EDUCATION

Shifting the Dial.

The Economic and Societal Impact of Removing Barriers for Underserved Learners in Aotearoa.

2022

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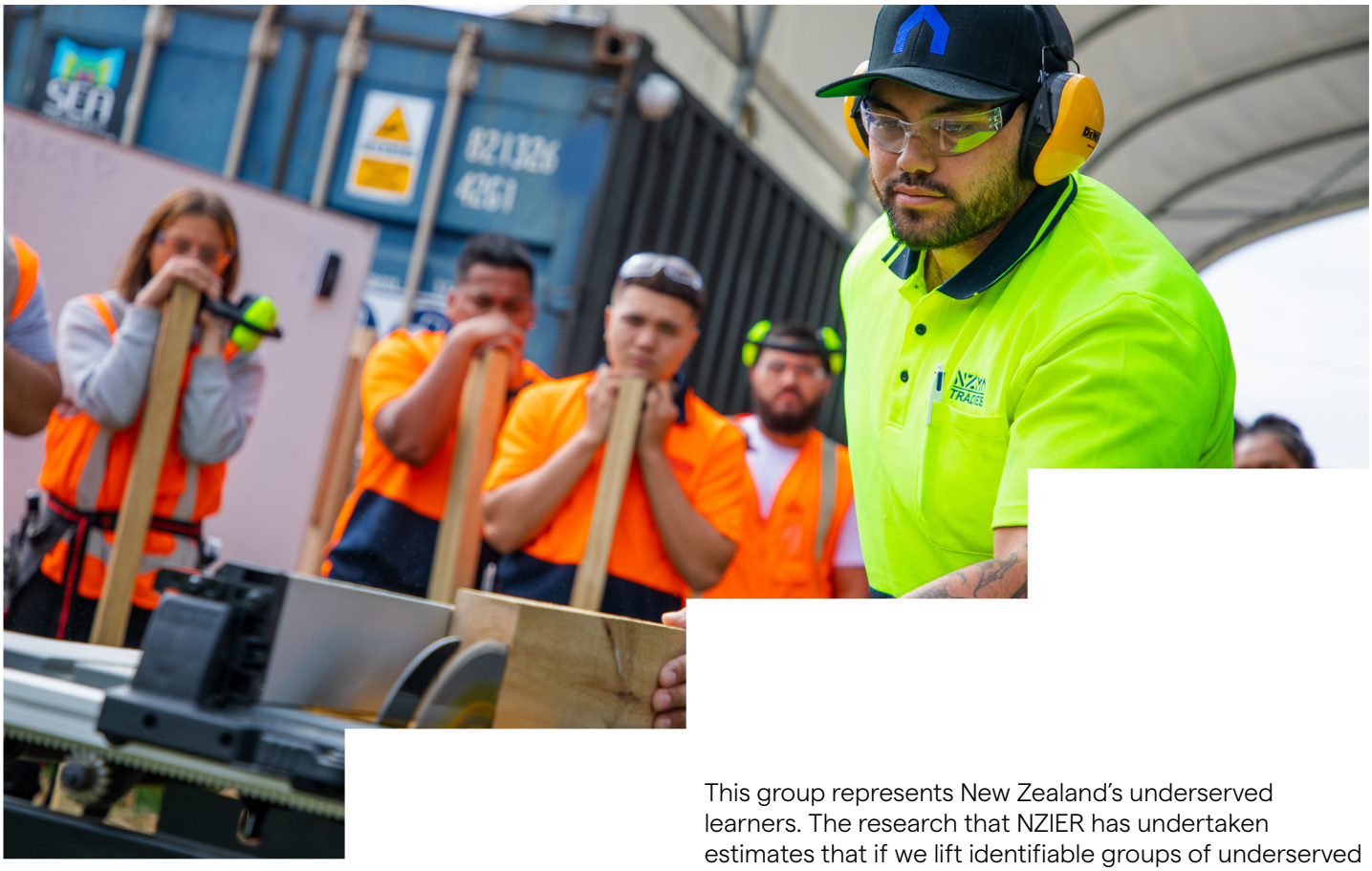
Foreword

What are the transformational benefits of lifting educational outcomes for underserved learners?

The health, economic, cultural and societal benefits of innovating and investing in education.

Mark Rushworth

Group Chief Executive
UP Education



Kiwis are fortunate to live in a country that places such high value on education.

And for most ākonga (learners), our education system is working well, providing them with the skills they need to thrive in a modern economy.

But for some, New Zealand's education system is not delivering. Learners are being left behind – either leaving secondary school without any qualifications, or not progressing to post-secondary education when they otherwise would and should have.

This group represents New Zealand's underserved learners. The research that NZIER has undertaken estimates that if we lift identifiable groups of underserved learners to achieve at the current national average, we'd be lifting more than 66,000 Kiwis aged between 25 and 49 years and unlocking economic, cultural, health and social benefits.

Why? Because underserved learners are more likely to experience poorer life outcomes, with a clear relationship existing between education level and income as well as wellbeing. People with higher level qualifications, for example, tend to have higher rates of employment and earnings, and have better health and social outcomes.

The NZIER research clearly demonstrates this point. On average, a person with a level 4 to 6 qualification will earn over $500,000 more over their working life, compared to someone with no qualification.

Photo: NZMA Trades West

But it's important that we don't reduce people down to be merely economic units of society. The benefit of education reaches far beyond wages. These economic outcomes flow on to whānau and local communities. They also generate better social outcomes, as well as healthier and longer lives on an individual level and intergenerational level. NZIER's work also demonstrates that education drives better cultural outcomes and greater cultural awareness, and participation.

Those missing out on education are not being given the springboard to reach their full potential in many aspects of their life.

Who are New Zealand's underserved learners?

While Aotearoa's underserved learners come from a wide range of ethnicities and backgrounds, Māori, Pacific people, and people with disabilities are disproportionately over-represented in the underserved group.

That is not to say that the education system is not working for all Māori, Pacific people, and people with disabilities. Overall Māori and Pacific educational achievement has increased in recent years. The proportion of Māori with at least a school qualification, for example, has increased from 59 percent to 72 percent in the last 20 years[1].

However, tertiary qualifications have not tracked at the same rate. The proportion of Māori and Pacific people aged between 25 and 49 who don't have any form of tertiary qualification is twice the national average. This shows us the system is not working for too many Māori and Pacific people.

A similar story emerges when we look at the education outcomes for people living with disabilities in Aotearoa. Ministry of Education data shows disabled adults generally have a lower-level school qualification than non-disabled people. They are also more likely to participate at lower levels in tertiary education and achieve lower levels of qualifications[2].

Clearly, the education sector is not meeting the needs of these students. So, doing more of the same is unlikely to shift the dial.

We need to change the conversation; instead of asking why so many students are failing in our education system, we need to look at why the system is failing so many students. The education sector needs to adapt to cater for all learners, rather than expect them to adapt to how we want to teach. That is what we aim to help do with this paper.

How can we reduce the number of underserved learners?

As part of this research project, we talked to many groups and stakeholders to better understand the barriers that underserved learners face in Aotearoa's education system.

We talked to students, tutors, support groups and education experts, and we asked them for their views on what Government and education institutions should do.

They all told us a similar story. We need to rethink how our education system delivers to hard-to-reach population groups.

We need to invest in specialist support services, such as social workers, pragmatic career advisers and counselling services. We need to make sure that our education providers are building resilience and instilling the life skills, which are so essential in the modern work environment, but for some students are not being taught at home.

