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For Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa | NZQA

NZCER
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Te Pakokori
Level 4, 10 Brandon St
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He kupu taka List of terms

Term	Definition
Ako	To both teach and learn, the collaborative negotiation of meaning and knowledge
Ākonga Māori	Student who identifies as Māori
Fono	Gathering, meeting
Kaiako Māori	Teacher who identifies as Māori
Kaiārahi matua	Senior leader
Kairangahau	Researcher
Kaitahi	Sharing food and/or eating together
Kanohi ki te kanohi	Face to face
Manaakitanga	The process of showing care and respect for others
Mātāpono Māori	Māori values
Principal's nominee	A senior staff member who liaises with NZQA and oversees many aspects of NCEA. See https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ncea-for-teachers-and-schools/principals-nominee/
Rōpū	Group
Tūāpapa	Foundation
Whakatika	To correct or make right
Whānau Māori	Māori families
Whanaungatanga	Relationship(s)

He Ihirangi Contents

1. He kupu whakataki Introduction

The school's open to change. They like their traditions but at the same time they're like, 'Oh if this is going to help you guys [get UE], if this can be better in the long run, we'll do it.' (Ākonga Māori)[1]

They're really good people at our school. Most of our demographic is Pacific Islander, so it's super important to have teachers that are very encouraging. Especially in a world where there's not that many of us [Pacific people] in high paying careers or high paying jobs or higher university courses. (Pacific student)

Inequities in the attainment of University Entrance (UE) are a persistent issue in Aotearoa New Zealand (Daniell, 2018; NZQA, 2022; Webber et al., 2018). These inequities disproportionately affect ākonga Māori and Pacific students, limiting their opportunities immediately after finishing school, and potentially having long-term impacts on further study pathways and career choices.

In 2022, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) identified a range of schools at which the UE attainment of ākonga Māori and Pacific students was at least 10% higher than their decile band[2] average (NZQA, 2022). These schools all had more than 100 Year 13 students, of whom at least 20% were Māori and/or Pacific. In this report, we call these schools *higher UE attainment schools.*

University Entrance (UE) is the minimum requirement to proceed directly from a New Zealand secondary school to a New Zealand university. To be awarded UE, a student needs to attain NCEA Level 3, with a minimum of 14 credits at Level 3 in each of three UE-approved subjects. The student must also have met thresholds for literacy and numeracy. These requirements are designed to make sure students are ready to undertake university study. (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2022, 2024)

NZQA then asked the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to work with a selection of these schools. The overarching research question that this study addresses is: In what ways do schools support ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE? This report summarises the new insights and understandings that this study generated in the hope they can be shared more widely.[3]

1 The quotes in this report have been edited to enhance readability.
2 When this study was conceptualised, the decile system was in operation. By the time the schools were selected, the new Equity Index (EQI) was in place, and we used these data to ensure we selected schools with a range of EQI ratings.
3 The study also generated insights into the ways that NZQA can better support ākonga Māori and Pacific students with UE. These insights were shared with NZQA in a separate report.

2. Ngā tikanga Methodology

Our team of Māori, Pacific, and Pākehā researchers came together with a shared goal of contributing to improving equity for ākonga Māori and Pacific students. As a team, we sought to create spaces for the voices and knowledge streams of the Māori, Pacific, and non-Māori and non-Pacific research participants at the schools we worked with and the members of our research team.

He Awa Whiria

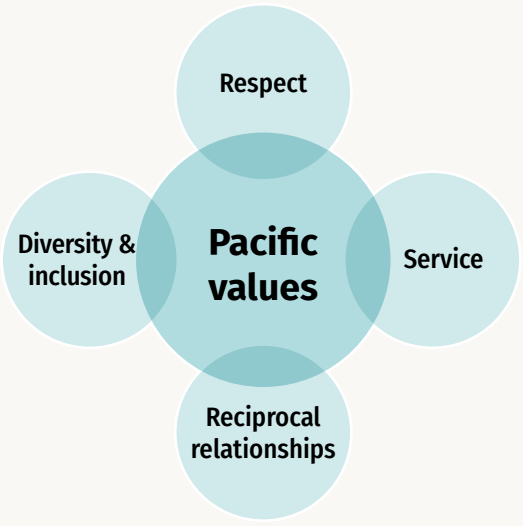
To ensure we prioritised the voices of Māori and Pacific participants and researchers, we drew upon the metaphor of He Awa Whiria, the braided rivers framework (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2019; Macfarlane et al., 2015; Ministry of Social Development, 2011). This framework acknowledges Māori and Western knowledge streams and creates space "for Kaupapa Māori research as a distinct stream" (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2019, p. 53). For this study, we extended the metaphor to include three broad knowledge streams and three ways of knowing and being: Māori, Pacific, and Western.

In taking this approach, we acknowledged the diversity within each of the three knowledge streams and, in particular, within the knowledge stream that we had conceptualised as Pacific. Pacific peoples are not a homogeneous group and there are many differences between the knowledge systems, languages, cultures, and backgrounds of those with Pacific whakapapa in Aotearoa New Zealand. Recognising this complexity, we agreed that drawing upon He Awa Whiria would help us create space for these three broadly defined knowledge streams to maintain their distinctness and integrity, while also providing opportunities for new learning to emerge when the streams converged.

