HANGA-ARO-RAU
Manufacturing, Engineering and Logistics
Workforce Development Council

Hanga-Aro-Rau Workforce Development Council for manufacturing, engineering and logistics

White Paper

Redesigning the Vocational Education and Training system to unlock the potential of Pacific Peoples through workforce development: Strategies to inform vocational training design

Contents

Foreword

Our explicit focus is on enabling a strong and prosperous Aotearoa New Zealand economy through investing in the success of Pacific Peoples. One with an established pipeline of workers and skills shortages filled by supporting a more diverse workforce at every level of industry. Our vision is to upskill Pacific Peoples into higher-skilled and higher-paying jobs to support a broader labour market to meet the changing needs of industry.

The purpose of this paper is to reinforce this vision, providing actionable guidance to those ultimately responsible for the redesign of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, including a transition to Industry Skills Boards (ISBs). The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), Ministry of Education (MoE), and New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and their agents, are currently informing the redesign of the VET system. This important and critical role is better supported with robust evidence-based information to ensure a responsive and evolving system, anchored by what has been proven to work well, for the future of all New Zealanders.

Three white papers have been written, each one with a focus on a different under-served community: Māori, Pacific Peoples and disabled people. It is acknowledged that in our diverse society there are some that may be represented in all three of the papers.

1. Redesigning Vocational Education and Training system to unlock the potential of Māori and the Māori economy through workforce development: Strategies to inform vocational training design.

2. Redesigning the Vocational Education and Training system to unlock the potential of Pacific Peoples through workforce development: Strategies to inform vocational training design.

3. Unlocking the potential of the disabled workforce: Strategies to inform redesign of the Vocational Education and Training system, and its link to employment support and recruitment.

We acknowledge that existing providers and organisations are doing some of what we are suggesting in this paper. The redesign of the VET system cannot lose what has already been accomplished when it goes through the next set of changes. With a redesign there is opportunity to reset, recalibrate and where it makes sense, to reinforce; for a stronger, more resilient and more responsive VET system.

One of the most effective levers to retain in the redesign, is to maintain the legislative and policy focus on under-served communities. That includes retaining in the Education and Training Act 2020, regardless of which entities are responsible, the provision to *"meet the needs of all of its learners, in particular those who are under-served by the education system, including (without limitation) Māori, Pacific, and disabled learners."*[1]

To discuss this lever and others that are available to us through the effective and efficient use of the functions that already exist within the system, please reach out to:

Phil Alexander-Crawford Chief Executive (Te Whiu, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Rēhia, Ngāpuhi) and Samantha McNaughton Deputy Chief Executive.

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[1] See Education and Training Act 2020, schedule 13(4)(f).

Acknowledgements

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- Saunoamaali'i Dr Karanina Sumeo
- Zeducation

Please note: Insights and quotes are not attributed to particular organisations or individuals.

1 Executive summary

There were ten core design features for the future redesign of workforce development and vocational education of importance to Pacific Peoples:

- **Maintain the legislative and policy focus on under-served communities**. These are contained in the *Education and Training Act 2020*, sch 13, *Te Pūkenga _New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology Charter*. In particular s 4 (f), which states: "meet the needs of all of its learners, in particular those who are under-served by the education system, including (without limitation) Māori, Pacific, and disabled learners." Similarly, the importance of meeting the needs of under-served learners is stated in the Orders in Council issued for the Workforce Development Councils in 2021.[2]
- There needs to be **greater alignment between what industry needs and qualifications offered by education providers**. Ensuring students have qualifications which are likely to lead to employment.
- **Culturally competent tutors / trainers / employers:** Those that are teaching the learners the skills they need for the future need to be supported to enhance their engagement with Pacific Peoples. This includes their understanding of Pacific cultures, name pronunciation and bias awareness to improve interactions and engagement.
- **Pacific representation:** At all levels the whole VET system from design through to delivery needs to have Pacific people involved. Pacific professionals bring with them the embodied knowledge of being Pacific learners themselves.
- **Partnerships with Pacific organisations and leaders:** Involving Pacific communities in the design and delivery of VET programmes ensures that the offerings meet their specific needs and aspirations. This can include partnerships with community organisations and leaders.
- **Culturally relevant curriculum:** It is essential to develop vocational education programmes that are tailored to the needs of Pacific learners.[3]
- **Accessibility:** VET programmes should be easily accessible, both geographically and financially. This includes providing support for transportation, childcare, internet access, digital literacy and other barriers that may prevent participation.
- **Workplace integration:** Strong connections between VET providers and local industries can facilitate work placements, apprenticeships, and job opportunities, helping Pacific learners transition smoothly into the workforce.
- **Recognition of prior learning:** A system that recognises and values the skills and experiences that Pacific learners may bring through work experience from prior jobs or from the Islands, and/or community participation can enhance their educational journey and provide pathways to further qualifications and progression in the workplace.
- **Long-term commitment:** A sustained commitment from government and educational institutions to improve Vocational Education Training for Pacific Peoples is necessary to achieve meaningful change. This includes setting expectations and targets, monitoring agreed actions and regularly reviewing progress.

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[2] For example, see Education (Hanga-Aro-Rau Manufacturing, Engineering and Logistics Development Council) Order 2021, s7(1)(d).

[3] (Matangi Fou, 2022a).

2 Redesigning a system that works for Pacific Peoples

This white paper highlights the opportunity in redesigning the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system to better equip future entities in upskilling Pacific Peoples, addressing critical skills gaps in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially in the manufacturing, logistics, and engineering sectors. Pacific Peoples are projected to comprise 11% of the Aotearoa New Zealand workforce by 2043, so intentional and targeted investment in their vocational education and broader workforce needs is essential for their personal and economic advancement and to meet the nation's growing labour market demands.[4]

Employment by broad skill level in New Zealand, 2023
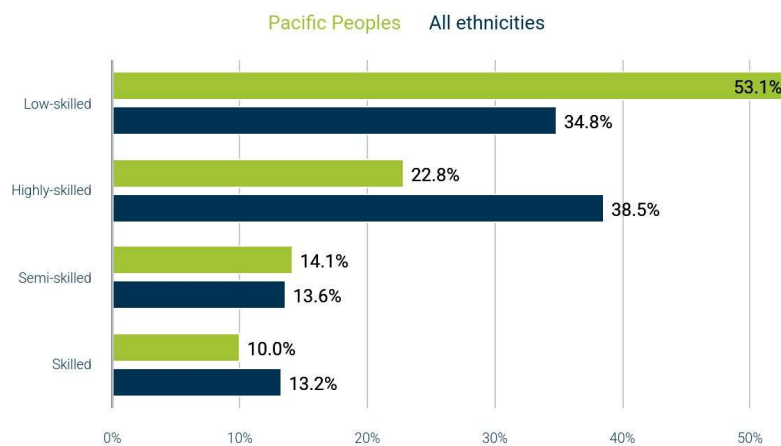% of total employment, year to March 2023

Figure 1. Employment by broad skill level in New Zealand, 2023.[5]

Moreover, investing in the vocational education of Pacific Peoples is beneficial for Pacific communities, families, and individuals and has broader economic benefits. By equipping Pacific Peoples with industry-aligned skills, these individuals can potentially achieve higher incomes. As a result, it increases agency and opportunities for the income earners and their families. For example, improved housing options, better food choices, and access to primary health care.

