Training for Unemployed People
Trainees' perspectives and government policies for the Training Opportunities Programme

Two-paper thesis for
Master of Education

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Training for Unemployed People: Trainees’ Perspectives and Government Policies for the Training Opportunities Programme

Abstract

This study aimed to compare and contrast government policy for the Training Opportunities Programme (TOP) with the perceptions and experiences of TOP trainees. The study identifies and critiques the key features of opportunity in training for the unemployed including 'skills training for employment', promotion of 'lifelong learning', and 'second chance learning'. It poses the question: "Is TOP training a place of opportunity or a 'collecting house for end of the line students'?"

Eighteen TOP trainees were surveyed over a six-month period to elicit their perceptions of opportunities, if any, in TOP. Four semi-structured interviews, which were tape recorded and transcribed, tracked the trainees' progress and career pathways on their vocational skills courses and beyond.

Features that were perceived as opportunities were the appeal of vocational skills, structure, routine, social interaction and a financial security, personal and vocational challenges, these factors increased confidence and self-esteem. Tutor and training centre networking with employers was the greatest single factor which aided people into employment. Trainees set and achieved a wide range of personal and vocational goals.
The study identified limitations in government policy for TOP when compared to the trainees experiences, and itemised barriers to the promotion of lifelong learning and opportunities for second chance learners. A considerable amount of positive personal and vocational trainee development was not identified in the conventional indicators of success used for reviewing courses.

The study goes on to suggest ways of building on current government policy to maximise opportunities for TOP participants and alternative measures for reporting course results to more accurately reflect the trainees progress on TOP courses.

There is minimal independent research into training the unemployed in a New Zealand context, ideas for further studies are suggested.
Overview

This research was prompted by my professional and personal interest in training programmes for the unemployed. As a manager, with five years experience of working with the unemployed I gained considerable knowledge of the trainees, their lives and experiences on the programme. However, because of the nature of my work there was insufficient time or opportunity to reflect in detail on this knowledge. Therefore, in this research I wanted to explore the issues of training from the trainees’ perspective, in particular their motivations for starting a course, how they felt about their own development in training and whether or not the course had any impact on their future choices in education and employment.

Training for the unemployed is marketed as ‘second chance learning’ for the most disadvantaged in society. As manager my role involved the application of government policy requirements for training the unemployed in the daily administration of the training centre. I was aware of a tension between the rhetoric of the Training Opportunities Programme (TOP) founding documents, which emphasised ‘second chance learning’, ‘lifelong learning’, ‘opportunity’ and flexible holistic training delivery and the reality whereby TOP operated within defined and specific government criteria. For example, entry to courses is restricted to very specific eligibility criteria; lifelong learning for courses emphasise credentialism and a strong labour market focus; and the success of courses is measured officially by the trainees’ gaining employment or moving onto further courses. All of this contrasts markedly with the stated rhetoric of government policy. This research provided time to critically evaluate TOP and clarify the contradictions between the opportunities and restrictions which shape the nature of TOP.
The research also provided an opportunity to seek out trainees’ perceptions of the value of TOP. The trainees’ needs and lives were interesting, complex and sometimes chaotic. There were examples of tremendous transformations in people’s lives and learning which were not recognised in the official results of the course. However, as a manager, I had observed a tendency to focus on cases of exceptional success or failure. This study provided an opportunity to follow the career pathways and opinions of a broad group of students over a six-month period.

Training for the unemployed has a low profile and little status in either mainstream education or employment circles a situation that may be partly as a result of constant government changes in title, entry criteria and conditions of training for the unemployed. These changes make the training schemes difficult to follow for anyone not closely associated with the programmes. However, I suspected that the invisibility of TOP was influenced by the targeted eligibility criteria which are based on the perceived disadvantages of TOP entrants. The entry criteria by their nature anticipated that the participants will have a variety of health, learning, social and motivational problems.

**The Research Question**

The research question I posed was this: Is TOP a place of opportunity or “a collecting house for end of the line” students? To investigate it I developed a research proposal that aimed to:
• Track trainees' progress and future career pathways for a six-month period from the time they entered their TOP courses.

• Seek out the trainees' opinions and perceptions of the advantages/opportunities, if any, of TOP training.

• Compare and contrast trainees' expressed opinions of a TOP programme with stated government policy for TOP.

• Improve knowledge of and suggest improvements for practice in the TOP environment based on the perceptions and opinions of TOP trainees.

I addressed these aims and reported on them by:

• overviewing of the areas of opportunity within the policy for TOP

• briefly explaining the historical, political and economic context of the programmes for training the unemployed

• critiquing the areas of opportunity and discussion of the tensions evident in each of the above areas

• The literature review focussed on the potential areas of opportunity and restrictions for TOP and equivalent client groups

• The findings section profiles the participants in this study by describing their background at the start of the courses, some of their experiences on the courses, their opinions of the advantages/opportunities in TOP and their career trajectories over a six-month period

• The discussion juxtaposes the trainees' experiences and opinions of opportunities within TOP against government policy for TOP. I was interested to seek out whether any
knowledge gained by tracking trainees within and beyond courses can be used to provide measures of success of the programmes.

- Finally, as TOP has had very little independent research I propose suggestions for areas of further research.
Chapter One

Opportunity and Government Policy for TOP

A picture of TOP training can be gained by considering:

- The features of ‘opportunity’ embedded in TOP.

- The historical, political and economic contexts of TOP, including an overview of TOP training.

- A critical review of the tensions within the themes of opportunity and their influence on the provision of training for the unemployed.

Features of Opportunity Embedded in TOP

As the name suggests, TOP is intended to provide opportunities for the unemployed. A brief overview of the features of opportunity within TOP from the government’s perspective follows:

1) TOP provides *skills training for employment* through lifeskills and vocation-specific courses, focussed on gaining employment or further training. The providers of TOP training offer short courses ranging from 8 to 26 weeks duration. The national average is 11 weeks per course (Ministry of Education, 1995). These courses include life skills and personal development, career guidance, vocational skills courses and work-based training courses. All except the work-based training courses are conducted on the premises of the training providers with visits to a variety of workplaces and the opportunity for work experience. Work-based training is conducted in the workplace and
overseen by a training provider. The work focus of these courses is emphasised by calling the participants ‘trainees’ rather than students.

2) TOP fosters and promotes *lifelong learning* for its participants by providing nationally recognised qualifications. Trainees are entitled to two years training once they enter a TOP programme or until they achieve a national diploma, whichever comes first.

3) As *second chance learning*, TOP is targeted at people considered usually to be non-participants in education. Trainees have to meet tightly prescribed eligibility criteria. The primary focus is on early school leavers and the long-term unemployed with no or low qualifications. TOP is the only form of free post-school education which entitles trainees to retain a social welfare benefit. Young people between the ages of 16 to 18 years are not entitled to receive an unemployment benefit. However, while on a training course they are entitled to a training benefit paid at the same rate as the unemployment benefit for the duration of the TOP course. All trainees receive a contribution towards their travel costs to and from the vocational training centre. This allowance is paid at the rate of the local bus fare or petrol mileage, with a trainee contribution of $5 per week.

**Historical, Political and Economic Context of TOP**

TOP is the most recent development in off-job training for the unemployed. Training schemes for the unemployed are funded from central government and therefore influenced by changes in government and policy. The timeline showing the recent history of training
programmes for the unemployed (see Table 1) provides a reference for significant influences on the development of training from 1978 to the introduction of TOP in 1993.

From 1978 to 1985 a variety of overlapping training schemes provided both off-job training and job creation schemes for the unemployed (Gordon, 1987). ACCESS and, subsequently, TOP marked the implementation of a nationwide scheme for off-job training for all age groups.

The period from 1984 to 1993 is popularly recognised as a period of revolution and upheaval in New Zealand’s political and economic history. In 1984 the newly elected Labour Government marked the start of the introduction of market-oriented monetarist policies. These policies were based on two fundamental principles; (i) the concept of the possessive individual where education was a private good; and (ii) the principle of competition and privatisation, where government takes itself out of or minimises provision of education (Lauder, 1987, 1990; Gordon, 1990 a, b). These two principles are evident for ACCESS and subsequently TOP, in the following practices and situations:

(i) Education is a private commodity

- Based on the premise that people are unemployed because they lack marketable skills.
Vocational and life skills acquisition through a series of short courses will enhance their employment prospects, (Appendix I provides the introduction to the ACCESS Charter).
Table 1: A recent history of training programmes for the unemployed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Report/Act</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Implications for TOP</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Training Assistance Programme, School Leaver Training and Preparation Programme, Adult Retraining Programme.</td>
<td>1978-1985</td>
<td>Variety of overlapping training programmes and job creation schemes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Government elected</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Move away from job creation schemes, supported training and retraining for the unemployed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Labour publishes Grey Booklet.</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Placement of young people on training schemes to acquire work and life skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS pilot programme.</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Foundations for single national training scheme for training the unemployed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation of New Zealand Qualifications Authority (formerly NEQA).</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Funding decisions moved from local representative control to a government agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Education and ACCESS Councils disestablished. Funding through Education and Training Support Agency.</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Increased emphasis on training and education for the unemployed. Separation of organisations working with the unemployed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for training moved from Ministry of Labour to Ministry of Education.</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Altered system of industry training. Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) to be formed and have input into the qualifications framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Training Act.</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOP introduced.</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Entry to ACCESS courses restricted to people who met specific disadvantage criteria. Entry was targeted at those considered to be most disadvantaged in the world of employment.

(ii) Based on the premise that competition ensures quality private training establishments (PTE) were encouraged to develop and run competing training programmes.

• Training providers tendered to run courses with funding allocated annually. Until 1990 funding was allocated through 21 Regional Employment and ACCESS Councils (REAC). The REACs included local business people, union representatives and members of the local community. They were disestablished in 1990, following the 1989 Audit Office Report, as they were not considered to be cost-effective. All purchasing decisions were then made by the Education and Training Support Agency (ETSA), which meant that decisions regarding the purchase of training courses moved from local body control to that of a government-funded agency.

• When an annual tender is agreed by a private training establishment, it is contracted under specific terms and conditions set out in a legal document. One of the conditions is called ‘positive outcomes’. A positive outcome is defined as a trainee moving on to employment or further training within a defined period of time after the completion of their TOP course. For government purposes, such conditions provide a source of accountability and an indicator of the success of programmes.

• TOP training is conducted by private training establishments which may be privately owned or run by non-profit organisations. Schools, polytechnics and workplaces can
also act as providers. At the time of this research there were 648 training providers nationwide, of which 522 were PTEs (Ministry of Education, 1995). Eighty-one percent of TOP training provision is based therefore within the private sector.

Another change which has influenced training for the unemployed was the shift in responsibility for training from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of Education in 1990, a move which thus emphasised the government's focus on training and education for the unemployed. However, provision of support for the unemployed is now divided between three ministries. Training programmes are placed with the Ministry of Education, the New Zealand Employment Service (NZES) under the Ministry of Labour and the Department of Social Welfare controls the social welfare benefits.

Soon after the election of the National Government, in 1991 the Ministries of Education and Employment jointly formulated and published an industry skills strategy. This strategy was reflected in the enactment of the Industry Skills Act 1992, which encouraged industry to lead the developments in training. The Act required the formation and government funding of Industry Training Organisations (ITO). The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), in partnership with the ITOs, started to develop a national standards-based qualifications framework linking all education, at all levels, across all fields of learning in New Zealand.

TOP was formulated in 1992, implemented from 1 January 1993, and marketed as a new initiative for training the unemployed. Information from ETSA and the Ministry of
Education heralded TOP as a change in direction for government policy. In practice there was a ‘grandparenting’ of ACCESS. TOP rolled over from the previous ACCESS training scheme, retaining many of the features of the ACCESS system, notably the private training establishments, the range of courses available and vocational skills training. Table 2 compares the features of ACCESS and TOP.

The transition from ACCESS to TOP took place in haste and without adequate preparation. Unlike ACCESS, TOP was implemented without the benefit of a pilot scheme to evaluate its effectiveness. The features which distinguished TOP from the previous ACCESS system were the name change; much simplified and more tightly targeted eligibility criteria for the unemployed; the Future Directions document (ETSA, 1993) which provided the vision for TOP training (note that this was not published until May 1993); the government policy that all training providers were to register and be accredited by NZQA; and the requirement that all courses offer unit standards from the National Qualifications Framework so as to ensure the provision of nationally recognised qualifications.

The instantaneous name change from ACCESS to TOP on 1 January 1993 in association with a lack of prominent advertising of the new system to potential trainees and employers meant that training providers lost many of their sources of recruitment of the unemployed. Much of the profile developed over the five years of ACCESS’s existence that could have benefited the profile of TOP disappeared. Government limited its promotion of the new scheme to the distribution of 100,000 leaflets to community agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureaus, doctors’ surgeries and community groups, according to Max Kerr,
National Manager of ETSA (letter to the author, 1 March 1993). Briefings were given to some of the agencies that had contact with the unemployed such as NZES and Quest (also known as the Careers Service). The government expected that, as private businesses the private training establishments had responsibility for marketing TOP. However, the majority of PTEs were (and still are) funded on a local level and so did not have the resources for a nationwide campaign. The changes in the programme title, the eligibility criteria and the lack of public profile, led to low course occupancy in early 1993 and meant that the most disadvantaged were not gaining access to the free training to which they were entitled.

Further changes in the eligibility criteria occurred from January to September 1993. Within a year the Prime Ministerial Task Force on Employment (1994) criticised the lack of formal evaluations for TOP and of the restricted eligibility criteria.

Privatisation enabled government policy to move swiftly. Large numbers of private training establishments were dealing directly with the government funding agency. With the demise of the REACs there were no community intermediaries to raise public awareness of the pending changes. As a result of the competitive nature of funding providers were not sufficiently united to oppose government changes for training the unemployed. Where training providers did group together to oppose the speed of change it could be considered that they had a vested financial interest in maintaining the status quo, as it was acknowledged that the TOP target group would have greater difficulty returning to the workforce.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Features of ACCESS</th>
<th>Features of TOP</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction of Programme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Introduction of Programme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduced at a time of rising unemployment.</td>
<td>Draft documents issued as unemployment peaked at 10.9% in 1992.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1985-1987 ACCESS pilot programme.</strong></td>
<td>No pilot programme instigated. January 1993 TOP superseded ACCESS. In practice providers and courses rolled over. Short period of grandparenting ACCESS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding</strong></td>
<td><strong>Funding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training courses for the unemployed run by private training organisations, funded from 1990 by ETSA. Providers tendered annually to continue running courses. Tenders were competitive.</td>
<td>Training organisations formally called PTEs. Funded by ETSA. Providers tender annually. After 1996 funding divided into contestable and negotiated four yearly cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providers income attached to targeted disadvantage factors for the unemployed. The least disadvantaged attracted 50% funding; the most disadvantaged attracted 120% funding.</td>
<td>PTEs required to be registered, accredited and offer unit standards from NZQA and the national framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eligibility Criteria</strong></td>
<td><strong>Eligibility Criteria</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted eleven categories of disadvantage criteria.</td>
<td>Targeted disadvantage criteria. These were initially simplified to recent school-leavers and long-term unemployed with no or low qualifications. In 1993 the eligibility criteria were extended to identify seven categories of disadvantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term vocational courses.</td>
<td>Short-term vocational courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses incorporate aspects of life skills (see ACCESS charter, Appendix I).</td>
<td>Courses incorporate ‘capability skills’ (see Future Directions document, ETSA 1993).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further Training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Further Training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Staircasing’ progress through courses intended to be linear, from lifeskills to basic vocational, to advanced vocational. Short-term training envisaged and demonstrated by individual disadvantage eligibility expiring after six months.</td>
<td>Career ‘pathways’ movement courses not necessarily linear. Up to two years eligibility to continue in training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mandatory to offer nationally recognised qualifications. This provider and others offered Pitmans, trade certificate and other such qualifications.</td>
<td>Mandatory to offer unit standards from levels 1-3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Outcomes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Positive Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of funding, in part, dependent on meeting contracted levels of positive outcomes, i.e., trainees moving into employment or further training. Results monitored by ETSA. For vocational courses a higher percentage of results allocated to employment.</td>
<td>Continue to be required and monitored by ETSA. Employment and further training weighted equally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Review of the Tensions Within the Themes of Opportunity

This section discusses the themes of opportunity, drawing on information available from ACCESS and TOP and that contained in government reports and critiques.

