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# Targeted Evaluation Report

Universal College of Learning (UCOL)  
Limited

Date of report: 1 February 2023

# Targeted evaluation of Universal College of Learning (UCOL)

*Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) became subsidiaries of Te Pūkenga - New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology as part of the Reform of Vocational Education.*

*NZQA carries out targeted evaluations of Te Pūkenga subsidiaries whose external evaluation and reviews (EER) became due during the transition to the new organisation.*

*The targeted evaluations focus on areas of educational performance that will be important for both the subsidiary and Te Pūkenga in the new operating environment.*

*The limited scope of the targeted evaluation means that it will not result in organisational statements of confidence. Therefore, no EER category status will be assigned.*

# About Universal College of Learning (UCOL) Limited

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*Universal College of Learning (UCOL) provides applied vocational education and training ranging from levels 1-9 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. UCOL operates four campuses (Manawatū, Whanganui, Wairarapa and Horowhenua), delivers education at community-based sites, and offers on-site, work-based learning with a range of industry partners.*

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Type of organisation:	New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology
Location:	Corner King and Princess Streets, Palmerston North
Code of Practice signatory <sup>1</sup> :	Yes
Number of students (2021):	Domestic: 6,528 learners in 2021 – 3,052 equivalent full-time students (EFTS); 3,418 learners under 25 years comprise 52.4 per cent of EFTS  Priority learners identified by the Tertiary Education Strategy <sup>2</sup> – Māori 29 per cent and Pasifika 6.3 per cent of EFTS; 1,401 learners declared a disability  International: 157 students in 2021 (123 EFTS)
Number of staff:	413.7 full-time equivalents – 272 teaching and 206 non-teaching
TEO profile:	<a href="#">Universal College of Learning (UCOL) Limited</a>
Last EER outcome:	Confident in educational performance and Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment (July 2017)

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<sup>1</sup> The Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021 (the Code)

<sup>2</sup> [The Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities and Tertiary Education Strategy 2020](#)

Scope of evaluation:	This targeted evaluation considered three focus areas <sup>3</sup> : <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Learner support – how effectively UCOL supports and guides learners.</li><li>2. Learning assessment design and practice – how effectively UCOL assesses learning.</li><li>3. Area of strength nominated by UCOL – Partnerships that make a difference.</li></ol>
MoE number:	6009
NZQA reference:	C45735
Dates of targeted evaluation:	15-23 August 2022 (virtual)

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<sup>3</sup> With sampling from the faculties of Engineering and Applied Technologies, and Humanities and Business for Focus areas 1 and 2.

# Summary of results

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*Targeted support services identify and meet the most important needs of learners. A collaborative approach to learner support provides culturally appropriate academic and pastoral support to learners across all campuses and community-based sites. However, the impact of support on learner success is not clearly articulated and there is limited evidence at an organisational level of how well the services match learner needs.*

*Enhancing, supporting and monitoring assessment practice is a current focus for UCOL, initiated in response to internal and external review processes. Recent changes in organisational structures have increased oversight of assessment design and monitoring of academic policies and moderation processes. While some early improvement is evident, the impact of these improvements is yet to be confirmed.*

*UCOL is moving towards an integrated delivery model involving workplace-based, online and educator-facilitated learning. UCOL demonstrates a commitment to strengthen and consolidate partnerships through a whole-of-organisation approach. Existing long-standing strategic iwi, business and industry partnerships, agreements and relationships are being enhanced by initiatives in the 2021/2022 Strategic Transition Business Plan. Many of these initiatives are in the early stages of delivery, with some successful examples of positive impacts demonstrating regional partnerships as an emerging area of strength.*

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- The nature and range of support provision and activities is appropriate and responsive to identified learner needs. Enthusiastic, skilled staff are working hard to provide services that meet the needs of learners across all delivery modes and locations. An organisational culture focussed on productive relationships underpins effective communication and information-sharing about learner needs.
- UCOL has regular processes for gathering individual learner feedback. Plans to establish more formal opportunities for learners to engage with management are important to ensure a stronger learner voice in planning and decision-making.
- Understanding the effectiveness of support services and their contribution towards learner achievement would be enhanced by the implementation of a clear strategy, identified targets and more integrated and effective use of data.
- UCOL has strengthened its quality assurance processes regarding assessment practice in response to some variable external monitoring and assessment moderation results. Effective oversight and monitoring by the academic committee framework is improving the quality of assessment

practice, and an intentional focus on assessment design within academic teams is driving improvements. Strengthened approaches are recent, and external moderation and monitoring reporting is not yet available to confirm the effectiveness of these improvements.

