

## Aiming for University Entrance

**H**ow can Level 2 NCEA results help schools to improve UE attainment?

At the beginning of this year Starpath used the 2016 UE results from our partner schools and backward mapped these to the cohorts' 2015 NCEA Level 2 achievement patterns.

It is not surprising that students who gained Excellence and Merit endorsements at NCEA Level 2 (in 2015) had a high success rate for UE in the following year (2016). In total 92 percent of students with Excellence endorsement in Level 2 went on to gain UE and 70 percent of students with Merit endorsements were successful at attaining UE in the following year. However, it is surprising that of the 2016 Year 13 students who gained Level 2 with an Achieved grade, less than ten percent went on to attain UE.

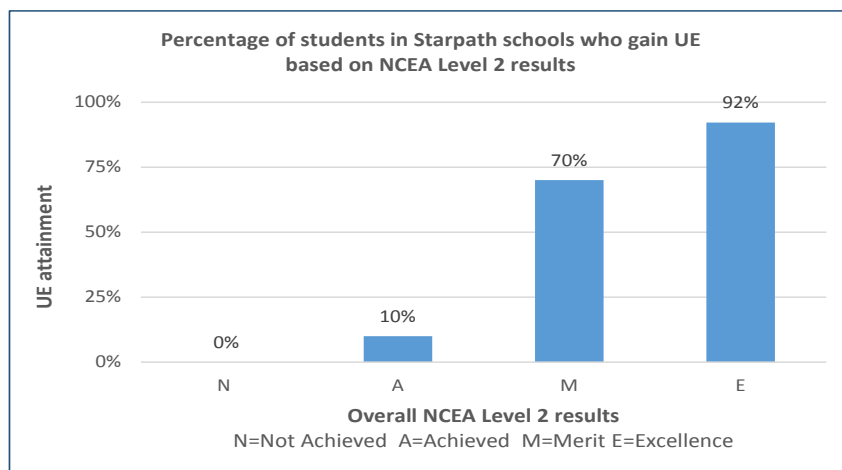
This suggests that, although students with endorsed certificates will need to be monitored to ensure they stay on track for UE, it will be students with aspirations for UE and a Level 2 achieved grade who will need additional support, focused tracking and strong academic guidance to reach their goals.

For these students there needs to be strong encouragement to overcome some of the UE barriers as early as possible, for example gaining UE Literacy during Year 12 or early in Year 13. Our data suggests that students do not, in general, gain UE Literacy through Level 3 external assessments. There are a good number of opportunities for students to gain UE Literacy (see item later in this news-

letter) but there needs to be careful course design to ensure that all students with UE aspirations have the opportunity to gain the required literacy credits, as well as the requisite 14 credits in three approved subjects.

Detailed course scrutiny is very important for those with UE ambitions. It is vital that these students are enrolled in courses of study that will provide a chance for gaining 14 credits in approved standards in three subjects. Teachers and students must be aware that any credits gained from Unit Standards at Level 3 will not contribute to the 14 credit requirement in an approved subject. It is also important that it is possible for students to gain a total of 60+ Level 3 credits, usually across five subjects. Designing courses with the barest minimum of standards/credits is high risk as there is no opportunity to fail a standard. Students with this type of course need to be carefully monitored so that if they fail a standard they have a chance at reassessment as soon as possible. For many students, relying on external exams is also a high risk strategy. That is not to say that students should avoid externals and indeed in some subjects, for example Level 3 Biology, students cannot gain 14 credits without an external component, but that students need plenty of experience of external assessments so that they can enter those exams with confidence, fully prepared and with a plan to succeed.

In 2017 Starpath schools have set ambitious targets for UE attainment. Students striving for this high award need specialised support, regular monitoring and expert guidance.



## From the Director



**O**ne of the enduring concerns to have emerged from Starpath's research is the distinct lack of emphasis on UE as the end-goal for secondary school students. Instead NCEA Level 3 is promoted as the pinnacle of secondary school success, even though it isn't. UE is the

minimum requirement to attend a New Zealand university and students must complete the right mix of approved subjects and the literacy and numeracy requirements to gain the UE award. The UE qualification should be encouraged for all students regardless of whether they intend to go to university straight from school because it demonstrates that they are hard-working to employers and keeps their options open for later on in life. It is also clear from many years of Starpath research that the vast majority of Māori and Pacific parents aspire for their children to succeed in education and have the opportunity to go to university. Yet the percentage of Year 13 Māori and Pacific students who were awarded University Entrance in 2016 was only 31percent nationally compared with 58 percent for Pākehā and 67percent of Asian students (NZQA, 2017).