By keeping more students engaged in education longer, we can encourage a life-long love of learning and encourage greater numbers into tertiary education. But tertiary institutions also have an important role to play to make their learning environments accessible and welcoming.

This includes creating culturally inclusive learning environments that make students feel at home when they walk onto a campus. Simple things like bilingual signage, applying a cultural lens to learning materials so that students can see themselves reflected in the material they are learning from, having a diverse range of tutors and trainers so students have role models and incorporating tikanga into the learning approach can all help to create a culturally supportive environment where students can thrive. Equally, it's vital that we make learning spaces physically accessible and that we plug into well-functioning funding models to give students one-on-one support to overcome access needs.

But it is also about ensuring all staff understand that they have an important role to play in helping students achieve. Our education workforce needs to be not only academically competent but culturally competent. They need to have the skills to build relationships with their students and provide them support, guidance and help them overcome the barriers that they might be facing.

There is also a critically important role for Government to play in helping support more Māori, Pacific people, and disabled learners to enter, and succeed, in post-secondary education.

Continued investment in research will help to better understand the needs, barriers, experiences, and performance of priority learners, with a focus of increasing participation in tertiary education. This would then allow Government to better target investment to support those learners at risk of being underserved by the education system.

[1] www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/208827/Educational-attainment-in-the-adult-population-Indicator.pdf
[2] www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/80898/disabled-people-and-tertiary-education

> "Underserved learners may be better served in education systems that have the capacity for more tailored and student-centred learning, rather than the one-size fits all approach."

The role of PTEs within the sector.

Private Training Establishments (PTEs) can also play an important role in helping to better meet the needs, and address the barriers, that many underserved learners might be facing.

This is reinforced by the research undertaken by NZIER, which shows that underserved learners may be better served in education systems that have the capacity for more tailored and student-centred learning, rather than the one-size-fits-all approach. We know, for example, that PTEs tend to have higher staff-to-student ratios compared to other tertiary institutions. They can also rapidly respond to learner, community and market needs.

An example of this is UP Education's partnership with Hoani Waititi Marae, which established a marae-based trades training campus to serve iwi, and the wider West Auckland community. NZMA's Trade West blends in-demand vocational education with tikanga Māori.

This innovative partnership is putting its learners at the centre by creating a place of learning that is culturally connected and inclusive with the aim of helping more Māori, and learners in the wider community, into the trades workforce.

Continual innovation and community partnership to meet the needs of our learners has seen UP Education achieve higher-than average qualification completion rates among Māori and Pacific people.

The case for investing in all learners.

Preparing all learners for our changing world has never been more important, as the nature of work continues to evolve and change.

The World Economic Forum estimates that robotics, artificial intelligence and automation are likely to eliminate 85 million jobs globally by 2025, but importantly will also see the creation of 97 million jobs[3].

Couple this with the skilled-labour shortages we are currently experiencing in New Zealand and it's clear we need to act now. This means upskilling and retraining our current workforce and preparing our young people for the world of tomorrow.

The key to achieving this is reducing the number of New Zealand's underserved learners. Together we can do this by investing in a diverse and innovative education sector that is accessible, to meet the needs of individual learners and address the barriers that many people face in education.

One size does not fit all and we need a system that's flexible so different providers can cover the different needs our ākonga have.

The case for investment is strong. As NZIER outline in this paper, education is one of the most influential levers for improving wellbeing. It has a cascading effect that creates flow on benefits in society.

Progressing the current underserved learner population from their current level of qualification to a level 4 to 6 accreditation would deliver an economic benefit of almost $11 billion over 30 years.

But, more than this, we would also see improvements in health outcomes, reductions in welfare dependence and better social cohesion and civic participation.

That is why investing in addressing underserved learners is a social investment in New Zealand's future, one that will deliver profound and long-term benefits to our country.

> "Preparing all learners for our changing world has never been more important, as the nature of work continues to evolve and change."

[3] www.weforum.org/press/2020/10/recession-and-automation-changes-our-future-of-work-but-there-are-jobs-coming-report-says-52c5162fce

Unlocking our capital.

Katrina Sutich
Group Manager
Tertiary Education
Ministry of Education

> "... every learner, no matter who they are or where they come from, is worth developing to their potential."

Whakamaua te pae tata kia tina - Take hold of potential so it becomes reality.

There are some big and really important long-term changes underway in tertiary education, changes that I'm banking will make a real difference for all tauira. And that's one of our biggest challenges: unlearning that success is possible only for some learners and widely embracing a mindset that every learner, no matter who they are or where they come from, is worth developing to their potential.

There was a time when I thought that educational success for all was a complex problem. I now realise there is a simple key that unlocks the solution: know our learners and involve them in the shaping and design of their learning. Why? Because they can see some solutions to problems that we can't.

As a country, we are under a lot of strain at the moment. We are grappling with climate change, social cohesion, the effects of misinformation, and economic uncertainty. To say nothing of a global pandemic. These are huge problems requiring transformational solutions.
These solutions will best be found when we unlock all our human capital in all its diversity and are open to all perspectives.

We need all the help we can get.

Photo: The Culinary Collective Symonds Street

> "One side-effect of being pushed out of a system is that it can sometimes provide some pretty clear insights into it."

Over coming decades, Māori will be a larger proportion of our population; we'll have more disabled people[1] and be more ethnically diverse. We are increasingly recognising that this diversity is what gives us our uniqueness.

We are already seeing an explosion of interest in our own history, in te reo Māori and in the Māori economy. There's growing appreciation of Pacific languages and cultures. Disabled people are becoming more visible in our media and as leaders.

Through the Kōrero Mātauranga, a huge number of people who were not well served by education told us that the system has been inaccessible and inflexible for too long[2]. Too often, people from these groups who have managed to realise education and economic success on their own terms said it was because they swam against the current of the education system rather than with it.

The Ministry of Education, as the steward of the system over time, clearly has not had all the answers.

That's why we need to put learners at the centre. Learners have clear ideas about what works for them. By partnering with kaiwhakaako and decision-makers, they can help to design practical, effective ways to be developed through their learning, and to keep going.

One side-effect of being pushed out of a system is that it can sometimes provide some clear insights into that same system.

Māori, Pacific, disabled and older learners have told us they need more innovative, flexible approaches to life-long learning that works for them.

We are seeing green shoots, where knowing our learners is making a real impact.

The students as partners programme, **Ako in Action**[3], at Victoria University successfully embedded a bi-cultural approach to learning and teaching, proving we have so much to learn from each other.

Students are helping to shape improvements in their care and protection in tertiary education. From 2022, students must be involved in developing and reviewing wellbeing and safety strategic goals and plans at every tertiary education organisation[4].

The voices of Māori, Pacific and disabled students at Te Pūkenga are helping ensure that decision-making and design meets learner-determined needs, aspirations and motivations[5].

Māori perform better where their culture, language and identity is acknowledged as integral to their education success[6]. That's why we now have a tertiary education strategy that calls on all providers to have high aspirations for every learner and to work with them to respond to their needs.

As with all transformations, hearing and acting on what learners say is an ongoing process.

The last 18 months have shown we don't have the luxury of viewing the education system as static. There will be more disruptions in the future.

Learning to listen to and incorporate a diversity of views from the learner population can be messy and difficult, especially in times of great uncertainty and stress, where quick decisions are needed. But we know that it gets better outcomes - for all of us.

He rau ringa, e oti ai. With many hands, the job will be finished.

