

# A Hanga-Aro-Rau: Manufacturing, Engineering and Logistics Workforce Development Council White Paper

## **Redesigning the Vocational Education and Training system to unlock the potential of Māori and the Māori economy through workforce development: Eight strategies to inform vocational training design**

April 2025

**Mā wai te huarahi e hora? Mā ngā ahumahi!  
Who will pave the pathway forward? Industry will!<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Whakatauaāki composed by Hanga-Aro-Rau Poumatua Darrell Lambert (Hanga-Aro-Rau, 2022a)

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## Foreword

Our explicit focus is on enabling a strong and prosperous Aotearoa New Zealand economy, with a particular emphasis on building a strong Māori economy. Our vision is He puke tāngata, he pikinga taumata hei oranga mahi – *more Māori with higher skills in higher paid jobs and improved employment opportunities*. This cements our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We are continuing to support a broader labour market to meet the changing needs of industry with an established pipeline of workers and skills shortages filled by supporting a more diverse workforce at every level of industry.

The purpose of this white 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 on the redesign of the VET system. This important and critical role is better served 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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)

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<sup>2</sup> See Education and Training Act 2020, schedule 13(4)(f).

Samantha McNaughton Deputy Chief Executive and  
Darrell Lambert (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Ruapani, Ngāti Kahungunu).

### Message from our Poumatua

Building a strong Māori economy that enables a strong and prosperous New Zealand economy will require a VET system that strongly reflects the voice of those it seeks to serve, Māori industry, Māori learners and employers of large numbers of Māori workers. This paper provides some of those voices.

To build a stronger Māori economy, we need Māori to be well-educated, healthy, housed and with opportunities to start and grow their own businesses. A VET system with settings aligned with the compulsory education and tertiary education systems and designed alongside Māori will significantly increase the skilled workforce available to industry and the potential of Māori and the Māori workforce.

Include Māori in the design of solutions, trust and enable them to lead and they will unlock their own potential.

**Darrell Lambert** – Poumatua (General Manager Māori Workforce Development). (Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Ruapani, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngā Puhi).

### Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the many voices that have contributed to this paper. The Māori Workforce Development tīma, as part of their engagement work, have held national and regional hui with industry representatives and advisory bodies, Māori trust enterprises and Māori business owners, vocational education training providers, government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, TEC and NZQA, ākonga and apprentices. Hundreds of meetings have allowed the development of the insights that have been used to develop this paper and its strategies, and then for those to be tested with stakeholders.

That testing started with the Ohu Ahumahi Māori (Workforce Development Council) members – the Kāhui Ahumahi – to develop the initial thinking with followup testing with Josie Glasson (Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri) Ohu Ahumahi, Pou Whakatakanga. Tōnui Māori Management Consultancy<sup>3</sup> provided independent support to enable us to test again with a smaller group of Māori business owners and leaders of Māori organisations in manufacturing, engineering and logistics, and other organisations in the sector with a large Māori workforce. A special acknowledgement to Cath Fraser for putting into words the many voices collected through this mahi. It is these many voices, with a shared vision of a mana enhancing VET system that shaped and refined the themes developed into the strategies within this paper.

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<sup>3</sup> Tōnui Māori Management Consultancy, 2024

# 1 Executive summary

## 1.1 Core design features

Eight themes related to the future design of workforce development and vocational education were identified across the contributions from the many people we spoke with. From our engagement with Māori industry, they need to see in our vocational education system:

1. A surging Māori economy, effectively leveraged
2. Māori representation, top down
3. Better workforce attraction, progression and productivity
4. Improved qualification alignment
5. Ākonga-centred teaching and training
6. Impactful change to pathways and transitions
7. Values, tikanga, cultural identity and diversity are championed
8. An appreciation of the significance of te Tiriti o Waitangi and its connection to achieving greater outcomes

Māori industry believe that success will depend on:

1. **The Māori economy.** We want to see strategies which support iwi and Māori business to help grow the economy and lift our nation's productivity, along with greater prosperity for us all.
2. **Representation.** System designers attending a few hui to 'engage' or 'consult' is not enough; Māori must be involved from the inception of the work, and in the room with the right people, at the right levels to be able to positively contribute to solutions and actions.
3. **Attraction, progression and productivity.** Workforce challenges have Māori solutions. The country's demographic profile is undergoing significant change with an ageing workforce: Māori youth are the largest group of untapped potential in the workforce supply chain.
4. **Qualifications, training and gaps.** The Māori economy is clear about what it is looking for, from vocational education: more Māori with higher skills, in higher paid jobs and improved employment opportunities. This includes upskilling the current Māori workforce in advanced technologies and processes and bringing on new workers with appropriate skills. Employers are calling for work-based learning, e-learning, micro-credentials for specialisms, Industry 4.0, digitalisation and AI, as well as management and leadership training.
5. **Understanding Māori ākonga and their whānau.** The system can be rewired so that Māori have the education levels needed to get good quality jobs. This begins at primary school, with basic literacy and numeracy and continues with learning

success and career plans, linking school and workplace. This needs to be undertaken in a way that embraces the cultural identities of ākonga.

6. **Transitions.** Better connections between ākonga and their whānau and schools, providers and industry will mean impactful change to the pathways into work for Māori youth, and better insights about career opportunities in 21st century trades, lifting economic performance and productivity.
7. **Values and tikanga to support cultural identity in the workplace.** Culturally responsive vocational training and skills development includes traditional tuakana-teina teaching and learning – these are effective approaches in building a skilled and productive Māori workforce, that can be internationally competitive.
8. **The Government's role in connecting all parts of the system is vital.** Engagement with iwi, hapū, Māori communities, industry and providers as part of system design will lead to stronger functionality and better outcomes for all stakeholders. We have a great opportunity to reset the system and bring everyone forward, together.

