

Project Fetu

Evaluation Report (2025)

Digital Micro-credential Pilot in Oamaru–Waitaki

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PROJECT FETU – EVALUATION REPORT (2025)

1. Executive Summary

Project Fetu was a regional pilot delivered in the Oamaru–Waitaki district to explore whether a digital micro-credential, supported by Pacific community organisations and employers, could build digital confidence, workplace capability, and culturally grounded pathways for Pacific learners. The evaluation found that this approach works best when it is community-led, relational, bilingual, and supported by families and employers. At the same time, regional delivery comes with challenges, including shift work, transport barriers, and small Pacific cohort sizes spread across multiple workplaces.

The pilot was co-led by Hanga-Aro-Rau and the Oamaru Pacific Island Trust (OPIT), who worked alongside local employers, Pacific learners, and The Learning Wave (training provider). Nine Pacific learners took part, mostly young adults of Tongan, Tuvaluan, Samoan, and Kiribati heritage. Six learning sessions were delivered over six weeks, followed by a graduation ceremony that brought together learners, their families, employers, and the wider community.

The evaluation drew on the Fonofale framework and used a mix of surveys, talanoa, interviews, and observation. All methods were used as planned, though participation varied due to shift work, transport, and family commitments. Of the two employers involved in the pilot, only one participated in evaluation activities, and one stakeholder engaged only minimally with surveys.

Culturally grounded support stood out as the strongest driver of learner participation and confidence. Learners consistently highlighted the impact of the OPIT team, the facilitator’s relational approach, and the encouragement they received from family. Learners with lower digital skills made meaningful gains in email use, digital navigation, and cybersecurity, while others found parts of the content too basic. Cybersecurity and AI literacy were seen as the most useful areas of learning, with learners applying tools like ChatGPT for translation and even composing a graduation song. Ninety percent of learners achieved the micro-credential, though what mattered most to them was feeling valued, safe, and supported in the learning environment.

Only one employer participated in evaluation activities, but their feedback was strongly positive. They noticed increased confidence, communication, and engagement among their Pacific staff and appreciated the community-led nature of the programme, even though digital skills at work remained largely unchanged. They expressed interest in supporting future programmes.

Partnerships strengthened across OPIT, Hanga-Aro-Rau, the employer, families, and The Learning Wave. Stakeholders described the collaboration as supportive and effective, with

strong “back-of-office” coordination. One stakeholder recommended earlier relationship-building with evaluators.

Overall, the pilot showed that a culturally grounded, community-led model can support Pacific workforce development in regional settings – provided it remains relational, flexible, and bilingual, and acknowledges the realities of shift-based work and limited local training options.

Key recommendations include:

- conducting baseline skills assessments and offering differentiated learning pathways
- strengthening Pacific cultural competency for non-Pacific stakeholders
- ensuring consistent Pacific language support and offering English literacy support where needed
- prioritising delivery during work hours
- embedding evaluation earlier, with time for relationship-building
- supporting Pacific-led organisations to progress toward NZQA Category 1 PTE status, and exploring cross-employer cohorts for regional scale

2. Introduction

There was strong interest from learners, OPIT, employers, and families to see workplace development opportunities continue in Oamaru. Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for ongoing, culturally grounded training to support Pacific workers in the district.

3. Background

3.1 Regional Context

Hanga-Aro-Rau partnered with OPIT to pilot one digital micro-credential in the Oamaru-Waitaki district. The pilot targeted industries such as food manufacturing, construction, infrastructure, and water engineering—sectors where Pacific workers are present but have limited access to training.

Project Ikuna previously delivered similar initiatives in Auckland; Project Fetu extended this kaupapa into a regional context to assess feasibility and impact.

3.2 Advisory Group

The pilot was supported by an advisory group comprising community leaders, learners, employers, Hanga-Aro-Rau, and The Learning Wave.

4. Regional Demographics

According to the 2023 Census, 5.5% of Waitaki's population identified as Pacific Peoples (approx. 1,291 people), compared with 3.4% in the South Island overall. Within the district, Oamaru town has a notably higher concentration of Pacific residents at 12.9% (2023 Census), significantly above both the district and national averages (8.9%).

The Waitaki population is evenly split between males and females. Due to the small number of Pacific residents, further demographic disaggregation is not recommended.

5. Programme Overview

5.1 Learning Sessions

The programme delivered the NZQA-recognised micro-credential 4341 Digital Skills for Manufacturing (Level 3, 5 credits) as the central learning qualification. It was delivered across six facilitated sessions plus a culturally grounded graduation ceremony.