Our understanding of He Awa Whiria guided our research approach at every level. For example, we drew upon mātāpono Māori and Pacific values (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) to inform the ways in

FIGURE 1 **Māori values that guided the research**

FIGURE 2 **Pacific values that guided the research**



which we worked as a team, with research participants, and with the data we gathered. Throughout the study, kairangahau Māori played a lead role with all data collection and analysis for Māori participants, and Pacific researchers took primary responsibility for data collection and analysis for Pacific participants.

As a team, we talked about our commitment to upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi within our research. Collectively, we agreed that privileging te reo Māori rather than Pacific languages within this report's headings was one way that we would demonstrate this commitment. We also recognise that there are many Pacific languages and did not want to privilege one or some Pacific languages over others.

The schools in this study

During the study, we worked with six *higher UE attainment schools*. Each of these schools had more than 100 Year 13 students, of whom around 20% or more were Māori and/or Pacific. At each school, UE attainment for these groups of students had been at least 10% higher than their Equity Index (EQI) band average for at least 3 of the past 4 years. Three of the schools serve a high proportion of ākonga Māori (we have referred to these as schools where we focused on ākonga Māori) and three serve a high proportion of Pacific students (referred to as schools where we focus on Pacific students).[4] Depending on the focus for each school, data collection centred either on the ways the school was supporting ākonga Māori to attain UE or the ways the school was supporting Pacific students to attain UE. From a list provided by NZQA, we purposefully selected and recruited a range of schools to take part in the study. Those we visited varied by:

- EQI band (ranging from those with "most" socioeconomic barriers to achievement to those with "fewest" barriers)
- the number of ākonga Māori and Pacific students at Year 13 (ranging from around 20% to 90%)
- school type (e.g., single-sex, co-educational, state, and state integrated)
- location (three schools were in Auckland, two were in the central North Island, and one was in the South Island).

Across the participating schools, UE attainment for ākonga Māori and Pacific students ranged from around 10% above to over 30% above their EQI band average.

At each of the schools we visited, participants varied but mostly included Year 13 ākonga Māori or Year 13 Pacific students on a pathway to UE; whānau Māori (Māori board of trustees [BOT] members) or Pacific parents (Pacific BOT members); and senior leaders (e.g., the principal and the NZQA principal's nominee,[5] who was usually a deputy principal), middle leaders (e.g., Year 13 deans), careers advisers, and kaiako Māori and Pacific teachers. In total, just under 200 participants took part in the study, either by participating in an interview or a student focus group session, or through responding to an online teacher survey.[6]

4 A "high proportion" is defined here as around 20% or more of learners.
5 https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ncea-for-teachers-and-schools/principals-nominee/
6 The six schools were sent an online survey for all staff who had connections with students who were working towards attaining UE. The survey asked about the aspects of school culture, pedagogy, systems, and approaches that supported students to attain UE. A total of 55 staff responded from schools where we focused on ākonga Māori, and 59 from schools where we focused on Pacific students.

This report documents the main findings that emerged from the study. Every effort has been made to signal which conditions, initiatives, and approaches supported both ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE, and which findings supported either ākonga Māori or Pacific students to attain UE. We would also like to acknowledge that some of the students we spoke with had both Māori and Pacific whakapapa.

3. Te whakatakoto i te tūāpapa mō te ekenga taumata Laying the foundation for success

We identified five foundational conditions that were needed for schools to support high UE attainment for ākonga Māori and Pacific students. The five conditions were:

- establishing and maintaining meaningful staff and student, and school and whānau, relationships
- understanding the importance of culture and the need to ensure that the school environment affirmed the languages, identities, and cultures of ākonga Māori and Pacific students
- holding high expectations for all students
- ensuring students were taught by effective teachers
- having effective school leaders who prioritised equity.

Throughout this section, text boxes are used to demonstrate the links between each of these conditions and the dimensions of effective practice that are described in *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners* (Ministry of Education & New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011), *Tapasā: Cultural Competencies Framework for Teachers of Pacific Learners* (Ministry of Education, 2018), and the Starpath Project's Phase Three final report (Webber et al., 2018).

Relationships matter

> *We have good student–teacher relationships here which create safe positive learning environments, especially for Māori.* (Ākonga Māori)[7]

> *Another big thing that makes learning easy is when you have that one-to-one connection with the teacher. It's a really big thing. Because you notice some teachers will just not connect and just are there to like literally teach, rather than [to] build a relationship with the student. Because if [the student is] not comfortable, then they won't feel okay to ask questions. And I think that's important.* (Pacific student)

7 Within this report, the labels ākonga Māori, kaiārahi matua Māori, and kaiako Māori are used to indicate statements made by Māori participants at a school where we focused on ākonga Māori. The labels non-Māori principal, senior leader, and middle leader are used to indicate statements made by non-Māori participants at one of the schools where we focused on ākonga Māori. Likewise, the labels Pacific student, senior leader, teacher, careers adviser, or BOT member are used to indicate statements made by Pacific participants at one of the schools where we focused on Pacific students. Finally, the labels non-Pacific principal, senior leader, and mentor teacher are used to indicate statements made by non-Pacific participants at one of the schools where we focused on Pacific students.

Staff and student relationships

We asked ākonga Māori and Pacific students what their schools were doing to support them to attain UE. In their responses, both groups emphasised that having caring, respectful relationships with their teachers was critical. They noted that many, but not all, of their teachers prioritised relationship building, and they acknowledged how beneficial it was for their learning when teachers made the effort to establish a one-to-one connection with them.