## 2 Redesigning a system that works for Māori

The redesign of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is an opportunity to elevate the activities that are establishing strong workforce pipelines for industry and better outcomes for Māori, while taking a more circumspect approach to the initiatives that fall short in creating a strong and productive economy for the betterment of Māori and all New Zealanders.

The VET redesign should enable the growth of the Māori economy. Through enabling strong growth of the Māori economy, strong growth of the wider economy will be assured. Economic growth, productivity and prosperity rely on more Māori with higher skills in higher-paying jobs and improved employment opportunities. Therefore, the redesigned VET system must seek to authentically honour the rights of Tāngata Whenua through honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The system must empower industry and employers (mainstream and Māori) to embrace, develop and sustain a changing demographic of our future workforce.

A redesigned VET system should include empowering Māori industry to provide opportunity to fill present and future workforce development needs, enabling Māori to help Aotearoa New Zealand's economy and productivity to prosper.

Any new or re-established entities as part of the redesign changes will need to include maintaining or establishing strategic partnerships with iwi and hapū to create strong links between Māori and whānau, hapū, iwi, industry and the VET system.

### 2.1 What Māori need from the VET system

What Māori need from the VET system is the same as what a productive Aotearoa New Zealand economy needs, a system that uplifts all New Zealanders into higher skilled and higher paid work.

- **Focus on outcomes:** The VET system should include a strong focus that improve outcomes for Māori communities, such as increased employment rates, skill development, and pathways to higher education. A focus on outcomes must come with targeted approaches evidenced by data. The Social Investment Agency established 1 July 2024 is “proposing new tools and approaches to ensure that we fund, deliver and measure the impact of social services to ensure better outcomes”.<sup>4</sup> One potential for the redesign of the VET system is to leverage these tools and approaches to enable data sharing and a central mechanism for analysis to allow different parts of the system to understand:
  - What has supported more ākonga to be successful in their learning leading to more innovative models of delivery and support.
  - What and when interventions made a difference in the learning journey of ākonga so they can be applied at the education provider level.
  - Where outcomes align to iwi/hapū (and where they don't) and what impact that has on whānau/community success to understand which community-led approaches need more support.

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<sup>4</sup> Office for the Minister of Social Investment, 2024, Pg4

“Māori would have confidence that the new system is committed to Māori success when success measures are designed together, and based on whānau and iwi aspirations.” – Industry participant, RoVE Technical Workshop, 2019.

- **Accessibility:** A pathway to employment and higher education means providing more accessible training programs to Māori learners. Accessibility includes:
  - Where training is delivered. Urban and rural training centres (including marae) or models of learning that includes blended learning.
  - How the training is delivered. Providing flexible learning options, such as online courses, industry and/or community-based training using work-based learning approaches.
  - Incentivised training. Including ‘earn as you learn’ options, apprenticeships, cash payments upon successful completion – reverse scholarships.
  - Early intervention student support models that consider comprehensive support services, including mentoring, tutoring, and counselling, to help Māori students navigate their educational journeys.
  - Recognition of Prior Learning: Acknowledging and valuing the skills and knowledge that Māori learners bring from their life experiences can help in creating more personalized learning pathways.<sup>5</sup>
  - Assessment using Universal Design Learning that allows tutors and students to gather evidence of learning in ways that prove competence without taking a one-size-fits-all approach for every learner.
  - A holistic approach to education that considers the well-being of the whole person, including mental, emotional, and spiritual health, is essential.

There are models that already exist providing improved success rates for Māori.

- **Workplace integration:** Opportunities for work placements and apprenticeships that connect students with Māori-owned businesses and organizations can enhance practical learning and employment outcomes. There are tools already available that can support employers. The Good Employer Matrix (GEM)<sup>6</sup> is an example of a tool that aims to see more Māori and Pacific Peoples progress into senior, well-paid, resilient jobs and provides employers with the tools, knowledge and resources needed to make this happen.
- **Partnerships with iwi and hapū:** Collaboration with iwi/hapū and Māori organizations can ensure that VET programs are aligned with the needs of local communities and the workforce.
- **Advocacy and representation:** Ensuring that Māori voices are represented in decision-making processes related to VET policy and practice is crucial for addressing their specific needs.

<sup>5</sup> See as a model Capable NZ, 2024

<sup>6</sup> GEM, 2024



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

## CASE STUDY

### Radio New Zealand Story: Helping hand for at-risk learners pays off for WITT pass rates

Taranaki's largest tertiary education institute says a big improvement in pass rates for Māori, Pasifika and disabled students is down to making sure they get plenty of help and support.

The Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki has also closed the gap between more vulnerable student groups and the general student body.

In 2022, the Māori pass rate at WITT was 64 percent – compared to 74 for general students.

In 2023, Māori achievement jumped to 72 percent, just five percentage points behind the general student body whose pass rate also improved.

Tuari Rewiti from the Kaitakawaenga Māori and Pacific Student Success Team said the change was down to an institute-wide focus on getting in early to identify and help at-risk learners.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 What the Māori economy needs from the VET system

Māori businesses are a key employer group to help grow Māori engagement and success in vocational education and the workforce. Reducing unemployment also impacts a raft of negative social indices: prison populations, poverty, crowded housing, intergenerational reliance on welfare and over-dependency on hospitalisation.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.2.1 The Māori economy is growing

Māori have a long history in international and domestic trade and business. Twenty years ago, the Māori economy was worth around \$16 billion; today the Māori economy is a \$70 billion sector<sup>8</sup>, forecast to be worth an estimated \$100 billion by 2030.<sup>9</sup> The Māori economy comprises:

- 57% firm ownership (9,880 firms owned by Māori employers).