A focus for Starpath's research this year is investigating the enduring question: What will enable significantly more Māori and Pasifika students in low decile schools to achieve University Entrance that allows progression to degree-level study?

Our current research is revealing a high proportion of students who did not achieve UE either did not attain UE literacy, did not achieve 14 credits in three UE approved courses, or were not enrolled in a programme of learning that allowed them to attempt 14 credits in three UE approved courses. Early identification, careful tracking and monitoring of course offerings and credits attained and increased opportunities to resubmit or re-assess standards must become a priority if UE attainment rates are to increase.

Māori and Pacific students have every right to choose and successfully attain educational pathways commensurate to their peers. My PhD supervisor, Professor John Hattie, once stated, "we have plenty of deans in schools to deal with behavioural issues and pastoral care Melinda... where are the deans focused purely on student success and achievement?" Perhaps a leadership role dedicated to ensuring all senior students have the opportunity to attain UE is what is needed?

Associate Professor Melinda Webber  
Director, Starpath Project



# Learning from our schools: results from the School Practices Survey

Starpath continually learns from its partner schools and earlier this year we conducted a School Practices Survey, focusing on UE. A total of 317 teachers and leaders from eight Starpath schools took part. The results helped us to understand perceptions about the enablers and barriers to success at UE.

Starpath researcher Victoria Cockle, who conducted the survey, said participants mostly had positive perceptions about the practices they have to support UE. The vast majority of staff believed all senior students were informed about the UE requirements, regardless of personal aspiration. Starpath research indicates this is an important factor in student success.

The survey also found staff generally believed they used assessment data to inform (and modify) their teaching practices; and generally believed there was a culture of high expectations in their school. However, Victoria cautions that of those who ticked 'agree' or 'strongly agree', there was some variability behind this.

"Many indicated that their agreement was with respect to themselves or their departments, and in many schools there

was a perception of variability across teachers and the school as a whole. We think this may indicate a lack of inter-department sharing, collaboration and relationship building, which schools may wish to investigate further."

Victoria also identified two potentially problematic findings. Not all teachers were able to name the targets for UE – and not all teachers believed that all whānau would be aware of the UE requirements.

"We believe that staff should know the UE targets, but more importantly know the students with the potential to gain UE so they can be tracked and 'picked up' if they miss an assessment. Also, we think it's important for all whānau to be aware of these so they can best support their rangatahi in their conversations at home about learning and achievement."

All schools have been given their own findings and the overall findings for all Starpath schools. The results can be used to guide future discussions with Starpath and will inform aspects of the Phase 3 research.

## Research in schools

### Emerging findings from Student and Whānau interviews

Starpath's Research Assistant, Kapua O'Connor, interviewed a small sample of Year 13 students and whānau from a range of partner schools in both Auckland and Northland towards the end of 2016 and early in 2017. He was interested in finding out what participants thought were the barriers and enablers for Māori and Pasifika students to undertake university study and what enables these students to achieve at a high level.

Kapua found four key themes emerged from these interviews. Students said they felt enabled both by being mentored and in being a mentor to younger students. Mentors that students talked about included older students in the school and students from tertiary institutions.

Having role models and representation in leadership was also a key theme. This included having Māori and Pasifika head students and prefects, leaders in sport and culture and peer mediators, as well as inspirational speakers visiting the school. One student explained the impact of role models when they said younger students look up to seniors and think: "I want to be like him one day. I want to be a prefect and I want to be a leader. I want to talk in assembly".

Students said they also felt enabled by

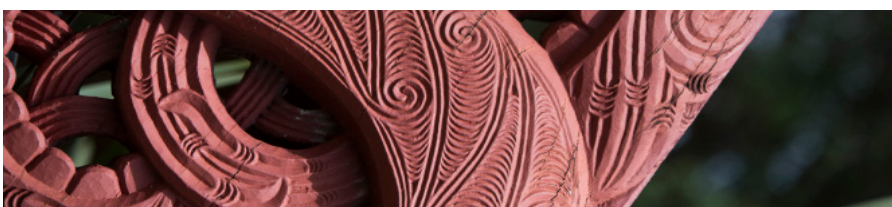


Kapua O'Connor - Ngāti Kuri

teachers they could feel a sense of cultural affinity with: "...they would know some of our myths and legends, and our tupuna stories and they could probably relate to us with some of those".

The opportunity to apply for financial assistance through scholarships was the fourth key theme to emerge from these interviews. Participants felt there should be more emphasis on scholarships, to make students aware that: "it's okay if you don't have money, there are still opportunities for you to grow".

