

★ Imagining Career Futures

Schools are using the Vocational Pathways suite of tools and resources in different ways, according to the needs of their 21st Century students. Jaylan Boyle of the Education Gazette explains.



Traditional academic programmes of learning aren't for everyone. There are as many paths to career fulfilment as there are individual students. Vocational Pathways help educators develop contextualised learning programmes and facilitate connections to further study, training or work.

Vocational Pathways is a framework used to provide young people with a greater range of options that will gain them NCEA Level 2; more closely align to the aspirations and aptitudes of individual students; and encourage collaboration between secondary schools, tertiary providers, and employers. This will in turn see more young people leave school with a foundation level education, more students staying in education for longer, and more transitioning to pathways that motivate them and contribute to the needs of our nation.

Currently, there are five Vocational Pathways, with a sixth – Creative Industries – soon to be made available:

- Manufacturing and Technology
- Construction and Infrastructure
- Creative Industries
- Primary Industries
- Services Industries
- Social and Community Services

These pathways have been developed with the collaboration of industry employers, tertiary providers, and training organisations. Via their NZQA login, students can access their Vocational Profile, which enables them to map their achievements to the Vocational Pathways. This gives students a clear 'line of sight' toward a possible career direction they may want to pursue, and to find out about key roles across different industries.

Educators can support students to plan their pathway using the Vocational Profile Builder on www.youthguarantee.net.nz. Gaining perspective in this way can motivate students; helping them to see that every standard they achieve is another step in the right direction.

The Vocational Pathways help educators to design curriculum programmes that will most effectively assist students to achieve NCEA Level 2, and students can see how their study choices contribute to the qualifications that will best prepare them for a career in their chosen field.

Because the Vocational Pathways have been designed in collaboration with industry, students get valued qualifications, and employers are assured that school leavers who have obtained NCEA Level 2 with Vocational Pathways have a broad skills and knowledge base that's relevant to industry.

This in turn provides educators with the necessary knowledge to design great study programmes, which can be adapted for individual students.

The Vocational Pathways also 'tag' assessment standards with none, one, or several of the bright colours that are used to represent the five pathways, depending on which industry sector(s) recommended them as relevant.

Let's take a look at a couple of hypothetical situations that underline how the Vocational Pathways make a difference:

Example 1: Imagine a 16-year-old student, who is aiming for NCEA Level 2, and is achieving a few merits and excellences, but has never heard of something called an 'agronomist'. The Vocational Pathways tell the student and their teachers that the standards they tend to be getting 'merits' and 'excellences' for are strongly recommended by the Primary Industries, and that one of the careers in that sector is called an agronomist. The student now knows that such a job exists, can find out what one does, that they need to be tertiary qualified to become one, and they now know which subjects and standards they need to focus on to keep that possibility alive.

Example 2: Let's take a Year 11 student who is working towards NCEA Level 1, but for them it's been a bit hit-and-miss so far. One afternoon, when the class is working on acids and bases, the student blurts out "why are we learning this?" The Vocational Pathways (hypothetically) identify that the acids and bases standard relates to the Primary Industries, Construction and Infrastructure, and Manufacturing and Technology. They identify a wide range of real-world roles and occupations related to these industries that – if the student works hard and achieves a minimum of NCEA Level 2 – they can give themselves the best chance of accessing, and can see what they need to do to get there.

Now let's look at a couple of real-world case studies. These are great examples of partnerships between schools and training organisations that are collaborating to provide learning that will enable students to progress.

Mathew Feekes: St Peter's College, Palmerston North and UCOL Trades Academy

Mathew's ambition is to work in the hospitality industry. He's not quite sure yet whether to be a chef or own and manage his own cafe.

The moment that spurred Mathew on the road to his chosen career came 18 months ago. He was on the verge of leaving St Peter's College, but instead became interested in how Vocational Pathways could give him the skills he was interested in.

Mathew spends one day a week at the UCOL Trades Academy. This has enabled him to continue his education and achieve NCEA Level 2, while getting real-world skills.

Mathew enjoyed cooking at home and raised the idea with the UCOL team. "They were positive about it. They created an atmosphere for me to learn and gave me hands-on opportunities," he says.

"They prepared me for the real world. Suddenly I was doing it."

'Doing it' includes mastering the coffee machine at UCOL's Ambitions Restaurant, preparing and cooking meals, serving customers in a formal setting, and working front of house.

By the end of 2013 Mathew had achieved NCEA Level 2 and National Certificate in Hospitality and, this year, he's tackling a one year Business Management Course. That means he has the flexibility to choose between managing his own restaurant or being creative in the kitchen.

Already Mathew has a part-time job at Joe's Garage restaurant and, last year, was nominated for UCOL's Most Outstanding Student. And all this is happening while he's still a Year 13 student at St Peter's College.

"Seventy per cent of students don't undertake degree level study after leaving school. That's the bulk of them. We see our job is to provide pathways for students so they can make sense of the confusion before a student leaves school without knowing what to do," says Kelly Gay, Executive Dean of Trades and Technology at UCOL.

"It's so important to create an environment where they grow and mature and make decisions for themselves. The Vocational Pathways framework supports that."

Hikurangi Hunt: Primary Industries Trades Academy (PITA) and Kuranui College

The Primary Industries Trades Academy at Taratahi allows Year 11 and 12 students to come onto campus one day a week and learn on the job. Because Taratahi operates as a farming business, students really feel like they are contributing as if in the work place. At the same time, their efforts and learning are contributing to them gaining NCEA Level 2 – without them buckling under the pressures of the classroom which often leads some students to drop out altogether. Attendance at the PITA is structured to minimise disruption to normal secondary school activities and to maximise tertiary and work placement opportunities.

By using the Vocational Pathways, students get a solid foundation but also the chance to either experience aspects of the industry or get the basics so they are ready for the next steps whether in further study or the work place. Students can learn a variety of skills such as animal health and safety, animal welfare or complete their drivers licence.

Hikurangi is a very determined 16 year old who as a youngster for his class in Year 13 has his sights set on succeeding in the dairy industry. He is a resident student at Taratahi having started at the Trades Academy in Year 11, at Kuranui College in Greytown.

Hikurangi, who grew up in Featherston as an only child, and knew very little about farming, first visited a dairy farm when he went to help out his Mum's friend when he was 12 and loved it. When he joined the Trades Academy at 14, he was placed on a dairy farm in the Wairarapa and had to wake up at 2.30am to do the morning milk. This didn't put him off at all. Although he admits that it was "Harder than he thought!"

"But that's the great thing," says Hikurangi, "It allows you to try before you make a decision about your career."

Developing a pathway in Year 10 helped Hikurangi achieve his NCEA Level 2 qualifications as he could use the credits from Taratahi. "It suited me better," says Hikurangi. "I loved being hands on and getting involved. My Mum was very happy about this but she wondered why I was so passionate as no one in our family farms! But I love nature, and cows and I am fascinated with milk production. The PITA was very encouraging and they helped me. They gave me the motivation I needed. But I still had to catch up on school work!"

Hikurangi is very proud of his achievements, and he has big ambitions to be a successful sharemilker one day.

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Boyle, Jaylan (2014). *Imagining Career Futures*. Education Gazette, June 2014, Volume 93, issue 9.
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