Whanaungatanga: Actively engages in respectful working relationships with Māori learners, parents and whānau, hapū, iwi and the Māori community. (*Tātaiako*, p. 6)

At schools where we focused on ākonga Māori, kaiako Māori told us that they were particularly intentional about fostering caring relationships with ākonga Māori that enabled them to learn and succeed as Māori. Similarly, at schools where we focused on Pacific students, Pacific staff played a very important role in establishing and maintaining warm, trusting relationships with Pacific students.

Māori and Pacific participants talked about these relationships creating a feeling of "family" and a sense of belonging at school. Kaiako Māori told us how important whanaungatanga was when supporting ākonga Māori. Likewise, several Pacific participants talked about it "taking a village to raise a child" and emphasised that their school was an important part of this village. For ākonga Māori, having their non-Māori teachers know, respect, and understand them as Māori was also important. Pacific students told us they valued their connections with Pacific staff and also noted that they appreciated it when non-Pacific staff took the time to get to know them well.

Turu 2: Collaborative and respectful relationships and professional behaviours
Establishes and maintains collaborative and respectful relationships and professional behaviours that enhance learning and wellbeing for Pacific learners. (*Tapasā*, p. 8)

At all the schools that we visited, teachers and school leaders emphasised that establishing and maintaining meaningful, respectful relationships with ākonga Māori and Pacific students was key when it came to supporting them to attain UE. In several schools, senior leadership had developed systems that enabled staff (e.g., deans and/or whānau or homeroom teachers) to move with students as they progressed from Years 9–13. These approaches had been introduced to make it easier for staff and students to establish enduring, learning-focused relationships. To prevent students from falling through the cracks, school leaders also set up structures to ensure that a range of staff were tracking student progress. This resulted in multiple people having connections with and knowing students.

School and whānau relationships

> *You need the ākonga to feel connected to a place because then they drag their whānau in. They go 'Look, I'm going to perform tonight, come along, come and watch.' And everyone gets excited and comes along.* (Non-Māori principal)

All the schools we visited recognised the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with whānau Māori and Pacific families. Likewise, they all talked about the crucial role that these relationships played when it came to supporting ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE. Many

of the schools had developed innovative approaches for connecting and building relationships with whānau Māori and Pacific families. These included:

Authentic whānau and school relationships are crucial. (Starpath Phase Three, p. 41)

- hosting events at which the success of ākonga Māori and Pacific students was celebrated (e.g., Matariki awards, kapa haka, and/or Pacific cultural group performances)
- establishing rōpū Māori for whānau Māori and/or committees for specific Pacific communities (e.g., a committee for Samoan families)
- hosting opportunities to eat together (e.g., kaitahi, BBQs, breakfasts, and dinner events)
- encouraging teachers to attend students' sports games and connect with whānau on the sidelines.

Although relationship building and celebrating student success tended to be the primary aims of these initiatives, schools often used them to raise awareness of and share information about UE.

Many schools had also developed creative ways to establish relationships with whānau Māori and Pacific families that were specifically focused on supporting students to attain the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and the UE award. These included:

- hosting information evenings for specific communities about subject selection, career goals, and NCEA and/or UE (e.g., a fono for Tongan families, a wānanga for whānau Māori)
- making formal events more accessible for whānau Māori and Pacific families by responding to community needs (e.g., providing translation support for families for whom English is a second language, using a "drop in" rather than "appointment" system for parent conferences to make it easier for whānau doing shift work to attend)
- providing information about NCEA and UE in the home languages of Pacific families.

These initiatives, which typically involved opportunities to connect kanohi ki te kanohi, complemented the more traditional approaches that schools used to build connections with families. These included deans seeking to establish connections with whānau so they could work together if a student was falling behind and/or frequently absent, and teachers communicating via email and through their school's student management system (i.e., KAMAR).

Culture matters

We've got that support, and we feel like we can be Māori. (Ākonga Māori)

It was evident from survey and interview data that all six schools understood that providing ākonga Māori and Pacific students with learning environments and contexts that affirmed their languages, identities, and cultures was essential when it came to supporting their UE attainment. All the schools were on journeys to become more culturally responsive and sustaining—albeit at different points—and they all agreed that there was "still a long way to go" (Kaiako Māori).

Tangata Whenuatanga: Affirming Māori learners as Māori. Providing contexts for learning where the language, identity and culture of Māori learners and their whānau is affirmed. (*Tātaiako* p. 2)

The steps that schools, and particularly school leaders, were taking to make culture count more for their ākonga Māori and Pacific students included:

- actively recruiting Māori and Pacific teachers, senior leadership team (SLT) members, and BOT members
- valuing and remunerating kaiako Māori and Pacific teachers for the additional work they did supporting ākonga Māori, Pacific students, and their non-Māori and non-Pacific colleagues. This included establishing and funding extra positions to reduce the impact of cultural taxation and to assist with building staff capability over time
- ensuring UE-approved subjects like Te Ao Haka, te reo Māori, and Pacific languages were offered
- funding and promoting professional learning opportunities that focused on culturally sustaining pedagogies and practices
- strengthening relationships with whānau Māori, iwi Māori, mana whenua, and Pacific families and communities (as described above)
- recognising and valuing the existing knowledges and skillsets of ākonga Māori and Pacific students by creating and promoting opportunities for them to assume leadership positions
- identifying ways to ensure that everyday school practices affirmed and celebrated the languages, identities, and cultures of ākonga Māori and Pacific students (e.g., through ensuring that use of te reo Māori is normalised and that Pacific languages are regularly seen and heard).

