work, and career decisions in a context where they are among the least powerful of consumers (Vaughan, 2005). The Government recently suggested its ongoing changes to tertiary funding were in part prompted by this situation, acknowledging that the EFTS “system made rather too many heroic assumptions about the capacity of individual students to predict what skills would be most valued in the labour market, and to communicate those through their choice of courses” (Cullen, 2006).

We tend to think of more choice as better when it comes to post-school options and the Hopeful Reactors certainly emphasise a need for meaningful options, but we should also take note that some of the most satisfied people in our study came from the Passion Honers’ cluster where exploring widely for more choices was unnecessary; they had their own criteria to satisfy. The

Confident Explorers understood choice in a more long-term sense and one that disturbed many of the assumptions about what following pathways would look like.

Many of the ideas shown up by the clusters can be summarised in the following table showing the old and new order of things related to career, including ideas about security and exploration.

Table 11 **Security and exploration in old and new orders of career development**

<b>Acceptable but increasingly inappropriate (old order)</b>	<b>Emerging but not yet accepted (new order)</b>
Career as destination	Career as process (see Wijers & Meijers, 1996)
Career trajectories decided at school	Career trajectory decisions decided and revisited throughout life
Commitment to a career as vocation	Commitment to building self as enterprise
Security built by long-term commitment	Security through exploring possibilities
Exploration as a discrete, contained phase	Exploration as part of lifelong learning
Commitment defined by long-term interest	Commitment defined by changing mix of short-term and long-term interests
Opportunity costs balanced against labour market rewards	Opportunity costs take into account work/life balance
Individual fits to entity of career	Career is constructed (see Savickas in Collins, 2001)
Goal is to achieve order	Goal is to value “chaos” or unpredictability (see Bright & Pryor, 2004)
Considered, rational decisions	Decisions using adaptive unconscious (see Gladwell, 2005)
Choice maximisation (see Schwartz, 2004)	Choice satisficing (see Schwartz, 2004)

Acknowledging the new order of career development and young people’s narratives of their pathway “navigations” (Raffe, 2003) and “identity investments” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) provides a good basis for thinking about the kind of support that would be useful to young people in producing career. For example, we might think differently about the role of relationships in producing career, particularly for different young people. The Passion Honers, Confident Seekers, and Hopeful Reactors all had a sense of themselves in relation to some kind of wider community; the Anxious Seekers struggled without these anchors. The Confident Explorers were active participants in team sports, volunteer work, and associations. The Hopeful Reactors were trying to maintain important links with their communities in a way that did not limit their life chances. The Passion Honers were becoming part of a community of interest as craftspeople and industry workers by using their previous networks and interests, often developed outside school. The cluster narratives underline the importance of young people having strong interests and receiving support early on, not just as they leave school (Wylie et al., 2006). The narratives also suggest that learning and thinking is now an activity that works when people get together and that schools might move more toward solving “authentic real-world problems” with inventive timetabling and

community networks (Gilbert, 2005)—something that alternative schools and programmes have been attempting in various ways (with mixed results) for some time (Vaughan, 2004).

These kinds of ideas form the basis of practical steps we could develop to support young people living in relation to the “epistemological fallacy” of modern times, where individualised responsibility for success or failure contributes to a “feeling of separation from the collectivity” (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 114). These ideas could also take us beyond the metaphor of “pathways”. We began this study thinking about the relationship between pathways and navigations (Raffe, 2003) but have come to see that it is worth thinking about it in different terms now. The young people’s narratives that we examined through the lens of the four clusters show that it is vital to look beyond the surface. Measuring the face-value instances of activities is not enough to understand *the meaning that young people make* of those activities and their role in their lives. Those meanings and roles are certainly about the pathways–navigations relationship in action. They are about how lives are differently constrained and possibilities differently opened up. We have conceived these in terms of security and exploration narratives. However, given the emphasis on *process*, thinking about *identity and career production* could be a useful shift in focus. It not only aligns itself more with young people’s priorities but acknowledges *career as process* (Wijers & Meijers, 1996), and that career development is *for* a society where the roles of learner and worker continue to change.



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Is it correct to suggest that young people's identities today are more "Individualised" than in earlier generations? How p...  
Disclaimer: This work was produced by one of our expert writers, as a learning aid to help you with your studies. We also have a number of samples, each written to a specific grade, to illustrate the work delivered by our academic services. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UK Essays. Is it correct to suggest that young people's identities today are more "Individualised" than in earlier generations? How people define themselves in relationship to society is an ongoing concern of Understanding identity and career production is therefore not only an acknowledgement of career as process (Wijers & Meijers, 1996), but also an acknowledgement that career development is for a society where the roles of learner and worker continue to change. xi © NZCER xii © NZCER 1. Introduction When I was just a little girl I asked my mother "What will I. leaving school. It investigates how young people make decisions about their careers and working life, including any part that indecision and "changes of heart" might play in that. It considers how we might (re)conceptualise the nature and role of work and learner identities for young people in transition.