1) Skills training for employment:
ACCESS focused on improving job prospects for the unemployed by providing training and retraining in vocational skills. The aim was to aid re-entry to the workforce and to enhance future potential earnings (refer Appendix I). ETSAs Future Directions document (1993) went a step further by arguing that sustained national economic competitiveness depended on encouraging multi-skilled workers:

As we approach the 21st Century the pace of technological, social and economic change continues to accelerate. Remaining internationally competitive in this type of environment presents a major challenge to New Zealand.

In this environment the modern worker may well have to change direction many times in a working life. Successful industries and enterprises stress the need for a multi-skilled, adaptable workforce. This means giving people a core of skills that they can build on as required throughout their working lives.

New Zealand however is currently ill-equipped to meet the increasing demand for skilled workers. We are struggling to compete with many countries because our workforce is not sufficiently well-trained. (p6)

Future Directions does not itemise specific vocational skills because of the need to prepare people for possible future changes in employment. Future Directions also noted the importance of lifeskills and generic skills to enhance opportunities of gaining employment. Under ACCESS these skills had included functional literacy and numeracy, and the ability to co-operate with others. TOP saw them renamed ‘capability skills’. They included:
Literacy and numeracy. Self management (punctuality; dependability; responsibility; pride in work). Communication (write and speak concisely; listen actively; receive feedback). Social and cooperative (resolve conflict; negotiate; participate in group discussions). Decision making. Information collecting and analysing (recognise and define patterns). Planning, organising and problem solving (organise and prioritise work; think creatively). Use technology.
Application of mathematical ideas and techniques in practical contexts. (ETSA, 1993, p13)

From government perspective, then, people are unemployed because they lack marketable skills. If the unemployed gain skills which meet employers’ requirements, they enhance their opportunity of gaining employment. This assumption is supported by reports which survey employers (Callister, 1990; Banks & Scott, 1990) and other influential leaders in politics and education (McQueen, 1992). Callister (1990) for example, concluded that a return to full employment and a high income economy would be possible in New Zealand if individuals and the community upskilled in the directions for future development, namely communications, the service sector and computer technology.

Reports such as these support the notion that industry is upskilling and that New Zealand lags behind other OECD nations in terms of a qualified workforce. Gordon (1987, 1990a, b), however has pointed out that industry is deskilling rather than upskilling, while Tobias (1991) has demonstrated that New Zealand is not significantly behind other OECD nations in adult participation in education and raised the issue that people may be skilled without holding qualifications.

The response from employers to vocational training programmes provides an indication of whether the labour market focus is successful for TOP training. In Canterbury two separate
surveys, (Banks & Scott, 1990; Schoeffel & Warren, 1990) identified the qualities that employers sought in people. These were suitable work habits, good written and oral communication, and good grooming and appearance. Dominick (1992) found that the following factors increased an individual’s chances of gaining or keeping employment:

- attendance at work based or vocational training;
- active job seeking behaviour;
- previous work experience;
- higher levels of education;
- European ethnicity. (p.1).

These qualities would suggest that employers also seek attributes of cultural capital as well as work skills when looking for potential workers. The most disadvantaged in society, at whom TOP is targeted, are less likely to present with strengths in these areas. Moreover, for people considered to be the most disadvantaged - long-term unemployed, with little work experience, without qualifications and Maori, Dominick (1992) research suggests that short courses are insufficient to improve their labour market prospects.

Two reports which solicited the responses of employers with regard to vocational skills training received low response rates (Ministry of Education, 1995; Schoeffel & Warren, 1990), indicating that such programmes are not priorities for employers. The Ministry’s report found that of the employers who did respond, only half were familiar with the vocational focus of TOP, even if they had employed a TOP trainee or provided work-based training or work experience. Some employers had not considered using TOP for recruitment, and some did not think that such programmes would have the type of person who could fulfil their needs. These findings suggest that as well as a lack of knowledge in the employment community there is also a prejudice and stereotyping of such programmes. The lack of awareness among employers about the vocational nature of training
programmes, even if they had actually employed TOP trainees, highlights the invisibility of such programmes in the wider employment community.

Future Directions (ETSA, 1993) emphasised that training delivery should be personalised to allow individual training pathways. It argued that tutors should become facilitators of learning and allow for flexible training delivery. The principles of self-directed learning are evident in the document, with training needs identified as holistic, student-centred, flexible and responsive, and as such requiring the use of alternative teaching methods to those of the traditional education system. All of these are valuable educational practices, and many of them were already in place under ACCESS.

However, while individual training providers may work to meet the individual needs of trainees, the conditions placed on providers mitigate against flexibility. Courses are within vocational skills topics, are full time, for a specific period of time, and providers are paid on attendance. Providers are financially penalised if trainees leave before the end of a course. At the time of this study it was not possible for a trainee to select a menu of modules from different courses. I could find no evidence to show that trainees were consulted in the preparation of the Future Directions document. However, from the outline of capability skills, it is clear that the document was based on the requirements of employers.

2) **Lifelong Learning:**

The Future Directions document emphasised the growth and development of a learning culture and lifelong learning.
When people leave school we want them to be thinking about training as their next likely step, we need employees who regularly look for training and retraining opportunities throughout their working lives; and we need enterprises which contribute to skill development as naturally as they invest in plant and raw materials. (ETSA 1993, p7)

The learning culture and lifelong learning emphasis of Future Directions were to be fostered through the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework with training providers expected to offer training at levels 1-3. The seamless education system promoted by the Minister and Ministry of Education at the time of TOPs inception aimed to hook trainees onto qualifications during the period of TOP training so that they could continue building on these base qualifications throughout their working lives. This aim was the first attempt to ensure that the national system for training the unemployed offered recognised qualifications. In principle this could have been an opportunity for the unemployed. However, the National Qualifications Framework unit standards were not yet available, and their ensuing development over the following years was ad hoc. At the time of writing, unit standards were not available in full for the courses researched in this study. Some training providers already offered a range of Pitmans and trade certificate qualifications. This was the case for the training provider used in this study. In the absence of unit standards these qualifications continued to be offered. For TOP, lifelong learning clearly had a labour market focus and emphasised vocational and lifeskills credentials.

The extension of training provision for people entitled to TOP training offered a practical method of encouraging lifelong learning. Under ACCESS, further training had been called 'staircasing'. As the name implied training was seen as a linear progression, with trainees
moving from lifeskills courses onto more vocational specific and advanced courses. Ferguson and Miller’s (1993) research on staircasing found that, in reality, only a small number of trainees moved onto advanced training. They concluded that the system of targeted funding for ACCESS trainees which expired after six months in training, plus the lack of independent guidance services and the competitive environment for providers created by the tendering process worked against the progression of trainees on to further courses. TOP eliminated staircasing and replaced it with career ‘pathways’. As noted earlier trainees have a two-year training entitlement in TOP and courses do not necessarily follow a linear progression.

The enhancement of lifelong learning requires an integration between training for the unemployed and other forms of educational provision. Gordon (1990a) argued that to improve opportunity, training for employment should have the same status as universities and polytechnic education. McGivney (1990) identified that finances targeted at special needs groups provided opportunity but also maintained marginalisation of that group.

3) ‘Second Chance Learning’: Entry Criteria for TOP Trainees

Training for the unemployed is promoted as an opportunity for the unemployed. However, entry to courses is restricted by selective eligibility criteria. This situation is known in the industry as ‘targeting disadvantage’. In 1988, under ACCESS, eleven targeting factors were linked to perceived disadvantage:

No formal school qualifications or less than three years at secondary school; Left school within the last 6 months with no formal school qualifications; Literacy or language problem; Maori or Pacific Islander; Single or widowed parent; Women in non traditional occupation; Registered as unemployed for 4 weeks; Registered as unemployed for 8 consecutive weeks or registered as unemployed for 13 out of the last 21 weeks... (REAC Charter, 1988. section 8).
Some of these target factors were altered over time. In 1990 for example, the disadvantage point based on Maori or Pacific Islander ethnicity was removed.

With the introduction of TOP, new eligibility criteria aimed to simplify and streamline the definition of disadvantage came into being. These criteria specifically targeted the long-term unemployed who had been registered with the New Zealand Employment Service for a continuous period of 26 weeks and who had two or fewer School Certificate subject passes. School leavers with low qualifications were entitled to join the scheme provided they waited for a four month period after leaving school, known as a 'stand down'. The intention of the stand down was to encourage school leavers to find alternatives to TOP courses, namely job seeking, fee paying alternatives to education or returning to school.

The highly restrictive eligibility criteria saw many disadvantaged groups in society turned away. These included people on the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), people with disabilities, school leavers aged 18 to 19 years with low qualifications, and long-term unemployed who had accepted seasonal work and ceased to have continuous registration with NZES.

During 1993 regular changes were made to the eligibility criteria. Training providers were informed from the Ministry of Education through ETSA. By 1 September 1993 the eligibility criteria were as follows:

Either
  aged 18 or under with low qualifications
  or
aged 18 or 19 with low qualifications and have left school within the last 6 months or registered with the NZES as an unemployed job seeker for at least 26 out of the last 39 weeks and either have low qualifications or have been referred to a course by NZES after an in-depth interview or registered with Workbridge as an active job seeker and have been referred to a course by Workbridge after an in depth interview. (Workbridge clients are no longer required to be registered with NZES)

...Low qualifications means no more than two School Certificate passes.

Additional places ... Some places are available to people registered as unemployed job seekers ... who have more than two School Certificate passes but whose highest qualification is below a degree or diploma level.

... Some places are available to people who have received the Domestic Purposes or Widows’ Benefit for at least four year and who also meet the low qualifications criteria. People don’t need to be registered with NZES to qualify under this category.

The four month stand down for school leavers was also removed in 1993 as it had been a disincentive to further training (Skills Development for Work Newsletter, ETSA, 1993; No 18, p1-2)

Essentially seven categories of disadvantage were identified within the first year of TOPs operation. The entry criteria above were in place in at the time I undertook this study (1995). Anomalies within these definitions for disadvantage are apparent. For example, people on the DPB had to be registered for a continuous period of four years and had to provide proof of that registration from Income Support. The average period of time that most individuals spend on the DPB is two and a half years (personal communication, Income Support, in the Welfare to Well Being meeting, 1995). Many people then attempt to return to work and may return to the DPB after a period of time. A continuous period of registration is therefore unusual for many DPB clients, and so disadvantaged them under the
entry criteria for TOP. DPB candidates with more than two School Certificate passes or young school leavers with 3 school certificate passes were similarly disadvantaged.

Changes have been made to the entry criteria during the time of this research. From 1 April 1996 students with more than two School Certificate passes become ineligible for TOP. However, refugees, people on the DPB for one year, and released prisoners are now eligible. These changes demonstrate the arbitrariness of defining the boundaries of the 'most disadvantaged' in society. Probably, no matter how the criteria are drawn up they will exclude significant groups of disadvantaged people.

Targeting the most disadvantaged is as the Audit Office (1989) put it, "conceptually attractive" because the practice suggests equity and opportunity for people at the bottom of the social ladder. However, targeting disadvantage has a financial motive. The eligibility criteria worked as a gatekeeper of the only free post-school education available, effectively keeping people out and costs down. In the years from ACCESS to TOP, the trends for unemployment rose. By 1990 unemployment was 6.9 percent. It peaked at 10.9 percent in 1992 when TOP was being formulated. However, despite the increase in unemployment, the provision of training places actually decreased. In 1989 ACCESS trained approximately 16,000 people (Audit Report, 1989), by 1995 TOP trained 15,500 people (Ministry of Education 1995).

To look at the situation a little differently, TOP entry criteria provides a mechanism for exerting pressure on training providers to seek out the long-term unemployed and those
who have left school without qualifications. To be eligible for training, applicants have to provide evidence that they meet the targeted entry criteria. Candidates need to provide school-leaving certificates, and proof from NZES of registration or any of the eligibility criteria. Potential trainees also have to provide proof of a negative situation; that they do not have more than two School Certificate qualifications. This evidence usually can be gained by making a statement in front of a Justice of the Peace. To be eligible trainees must emphasise their past failures before they can enter the programme.

In 1989 the Audit Office report identified anomalies in the ACCESS system of targeting disadvantage criteria. The first of these was that

a [training] providers’ success and possible future involvement is judged on the number of jobs trainees get. Yet [training] providers are asked to train the most disadvantaged at gaining employment. (p12).

The report also criticised the weighted disadvantage points under ACCESS and considered that training providers would wish to select people with the motivation to gain employment. This report reframed the notion of disadvantage to include a lack of motivation, and/or work and work experience; the presence of physical and mental disability; prejudice on the basis of race, personal history, or age; recent events such as redundancy; release from prison; sickness or drug dependency.

**Conclusion**

Therefore the tensions and contradictions evident in TOP arise from:
- **Marketing the scheme as ‘new’**: In practice much of the programme was a continuation of ACCESS, the former vocational training programme.

- **Offering ‘skills training for employment’**: While this offer provides an opportunity for new learning, it is based on the premise that the individual lacks marketable skills. If training is provided which meets the employers’ demands, the individual has a greater opportunity for employment. However, TOP courses remain invisible to employers. Research shows that few employers are aware of their vocational work; employers seek qualities from cultural capital rather than training; and prejudice and stereotyping hinder opportunities with employers.

- **Promoting ‘lifelong learning’**: This is an excellent ideal, especially in its aim of extending the period people could have in training. However, it falls within the restrictive confines of credentialism and has suffered from being tied to the National Qualifications Framework, which was only evolving at the time TOP came into operation.

- **Offering ‘second chance learning’**: This offer presents the opportunity for free education alongside a social welfare benefit for the most disadvantaged in society. However, the eligibility criteria are used as a financial gatekeeper to restrict the number of people eligible for this sole form of free education available to adults.

- **Intending the training to be flexible**: Certainly, this allows for individual differences and provides holistic delivery of training, yet providers have to operate within short course boundaries, full attendance is required and providers are penalised if trainees leave courses early.
• *Having positive outcomes:* that are within narrow confines of employment or further training.

The provision of training for the unemployed can offer many benefits to people. This section has critically reviewed the notion of opportunity within government policy and found a number of limiting factors. This study aims to compare government policy for TOP with the trainees’ needs and perceptions of opportunity.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This literature review draws on government and independent reports for both ACCESS and TOP, and on overseas studies of equivalent client groups. This section provides an outline of government-sponsored reports on TOP, and a snapshot of TOP trainees and their trainees’ perceptions of the opportunities within the courses. It then goes on to at this client group against such variables as, compensation for work practices, personal goals and potential barriers.