People matter

> ***Because I'm Samoan myself I'm able to connect and speak in a way that I know our parents would be able to understand. This is me making sure that I look after the vā—the space between me and their parents. I've talked to parents and it's [been] their first time getting a clear understanding of how things work as [their children] transition through Year 13 and out after high school.*** (Pacific careers adviser)

Māori and Pacific teachers, careers advisers, school leaders, and BOT members played a crucial role when it came to supporting ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE. They positioned themselves as advocates for these students and worked tirelessly to build relationships with them and support them to succeed. They also understood that they were uniquely placed to establish relationships with whānau Māori and Pacific families. These relationships helped to ensure that families had access to information about UE requirements, which in turn enabled them to support their young people to fulfil these. In addition, Māori and Pacific teachers, school leaders, and BOT members frequently took responsibility for spearheading and running initiatives that were designed to support ākonga Māori and Pacific students to succeed.

Turu 1: Identities, languages, and cultures
Demonstrate awareness of the diverse and ethnic-specific identities, languages and cultures of Pacific learners. (*Tapasā*, p. 10)

At schools where we focused on ākonga Māori, kaiako Māori told us about the work they did leading kaupapa Māori and building the capability of their non-Māori colleagues to uphold the "right [of ākonga Māori] to be in te ao Māori and proud and poho kererū in [their] own world" (Kaiako Māori). Similarly, at schools where we focused on Pacific students, we heard that Pacific teachers often organised and/or led Pacific-focused professional learning opportunities. We also learnt that Pacific

teachers, school leaders, and BOT members offered their non-Pacific colleagues important insights into the lived experiences of Pacific students; explaining, for example, that many students had family commitments, paid employment, and church responsibilities outside of school hours and that these commitments could limit the time Pacific students had for studying and completing assessments during evenings and weekends. These insights enabled schools to develop initiatives in school time to support Pacific students to complete assessments and attain achievement standards that contribute to UE subjects.

Agency matters

The individual and collective agency of students also impacted on their ability to attain UE. Students talked about how they supported each other. They valued being part of a collective with similar goals and wanted their peers to experience successes too. These strong peer relationships helped create a supportive culture that valued achievement and made UE seem more attainable to some students. Some were clear they did not want to feel they were competing against each other. Staff contributed to the collective culture by setting up approaches such as homework clubs to create spaces where students could support each other. Māori and Pacific student leaders also played an important role in contributing to school practices and fostering a supportive and positive culture. Within these schools, past and current students acted as role models for their peers.

High expectations matter

> *From the base of the mountain, we reach the highest pinnacle of our true potential success. What happens when we reach there? Another mountain comes, another bigger mountain. So, we're motivating, speaking success into those things. That's our norm; excellence is who we are.* (Kaiako Māori)

> *There's lots of [students] who in Year 10 decide, 'I want to be a plumber.' Awesome, that's great. But what we then say is, 'Just because you want to be a plumber that doesn't mean your aspirations academically have to diminish.' So, we always say, 'When you leave school, you're going to have options and the option you're going to have, is the best qualification you can have, which is University Entrance.'*
> (Non-Pacific principal)

Survey and interview data showed that a culture of excellence and high expectations for achievement was well-embedded at all the schools we visited. In each case, this high-expectations culture complemented the school's commitment to both establishing and maintaining relationships with students and their families, and to creating opportunities for students to succeed as Māori and Pacific. Together, these elements provided schools with the foundation they required to support ākonga Māori and Pacific students to strive for and attain UE.

Ako: Maintains high expectations of Māori learners succeeding as Māori. (*Tātaiako*, p. 12)

Students had high expectations for themselves. The source of their aspirations to attain UE and/or go to university varied. Some came from a family in which it was expected they would attend university, others talked about the importance of having their own university aspirations. Some students mentioned a desire to be the first in their whānau or family to go to university. A number of students were motivated by wanting to make a difference for their community (e.g., by working in Māori health). In many cases, school career planning and support, or a peer culture that valued UE, had also shaped their university aspirations.

Turu 3: Effective Pacific pedagogies Understands the aspirations of Pacific learners, their parents, families and communities for their future and sets high expectations. (*Tapasā*, p. 14)

Teachers and school leaders recognised that university was not necessarily the pathway that all students would embark on immediately after Year 13. However, they were adamant that all students should have the option to do so. Most school leaders told us that they used achievement data to set UE targets for their students. They purposefully set the same high UE targets for ākonga Māori and Pacific students as they did for all students. School leaders explained that they strategically allocated resources to ensure that ākonga Māori and Pacific students were supported to attain these targets. Because school leaders were intentional about establishing a high-expectations culture, staff and BOT members at these schools knew and could talk about their UE targets.

Although most teachers and school leaders had high expectations for their ākonga Māori and Pacific students (both generally and in relation to UE attainment), not all students understood this. During our conversations with Year 13 students who were on a pathway to UE, a few students expressed surprise that they had been selected to speak with us. Therefore, one next step for some of these schools is to ensure that students know their teachers believe in and have high expectations of them, and to make sure that students believe in and have high expectations of themselves.