A secondary benefit is that it also generates increased tax revenue for the government.[7] This additional revenue is crucial for funding essential public services such as health, education, infrastructure, and superannuation, ensuring the long-term sustainability of these services.

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[4] (Statistics New Zealand, 2024a).
[5] (Infometrics, 2024a).

Mean annual earnings in New Zealand, 2023

Year to March 2023

$67,320	Māori
$64,423	Pacific Peoples
$74,395	All ethnicities

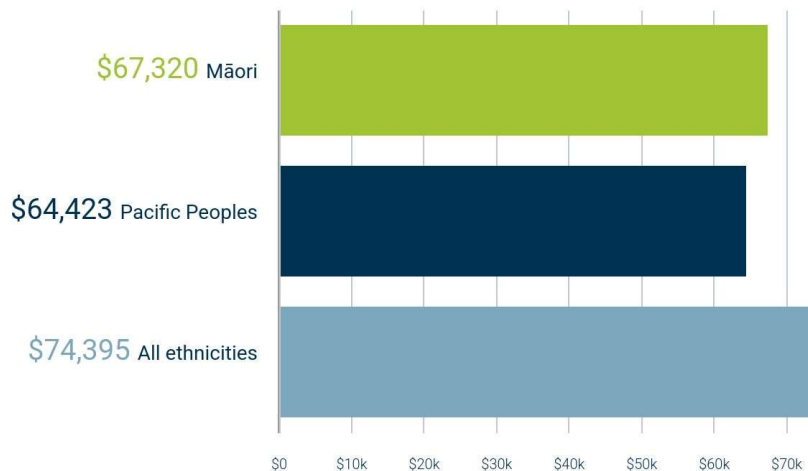$0 $10k $20k $30k $40k $50k $60k $70k

Figure 2. Mean annual earnings in New Zealand, 2023.[6]

The opportunity to upskill Pacific Peoples is particularly timely given the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, shifts in immigration policies, and an ageing workforce, all of which have intensified the skills gaps in New Zealand.[7] As immigration alone may not be sufficient to meet labour demands in the near term, enhancing the capabilities of the domestic workforce through targeted vocational education becomes even more critical. To enable the VET system to address this, it needs to consider the following:

1. **Maintain the legislative and policy focus on under-served communities:**

   - Contained in the *Education and Training Act 2020*, schedule 13, *Te Pūkenga _New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology Charter* s 13(4)(f) states "meet the needs of all of its learners, in particular those who are under-served by the education system, including (without limitation) Māori, Pacific, and disabled learners."
   - Similarly, the importance of meeting the needs of under-served learners is stated in the *Orders in Council* issued for the Workforce Development Councils in 2021.[8]

2. **Culturally competent tutors / trainers / employers:** Those teaching the learners the skills they need for the future need to be supported to enhance their engagement with Pacific Peoples. This includes their understanding of Pacific cultures, name pronunciation and bias awareness to improve interactions and engagement.

   - Develop a cultural competency framework for the VET system: potentially along similar lines to *Tapasā - The Principles of Culturally Responsive*

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[6] (Infometrics, 2024b).
[7] (Deloitte, 2023).
[8] For example, see Education (Hanga-Aro-Rau Manufacturing, Engineering and Logistics Development Council) Order 2021, s7(1)(d).

Teaching[9], which is the cultural competency framework for compulsory education.[10]

3. **Pacific representation:**

   - **Governance:** This model should prioritise the inclusion of Pacific leaders and organisations in the governance of vocational education institutions and programmes, ensuring that their perspectives are reflected in the policies and practices that shape the system.[11]

   - **Increased numbers of Pacific teachers, managers, and curriculum writers:** the whole VET system from design through to delivery needs to have Pacific people involved. Pacific professionals bring with them the embodied knowledge of being Pacific learners themselves, along with their professional expertise.

   - **Partnerships with Pacific organisations and leaders:** Involving Pacific communities in the design and delivery of VET programs ensures that the offerings meet their specific needs and aspirations. This can include partnerships with community organisations and leaders.

4. **Culturally relevant curriculum:** It is essential to develop vocational education programmes that are tailored to the needs of Pacific learners.[12] The curriculum should reflect the cultural values, languages, and practices of the learners. Incorporating Pacific perspectives and knowledge can enhance engagement and relevance for Pacific Peoples.

5. **Accessibility:** VET programmes should be easily accessible, both geographically and financially. This includes providing support for transportation, childcare, internet access, digital literacy and other barriers that may prevent participation.

   - **Earn while you learn:** taking time off work or working part-time only is simply not an option for many Pacific Peoples as they need to contribute to their family's income. Earning while you learn provides an opportunity for people to do both.

   - **Support services:** Tailored support services, including mentoring, tutoring, and counselling, can help Pacific learners navigate the education system and succeed in their studies.[13]

   - **Flexible learning options:** Offering flexible learning pathways, such as part-time study, online courses, and evening classes, can accommodate the

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[9] (Ministry of Education, 2023).
[10] (Ministry of Education, 2018).
[11] (Hanga-Aro-Rau, 2024).
[12] (Matangi Fou, 2022a).
[13] See Martin (2024) for an example of how Pacific learner completion rates improved with tailored support services at the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT).

diverse needs of Pacific learners, many of whom may have work, family, and church commitments.

- **Career guidance:** Access to career counselling and guidance tailored to the aspirations and needs of Pacific Peoples, that includes an understanding of community and whānau from a Pacific perspective, can help learners make informed decisions about their educational and career pathways.

- **Language support:** Providing language support for those who may not be fluent in English can help Pacific learners fully engage with the curriculum and succeed in their studies. Likewise, language support for tutors and trainers, who may not be familiar with Pacific languages, will better equip the teachers to better engage with their learners.

6. **Workplace integration:** Strong connections between VET providers and local industries can facilitate work placements, apprenticeships, and job opportunities, helping Pacific learners transition smoothly into the workforce.