These findings will contribute to the overall research from Phase 3, in addition to the student, whānau, and leader interviews which Starpath is in the process of conducting in the first half of this year.



## Starpath Toolkit

Our resources and findings are available online at the Starpath Toolkit.

This valuable resource is free and enables any school in New Zealand, or the world, to access our knowledge and apply it in the classroom. The resources are comprehensive and are updated frequently. See:

[www.starpathtoolkit.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.starpathtoolkit.auckland.ac.nz)

## Partners' Day 2017

The annual Starpath Partners' Day will be held on Tuesday 12th September. We will host the day at the Kohia Teachers Centre at the Faculty of Education and Social Work. The Starpath team will prepare a varied and interesting programme for principals and senior leaders from our nine partner schools. Please put this date in your diary. We look forward to another positive, collaborative Partners' Day.





# NCEA – A Whole New World

In February Starpath responded to a request from Dargaville High School to help upskill their Year 11 students' knowledge of NCEA.

Starpath's Professional Development Facilitator Tania Linley-Richardson developed a one hour session for a rotation of classes which involved working with each other in small groups to find answers to a range of questions on various aspects of the qualification. These included general information about the qualification, the marking of assessments (both internal and external) including moderation and appeals, literacy and numeracy requirements and using the NZQA website.

Students used resources on the internet, the *Understanding NCEA* book produced by Starpath (which is available in the Starpath Toolkit in the Academic Conversations section), and their prior knowledge to complete the tasks in the round robin-style lesson. Answers to the tasks were provided before each group moved on to a new set of questions. All students were given a booklet to take home to share with their parents, which included all the information covered in the lesson. Some

students asked additional, very pertinent, questions at the end of the lessons, such as "If I don't pass Level 1 and get my 80 credits, will I have to repeat this year?"

Most students on the day said the lesson had been helpful and that they'd learnt a lot more about NCEA. From a teaching perspective, Tania said she found it interesting that many students did not initially know what the acronym NCEA stood for. "This was a good reminder of how much we as educationalists use and rely on our own jargon!"



## UE Literacy: a Closer Look

University Entrance Literacy is a requirement for the UE award, but gaining it can be a complicated process. One of Starpath's latest initiatives is to conduct 'UE Literacy audits', where we visit a partner school to look closely at what subjects, standards and credits the school has available in Levels 2 and 3 which may contribute to UE Literacy.

With the complexities of NCEA the audit is helping school leaders better understand if there are enough 'opportunities to learn' for students to be able to meet the UE Literacy requirement.

"Opportunities to learn is a term educational academics use a lot. It is about making sure the opportunities are there in the first instance to give students the best possible chance at success," says Tania Linley-Richardson, who has been conducting the audits.

The UE Literacy audits have involved looking closely at the standards

offered in all Level 2 and 3 courses in a school, whether the subject can contribute to UE Literacy, and if so how many reading and writing credits are offered to students at each level. Consequently, Starpath has been able to show senior leaders and principals where the gaps are in senior course design for opportunities to learn in UE Literacy.

"Where possible, we have met with senior leaders to give feedback on the audit and discuss possible interventions that could be implemented to support Year 13 students with this aspect of the University Entrance requirements," Tania says.

In addition to the audit for individual schools, Tania has taken a closer look at the Achievement Standards which contribute to UE Literacy. A basic analysis of these standards, based on the information available on the NZQA website in March 2017, showed a vast difference between Levels 2 and 3, particularly regarding reading with three times as many standards offered at Level 3 than at Level 2. Key points to note are found in the table below:

Level 2	Level 3
46 Achievement Standards contribute to UE Literacy	113 Achievement Standards contribute to UE Literacy
11 subjects contribute	27 subjects contribute
33 standards have reading credits	97 standards have reading credits
28 standards have writing credits	62 standards have writing credits
15 standards have both reading and writing credits	48 standards have both reading and writing credits
25 standards are externals	52 standards are externals
21 standards are internals	61 standards are internals

\*In addition there are two generic AS in English for Academic Purposes which can contribute to UE Literacy. One of these has 5 writing credits and the other has 5 reading credits. Both these standards are internals.

NB: This summary is based on English medium subjects and excludes Hangarau, Pāngarau, Putaiao, Te Reo Māori, Te Reo Rangatira and Tikanga ā-Iwi. The full list of Achievement Standards is available on the NZQA website and can also be found in the online Starpath Toolkit, in the Literacy section under Literacy Leadership.



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The Starpath Project for Tertiary Participation and Success is a partnership with the University of Auckland. The Project works with secondary schools to transform educational outcomes for students who are currently under-achieving at secondary school and, as a result, under-represented in tertiary education.

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