Topics included:

1. Industry 4.0 and digital skills
2. Digital navigation and workplace tools
3. Email and communication
4. Online safety and cybersecurity
5. Data accuracy and integrity
6. Understanding workplace data
7. Graduation ceremony

5.2 Learner Demographics

Nine Pacific learners participated. Tongan learners were the largest group, followed by Tuvaluan, Samoan, and Kiribati participants. Most learners were aged 15–24.

Of the nine learners, six were employed by one employer and three by another. Both employers were part of the manufacturing industry.

5.3 Learner Language Preferences & Digital Access

- 62.5% preferred bilingual (English + Pacific language) delivery
- 37.5% preferred English only
- None preferred Pacific-language-only instruction

This indicated comfort with English but strong value for mother-tongue inclusion.

6. Evaluation Purpose and Approach

6.1 Purpose

To assess the extent to which Project Fetu achieved intended outcomes and to identify learnings to inform future regional Pacific workforce development initiatives.

6.2 Evaluation questions

We were asked to answer the following five evaluation questions:

1. To what extent did Pacific learners gain foundational digital and workplace skills through the pilot, and how did achieving a micro-credential influence their confidence, engagement in learning, and perceived value of work-ready, future-focused skills?
2. What types of wraparound support were most effective in enabling consistent participation, and what key cultural, social, or logistical factors influenced learners' motivation, confidence, and sustained engagement throughout the pilot?
3. How do participating employers in Project Fetu perceive the value and impact of the pilot, and what changes, if any, have they observed in staff attitudes, participation, and awareness of upskilling opportunities?
4. How did Project Fetu's pilot strengthen these multi-stakeholder partnerships, and how did such collaboration influence the design, delivery, and cultural relevance of the micro-credential initiative?
5. What does a culturally grounded, community-led, and employer-supported model of regional delivery look like, and how could it inform the design of future Pacific workforce development initiatives across Aotearoa New Zealand?

6.2 Methods

- Baseline and final surveys
- Group talanoa
- Individual talanoa
- Stakeholder talanoa
- One employer interview
- Observation of one learning session and the graduation ceremony
- Mixed-methods triangulation and cultural interpretation sessions

Due to shift work and family responsibilities, participation in both learning and evaluation activities varied across learners.

6.3 Limitations

- Only one employer participated in evaluation activities
- Some learners missed learning sessions; others missed evaluation activities
- One stakeholder indicated relationship-building with evaluators should occur earlier
- One stakeholder did not complete surveys but did participate in a talanoa

7. Key Findings (Including Discussion)

7.1 EQ1 — Digital Skills Development and Micro-credential Impact

Introduction

Evaluation question 1 examined whether the pilot strengthened learners' digital skills and supported the achievement of the "Digital Skills for Manufacturing" micro-credential. Overall, learners gained practical skills in cybersecurity, email literacy, and everyday digital functions, with the strongest gains among those with low baseline digital confidence. However, there was significant variation in learner capability, highlighting the need for differentiated pathways and baseline assessments. Motivation and confidence shifts were driven not by the micro-credential itself, but by relational, cultural, and wraparound support.

Learner skill development

Learners with limited prior digital exposure reported gaining foundational capability for example: sending emails, attaching documents, navigating online tools, and using everyday functions such as "Find my phone." Cybersecurity emerged as the most valued and consistently retained skill across the cohort. Learners shared insights such as:

"So if you get an email, you always got to look at the domain to see if it's a scam."

"You always check the back end of the email like the gmail.com part."

AI literacy, particularly using ChatGPT, was another area of meaningful uptake. Learners used AI tools in practical and culturally relevant ways, including:

- translating English to Tongan
- composing a song performed at graduation

This demonstrated the immediate real-world relevance of the digital tools taught.

Variation in baseline capability

Despite these gains, some learners entered with moderate digital confidence and found

content too basic, with several reporting they “did not learn anything new.” One stakeholder reflected:

“I don't think they knew what they were walking into...I don't think they knew what the micro-credential was about.”

This misalignment reinforces the importance of baseline assessments and clear pre-programme communication.

Initial motivation and engagement challenges

Many learners reported low initial motivation and uncertainty about programme expectations. Several did not understand what they had signed up for, with comments such as:

“When we started, I didn't even know what I was walking into... I thought it was coding.”

Attendance was also challenging for some:

“I think a challenge is... just turning up... some days where I just didn't want to go.”

Growth in confidence and engagement

By graduation, confidence and engagement were visibly higher. Learners attributed this shift to:

- relational facilitation
- feeling safe, seen, and valued
- OPIT's consistent reminders and relational support
- family encouragement and interest

As one learner shared:

“The environment in our class... I could be myself... They didn't treat us like we were strangers.”

Ninety percent of learners successfully gained the micro-credential.