- Productive regional partnerships and improved stakeholder engagement are acknowledged by UCOL as essential for a strategic shift towards a more flexible, integrated delivery model. The recently established Business and Industry Partnerships directorate is consolidating the management of key relationships to maximise value and provide an understanding of their impact. Existing cross-organisational partnerships have contributed some valued outcomes including employment, relevant education and training, and social benefit aligned to the Strategic Transition Business Plan priorities, and there is further potential to grow and strengthen this activity.
- UCOL values strong relationships with iwi and hapū and is making continuous improvements to enhance existing relationships. There is ongoing work to further develop appropriate frameworks and operational approaches that will ensure UCOL understands and is able to support Māori aspirations within the region. Continuing to grow partnerships with iwi and hapū in the region remains a priority as Te Pūkenga is further implemented.

# Focus areas

## Focus area 1: How effectively are learners supported?

### Findings and supporting evidence

Te Mana Tauira<sup>4</sup> teams lead a collaborative, relationship-based approach to learner support that responds appropriately to identified learner needs. A three-tiered model targets priority<sup>5</sup> and at-risk learners throughout their study with a range of interventions. Attendance, academic progress and engagement data is systematically used to identify individuals who may be at risk. Fortnightly faculty meetings identify interventions and monitor the effectiveness of engagement with individual learners. Information systems (e.g. Pātaka Korero, Attendance App) are used to capture and share information about staff engagement with learners across teams to improve services to learners.

Relationships are established with learners and whānau at the start of study to support learner success. Pre-enrolment conversations and kōrero admissions interviews enable staff to understand the learners, their aspirations, needs and goals and identify the support needed. Early relationship-building between lecturers/tutors, learners and class groups helps learners settle into their learning environments. Study planning with academic portfolio managers clarifies programme expectations and establishes opportunities for communication between learners and management.

The Raukura team provides dedicated, culturally appropriate services for Māori learners which are valued by teams across UCOL. The teacher development programme, Te Atakura<sup>6</sup>, established in 2013, is noted as a significant driver of positive change for Māori learners, with the focus on relationship-based teaching. Evaluation of Te Atakura established a positive impact on Māori learner achievement in the early years of the project. Synthesis of a large body of more recent data is planned to provide evidence of the ongoing impact on learner success.

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<sup>4</sup> Te Mana Tauira includes Student Success, Raukura, Māori Pasifika Trades Training and Te Atakura.

<sup>5</sup> Priority learners for targeted support are learners in certificates at levels 3 and 4, and first-year degree courses.

<sup>6</sup> Te Atakura is a culturally responsive teaching approach, focused on developing a strong learning relationship between students and their teachers. It aims to improve the educational achievements of Māori students, as well as their wider classmates. UCOL was the first tertiary institution in the world to embed Professor Russell Bishop's research into improving Māori learning, and the majority of the Te Atakura team are accredited members of Cognition Education's Relationships First – Global Network.  
<https://www.ucol.ac.nz/study-at-ucol/maori-pasifika/te-atakura>

UCOL's comprehensive self-review against the Code of Practice identified the organisation as compliant with most outcomes, and assigned actions to managers to address gaps in evidence or practice. A disability action plan for 2022 responds to areas of need identified in the Code self-review. This has enabled UCOL to provide funding for assisted technology, subsidise provider costs for interventions, and focus on access to education as a human right, to enable learner independence. UCOL Horowhenua was the first Te Pūkenga subsidiary to be registered with the Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark<sup>7</sup> identifying the campus as a dyslexia-friendly organisation.

Covid lockdowns presented significant challenges for staff, learners and support activities. UCOL implemented additional services to support student health, wellbeing and learning needs, and provided online, email and phone access to support. Additional resourcing required to provide effective teaching, learning and services during Covid interrupted some planned improvements such as the development of survey tools to improve learner feedback on service effectiveness, and a project for gathering student feedback.<sup>8</sup>

Opportunities for learners to provide feedback are variable. Centrally administered surveys generally have low response rates and limited utility to identify and drive improvement. The student satisfaction survey, Tōku Reo – My Voice, has positive response rates for an online survey and is used to identify and address priority issues. Student services systematically gathers feedback at activity level, which has led to improvements such as the availability of a nurse practitioner to respond to identified difficulties for Māori, Pasifika and disabled learners accessing medical help. Feedback from end-of-programme evaluation surveys is used to inform the curriculum and deliver improvements.

Other mechanisms for gathering feedback from individual students within faculties are generally informal and dependent on relationships between learners and staff. Some useful information arising from Māori learner focus groups suggests a positive link between teacher development on the Te Atakura programme and Māori learner experiences. The planned student council will re-establish formal opportunities for students to engage with management and influence planning, policy and procedures.