7. **Recognition of prior learning:** A system that recognises and values the skills and experiences that Pacific learners may bring through work experience from prior jobs or from the Islands, and/or community participation can enhance their educational journey and provide pathways to further qualifications and progression in the workplace.

8. **Long-term commitment:** A sustained commitment from government and educational institutions to improve vocational education training for Pacific Peoples is necessary to achieve meaningful change. This includes setting expectations and targets, monitoring agreed actions and regularly reviewing progress.

The development of a vocational education system in Aotearoa New Zealand that effectively serves Pacific Peoples is crucial to ensuring their educational and career success while helping to grow the economy. Pacific Peoples, projected to make up a significant portion of the future workforce, will inevitably play a pivotal role in the nation's economic and social fabric.

This white paper synthesises insights from key reports, stakeholder talanoa, and a literature scan to propose a VET system that is culturally responsive, equitable, and aligned with the needs of both learners and industry. We have used a process of testing the insights with key stakeholders within the Pacific community. There has been unanimous support for the insights and draft report. The VET system must be a key partner in helping address systemic inequities, helping close pay gaps, and improving career progression opportunities for Pacific Peoples.

Upskilling Pacific Peoples presents a unique and timely opportunity to address Aotearoa New Zealand's skills gaps, particularly in sectors vital to economic growth. By investing in culturally responsive vocational education, we can develop a skilled workforce that not only fills current labour shortages but also drives future economic prosperity.[14] This strategic

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[14] (Uptempo, 2022a).

investment will not only empower Pacific communities but also ensure the nation's long-term competitiveness and ability to fund essential public services.[15]

2.1 Addressing systemic barriers

Several systemic barriers hinder the participation and success of Pacific Peoples in vocational education. One major issue is the disconnect between education providers and the actual needs of Pacific learners and their communities.[16] Many Pacific learners leave school early to support their families financially, often entering low-skilled jobs that offer little opportunity for progression.[17] This trend is exacerbated by a lack of culturally relevant education and training options that align with the realities of Pacific learners' lives.[18]

To address these issues, the root cause must be dealt with—the Pacific pay gap and wealth gap must be reduced and ultimately closed[19] —so that Pacific young people are not needing to leave school early to support their families but can instead complete school and go on to complete further training opportunities, should they wish to.[20] Also, it is essential to develop vocational education programmes that are not only accessible and inclusive but also tailored to the specific needs of Pacific learners.[21] While the root cause is being addressed, it is important that scaffolding to address the socio-economic challenges faced by many Pacific families, such as childcare, transportation, and financial assistance, be provided.[22] These services can help to alleviate the pressures that prevent some Pacific learners from fully engaging in their education and can provide the support needed to help them succeed.[23]

The literature consistently emphasises the importance of involving Pacific communities in the design and delivery of vocational education, ensuring their voices are central to decision-making processes.[24] This model should prioritise the inclusion of Pacific leaders and organisations in the governance and senior leadership of vocational education institutions and programmes, ensuring that their perspectives are reflected in the policies and practices that shape the system.[25]

Moreover, there is a need to address the systemic barriers that exist within the VET system itself. This includes ensuring that vocational education providers are equipped with the resources and support needed to effectively serve Pacific learners, as well as addressing any biases or discriminatory practices that may exist within the system.[26]

[15] (Deloitte, 2023).
[16] (Chu, Abella & Paurini, 2013).
[17] (Chu, Abella & Paurini, 2013).
[18] (Sililoto, 2022).
[19] (Cochrane & Pacheco, 2022).
[20] (Uptempo, 2022b).
[21] (Ryan, Kitone & Fleming, 2017).
[22] (Uptempo, 2022a).
[23] (Uptempo, 2022a).
[24] (Chu, Abella & Paurini, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2023).
[25] (Chu et al., 2013).
[26] (Action Plan for Pacific Education, 2023)

2.2 The case for prioritising Pacific Peoples as the future workforce and customers of Aotearoa New Zealand

Demographic trends highlight the urgency of reforming vocational education to better support Pacific communities. By 2043, 21% of Aotearoa New Zealand's employment base will be Māori, and 11% will be Pacific, indicating a significant shift in the composition of the workforce.[27] Between 2013 and 2018, the number of Māori and Pacific in employment grew by 47% and 57%, respectively, nearly triple the rate of New Zealand Europeans.[28] These figures highlight not only the rapid growth of these populations within the workforce but also the critical need to ensure they are well-prepared to meet the demands of a changing labour market.

Upskilling Pacific Peoples offers a strategic solution to the growing skills gaps in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific communities represent a young and rapidly growing segment of the workforce, with the median age of Pacific Peoples at just 24.9 years, significantly lower than the national median.[29] [30] This approach not only addresses the current labour shortages but also ensures a more diverse and resilient workforce for the future.

New Zealand is set to face substantial skills shortages, particularly in key industries such as manufacturing and engineering, where a projected shortfall of over 40,000 workers by 2028 threatens to constrain economic growth and output.[31] These shortages extend across both highly skilled and semi-skilled roles, making it increasingly difficult for companies to meet demand and maintain international competitiveness.[32] The logistics sector also faces a pressing need for workers skilled in advanced supply chain technologies, driven by increasing automation and the need for data-driven decision-making.[33]

Employment growth in New Zealand, 2023
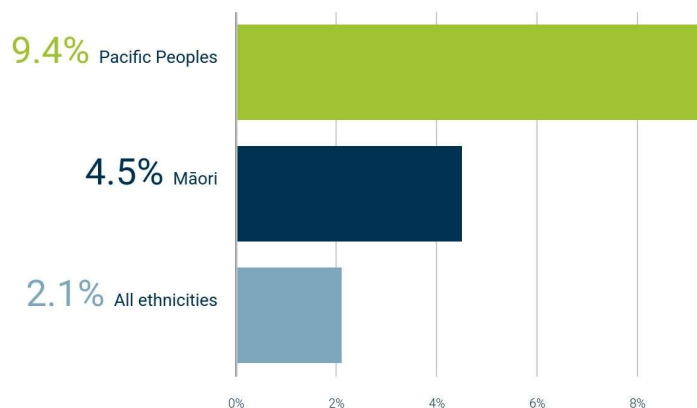Annual average % change, year to March 2023

9.4% Pacific Peoples
4.5% Māori
2.1% All ethnicities

Figure 3. Employment Growth in New Zealand, 2023.[34] [35]

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[27] (Statistics New Zealand, 2024a).

[28] (Statistics New Zealand, 2018 cited in Good Employer Matrix, 2024).

[29] (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, n.d.).