Government Sponsored Studies

Government-sponsored studies provide the most comprehensive body of research into training for the unemployed in New Zealand: These include those conducted by the Audit Office (1989), Dominick (1992), ETSA Review (1995), and the Ministry of Education (1995). The first two reports were commissioned at a time of rising unemployment, of criticism that positive outcomes (that is trainees moving into employment and further training), were low and of concerns about the cost-effectiveness of training the unemployed.

The Audit Office obtained data from 225 trainees on 99 courses across the country. Almost all of these people stated that they were satisfied with the:

... course level and content, trainers’ ability to train, knowledge or skills gained, and opportunities (M)ACCESS presented (p2)
However, the main thrust of this report was the effectiveness and efficiency of such courses from the perspective of a nationally standardised programme. The report concluded that there was limited identification of differing skill levels and individual training needs. It also criticised the way that ACCESS programmes targeted disadvantage. Despite these contentions no changes to the eligibility criteria followed.

Dominick (1992) tracked the employment results of ACCESS trainees three and six months after the conclusion of their courses. Approximately 500 ACCESS candidates from the Waikato/Thames area and Canterbury responded. The study aimed to compare ACCESS trainees with people on the Job Seeker Register (JSR) and the Job Opportunities Scheme (JOS), both supervised by NZES. JSR candidates receive no assistance for job seeking; JOS candidates were placed in subsidised employment. The report found that ACCESS trainees were more likely to gain employment than JSR clients. The report also identified that because of differences between the programmes and participants for JOS and ACCESS that a comparison was difficult. JOS candidates were considered ‘work ready’ whereas ACCESS candidates had a number of disadvantage factors for employment. The research concluded that the ACCESS programmes were effective in improving the labour market prospects of individuals.

Specifically the trainees found employment as a result of contact with their tutors and training providers who networked with employers after the course finished.

Overall 26% of trainees who obtained employment during the follow up period found out about the job from an ACCESS tutor or training provider.” (Dominick, 1992; p63)
In addition to looking at the labour market prospects Dominick briefly sought information from trainees about additional benefits. She found that trainees were motivated by job seeking or gaining new skills and 62 percent of the trainees reported that participation in training:

made it easier or helped them in getting along with people. (1992, p68)

Over 40 percent said that participation on ACCESS courses had made everyday living easier for example, in terms of budgeting and form filling. Three to six months after the courses were completed, over 80 percent of the trainees reported that they had used the skills learnt in some way, either in employment or on going training.

The Ministry of Education (1995) evaluation of TOP was prompted by the criticism from the Prime Ministerial Task Force on Employment (1994a,b). The researchers interviewed 748 current and former TOP trainees. They found that trainees’ goals were consistent with the goals of TOP, that is to upskill, to gain education and training and to get a job. For these trainees a job had lesser priority than gaining skills. This is the reverse of the findings from Dominick (1992) and ETSA (1995). The majority of TOP trainees considered that TOP improved their work skills and increased their confidence and self-esteem. But they also highlighted ongoing difficulties, such as lack of qualifications and insufficient work experience. Furthermore, they identified problems that limited their ability to attend the courses, such as transport and health. Trainees on the DPB reported a greater degree of family and child care related problems then other groups. Maori women aged 20-30 years were the group most represented amongst those identifying problems associated with attendance. The research did not seek out reasons for these problems. Although focused
largely on the indicators of positive outcomes the research provided some feedback from
the trainees' perceptions.

The ability for the trainees to work at their own pace, and to receive one-to-one
tutoring were also important for successful outcomes... Nearly all trainees thought
that TOP could be improved by offering nationally recognised qualifications,
having more work experience and more work-based training options. (1995; 5)

For each of these three reports the priorities are the results of TOP and ACCESS courses,
and matching these outcomes with government policy for the training programmes. The full
potential range of trainees’ experiences and opinions are not evident in these reports.
However, it is clear that training courses are successful in improving the labour market
outcomes of the unemployed.

Laurensen (1989), in a smaller-scale independent study, researched 47 ACCESS trainees
ten to twelve months after they had completed their vocational skills training. Her research
looked at the relationship between the disadvantage criteria and the labour market outcomes
of the ACCESS participants. She found that regardless of disadvantage criteria one year
after the course 30 percent of any one disadvantage category would still be unemployed,
and 70 percent would find employment or further training. She also questioned the validity
of the outcomes reported to ETSA and found that the results were restrictive, and not
representative of the value that the trainees gained in their courses.

**Snapshot of TOP Trainees**

When I began this study there was only one ETSA Review (1995) of TOP. Conducted by
ETSA staff across five regions, the study involved interviews with trainees, training
providers and ETSA staff. The trainees and training providers were aware that the
interviews were conducted by the funding agency, and as a consequence they may have
been circumspect about some of their responses. Its purpose was to provide a ‘snapshot’ of
training providers and trainees at a time of educational change in employment training.
Nevertheless, the Review offered valuable descriptive detail about the trainees and their
lives. The researchers reported that trainees’ reasons for participation in TOP were to:

help them get a job; develop skills which will help them to get a job; be the only
way they can get the specific training they need to qualify for a particular job; ‘Be
not a bad place to spend time, and maybe learn something useful.’ Most indicated
that the learning environment and the social interactions available are positive
features of Training Opportunities (p7).

The trainees described themselves as keen to gain skills and seek employment. Participation
in TOP was considered to be more enjoyable than school for all age groups of TOP
trainees. The older trainees reported a greater need for vocational courses and skills,
however they did not consider that they needed as much of the lifeskills training and content
as the younger trainees.

The ETSA Review also indicated that many of the trainees’ came from disadvantaged
backgrounds and/or life experiences. They tended to be

young, often recent school leavers with no experience of the reality of the
workplace. In addition to limited qualifications this group lacked social and
capability skills. Many were described as having significant problems in their
backgrounds, such as drug or alcohol abuse, a history of physical and/or sexual
abuse, housing or health problems or criminal activity... the low self esteem and
past disappointments acted as a barrier to new and positive challenges (pp5,9).
On the positive side however, the respondents reported benefits in being able to learn at their own pace, being treated as an adult and being part of a team. They also noted the value of social interaction in the group.

Training Opportunities trainees are likely to benefit from group work more than the usual adult learner, for a number of reasons. The need for affirmation and development of social skills as a basis for cooperation and support in the workplace was considered important. Replicating workplace discipline, practice and habits was accepted by trainees as preferable to rules. (p13)

**Trainees' Perceptions of Opportunity**

**Vocational Skills and Personal Goals as Reasons for Participation**

Upskilling, practical and vocational reasons are amongst the most usually reported motives for participation in training from TOP and TOP-equivalent clients (Caswell, 1993; Cocklin, 1993; Cocklin & Walther, 1994a,b; Holmes & Storrie 1985; McGiveny 1990, 1992).

McGivern’s (1990) study, for example, found that the unskilled, the unemployed and ethnic minorities expressed a desire for practical programmes and vocational courses. However, Holmes and Storrie (1985) suggested from their Adult Basic Education Programme based in an area of high unemployment that unemployed, unskilled or semi-skilled workers initially give vocational reasons for participation as socially acceptable reasons for involvement in education. However, over time vocational reasons give way to other personal goals in education (Holmes & Storrie, 1985; McGiveny, 1990).

McGivern’s (1990) researchers sent out 70 anonymous questionnaires to qualifications based or specifically occupational courses and found that less than 25 percent of the
respondents stated instrumental aims. Fifty percent stated that they participated for pleasure. Cocklin’s (1993) and Cocklin & Walther’s (1994a,b) reports into adults returning to school also found that while credentials were expressed as the main reason for returning to school, a wide range of individualised reasons emerged during the research, with personal goals of at least equal importance to the student. Caswell (1993) found that the students who continued with their literacy education and reported a large perceived improvement in their literacy skills also reported increased self-confidence. Initially these students did not admit to feelings of low confidence, but later admitted that there were other problems. Each of the studies just cited interviewed the respondents more than once.

Further studies which interviewed TOP and equivalent groups also found that in adult education many such clients do not consider that there is a difference between vocational and non vocational courses. (Benseman, 1989; McGiveny 1992).

An unpublished work by Taylor (1994) based on individual interviews with women TOP trainees found that they were highly motivated as learners, they had participated in organised learning activities as well as self directed learning projects.

**Compensation for Work Practices**

Involvement in training can provide a means of maintaining a structure and order to an unemployed person’s day in a manner which is socially acceptable. Tuckett (1995) citing a study by Watts and Knasel (1985) observed that:

- education and training can help considerably in the re-integration of unemployed people by providing:
  - a time structure for their day
• regularly shared experiences and contacts with people outside the nuclear family
• links to wider goals and structures
• a new status and identity (that of the ‘learner’ which while it may not be seen as a full substitute for that of ‘worker’ may non-the-less be preferable to the essentially negative status of ‘unemployed’
• a stimulus to activity.

(p11)

Gooderham Reference group theory (1993) is a conceptual framework from the observation of adults with low levels of schooling entering higher school education in Norway. This theory suggested that for unskilled and semi-skilled unemployed adults who may not ordinarily participate in organised adult education the need for social mobility will encourage participation. He considers that this is particularly so at times of high unemployment, movement in and out of jobs is restricted and competitive. People use adult basic education as an alternative channel of social mobility (Gooderham, 1993).

Courtney’s (1992) theory of social participation supports Gooderham’s ideas. Courtney sees participation not as an isolated act but as a:

... social act embedded in a matrix of other social actions, the majority of which are habitual and routine and few of which arise above other others and are in some respects out of the ordinary. (p94)

This research is particularly interesting in its reframing of the notion of barriers and opportunities to adult education into a focus on the voluntariness of participation. Courtney argued that adults returning to adult learning are often do so because of the pressures of the employment market, the need to be competitive and the need to interact with other groups. According to Courtney the need to conform is a compulsion in itself which reduces the voluntary nature of participation (Courtney, 1992).
Babchuk and Courtney build on this premise by observing that an important factor in an adult's decision to participate in formalised learning programmes is the influence of the such primary or influential groups as the immediate family, friends and co-workers, and of secondary group or influentials, such as the church and community leaders.

**Potential Barriers Faced by TOP and Equivalent Students**

McGiveny (1992), in her review of British and European literature on what motivates unemployed adults to enter further education, points to such barriers as inappropriate training responses to unemployment and schemes designed according to external needs and criteria, for example, those governed by the participating institutions. There were cases of insufficient help for the unemployed with a low level of schooling to participate in the training and discriminatory selection procedures where the less competent trainees were screened out. She cites an example of young trainees participating in a six-month scheme which did not result in employment and disadvantaged the young participants and provided a negative signal for employers. There were also instances of separate goals and aims between education sectors. In reference to the last point, McGiveny provided an example of a Scandinavian study which found that long-term unemployed people were suspicious of 'creative' work, preferring 'useful and necessary skills'.

People who have a reduced amount of communal involvement tend to become more reliant on secondary, community and government agency advisers to provide them with information about the opportunities available to them. McGiveny (1992) found that educational providers, employment services and social security officers in the United
Kingdom provided inadequate or inaccurate information and had little liaison regarding the educational opportunities available.

A more substantial body of research is available from the perspective of labour market results, in particular the number of trainees moving into employment or further training, and the factors that may help or hinder that progression. However, with the exceptions of Caswell (1993), Cocklin (1993), Cocklin and Walther (1994a,b) and Taylor (1994) I could no recent research available in a New Zealand context which follows trainees during their learning experience. This study followed the trainees during and after their TOP course to track the conventional means of success through further training or employment and to identify sources of opportunity and restrictions from their perspective.
Chapter Three

Method

Rationale for Semi Structured Interviews as the Chief Source of Data Collection
My main source of data came from semi-structured face-to-face interviews. My aim was to focus on the trainees’ perceptions of the potential opportunities and restrictions in TOP. I wanted to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the trainees’ thoughts, feelings and experiences, over a period of time.

TOP trainees are often transient. The Ministry of Education (1995) interviews found that they could contact only 37 percent of the trainees initially identified to take part in the research and concluded that this was one of the difficulties of working with a highly mobile population. I hoped that with regular contact a rapport would develop and that this small study would retain a high percentage of the participants.

Part of the eligibility criteria for entry to TOP is based on no or low qualification levels. Moreover the capability skills include the need for literacy support. A written form of data collection would have been impractical and would have discouraged trainee participation.

Selection of Participants
I asked trainees in four TOP vocational skills courses if they would participate in the research. All of the trainees willing to participate were accepted for the study. Trainees were not selected according to age or the eligibility criteria they met. Initially, there were
21 volunteers, but three of them left the centre within the first week of this research. All three were male participants over 20 years of age. The remaining 18 trainees participated in a minimum of two interviews each. Fourteen of these participants took part in all four interviews.

I timed the research to fit in with the start of new courses at the training centre, which limited the participants to the courses which started in the period April to June 1995. These were courses in the clerical, sales and service sectors. Vocational courses based on trades were not available at this starting time.

**Procedure**

This study was conducted over a six month period and was based on a series of semi-structured interviews tape recorded interviews. The interviews took place from April to December 1995. All of the trainees began training between April and June 1995.

I interviewed 12 of the 18 volunteers individually in a private one on one setting in the training centre. The interviews took approximately 30 - 40 minutes each. The remaining six trainees (all from one skills course) volunteered to be interviewed together. These interviews were approximately one hour long.

I was interested to see if there was an overall difference in the responses between the students involved in the one-on-one interviews and those in the group interview. As a manager of a training centre I have often observed that the trainees benefit most from group
affiliation, that they become a team quickly and form friendships at least for the time in the training centre. The group interview provided an opportunity to observe the group dynamics in place when the trainees were asked very similar questions.

Interviews were informal and conversational in style. With one exception, all of the interviews took place in the training centre in a private setting. Individual interviews were conducted in an office available at the centre, while the group interviews took place in the training room. In each case the environment was sparse with suitable tables, chairs and heating and natural light.

The series of four individual and group interviews took place

1. at the trainees point of entry onto their skills course
2. at the half-way point on their training course
3. at the end of their course of study
4. three months after they had left the course.

The trainees gave me permission to use statistical data from their TOP enrolment forms. This gave me access to information including their past TOP history and eligibility criteria for entry to the course.

**Interview questions**

I intended the interview questions to be open ended and so that the participants could control of the direction of the interview. The interview guides were structured around the
trainees' goals and aspirations. I wanted to elicit the trainees' ideas about skills training for employment, lifelong learning and second chance learning, as well as their purpose for participating on skills courses and their perceptions of what they might or later had.

I made no direct reference was made to government policy in the first two interviews, as I wanted to find out if the trainees knew anything about government policy for skills training and to see if they would raise these issues.

Copies of the introductory letter, consent form and question guides used in the interviews are provided in Appendix II. A brief synopsis of each of the interview guides follows:

**Interview one** aimed to encourage the trainees to talk about their own previous experiences of employment, unemployment and experiences as learners; to seek out the extent of their knowledge of TOP training and reasons for joining the course at this point in their lives; and to focus on their goals and aspirations for the future.

**Interview two** sought information on the trainees' progress both in skills training and personally, and focused on whether their goals or aspirations had changed during the course; their opinions and needs in skills training; their relationships with other trainees in the training centre; and their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the TOP courses.
Interview three continued to review the trainees' goals and aspirations; their opinions on their progress to date in developing vocational skills and in personal development; their relationships with other trainees; whether they had felt like giving up on the course; their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of TOP training. and included the question "If they were the Minister of Education what would they do about TOP courses"

Interview four encouraged reflection on the trainees' time on the TOP course; asked about their original motivation for joining the TOP course; asked them to reflect on what impact, if any, TOP had on their current circumstances; and sought their suggestions for improvement on the courses.