There are some good examples of small-scale reviews and pilots used to provide information about the impact of services and to identify improvements at activity level. These include the tracking of learners with a self-identified disability or mental health needs. This aims to better understand these learners' use of the services available and changes made to the hardship grants policy following

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<sup>7</sup> The DFQM is an initiative to promote a supportive learning environment for dyslexic people funded by the Tertiary Education Commission. [Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark » Ako Aotearoa](#)

<sup>8</sup> Identified in the Student Success Whanganui Self-Assessment Report 2020.



analysis of learner withdrawal interviews about the extent of hardship challenges faced by learners. These discrete reviews of initiatives/activities provide insights at a case study level. However, there is limited information about the impact of the support provided on learner success, retention and engagement. Identification of themes across Te Mana Tauira would help to inform planning and decision-making.

Course and qualification completion trends are included in annual self-assessment reports and are monitored at an organisational level. Māori and Pasifika learners have lower course and qualification completion rates than other students. While the gap decreased over the initial years of implementation of Te Atakura, more analysis is needed to evaluate the recent impact of interventions with Māori and Pasifika learners on retention and success.

UCOL acknowledges that a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of learner support requires attention and investment, including a greater focus on the availability of integrated data and analysis. However, initiatives to address this need have been deferred pending likely opportunities to leverage existing systems and expertise within the Te Pūkenga network.

## Focus area 2: How effectively is learning assessed?

### Findings and supporting evidence

The policy framework for learner assessment is generally clear, well understood and communicated within academic portfolio areas. Guidance for assessment within programmes of study is set out in programme regulations and appears to be appropriate and comprehensive.

In recent years there has been some variability in results from external moderation of unit standard assessment and monitoring of internal moderation with some areas showing poor outcomes over multiple years.<sup>9</sup> UCOL has implemented improvements to assessment and moderation practice in response to issues identified through internal and external moderation of assessment. Recent changes to the organisational structure have enhanced management's line of sight on moderation practice and increased the level of scrutiny given to assessment design and quality. Pre-assessment moderation is currently focused on ensuring assessments meet learning outcomes and that they assess learning at the appropriate level.

Central monitoring of assessment and moderation by the academic committee and Faculty Boards of Educational Improvement (FBEIs) contributes to a clear understanding of assessment practice across the organisation. A recent report analysing industry training organisation moderation outcomes identified themes

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<sup>9</sup> Details in Appendix 1.

and areas for improvement and staff professional development. Curriculum and Academic Services provides expert support for academic portfolio managers and academic staff to assure the quality and consistency of assessment through collaboration and sharing of good practice.

Other improvements underway to address identified issues include changes to record-keeping processes, a systematic review of assessment resources, and post-assessment moderation occurring prior to results being released to learners for programmes with poor historical moderation outcomes.

New staff members are supported with assessment and moderation workshops, a buddy system and cross-marking to assist with developing their assessment practice. The unification of programmes underway with Te Pūkenga is guiding prioritisation of assessment development and redesign. Benefits from this collaborative activity across the subsidiaries will have positive impacts on assessment quality including shared good practice and collaborative moderation activities.

Processes for managing academic integrity appear to be well understood by staff and learners, with a range of processes in place for detecting, responding to, and managing situations of academic dishonesty. Academic staff are engaged in conversations about the quality of assessment. They are aware of the importance of assessment design as a key tool to manage the authenticity of assessment, particularly in the context of valid and authentic online assessment.

Employer and learner voices are being used effectively in programme and assessment design within the blended/integrated learning project. Learners, employers and industry stakeholders are collaborating with the learning designers to ensure assessment is relevant, realistic, matches the learning context and is consistent with learner and employer needs. Implementation of an e-portfolio system is underway to simplify the process for external stakeholders to attest to work undertaken as evidence for assessment. This design approach provides a potential model to enhance the quality and relevance of assessment for all delivery modes at UCOL.

The Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) team provides a comprehensive and personalised assessment process, from initial conversation through to self-evaluation of evidence (profiling), development of plans and targets, and coaching through suggested pathways and programmes of learning. The consistency and validity of evidence is assured by two assessors for each application, with external contractors acting as moderators to quality assure the process where needed. The APL process provides a useful alternative pathway, particularly for programmes in business and humanities, and for New Zealand Defence Force and Chamber of Commerce learners. Interestingly only 10 per cent of initial enquiries complete their qualifications through the APL process, with 90 per cent of learners electing to enrol in full programmes of study.