<sup>7</sup> Deloitte & Hanga-Aro-Rau, 2022; 2023

<sup>8</sup> BERL (Business and Economic Research Ltd), 2019

<sup>9</sup> NZTE, 2024

- 13% self-employment (18,600 self-employed Māori). Employment in these two groups was 29,800 in 2022, up 2,600 employees (9.6 percent) from 2021.
- 30% Māori authorities: trusts, incorporations, and other Māori structures and assets. Employment rose by 1,200 (11 percent) between 2021 and 2022, to 11,800.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Māori economy presents strong workforce and economic opportunities

- Māori employers are three times more likely to employ Māori and employ 43 percent Māori on average.
- Non-Māori businesses seeking to develop commercial partnerships with Māori industry or demonstrate commitment to Te Tiriti as part of organisational reporting requirements, need to develop their own Māori cultural awareness and competency<sup>11</sup> – Māori trainers can deliver this.
- The Māori economy is becoming more visible, with growing diversification of exports and services, and examples of legislative provision (such as the dedicated Māori Trade and Economic Cooperation chapter in the 2022 NZ-UK Free Trade Agreement).

### 2.2.3 Small yet powerful changes yield long-term economic benefits

- **Planned and targeted education and career pathways** means providing young people with a clear line of vision of what is possible in terms of education and career progression, and a much easier to navigate pathway is laid bare. An understanding that the path is non-linear and flexibility in the education system to empower Māori participation builds a stronger more resilient Aotearoa New Zealand economy.

“We need to build confidence in our rangatahi so they can see enduring career pathways when university isn’t an option. We need to know where the footpaths are, so we can start running.” – Māori employer, 2024.

- **A reduction of red tape** and more flexibility in accessing resourcing. The Māori economy includes about 60,000 small-to-medium Māori businesses and sole traders<sup>12</sup> who tell us compliance and regulatory monitoring costs stymie growth. The current government can significantly reduce costs by looking at compliance and regulatory processes to create efficiencies.
- **Respect for autonomy** and self-determination means re-looking at how processes to determine eligibility for scholarships, entry into training programmes and even into work can hinder accessibility for Māori. Associated government reporting criteria needs to be better geared to be used effectively to identify inefficiencies and then redesign them to effect positive system changes.
- **Responsive to regional needs** and opportunities and a willingness to support and grow capacity in local enterprises. An evaluative framework established and monitored by the Social Investment Agency that enables assessment against employment outcomes, community innovation and support.
- Infrastructure investment across the Government’s economic programme, particularly the Regional Infrastructure Fund, should deliberately target public iwi partnerships. **Iwi and Māori co-investment** that aligns with workforce development plans that gear the country up to meet its infrastructure workforce supply needs.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics New Zealand, 2022a

<sup>11</sup> Chapman Tripp, 2023

<sup>12</sup> Poi-Ngawhika, 2023

- A pathway to **pay equity and social justice**: Māori median salaries are about \$75 per week lower than the median salary for all New Zealanders. If every working age Māori gets the same salary as other New Zealanders, it would add more than \$2.5 billion in revenue into whānau Māori pockets per annum.<sup>13</sup> This starts with education and career planning – for all rangatahi and workers.

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<sup>13</sup> Cochrane & Pacheco, 2022

## 3 Representation – at all levels

New Zealand suffers from persistent disparity of social and economic outcomes between Māori and non-Māori, despite decades of policies to ‘close the gap’. One explanation is that Māori are often not part of the design phase.

“It’s the follow-through. They will always say they are consulting, but who are they talking to and are they representative of the entire sector and what are they doing after hearing the feedback?” – Iwi leader, 2024.

### 3.1 What would ‘good’ look like in a representative model for the redesign of the VET system

The redesign of the VET system needs to retain the importance of open, transparent recruitment processes and the strategic involvement of Māori leaders to ensure authentic representation and effective outcomes. This could look like;

- **Open and transparent recruitment processes for representative leadership:** This starts at, or before the design phase – not afterwards.

“We want to select our own representatives, iwi-endorsed, not Crown appointed.” – Māori industry representative, 2024.

“The right people in the right room, at the right time, writing the right things.” – Māori PTE trainer, 2024.

- **Having agents for advocacy.** Stakeholders need to know who their people are, have confidence in their commitment, and understand the measures of success and accountability.
- Strategic appointment of Māori leaders with mana in education could also provide an avenue to include and **incorporate design feedback from all educational sectors**, including universities and wānanga. Closer ties avoid duplication and support ākonga transitions.
- **Cross-sector hui and events.** In 2024, Hanga-Aro-Rau piloted a series of successful networking events in Auckland and Hamilton, connecting Māori industry, Māori trainers from ITOs, PTEs and ITPs and TEC spokespeople. Topics covered included how TEC makes decisions to fund, and how to ensure industry voice gets heard in the advice provided to TEC to assist with setting targets and priorities. We see the insights gained from Māori industry about the value of such events as widely transferable across all industry sectors.

“We are not hard-to-reach communities. The forums are already there. The relationships are there too.” – Iwi participant, RoVE Technical Workshop, 2019.

## 3.2 Don't waste good practice representation

Since 2022, the Hanga-Aro-Rau [Industry Stakeholder Group \(ISG\)](#) has provided guidance and feedback on the organisation's strategic direction and performance, and 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 WDC to have an industry-led advisory group guiding its strategy. Recruitment and selection look at the key capabilities needed for a strong representative group with cross-sector knowledge and deep community connections.

When the dust settles after the vocational educational training system is redesigned, why let these effective and informed advisory groups disband – instead leverage their skills, knowledge and mana to steer the next set of entities through their establishment.



Image 1: Hanga-Aro-Rau Industry Stakeholder Group 2024

## 4 Improving attraction, progression and productivity

### 4.1 The right skills at the right time

A key challenge for Māori industry, as for all industry, is the **shortage of skilled and qualified workers**.<sup>14</sup> A compounding factor is our ageing workforce with not enough new/young workers coming in to replace those ageing out.