There was a three month period between interviews 3 and 4. In this time the trainees had little contact with me. Initially, to allow preparation for the final interview, I sent the first five trainees to be interviewed a letter outlining the questions that would be asked, to allow them time to consider their responses. However, rather than aiding the conversation the letter appeared to limit the conversation with three of the respondents. One trainee who had spoken freely in the earlier interviews became quite stilted in her responses and answered pre-prepared questions only, which made any further discussion or elaboration difficult. Another commented:

Words, words, words! Why didn't you just phone and say I want a chat, that would have been much better.

After this experience I decided not to use the letter again and instead phoned the participants to check when they would be available for the interview.
I experienced difficulties bringing together the six trainees who had been interviewed as a group. It was impossible to coordinate six adults with different work, training and home commitments. After two cancelled meetings for the group interview, the trainees asked to be interviewed separately, I conducted some of these final interviews were conducted on the telephone.

I tape recorded all interviews with the trainees’ permission and then transcribed the recordings. The transcribed interviews were analysed chronologically to gain a snapshot of the trainees at different stages in their course development and three months after the course had concluded. It enabled the researcher to follow the trainees’ learning journey. I also analysed some responses across interviews, especially given that as trainees became more relaxed with me their responses became more personal and informative.

**Role of the Researcher**

As manager of the training centre at which the study took place I was placed in the position of insider researcher. I was also the direct supervisor of each of the tutors for the courses. Individual and group interviews with the trainees without the tutors present could be construed as ‘looking over their shoulder’ with the tutors feeling that their work was being inspected or alternatively pay particular attention to the interviewed trainees. However, the tutors generally had a good working relationship with myself as the manager and with one another. Furthermore they had been with the training centre for a considerable period of time and were not nervous at this time about the possibility of losing courses in annual
tenders. Also, they had been involved with me in previous research for my Master of Education programme. I asked all tutors for their permission to seek volunteers from their groups. I also made clear to them that any participation in this research would not require extra work from them and that the trainees were the focus of the study. The tutors were supportive of the research and were interested to in gaining knowledge of TOP training from the trainees’ perspective. All tutors agreed that any trainee who wished to participate could do so.

The deliberately limited my data collection to enrolment details and tape recorded interviews. I decided against training room observations of the volunteer trainees to avoid the risk of both trainees and tutors feeling that I was testing their work.

My position of insider researcher could also have led to the trainees to volunteer in the participate in the research to because they had a more personal agenda and wanted time with the manager of the centre. However from April to December 1995 I was on maternity leave from the position as manager. The participants in the study were new entrants to the training centre and had not been present when I worked as the manager of the centre. In the course of this study the researcher accepted employment elsewhere and did not return to full-time work at the TOP centre.
Chapter Four

Findings

A main aim of my study was to allow the participants and their stories to speak for themselves. This chapter is therefore made up of two sections:

- Details on the participants, including statistical and biographical information.
- A description of tracking the trainees’ learning journey in four sections; focussing on their background and prior experience, their perceptions of opportunity, their perceptions of learning and their career pathways.

The Participants - a general profile

Table 3 provides a comparison of the trainees in this study with the profile for TOP trainees obtained through personal communication from ETSA 1995 in the Canterbury region and taken from the Ministry of Education national profile of trainees (Ministry of Education 1995).

The 18 participants in this study were comprised of eleven female and seven male trainees. This study had a higher proportional representation of female participants than the Canterbury or national statistics demonstrate.

The information on the trainees’ enrolment forms showed that 13 of the trainees in the study were of European/Pakeha ethnicity, three were Maori and two had elected not to nominate their ethnicity. The balance of Maori and Pakeha ethnic mix is roughly
compatible with the Canterbury statistics. However it is important to note that Pacific Island trainees are not represented in this study, and there are no male Maori respondents (see Table 4). The courses represented in this study are in the clerical, computer, sales and service sectors, which may have a bearing on the ethnic groups attracted to the courses.

In the Canterbury and nationwide statistics trainees under the age of 20 years constitute the highest percentage of trainees on TOP. The respondents in my study were more evenly distributed across the age ranges. Seven trainees were under 20 years of age; whilst the remaining 11 trainees spanned 21 to 53 years of age. The 20 plus age range was more heavily represented in this study than in the Canterbury and the national profiles (refer Table 3).

The participants in the study represented the range of disadvantage entry criteria available for TOP entry in 1995, with the exception of the trainees with refugee status. Table 4 shows that 39 percent of these participants were Workbridge referrals. The Canterbury statistics for Workbridge referrals to TOP courses was only 8 percent. My study therefore has a higher representation of people in the process of rehabilitation associated with permanent injury or illness which had affected their working lives.

More respondents in this study had low qualifications than in the Canterbury or national statistics. Two of the respondents in the study were educated to higher than School Certificate level. These trainees entered TOP through the ‘15 percent’ rule which
Table 3: Comparison of the participants in the study with the Canterbury and national profiles of TOP trainees.

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<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low qualifications:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 School Cert.</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous experience of TOP:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first course</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two courses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three courses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four or more courses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further training</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

(a) Canterbury statistics available on total placements from the Christchurch ETSA 1 April 1995 to 31 December 1995 (personal communication, Gill Taylor, Regional Adviser Programmes, ETSA, March 1996).


(c) Two trainees did not note ethnicity on their enrolment forms.
enabled training providers to take on a limited number of trainees who have a higher level of education but do not have a degree or national qualification.

The study also has a greater percentage of first-time course entrants amongst its participants than was evident in the Canterbury or the national statistics. Table 4 provides a descriptive profile of the participants and their history at the time of enrolment on the course.

Six of the trainees were recent school leavers while the remainder had experienced a period of unemployment, the shortest being six months and the longest five years unemployment. One third of the respondents had been unemployed for two years or more.

**Specific Descriptions - biographical details**

**Who participated in TOP?**

On the basis of information obtained from the enrolment forms and the interviews I was able to group the trainees under six descriptive categories, drawn from common features in the trainees backgrounds, such as at risk factors including drugs and alcohol abuse, school histories, health and work history or lack thereof. I was interested to see if TOP presented more opportunities or restrictions to any one particular grouping. These categories are more detailed than the eligibility criteria noted in Table 4.
Table 4: Study participants - descriptive summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SL Leaving Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Quals.</th>
<th>Eligibility</th>
<th>TOP History</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>2SC</td>
<td>SL16/17</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>2SC</td>
<td>WBR</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>SL16/17</td>
<td>Course 2</td>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>SL16/17</td>
<td>Course 4</td>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>not noted</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>WBR</td>
<td>Course 3</td>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Aneta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>SL16/17</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>School leaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>NZES</td>
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<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>NZES</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Maori</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>NZES</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>HSC</td>
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<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>WBR</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>8 Months (ACC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>WBR</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 year (ACC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>WBR</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 year (ACC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marg</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>DPB</td>
<td>Course 2</td>
<td>DPB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cath</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>DPB</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>DPB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>2SC</td>
<td>NZES</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>WBR</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>WBR</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

**Eligibility Abbreviations**
- SL16/17: School leaver aged 16/17 years of age
- WBR: Workbridge referral, students entered course as a result of injury or disability
- NZES: New Zealand Employment Service referral, students entered course with unemployment registration of 26 out the previous 39 weeks
- DPB: Domestic Purposes Benefit, students entered with 4 years registration on the DPB

**Qualifications Abbreviations**
- SC: School Certificate passes
- HSC: Higher School Certificate passes

# All names are pseudonyms.
An analysis framed by the eligibility criteria alone would make it more difficult to draw generalisations about the trainees. Some have multiple disadvantage based on the eligibility criteria. For example, both Phoebe and Chloe are recent school leavers. However the fact that they have entered TOP through Workbridge suggested medical problems in their background. Chloe was recovering from an addiction. In Phoebe’s case the medical factor was undisclosed.

To provide a greater personal insight into the trainees, I developed brief biographies of several of them. These trainees are be quoted more frequently throughout the findings to provide a descriptive picture of their opinions and experiences. With the category descriptions I selected where possible two participants, one male and one female, to demonstrate common factors in the trainees’ eligibility criteria and personal circumstances for each of the categories. The categories and brief biographical details follow.

**Category 1: Recent school leavers not considered to be at risk. These trainees have chosen to continue to live with their families.**

*Jane, 16 years, moved from school onto the training course.*

*Rob, 18 years, moved from school to a training course. He left that training course after six to seven weeks and had a period of unemployment before joining his current course.*

There were three trainees in this category. One had chosen to remain at school until 18 years of age; the other two left at the minimum school leaving age. These trainees had not yet experienced unemployment. Both Jane and Rob had some experience of employment
on a part-time basis. All of these trainees continued to live at home during the period of this research, and all talked about parental support during the time on the course.

**Category 2: Under 18 years of age, recent school leavers, youth at risk.**

*Aneta, 16 years, joined her current course after a period of living as a ‘street kid’. At the time of the course she was a lodger with distant family members.*

*Chloe, 17 years, had a history of drug and alcohol abuse. During the course she was reorganising her life and had returned to live with her parents.*

There were three trainees this in category. Each had experienced a period of moving in and out of their parents’ or guardians’ homes while on the course.

**Category 3: Over 18 years of age, with little or no work experience.**

*Sara, 23 years, had attended two years at university and left because she did not pass the course. This was followed by a four-year period of unemployment.*

*Mike, 23 years, had attended one year full time of a polytechnic computer qualification. He failed some of the exams and decided not to continue with the course. He is still interested in pursuing the qualification on a part-time basis. He has been registered as unemployed for four years.*

Both of the above trainees had a higher level of post school education than usual and entered the TOP system in the “Special” category which entitled 15 percent of trainees on vocational courses to enter with more than two School Certificate passes.
This category contained four trainees over 18 years with little or no work experience. The youngest was 19 years of age, the oldest 29 years of age.

**Category 4:** Trainees over 18 years of age. Unemployed as a result of an accident and no longer able to return to their former employment.

*Ann, 33 years, formerly a nurse aid, had a back injury and cannot return to work.*

*James, 27 years, formerly an owner operator of a business. As a result of a back injury he cannot return to his former work. He sold his business and is seeking retraining.*

There were three trainees in this category.

**Category 5:** Solo parent entering on the DPB eligibility.

*Cath, 30 years, a solo parent with one child aged 6 years old.*

*Marg, 29 years, a solo parent with one child aged 8 years old.*

There were two trainees in this category.

**Category 6:** Long term unemployed with a previous substantial history of employment.

*Betty, 53 years, had been unemployed for over 5 years. This time was spent caring for dependent family members, her responsibilities meant that she was not available for full time employment during this time.*

*Doug, 34 years, had been made redundant over two years ago. His skills are no longer in demand and he needed to retrain.*

There were three trainees in this category.
Interviews

The findings from the interviews have been presented in four main sections:

1) **Trainees’ background**
This section considers the trainees’ background, their experiences of school and unemployment, their expectations and their first impressions of the TOP courses they have joined.

2) **Trainees’ perceptions of opportunities**
This section looks at the trainees’ experiences and opinions of opportunity, it traces any changes in their views as they move through their course.

3) **Trainees’ perceptions of learning**
This section frames the trainees’ perceptions of learning, their behaviours on the course, their job seeking activities and their reaction to vocational skills and assessment.

4) **Trainees’ career pathways**
This section considers the trainees’ courses of action and outcomes at the conclusion of their course. It also includes their reflections of the course and the value of the course to them.

A comparison was made of the group and individual interviews. However the responses were not noticeably different with the exception that the group often appeared to be
more cheerful and chatty than the individual interviews. The group frequently bounced ideas within the course members and required less input from the interviewer. Therefore, no distinction was made between the data collected from the two interview formats.

Throughout the findings, quotations have been taken directly from interview transcriptions to provide a fuller picture of the trainees. These are set out in the text in italics and with the number of the interview, for example (Chloe, 1), indicates that the quotation is from the first interview with Chloe.

1) Trainees' Background

School experiences emerged as a powerful and still vividly relived and retold experience for many of the trainees. Trainees in the group interview discussed their school experiences at length. All trainees demonstrated common experiences of negativity and failure from school and talked emotionally about the school grading system, streaming in schools and feeling prevented from selecting their preferred options for subjects at school.

As shown in Table 4, the majority (15) of trainees left school at the minimum leaving age for their time. Three trainees chose to remain at school beyond the minimum leaving age. Two of them gained qualifications beyond School Certificate level. These three trainees reported more positive impressions of their schooling.
Trainees in categories 1 and 2 noted that peer pressure was strong at school to “bunk off”, get into drugs and alcohol or simply to avoid school work. One trainee felt that dealing with this situation had benefited her personal development.

* I enjoyed the last two years [at school], I learnt a lot about myself, not necessarily in the classroom... I did drugs, alcohol, sex, the whole issue, but I also learnt what I was capable of... (Chloe, 1)*

All of the trainees in categories 3, 4, 5 and 6 over 30 years of age left school at the minimum school leaving age. These trainees did not discuss issues of peer pressure. When most of these trainees left school, employment had been relatively easy to find. These trainees noted that there were family expectations that they would go to work and earn. Seven of these trainees reported that their families were proud of the income that they were able to earn at an early age. Two of the trainees now noted with regret that they had not stayed on at school. These trainees talked about having “lost out” by not making the most of their time at school:

* ... in my time, ‘What was university’? I didn’t know anything about university... I was never told about anything like that. I saw a job going... I was about to study for School Cert and thought, ‘Wow, I am going to get that job’, and at that time it seemed good, but later on in life it wasn’t. (Alex, 1)*

Three of these trainees who were parents also wanted education to be different for their children. They wanted their children stay on at school and possibly go on to tertiary education.

Frequently shifting schools and gaps in schooling were noted by different generations of trainees as reasons for not remaining at school:
I was actually older because I changed school so much...I was 15 when I started high school. My mother wanted me to go to...and look after sick relatives. Of course I had to go. When I returned I had to do detention for several months. I wanted to leave. I asked for a leaving certificate and they said no, so I walked out of school. I didn’t feel that I had any choice really. I wasn’t enjoying it. I couldn’t go any further... (Betty, 1)

I had been to about 10 different schools...I kept missing out on the basic stuff, every time I changed schools they were doing different things and I just couldn’t keep up. That is why I decided to leave school... I just couldn’t cope, I didn’t know the things that other people knew. (Aneta, 1)

I loved school but.. when I was in my teens we moved about and I couldn’t get back into it. (Pia, 1)

Trainees in categories 3 to 6 did not raise equivalent issues of peer pressure.

Trainee perceptions of their status as unemployed

I found a marked difference between trainees’ ages and their social networks. All of the trainees who had left school recently or who were on the DPB (categories 1, 2 and 5) had friends and family who were unemployed. In some cases, family members had already attended TOP courses. None of the remainder of the trainees (categories 3, 4 and 6) reported that they had friends or family who were unemployed.