The incorporation of Mātauranga Māori into the programme portfolio and in particular, assessment design, is in the early stages of emerging practice, with examples in applied science, conservation, nursing and teaching and training. Further investment in capability building in this area and clear expectations for the inclusion of Mātauranga Māori is needed to support implementation. The unification of programmes across the Te Pūkenga network may contribute to this development.

A good mix of assessment approaches is in place, and learners identified that formative assessment supported their preparedness for summative assessment. Learners expressed general satisfaction with assessment and said they were well prepared for assessment and knew what was expected. Students from the business programmes were satisfied with the provision of programme and assessment information in the learning management system, noting that it was a useful repository of relevant assessment information.

Learner feedback on the suitability of assessment does not appear to be systematically gathered, and some learners indicated dissatisfaction with the match between the curriculum and industry expectations. While some staff and learners reported issues in relation to timeliness of marking, there was no evidence to suggest this was a significant systemic issue. Additional resources were available in some areas to ensure marking timeframes were met.

The results of NZQA consistency reviews for 2018-21 show that all 66 reviews of UCOL's submissions were rated 'sufficient'. This provides assurance that the evidence relating to programme design, assessment practice and moderation results – supported by stakeholder feedback – shows that graduates have achieved the outcomes specified in the graduate profile of the qualifications under review.

Annual programme reviews, moderation and monitoring reports currently provide some reflection on the effectiveness of assessment at programme level. Faculty Boards of Educational Improvement (FBEIs) regularly monitor assessment and moderation schedules and actions in the academic areas, with summary reporting to the academic committee from FBEIs and curriculum and academic services. This provides opportunities to review performance and identify and monitor improvements at an organisational level.

Activity is in progress to improve the quality of assessment tools and assessor practice. At this stage of the process, reporting on external moderation of assessment is not yet available to confirm the effectiveness of increased oversight and associated improvements in assessment design and assessor practice.

### Focus area 3: What are the subsidiary's areas of strength?

#### Findings and supporting evidence

##### Regional partnerships, delivery and support

The identification of partnerships as an area of strength draws from successful existing regional relationships and is linked to UCOL's strategic move towards more flexible, integrated and work-based learning. This is developing as an area of strength. UCOL understands the importance of partnering with industry, iwi and others to design and deliver programmes that meet stakeholder needs, and to provide opportunities that contribute to upskilling the Central North Island region through education, training and employment.

UCOL established the Business and Industry Partnerships directorate in early 2021 to consolidate the management of industry and community stakeholder relationships across the organisation. The group's brief is to strengthen UCOL's approach by better leveraging existing relationships, developing new partnerships, and embedding effective stakeholder engagement practices so that UCOL has more effective connections to the regional economy. The directorate is in its second year. While there is some evidence of the value of the structural and business approach to partnerships at an organisational level, the full value of the developing partnerships to UCOL, iwi, community, employers and learners is still emerging.

Enhanced outcomes for stakeholders include employer training courses, increased work-based learning opportunities, and spaces such as Backhouse Trust (Whanganui) and the Workhub (Manawatū). These spaces connect industry, employers and learners during internships and workplace-based projects. Processes to evaluate the effectiveness and success of these partnerships are in place, and reporting to partners has been improved.

The productive and longstanding relationship with the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) demonstrates an effective model of partnership which has contributed to increased enrolments at UCOL and the uptake of flexible qualification pathways for NZDF staff. Regular progress meetings and quarterly reporting provides some ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness and success of this partnership.

UCOL's preferred partner status with the Lowie Foundation to deliver the Kick for the Seagulls programme – the New Zealand Certificate in Foundation Skills (Level 2) – in prisons has seen a strong relationship develop with the Department of Corrections. Delivery is about to commence in two additional regional Corrections facilities, with the increase in scope demonstrating the value of this partnership for all parties. Strategic partners spoke of the valued relationship with UCOL and reported a high level of responsiveness from UCOL to meet partners' needs, with UCOL doing what it says it will do.

A range of multi-level, cross-organisational initiatives have recently been implemented, including with Kainga Ora, NZDF and Te Ahu a Tūranga. UCOL is an alliance partner with Waka Kotahi (New Zealand Transport Agency) in the Te Ahu a Tūranga – Manawatū Tararua Highway Project.<sup>10</sup> This project has provided learners with internships and work placements, and graduates with apprenticeships during the past two years. Benefits and outcomes from the enhanced focus on partnerships include increased enrolments from Chamber of Commerce and NZDF partnerships, employment and work-based learning opportunities within the Te Ahu a Tūranga project, and real-world industry projects in the Workhubs leading to employment for graduates.