- We have among the highest rates of employees aged over 55 years in the OECD, expected to rise further in the coming years. At Census 2018, over a quarter (27%) of the national workforce were in the 50-to-64-year age groups. By 2030, 25% of the workforce will be over 55.
- Overall population growth is slowing: in the 2018 Census, 20% of the total Aotearoa New Zealand population was aged under 15.
- Māori have a much younger population: in 2018, 32% were aged under 15.
- The Māori population is also growing faster: in 2018, Māori comprised 17% of New Zealand's population, projected to increase to 21% nationally by 2043.

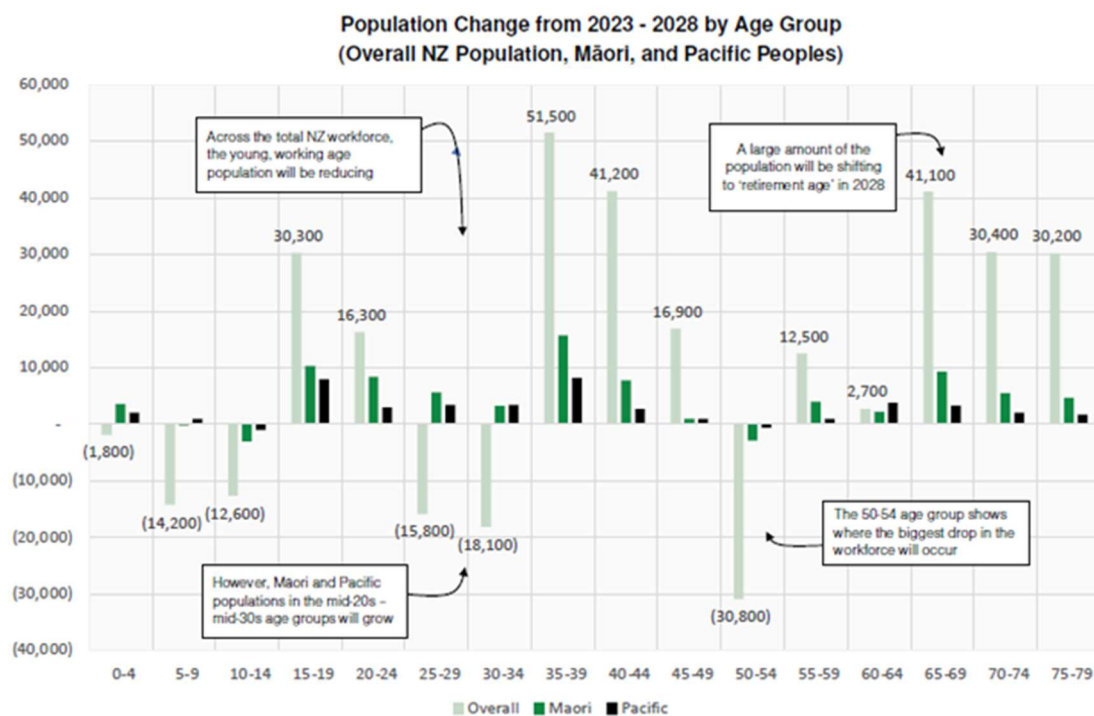


Figure 1: Population Change from 2023 – 2028 by Age Group : Māori youth, and underutilised Māori of working age (13.4% compared to 9.2% for the overall population) are the largest group of untapped potential in the workforce supply chain.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cochrane & Pacheco, 2022

<sup>15</sup> Derived from multiple data sets, Statistics New Zealand, 2022b

## 4.2 What design feature will encourage rangatahi into higher education and support retraining

- **Exposure to Māori industry success stories**, with schools and providers hosting guest speakers at local hui, and opportunity for Q and A, dialogue.
- **Increasing government funding** for in-work training options and using the learner success component funding to incentivise better support systems for rangatahi and older trainees/learners.
- **More support to learners** in/out of work to assist with life administration: travel, accommodation, budgeting.
- **Improved connection with schools** to feed into pathway programmes about preparation to enter the workforce, and employer expectations. Starting to connect with schools earlier in Year 9 so rangatahi can see what options are available to them and schools can provide support earlier to provide better support.
- **Better government and industry collaborations**, including subsidised pilot programmes for school-leavers and the transfer of workers that are displaced to other roles and industries.
- **Increase te ao Māori/community support** to build self-belief and aspirations.

“Being held in trades because that’s all we’re built for, is crap! We need to tell kids they can do it – they are natural born leaders, but they need to know how to do it in a pakeha-controlled world.” – Māori employer, 2024.
- **Raising understanding of business** through work experience, Gateway programmes, field trips and site visits, industry open days.



## 5 Addressing qualification and training gaps

### 5.1 You can't be what you can't see

Many employers report a mismatch between skills and competencies taught in qualifications, and what is needed by industry. Gaps include new technologies, digital skills, employability skills, literacy and numeracy, and general work-readiness. Core employability or transferable skills mentioned were work ethic, team-mindedness, critical thinking, problem-solving, an understanding of productivity, industry, and how businesses work, foundation literacy and numeracy.

New employees, and by extension, the providers that prepared them, often did not understand the jobs and the industries that they were coming to.

“Working with Māori and having a focus on improved outcomes is the responsibility of everyone, not just Māori.” – RoVE Technical Workshop participant, 2019.