Trainees in categories 1 and 2 had little experience of the work force. However, three of these trainees had gained part-time employment. They had left these jobs because of difficulties with employers. They talked of rules being changed on them at short notice and considered that they had been treated unfairly. Two of them considered that they could easily find unskilled casual work if they really tried, but they wanted to develop
career possibilities. They observed that unskilled work was often stressful with poor
employers and no future:

*Most of my jobs were jobs where you weren't looking for promotion...just
looking at the same pay year to year...I've done waitressing, working in a fish
factory,...working in an elderly home,...and as a cleaner...pretty much dead
end jobs, there weren't any prospects there.* (Chloe, 1)

Trainees in **categories 3, 5 and 6** had experienced long-term unemployment. In each
case they reported an erosion of confidence, self-esteem and motivation, a restricted
social circle and a need to 'get out of the house':

*I had been out of work for a couple of years and I got turned down quite a few
times. So you get discouraged. You stay at home, you muck about...I was
getting into a rut. I just had breakfast, turned on the TV and did the same
thing until tea time, you travel about one kilometre between the sofa and the
kitchen all day.* (Doug, 2)

When asked how they felt about unemployment before starting the course only on
trainee acknowledged that she had enjoyed her time without work, but still felt a lack of
confidence in seeking employment.

*Unfortunately I am one of those people. I loved it. You have all that time to
yourself. I read extensively. People say that you are wasting your time, and
sure I am not working, but I am doing a lot of things for me. But I didn't like
it in that I was getting out of my depth as far as employment goes. I mean I
don't want to be unemployed for the rest of my life; no way.* (Sara, 1)

The three trainees who had been on ACC for injury (**category 5**) were very clear that
they did not consider themselves to be unemployed. Unlike the other trainees they felt
confident about meeting the requirements of the course from the outset. In each case
they were not officially registered as unemployed; they were on ACC. They reported
that during their time out of work their days were occupied with recuperation,
physiotherapy and making contacts with the referral agencies, such as ACC and
Workbridge. Two of the men were in similar circumstances, having been injured just as their child was born. In each case, their partners returned to full or part time work and they took the responsibility for child care. Both noted with great enthusiasm that this had been a very special experience for them:

\[\text{[Unemployment] wasn't a biggie really because my wife went back to work and I had to care for the little one. She went back three days a week and there is always something to be done like going to physio, or my weights or ACC or the doctor or someone wanted something or forms to fill out...I don't have any friends who are unemployed, not until I came on this course anyway... (James, 1)}\]

A prolonged period of unemployment made a difference to these trainees' opinions about unemployment. In subsequent interviews, two of the trainees identified and described increasing difficulties with friends and family as a result of being out of work for a period of time. These feelings may have been exacerbated by the fact that these trainees did not have a network of people who were unemployed:

\[\text{[Friends and family] were good about me doing the course, but my injury is like a joke to them. They give you a hard time and call you a bludger. (James, 4)}\]

All of the trainees had an opinion on reasons why people were unemployed. The views of ten of the trainees were summed up by this statement:

\[\text{People don't want to work, they are in their comfort zone... this is the first time I have been with the unemployed, and some just don't want a job. (James, 1)}\]

James changed his opinion by the fourth interview:

\[\text{I used to think 'yeah there's jobs out there and the unemployed just don't want to work' now it is not like that. It is really difficult. There are plenty of jobs but you need to be qualified and if the job doesn't need a qualification normally you don't hear about the job. You know someone will tell their mate and they will get it. (James, 4).}\]
Four trainees considered that people were unemployed because of lack of training or guidance for career development. Two trainees related unemployment to the Employment Contracts Act. One of these trainees considered that unemployment would be eased if people were prepared to work part-time and not expect a 40 hour working week. One trainee described how her father was going to give up his current job because the social welfare benefit and his income from employment were the same. She concluded that in some cases wages were too low.

2) **Trainees’ Perceptions of Opportunities**

The trainees’ perceptions of the opportunities offered by TOP were influenced by a desire to gain a job and by other complex factors in their lives.

**Employment, qualifications, vocational skills**

All 18 trainees stated at the start of the first interview that they had come onto the course in order to find a job. When asked about their ideal situation three months from the time of interview, each student said that they would like to be in work after the course finished.

Trainees in categories 1 and 2 wanted to sample different courses and trial different careers, but the demands of the labour market would not allow this to happen readily, they thought the TOP courses would introduce them to these careers. They wanted to find out if they might like a career in a particular field. Individual trainees expressed an
interest in a very wide range of careers. For example, Jane was interested in the possibility of being a doctor, firefighter or clerical worker. By the fourth interview she was developing an interest in hospitality and cooking. In her case, as with other young people, the TOP courses served to help with reality testing and connecting their ideals with the real world. Chloe wanted to work in her own business in the future and felt that the clerical sector skills covered on the course would be useful.

The trainees in categories 3 to 6 were focused on retraining and updating their skills, either because injury prevented them from returning to their former employment or because they considered that their former skills were redundant. Computer skills and the influence of computers on the future workplace were considered to be very important by several of these mature trainees. Most of them had chosen vocational skills in workplaces influenced by computerisation.

Although all the trainees hoped to find employment, only one of the 18 participants was actively job seeking at the time of the first interview. When asked why they were not job seeking in the first week, trainees said that they wanted to trial the skills to find out whether they liked them, and whether they were capable of achieving them. In some cases there was a fear of not having enough knowledge for the workplace and not wanting to start a job and to have to ask questions about the use of equipment or systems.
I observed an increased interest in gaining qualifications over the period of time that the participants were in training. Only five expressed a strong interest in the qualifications on the course in the first interview. However, by the third interview the 15 trainees who had continued on their course expressed a desire to gain the qualifications offered. They included two trainees who initially had been interested only in the skills.

Escape from crisis

Betty and Aneta explained in the first interview that a crisis in their lives resulted directly in their decisions to enrol on the course:

*I did get myself into an awful rut, especially after my dad died. I was at home and just sitting there, and I thought, 'What am I going to do next?' I needed to get a new direction. It has helped me to reach out with people in my class.* (Betty, 1)

*I was on the streets for about three months...I got put up for aggravated robbery and I had to sort myself out, otherwise I had to go to jail.* (Aneta, 1)

Aneta chose to enter a TOP course as a step towards stability in her life. Despite the pending prison sentence, she felt that the course had been her own choice.

*I didn’t like school I was always bunking and things like that... with a course I want to do it, it was my choice.* (Aneta, 1)

Some trainees did not disclose personal information at the first interview. It was only at the fourth interview that Marg revealed that she had been in an abusive relationship, had moved into a women’s refuge and, as a result of the changes she had made in her life, had entered her first TOP course. The course had helped her to gain confidence, a
pattern that continued and strengthened throughout her time on subsequent TOP courses.

Employment, vocational skills, qualifications and a crisis in their lives were mentioned in the first interview as reasons for joining the course. Later interviews highlighted the importance of routine or structure for the trainees, confidence building activities and the security of the Social Welfare Benefit.

**Structure and routine**

All 18 trainees mentioned the importance of structure or routine at some point during the four interviews. They were all pleased to be in a 9.00 am to 4.00 pm routine. For trainees in category 1 said the structure satisfied their parents and allowed them to be occupied for the day. Two mentioned that they did not want to sit at home all day. Trainees in category 2 noted that they would save money because they were away from the temptation to waste time and money with peers who spent time at the 'spacies'. Mature trainees were pleased to be in a work day routine and pleased to get out of the house and meet other people:

> It's good because really the hours I am going to work will be nine till five and it has got me back into that, so it's good. (Ann, 2)

**Confidence**

Discussions about confidence were raised by all of the trainees. Confidence was discussed in a work context in relation to feeling sufficiently confident to apply for jobs in their new career areas and to apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge to the
workplace. Personal confidence to get out and mix with new people was also raised by all of the mature trainees, with the exception of the three trainees on ACC. Issues of self esteem and personal achievement were especially important to trainees in categories 5-6.

I also observed that the trainees’ increased confidence was evident in an improvement in their dress standards, and interactions with other trainees. As the course progressed trainees reported more frequent use of the training centre cafeteria where approximately 100 staff and students gather at break times.

Social welfare benefit

Two trainees in category 3 felt coerced by NZES and feared that their social welfare benefit would stop if they did not join the course. One trainee noted in her first interview:

... my employment officer, he said that I could either go on a course, get a job or get off the dole... (Mary, 1)

Mary made the most of the situation by selecting a course that complemented her other interests and personal study. Another participant recounted a similar experience:

I sort of was [forced to go onto the course]... NZES said that I would be taken off the benefit by lunch time if I didn’t find something to do. (Mike, 2)

Other trainees reported knowledge of similar examples and provided anecdotal evidence of people feeling forced (through fear of their benefit being stopped) onto a course to demonstrate that they were willing job seekers. Secure finances were an important factor. Trainees of all ages noted that the additional travel money was a bonus and helped on the course.
Social Welfare benefits generated considerable discussion from all trainees at some point during the four interviews. Every one of them noted that being eligible for the benefit was an important factor in choosing a TOP course over other forms of training or education. All trainees in categories 3 to 6 were aware of the cost of attending tertiary educational institutions. Nine of these trainees had made some enquires into the costs of other forms of education before starting the TOP course. Free TOP courses which did not affect their social welfare benefit was a major reason for joining the course.

All of the trainees in categories 1 - 2 stated that receiving a training benefit was important to enable them to pay for accommodation, to be independent, buy clothes for work or consider planning and saving for the future. Aneta felt that access to a benefit was a great help in adding stability to her life after living on the streets with no income. She could pay board to her guardians and was enjoying the stability of a regular income:

... young people who haven't got money go out and do burglaries and things like that to get money. Since I came in off the streets and kept coming here I have kept away from all that and I have money coming in... I don't know where I would be if I hadn't done the course because I know that I would never go to school, I would just be on the streets again... I would probably be in Kingslea actually. (Aneta, 3)

These trainees knew of situations where obtaining a social welfare benefit could be abused. The younger trainees showed little respect for trainees who moved from course to course in order to get a training benefit. In the culture of the training centres, such trainees are known as 'course hoppers'. The participants in practice discussed this in derogatory terms and reported that they did not want to be seen to be course hoppers.
The participants were also aware that the training benefit for those under 18 years was under threat and that the government had stated its intentions to stop the payments. Two trainees said that the end of the training benefit payments would make no difference to their attendance and that their parents would support them. The remaining four trainees said that no benefit would lead to financial hardship for them.

The mature trainees were all aware of the benefit for trainees under 18 years. Two mature trainees in category 4 considered that the younger trainees were just on the course for the money and that they did not want to learn. They felt aggrieved about this. While other trainees did not object to the payment of a training benefit, they had anecdotal stories of young people at other training centres who were only present for the benefit and who had problems which distracted and disturbed other learners.

**Personal goals**

Trainees frequently mentioned personal goals and challenges as reasons for participation. One stated forcefully that this was an opportunity to make something of herself:

> People said that I couldn't get onto this course and my friends are all unemployed and they want me to be with them, but I want more. I want to be a good example to other people; I want to live my life well and show others that it can be done... (Pia, 1)

Another felt that she was giving something back to society.

> I feel that I am earning my money even just doing a course. I feel that I am giving something back and that makes me feel better. (Marg, 4)
3) Trainees' Perceptions of Learning

Trainees' views on lifelong learning

None of the trainees in categories 1 and 2 expressed interest in extramural learning. For them, learning happened within the institution in course time. They talked in detail of learning both vocational and lifeskills on their courses. They also talked in detail about the social aspects of their course. These trainees did not identify any outside groups or learning situations in which they participated. Two of these trainees were aware of the possibility of returning to school or being involved in distance learning projects.

However, they had not made any plans to participate in this form of education. These same trainees also said that they enjoyed working under exam conditions and considered that this was representative of a learning activity:

*I like doing tests, I know that is weird... I like being in a room and just blocking everything out. Its like being at school; its quiet and there are no distractions and you really get on with it.* (Jane, 1)

Eight of the mature trainees had not participated in any form of full-time course since their school days. For Betty this was in 1958. Two of these trainees reported that they had taken part in short-work based courses but in each case they were for a few hours at a time and had been some time ago.

When asked about themselves as learners, three of the oldest trainees immediately related difficulties faced with exams at school:

*There are frustration's. I was good at spelling, now I find it very hard. There are some words I haven't even come across... I will keep an open mind and see how I go... sitting qualifications might be stressful, I freak out at tests and exams.* (Betty, 1)
Two mature trainees considered that ‘learners’ go to institutions in an academic sense to learn. Their response to the question, ‘Do you think of yourself as a learner’ illustrated that:

*Well my wife has a CV about 20 volumes long, she has done it all in her field, but I am not one for sitting down. I do a lot of things with my hands... I just never had the motivation to go to night school or university or anything... but I don’t stagnate. Some people let their lives pass them by.* (Alex, 4)

One trainee avoided the use of the word ‘learning’ but compensated by talking about the desire to ‘absorb’. The term frequently peppered his conversation:

*Like when I haven’t done something I really absorb it. Then when I have done it I lose interest. It’s no good then... we did a body language video today, it was something new... so I really absorbed that.* (James, 1)

*No I don’t think of myself as a learner or student or anything but I know that if I saw someone in the next room doing something really new I would think ‘now what is he doing?’ I would stop and have a look and ask some questions. To me that is how you learn. That is just the way I am.* (James, 4)

Although trainees did not consider themselves to be learners, on further reflection they revealed that they had undertaken various learning projects.

**Ann** had participated in arts and crafts throughout her adult life and was currently involved in evening classes. She also hoped to make a secondary income from arts and crafts.

**Mary** had been very focused on alternative medicine. She had financed her own learning with a combination of part-time polytechnic courses and had completed distance learning courses based on homoeopathy with reputable private institutions. She had engaged
private tuition from a ‘master’ in her field of interest. She had educated herself in homoeopathy and eventually hoped to earn a living in this field.

James had completed a part-time course in computer keyboard skills and was learning about computer graphics at home to the point of morphing and other technical graphic details. He too wished to develop this strong interest into further training for employment.

Phoebe had an ongoing interest in art and had involved herself in a non-certificated distance learning art course during her TOP training. She continued it after her course was completed.

Cath had begun a full-time nursing course at polytechnic, she had placed this on hold as she had moved town. She returned to the course part time at the conclusion of the TOP course.

Mike had started a national diploma in computing and had completed a number of papers full-time. He retained the goal of completing the qualification on a part-time basis.

Alex stated that he had no interest in learning institutions, but that he felt he was a very active learner and a self-starter in all that he did. He was currently researching a business plan for a car dealership.

Sara still maintained her goal of returning to university and was continuing, in her own worked to ‘read to excess’.

Betty expressed an interest in crafts, but found that courses were too expensive on a social welfare benefit.
All except the last two trainees did not see a distinction between their personal and vocational interests. Betty frequently said that students who could not find employment ought to have assistance towards craft and personal interest courses to develop their confidence and personal skills.

Despite the range of interests of the trainees and the flexible way that they approached these interests, trainees had expectations of being 'taught' while they were on the course. In the individual interviews, all 12 of the trainees expressed a desire for more 'structure' on their courses. Specifically they wanted more time on the task, less time in discussion, less freedom to choose their activities and less time on self-paced learning. On each of the courses tutors had devised manuals of learning to enable trainees to move at their own speed. Initially, these were not popular with the trainees. The older categories reported that the younger trainees wasted time and that they felt distracted by the young people's behaviour. Many of the trainees' still self-paced learning to be an unproductive way of working even by the second and third interviews. However as trainees adjusted to self-paced work and moved to subsequent courses, they began to change their minds and reported that it was an effective way of working. One trainee who had experienced a course where the tutor led the group and another course where trainees were working on their own learning packages concluded that:

...leading from the front must be harder. It is probably more work to set up the manuals and things but it is much more laid back. (Sara, 4)

During a series of discussions that James had with his tutor and group, he raised issues that some of the trainees touched on (in their second and third interviews) regarding their
desire for more structured learning. He considered that learning should be a linear process:

*It should be that you go in one end looking for skills and you come out the other end looking for a job. (James, 4)*

The desire for structure and for the teacher to lead from the front was demonstrated by two trainees who related a conversation held in their group. This conversation highlighted the differences in expectations between the tutor of the group and those of some of the trainees.