[30] (Uptempo, 2022a).

[31] (Hanga-Aro-Rau, 2022a).

[32] (NZ Engineering News, 2024).

[33] (SupplyChainBrain, 2024).

[34] (Infometrics, 2024c).

[35] (2024 data has identified a significant negative employment growth for the Pacific workforce, potentially due to downturns in industries that greatly impact the Pacific demographic in a greater proportion than other counterparts.)

Employment growth in New Zealand
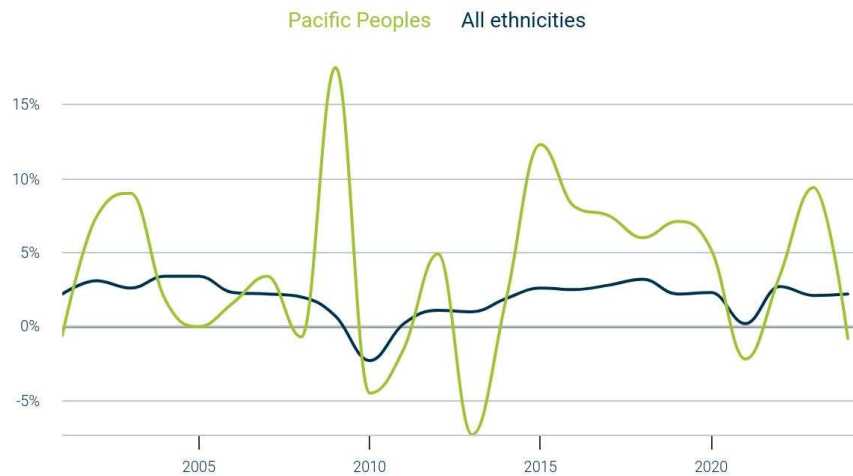
Annual % change, March years

Figure 4. Employment Growth in New Zealand – Annual Percentage Change.[36]

This youthful demographic signifies that Pacific Peoples will continue to be a growing and dynamic segment of the workforce for decades to come. Ensuring that this young population is equipped with the skills and opportunities necessary to succeed is not just a matter of equity, but a strategic imperative for the nation's economic future.

Population by 5-year age group in New Zealand, 2023

% of total, as at 30 June
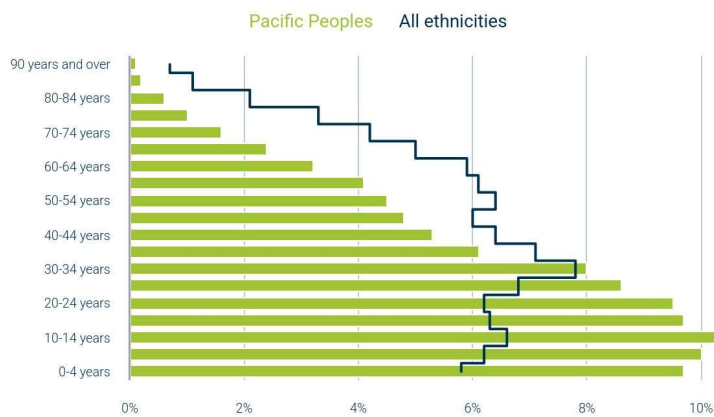
Figure 5. Population by 5-year age group in New Zealand, 2023.[37]

Given these demographic realities, there is a clear business case for closing pay gaps and investing in the vocational education of Māori and Pacific Peoples. These groups are not only the future workforce but also the future customers of Aotearoa New Zealand's

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[36] (Infometrics, 2024d).
[37] (Infometrics, 2024e).

businesses. Ensuring their success in the labour market is essential to the sustained economic growth and social cohesion of the nation.[38]

2.3 Cultural responsiveness and relevance

We know that the success of Pacific learners in vocational education is closely tied to the cultural responsiveness of the education system.

Cultural responsiveness in vocational education involves recognising and valuing the unique cultural skills and knowledge that Pacific learners bring to the classroom. This includes integrating Pacific languages, cultural practices, and community-oriented learning approaches into educational programmes. The *Te Rito Insights from Pacific Learners Report* highlights the importance of embedding cultural practices in education to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment for Pacific students.[39] Such practices not only enhance the educational experience for Pacific learners but also benefit all students by creating a more diverse and enriched learning environment.

Additionally, Pacific communities place a strong emphasis on collective well-being, where the success of the individual is seen as contributing to the prosperity of the entire community.[40] This cultural perspective necessitates an educational approach that is inclusive of Pacific values while actively integrating these values into the curriculum and learning environment.[41]

In the case of the Uptempo programme, powered by The Southern Initiative, a social innovation unit nested within Auckland Council, what set it apart was its whole of aiga (family) approach. The Uptempo team has been exploring what effective Pacific-centred adult learning looks like since August 2021. It found that a holistic village approach to learning, where the family is involved in a family member's educational journey, is more effective, leading to better results.[42]

Cultural responsiveness should extend beyond the classroom into the workplace. A gap often exists between culturally inclusive training provided in educational settings and the workplace realities, where Pacific culture and values may not always be fully understood or appreciated. This disconnect can impact the satisfaction, career progression, and productivity of Pacific workers.[43] Addressing this gap requires employers to consider engaging in Pacific cultural competency training, which can help them better support and collaborate with their Pacific workforce. For example, taking practical steps to deepen cultural awareness like attending a local Pacific cultural event, reading Pacific literature, or participating in an annual initiative like language weeks.

Such training should be an ongoing process, reflecting a genuine commitment to understanding and valuing Pacific communities and their cultures.

For our VET system this is what that could look like:

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[38] (Wilson-Uili, Kingstone & Richmond, 2022).
[39] (Te Pūkenga, 2021).
[40] (Uptempo, 2022a).
[41] Hanga-Aro-Rau, Mana Moana Pacific Outcomes Framework (Pacific Leo-Voices Document), p 1
[42] (Uptempo, 2022a).
[43] (Deloitte, 2023).

In the classroom[44]

- **Put Pacific learners' identities and cultures at the core of teaching practice:** Respect, affirm and value learners' identities, languages and cultures – pronounce their names correctly, and draw on their pool of knowledge to develop a relevant curriculum that is engaging. Take the time to learn about each learner's cultural background, learning styles and what makes them unique. This can lead to establishing trust and creating better rapport with the learner.

- **Engage families and communities:** Develop relationships with families and communities and involve them as valued partners in curriculum delivery. Adopt pedagogies that work for Pacific Peoples, seeking community consensus on best practice for their collective needs. Encourage a diverse culture of Pacific voice (with older and younger people) to collaborate on positive strategies and tangible outcomes to support contemporary learning systems.