### 5.2 Design features to improve training ‘fit’

- **Bite-size and transferable qualifications** (such as micro-credentials) allow ākonga and workers to see progress without taking on long-term commitment, where completion will be more of a challenge. Celebrate every success to create a positive learning experience that encourages an ongoing commitment to learning.
- **Less theory and more practical delivery and assessment** in qualifications to reduce the difficulty for learners with reading and writing challenges. Examples include portfolios with photographic evidence, or recorded narratives and commentary related to meeting learning outcomes. Developing more flexible assessment options will improve outcomes for all learners.
- Where online learning is the only available option, ensure that face-to-face learning support and **pastoral care** is available through established regional education providers. Especially in rural communities, this could be done through local schools, community education providers, marae, regional polytechnic satellite campuses or even libraries.
- Partnerships between employers and **external literacy and numeracy training** organisations, for easily accessed, on-site upskilling. Look for ways to integrate it into normal everyday tasks.
- **Role models**, in the workplace, in the community, in education can make a big difference for young Māori. Create an intentional commitment to growing Māori into manager roles and senior positions.
- Better management of **consistent standards and practices** across training providers. Create intentional links to *Ka Hikitia* so that outcomes are better monitored and therefore better managed.
- Better alignment and **progression between levels 2, 3 and 4** in the qualification's framework. The steps between each qualification should be smaller, create shorter foundation programmes that can allow a learner to work up to more technical level qualifications.



- Pragmatic, **inter-agency collaboration**. Remove some of the steps, create processes that make it easier for the learner, so their user journey is simplified, even if that means more processes and steps for the education provider or government agency.

### 5.3 What this can look like in practice

In 2023, the Hanga-Aro-Rau Whanake Māori Workforce Development team collaborated with employers, providers and government (MSD) to move 73 people from benefits into pre-employment training and then employment. The initiative targeted commercial road transport, distribution, logistics and meat processing, based in Auckland and the Waikato.

The key to success was matching industry need with the products and support of government agencies and the vocational education and training system and acting as the 'connector' between each part of the system to ensure success. The process we followed was:

1. Māori workforce development engagement discussions held with industry including iwi business.
2. Identify their current and future workforce needs.
3. Liaised with MSD regarding their *Skills for Industry* funding (this covers pre-employment training, costs associated with the move into employment, and pastoral care) to understand the parameters necessary to successfully connect the learner with the employer.
4. Connected appropriate providers, industry and MSD using the established criteria.
5. Facilitated the process, working with:
  - Industry stakeholders who agreed to employ the MSD clients.
  - Providers that tailored and delivered the training the clients needed for the workplace.
  - MSD who selected the clients and funded the provider.

## 6 Understanding Māori ākonga

“There is no typical stereotype!”

Māori are not all the same, and nor are Māori youth. Māori identity includes ancestral, familial, demographic, geographic, social, cultural, political and experiential differences. Different iwi, hapū and whānau have different traditions, beliefs and dialects. Further, recent statistics show that half of all Māori have partners from another culture.<sup>16</sup> For Māori, then, one-size-fits-all solutions can be unwelcome and unworkable. For Pākehā, culture is just one of many descriptors, if even mentioned, but references to Māori can be too quick to assume a shared cultural knowledge, values and ways of being.

Today’s Māori ākonga are equally a diverse and dynamic population, yet a large number have in common that they are facing unprecedented challenges. For example:

- Many urban Māori have lost their connection with iwi and hapū and can lack this grass-roots support in the face of complex, and intergenerational challenges.
- Rangatahi are especially vulnerable if whānau history includes multi-generational trauma/unemployment/poverty/poor mental health.
- 32% of Māori (compared to 24% of the overall population) have an impairment or disability of some kind.<sup>17</sup> Filling in forms, having to interact with bureaucracy is a barrier, especially for dyslexic learners. Māori who are also disabled are less likely than non-disabled Māori to be in the labour force, and those who are in the labour force have higher rates of unemployment. Income is lower, and the rate of discrimination is higher.<sup>18</sup>
- Many have adult responsibilities, caregiving, and financial support, especially in single-parent households.

### 6.1 The importance of te Tiriti o Waitangi to workforce development

“We must invest in the future now. Māori are earners and learners throughout Aotearoa, contributing to all industries and regions. As growing and young populations, our vocational education system has to work with iwi/Māori, industries, and regions to attract, develop, and promote Māori for the collective prosperity of all in Aotearoa.” – Kāhui Ahumahi, 2024.

Māori businesses are seeing the benefits of a culturally embracing work environment, adding to strategies around recruitment, training, retention and progression. Our growing and more youthful Māori population is key to strengthening our workforce. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is seen by many Māori as both part of our country’s constitutional makeup and the foundation to both a culturally diverse workplace and helping to respond to Māori needs and aspirations. Understanding the importance of that will add another tool to all employers’ toolkits (whether they be Māori or non-Māori) to help build their workforce.

“The Māori workforce is your workforce of the future.” – Māori contractor, 2024.

Aligning vocational education with Te Tiriti o Waitangi involves more than policy commitments; it requires actionable steps that prioritise the needs and aspirations of Māori. This includes directing investment towards initiatives that support equity and inclusion, ensuring that Māori

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<sup>16</sup> ACC, 2023

<sup>17</sup> Meares, 2024

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

learners have access to the resources and opportunities needed to succeed. This means a culturally embracing and responsive vocational education system, at all levels, that incorporates 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.

## 6.2 What a redesigned vocational education system needs to do

- **Build flexibility into delivery models** and allow workplace leaders to respond to the needs of their new Māori employees and apprentices, e.g. ākonga taking care of family responsibilities on top of working (whānau centric learning).
- **Strengthen work-based learning** – the “earn while you learn” model so ākonga are not burdened by debt, or having to balance commitments of working fulltime, and then finding time to study.<sup>19</sup>
- **Recognition of prior learning and expertise**, in tikanga and kaupapa, in representative and leadership roles, in marae and sport.
- Provide **resourcing for pastoral care**, e.g. assist rangatahi with driver licences.
- **Work with community:**

“Connections, relationships, hauora are all things that help rangatahi advance.” – Iwi leader, 2024.

