



Starpath
A University of Auckland Partnership for Excellence



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF AUCKLAND**
NEW ZEALAND

Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

The Starpath Project

Raising achievement for students from low socio-economic backgrounds



Starpath Director Dr Elizabeth McKinley with Leanne Stewart and Titi Motusaga from Massey High School, one of Starpath's partner schools

The Starpath Project at The University of Auckland has worked with secondary schools for five years to understand why Māori, Pacific and students from low-decile schools are under-represented in tertiary education.

Starpath is the first rigorous research project to look at how to overcome the impacts of socio-economic status on educational achievement in New Zealand.

"Māori and Pacific students who gain UE have the same likelihood of going to university as other ethnic groups – it's just that so few of them achieve UE," says Professor Raewyn Dalziel, Chair of the Starpath Board.

Only 21 percent of Māori and 23 percent of Pacific students leave secondary school with University Entrance (UE), compared with 49 percent of Pākehā students (2008 figures).

Starpath combines research with practical strategies to improve enrolments and raise achievement for these groups.

"A population with a high level of tertiary education is essential for New Zealand's future success as a high income, high value economy," says Starpath Director Associate Professor Elizabeth McKinley. "It is inefficient for our education system to continue to produce large numbers of low skilled workers with little or no qualifications."

A recently released Starpath study into NCEA choices in low-mid decile schools found that although many students aspired to achieve UE, they were not taking the combination of subjects or performing at a level that would

prepare them for entry into their chosen university course.

Starpath has also been working with partner secondary schools to trial an academic counselling and target-setting initiative for students. In just a year at one partner school, Māori and Pacific students significantly improved their success in NCEA and UE results.

Starpath has completed and is involved in a number of ongoing qualitative and quantitative studies. As well as working closely with partner secondary schools, studies also draw from national NCEA data that includes all students in the education system.

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The barriers

The project's overall aim is to identify the key barriers to tertiary success for under-represented groups. By combining the results of a number of long-term studies, it has been able to identify the following barriers:

- A lack of long-term data on student participation and achievement in our schools, to permit tracking of students and effective goal-setting;
- Inequitable access to achievement standards under NCEA;
- A lack of knowledge in low-decile schools of how NCEA pathways lead to tertiary qualifications and careers;
- A lack of evidence-based guidance to help students make the best academic choices;
- A lack of evidence-based programmes to improve literacy, particularly for at-risk students and students falling behind;
- A proliferation of programmes outside the core curriculum which are neither strategically planned nor monitored to see if they improve academic outcomes;



- The difficulty of achieving a successful transition from secondary to tertiary education

"An important discovery for Starpath was the lack of long-term data kept by schools

on a student's individual participation and achievement. Without this, it is very difficult for teachers and schools to identify when students fall off the pathway to tertiary education," Associate Professor McKinley says.

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The future

There is still work to be done. Starpath's next phase will draw on its significant insights into enhancing academic achievement by involving more schools in research-based interventions. Starpath intends to work with clusters of schools to develop data collection and literacy practices to lift whole school performance and achievement.

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Project Director: Associate Professor Elizabeth McKinley
Project Sponsor: Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond
Project Chair: Professor Raewyn Dalziel

About the Starpath Project

Starpath is a Partnership for Excellence led by The University of Auckland in partnership with the New Zealand Government. It aims to address New Zealand's comparatively high rate of educational inequality with Māori, Pacific Island and students from low socio-economic backgrounds showing significant rates of educational under-achievement compared with their peers.



Starpath Project Sponsor Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond



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