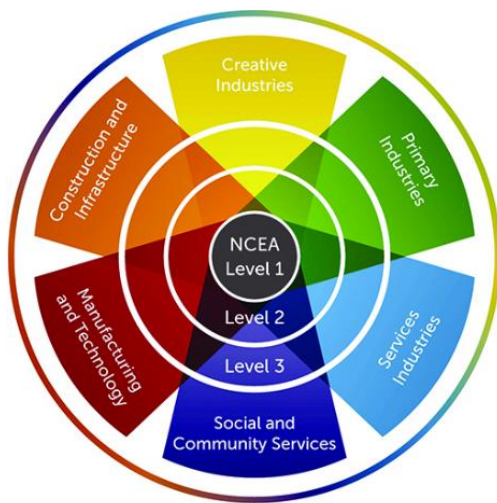


Vocational Pathways: Authentic and relevant learning

Vocational Pathways provide new ways for students to achieve the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). The Ministry of Education has worked with industry groups to identify Achievement Standards and Unit Standards that will prepare students for employment or ongoing education in one of six key industries: Creative Industries, Primary Industries, Services Industries, Social and Community Services, Manufacturing and Technology, and Construction and Infrastructure. Students can achieve an endorsement – a Vocational Pathways award in one of the pathways – at NCEA Level 2 by completing enough approved standards.



ERO evaluated how well secondary schools were implementing the Ministry of Education’s Vocational Pathways. At most schools, leaders and staff were aware of Vocational Pathways and saw value in them. Careers staff were using the Pathways to support students’ course selection for NCEA and through to further education, training or employment. In some schools, the Pathways were helping students to see how their courses were relevant to future career options by providing opportunities for contact with tertiary educators or people employed in the industries.

Traditionally, schools have valued, taught, and assessed for a set of skills associated with university education. Vocational Pathways help to show students that there is a broad range of career choices, and success can take many forms.

For example, Flaxmere College was taking particular advantage of the Creative Industries standards to provide a clear pathway for students who were passionate about traditional Māori arts and culture through well-attended and popular courses in whakairo and mau rakau. Students at the college spoke of how the recognition of their skills in these creative pursuits had given them a sense of pride in their learning.

“It’s not if you’re smart, it’s how you’re smart.”

(Principal, Hauraki Plains College, Ngatea)

Increasing the relevance of students' learning is central to Vocational Pathways. When students perceive their school-based learning lacks relevance, they can become disengaged from school entirely. Vocational Pathways encourage schools to implement more authentic learning and assessment contexts for students. However, ERO found that only a small number of schools were using Vocational Pathways to inform their curriculum design and implementation.

“If you want to excite people, you have to have education for a purpose that relates to their lives.”

(Principal, Hornby High School, Christchurch)

Leaders in these schools identified a tipping point at which they realised that taking the Pathways seriously meant that they needed to consider how their curriculum implemented relevant learning, and supported a pathway approach.

In schools where Vocational Pathways influenced the curriculum, teachers were providing more authentic learning and assessment contexts for their students. At Hauraki Plains College, for example, students in the Primary Industries pathway planned and implemented a redesign of nearby reserve, submitting and gaining approval from the local council for their plans. The teacher described this as a “real-world problem, and a real solution for the community.”

Discussions starters for schools

- How can we use Vocational Pathways to help provide careers information and support for students to select and plan courses?
- How well is our current curriculum engaging students? Do students have opportunities to experience authentic and relevant learning?
- How can we provide a programme responsive to Pathway choices that students make? How can we enable students to achieve Vocational Pathways awards?
- How can we work with Secondary-Tertiary Programmes to help provide a coherent pathway for students as they move on to further training and/or employment?
- How aware are our students, parents, whānau and community of Vocational Pathways?
- What signals do we send about what kinds of careers are valuable? How do we make sure that students feel comfortable that they can follow their interests?

“It’s too easy to say it’s just a tack on. You can squeeze the system a bit harder, but you only get so much improvement before you need to change.”

(Principal, Paeroa College)