- **Ensure workplaces are inclusive.** This may require professional development training for existing staff and a focus on what equity means in their own setting.
- **Culturally responsive** and inclusive practice with high expectations - the onus for upskilling is on the trainer, not the trainee.<sup>20</sup>
- **Backfill literacy (including digital) and numeracy gaps.** Lack of basic literacy skills impedes success in all avenues of life, including recruitment, workplace learning, digital and advanced skill development, completion of higher qualifications.<sup>21</sup>
- Investigate **alternative methods of training:**

“They’ll digest and learn from TikTok but not a written manual. Find ways of using the platforms they already engaging with.” – Māori employer, 2024.

- Promote appropriate and flexible **resourcing from government partners.**
- **Recruit more Māori and Pacific staff** in visible and influential roles.

“Don’t be afraid to have Māori at the board table as well- it adds value.” – Māori contractor, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Te Pūkenga, 2021

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Deloitte & Hanga-Aro-Rau, 2022

## 7 Better transitions

### Better school-provider-industry networks are needed

Trades, including (but not limited to) manufacturing, engineering and logistics, can still be perceived as offering low-skilled, repetitive jobs in workplaces that lack creature comforts, when the reality of modern trade professions and what 21st century workplaces look like is very different.

“Our kids need a clear pathway to success – they need a Year 9 – Year 13 roadmap of milestones and subjects they should be studying to help them.” – Māori employer, 2024.

This means:

- Careers people in schools need to widen their awareness and knowledge of vocational pathways, as for many young Māori, they will be the key informant about workforce direction.
- Rangatahi and whānau visiting sites and seeing work in action can be life-changing.
- Industry needs to be invited into the schools and talk to ākonga, and role models to share stories of career progression and success.

**In addition, schools and providers need to offer scaffolded support, with Learner Success Plans which reflect pastoral care and support** – especially in the context of intergenerational poverty, and intergenerational trauma. This might mean foundational literacy and numeracy support, mental health and pastoral care, driver training and support to gain a licence. Responses must be learner-centric, not institutional. Wrap-around services must be age-appropriate, easily accessed, and relatable, for example, linked to sport.

“Affirmation. Tell them they are doing a good job. Showcase success, nurture confidence and self-esteem for a job well done.” – Māori employer, 2024.

### 7.1 Design feature to support transition

- **Embedded resourcing** for Trades Academies, GATEWAY and STAR programmes to enable rangatahi to gain workplace skills while still in school.
- **Better connection with other government agency resourcing**, e.g. the Māori Trades Training Fund, and Mana in Mahi (MSD) which support industry taking on youth in their first working role.
- **Māori liaison positions** within the tertiary providers that work with ākonga to create tikanga-based career development plans, including holistic support, soft-skills, and resilience.

## 8 Values and tikanga are our super-power

Values are a foundation for business, just as for life. When employers embrace Māori values, they are building a culture and creating a safe place for all kaimahi, not just Māori, and a foundation for productivity. Further, visible Māori values can play a key role as an attraction and retention solution to recruiting a skilled workforce, and particularly larger numbers of youth and women.

“The easy stuff like karakia should be embedded and normal practice. Our international workforce love and embrace our culture.” – Māori manager, 2024.

Māori are the experts of their own world, and can contribute with authority to:

- Develop organisational values and co-construct statements about vision and organisational culture that lift the mana of every employee.
- Guide bicultural conversations on matters concerning equity and inclusion.
- Lead whakawhānaungatanga, building respectful, mutually beneficial relationships.
- Blend Western and te ao Māori approaches to business.

### 8.1 Role models, mentors (tuakana-teina) and champions

Māori industry understands that for Māori youth, and for all people, connections and relationships enable success. Putting people in front of them that they connect with, and exposure to other options than what parents and whānau do is important – even more so if the apprentice is the only person in the household in fulltime work.

Effective mentoring, drawing on our tradition of tuakana-teina learning, will also involve pastoral care and conversations in a holistic, wrap-around, ‘Te Whare Tapa Whā’ model.<sup>22</sup> Mentoring is not just for new employees but is an important strategy for getting Māori into management and senior levels, and encouraging people to study/undertake ongoing training, aiming for the next tier up.

### 8.2 Incorporating Māori cultural features into system design

- Establish a **kaihautū (leader) Māori role** in every provider, every workplace.
- Offer and embed ongoing **cultural competency training** to upskill and build confidence in non-Māori staff as well as Māori who cannot be assumed to have all come from a marae upbringing.
- **Visible values and tikanga** in daily practice. This starts with ‘onboarding’ processes, when providers and workplaces should have a powhiri (manuhiri have a mihi whakatau), and cultural inductions. Other elements include kapa haka practices, learning pepeha, te reo Māori classes, understanding and supporting tangihanga, making it comfortable for everyone to say ‘kia ora’.
- Create **structures which establish group responsibility** to ensure everyone performs; the group also provides guidance/correction to young workers.
- Formalise and resource **mentoring programmes** across providers and industry, including training to help businesses identify, engage and fund good mentors.

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<sup>22</sup> Durie, 1998

## 9 The opportunity for Government

“We start initiatives, but they change with new government policies. Yet Māori haven’t changed.” – RoVE Technical Workshop participant, 2019.

Building trust with Māori industry is essential for all parts of our system, but especially the education, employment and training ministries, if we are truly going to change outcomes and deliver prosperity for all of Aotearoa, and enact the spirit of te Tiriti o Waitangi. With upcoming changes in the vocational education system, we would like to see the role of employer as educator escalated. We believe there is an opportunity for Māori industry and organisations to move into service provision in joint ventures with government and all parts of the system.