*Then I said 'Well you are the teacher, teach us something' and he said 'No. I am not, I am a tutor' I said 'Well it's the same thing' and he said 'No it is not, I am the tutor. I will point you to where you can learn' or whatever, and I says 'You are supposed to be teaching us all these things and not just pointing your finger at stuff. (James, 4)*

The trainees interviewed as a group did not mention structure as an issue on their courses. However they did note that they had initially felt uncomfortable when the tutor gave them choices about activities or delegated responsibility onto them. But that they grew eventually to enjoy this and to be highly motivated by it. Trainees mentioned this motivational aspect in the group and individual interviews:

*It is much more relaxed. You can concentrate more when you are relaxed. With this group you know that something funny is going to happen so you work more, it just makes for a good atmosphere... there's a lot of contact not just tutor to pupil, but person to person. (Doug, 2)*

**Vocational skills**

When asked about their learning on the course, all trainees referred specifically and directly to the vocational skills covered on them. During the second and third interviews they discussed their progress in relation to the skills on offer on the course. All trainees
who continued on the courses clearly expressed their pleasure in their accomplishments in mastering keyboards, sales techniques or knowledge of the law and other course content. Trainees were also very familiar with the intended course syllabus and were aware if a particular topic was not covered in detail.

Three trainees noted that they felt that TOP courses were valuable because they focused only on the information that they needed rather than having to work through other more theoretical information that they would not have to use later. Trainees also talked of the importance of the ‘hands on’ approach and the practical nature of the courses.

Where courses had the theoretical information interspersed with physical activities, the trainees were enthusiastic about the combination, although they did not necessarily like all of the activities. This was particularly evident in the group interview, where the trainees were especially enthusiastic about the combination.

**Capability skills**

Capability skills (ETSA, 1993) were noted in the TOP critique. Capability skills refer to the development of social skills and job-seeking activities such as letter writing, practice for interview situations, communication skills. The trainees in categories 1 to 2 adapted with more acceptance to these demands. Aneta talked with considerable enthusiasm of how she had learned to write letters or to telephone employers to apply for jobs. She accepted that this task was more complicated than she had originally thought and was pleased that she now had a range of questions and answers that she could apply to a job-
seeking situation. These trainees were also more willing to acknowledge a need for literacy and numeracy support than were the mature trainees.

Many trainees (especially in categories 3 to 6) did not acknowledge or realise the significance of some of the activities and the skills that they were involved in were. Mike, however, was aware of the achievements made in some areas by the younger course members:

*Like, some people had to hand in an assignment and it was the first assignment they had ever done. Like they never did anything like that at school.* (Mike, 4)

**Age and behaviour on the course**

Throughout the interviews, the differences between trainees who had come directly from school and those who had some experience of the workforce were very evident. The trainees in categories 1 to 2 continued with typical difficult adolescent behaviours such as talking back and challenging house rules. Aneta being a case in point. When told not to eat in class she sought legitimate reasons including the need for throat lozenges and then indigestion tablets.

The two trainees who left early in category 4 were very aware of the differences in age and experience.

*One of the big things for me personally was they had such a cross-mixture of people there [on the course] who shouldn’t really have been put together... You are putting people with lots of experience with people who have no experience whatsoever. Some didn’t have a hope of getting the jobs that they probably wanted to get.* (Alex, 4)
In the individual interviews, all of the trainees in categories 3 to 6 raised issues about behaviours of the younger trainees. They referred to breaking rules, being late, and attention-seeking behaviour. However all except the two trainees who left the course early said that it was important to be patient and provide an example for the younger trainees. Two trainees expressed some sympathy for the tutors after they had left the course.

_The younger ones are just so picky about everything. They don’t want to do this and that... You have got to be tolerant. You don’t know who you could end up working with._ (Ann, 2)

The interactions between these groups also provided opportunities for considerable personal development. When asked about her evident increase in confidence and assertiveness as the course progressed, Betty replied:

_I think that being with younger people really helped, if anyone had been older than myself... I would probably have been more polite... with the younger ones, they give you a hard time, so I give them a hard time back [laughter]._ (Betty, 3)

In another group, all but Mary and Mike (the two eldest) were largely school refusers. These two took on the role of mentors for the younger trainees, explicitly leading discussions and challenging them to think about the point of view they held. In the individual interviews the young people acknowledged the role that these two trainees played in providing an example, helping them to avoid peer pressure presenting role models:

_Mary and Mike, I really look up to them, like Mike will give you advice... and he has a really friendly attitude, it is nice to have someone to look up to._ (Aneta, 2)
For Aneta, her time on the course was a period of relative stability. She had been on the streets before and returned to that life after the course. Mary in particular was aware of emotional issues at stake for Aneta. The role models were doubtless helpful in maintaining a period of stability for her.

The group trainees openly discussed their age differences and frequently joked with the youngest member of it:

*I find that I am learning all the time from this bunch... life sort of things.* (Rob, 2)

*Rob has grown up a wee bit,... he has learnt lifeskills... his attitude has improved and grown up. When he first started, he was an obnoxious little shite. Now he is actually quite likeable. We knocked him into shape a lot. He actually needs a bit more work.* Throughout this banter from Cath and Marg, Rob was listening and laughing.

Rob also mentioned that Doug on his course provided a role model for him.

*If I have any trouble I find that I will ask Doug because he is a lot older, I found that I will ask him and he will give me a reasonably good answer and I will take it in.* (Rob, 2)

Overall, for the time they were on the course the younger trainees appeared to benefit from the experiences of the mature trainees and gain personal development from their interactions with them. They noted this benefit as much in relation to one another as each other as in relation to their tutor.

4) **Trainees' Career Pathways?**

Table 5 provides an overview of each of the trainees qualifications and career pathways three months after the completion of his or her TOP course.
Table 5: Study participants' pathways three months after the completion of course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jane +</td>
<td>Pass from centre Pitmans first class</td>
<td>2 subsequent TOP courses (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>Pass from centre Failed Pitmans</td>
<td>Part-time course with a PTE and a correspondence course (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Distinction pass Safety qualifications</td>
<td>Period of unemployment. TOP course (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>Pass from centre Unit standards</td>
<td>Period of unemployment. Returned to TOP course (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Unable to trace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aneta</td>
<td>Pass from centre Unit standards</td>
<td>Unable to contact. Returned to at-risk situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Pass from centre Pitmans First class</td>
<td>1 TOP course and then onto teachers training (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mary +</td>
<td>Pass from centre Unit standards</td>
<td>Part-time employment and part-time study (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pia</td>
<td>Safety qualifications</td>
<td>Full-time employment (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Pass from Centre Unit standards</td>
<td>Unemployed. Part-time study. Voluntary charity work (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ann +</td>
<td>Pass from centre Pitmans</td>
<td>1 subsequent TOP course. Withdrawn from further TOP courses (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alex +</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Full time Employment (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Unemployed. Seeking further training (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marg +</td>
<td>Safety qualifications</td>
<td>1 subsequent TOP course and part-time work.(R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cath</td>
<td>Pass from centre Safety qualifications</td>
<td>Unemployed. Assisting as teacher's aide, voluntarily (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Doug +</td>
<td>Distinction pass Safety qualifications</td>
<td>2 part time jobs, approx. 60 hours per week (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Betty +</td>
<td>Pass from the centre</td>
<td>2 subsequent TOP courses in related fields (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mat. +</td>
<td>Pass Safety qualifications</td>
<td>2 subsequent TOP courses and part-time evening work.(R)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
R = Trainee perceived their future course of action to be part of a coherent pathway leading on from the course they completed.
I = Trainee perceived that the course they were on did not benefit them in their current situation and had no connection with their current situation.
+ = Trainees who were counted as an outcome at the official 8 week period of outcomes by ETSA.
Safety qualifications = Defensive Driving, First Aid, Self Defence
**Employment or further training**

The officially recorded outcomes eight weeks to the day after the course was completed showed that nine of the trainees moved into employment or further training. These trainees are marked with + on Table 5.

However, when the definition of a positive outcome is extended to include part-time study and/or contribution to the community in voluntary work, then 15 trainees may be counted. All were involved in an activity which was more than job searching and which aimed at changing their employment status. Five of these trainees had multiple outcomes; they had combined study and work in some form.

The trainees’ perceptions as to whether their current course of action was part of a coherent pathway aided by their TOP course (Table 5) were mixed. Alex, for example, moved into full-time sales work, but considered that the course had not attributed to this position. Pia had moved into full time work in the manufacturing industry, unrelated to her training course, nevertheless considered that the skills and motivation gained on the service course had directly contributed to her employment.

Six trainees gained employment directly from work experience or employer contact with a training centre. Of these Doug had gained two part-time jobs of 30 hours each. He continued to work both in the hope that he would be able to prove a work record and gain employment with one placement for a forty hour week. Marg and Mat had obtained part-time work and were able to continue with their training courses. Pia had moved
onto a further course after a period of job seeking and gained employment through that training centre’s contact with employers. In the case of these four trainees, the employment was triggered by the employer coming into the training centre and selecting staff for the future, a practice that had arisen through the tutor bringing employers into the training centre on a regular basis. Mary had gained her part-time employment of 20 hours or more per week at her work experience placement (which related to her homoeopathic interests) and attributed her job to the fact that she was actually on the course as well as gaining relevant skills on it. Aneta had also gained temporary employment in her work experience placement but it continued for a short period only.

Seven trainees changed their career direction as a result of participation and experiences on their TOP courses. For them, their first TOP course had become a springboard for further training and education. Betty had originally decided that one course would be sufficient. However, as she progressed through her first course she became aware of the skills she needed to gain to enter the workforce and enrolled on two further courses. She made the decision that it would be more beneficial for her to continue in training now that she was involved in learning. Ann, meanwhile found that her original choice of employment was a solitary job and that she would prefer to become involved in employment that was more sociable. She was also aware that she needed to complete more training in computers to enter into a clerical workplace in the future. Sara having realised that she had the skills to complete professional training, was accepted into teacher training after completing a TOP computer course. Her first class pass in the
Pitmans examinations had further encouraged her to return to full time tertiary education:

[TOP] encourages me to know that I am capable of learning. Of course when I was at university I stopped in the second year. I didn’t do so well, so when I passed by Pitmans I was absolutely thrilled and I knew that I was capable of achieving results, so yes it has increased by confidence and it has helped me to get back into a learning environment. (Sara, 4)

The employment outcomes for trainees in the 19 to 35 years age range showed generally there more positive outcomes for trainees in categories 3 to 6 than in categories 1 to 2. Significantly all of the mature trainees from long-term unemployment moved into further training or employment. Significantly the trainees in category 2, at risk youth, were the group with the lowest outcomes. Two of these trainees returned to the at risk environments. These trainees were the only participants to cease contact with the research. Chloe left before the end of the course and nothing is known about her personal situation. For Aneta her completion of the course, was probably the first time project that she Aneta had seen a project through from start to finish. Her enthusiasm about the course at the time made her return to the streets of Christchurch soon after all the more poignant:

[The course] it has done far more than I expected because I didn’t realise that I would get this far, it has been a really good opportunity for me,... I now look at other people’s point of view instead of just myself... I don’t want to sound big headed or anything but I find myself more mature than I used to be. (Aneta, 3)

Three trainees (from categories 3 to 5) were unemployed at the time of the fourth interview. James was disillusioned because of his difficulty getting onto a specific TOP
course. His goal was to learn the skills available for that course, and he was working with his Workbridge placement officer to gain work experience in a relevant field.

Mike’s and Cath’s job seeking effort were not proving successful, both were feeling depressed and lacking in motivation by the fourth interview. Both were applying for one job at a time and waiting for the reply. Both were actively involved in other learning and both had part-time courses at polytechnic which would lead towards a tertiary qualification. However Cath had fallen into a spiral of misfortune brought on by lack of resources and money. In the three months following the course her car had broken down and she could not afford to get it fixed. Therefore she had to spend more on bus fares and more time on travel to transport her daughter to and from school which affected her job seeking. Shortly after our last interview her telephone was cut off.

*While I was on the course I could have walked across the Square at four o’clock in the morning and not felt concerned, my confidence was so strong. Now I feel knocked about by unsuccessful job hunting and the financial worries. It had made it really difficult to keep things going.* (Cath, 4)

However, she was also involved as a teacher’s aide at her daughter’s school. She loved this work and found it very motivating. Mike was involved with voluntary work with a charity providing night time assistance and support for young people on the streets involved in drugs. By the fourth interview he had met Aneta on some occasions.

Neither Cath nor Mike considered that their part-time study and voluntary work in the community was of value and both desperately wanted employment. For Mike the lack of employment also coloured his memories of the course he had participated in. During the
course he had often been positive and offered little criticism of it. He had particularly enjoyed working with the young people on his course and for a short period had considered greater involvement in the field of training. However by the last interview he had this to say:

_As far as content goes, I remember some of it, though I don't think that it has helped me in any way... TOP is a bit of a collecting house for end of the line students rather than a really positive place to be._ (Mike, 4)

In the final interview, all of the trainees mentioned the non vocational skills they had gained on the course. Confidence and self esteem were important. Some trainees had achieved personal goals which would influence their lives. Cath, for example, had given up smoking on the course with the encouragement of her group, and despite her current strained circumstances she had not returned to smoking. Pia had lost weight and reported feeling healthier as a result. For Mike, the course:

_Did help me out in a way. like I used it to fine tune people skills but that was all that it really helped me for._ (Mike, 4)

Two of the school leavers referred to meeting people and having to mix with many different people:

_I have had mates from all over the place. Like there were Pakistani and Indian students on the courses. It was really good to mix with different people... like I know some people feel violent towards people like that I sort of did. But it was really good to know more about them and be on different courses with them._ (Pete, 4)

Five trainees also reported that they felt better about being in learning situations and felt more confident about going into these situations.

_I have more confidence and a thirst for learning._ (Betty, 4)
Barriers faced by trainees whilst in training and job seeking

Four of the trainees with pre-school and primary-school-age children reported that they were not entitled to child care assistance while on the course. They had to find $100 per week out of their benefit or their partners’ incomes for pre-school children or during the school holidays. Cath said that in future she would try to select courses that did not run during the children’s holidays, as she did not have family help readily available but this would have been difficult, for her, as TOP providers run courses ‘back to back’ and do not break at term times. Only one trainee with children was continuing in training by the fourth interview.

*It is so difficult to find that extra money if you don’t have family or someone to look after the child. It knocks you right back having to cut back on necessities to cover the costs of child care.* (Cath, 3)

Ann had difficulty coordinating the requirements of two support agencies which were providing conflicting career guidance. Having decided during her work experience that tourism would be a possible career, she had researched a course on computers and one on tourism. Her Workbridge counsellor supported her in these efforts. However ACC advised her that if she continued onto the tourism course they would cut her sickness benefit and she would be entitled to an unemployment benefit at a lesser rate. This would have left her in financial difficulty, as she would not be able to afford the medication she required. She withdrew after three days on the tourism course because she could not afford to jeopardise her sickness benefit. Trainees who maintained contact with me into 1996 passed on information that she was still unemployed and had not returned to other courses.
Three trainees had found that participating on the course reduced their entitlement to assistance from NZES. Subsidised work positions available for the long-term unemployed were not available for participants on TOP courses. Each of these participants felt that the situation was unfair and that little assistance is available for people who try to help themselves.

