

**Improving Student Preparedness  
for Transition from School  
- Career Decision-Making Abilities Project**

**Julie Thomas and Matthew Freeland**

**Careers New Zealand**

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Note to reader: Career Services re-branded in May 2011 as Careers New Zealand. Both names are used throughout the paper and they refer to the same organisation.

### **1. Background**

In 2007, The Nielsen Company (Nielsen) assisted Career Services with the implementation of the first measure of the Career Decision-Making Abilities (CDMA) survey. The research was conducted to gain a better understanding of school leavers' decision-making abilities and their preparedness for the working environment.

The CDMA project was part of a wider Career Services evaluation strategy called Better Tertiary and Trade Training Decision-Making (BTATTD) which sought to build on and improve existing resources, information and support to assist young people and their influencers to make better tertiary and trade training decisions.

In 2010 Career Services commissioned Nielsen to repeat this work.

The objectives of the research were to :

- Better understand how young people make decisions and what information and support they require.
- Track key areas covered in 2007 (e.g. readiness, knowledge and information) to identify whether any shifts have occurred in student thinking.
- Identify key strength areas where students feel they are prepared for school leaving.
- Identify areas for improving student preparedness – where additional information and communications or a change in tack might be beneficial.

### **2. Methodology**

The surveys conducted in 2007/08 and 2010 were identical with the exception of an additional question in 2010 that asked school leavers about their overall levels of confidence in career decision-making.

In 2007/08, 610 school leavers participated in the research. Responses were gathered through hard-copy paper surveys in eight schools in 2007 and a booster survey involving face-to-face interviews with youth in three shopping malls in the country in early 2008.

In 2010, 335 school leavers participated in the research through a mixture of hard-copy paper surveys in eight schools and an online survey. The surveys were incentivised in both 2007/08 and 2010. Six of the eight schools in 2010 also participated in the earlier research.

As some schools wished to have their results kept anonymous, the data used here and in the presentation is at the aggregate level. Details on individual schools have not been discussed.

The mean score was used throughout the analysis as it provided a simple measure that could be applied across all scale questions and aided consistent analysis. Any results marked as 'significant' refer to a statistically significant difference and one less due to random variation.

### 3. Research areas

The survey featured 26 questions and focused on five distinct research areas:

- Plans when leaving school
- Overall confidence
- Readiness
  - a. Motivation
  - b. Decisiveness
  - c. Beliefs
- Information
  - a. About making decisions
  - b. Themselves
  - c. Jobs / occupations
  - d. Obtaining information
- Consistency of information
  - a. Overall consistency
  - b. Students' opinions
  - c. Opinions of others.

Awareness of Career Services was also asked in both research waves. This information is for the use of Careers New Zealand and has not been published in either the presentation or in this research paper.

### 4. Key findings

Within the three key areas of Readiness, Information and Consistency of information, the survey focused on ten sub-areas (stated above).

In 2010, only two of the ten sub-areas experienced a significant shift in results. In both cases, there was an increase in mean scores. The shift occurred within Readiness on motivation and beliefs.

*Overall*, there was not a significant shift between 2007/08 and 2010; most areas recorded very similar mean scores.

The following sections examine some of the key findings and discuss the implications for practitioners working within the careers sector with young people.

## 5. Plans for the future

In 2010, around two thirds of school leavers had definitive plans for when they left school. Tertiary education was the most common path; just under half intended to undertake university training and around a quarter intended to undertake some other form of tertiary study. Following this, two in ten expected to go straight into full-time employment.

The majority had started thinking about careers that they might be interested in; around half were interested in one particular career and four in ten were interested in a number of potential careers. However, it is of some concern that one in ten school leavers had not started thinking about what careers they might be interested in.

Compared to 2007, there was a slight decrease in the number of school leavers who had definitive plans when leaving school (67% vs 72%). Those individuals with low levels of overall confidence were significantly less definitive in their plans than those with high levels of confidence (35% vs 80%).

Females were significantly more likely than males to intend to go to university (52% and 37% respectively). Whilst not significant, there was some indication that male school leavers were more likely to go into full-time employment or some other tertiary study. Those school leavers with higher levels of overall confidence were significantly more likely to say that they had one particular job in mind, rather than several options.