[1]National ethnic population projections: 2018(base)–2043 | Stats NZ; Mapping housing for the disabled in New Zealand (nzma.org.nz); Statistics NZ, General Social Survey

[2]What you told us (education.govt.nz)

[3]Leota, A. & Sutherland, K.A. (2020) "With your basket of knowledge and my basket of knowledge, the people will prosper": Learning and leading in a student-staff partnership program. Chapter in book: Building Courage, Confidence, and Capacity in Learning and Teaching through Student-Faculty Partnership. Eds. Alison Cook-Sather and Chanelle Wilson. Lexington Press.

[4]Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021 – Education in New Zealand

[5]New research highlights what disabled learners need to succeed | Te Pūkenga (xn--tepkenga-szb.ac.nz)

[6]Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia – Education in New Zealand

Education is one of the most influential levers in society, so it's worth investing in.

Michael Bealing
Principal Economist, New Zealand Institute for Economic Research (NZIER)

> "The links between education, the economy, health and social settings show that education is one of the most influential policy levers we have to improve the welfare of New Zealanders."

The international literature is clear. Improving people's educational outcomes enhances their overall quality of life, by lifting economic, health and social outcomes.

Findings in Aotearoa New Zealand are no different. Statistics offer a clear story of the over-representation of Māori, Pacific people, and people with disabilities in lower rates of educational achievement, and adverse health and social statistics.

Improving educational outcomes among those with a disability is vital for achieving equitable social and economic outcomes for people with a disability. Better educational outcomes are associated with higher earnings, which are needed to fund the independence of people with disabilities as they seek to escape the tyranny and potential poverty a disability can place on individuals and their whānau.

But there is hope.

My economic modelling concludes the economic pay-off gained by investing in education is undeniable on many levels. The links between education, the economy, health and social settings show education is one of the most influential policy levers we have to improve the welfare of New Zealanders.

On average, if every unqualified person moved up to hold a level 4 to 6 qualification, they would receive $585,900 extra in wages during their working lifetime. That's more than half a million dollars to be taxed and spent in our economy. Of course, the level of income increase depends on labour market outcomes too, but the potential is real.

If we look at underserved learners in New Zealand as a cohort, across their working life, we can see just how significant this impact is. The net present value of the increase in average earnings

Photo: NZMA Ōtāhuhu

would be $10.9 billion over a 30-year period, after adjusting for labour force participation.

That figure shifts the dial in terms of GDP and all other economic metrics, underpinning the case for why we should be investing in system changes and innovative approaches to lift underserved learners.

Māori, Pacific people and people with disabilities are over-represented in underserved learners, and this group is also more likely to be male than female. The combined group of underserved learners is an estimated 66,290 people, aged 25 to 49 years.

Young Māori men, in particular, are in dire need of an uplift in better education outcomes. Almost 60 percent of young Māori males in New Zealand leave high school without any qualifications. This decreases their employment opportunities by between 12 and 33 percent.

Twice as many Māori and Pacific people of working age (25 to 49 years) have no qualifications when compared to the national average. Likewise, the proportion of people living with disabilities and no qualifications is double the proportion of non-disabled people.

Better health, social and cultural outcomes.

It's important we don't just view people as units of the economy. Lifting education outcomes links to better self-esteem, health quality gains, and longer life expectancy.

Tertiary education is associated with lower levels of obesity, smoking, crime and dependency on welfare benefits. Education influences health through three mechanisms:

- self-awareness/self-care, which is shaped by the health literacy benefit of education
- context, which includes the effects of economic outcomes such as healthy housing and healthy diet
- behavioural patterns that are shaped by environmental factors, social norms, and exposure to new ideas during and after education through the role of education as a social mobility phenomenon.

Education also improves social cohesion and civic participation. A sense of purpose is also higher among those with higher levels of qualification.

Onwards and upwards.

Education can be an effective pathway to transformation. Education, which is innovative, flexible and tailored to the aspirations of increasingly diverse populations can remove many barriers to access that these groups commonly experience.

Tackling this issue head on, UP Education is achieving above the national standards for underserved learners – particularly Māori.

So, what's UP doing differently? There is no one single solution, but part of the recipe for success involves embracing harder-to-reach learners and making them feel welcomed on their campuses, as they are, and wherever they are at educationally.

PTEs, in general, are delivering tangible results for underserved learners and are more popular with Māori and Pacific learners than universities.

This suggests underserved learners are being well-supported in establishments that are prepared to invest in sufficient resources and tutors to accommodate a more tailored, student-orientated approach to teaching.

Providers offering immersive, culturally inclusive curriculums have the power to reverse the tide on these unacceptable statistics for our Māori, Pacific and disabled underserved learners.

Our opportunity.

Tertiary education is a realistically attainable route to immensely improve the wellbeing of these individuals, as well as that of their whānau – to help halt inter-generational poverty and much more.

A good education is a lifelong investment. It sets a person up to lead a more fulfilling and healthy life, and it has a clear economic pay-off in New Zealand.

Now's the time to look at what's working and replicate it at pace. Of course, it's easier said than done, but the size of the prize makes it well worth fighting for.

Full Report available at www.up.education/thought-leadership-papers

New Zealand Institute of Economic Research findings into underserved learners.

The benefits of education.

Better economic outcomes that flow on to whānau and local communities.

Better social outcomes, healthier and longer lives on an individual level and intergenerational level.

Better cultural outcomes, greater cultural awareness, and participation.

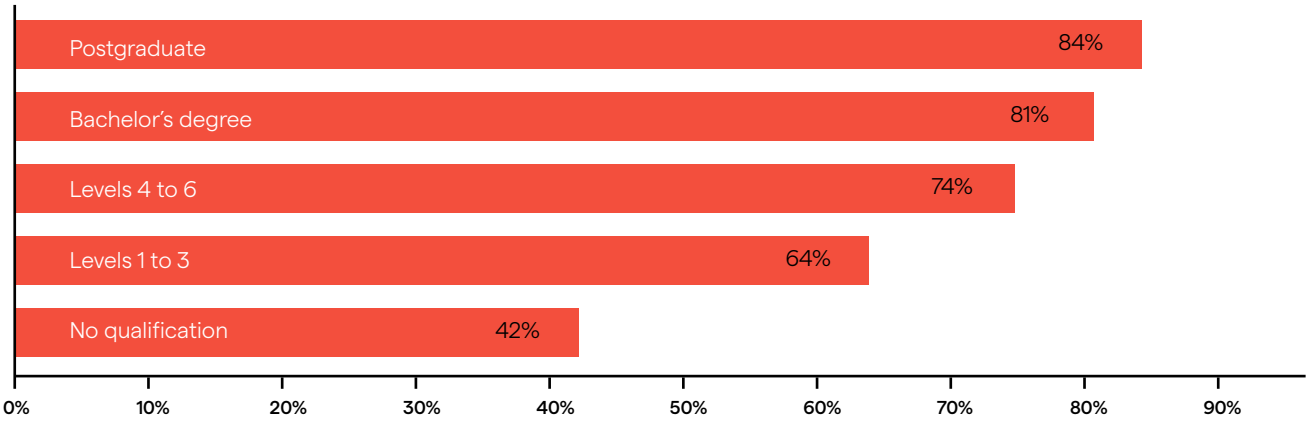
Underserved learners.

66,290 people aged from 25 to 49 years.

Māori, Pacific people and people with disabilities are over-represented.

More likely to be male than female.