Sara who had applied and been accepted for the teacher training intake before the end of her second TOP course, learned that because of this acceptance she would no longer be entitled to the assistance of NZES for the remainder of 1995 and that her future job applications would have to go through Student Job Search. However, she was not yet an officially enrolled student and therefore could not enrol with Student Job Search.

Mike had mentioned in previous interviews that he had started the course because of pressure from NZES and the fear that his benefit would be stopped. In the fourth interview he expressed disappointment that there had been no follow up or support while he was on the course:

[I started the course because of] pressure from the New Zealand Employment Service... they made no contact afterwards to see how things were going. They just put me on a course and left me to it. When I went back to them to find a job they told me that I wasn’t on their list... I wasn’t able to apply for a job because I had been on a course. It was really unfair. (Mike, 4)

Trainees' awareness of the status of TOP

Trainees of all ages considered that there was a stigma attached to TOP training:

I have heard people say that if you are on a course you are a bum and can’t get a job, I don’t think that’s very nice. ‘Cos you are not [a bum]. We are here spending quite a lot of out time trying to get qualifications. (Jane, 1)
... I also think that the courses have a social stigma attached to them... it's like if you go to university then you must be really motivated and have the vision in your mind... whereas if you go on a training scheme then you are just filling in time, well that is the impression that society has anyway. (Mary, 1)

Eight other trainees reiterated Mary’s point about the lack of status. One trainee associated the lack of status with the lack of universally understood title for their training.

All over the world you have university, and even polytechnic but there is not the one name for these kind of courses. (Rob, 1)

Trainees in the group and individual interviews immediately linked the stigma of TOP to being a programme for the unemployed. Sara had heard from her university contacts that TOP had a bad reputation:

I've been to university, so I have had a long run in the old education system... I had actually heard quite bad things about them [TOP courses] to be honest. Things like you don't get much out of them. You don't get qualifications etcetera... but I decided otherwise for me anyway... not a high recommendation. (Sara, 1)

The trainees individual stories reflect just a small sample of the wide variety of people who attend TOP courses. In many cases TOP or other training programmes are a vehicle to provide the conditions for their transformations from long-term unemployed or alienation at school to people who are feeling positive and focused about their future.
Chapter Five

Discussion

My study set out to explore, from the TOP trainees’ perspectives whether TOP is a place of opportunity or in Mike’s words in his final interview “a collecting house for ‘end of the line’ students”. In this discussion chapter I will compare and contrast these trainees’ perspectives with government policy for TOP.

Skills Training For Employment and Trainees’ Perceptions of Opportunity

Before I came on this course I had all day to do things, but nothing got done. (Betty, 3).

Skills training from the government’s perspective, as described in Chapter 2 focuses on short vocational and lifeskills courses which meet labour market demand and thereby increase opportunities for the unemployed to gain work. Those government-sponsored studies which have evaluated the efficiency and effectiveness of training programmes for the unemployed show that their employment and further training results are successful (Audit Office, 1989; Dominic, 1992; Ministry of Education, 1995).

These studies, along with the ETSA Review (1995) also show that for course participants a job, skills training and qualifications are the main motivations for enrolling on the programmes. This finding was confirmed by the first interview that I conducted, where each trainee reported that employment had the highest priority, gaining skills was
a close second and qualifications third. In short, the goals of the trainees and the
financial sponsors are the same.

However, with the exception of the ETSA Review (1995) the government-sponsored
studies sought little information about trainees’ reasons for success or lack of success on
the programmes. My (albeit small-scale) study made it possible to track both the course
outcomes and the process that the trainees considered important in enabling them to find
employment, further training or positive alternatives in their future.

The descriptive profile that I developed of the study participants a picture of people
whose lives at the time they entered TOP demonstrated the negative effects of
unemployment and/or school failure. Some of these effects have been described by
McGiveny (1992) as:

> Progressive loss of self confidence and self esteem... deterioration of personal
> and social skills; growing social isolation; personal and family stress; lack of
> money; perceived inability to initiate future events. (p2)

My findings regarding the trainees’ progress on their courses suggested they were
assisted to enter training by the acceptance and support for training for employment in
their wider community. Certainly, training appeared to provide a structure for the
trainees’ working day, enhanced their social interaction and opportunities to be part of a
team, and gave them security of income. These factors all contribute to placing trainees
in a position where they can achieve personal and vocational goals, and increase their
confidence and self esteem. Furthermore, the contact with employers through their
tutors' and training providers' networks increased their opportunities for employment at a time when the trainee had gained confidence.

**The vocational nature of TOP**

The courses offered by TOP were perceived by the trainees to be essentially practical, and hands-on, and as such would not require the trainee to focus on unnecessary theoretical information which most of the participants had found threatening in the school environment. Trainees perceived themselves to be 'doers' rather than 'learners'. Vocational training linked in with this self perception.

There is evidence from these trainees that participation in vocational skills training was encouraged by their immediate families, friends and the referral agencies working with them. Courtney (1992) and Gooderham (1993) support this finding. Certainly, the referral agencies, Workbridge, the Mature Employment Service, ACC, and NZES, were influential in opening contacts, offering information about the courses and providing support for the trainees to enter training. Support from these agencies, particularly NZES and ACC, were seen as even more important because of their control over the trainees' social welfare benefits.

The trainees' comments revealed that their families and friends considered the trainees' participation on vocational courses to be pro active: the trainee was doing something about unemployment and trying to change his or her situation. They therefore remained supportive of a trainee remaining on the course even on those occasions when that
person considered withdrawing from it. Vocational training was a socially acceptable option.

The trainees' choice of a training establishment also linked in an environment that the trainees considered to be more in keeping with the world of work than school. The size and facilities reflected the trainees' expectations of the potential future workplace. The trainees in this study correspond with the adult trainees of the ETSA Review (1995) who reported that house rules appropriate to the workplace were easier to accept. All but three of the trainees in the study were unwilling to approach tertiary institutions.

The employment focus continued to be important to the trainees throughout the course. In the final interview, all the trainees identified work experience and work placement visits as the most enjoyable and memorable aspects of their courses, even where there was no direct personal interest in the specific workplace as a potential place of future employment. These responses correspond with the trainees in two other TOP studies (ETSA, 1995; Ministry of Education, 1995).

**Structure and social interaction**

As the trainees progressed on the courses, they all, regardless of age, emphasised the important role the courses played in bringing structure into their lives. By having their day purposefully occupied these trainees described the ways in which they valued their free time and were more constructive and selective in their leisure activities. In particular, they noted the importance of an externally imposed routine, a focus for the
day, choosing clothes to wear, mixing and socialising with others, limiting the hours of
watching television and other routine matters. The structures and routines in their day
matched the same habits and practices of their employed counterparts in society (Tuckett
1995) and supported Courtney's (1992) notion that participation in education and
training is a social act.

These findings were noted by all trainees of all ages at different times in the course.

All the trainees in this study demonstrated and reported gains from social interactions
and team work on the course. Similar findings were reported in the ETSA Review
(1995). Routine, structure and social interactions provide anchors for the trainees' day,
resulting in a more meaningful use of their time. This becomes a springboard for the
trainees confidence and enables the trainees to achieve positive outcomes. However
these are not easily measured or accounted for in any conventional means of measuring
outcomes. Yet without these factors it is doubtful that trainees from such disadvantage
would be able to make the move into the more conventional outcomes for the courses.

**Social Welfare Benefits**

Financial security made TOP an opportunity over other forms of training for the
participants. Security of income was essential to provide an opportunity for change for
the younger trainees in categories 1 and 2, and for reducing stress and a sense of
continuity for the trainees in categories 3 to 6.
The potential loss of a social welfare benefit proved to be a disincentive for unemployed people entering training in England (McGiverny, 1992). Cocklin's (1993) Christchurch study into adults returning to school noted the difficulties that adults have when they are no longer entitled to a social welfare benefit. These people had three choices: to use their savings, to be supported financially by family or friends or to resort to benefit fraud or deception. Maintaining the social welfare benefit entitlement enabled the TOP trainees to continue in training.

However, it was evident that the social welfare benefit could also be used as a means of coercion. Country (1992) provided the example of people attending 'learnfare' in the United States to get a welfare cheque as an example of the lack of voluntariness in participation. The ETSA Review (1995) noted that none of the trainees spoken to were coerced onto the courses. Quite possibly, though these trainees were aware of a need to be guarded in their responses when interviewed by a funding agency. Two of the participants in my study acknowledged that NZES had mentioned withdrawing their social welfare benefit because they were seen not to be doing enough to seek employment. Despite that potential threat, both of the trainees participated well in their courses. Both played an active part as role models to the younger trainees on the course. One gained employment at the conclusion of the course, the other sank into a downward spiral of depression about their personal circumstances.

The social welfare benefit caused considerable discussion among the participants. Trainees in this study and Ferguson and Miller's (1993) study did not want to be seen as
a participant "just for the money". They all made derogatory statements about 'course hoppers'. I surmise that these are socially acceptable responses because it is socially unacceptable to talk about protecting a social welfare benefit and that entering a training course may be considered an 'easy money'. There is evidence to show that people do not enter training for just financial reasons. For example, Holmes and Storrie's research in the United Kingdom (1985) in an area of high unemployment found that at least 40 per cent of the population eligible to receive a social welfare benefit and free education and training did not enrol.

**Personal goals**

This study would suggest that each of the above factors mentioned create conditions that enable trainees to realise personal goals, develop confidence, and gain both personal and vocational pleasure from learning and their achievements. These trainees demonstrate McGiverny (1990) findings that vocational reasons for participation in adult education and training diminished over time to be replaced by personal goals and satisfaction.

Similar developments are evident in other studies with similar groups of students (Caswell, 1993; Cocklin, 1990; Holmes & Storrie, 1985). Trainees in this study set and achieved personal goals which, in turn, made a difference to their lifestyles, health, and the examples they set for their families. This development of confidence and self-esteem was fundamental to the trainees changing their situation. It gave them opportunities to set new personal and learning challenges and increased their confidence to network with new groups of people. The range and variety of employment, training and further education options achieved by the trainees provide evidence of their enhanced self
esteem. It is interesting to note that trainees under the ACCESS system who gained employment considered that their attitude to work and finding work had been an important factor in gaining employment (Dominick, 1992).

**Networking through tutors and training providers**

The trainees in my study had experienced rejection in employment and already found the labour market restrictive and competitive. TOP training provided them with an avenue for mobility into the labour market. Training programmes provide a means of networking and bringing social mobility into the lives of job seekers (Goodeham, 1993).

With one exception, the trainees in this study who gained employment did so through tutor and training provider contacts with employers. Dominick (1992) also found the same practice under ACCESS and that tutors and training providers helped their former trainees for a considerable period of time after they had left the training centre. In both studies this takes place long after the tutor or training centre have any obligation to assist the trainee. This would also indicate that despite the change from ACCESS to TOP tutors and training centres continue with good practice which they know will best assist their trainees.

However networking and any other job seeking strategies are not necessarily successful with all groups of trainees. The trainees in category 2 in my study were the least successful in terms of successful outcomes into further training or employment. They were also more transient than the other groups; two participants eventually lost contact
with the study. The group which was most successful was category 6, the oldest age
group among the employed. A finding that is the reverse of Dominick’s (1992) research
which found that the younger age group with low qualifications were the most successful
outcomes for the programmes. It should be reiterated however that my finding came
from a considerable smaller sample than Dominck’s. With the exception of these two
extremes it was difficult to make any other generalisations about the categories used to
describe the trainees. As well as the complicated factors in people’s lives and their
reactions to the courses chance may also play a part in the outcomes from courses.

**Lifelong learning**

When asked, “If you were the Minister of Education how would you run these
courses?”, the trainees gave these types of responses:

*I think that I would go to the places like here and speak to people and find out
why they come. I would find out what they need to encourage them to come on
the courses.* (Pia, 3)

*I am on the DPB. I looked at other courses but once I got the prices there was
just no way that I could follow it up.* (Marg, 3)

Lifelong learning within TOP focuses on the acquisition of qualifications from the
National Qualifications Framework and the provision of a two-year allocation for TOP
training. The participants in this study who had negative experiences of schooling and
were not usual participants within formal learning institutions were not initially
enthusiastic about gaining qualifications or about a prolonged period in training. The
majority wanted to complete one course; to gain the skills then gain employment.
However these trainees became increasingly more focused on and enthusiastic about
gaining qualifications as they progressed through their courses. Greater knowledge of the courses available and greater confidence undoubtedly played a part here.

Although the TOP trainees are identified as people who are likely to be non-participants in education, study trainees over the age of 20 years were highly motivated and active as learners. Most had demonstrated that they have already been involved in a wide variety of learning projects. These trainees were highly self motivated within their own fields of interest and endeavour and had invested a considerable amount of time and money in the pursuit of their interests. In her smaller scale study of TOP trainees Taylor (1994) found an equivalent level of motivation amongst her participants. Taylor drew parallels between these trainees and McGivney’s (1990) European findings which showed that participants of equivalent programmes are people already motivated in other aspects of adult life. TOP training policy does not allow trainees the flexibility to pursue their specific interests. All courses are framed within skills areas perceived to be in short supply. However at an individual level, tutors and trainees worked together to combine trainees’ personal learning interests and employment possibilities to the greatest extent possible.

When writing about the ACCESS programme Gordon argued that:

"Training should not become the ghetto of the unemployed, but the basis of real opportunities; training should have the same status as university or polytechnic students" (1990a, p 180)

However an unexpected finding on my part was the trainees awareness of the lack of status for the programmes. They were also aware of the financial barriers to training and
education outside of the TOP system. Although the unit standards and the National Qualifications Framework are intended to aid the portability of qualifications and aid the seamless movement from one institution to another. A major barrier in the promotion of lifelong learning is that any training or education other than TOP incurs costs for the trainee and the loss of social welfare benefit. This factor had influenced the choices of the trainees in this study and for all but one student, moving onto a student loan and paying fees for polytechnic or university study was prohibitive.

Vocational training for the unemployed in New Zealand has been largely invisible, in the past because successive governments have marketed changes in training schemes as 'new' schemes, providing a veneer of change. In practice, there has been considerable continuity of the programmes. Vocational training programmes do not have an extensive history, but they can be tracked back to 1978 in recent history, with the current TOP programme having its roots in ACCESS implemented in 1985. Stressing the element of continuity to the trainees and the wider community may lead to the growth of a positive reputation for the training programmes, thereby ensuring that they are a positive place to be rather than an 'end of the line' option. The profile of training for the unemployed could also be raised by a prominent nationwide advertising campaign to increase knowledge amongst employers, prospective students and the community.

**Second chance learning: targeting the most disadvantaged in society**

*I didn’t know that three School Certs were too much for anything before I came here.* (Dong, 3)
'Second Chance Learning', targeting people with the least resources and least opportunity for education, and providing free training, qualifications and job-seeking support, provides an opportunity to redress inequalities in society. In terms of access to education, this premise could be interpreted as nurturing lifelong learning. However, as noted in Chapter 1 of this report, the eligibility criteria for second chance learning have been regularly altered. Each change excludes a significant number of people disadvantaged in society. The definitions of second chance learning and the disadvantage criteria are a mechanism for gatekeeping and restricting entitlement to free adult education.