In the context of this focus area, iwi relationships are relevant and important. UCOL has relationships with the following:

- Rangitāne o Manawatū
- Te Rūnanga o Ngā Wairiki Ngāti Apa
- Ngāti Tūwharetoa
- Ngāti Rangi (Taumarunui)
- Te Whakapiki Mātauranga Accord with Whanganui Iwi
- Muaūpoko Tribal Authority
- Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa
- Rangitāne o Wairarapa.

Successful initiatives are providing training and employment for iwi and hapū, particularly in construction and housebuilding, infrastructure works, and te reo Māori (Adult and Community Education). UCOL has recommenced systematic reporting to regional iwi on participation rates and learner outcomes. This is a renewed step towards answering questions about the value UCOL is contributing to relevant iwi, as determined by those iwi. While UCOL is working on developing stronger relationships with iwi, this strategic focus will need to be maintained to ensure UCOL is well positioned to support Māori aspirations within the region.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/te-ahu-a-turanga/> Alliance between Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, Fulton Hogan, HEB Construction, Aurecon, WSP, Rangitāne o Manawatū, Rangitāne o Tamaki nui-a-Rua, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Tāmaki nui-a-Rua, Te Runanga o Raukawa (Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga and Nga Kaitiaki o Ngāti Kauwhata).

# Appendix 1

**Table 1. External moderation results. Transitional industry training organisations (TITO) managed unit standards judged at the national standard 2018-20**

ITO/Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
BCITO	6/6	5/7	4/8	-
Competenz	2/2	0/2	-	1/5
Connexis	0/3	2/3	1/5	-
HITO	2/2	2/2	2/2	-
MITO	-	0/1	1/1	-
Primary ITO	-	-	0/3	-
Service IQ	4/4	0/2	5/5	-
The Skills Org	-	5/8	-	-
Skills Active	-	2/2	2/2	-
Totals	14/17 82%	16/27 59%	15/26 58%	

Source: UCOL Data.

## **NZQA National External Moderation System (NEM) 2018-20**

2018 outcome: Meets the Majority of requirements (Numeracy non-compliant)

2019 outcome: Did not meet requirements and an action plan was requested for Numeracy (2<sup>nd</sup> year), Visual Arts, Technology, ECE, Core Skills (all 1<sup>st</sup> year non-compliance)

2020 outcome: Did not meet requirements and an action plan was requested for Early Childhood (2<sup>nd</sup> year), English for Academic Purposes, Communicating with Children, Computing and Numeracy (3<sup>rd</sup> year) systems.

2021 outcome: Did not meet requirements and referred to Risk for poor Numeracy moderation results. Also, non-compliant in Literacy, Communication Skills, Technology, Visual Arts, Chemistry, Art History.

Source: Quality Assurance Division, NZQA

## **NZQA Programme monitoring results**

New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5) – Programme monitoring. Finalised 5 March 2019

Outcome: Meets programme criteria overall (no significant areas of concern)

New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Academic) (Level 4) – Moderation only monitoring. Finalised 27 June 2019

Outcome: Does Not meet programme accreditation criteria

New Zealand Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care (Level 5) – Internal moderation system monitoring. Finalised 18 February 2022

Outcome: Does not meet programme criteria

UCOL indicated intention to teach out this programme, not accept new enrolments and to request withdrawal of accreditation. However, they have accreditation to deliver another programme towards the same qualification (from 28 January 2022).

*Final*

NZQA requested action plan to evidence actions to be taken to address the issues in relation to the newly accredited programme. Action plan received and accepted April 2022.

Source: Quality Assurance Division, NZQA

## *Disclaimer*

*The findings in this report have been reached by means of a modified evaluative process. They are based on a representative selection of focus areas, and a sample of supporting information provided by the TEO under review or independently accessed by NZQA. As such, the report's findings offer a guide to the relative quality of the TEO at the time of the EER, in the light of the known evidence, and the likelihood that this level of quality will continue.*

*For the same reason, these findings are always limited in scope. They are derived from selections and samples evaluated at a point in time. The supporting methodology is not designed to:*

- *Identify organisational fraud<sup>11</sup>*
- *Provide comprehensive coverage of all programmes within a TEO, or of all relevant evidence sources*
- *Predict the outcome of other reviews of the same TEO which, by posing different questions or examining different information, could reasonably arrive at different conclusions.*

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<sup>11</sup> NZQA and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) comprehensively monitor risk in the tertiary education sector through a range of other mechanisms. When fraud, or any other serious risk factor, has been confirmed, corrective action is taken as a matter of urgency.