Conclusion

The pilot partially achieved its objective of strengthening digital and workplace skills. While learners gained practical competencies, the micro-credential framework itself mattered less to learners than the cultural safety, relational pedagogy, and wraparound support that enabled their engagement and confidence. The shift from low initial motivation to confident participation highlights the importance of culturally responsive delivery and the need for baseline assessments to ensure future cohorts receive level-appropriate content.

7.2 EQ2 — Wraparound Support and Engagement Factors

Introduction

Evaluation question two explored what supported or hindered learner engagement. Wraparound supports: cultural, relational, familial, educational, and logistical were central to learner motivation, attendance, and success. Engagement flourished where trust, cultural alignment, and consistent follow-up were present. However, structural barriers such as shift work, after-hours delivery, transport constraints, and limited language support created challenges.

What strengthened engagement

Wraparound support took multiple forms:

1. Community trust and OPIT's leadership

OPIT's presence as a trusted Pacific organisation enhanced comfort and participation. The facilitator noted:

"The way the community backed these guys, it's incredible... next level."

2. Family influence and cultural motivation

Many learners identified parents as key motivators:

"I always acknowledge my parents... they pushed me to go to school."

3. Relational, high-energy facilitation

Learners highlighted the facilitator's inclusive approach:

"[The facilitator] actually included everyone... and would come to us individually."

The facilitator described her approach as:

"We all just share our experience and be ourselves."

4. Peer-to-peer collaboration

Learners supported each other through translation and collective problem-solving. The facilitator described:

"We help each other out... this is not individual learning."

Several learners identified the relationships they developed as a cohort being a highlight of the programme.

5. Consistent OPIT follow-ups

Learners appreciated reminders and direct encouragement. One contrasted this with university:

"Down there, they just say time management... But down here... they remind you and keep pushing you."

6. Safe and affirming learning environment

Learners repeatedly described feeling “seen, heard, and valued.”

7. Employer engagement (variable but impactful)

One employer representative attended a learning session and participated actively:

“He made a real effort... that’s what mattered.”

What challenged engagement

- **Shift work and early start times**, leading to fatigue:

“The timing of it.”

- **After-hours scheduling** conflicting with sport, church, and family responsibilities
- **Limited Pacific language support**, as the translator also prepared kai
- **Transport issues**, affecting at least two learners
- **Content misalignment** – many learners found digital content too basic
- **Recruitment hesitancy** due to previous unmet promises by external organisations
- **Limited ethnic diversity**, with four Pacific ethnicities represented but others absent
- **Gendered barriers**, with Pacific women unable to change shifts to participate

Conclusion

Wraparound support was foundational to learner engagement and success. Relational facilitation, OPIT’s consistent follow-ups, strong peer support, and community pride created a powerful learning environment. While structural barriers were significant, cultural and relational strengths mitigated many challenges. The result was deep learner pride and growing confidence, as one facilitator reflected:

“I think they realised they could achieve something... that gave them confidence”.

7.3 EQ3 — Employer Perspective and Workplace Impact

Introduction

Only one employer participated in evaluation activities, but their feedback offered valuable insight into workplace impacts, collaboration experiences, and future interest. Their reflections were highly positive and aligned with broader stakeholder themes.

Key perceived impacts

- Increased confidence among Pacific staff

- Improved communication
- Greater awareness of upskilling opportunities
- Higher engagement at work

Their primary aspiration was confidence-building:

“It’s going to give them confidence and a voice.”

They were also motivated to strengthen cultural understanding:

“...understanding Pacific culture so I understand my workers better.”

Collaboration experience

The employer described their collaboration with Project Fetu partners as:

“Excellent – strong supportive partnership that enhanced the programme.”

Digital skill application

The employer did not observe on-the-job improvements in digital capability, which reflects learner feedback that much of the content was not new for them.

Future interest

The employer was enthusiastic about participating again:

“I think it was done brilliantly, good engagement and communication.”

Conclusion

Despite limited digital skill application in the workplace, the employer observed clear gains in confidence, communication, and engagement among Pacific staff. The collaborative model was valued, culturally aligned, and effective. The employer expressed strong support for future participation.

7.4 EQ4 — Partnership Strengthening and Collaboration

Introduction

Partnerships were a significant strength of the Project Fetu pilot. Stakeholders consistently reported improved collaboration, stronger communication, and increased visibility of each other’s roles and contributions. Survey data and qualitative feedback show that the pilot not only deepened organisational relationships but also enhanced community awareness of opportunities for Pacific learners. Some areas for improvement were identified, particularly around relationship-building with evaluators at the outset.