- **Demonstrate personal commitment to learner success:** Insist on high standards, rejecting deficit views of Pacific learners and instead harnessing Pacific cultures as a learning superpower.

- **Support mentoring programmes for learners:** Nourish Pacific learners by emphasising learning relationships, including peer-to-peer, tuakana-teina models, intergenerational learning, having a 'matua' or 'aunty', and having strong Pacific peer-support networks.

- **Incorporate new teaching strategies and technologies:** Remain open to learning, whether it be new ways of teaching and/or assessment, or new technologies. Take advantage of professional development opportunities, and in return share learning with learners and colleagues. Be mindful that not all Pacific learners are familiar with new technology. Provide them with the necessary step-by-step support and with the right learning equipment.

- **Physical classroom environment** includes culturally appropriate images / furnishings to create a sense of belonging.

- Celebrate **culturally significant events** such as language weeks / festivals to create opportunities for co-learning.

In the workplace[45]

- **Connect learning to culture and aspirations:** Understand what motivates Pacific learners in industry training to develop positive, future-focused goals. Connect learning opportunities with Pacific aspirations, the values of uplifting family and community, and caring for others. Connect aiga aspirations to concrete career pathways by providing real-life examples, role models, and peer support from those who have gone before, as this makes the career pathway feel real and more

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[44] (Chu, Abella & Paurini, 2013; Chu-Fuluifaga, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2019; Sililoto, 2022; The Southern Initiative (TSI), 2024 cited in Meares 2024a).

[45] (Ryan, Kitone & Flemming, 2017; The Southern Initiative (TSI), 2024 cited in Meares, 2024a).

attainable. Create a family-friendly work environment as it increases comfort levels and builds transparent and safe relationships at work.

- **Take a broad view of Pacific workplace success:** Value soft skills and transferrable skills that spill over into non-work settings and interactions. Such as respect for elders and knowledge sharing that can create strong interpersonal relationship, listening skills and the ability to pass down valuable knowledge.

2.3.1 Use existing representation

Since 2022, the Hanga-Aro-Rau Industry Stakeholder Group (ISG) has provided guidance and feedback on the organisation's strategic direction and performance, as well as advice and information from an industry perspective.

Members represent a broad range and diversity of views and traverse the wide range of our 70+ sectors.

Members are from industry, non-profit and commercial industry associations, regional trusts, Māori and Pacific organisations, unions, high schools, and the National Iwi Chairs Forum. This is not business-as-usual: Hanga-Aro-Rau is the only Work Development Council (WDC) to have an industry-led advisory group guiding its strategy.

When the dust settles after the VET system is redesigned, why let these effective and informed advisory groups disband, and with other groups such as the Kāhui Ahumahi instead leverage their skills, knowledge and mana to steer the next set of entities through their establishment.

3 Aspirations and ambitions for vocational education

Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand hold diverse aspirations for education, which are deeply intertwined with their cultural values, community well-being, and familial roles and responsibilities.[46] However, to help realise these aspirations systemic barriers within the education system need to be addressed, and by removing these it will help provide the resources and opportunities necessary for achieving long-term success.[47]

The *Our Future Now Report* reflects the desire of Pacific communities for an education system that supports their cultural identity, economic participation, and intergenerational success.[48] However, the mainstream education system, starting with compulsory education, frequently fails to adequately address the specific needs of Pacific learners. This systemic inadequacy is exacerbated by a lack of culturally responsive support systems and educational pathways that align with Pacific values and ways of learning.[49]

This means our training system needs to:

- **Connect learning to culture and aspirations:** Understand what motivates Pacific learners in industry training in order to develop positive, future-focused goals. Connect learning opportunities with Pacific aspirations, the values of uplifting family and community, and caring for others. Connect aiga aspirations to concrete career pathways by providing real-life examples, role models, and peer support from those who have gone before, as this makes the career pathway feel real and more attainable. Create a family-friendly work environment as it increases comfort levels and builds transparent and safe relationships at work.

- **Contextualise and tailor learning:** Encourage facilitators to use creative learning support approaches based on an understanding of learners' individual and collective strengths.

- Support **culturally responsive learning systems** and support mechanisms to ensure all those within the training system are better equipped to meet individual learner needs.

- Create opportunities for students to **learn by doing**, thereby enhancing the exposure to different types of learning and skills. Ensure learners are assessed in a way that better enables them to evidence their comprehension and learning.

Moreover, the significant contributions of Pacific communities through unpaid work and volunteering are often undervalued and under-recognised within the broader economic system.[50] This lack of recognition extends to the vocational education system, where Pacific learners may not see their contributions and potential fully acknowledged, further disincentivising engagement with these pathways. Addressing these systemic shortcomings is critical to ensuring that Pacific aspirations for education and economic participation are realised.

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[46] (Matangi Fou, 2022c).
[47] (Matangi Fou, 2022d).
[48] (Matangi Fou, 2022b).
[49] (Uptempo, 2022a).
[50] (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2021).

This can be done by:

- Recognising the transferable skills people may bring from their community work. Such as leadership, teamwork, collective decision making.

- Considering ways in which the skills that person acquires through their volunteer or unpaid work can be recognised within their learning and workplace.

4 Equity and access: overcoming barriers

Equitable access to vocational education is essential to ensuring that Pacific learners can fully participate in and benefit from the education system. However, Pacific learners often face significant socio-economic barriers that hinder their access to education and limit their opportunities for success.[51] These barriers include financial constraints, limited access to educational resources, and the need to balance education with family and community responsibilities.[52]

In the VET system we can help address these by:

- Looking at how support systems can be better tailored to meet Pacific learners' needs, and where they exist, better communicated towards learners to help them overcome the barriers they experience.

- Creating more flexibility in how support can be administered to meet differing needs.

- Create more flexibility in how a learner progresses through their vocational pathway that allows the learner to successfully complete their studies/training even when they are balancing their work, family and community responsibilities.

4.1 Earn while you learn

Many Pacific people are not in the financial position to study without the need to work, as they need to financially provide for their families. One way of addressing this barrier is through earn-while-you-learn programmes. For example, Pacific trades training scholarships have been successful in addressing some of these barriers by offering funding, tools, pastoral care, and employment opportunities.[53] Such programmes demonstrate the effectiveness of a holistic approach that addresses both the educational and socio-economic needs of Pacific learners. However, while these programmes are beneficial, they are often limited in scope and reach. There is a pressing need to expand and scale these initiatives to ensure that a broader segment of the Pacific population can access and benefit from them.

Accordingly, the system needs to:

- Re-assess the delivery of programmes to adopt more 'earn while you learn' models that are of benefit to the learners, industry and the education system.