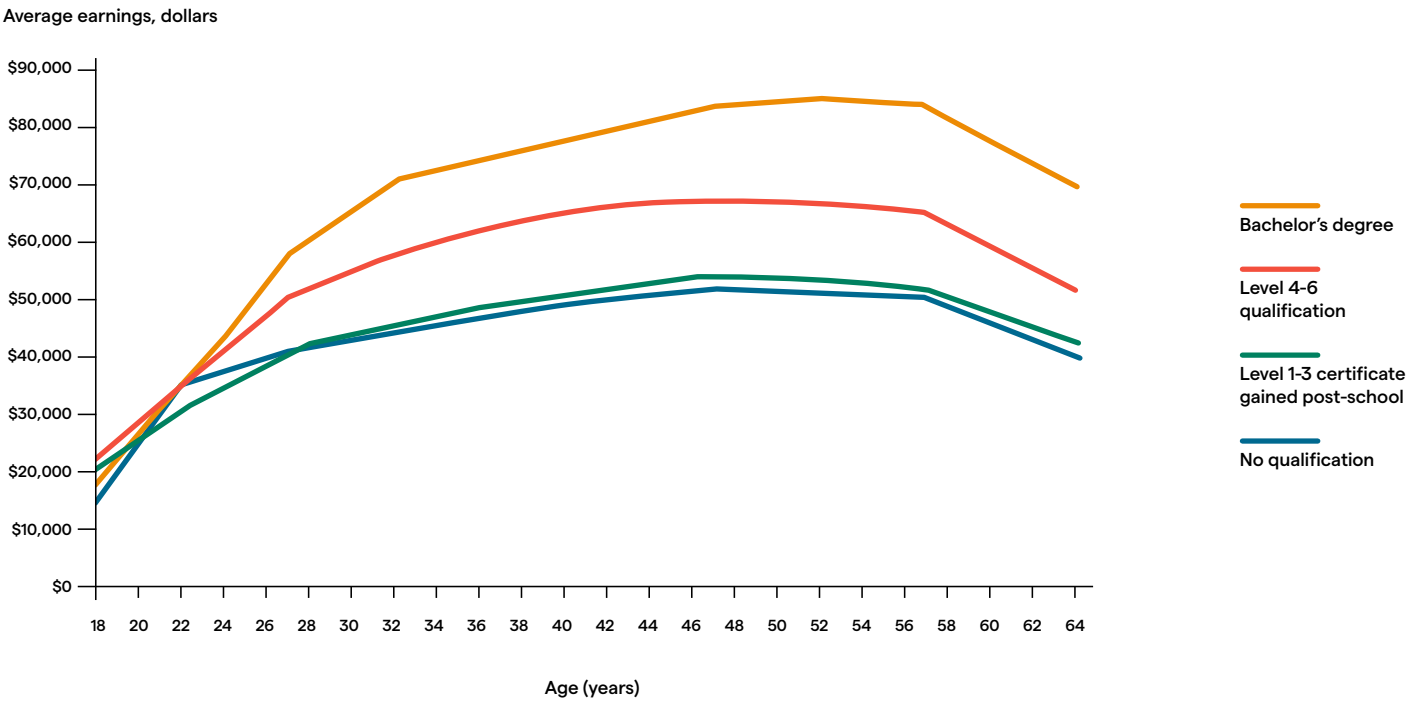
Employment rate by highest qualification in 2020.



Economic outcomes of lifting underserved learners to national average.

Education level	Average earnings from 18 to 64 years old	Extra earnings, compared to no qualification	Percentage increase
No qualification	$2,096,900		
Level 1 to 3 certificate gained post-school	$2,154,200	$57,300	3%
Level 4 to 6 qualifications	$2,682,800	$585,900	28%
Bachelor's degree	$3,248,800	$1,151,900	55%

Lifting underserved learners to level 4 to 6 qualifications equates to $10.9 billion in extra wages over a thirty year period, after adjusting for labour force participation.



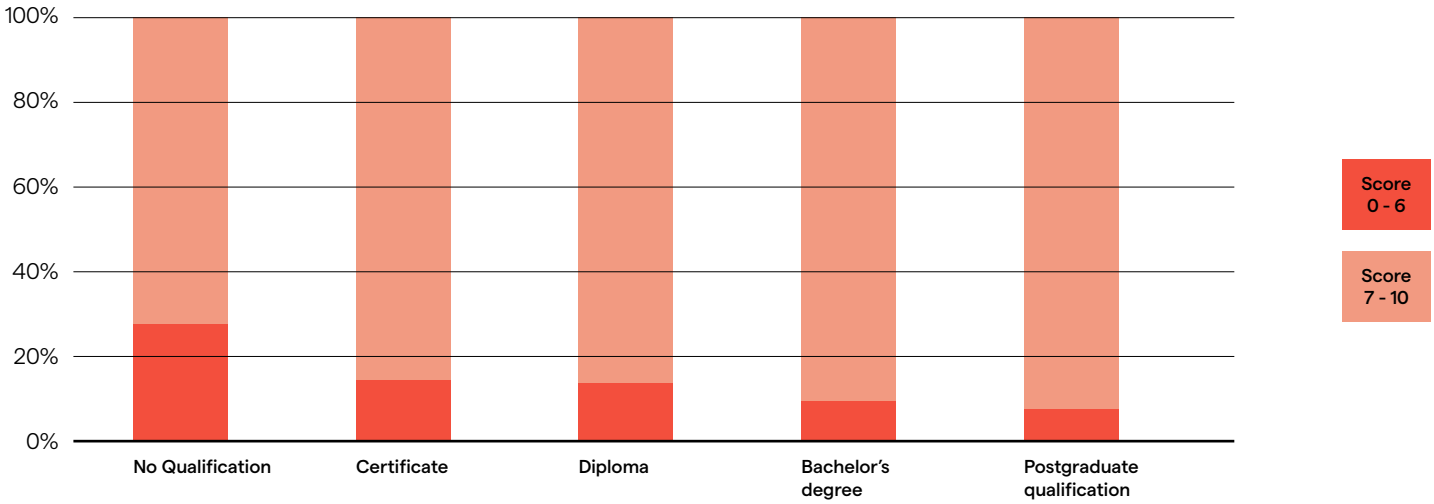
An opportunity for better social outcomes.

Tertiary education is associated with more positive social outcomes and fewer adverse social outcomes.

Improvements in education outcomes are associated with better self-esteem, better health literacy, health quality gains and longer life expectancy.

Tertiary education is associated with lower smoking rates, lower obesity rates, low crime rates and less welfare dependency.

Sense of purpose



Percentage of respondents by a self-reported sense of purpose. People who reported 0 felt their lives were not at all worthwhile, and those who reported a 10 felt their lives were completely worthwhile.

An opportunity for better social outcomes.

Education improves social cohesion and civic participation among males.

A sense of purpose is higher for those with higher levels of education.

Education is one of the most influential levers in society.

The links between education, the economy, health and social settings indicate that education is one of the most influential policy levers for improving the welfare of New Zealanders now and in the future.

To review the full report and references, visit www.up.education/thought-leadership-papers

Section one

How do we encourage more underserved learners to embark on post-secondary education?

Pivoting our education system so that it works for Pacific youth.

Sonia Pope
Educational Psychologist

> "While there is no 'quick fix', it is essential that we do pay more than pay lip service to lifting Pacific success rates."

Pacific learners can face many barriers during their education journey.

Unfortunately, these barriers often start early, and can negatively affect their perception of tertiary education.

That is why if we want to achieve true change in Pacific education, we need a collective, integrated approach that starts as early as primary school.

By addressing barriers early, not only will we support more Pacific into post-secondary education, but we will improve their success rates and help them thrive at a tertiary level.