### 9.1 Design features which will enhance public and private sector relationships in vocational education.

- **Removing the red tape for small businesses around funding** eligibility, access and reporting. This includes ensuring government policy on education and vocational training is not dominated by benefiting larger off-shore owned corporates; the majority of Māori enterprises are small/owner-operated.
- **Networking events for multiple stakeholder groups** (Government, Māori, and all industry, iwi, and ākonga-as-future-workforce).
- Consistency and **security with funding** programmes that work, e.g. the TPK Business Development Training fund for small businesses; Māori Trades Training Fund; Gateway and Intro to Trades courses to offer learners a taster to see if a certain workstream is really for them.
- **Consistency around apprenticeships** – some have the ability to fast-track completion, which helps post-school leavers with family responsibilities.
- **A better, equitable response to geographic restraints** – there are limited training facilities and insufficient career guidance available in the regions.
- **Alignment between investment in education and incentivising learner achievement** monitoring success in a way that advocates for Māori in the VET/TEC space.
- Creating a **streamlined approval process for micro-credentials** that enable skill and knowledge transfer, quick career pivots and niche training.

“We want to work with Te Tiriti partners who understand their obligations, and can grow more people, who don’t necessarily look like Māori, but can think like Māori.” – RoVE Technical Workshop Iwi participant, 2019.

## 10 Wide representation

### **Testing the themes and strategies developed from what we have heard.**

Hanga-Aro-Rau has listened to what has been said and is being said by Māori. When we draft strategies and design actions, we return in a continuous cycle of testing to ensure our approach is reflecting their intentions. We ask our Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners, genuinely, “Do our ideas connect with your own aspirations and plans? Is this mahi contributing to an education system that will improve outcomes for Māori?” Then, we share our understanding with our Industry Stakeholder Group, and take guidance from our Council, and from the members of Te Kāhui Ahumahi. Therefore, our thinking as we compiled this document has been tested externally and internally, by taking core principles out to industry and iwi, and back to our own leaders, asking for their input/advice/critique/challenge.

Finally, our commentary is supported in places by data from Statistics New Zealand, Infometrics and other proprietary data sources.

All quotations, unless otherwise attributed, are from the engagements described above.



## 11 Profiles

Below are Māori success stories from industry that illustrate the importance of a connected VET system that support Māori and the Māori economy.

### 11.1 Koru Customs & International Freight Limited

“This industry is all about getting stuff done,” says Steve Tomlinson, Owner and General Manager of Koru Customs & International Freight Limited. “We’re a Māori family business and we like to bring a bit of flavour to our industry and what we do. We understand that a lot of what we’re moving is emotive or is being transported under deadlines with real-world consequences, so we try to treat every shipment like it’s our own.”

Since 2007, Steve (Rangitane ki Manawatu) and his wife and business partner, Maria (Ngāti Porou), have provided comprehensive customs clearance and freight forwarding services from their base in Ōtautahi Christchurch. “As customs brokers, we facilitate the movement of goods in and out of the country with border control agencies like MPI [Ministry for Primary Industries], Customs, Food Safety, MFAT [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade], and Internal Affairs.” “Prior to starting the business, we were both working for a multinational customs company,” Maria says. “Steve kept giving more and more to that business and our whānau was lagging. We were burning ourselves out, living for work. We needed to reset. So, two dummies quit their jobs with no plan and that’s how this started.” Maria designed the logo and chose the name, and Koru Customs & International Freight Limited was born. “We all know what the koru is symbolic of, and it definitely was a brand-new start for us,” she says.



Word-of-mouth referrals and above-and-beyond service have seen Koru grow into an international success and an exemplar of how Māori-led businesses can thrive through shared values and strong connections. “Māori are really good at hospitality and we’re able to build relationships easily,” Steve says. “People respond to that and they tell their friends.”

Their whānau-led approach has also enabled them to welcome daughter, Alyssa, into the business. “My dad’s been in the industry since he was 18,” she says, “so I grew up around it and came into it quite naturally.” After earning a Bachelor of Commerce at Canterbury University, Alyssa took the leap and completed the Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders qualification. “I didn’t need my degree to come into the industry, but as the first in the family to complete university, it’s something I’m quite proud of.”

“The pathway to what we do is varied,” Steve adds. “I started at a small family business where I learned the industry from the ground up. You don’t have to have any formal training because you can get taught on the job, but there are a number of qualifications available: Intro to Customs or Intro to Freight Forwarding are a good place to start.”



“I became interested in the industry because of the stories Steve would tell me,” Maria says. “I started in sea freight and exports and decided to get qualified as a customs broker because I wanted to be able to complete the full job. That’s how I ended up going to study and got my ticket.”

At Koru Customs & International Freight Limited, Te Ao Māori is ever-present, with Te Reo Māori spoken and Alyssa’s pēpē running around the office. Steve and Maria hope that their successful approach will inspire other Māori to consider a career in freight forwarding and customs, and shed light on the varied opportunities available. “It’s a demanding but rewarding industry,” Steve says. “While we’re all fiercely competitive, we have lifelong contacts and friends. It’s more than just a workforce; we’re whānau as well and there aren’t enough of us.”

“You don’t hear about our industry in Māori circles,” Maria agrees. “We just get lumped in with logistics. But we can influence people by inviting them in to meet us. It’s about the way we carry ourselves and how we represent who we are.”

Photos: Koru Customs & International Freight

## 11.2 Reni Wereta-Gargiulo – KiwiKai Nelson

“As Māori we are very natural with Tikanga, Kaitiakitanga, Rangatiratanga - and continually excited to pass down what we know to our employees, manaaki especially,” says Reni Wereta-Gargiulo (Ngati Ruanui, Nga Rauru Kitahi, Te Atiawa), Owner of KiwiKai Nelson. “We’re really important to the chain of employment. We bring with us our values, our intelligence, and our joy, as well as the wisdom of those who came before us.”



The daughter of a pākehā mother and a Māori father, Reni says she struggled to find her place in the New Zealand education system. “When I was in high school, there were only about five Māori students out of 600. I was extremely intelligent, but school didn’t do it for me. I remember the careers advisor swearing at me once and I felt so deflated. But, as soon as I got into the workforce, I thrived. I’ve never let anything stop me.”