- Re-assess the fees for these programmes, including the impact on the revised fees-free offering, to better reflect the learner success outcomes reducing barriers for learners and incentivising greater uptake of this model of delivery across the VET system.

One area where additional support is needed is in the provision of wrap-around services that address the socio-economic challenges faced by many Pacific families.[54] These services could include childcare support, assistance in obtaining a driver licence, transportation

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[51] (Uptempo, 2022b).
[52] (Uptempo, 2022b).
[53] (Talanoa 1).
[54] (Meares, C., Siakumi Kautoke, M., Wason, K. & Van Marrewijk. K. (2023); Talanoa 1).

assistance, food being provided while at training, financial and English literacy programmes, all of which can help to alleviate the pressures that prevent Pacific learners from fully engaging in their education.

Uptempo provides an example of a wrap-around support model that involves simultaneously providing employment brokering, discretionary funds to alleviate immediate pressures, digital and internet access, connecting to social support groups like the FONO, sorting employment basics, and creating family career and personal plans to support Pacific learners' education journey.[55]

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[55] (Uptempo, 2022a).

5 Perception and value of vocational education

One of the most significant challenges facing the vocational education sector is the perception that it is a lesser alternative to academic pathways. This stigmatisation not only affects student enrolment but also influences the broader community's view of vocational qualifications and careers. As highlighted in both reports and stakeholder talanoa, there is an urgent need to reposition vocational education as a valuable and viable pathway for all learners.[56]

Vocational education is often perceived as a fallback option for students who are not academically inclined. This perception is reinforced at the secondary school level, where vocational education programmes are sometimes marginalised or deprioritised in favour of academic pathways.[57] For example, some schools have dismantled engineering workshops or other vocational training facilities due to a lack of support and resources. As a result, limiting the opportunities available to students who may excel in hands-on learning environments.[58]

It is essential to challenge this perception and to promote vocational education as a legitimate and respected option that can lead to rewarding and well-paying careers.[59]

Repositioning vocational education requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including educators, industry leaders, and policymakers. Schools should be encouraged to offer a wider range of vocational education programmes and to actively promote these programmes as valuable options for students.[60] Industry leaders can play a crucial role by partnering with schools and vocational education providers to offer apprenticeships, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities that highlight the real-world applications and benefits of vocational training.[61]

Moreover, there is a need for a broader cultural shift in how vocational education is perceived by the public. The wider eco-system can help address this through public awareness campaigns that highlight the success stories of individuals who have built successful careers through vocational pathways, as well as efforts to showcase the diverse and dynamic nature of vocational education and the industries it supports.[62]

The *Just for Jobs* campaign in the late 2000s featured on TV stations promoting the roles people were in thanks to vocational education. One stakeholder recounted featuring in the campaign as a microbiologist.

The VET system can do this by:

- **Build relationships with learners, their families and their support networks:** Engage with Pacific families and learner support networks to share information about industry training opportunities, and information that busts myths about the 'value' and requirements of workplace learning. Be aware of hesitancy around upskilling and the

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[56] (Adaption, 2023).
[57] (Adaption, 2023).
[58] (Talanoa 1).
[59] (Adaption, 2023).
[60] (Matangi Fou, 2022e).
[61] (Matangi Fou, 2022e).
[62] (Meares, 2024b).

reasons for it; talk this through with learners and support them to consider that education is for everyone, at any time. Keep in mind that family support can really strengthen learner aspirations and engagement. Promote the positive outcomes of upskilling via real-life stories about Pacific people who have been through vocational pathways that resulted in successful and fulfilling careers. This will benefit the learner and their family, as well as inspire the community and younger generations.[63]

5.1 Aligning vocational education with Industry needs

A critical issue identified in the current vocational education system is the misalignment between the skills taught and the qualifications available in educational programmes and the needs of Industry. This misalignment can result in graduates who are not fully prepared for the demands of the workplace, leading to frustration for both employers and employees, and students being left indebted without employment opportunities.[64]

The *Ecosystems Report* and stakeholder consultations emphasise the need for vocational education that is closely aligned with industry requirements.[65] This alignment is essential to ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills, competencies, and qualifications needed to succeed in the workforce and that employers have access to a pool of well-trained and capable workers.[66]

One of the key strategies for achieving this alignment is through stronger partnerships between vocational education providers and industry.[67] These partnerships can take many forms, including collaborative curriculum development, Industry-led training programmes, and work-based learning opportunities. By working closely with Industry, vocational education providers can ensure that their programmes are responsive to the needs of the labour market and that graduates are well-prepared for the challenges they will face in their careers.[68]

In particular, the projected growth in the Māori and Pacific workforce highlights the need for vocational education programmes that are tailored to the specific needs of these populations.[69] As Māori and Pacific peoples increasingly become key contributors to the economy, it is essential that they are well-prepared for roles in high-demand sectors such as logistics, manufacturing, and engineering.[70]

Industry engagement is crucial in creating training programmes that are not only relevant to the needs of the labour market but also accessible to Māori and Pacific learners. This could involve the development of targeted apprenticeships and internships that provide hands-on experience in these sectors, as well as the creation of micro-credentialing programmes that offer flexible and accessible pathways for upskilling and reskilling.[71]

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[63] (Ryan, Kitone & Flemming, 2017; The Southern Initiative (TSI), 2024 cited in Meares, 2024a).
[64] (Meares, 2024b).
[65] (Matangi Fou, 2022e).
[66] (Talanoa).
[67] (Talanoa).
[68] (Talanoa).
[69] (Talanoa).
[70] (Deloitte, 2022).
[71] (Deloitte, 2022).

Project Ikuna, operating under the umbrella of *Alo Vaka* (formerly known as *Auckland Pacific Skills Shift*), has made significant strides over a four-year period. During this time, the project has delivered 4,000 micro-credentials to over 350 workplaces. According to Sarah Leo, Manager of Pacific Partnerships at Tātaki Auckland Unlimited,

> "Project Ikuna and the Future Ready micro-credentials offered through the programme have brought tremendous benefits and impact for both workers and employers, resulting in a more engaged workforce and increased productivity."

Lifelong learning and career progression

Vocational education should not be viewed as a terminal pathway but as a gateway to lifelong learning and career progression. The *Mana Moana Pacific Outcomes Framework* advocates for a VET system that supports continuous upskilling and reskilling, allowing Pacific learners to advance in their careers over time.[72]

5.2 Formalising and recognising skills people already possess

Vocational education provides an opportunity to formalise skills and expertise Pacific people already possess. One stakeholder shared an insightful example:

> "They've been doing this work for 10 years, building projects as labourers. But because they don't have the LP [Licensed Practitioner] or the certificate, they can't charge more or sign off on their own work. Now that some have gone and got all their tickets as builders, they can sign off their own work and get paid more for the work they've always been doing."