While there is no 'quick fix', it is essential that we do pay more than lip service to lifting Pacific success rates.

We need the courage to do things differently, using research and evidence-based best-practice to deliver what works for our young people.

Photo: NZMA Rotorua

> "Having a disability as a Pacific person is yet another disadvantage that Pacific families face and, because it is mostly not understood, Pacific families struggle to get the right support systems to help them cope with the adversities."

Navigating a foreign system.

Pacific learners gain their first knowledge at home, governed by collectivist values and protocols.

Success and notions of success, grief and even empowerment are shared amongst family members, it is never felt alone or as an individual.

From an early age, Pacific children learn the meaning of teamwork and empathy through their experiences of big families, cultural events or attending Pacific churches.

These village-based concepts play a big part in how Pacific learners view society and the societal systems in which they live.

However, when Pacific learners are introduced to a western-focused learning environment or system, they are disadvantaged because they lack the skills to navigate the system.

Environments such as tertiary education are foreign to Pacific learners because they are very individualistic and independent. These skills, which have not been properly taught to our Pacific learners, contribute to their disadvantages at a tertiary level.

As a result, navigating the education system can create anxiety for our Pacific learners, and this can create a sense of hopelessness.

Without positive coping mechanisms to deal with the overwhelming emotions when navigating such a space, their mental health or their cultural identity can be detrimentally impacted.

On one hand, some Pacific learners become more resilient in overcoming the system that heavily disadvantages them, but most of our Pacific learners struggle to navigate a foreign system, and this creates negative and long-lasting effects that can be passed intergenerationally.

Family and home life.

Our education systems lack the flexibility to include family responsibilities, culture or cultural competence as considerations when creating the education curriculums.

Tertiary education programmes, and their lack of both cultural awareness and cultural topics, strip the cultural identity of our Pacific learners.

When Pacific learners come home to a culturally rich environment, they can struggle to make the connection to their culture.

Pacific learners become less invested and less engaged in their cultural events or protocols because their cultural identity has slowly been stripped away through environments which are not inclusive of their cultural knowledge.

As a result, the family and home life are impacted because our Pacific learners are not only trying to flourish through their tertiary education but also trying to navigate an identity crisis.

Having a disability.

Pacific learners often go undiagnosed with a disability, or don't want to identify with having a disability due to stigma in Pacific cultures.

The head or the brain are often tapu (sacred) in Pacific cultures, and you have to be extremely cautious when discussing these topics.

As a result, issues such as mental health are often difficult to talk about, and cognitive disabilities, such as depression, anxiety or autism, are not properly understood.

Because of this lack of understanding, there can be fear about living in society with a 'disability' and the negative way that might be seen in their culture and community.

Having a disability as a Pacific person is yet another disadvantage that Pacific families face and, because it is mostly not understood, Pacific families struggle to get the right support systems to help them cope with the adversities.

Injecting flexibility into the learning environment.

Our education system is built on a myriad of government-led structures and imposed policies that teachers need to navigate every day.

While these policies might have been developed with the best of intentions, they have created an overly bureaucratic environment within our classrooms and learning institutions that is stifling learners and preventing them from succeeding.

We are also seeing teachers becoming frustrated by these rigid structures, which they know are unfit for purpose for Pacific learners or any

> "If we truly want to shift the dial on Pacific educational outcomes, our education policy requires fresh, collaborative thinking that accurately reflects what Pacific learners need to succeed."

non-Pākehā learners for that matter.

Why? Because many of our education policy settings assume a 'level playing field', which is insulting to a teacher's daily reality.

As a result, teachers are often handcuffed from infusing flexibility and creativity into the classroom, which is required when students come from a growing number of different cultures.

If we truly want to shift the dial on Pacific educational outcomes, our education policy requires fresh, collaborative thinking that accurately reflects what Pacific learners need to succeed.

And this requires a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' approach, providing our educators and cultural experts not only a voice, but a seat at the table where they can advocate on behalf of Pacific learners at a government level.

Rethinking culture in the classroom.

Most importantly, we need to address the cultural competency of our education workforce.

A culturally competent and confident educator can build a rapport with their students, and this rapport can often be the crucial difference as to whether a student succeeds or not.

Unfortunately, existing frameworks tend to be too generic and too simplistic and, after training, educators are often unsure about how to integrate cultural competency frameworks into their teaching approach.

Cultural training needs to be reflective of the wide variety of different cultural groups that make up modern Aotearoa, and should empower educators to have the confidence to put their knowledge into practice.

A culturally competent educator knows they need to dig deeper into their Pacific students' backgrounds – including church, family values and beliefs – reaching and teaching the whole person acknowledging every aspect of their lives.

Once that foundation of trust is set in stone, educational success becomes more achievable.

Whole person approach.

Our teaching model has remained unchanged for far too long.

In primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, we see students being 'talked at' from the front of the classroom by an educator. In this model, Pacific students have no agency over their own learning.

If our education system doesn't allow a connection for learners between who they are, their culture and their community, how do we expect them to be engaged and feel valued at school?

Instead, we need to adopt a more holistic, culturally nuanced, approach in the classroom.

We can see the success of this approach by viewing the healthy success rates obtained for Māori attending full immersion education settings and marae-based training.

Unfortunately, too many Pacific learners face the barrier of low expectations.

One of the great tragedies in Pacific education is the unspoken mantra found in many mainstream New Zealand schools: 'Just pass, that'll do. No need to excel'.

This is an incredibly damaging message for any young person to hear and it needs to stop.

Instead, we need to be creating an environment that is built on high expectations, where our Pacific youth know they can achieve anything with hard work, just like anyone else.

In the word of Polynesian education specialist, Michelle Johansson: "Don't dumb it down because they are brown. Respect them enough to bring their best. And when they bring you less, say this is not good enough, not you are not good enough."

If we want to see more Māori thrive, we need to rethink our education system.

Novi Marikena,

Kai Whakaawe

Principal Māori Adviser for three West Auckland Boards and Auckland Council

> "Secondary schools should be about introducing practical skills to their students so that they leave school with meaningful qualifications and self-confidence."

While it is easy to ask why too many Māori are not thriving in post-secondary education, the real question should by why is Aotearoa's secondary school system failing so many of our Māori youth?

With 35-years' experience in education, I've seen first-hand the disparity in which many government services perceive and treat people. We just need to look at how Government develops policy.

Despite the Crown being bound to genuine partnership through Te Tiriti o Waitangi, too often this partnership takes the form of 'Government knows best' resulting in the development of generic policy and services.

This one-size-fits-all approach does not, and arguably will never, resonate with Māori learners. People from any culture should never feel they need to fit into a certain 'box' to gain societal acceptance, especially a box that they did not create or want.

As someone who never completed high school, started work aged 13 and found their way into teaching, I passionately want to see the barriers that I experienced removed and for more Māori to thrive in higher education.

Sowing the seeds early.

Our secondary school system is designed to be a largely generic learning space, with a fixed curriculum designed to prepare students for university.

Instead of encouraging students to embrace their passions and arming them with the skills that they need for the real world, our secondary system often crushes their spirits.

It is no surprise that too many Māori fall out of the education system early, with no meaningful qualifications and few prospects.

We have our approach all wrong. Secondary schools should be about introducing practical skills to their students so that they leave school with meaningful qualifications and self-confidence.

Photo: NZMA Hamilton

No young person should leave school without the skills that allow them to walk into a job.

Rather than expecting students to finish secondary school and then undertake vocational training, we should be bringing tertiary providers into secondary schools to teach students who are interested in pursuing vocational careers.