Effective teaching matters

> *It's really in the way we [the kaiako Māori] deliver. Pushing that student to their truest potential, which is much more than they have ever realised. You've got to take them to that realm of the unknown. You can go deep [with] a lot of haka, a lot of waiata, a lot of whakataukī. Using our Māoritanga to inspire and it does work here because the kids are really hungry for it.* (Kaiako Māori)

> *The teachers, they really prioritise our learning. I was surprised, because I started at [this school] last year, to find out a lot of the teachers were willing to give up their time during break time [and] after school to do tutorials. I was like, 'Whoa, you care.' That really helps us complete standards and that, sacrificing their time.* (Pacific student)

The importance of effective teaching and high expectations. (Starpath Phase Three, p. 33)

The role that effective teaching played in supporting ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE was emphasised at all six schools, mostly by school leaders, teachers, and students.

School leaders fostered a culture of high expectations for staff and prioritised learning and continuous improvement. They were intentional about employing and retaining high-quality teachers, and they valued the skills and understandings that kaiako Māori and Pacific teachers drew on when working with ākonga Māori and Pacific students. Many of the schools allocated extra resources to create additional equity-focused positions (e.g., positions for reo Māori teachers, mentor teachers, or literacy teachers). This form of strategic resourcing assisted schools with employing and retaining quality staff.

Turu 3: Effective Pacific pedagogies Implements pedagogical approaches that are effective for Pacific learners. (*Tapasā*, p. 14)

School leaders also took responsibility for establishing a learning-focused professional culture within their schools and endeavoured to provide staff with access to high-quality professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities. At one of the schools where we focused on ākonga Māori, they had been working for almost two decades on strengthening their culturally responsive practices. Likewise, numerous participants at other schools told us their school was also on this journey and that they had taken part in external and internal PLD focused on building staff capability in this area.

During our conversations with ākonga Māori and Pacific students, they told us that effective teachers supported them to attain the UE award by:

- establishing caring and respectful relationships with them and their families
- believing in and having high expectations of them
- teaching in engaging ways and adapting their style to suit different students
- caring and going the extra mile to support them to attain achievement standards that contribute to UE subjects
- creating culturally safe learning environments.

Leadership matters

> *We still get feedback that our kids need more as Māori but there's definitely been a positive shift. The support we've had from [the principal], the board of trustees, we've felt no barriers. We've been able to basically say, 'This is what we need.' And they understand, and we've got almost like a passage. Definitely, we feel that support from the board and from [the principal].* (Kaiako Māori)

> *In Samoa, there is an old proverb, 'O le tele o sulu, e maua ai figota. E māmā se 'avega pe a tatou galulue fa'atasi.' And it just simply means, 'My strength does not come from me alone, but from many.' And I say that in reflection of [the principal] because if you take that proverb, that's [him] as a leader. He reaches out to his SLT, reaches out to the team. And then puts systems in place to make sure that whatever plan he implements to support those UE Pacific students is of the best of his knowledge, and the best of his ability.* (Pacific BOT member)

School leaders had clear visions for equity which underpinned the work the schools were doing to support high UE attainment for ākonga Māori and Pacific students. This leadership was evident at multiple levels; from the schools' leadership teams (i.e., the principal, BOT, and SLT, inclusive of the NZQA principal's nominee) through to the leadership that teachers and students demonstrated.

In all the schools, the SLT, and particularly the principal, led with moral purpose. They played a crucial role creating the conditions that enabled others to support ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE. They did this by "walking the talk" themselves and having an unrelenting focus on improving equity for students and through fostering a school culture (and introducing initiatives and approaches) that supported this goal. In addition to prioritising whanaungatanga, creating the conditions within which culture genuinely mattered, and emphasising the importance of high expectations and effective teaching, these leaders created distributed leadership structures. The principal's nominees were key staff members. At all the schools, the staff in this role were either deputy or assistant principals. They were instrumental in developing and overseeing school approaches to NCEA and UE. Senior leaders also ensured that achievement data were used to inquire into and inform teaching, leadership, and resourcing decisions. In general, they did not wait until the end of the year to review initiatives or approaches. Instead, they looked at data regularly to see how their students were tracking and promptly allocated extra resources or offered new forms of support to assist students if needed. This responsiveness and willingness to innovate was one factor that supported students to gain UE.

Part of the school leaders' vision for equity involved taking all staff with them on a journey to become more culturally responsive and sustaining. Leadership also came from kaiako Māori and Pacific staff, who used their cultural understandings to create ways of working and forms of support that worked for students from their cultures.

Within the six schools, responsibility for being leaders of learning was shared by senior leaders, teachers, and students. Further information about the ways in which schools achieved this are described in the next section, where we provide details about the specific initiatives and approaches that schools employed to support ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE.

4. Ngā kōkiri me ngā ara tautoko i te ekenga taumata Initiatives and approaches that support success

Schools developed and employed a variety of initiatives and approaches that aimed to support high UE attainment for ākonga Māori and Pacific students. These fell into five broad categories:

- Developing leadership systems, roles, and opportunities that prioritise relationships, learning, and achievement
- Using achievement data to set targets, identify and respond to needs, and allocate resources
- Designing pathways to UE that reduce barriers
- Starting students early on a pathway to UE
- Supporting students to stay on a pathway to UE.

In this section, we provide some practical examples of the initiatives and approaches that schools were using to support high UE attainment. Where relevant, text boxes are used to draw attention to links between these approaches and findings from the Starpath Project's Phase Three final report (Webber et al., 2018).