This example highlights how vocational education not only formalises existing skills but also empowers Pacific workers to advance professionally and achieve better financial outcomes.

5.3 Older Pacific workers

Lifelong learning is crucial in today's rapidly changing labour market, where technological advancements and shifts in industry demand require workers to continually update their skills and knowledge.[73]

Many Pacific workers, having spent decades with one employer, now face redundancy and the need to change roles or employers for the first time in their working lives. In this transition, training plays a key role. There is a need for targeted support services that help older Pacific learners navigate the challenges of lifelong learning, such as career counselling, mentoring, and financial assistance.[54]

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[72] (Mana Moana, 2023).
[73] (Uptempo, 2022a)

5.4 Pacific disabled people in education and employment

Pacific disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand face unique challenges in both education and employment due to intersecting factors such as cultural identity, disability, and systemic barriers in the broader socio-economic environment.[74]

The educational disparities faced by Pacific disabled people are significant, with a lack of culturally responsive support systems that can accommodate their specific needs.[75] In the workforce, Pacific disabled people encounter multiple layers of discrimination and exclusion, often exacerbated by the intersectionality of their identities.[76] This economic marginalisation is further compounded by systemic barriers within the workplace, including a lack of reasonable accommodations and widespread employer bias.[77]

These barriers often result in lower educational attainment, which negatively impacts their employment prospects and perpetuates economic disadvantage.[78] There is a critical need for educational institutions to adopt more inclusive practices that honour both the cultural and disability-related needs of Pacific learners.[79]

There is a critical need for employer education and training to combat ableism and foster more inclusive workplaces.[80] Additionally, stronger legislative frameworks are necessary to enforce disability rights in employment and ensure that employers are held accountable for providing equitable opportunities to all workers.[81]

Training institutions and employers need to[82]:

- Make reasonable accommodations for students and employees with disabilities.
- Undergo training to combat ableism.
- Resource Te Kawa Mataaho | Public Service Commission to extend its work to identify and eliminate pay inequity based on gender and ethnicity to include disability and age and to extend requirements to Crown entities, local government and education institutions.
- Provide ethnic-specific disability funding and employment support.
- Partner with unions and community groups to raise awareness of employment options and opportunities for Pacific disabled people.
- Ensure that better-quality pay gap data is collected for disabled people, including data that can be disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.

5.5 Māori and Pacific: Tāngata Moana-nui-a-Kiwa

In the workforce, individuals who identify as both Pacific and Māori may encounter compounded barriers related to both ethnicities. The *Voices of Pacific Peoples Pacific Pay*

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74 (All is for All, 2024; Meares, 2024b).

75 (Meares, 2024b).

76 (Meares, 2024b).

77 (All is for All, 2024; Meares, 2024b).

78 (All is for All, 2024).

79 (All is for All, 2024).

80 (All is for All, 2024).

81 (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2022).

82 (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2022).

Gap Inquiry Report highlights that these individuals are often subject to systemic discrimination and bias that reflect both anti-Pacific and anti-Māori sentiments.[83] This dual discrimination can lead to greater economic marginalisation, with these individuals facing higher rates of unemployment and underemployment compared to those who identify solely as Pacific or Māori.

The *Hanga-Aro-Rau Lumana'i o Tangata Moana Action Plan* highlights the importance of creating workforce development strategies that are inclusive of those who identify as both Pacific and Māori.[84] This includes fostering environments that respect and uplift both cultural identities, ensuring that these individuals feel valued and supported in their professional lives. The action plan also calls for targeted mentorship and leadership development programs that cater specifically to the needs of Pacific and Māori workers, recognising the unique challenges and opportunities they face.

Moreover, *Unlocking potential: what the research tells us about the current enablers of employment for disabled people* discusses the additional challenges faced by individuals who identify as both Pacific and Māori and who also have disabilities.[85] The intersection of these multiple identities—Pacific, Māori, and Disabled—often results in compounded disadvantages in both education and employment. The report advocates for stronger legal protections and more comprehensive support systems that address the full spectrum of these individuals' identities.

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[83] (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2022).
[84] (Hanga-Aro-Rau, 2024).
[85] (Meares, 2024).

6 Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Aligning vocational education with Te Tiriti o Waitangi involves more than just policy commitments; it requires actionable steps that prioritise the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific people. This includes directing investment towards initiatives that support equity and inclusion, ensuring that Māori and Pacific learners have access to the resources and opportunities needed to succeed.[86]

There is a need to ensure that the VET system is culturally responsive at all levels. This includes incorporating indigenous knowledge and practices into the curriculum, providing culturally appropriate support services, and fostering an environment that respects and values the cultural identity of all learners.[87]

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[86] (Hanga Aro Rau Investment Advice, 2024, p 14 & 15)
[87] (How to read the Mana Moana Pacific Outcomes Framework)

7 Conclusion

The synthesis of discussions, reports, and demographic data reveals that a vocational education system that fully serves Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand must be built on a foundation of cultural responsiveness, equitable access, and alignment with industry needs. The demographic projections highlight the importance of addressing pay gaps and investing in the vocational education of Māori and Pacific, who will constitute a significant portion of the future workforce.

Moving forward, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to address the identified weaknesses and build on existing strengths. This requires a concerted effort to ensure that vocational education is not only accessible and inclusive but also aligned with the needs of the labour market and responsive to the cultural values of Pacific learners.

By fostering strong partnerships between education providers, industry leaders, and Pacific communities, New Zealand can create a vocational education system that empowers Pacific Peoples to thrive in the workforce and contribute to the nation's economic and social well-being. This is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic imperative for the future prosperity of Aotearoa New Zealand.

8 Case studies

8.1 Case Study: Effective On-the-Job Training for Pacific People at a Pacific-Owned Business

This case study explores the on-the-job training methods employed by a Pacific-owned business to empower Pacific youth. Founded by a visionary entrepreneur at the age of 55, the business serves as a family-run enterprise focused on providing employment and practical skills training to unskilled youth, predominantly from Pacific backgrounds.

Cultural integration and comfort: The business owner emphasises the importance of creating a work environment where Pacific youth feel comfortable and connected to their culture. This includes allowing them to express themselves through culturally significant music, fostering a sense of belonging and community within the workplace.

> "We've had rap music in one warehouse, church music in another, and island music somewhere else. It's madness sometimes, but it works because they feel at home and work better," says the business owner."

