

High school students turn up in droves for a taste of tertiary study

Competition for places in the West Coast Trades Academy is heating-up, with more students than ever this year enrolled to take part in the school-to-work training programme.

Tai Poutini Polytechnic is the main provider for the Trades Academy, providing ongoing training opportunities for West Coast students. The Trades Academy, which introduces high school students to the industry of their choice, has been oversubscribed across 95% of its programmes this year.

West Coast Trades Academy General Manager Tania Washer says that every West Coast high school is now engaged in the programme.

“We’re going from strength to strength. Six years ago, we had 32 students. This year, we have 140 studying at TPP, and 230 across the West Coast. Enthusiasm levels are also at record highs, and we’ve had 100% attendance of our year two students this year. They are all turning up to class motivated and ready to learn,” she says.

“Gaining a place at WCTA is now highly competitive, and students need to demonstrate that they are committed to the trades pathway they are applying for. Placements into TPP take into account a student’s drive and desires to do that programme, and look at social outcomes as well as educational capability.”

Alex Cabrera Chief Executive at TPP says that the polytechnic works closely with WCTA to ensure the programmes meet local economic drivers. “Every year, we review our programmes, looking to where the vacancies and skill shortages are, and working with businesses to include internships and work experience,” he says.

“Our computer programme is a great example of this. This year we’ve introduced a 3rd year level, so students can stay at school but also learn computer programming.”

Mark Dixon is Head of the Trades Academy programmes at TPP. He says it’s all about preparing students to be competent learners at tertiary level. “When they have completed a programme at TPP through the Trades Academy, more than 80% achieve NCEA Level 2, and they are much more likely to go on to further tertiary study. They’re familiar with the environment and have studied at that level – I guess it takes the fear out of it,” he says.

Greymouth High School Principal Andy England agrees.

“Secondary school students across the region love the West Coast Trades Academy. Being able to attend programmes at Tai Poutini Polytechnic while still at school gives them a broader curriculum which is better focused on the jobs they eventually want to do,” he says.

“Since WCTA started, more students stay in school until the end of Year 12 and more students pass NCEA Level 2. The students enjoy the learning and their tutors at Tai Poutini Polytechnic and the experience gives them a good bridge to full time tertiary education.”

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