



# Nelson academy fills the gap

Top of the South Trades Academy, Nelson, Marlborough, Tasman

The lack of vocational training opportunities available to students across the Top of the South region is being addressed by a unique educational organisation.

Five colleges and the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) recognised the need to provide clear pathways for students leaving school and considering tertiary training or employment in the region.

The Top of the South Trades Academy (TOTSTA) was established in 2011. Shaaron Adams, Trades Academy Manager, opened the door to students and within five months there were 110 students from the Nelson Tasman region participating. Now two years later the Academy has 15 partners in a region extending from Nelson and Tasman to Marlborough, offering 12 different programmes to nearly 300 students.

TOTSTA provides students in the region an opportunity to learn and engage in programmes across a range of industries and trades enabling successful transition from school to tertiary training and the outside employment world.

“My satisfaction is getting all of our partners working in a constructive way for the students in the region,” Shaaron says. “Daily I see the energy and motivation that the students have gained.”

Students can access programmes across hospitality, tourism, agriculture, construction and many others. The programmes have a component where students study at their own school and attend at least one day at TOTSTA. Students thrive in the tertiary-type-hands on environment. Students have to take on more personal responsibility and are therefore more engaged in the ‘work’, they are punctual and are present and start to learn the fundamentals of what it might take to work in a particular field or industry.

“Vocational Pathways is an extremely timely initiative. The Vocational Pathways framework are helping students, parents and the community prepare our young people for work, study or training and our programmes are providing the skills that industry wants.” TOTSTA is starting to build and grow the number of students coming out with valuable skills and qualifications to help build the pool of talent in New Zealand.

Shaaron explains that TOTSTA’s role is to provide an atmosphere where students experience what tertiary training is about, succeed in that environment, build relationships with tutors and students from other schools and get a sense of the pathways open to them.





*I like being practical.  
building skills will  
set me up for life.  
My path is Orange.*

"We give the students in our region an opportunity to have a 'foot in the door' or a clearer picture of their future options while still remaining in the school environment and part of the school's values."

Nat Edwards from Waimea College experienced that 'foot in the door' while pursuing a career in mechanical engineering.

However, as a result of the environment and conversations with tutors who encouraged him to make his own decisions, Nat changed his mind.

"I had a career rethink. I wanted to try something different. I talked to my family and a couple of local builders and decided I wanted to do construction," Nat says.

"I'm a hands-on, outdoors person. I had this vision of starting with an empty space and building something architecturally designed."

As a result Nat, who's in Year 13 at Waimea College, has started his second year at TOTSTA with the goal of an apprenticeship in building.

In 10 years' time he intends to own his own company to build the structures of the future somewhere in the world. But there's also a strong humanitarian side to Nat.

"I want to help people in need. I want to build homes for them and give them shelter," he says.

That humanitarian component is a key part of TOTSTA and students are treated as colleagues, receive personal attention, shown the right pathway and get the hands-on experience they require.

Shaaron says the students are more motivated with their studies and understand the importance of maths and English because of how the subjects are implicitly being taught and applied in practical projects such construction or business.

Peter Allen, at Motueka High School said that they rely heavily on industry to support their vocational programmes.

"We have excellent relationships with organisations who open their doors to our students and teach them on-the-job. This is a great example of industry taking responsibility for ensuring they have an educated and skilled future workforce. It is these kinds of partnerships which help ensure that young New Zealanders are getting what they need to make their lives a success." Motueka has excellent relationships with local employers such as Mac Hops, Kono Horticulture, Nelson Forestry HQ, Carter Holt and Talley's to name a few. The van which transports the students to their onsite learning was sponsored by industry.

"We help our children aspire and they go from there" says Peter.

More than 4,200 senior secondary schools students, from 264 schools are currently enrolled at a Trades Academy this year, in 22 Secondary-Tertiary Programmes throughout New Zealand. Using the Vocational Pathways, students can plan their options from learning to earning.

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