Our current education settings mean we miss an important opportunity in those last two or three years of secondary school, when students are eager to be introduced to more career orientated, practical skills training in the classroom.

> "When we think about Māori education, we need to understand the strong influence that whānau rightfully have in the overall learning journey."

Whānau legacy of learning.

When we think about Māori education, we need to understand the strong influence that whānau rightfully have in the overall learning journey.

Māori are often grappling with the unresolved trauma of the colonisation and institutional racism that have left them as second-class citizens in their own country.

Many Māori distrust the state and have poor experiences from government-delivered services, including the education system. Māori continue to be victimised by a system that is built on low expectations and which does not give them a voice.

But every parent wants to see their child succeed and to have a better life than them. That is why it is crucial that education providers start working in partnership with whānau to earn their trust.

This is not about providing lip service. The partnership needs to be genuine and the communication open, respectful and meaningful.

Partnership underpins success.

Partnership is key. We are fighting a losing battle unless tertiary-level providers operate in true partnership with iwi to ensure courses are developed and structured in a way that meet the needs of Māori from the outset.

A 'them and us' mentality will never drive the change we need; neither do courses, policies and education settings created in isolation from those who will be the end users of them.

An example of what can be done can be seen at Hoani Waititi Marae, where lifelong learning has been an integral part of the marae's ethos. As a result, the marae is recognised as a global centre of excellence in indigenous education and cultural innovation.

We have long wanted to set up a higher learning institute, which is why we made the decision to partner with NZMA to deliver trades training on the marae.

This has seen NZMA's Trade West Campus established at Hoani Waititi Marae with the aim of helping more Māori and Pacific into skill-based education.

Using tikanga as our foundation, we wanted to do things differently. That is why an essential component of Trades West is the pastoral care provided; students are taught goal-setting and are given the opportunity to participate in marae-based learning programmes.

> "We are fighting a losing battle unless tertiary-level providers operate in true partnership with iwi to ensure courses are developed and structured in a way that meet the needs of Māori from the outset."

While the partnership with NZMA has not been without its challenges, and there is always room for improvement, it does show what can be done and should serve as a blueprint for providers around Aotearoa.

The approach can be encapsulated in the whakataukī "Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi" – With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive.

How we can help tāngata whaikaha rangatahi (disabled youth) make a successful and empowered transition into post-secondary education.

Chrissie Cowan

Chief Executive Kāpō Māori Aotearoa, and Chair of Access Alliance

Leading an organisation that focuses on supporting kāpō (blind, visually impaired, low vision and deafblind) Māori and their whānau allows me to see first-hand the challenges tāngata whaikaha rangatahi (young disabled people) face in the Aotearoa education system.

Tāngata whaikaha rangatahi experience multiple obstacles entering post-secondary learning, and it is a tragedy that few successfully make this transition.

The statistics paint a bleak picture. Our disabled population experience an unemployment rate which is 50 percent higher than the national rate.

Tāngata whaikaha ākonga (disabled students) have a lower course completion rate than non-disabled students, and almost one third of tāngata whaikaha wāhine (disabled women) have no formal qualifications – compared with about 15 percent of non-disabled wāhine.

The impact of these appalling statistics is not just economic. There are wider negative mental health and wellbeing outcomes that come with being left on the sidelines of New Zealand society.

Our education system – primary, secondary and tertiary – should be meeting the needs of all New Zealanders. Unfortunately, tāngata whaikaha rangatahi have been disenfranchised for far too long and the need for change is urgent.

Educating the educators

If we want to increase tāngata whaikaha ākonga engagement in tertiary education, we need to mandate support and training to all staff who are employed in tertiary organisations – from the person who answers the phones, to the tutors, to the lecturers, to the administrators and markers.

Ensuring that all staff undertake specialist, tailored training will equip tertiary organisations to provide better support to tāngata whaikaha learners. Training on disability and inclusion already exist, but many tertiary organisations don't value it. So, it's not just improving existing training it is making sure people undertake it. It is imperative that specialist training includes Māori pedagogies such as 'Ako wananaga.' Ako means both

Photo: NZMA Rotorua

teach and learn. It's a reciprocal relationship where the educator is also learning from the student. It is also suggested properly funding support/disability staff to provide needed assistance.

Too often tāngata whaikaha ākonga are met with generic bias and stereotypes. Tāngata whaikaha rangatahi are told to "have your dream, but be realistic". This mindset must change. It dims a young person's right to find true purpose in their life.

Tāngata whaikaha Māori rangatahi are not well served by mainstream education. At Manaaki Tangata Kotahitanga (MTK), the youth division of Kapo Māori Aotearoa, we have found that those students who have most successfully navigated tertiary training tend to come from outside the mainstream education system.

Why? Learners from Māori-medium education settings arrive with a palpable sense of self-belief and self-determination. They know who they are, where they come from and where they want to go. This gives them a solid foundation and the resilience they need to face the challenges – cultural and disability-related – of moving into a tertiary environment. From this grounding, they have the courage to speak up, question, debate, affirm achievement and determine their own futures.

Not limited by a 'label'.

Today's generation of future tāngata kāpō Māori leaders are not constrained by societal labels or norms that historically marginalised and separated tāngata whaikaha Māori from their culture, whānau and community. Self-identity is their kaupapa (principle) not their disability. They do not want 'special' treatment.

To help foster this self-belief, tertiary providers should ensure that all learners see their culture and values reflected and embedded into courses. The Māori concept of ako, which recognises the knowledge that both teachers and learners bring to learning interactions, should be embedded in the education experience.

Kāpō Māori do not wish to be siloed – because of blindness or their heritage – they just want to succeed on an even playing field.

"This is unacceptable! No tāngata whaikaha ākonga should finish secondary school without a plan that includes being connected to services and funding to provide ongoing support."

At MTK, we give our rangatahi agency over their own lives. Nothing happens without their permission. This is a shock for many arriving from school, who might never have experienced control over their own destiny.

Too often, our policymakers are still making generic assumptions about the day-to-day experiences of tāngata whaikaha Māori rangatahi without talking to them. We deny them a voice to help shape the very policy that will play an important role in shaping their lives.

We need a radical perception change so that we can accurately reflect the reality of all disabled learners. The current approach is akin to building a house, without considering who will live there. The first step is talking to and empowering them to have a voice, share their experiences and take control of their own future.

Government services and education providers then need to provide our rangatahi with the right tools and services to help them realise their goals.

Transition between secondary and tertiary.

Aotearoa does not adequately support tāngata whaikaha rangatahi to transition between secondary and tertiary education.

As a result, many young people are left to fall through the cracks between government agencies and support services. This sees many tāngata whaikaha Māori rangatahi cast adrift and left to fend for themselves on the welfare system.

Too often, if their whānau are unaware of the support available, tāngata whaikaha rangatahi end up feeling overwhelmed and isolated.

This is unacceptable! No tāngata whaikaha ākonga should finish secondary school without a plan that includes being connected to services and funding to provide ongoing support.

We need to introduce Māori centred models, principles and practices and work closely with tāngata whaikaha Māori ākonga and their whānau, who are the most at risk of being disconnected. Together, we need to develop solutions that inform, guide and connect them with specialist services and agencies with an approach that is inclusive, empowering and aligns with the Māori principle of rangatiratanga and the disability community principle of "Nothing about us without us".

We need support services to be cohesive, empowering and ambitious for tāngata whaikaha rangatahi wrapping around the whole person, their whānau and all of their needs so they feel supported to continue with their education journey.