This environment leads to a noticeable increase in confidence and participation among the youth, which contrasts sharply with their initial shyness and reluctance in mainstream training settings.

Practical skills and real-world application: The training provided is hands-on, focusing on practical skills that are directly applicable to the job. For example, youth are taught how to pack boxes, tape products, and operate within a logistics environment. This training is delivered within the workplace, allowing trainees to immediately apply what they learn, reinforcing their skills through repetition and real-world application. The owner notes, "We show them how to pack boxes, how to tape them, how to come to work on time, and how to read their payslip. It's simple, but it makes a big difference."

Mentorship and role modelling: The business owner serves not only as a leader but also as a mentor to the youth. Their approach is grounded in leading by example and fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding. By sharing personal life experiences and challenges, the owner inspires the youth, demonstrating that success is achievable regardless of their background or past educational struggles. "I started this business when I was 55 years old, without any formal education. If I can do it, they can too. It's about showing them that they can succeed," the owner explains.

Flexibility and individual support: Recognising the diverse needs of their employees, the business provides flexibility in training. For instance, training is offered during lunch breaks, and the youth are paid for their time, integrating learning into the workday rather than separating it from their employment. This approach reduces the financial and time burdens on the trainees, making education more accessible and relevant to their daily lives. The owner suggests, "Why not pay them for an hour of their lunch break to do a course? They work, they learn, and they still get paid. It's a win-win."

Focus on retention and long-term employment: The company's training model is designed not only to equip youth with skills but also to prepare them for long-term employment. While some trainees choose to stay with the company, others move on to other opportunities, carrying with them the confidence and skills gained. This approach has led to

high retention rates and strong, positive feedback from those who have moved on to other jobs. "We've had people stay with us since 2013, and some don't want to leave because they feel comfortable here. But the goal is to get them ready and send them on their way," the owner explains.

This case study provides valuable insights for other businesses and training institutions looking to enhance their engagement with Pacific youth and improve employment outcomes within the Pacific community.

8.2 Case Study: opportunities in regional Aotearoa New Zealand

A Pacific regional advocate we spoke with shared the following insights.

In contrast to Auckland, the regions of Aotearoa New Zealand offer a range of opportunities that can enhance the quality of life for Pacific people. These opportunities include:

1. **Affordable living and better quality of life**

   o **Cost of living**: Housing costs in the regions are significantly lower than in Auckland. Families can afford better living conditions without the financial stress associated with Auckland's housing market. As one Pacific regional advocate noted,

      "The quality of life that [Pacific people] have compared to our families in Auckland... the gap is quite wide."

   o **Less commute, more family time**: Shorter commutes mean more time at home with family, which is crucial for maintaining strong family bonds and cultural practices. The same advocate explained,

      "We're keeping our own workforce within our region, to actually contribute to our own economy and to our own community rather than adding more stress on our families by sending their kids away."

   o **Discretionary Income**: In regions like Balclutha, workers in industries such as meat works have enough income to purchase a home with discretionary income over and above to save, invest, and support their families, contributing to a higher quality of life. The advocate mentioned that in some regions,

      "After paying a mortgage they still got money to spend,"

      highlighting the financial stability that regional living can provide.

2. **Employment and vocational training**

   o **Regional employment**: The regions have seen significant investment in infrastructure and industries such as horticulture, forestry, and manufacturing. This has created jobs that not only pay well but also offer pathways for skill development and career progression.

- o **Vocational training**: Vocational education in the regions is more aligned with local Industry needs. Initiatives such as internship programs allow young Pacific people to earn while they learn, reducing the burden of student loans and making education more accessible. The training often includes culturally relevant support systems, ensuring that Pacific learners are not only educated but also culturally affirmed. The advocate has recently developed an internship programme which ensures pastoral care for the students and the employer,

    "There is a full 12 months [of] pastoral care for both the individual and the business within the internship program,"

    the advocate mentioned, underlining the comprehensive support offered.

3. **Community and cultural connection**

   - o **Strong community ties**: In regional towns, Pacific communities are often more integrated into the wider community. This integration fosters a sense of belonging and reduces the segregation that can occur in larger cities like Auckland.

   - o **Cultural competence in workplaces**: Employers in the regions are increasingly recognising the importance of cultural competence. Training programs for both employers and employees are being developed to ensure that workplaces are welcoming and supportive of Pacific cultural values.

     "It's really important that the employer also has a cultural competency framework…because we can't just do things for the sake of it; we need to do it because it's the right thing to do", the advocate emphasised.

4. **Education and workforce development**

   - o **Educational pathways**: Regional education providers are developing programs that recognise and build on the skills that Pacific people already possess. This includes offering micro-credentials that validate prior learning and provide a pathway to higher qualifications and better job opportunities. The advocate highlighted the importance of this, noting,

     "That is the power of vocational but also the power of having that ticket because they can quote better, they can actually sign off their own work."

   - o **Collaboration with Pacific Islands**: There is potential for collaboration between New Zealand and Pacific Island nations to align educational qualifications. This would allow Pacific Islanders who migrate to New Zealand to have their skills and qualifications recognised, enabling them to enter the workforce at a level commensurate with their training. The advocate suggested,

     "How about we actually sort out our training skills so that the job offers that they come over with are [already] skilled, having New Zealand qualification standard training?"

Another helpful case study, from a manufacturing company: Building a Culture of Care: Autex's investment in training, wellbeing, and organisational culture to support Pacific workers - GEM

9 Methods

In preparing this paper, Hanga-Aro-Rau held talanoa with key Pacific organisations. Talanoa is deeply rooted in Pacific cultural practices. It is a method of conversation that involves talking, discussing, story-telling and engaging in meaningful dialogue. This practice is widespread across the Pacific, recognised in many island nations such as Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Niue, Hawai'i, the Cook Islands, and Tonga.[88] Vaioleti[89] notes that, "[t]alanoa is natural for most Pacific peoples."

Talanoa can occur at varying levels.[90] For our consultations, we utilised fokotu'u talanoa, which typically takes place in formal settings where important and official matters are discussed.[91]

Most of our talanoa sessions were conducted online and lasted for about an hour. Given the nature of talanoa—being subjective, oral, and collaborative—questions were not always predefined. This flexibility allowed us to probe, challenge, clarify, and re-align the discussions as it occurred.[92]

Once the paper was drafted it was sent to the consulted organisations who had an opportunity to provide feedback, prior to it being finalised.

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[88] (Vaioleti, 2006).
[89] (Vaioleti, 2006).
[90] (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2022).
[91] (Fa'avae, Jones & Manu'atu, 2016, p. 140).
[92] (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 25).

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