The Prime Ministerial Task Force on Employment (1994) suggested that focusing only on people with a substantial history of unemployment and ignoring the recently unemployed was a recipe for compounding the problem of long term unemployment. The participants in the study agreed, saying it was frustrating not to have heard about or taken part in TOP earlier.

In the ETSA Review training providers noted that the disadvantage criteria led to a concentration of trainees with special needs. Tutors of TOP commented that the difficulty faced on the programmes was that trainees' personal difficulties "muddy the goals of the course and knock things off track" (ETSA 1995, p 23). They also emphasised that considerable time and effort went into dealing with trainees' social and personal issues and felt that ETSA should recognise this.
As discussed in Chapter 1 recruitment based on negative factors in people's lives leads to stereotypical expectations from society, employers and in some cases the participants themselves. The findings in this study identified two cultures within the training centre. The first included participants in categories 1 and 2 who had family and friends who were unemployed, and who had either experienced TOP courses or had friends who had participated on them. The second group included trainees in categories 3 to 6. A small number from this group either had some involvement in tertiary study while a larger number did not have friends or family involved in TOP. They also had few contacts who were long-term unemployed. The trainees in categories 1 and 2 demonstrated behaviours similar to school refusers. These differences in behaviour were the cause of the most friction on the courses. At times it may have contributed to the feeling of a 'ghetto' to have people with many of the social, medical and financial concerns in one place. The differences may have been more strongly highlighted in this study because of the broad age range involved in this study, which is slightly atypical for TOP (Table 3). However, the combination of ages and interests also proved to be a feature of personal growth and development for young and old alike. For the young trainees this may have been their first opportunity of co-operating in mixed age groups and their first experience of positive peer role models. While the benefits may have been greater for the younger trainees the mature trainees also gained confidence, improved their interpersonal skills and enjoyed the company of the young. Cocklin (1993) also found that the adult students returning to school favoured mixed age groups in classes even though this may have lead to some friction at times.
The trainees were acutely aware of the differences in levels of motivation within their groups. When "second chance learning" was described to the trainees as an opportunity to bring reluctant learners on board, the trainees considered it a good idea. However their preference was for motivated learners, even if they were outside of the criteria. Such people might include retired people and people who wanted only part time training or people who already had a higher level of qualification. Trainees felt some sympathy to groups in similar financial circumstances to themselves who were excluded.

Despite the difficulties raised, the majority of trainees reported that this was a favourable experience and that they gained from the group interaction and personal development within courses. All age groups commented on this and on learning from course members as an important aspect of their training. The differences may have been extenuated in this study because of the spread of ages of the participants. This study had a higher number of participants in the middle age group than the Canterbury or national average.

The policy of promoting and facilitating second chance learning needs to be co-ordinated through all government policy and government departments that work with social welfare beneficiaries to ensure success for the principles of lifelong learning and second chance learning. A major hindrance to the trainees continuation in training was the conflicting policies of the different agencies that they worked with. Whilst initially there was great support for the trainees to enter courses (as described in the findings and earlier in this chapter), once on the course trainees found little support for their continuation in training from some of the agencies. The Prime Ministerial Task Force on
Employment (1994) had already identified the loss of assistance and access to subsidised employment through NZES once a trainee participated on TOP. In 1995 the situation still happened.

The findings provided examples from several trainees who found their eligibility with other support agencies withdrawn as a result of participation on the training course. The most frequently reported was the loss of access to subsidised employment positions through NZES as a result of participation in TOP. From the trainees’ perspective it would be logical to train on one or more courses, enter a subsidised position in their new field of work doing so would allow them to open a career after several years of unemployment. The separation between the Ministry of Education which funds TOP and the Ministry of Labour which oversees NZES. A similar problem arises between ACC and TOP provision which ultimately resulted in one trainee leaving a course and returning to a position as a long term beneficiary. Trainees feel powerless when dealing with three conflicting government agencies and fearful of the loss of their social welfare benefit. The issues discussed strongly suggest inflexibility, lack of contact and competing agendas between the government agencies that work with unemployed people. These are very real barriers to the promotion and realisation of lifelong learning and second chance learning.

The costs of childcare during course time was a source of difficulty for several of the participants. The Ministry of Education (1995) found that more DPB trainees that any other group reported problems including a greater degree of family and child care related problems. However this report did not explore whether this is as a result of child costs
or other strains on the individual. TOP eligible clients will always be beneficiaries of social welfare, whatever criteria is drawn up. To promote second chance learning some realistic assessment must be made of the additional costs incurred by participating in TOP and assistance is needed to help people pursue training.

**Reviewing course outcomes and measures of accountability.**

The recording of positive outcomes in terms of employment and further training provides a specific and measurable form of accountability for the work undertaken by vocational training institutions. Employment, further training and gaining qualifications also concurs with the trainees original reasons for entering a TOP course. However as noted before this is a one dimensional means of gathering evidence about the success of vocational training for the unemployed. Examples of studies which tracked the trainees for several months after their courses (Dominick, 1992; Laurenson 1989) identified that the closing of reporting four or eight weeks after the conclusion of the course does not provide a full picture of the labour market outcomes of the trainees.

Other forms of reporting may include a flexible date for reporting outcomes and acknowledgment of the tutor and training centre’s contribution to the employment positive outcomes achieved. An alternative may be to track on a sample of trainees over a prolonged period of time to gain a more comprehensive picture of the influence of TOP training for the unemployed. Hindmarsh (1995) discusses progression routes as a study for people entering non formal education.
A fuller picture requires a means of identifying, measuring and accounting for increased motivation, the development of personal confidence and self esteem. Preferably taken from the trainees position and matching their needs and desires for further learning. There also needs to be an acceptance that an externally imposed structure and routine is an important aspect of some adults’ lives, therefore courses like TOP serve an important purpose by providing for that need, which becomes the springboard for further development.

Outcomes may be measured from the trainees position, acknowledging that the complex factors around an adults life may prohibit further official outcomes for some while others may be able to achieve multiple outcomes, as shown by the participants in this study.

Alternative outcomes which demonstrate genuine progress for the participants or which include their contribution as a citizen in voluntary and support work. If such work were valued more readily trainees like Mike and Cath would value their own contribution more highly.

Accountability is, in modern terms, a ‘two way street’ and whilst private training establishments should provide a clear form of accountability for the funding they receive in a way that accurately describes their work and progress with trainees. Accountability for cost effectiveness should be placed on the wastage of resources, goodwill and public profile before a training initiative is marketed as a ‘new’ initiative.
Conclusion

Is TOP a place of opportunity or a "collecting house for end of the line" students? From this small scale study it is apparent that TOP can provide a place of opportunity, in the first instance trainees and funders both seek the goals of gaining employment, further training and qualifications. However to achieve these goals and to move a person from a period of alienation at school or long term unemployment certain conditions are necessary to build confidence, develop self esteem, and increase motivation in the learner. Participation on training courses provide a structure and routine for the day, improve social skills, while allowing the trainee to maintain a social welfare benefit and thus ensuring stability in their lives. Support for training from family and agencies working with the unemployed person plus networking through tutors and training centres play a vital role in reintegrating people into employment or further training.

This study shows that TOP is meeting the trainees needs and providing opportunities for development but not necessarily in the ways prescribed and measured by government policy. Much of the valuable work in TOP is individualised, it is not easily measured or accounted for. This discussion has suggested that government policy for training the unemployed should start with the trainees and develop a system which responds and interacts with their needs rather than being driven by short term political needs. The discussion has also made suggestions for some ways that the knowledge gained from tracking the trainees' progress within courses may be used to determine actual measures of accountability which more accurately reflect the trainees development on TOP.
However there are aspects of TOP which can encourage an impression of a 'ghetto for the unemployed'. They also encourage the negative stereotypes that many employers may hold of this form of training and that society may hold of people on a social welfare benefit. The lack of motivation apparent among and noted by a number of trainees at times in this research and the range of trainees thrown together as a result of 'targeting disadvantage', and the financial barriers placed between TOP and other tertiary institutions all indicate how negativity can permeate and work against the efficacy of the courses. However overwhelmingly, the trainees in this study, found TOP a motivating, supportive and encouraging place to be. Over a six-month period it did in fact make a difference to their lives.

Training for the unemployed has been a feature of New Zealand life since 1978. Government policy for training programmes needs to emphasise continuity and build on past successes of these programmes. The true promotion of lifelong learning and second chance education requires a long term vision for training programmes, heightened public profile within the public's consciousness. Government policy needs to be such that non-conflicting and clear pathways can be established between the training institutions and other educational and welfare agencies to ensure that attendance on these courses do not financially penalise trainees. Government policy for the different agencies which support the unemployed also need to ensure open communication and continuity to truly enable people to change their employment status.

The skills required by the people who work in this field are many and varied. Training centres frequently consider aspects of their own quality control but rarely share more
generalised observations with others in the field of work. A learning culture can best be promoted between providers by reducing competition, and encouraging the sharing of good practice. It is an area that can transform lives and futures.

There is a need for more research into the work done within TOP courses. Some suggestions for further research are:

- A longitudinal study into TOP trainees on a larger scale in order to draw more detailed picture of their needs before, during and after attendance on courses.
- Studies into how and why trainees gain employment or other successful outcomes.
- Identification of which groups of trainees benefit most or least from TOP training.
- A more in depth study into the stages that the trainees go through on their learning journey.
- A study into the complicated roles that the tutors have to adopt when working with this client group in order to identify the skills and good practice which would best help tutors in the future.
- A study to identify the drop out rate on TOP courses. If the goal of TOP is to truly help the most disadvantaged, then an understanding of the reasons for drop out and an evaluation of how these groups of people can best be assisted is essential.
Appendix I

Excerpt from ACCESS charter

"The overall aim of ACCESS is to improve the job prospects of unemployed individuals by providing them with training. Within this broad aim the Government has identified three more specific goals. These are to:

a) ease individuals’ entry or re-entry into the labour market by enabling them to acquire vocational skills;

b) enhance individuals’ ability to enter or re-enter the workforce by promoting the acquisition of skills necessary for working life, for example functional literacy and numeracy, the ability to co-operate with others...

c) provide a skill base for further vocational development which will enhance the long run employment and earnings potential of trainees…"

(Regional Employment and ACCESS Council Charter, 1988 Section 1)
Appendix II

Data collection

I would like your opinions about the training that you are involved in

You are invited to take part in a research project to find out more information Training Opportunities Programme students reasons for joining a TOP course and to seek your opinions on any of the advantages for joining these courses and your opinions are welcome.

I am looking for 12 volunteers for individual interviews and 6 volunteers to join a regular discussion group to help me with the information above. The volunteers will be interviewed at the start of the course, about half way through the course, at the end of the course and three months after they have left the training centre. The interviews will be tape recorded, however no record will be kept of your name or identity. If you wish we can use another name of your own choice or simply leave out names completely. No one in the training centre will have access to the tape recordings. If you would like to take part but do not want to be tape recorded please let me know.

Eventually I will put all of the information that people have shared with me together into a report, which will be quite general and no one’s name or identification will be used. If you would like to see a copy of this report you are welcome to keep in contact with me and I will pass it on when it is finished. This is quite a long project and may take up to one year to complete.

Thank you for your time and for your help.

Therese La Porte
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER
ph : 358 3443
(Appendix II cont...)  

**Consent Form**

I have read and understood the information above.

On this basis I agree to take part in the project and I consent to the publication of the results of the project on the understanding that no one's name or identity is used in the report.

I understand that I may withdraw at any time from the project.

I also have the right to withdraw my information from the project if I am no longer comfortable with the project.

Signed.................................................................

Date.................................................................
(Appendix II cont...)  

Outline for Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview One

(Conducted in the first week of the course.)

☐ What do you know about TOP courses?
☐ Why have you chosen to join a TOP course?
☐ Why this particular course?
☐ Why now?
☐ How did you hear about this course?

☐ Describe your past experiences of training or learning.
☐ What past learning experiences have you enjoyed/not enjoyed?
☐ What do you hope to gain from this course?

☐ What kind of work have you been involved in until now?
☐ How long have you been unemployed?
☐ How do you feel about being unemployed?
☐ Why do you think that there are many unemployed people today?

☐ Do you know what this course might offer you?
☐ Are you actively job seeking?
☐ What kind of job, if any, would you like?
☐ Are qualifications important to you?
☐ What do you know about changes in qualifications offered today?

☐ Are you course/job seeking?
☐ What would your ideal situation be at the end of this course?
☐ What are the advantages/disadvantages of TOP training?
☐ Do you have any other observations that I have not asked you about?
Interview Two

Trainees were encouraged to recap on their goals which were shared in the last interview, and to talk about the vocational and personal skills they may or may not have been gaining.

☐ In the last interview you thought that you would... how do you feel about those ideas now?

☐ How do you feel about learning at the moment?
☐ How is your course progressing?
☐ What kind of work are you doing at present?
☐ How do you feel about the skills that you are learning?
☐ How do you feel about yourself as a learner?

☐ Is the course progressing as you expected it to?
☐ Do you think that you might take up further training after the course?
☐ Do you think that the skills you are covering relate to finding employment/ gaining qualifications.

☐ How do you feel about working with a group of other trainees?
☐ Do you think that there are any benefits/disadvantages to working with a group?
☐ What would be your ideal training environment?

☐ Are you course/job seeking?
☐ What would your ideal situation be at the end of this course?
☐ What are the advantages/disadvantages of TOP training?
☐ Do you have any other observations that I have not asked you about?
Interview Three

Trainees were encouraged to recap on their goals which were shared in the last interview, and to talk about the vocational and personal skills they may or may not have been gaining.

☐ In the last interview you thought that you would.... how do you feel about those ideas now?

☐ How do you feel about your progress on the course so far?
   ☐ Learning/Vocational skills/ personal skills?

☐ Has the course progressed as you expected it to?
   ☐ What has been different?
   ☐ What has been the same?

☐ Describe any development towards qualifications on this course.

☐ How has your group progressed?

☐ Have you ever felt like giving up the course?
   ☐ If so what kept you going?

☐ What would you like to get out of training in the future?

☐ If you were the Minister of Education what would you do about these courses?

☐ Are you course/job seeking?
   ☐ What would your ideal situation three months from now?
   ☐ What are the advantages/disadvantages of TOP training?
   ☐ Do you have any other observations that I have not asked you about?
Interview Four

Trainees were encouraged to recap on their goals which were shared in the last interview, and to talk about the vocational and personal skills they may or may not have been gaining.

☐ In the last interview you thought that you would... how do you feel about those ideas now?

☐ Can you remember what motivated you to join a TOP course?
☐ What do you think encourages/discourages people about TOP courses?

☐ What do you remember most about your time in training?
☐ Did the course contribute in any way to your confidence/job prospects/learning/qualifications?

☐ Would you recommend the training to others?
☐ What would you change about the training you received?
☐ Has the training been relevant to what you are doing now?
☐ Do you think that your motivation has increased/stayed the same/decreased as a result of the training you received?

☐ Did you receive any career guidance on your course?
☐ Did you find that TOP worked together with other agencies such as Workbridge, New Zealand Employment service or others?

☐ If you were the Minister of Education what would you do about TOP courses?
☐ What are the advantages/disadvantages of TOP training?

☐ Do you have any other observations that I have not asked you about?
References