Only then will we end the curse of low expectations, which is doing so much damage to tāngata whaikaha rangatahi.

Te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere; te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga nōna te ao.

The bird who partakes of the miro berry owns the forest; the bird who partakes of education owns the world.

Ko ngā rangatahi ngā rangatira mō āpōpō.

Youth today are the leaders of tomorrow.

Jane Hughson
Youth Work Programme Manager
New Zealand School of Tourism

> "We need to stop applying a Pākehā lens over our education system, and instead look towards tikanga as providing a sturdy foundation to build young people's self-esteem to set them up for success in life."

Young people should feel seen and valued within our education system.

Unfortunately, for some Māori this is not a reality and this can have a detrimental effect on their overall wellbeing, hauora and life outcomes.

Statistics don't lie. Our education system has failed far too many Māori for far too long. The long-term nature of the problem means there is no easy solution.

Biases, stereotypes, assumptions, the historical legacy of colonisation and disconnection from iwi all combine to impact the taha hinengaro (self-belief and mental and emotional wellbeing).

As a country, we need to do better.

Photo: New Zealand Institute of Sport Christchurch

Not only is that the right thing to do, but we have an obligation to address this ongoing disparity in our education system by honouring the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

And this means working in partnership. We need to stop applying a Pākehā lens over our education system and instead look towards tikanga as providing a sturdy foundation to build young people's self-esteem to set them up for success in life.

To achieve this, we need to support our education workforce to upskill in 'cultural emotional intelligence'. This requires fresh thinking. As our student population and education workforce become increasingly diverse, more work is required to ensure educators can effectively work with different cultures.

This is a focus in my current role at the New Zealand School of Tourism, which sees me supporting the professional development of tutors and the next generation of youth workers. As part of this work, I encourage our staff and students to see the whole of a person, have empathy and understand the issues that may be impacting a student's learning outside of the classroom.

"For most young people, essential skills such as self-regulation, coping with feelings and being confident to speak openly, are not taught at home."

Addressing underachievement in secondary school.

If we are going to address the under-representation of Māori and Pacific in tertiary education, we first need to address the causes of underachievement in secondary school.

We underestimate how big the transition from primary to secondary education can be. Going from one classroom and one teacher, they find themselves in different classes with multiple teachers. Schools are larger and it is easier for learners to become lost and disconnected within the system.

Early intervention can help ensure young people complete their secondary school education and don't end up in alternative education settings, which often act as a holding room until a student is old enough to be 'exited' from school.

The way we talk about and to our rangatahi needs to change. As educators, we need to see our youth for the potential they possess and not the problem they pose. We should be introducing better wraparound services to ensure those students who might be struggling have the support that they need.

For most young people, essential skills such as self-regulation, coping with feelings and being confident to speak openly, are not taught at home.

Our secondary schools need to step up and support our rangatira mō āpōpō to gain the skills to smooth the transition into higher education, employment and better life outcomes.

This doesn't need to be the sole responsibility of teaching staff, though they have a role. It is about ensuring schools have the specialist staff, such as social workers and counsellors, that can help to support teenagers' successful transition into adulthood.

Improving the resilience of our young people

Māori and Pacific are not only over-represented in educational underachievement, but they're also over-represented in New Zealand's shameful mental health statistics.

That is why we need to urgently improve dedicated mental health support in our education institutions as part of a strategy to turn the tide of Māori and Pacific learners. Our young people need people they can trust, who will listen and who can advocate on their behalf.

Imagine the impact if all learning institutions had a team of specialist staff dedicated to supporting students, on their terms, in a culturally appropriate and accessible environment.

This is an investment for the future. By teaching our youth emotional regulation skills early, we can foster better mental wellbeing long-term. For too long, our mental health conversations have been about placing more ambulances at the bottom of the cliff rather than about how we build the fence at the top that prevents them falling off in the first place.

It's now time to build the fence.

Creating the right mauri.

Moana-Roa Callaghan

Kaiako Reo, Toi Whātua,
Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Whai Māia

> "For us, education is about making a purposeful move. And the need to make these purposeful moves is the product of colonisation and the generational trauma associated with it."

Māori are taught that doing well at school and going to university means a well-paying job.

The power of education to provide economic freedom has been demonstrated for my generation by those who have walked it before.

I think of esteemed Māori scholars, leaders and advisors like Sir Āpirana Ngata, Pei Te Hurinui Jones, Sir Turi Caroll, Dr Rawinia Higgins, who have shown how education can change one's life and standing.

But what we are not encouraged to do is to embark on study because we are curious, for the fun of learning or because we want to learn more about something we are interested in. For us, education is about making a purposeful move.

And the need to make these purposeful moves is the product of colonisation and the generational trauma associated with it. The statistics speak for themselves – Māori have not had the same opportunities and find themselves on the backfoot.

The disparity that exists between Māori and Pākehā is complex and intergenerational, but it is this disparity that sees the decision to embark on post-secondary by Māori often being much more deliberate and considered than it is for Pākehā.

This decision is reinforced by our secondary school system, which aims to set young people up on the pathway for academia. Most of the time, you are groomed for university.

Photo: NZMA Christchurch

The problem with this approach is that it doesn't teach young people to explore their potential and natural gifts with freedom. If we do not speak the natural language of our DNA, by finding resonance with our genome's natural frequency, we quickly become disconnected and risk crashing and burning. That is why so many Māori become disenfranchised with the current education system.

As I think back to my time at secondary school, my teachers and leaders did their best to groom me so that I could walk comfortably in two worlds – the Māori world and the Pākehā world – but some neglected to teach me how to tap into my internal systems, my ngākau (heart).

The natural language of our DNA and our genome's natural frequency is the recipe for success and our schools need to be teaching young Māori how to identify it, navigate it and pursue it.

Improving the transition from secondary to tertiary education.

While our secondary schools work to prepare learners academically for tertiary study, they don't prepare them for the reality of leaving school and being on their own.

The transition from secondary school to tertiary study can be a cultural shock. Going from a highly structured education environment, students can find themselves left on their own – expected to find their own way in an unfamiliar environment.

While many young Pākehā will have parents and other family members who have been to university, the same cannot be said of Māori. Our parents simply didn't go to university.

This means Māori in tertiary study (of the 21st century era) are often the first in their families to find themselves at university or polytechnic, and they often find themselves in an environment that is completely foreign.

Tertiary institutions need to understand that these students need support and guidance.

Pastoral care, however, needs to honour a young person's essence so they can connect with their true gifts and potential.

Creating the right environment.

But we also need to create the right environment at our tertiary institutions. It's about establishing the right mauri.

To support Māori to thrive in tertiary education, institutions must strive towards creating the ideal campus that develops a positive energy.

What does this mean? It means feeding our tairongo (senses) with positive kai (energetic food). The sounds, smells, feel and look of a campus are all critical.

It means focusing more on the positives and less on the negatives. This means fewer posters about anti-smoking and mental health and more about passion, innovation, inspiration and design. It's about feeding the subconscious state of mind positively and encouraging learners to keep moving.

As a country, we have come a long way in the last decade. It wasn't that long ago that being Māori and proud was frowned upon. Now we are becoming prouder of our indigenous culture. Being Māori is cool in a way that it wasn't for our parents' generation.

This allows us to have a more honest and mature conversation about disparity, colonisation and what it means for Aotearoa. We should be proud of this and embrace the conversation that we are now having.

After all, if you are alive and not moving then you are deteriorating. But if you are alive and moving, you are growing. And when you grow, that is when real transformation can happen.