Developing leadership systems, roles, and opportunities

> *One of the changes [the principal] made was to change the form class structure. So, [students] are in a form class from Year 9, which is house based, through to Year 13, with the same form teacher. So, their form teacher knows their form class well. In terms of UE and checking in and credits, the form teacher is the first port of call. And then if someone's struggling the deans are house based, so know their learners and their whānau. And then we have careers support. And then [a staff member] who does a lot of the data work with KAMAR. So, there's lots of points of contact there's not [just] one person.* (Non-Māori senior leaders)

At all the schools, senior leaders had established leadership systems, roles, and opportunities that prioritised relationships, learning, and achievement. Because these relationship-focused leadership initiatives increased the chance that students were known and understood, they reduced the likelihood that students could fall through the cracks. In most schools, this was achieved by creating systems that enabled deans and/or whānau, form, homeroom, or tutor teachers to move with students as they progressed from Years 9–13. We heard that such approaches had the added benefit of enabling schools to ensure that both the pastoral and the academic needs of students were met by staff who knew them well.

> *We had very few [Māori] kids wanting to be student leaders, mainly because of the way we've traditionally selected them. They had to stand up in front of the teachers and give a speech. And all of that's gone and our student leadership team is saturated with Māori kids now. The skills that are representative of [our] Māori cultural toolkit are in our head students now, and they're the things that are valued.* (Kaiārahi matua Māori)

> *We have a very, very strong and active Samoan parents' community. And so, they ask us [the SLT] to come to meetings to present to the parents on academic achievement and support for Samoan [students]. The community is very, very active in terms of engagement in the school and in terms of providing initiatives for [students].* (Non-Pacific principal)

Many schools had also established a culture that enabled Māori and Pacific teachers, students, and family members to lead. Senior leaders did this by recognising and valuing the knowledge, skills, and insights that members of their schools' Māori and Pacific communities could contribute and by creating space for people to step forward. In one instance (quoted above), this enabled staff to lead a change process that aligned the school's system for recruiting student leaders with mātāpono Māori. As a result, many more ākonga Māori stepped forward and became head students. This provided these ākonga with opportunities to experience success as Māori and, in turn, to influence their school's efforts to improve equity for ākonga Māori. In addition, this change also ensured younger ākonga Māori saw themselves as future leaders. As noted earlier, all schools recognised and valued the contributions of whānau Māori and Pacific families, and some did a particularly good job of working in partnership to create leadership spaces and opportunities for these communities (e.g., through encouraging and supporting the establishment of rōpū for whānau Māori and/or parents' committees for specific Pacific communities).

Using achievement data to set targets, and identify and respond to needs

> *I've always been into early intervention. Let's not wait till we get the results to know what we already knew six weeks ago was on track to happen. Every two weeks was a good amount of time to start having those conversations [with the extended leadership team] and looking at our intervention strategies or where things were tracking and what we might need to do. And so, every year since [we started doing that] we've reached our [UE] targets.* (Non-Pacific principal)

At all the schools, using achievement data to set targets, identify and respond to needs, and allocate resources were viewed as practices that supported ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE. School leaders played an important role, modelling

Effective data utilisation is crucial for students' success. (Starpath Phase Three, p. 70)

these data utilisation practices within their own teams and with the BOT, and establishing a school culture within which data use was highly valued. Because senior leaders walked the talk when it came to data utilisation, teachers typically made excellent use of data for tracking student progress and identifying and responding to their needs. Likewise, in many schools, students were taught to track their progress and could identify if they required additional support with attaining credits.

Designing pathways to UE that reduce barriers

> *I think [de-streaming] helped dissolve some of those structural inequalities. Because it was a bit of a refrain that if you were in ENR [English enrichment] you were ENR for life. And it was okay not to get 14 credits because, 'Why would they, they're in the bottom class?' Whereas, the moment it was 90% of the [students] doing English, then we've got to come up with a course that's going to allow 90% of the [students] to succeed. That was huge it really helped us think about the quality of [the] teaching and learning service that we were offering.* (Non-Pacific senior leader)

> *We've already made that one change [removing prerequisites]. Our [ākonga Māori] couldn't get into the classes [because] we used to have a lot of prerequisites. And when kids would change their mind, 'I want to have a crack at sciences.' [They would hear] 'Oh you didn't do it at Year 11, you can't do it.' So, I think our journey around giving opportunities, having growth mindsets, there's more willingness to let kids try.* (Kaiārahi matua Māori)

When designing their courses and curricula, the six schools had a strong focus on establishing coherent pathways to UE and communicating about these to all students. They used a variety of approaches to ensure that their offerings provided ākonga Māori and Pacific students with unimpeded access to pathways to UE. These approaches, which were not all employed by all schools, included:

Effective systems and processes around NCEA and UE are essential.
(Starpath Phase Three, p. 48)

- removing streaming and prerequisites to make it easier for students to take UE-approved subjects
- raising the profile of achievement standards and UE-approved subjects (e.g., by limiting the number of unit standards subjects on offer)
- structuring courses to include a balance of internal and external assessments so students could secure achievement standards that contribute to UE subjects early, through completing internal assessments
- partnering with Te Whatu Ora to offer a Health Science Academy and/or with the Pūhoro Charitable Trust to offer a Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Mātauranga Māori (STEMM) Academy.