Stakeholder feedback

Three out of four stakeholders who responded to the final survey described the collaboration as “excellent – a strong, supportive partnership that enhanced the

programme.” One stakeholder rated the experience as “good – generally positive collaboration with minor issues.”

Stakeholders highlighted the positive interpersonal and operational environment created during the pilot. One participant reflected:

“My experience with Project Fetu was amazing. I loved every bit of it. Our team behind the scenes was amazing. Met a lot of amazing new people and made connections with them. Hopefully we can do more of these projects in the future.”

The “back-of-office support” from Hanga-Aro-Rau was described as invaluable for keeping the pilot running smoothly. Another stakeholder noted the pilot’s contribution to raising community awareness:

“The project helped raise community awareness of opportunities and encouraged greater interest in learning and upskilling. People who attended the events said they wanted to see more initiatives that support Pacific workers and families in Oamaru.”

These reflections suggest that the collaborative effort extended beyond organisational partners and had a broader influence on local engagement.

Key partnership gains

- OPIT’s leadership affirmed as a crucial enabler in regional Pacific workforce development
- A shared commitment to ongoing collaboration, with stakeholders expressing interest in future projects

Challenges

- Some stakeholders would have preferred an initial relationship-building phase before evaluation activities commenced
- One stakeholder’s limited engagement with the surveys suggests that the evaluation tools were not fully aligned to their needs

Conclusion

Partnerships strengthened significantly throughout the pilot, supported by strong leadership from OPIT and operational backing from Hanga-Aro-Rau. Stakeholders reported highly positive collaboration, with benefits extending into the wider community. To build on this success, future initiatives should include earlier relationship-building with evaluators and co-design of evaluation tools to ensure they are fit for purpose for all partners.

7.5 EQ5 — A Culturally Grounded, Community-Led Regional Delivery Model

Introduction

Evaluation question 5 explored the extent to which the pilot demonstrated an effective

Pacific, community-led delivery model in a regional context. Findings confirm that the model was successful when it integrated Pacific leadership, cultural alignment, bilingual support, family engagement, employer flexibility, and differentiated learning approaches.

Essential components of the model

1. Community leadership

OPIT's leadership was a critical enabler, grounding the project in trust, cultural alignment, and accountability.

One stakeholder noted the need to "Strengthen Pacific leadership across all stages of planning and delivery to keep Pacific needs at the centre".

2. Pacific language support

Learners preferred bilingual delivery, and consistent translation must be intentionally resourced.

3. Family support and engagement

Family involvement amplified impact across two dimensions:

- **Confidence:**
Families expressed pride, which boosted learner motivation.
- **Accountability:**
Cultural responsibility and reputation within families and community encouraged commitment.

A stakeholder described the effect:

"Including families transformed the project... education is not just personal – it's communal."

Graduation and community events further strengthened whānau understanding of the value of learning.

4. Employer-supported scheduling

Sessions during work hours are ideal.

After-hours scheduling created fatigue and restricted engagement.

5. Content alignment with learner capability

Mixed-ability cohorts require differentiated approaches and baseline assessments to ensure learners receive level-appropriate content.

6. Regional scale considerations

Small Pacific populations and dispersed industries limit workplace-specific delivery, making cross-employer cohorts a promising approach.

Conclusion

Project Fetu demonstrated a strong Pacific-led, culturally grounded, family-supported regional model. Its success depended on cultural alignment, relational delivery, language support, employer partnership, and adaptability to regional realities. The model is effective but must remain flexible, bilingual, and grounded in Pacific values to scale sustainably.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Programme Design & Delivery

- Conduct baseline assessments of learners during the recruitment process to ensure the micro-credential is the right fit for each learner
- Offer differentiated learning pathways (foundational + advanced)
- Ensure alignment between learner expectations and the content of the micro-credential.

8.2 Pacific Cultural Competency

- Provide Pacific cultural competency training for all stakeholders before delivery
- Support the development of Pacific-owned and operated tier-one training providers.
- Invest in pathways for Pacific providers to obtain NZQA Category 1 PTE status so they can deliver NZQA approved micro-credentials

8.3 Recruitment

- Develop bilingual video and written recruitment materials
- Use trusted Pacific community networks

8.4 Language Support

- Ensure consistent, high-quality Pacific language support throughout delivery
- Provide supplementary English literacy support where relevant

8.5 Scheduling & Structural Supports

- Prioritise programme delivery during paid work hours to reduce fatigue and maximise participation

8.6 Evaluation

- Embed evaluation considerations into programme design
- Include a relationship-building phase before evaluation begins

8.7 Regional & National Scale-up

- Further explore regional cross-employer cohorts
- Apply learning to national Pacific workforce development frameworks