## 6. Overall confidence

The majority of school leavers were somewhat confident in their career decision-making abilities. Four in ten had a strong level of confidence, and just over a third expressed moderate levels of confidence. However, it was of potential concern that around a quarter of school leavers had low levels of confidence.

Statistical analysis was undertaken by Nielsen to identify what drives overall confidence. First, factor analysis was undertaken to reduce and group the number of variables that go into the regression model. The five factors (themes) identified were:

- Clear career direction
- Well informed
- Self confident
- Internal harmony
- Know how to access information.

Regression analysis was then undertaken to establish the extent to which each of these factors drives overall confidence. A total of 41% of the variation in overall confidence can be explained by these five factors.

Clear career direction contributed most to overall confidence and, within this factor, information regarding skills and abilities, and how to transfer them to careers, were the key areas to improve.

## **7. Readiness**

Compared to 2007/08, more school leavers in 2010 recognised the importance of choosing a career now but there was also some perception that a career may eventuate over time. This supports a view that it's important to get into work or study for a career but that over time one's career path may change.

The 2010 cohort had a realistic outlook and understood that there was more than one career that would suit them and that the first career choice made was not necessarily permanent.

Some school leavers recognised a level of personal indecision, and many identified with a need to have their career decisions reaffirmed by a professional person or someone they trusted.

Māori school leavers were significantly less likely than NZ European students to associate with only one career that suits them. It appeared that this group was keeping its options open. This group was also more likely than NZ European students to seek confirmation and support for their decisions from professionals or someone they trusted, e.g. whānau.

## **8. Information**

The results from 2010 indicated that information and tools that assisted students to reach a wise decision could be improved, and those that already existed needed to be communicated to students more effectively. In this regard, raising awareness of the service offerings from Careers New Zealand would be a key start.

Most school leavers had a strong sense of what jobs they found interesting. However, they were less in tune with their own skills and abilities and therefore may not actually have had the information about themselves to make decisions easily. Tools that could aid students in this process, i.e. identifying their own skills, and how they might be transferred to the work place, would be very beneficial.

The results also suggested that there was room to improve the extent of information available to school leavers regarding potential jobs and occupations - particularly in terms of the finer details of what different career options involved - and help school leavers identify jobs that would be in high demand in the future.

Māori school leavers were significantly less likely than NZ European students to believe that they had enough information about the range of jobs open to them; had enough information on the characteristics of a job or course; and knew what jobs and careers would be in high demand in the future.

## 9. Consistency of information

School leavers generally viewed the information supplied by people who were important to them as valuable and in line with their career views. However, results suggested that there may be some inconsistencies in the information students are receiving about their own skills and how they fit with various career options. While most school leavers claimed that they could match their skills with their careers, a degree of worry existed for some. In light of this, there was a need to assist students with the cross referencing and matching of skills with job skill requirements.

## 10. Conclusion

There was not an *overall* shift in results between the two research waves; the results indicated that the situation remained broadly static.

Looking forward, the careers sector – which includes, but is not wholly exclusive, to schools – should look to ensure that information channels to young people are available and easily accessible. While there is much information available online, it appears from the two waves that young people need help interpreting data to readily understand how such information can be used to assist in decision-making.

In particular young people need assistance in understanding their own skills and abilities and how these fit with jobs and careers of the future. That Māori school leavers were significantly less likely than NZ European students to believe that they had enough information about the range of jobs open to them is of concern.

Key influencers, e.g. career professionals and parents, have a key role to assist young people here. This is particularly the case for Māori students who are more likely to seek confirmation and support for their decisions from professionals or someone they trust.

This is also a challenge to Careers New Zealand to ensure that its information repositories are well-signposted and its support to influencers is well-targeted. Tools currently under development include an online learning module on skills to enhance self-awareness and improve the quality of career, work and learning choices.

A condensed version of the final CDMA report from 2010 is available from Careers New Zealand by contacting Matthew Freeland at [matthew.freeland@careers.govt.nz](mailto:matthew.freeland@careers.govt.nz).