Teachers and school leaders at several schools emphasised the positive impacts that removing streaming and prerequisites had in terms of supporting ākonga Māori and Pacific students to attain UE. Impacts included:

- increasing students' access to courses that led to UE-approved subjects
- encouraging teachers to have high expectations for all students, and students to hold themselves to high standards
- prompting teachers to ensure that their courses and teaching approaches reflected and responded to the needs of all students.

Starting students early on a pathway to UE

> *We tell them from when they come in that, 'Our expectation is for you to achieve in a lot of areas, but we expect you to achieve the highest qualification that you have in New Zealand, which is University Entrance.'* (Non-Pacific Principal)

> *What I love is [the careers adviser] spends hours getting to know the students. The students do fill in a careers survey every year. So, if something comes up, an engineering opportunity or [someone] is coming to visit to talk about this, she'll pull them out of class and be like, 'Hey we've got this person coming, do you want to be a part of it? Do you want to go here? Hey, you need to apply for this.'*
> (Non-Māori middle leader)

Survey and interview data showed that the schools were employing a range of strategies to ensure that ākonga Māori and Pacific students started early on a pathway to UE. We learnt that teachers and school leaders talked with students and their families early and often about the importance of UE and about UE requirements. Students had regular conversations with teachers, school leaders, and careers advisers about their aspirations, including their university and career goals. Likewise, we were told that, from as early as Years 9 and 10, students received support with subject selection to increase the likelihood that they were on a pathway to UE. In at least some cases, this involved careful tracking of junior students' numeracy and literacy attainment to enable early intervention if additional support was required. Finally, we heard about the ways in which schools sought to inspire ākonga Māori and Pacific students to see themselves as university students and graduates.

Tracking and monitoring of Year 9 and 10 students for UE is important.
(Starpath Phase Three, p. 66)

At one school, the tradition of hosting an academic prizegiving early in the school year enabled them to celebrate their recent graduates' NCEA achievements and promote the importance of UE attainment. The school did this by inviting the Year 13 students from the previous year's cohort to return in February for a full school prizegiving. At this event, every student who had attained UE crossed the stage, saw their name projected on screen, and received a certificate and applause.

Schools need to provide opportunities for students to be inspired.
(Starpath Phase Three, p. 55)

The ākonga Māori and Pacific students we spoke with told us that their schools had done a good job of explaining UE and UE requirements to them. Although a few noted that their schools had probably

started talking to them about UE before they fully tuned into these messages, they thought it was helpful to be told about UE early and often.

The importance of proactive careers advisers was emphasised at almost all the schools, particularly by students. We heard that these advisers, who typically had strong relationships with universities, invested hours building relationships with students, talking with them about their aspirations and their career goals, and ensuring that they had access to the people, organisations, and resources they required to fulfil their ambitions.

Supporting students to stay on a pathway to UE

> *All the teachers always check up on you. Like I always have the deans emailing me, 'How are you going to get these credits?' or 'When are you going to get them?' And [the careers adviser] is pretty good too.* (Ākonga Māori)

> *Our dean is like the meanest keyboard warrior. She texts and she sends emails and emails. She's constantly contacting [my family]. My parents forward me the texts that she sends to them.* (Pacific student)

When it came to the initiatives and approaches that schools were using to ensure that ākonga Māori and Pacific students stayed on a pathway to UE, all six schools emphasised the importance of tracking student achievement, communicating with whānau, and ensuring that students had multiple opportunities to learn and attain achievement standards that contribute to UE subjects.

All the schools used the KAMAR student management system to enable leaders, teachers, and students to track attendance, achievement, NCEA credits, and student progress towards the UE award. Many schools were prompt to notify and involve families if their young people were falling behind, not attending school regularly, or if they required additional support. Schools also acknowledged the importance of students taking responsibility for tracking their achievement. In two cases, we were told about initiatives that schools had implemented to ensure that students understood and used the KAMAR portal to track their own NCEA credits.

At all six schools, teachers and school leaders used tracking to identify and provide assistance to students who needed extra support. Across the schools, two main types of support and assistance were provided:

- intensive targeted assistance that was available to small groups of students, usually for a limited period
- universally available assistance that could be accessed by a wider group of students.

Intensive targeted assistance

If, for example, they're so far behind in maths and they can get UE in say three of their other subjects we'll [the mentor teachers will] have a talk to the maths teacher. So, rather than [the student] sitting in maths and daydreaming and doing nothing, [we] pull them out of maths. So, we've got that subject [time] that we can use for a mentoring line as well. And that's [done in] consultation with the dean, 'Look this is probably not going to be a UE subject, let's pull that [subject] off the timetable and that's going to be another subject [time] we can use for mentoring.'
(Non-Pacific mentor teacher)

Students need multiple opportunities to learn and achieve. (Starpath Phase Three, p. 61)

Schools offered a range of forms of targeted assistance for all students who were at risk of not attaining UE. The support depended on students' contexts and could include developing individual achievement plans for students and/or creating opportunities for students to work closely with a teacher or mentor. In a few cases, this involved utilising the Mentoring and Tutoring Education Scheme (MATEs) programme, which students access on-site, after school.