Like many entrepreneurs, Reni’s path to launching her business began as a personal one. “When my dad was dying of cancer, I would go to Dunedin every few weeks and cook for him. And then, in the space of one year, I lost him, separated from my husband, and was made redundant from the marae.” This challenging period inspired Reni to bring her sustainable, nourishing food to others; she branded herself as Kiwi Kai and began selling marinated fish at the local Saturday market. “The community was very supportive and started giving me catering work. From there, I registered my kitchen, and we grew and grew.”

The first two years of the business were a whirlwind, says Reni, with a flurry of media attention and several high-profile competition and funding wins. “I couldn’t believe it when we were asked to feature in a 10-episode documentary about New Zealand Chefs for Māori TV. With that

coverage and my background in marketing, we were able to naturally create a good media presence.” From there, Kiwi Kai launched its successful beverage line, Atutahi, and began competing in both food-based and business-based competitions. “We entered the Farmer’s Market New Zealand Awards, got recognition for the seafood category in our first year, and took first prize the next. In 2022, Māori Women’s Development Inc encouraged us to enter their annual awards, and we won both the Business Collaboration Award and Supreme Award.” With these significant New Zealand accolades under her belt, Reni applied for the international entrepreneurial women’s network SheEO. “We were selected to complete the programme, which was a huge accomplishment that provided us with invaluable links to other female entrepreneurs and funders, globally.”

As Reni looks ahead, she is determined to maintain her momentum and has continued to expand with established sister company Kai Fusion NZ, now handling the catering arm of the business. “I never really stop; I’m expecting another big growth jump for Kiwi Kai and Atutahi. I’m quite competitive, which is definitely a motivator, but I’m also inspired by others’ belief in us. Great feedback is one of the things that propels us forward.”

Encouraging rangatahi to keep learning and upskilling is critical for the future of the food and beverage industry, Reni says. “We know what it was like to be young and what we needed to help us; we can help now by supporting new employees. The Māori talent pool in Nelson is quite slim and they can sometimes feel that they aren’t good enough for us when, in fact, it’s the opposite. We need them to make us better. We encourage young people to dream big, we bring our people in slowly, and we never give them a job they can’t do.

“In hospitality and food and beverage, there’s so much room for growth. You can start off as a kitchen hand or a waitress and every single role is important because they’re all necessary to make the team work. There’s also room to challenge yourself in this industry; ideas and innovation are accepted. As employers, we have to show them the right way and then give them the tools and skills to do it. Everyone has something great that they’re good at.”

### 11.3 Paris Benay Kataraina Mitchell: Navigating New Waters as a Wāhine Māori in the Marine Industry

Paris Mitchell, a recent graduate of the Marine and Specialised Technologies Academy of New Zealand’s (MAST) Level 4 Alloy Boat Building apprenticeship, has carved a unique path in the maritime trade. As a wahine Māori, she’s leading the way for more women to enter the traditionally male-dominated world of boat building.

“When I first joined MAST, I was the only woman in New Zealand pursuing this qualification,” says Paris. “Now, there are a few others in production alloy boat building and aluminium welding, but it’s an industry that’s calling out for more women and minorities to help fill the skills gap.”

Growing up with parents who both worked in the trades, her father, a heavy fabrication engineer, and her mother, a carpenter, Paris was equipped early on with the practical skills needed for success. Already a certified aluminium welder, she’s now applying her boat building skills on her third catamaran.

Boat building wasn’t always her dream. “I never even heard about it growing up,” she admits, “but I’ve discovered a real passion for the work.” University didn’t appeal to Paris due to the debt, the drinking culture, and the lack of hands-on experiences. “I realised my heart was in

creating and engineering, just like my parents. Through them, I learned that real-life experience and connecting with the right people is the key to success.”

Paris’s journey into boat building began with a Level 3 Mechanical Engineering Certificate at the Eastern Institute of Technology. A Māori mentor at her work experience placement encouraged her to call the boat builders down the road in Hawke’s Bay. Starting as a junior, Paris spent a year doing the humble tasks of sweeping floors, washing boats, and learning from the ground up. Once she was signed up in January 2021, she had properly earned her bosses trust and encouragement being their first female apprentice.

Due to the housing crisis, Paris and her husband relocated to Christchurch in April 2022, where she now works at Icon Marine Manufacturing. “My previous employers were very understanding of the move. They encouraged me to keep improving my craft and to fight hard against anyone who may tell me that I am not capable. Icon Marine is the same, they are always supportive, and I learn something new every day.”

In her spare time, Paris channels her creativity into personal projects, building jetboats and working on aerial apparatuses, expanding her skills even further outside of the boat building trade.

Finding her voice as a wahine Māori in the marine industry wasn’t easy at first. “In the beginning, I was intimidated by the men around me and put a lot of pressure on myself. But through a network of ‘tradie ladies,’ I’ve found a group of women who support each other through the challenges of working in male-dominated trades.”

Her journey has helped her develop resilience. “They’ve taught me to shake off mistakes and not be afraid to fail, it feels like a superpower.” Alongside her hands-on work, Paris is studying Fusion 360 and te reo Māori, determined to become an outstanding boat builder. “I was taught to never settle for average. I want to take my time, learn as much as I can, and eventually build boats overseas before bringing what I learn back to Aotearoa.”

Paris’s ultimate dream is to construct a superyacht and share her knowledge with others who may have never seen themselves working in the maritime industry. “People are often surprised when they meet me, a Māori woman in overalls with welding gear and a messy ponytail sticking out of my helmet. I feel like living proof that diversity is a strength. Change is happening, and it feels good to be part of it. You should never judge a book by its cover.”

Paris is an inspiring example of what can be achieved when determination, passion, and support come together, paving the way for other wāhine Māori to follow her lead in the marine trade.



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