One school had established an in-house mentoring programme that was offered during school hours from Term 3 each year. This programme was staffed by two mentor teachers who worked with Year 13 students who were on a UE track and had been identified as needing targeted support to attain the required credits. These students worked alongside the mentor teachers during their line of study (4 hours a week). At other times the mentor teachers consulted with students, subject teachers, and the Year 13 dean, about ways they could maximise the available teaching and learning time to support students. Once a plan had been developed, students sometimes worked with the mentor teachers during:

- classes for their unit standards subject(s) in which they had already fulfilled the requirements
- classes for their UE-approved Level 3 subject(s) within which they already had at least 14 credits
- classes in which the teacher had moved on to exam preparation (and the mentor students would benefit from first completing their internally assessed achievement standards)
- classes for additional (e.g., 4th and/or 5th) UE-approved subject(s) in which the student was unlikely to get 14 credits, even with additional support.

Universally available assistance

In addition to providing targeted support to students who were at risk of not attaining UE, schools sought to ensure all students could access the assistance they needed. Universally available assistance ranged from the provision of extensions for internal assessments through to catch-up sessions and days (including summer school sessions). Because schools realised that ākonga Māori and Pacific students often had commitments after school (e.g., caring for siblings and/or doing paid work), they frequently offered these catch-up opportunities within school hours. They achieved this by modifying the regular timetable for some or all students. For example, two schools ran off-timetable sessions for a given subject (either for a full day or for an extended block) to enable students to work with subject teachers to complete achievement standards that contributed to UE subjects.

5. He kupu whakakapi Conclusion

Our team had the privilege of working with and learning from the students, staff, and community members from six secondary schools who were committed to improving equity for ākonga Māori and Pacific students. Their efforts to ensure these students had equitable access to a university education were underpinned by a wide range of conditions, initiatives, and approaches. There was commonality in many school actions, but schools had also introduced approaches that were tailored to the specific needs of their students and communities. The schools in which students' attainment of UE was in the higher range for their EQI band average had typically embedded a more comprehensive range of conditions, initiatives, and approaches than the schools in which UE attainment was around 10% above average.

All the schools were on journeys to become more culturally responsive and sustaining, and they all believed that their students had the right to be known, to be understood, and to succeed as Māori and/or as Pacific. Those we spoke with knew the equity-focused initiatives and approaches that their schools employed were making a difference for their students, and they wanted ākonga Māori and Pacific students at other schools to experience these benefits too. They also wanted their graduates to experience success at university, and expressed some concern that universities may not be providing the level of equity-focused care and support that they did. Likewise, they feared that aspects of the NCEA change programme could have the unintended consequence of increasing rather than reducing inequity for ākonga Māori and Pacific students.

In terms of laying the foundation for Aotearoa New Zealand to grow a more culturally representative workforce and to become a more equitable society, these six secondary schools are leading the way. The initiatives and approaches employed in these six schools show other secondary schools, policy makers, and universities what it takes to improve equity for ākonga Māori and Pacific students, and that it can be done.

Further details about this research will be provided in forthcoming publications and resources.

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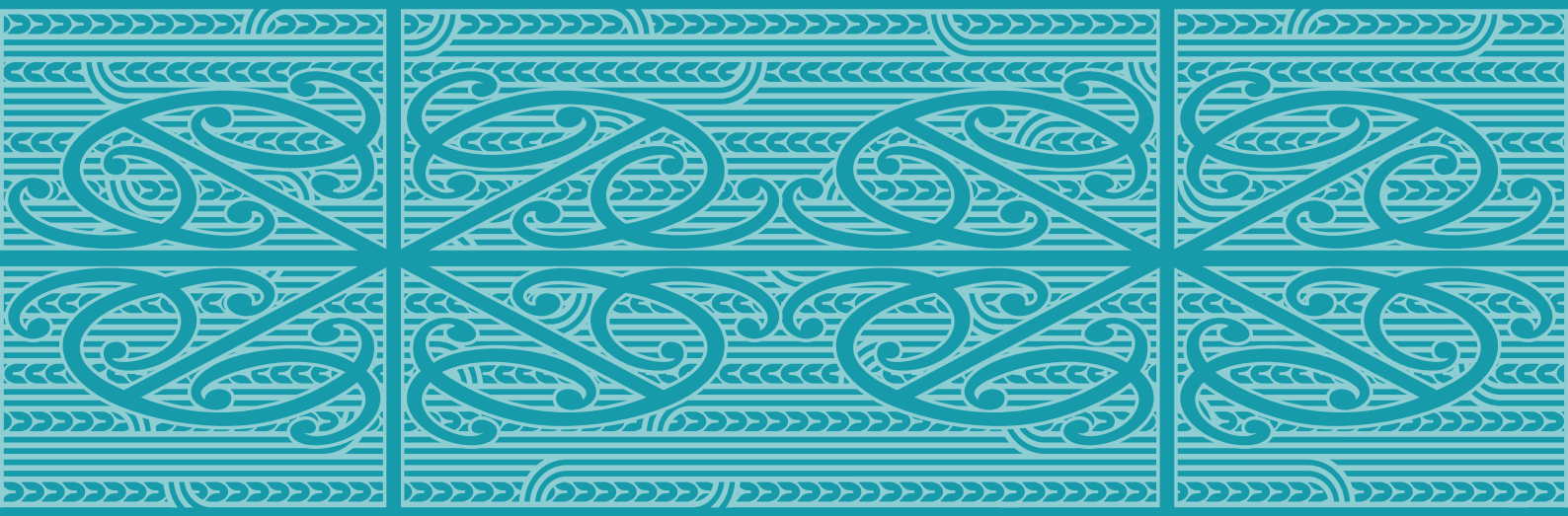

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