"As a country, we have come a long way in the last decade. It wasn't that long ago that being Māori and proud was frowned upon. Now we are becoming prouder of our indigenous culture. Being Māori is cool in way that it wasn't for our parents' generation."

Our young people with disabilities feel forgotten in our education system.

I.Lead

Youth with Disabilities Movement

I.Lead is a youth with disabilities movement aimed at breaking down the barriers young rangatahi and tamariki in New Zealand face today. They advocate for change towards a completely inclusive and accessible society.

> "Tertiary education institutes must normalise young people with disabilities attending their courses in order for students, families and teachers to gain confidence in their own tertiary journey."

Young tamariki and rangatahi with disabilities have said it for too long – they feel forgotten, discriminated against and underserved in their education. From a lack of funding for additional supports at school to inaccessible buildings, it is not hard to understand why students with disabilities are less likely to receive their NCEA certificates.

When we speak to teachers, more often than not we hear that they feel underprepared to serve learners with disabilities. The odds are stacked against these learners and without change, New Zealand will continue to disadvantage those with disabilities in the education sector.

The following are three true stories from rangatahi with disabilities on their experience in the New Zealand education system.

Photo: NZMA Christchurch

Don't judge a book by its cover.

Secondary schools support students with disabilities to the best of their ability during their time at the school, but my experience is that the encouragement of some teachers for students is minimal when it comes to further studies.

Students with disabilities often don't see themselves going on to tertiary studies, due to the low expectations by their teachers and a lack of self-confidence. I have experienced this myself due to my disability impacting my physical appearance, teachers have assumed it correlates with my intellectual capacity.

Teachers would set a standard for me based on my appearance and wouldn't ask if I had any aspirations of going on to additional studies after school. Teachers are meant to be champions for their students and guide them through the challenges. When they don't believe in their student's ability, it is a blow to the student and reinforces the negative stereotypes around persons with a disability.

I am eternally thankful for the support I received at home from my family and friends believing in my abilities, which provided me with the confidence to attend and complete my university degree.

Education institutes can encourage young people with disabilities to undertake tertiary study by advertising that they have students with disabilities completing their studies. Have them share their stories during their time at university to other young people with disabilities. This will enable other students to visualise themselves being in their position.

Tertiary education institutes must normalise young people with disabilities attending their courses in order for students, families and teachers to gain confidence in this possibility.

Abdulla, Bachelor of Arts

Invisible disability, invisible learner.

In the month I turned three years old I got out of bed in sheer pain and was quickly rushed to hospital by my parents. It took four months for me to finally be diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis.

Over the years, going in and out of hospital for surgeries and treatments made my school life increasingly difficult. As my disability is invisible, my additional learning needs were often neglected. Missing so much school meant that I was behind in my learning.

Without the help of my teacher aide, I would not have finished school. However, funding of teacher aides was limited, and this meant I was often left without their support.

After missing large chunks of school due to hospital stays, and being provided with little to no additional support, at year 11 I was still only able to comprehend year 6 maths.

I felt let down by a system that was meant to give me the best chance possible to succeed, and this was difficult knowing it was because of a disability I had no control over.

My hopes for other rangatahi and tamariki with invisible disabilities is that they are provided with individualised support for their disabilities, not just standardised care.

Kathleen – Youth Worker

Accessibility is everyone's problem.

Awareness of the real meaning of accessibility starts within the walls of your classroom, especially when it comes to navigating an environment when you're the only student in mainstream using a wheelchair.

Being a teacher, you would have an ideal image of your students and how you would want your classroom set up. The only obstacle for students without a disability is starting again in a new classroom, making new friends for the year and possibly learning that their subjects are a little harder than they were last year.

So, imagine being a year 13 student; you walking into a classroom, you say hi to your mates, then go back at your desk. You then look over to see a kid in a wheelchair, looking younger than your peers, just sitting there.

Then imagine term 3 approaching and you see your teacher getting frustrated at that kid for not knowing anything because no one even thought to involve her in year 13 discussions. That's what happened to me.

I took history, maths and English, and had a class that did work experience – I loved my classes but I had one problem. The problem was that the class I was meant to take was upstairs and because there were no elevators, I had to study level 3 English. I struggled a lot and it was probably only in the last few weeks before I changed schools again that they finally noticed me.

If I could go back in time and change one thing, I'd be more vocal, accept that I'm different and teach others by existing that it's okay to be different. I would have also wanted a lot of support.

Level 2 was pretty important for me, considering I really wanted my UE. if they were not able to afford an elevator, one thing I could have been happy with was to be partnered up with a tutor or a teacher aide. My future would have been different.

Lavinia – Youth Worker

A student-centred approach, built on authentic relationships, is critical to reducing education disparity in Aotearoa.

Kelli Kemara

Head of Transformation
NZMA and NZST

> "While it is cliché, it is true that it takes a village to raise a child, and kaiako and education providers are an integral part of the village."

If we want to help more Māori and Pacific ākonga succeed, we really need to be thinking about how we help educators build stronger, more meaningful connections with their students.

Even if a teacher has amazing academic qualifications or industry experience, they will struggle to help their students achieve if they are unable to build authentic connections and recognise the value and experiences ākonga bring to the classroom.

That is why developing strong relationships, built on mutual trust, respect and understanding, needs to be the foundation stone in any strategy aimed at improving Māori and Pacific educational achievement.

My most cherished teaching experience was in Ōpōtiki, where I learnt first-hand how important relationships were.

The Ōpōtiki district rates extremely poorly on indicators regarding social and economic outcomes. This means poor health and educational outcomes, inadequate housing and high rates of criminal offending.

I quickly discovered to be a good educator you needed to build connections with rangatahi and people within their sphere of influence – whether that be whānau, iwi or community members – to understand what was going on in their world.

These relationships allow you to work effectively to address barriers, provide tailored support and overcome problems early. While it is cliché, it is true that it takes a village to raise a child, and kaiako and education providers are an integral part of the village.

Photo: NZMA Trades West

Moving to Hamilton, I found myself at a much larger secondary school with a similar decile to Ōpōtiki. The connections between educators, the community and students were not as strong because of the size of both the school and the city.

While the community in Ōpōtiki was tight, in Hamilton many rangatahi are disconnected from their marae and iwi, and they don't necessarily have the support structures in place at home or in their community to guide them. This means they can quickly become lost in the school system.

But I also learned, and I see this in my current role at UP Education, that our qualification framework is also inhibiting the development of authentic relationships, which are so critical to learning.

What do I mean? New Zealand's rigid assessment-based model – where you either pass or you fail – does not support the growth potential of individual learners – especially for young Māori and Pacific learners.

Māori and Pacific ākonga bring huge value to education providers in terms of values and cultural principle. Where this is recognised and nurtured, these ākonga will grow and flourish.

Yet often our rangatahi do not see themselves or their experiences reflected or recognised by our qualifications framework. While we talk about an inclusive approach to education, the outcomes framework does not support it.

It is this insight that I have brought to my current role as Head of Transformation, and which is helping me to develop the educational strategy for NZMA and the New Zealand School of Tourism.

At the core of our strategy is achieving learner equity. We want every student to succeed, no matter their background. But while there is no one single answer, we do know that to be successful we need to take a student-centric approach.

While this might seem like a bit of a buzz phrase at its most basic it is about asking, not assuming, what your students need and then tailoring solutions designed for them. We need to remember that each student is unique – they are each facing their own challenges and they each have their own aspirations.

As part of this work, we looked at the numeracy and literacy of our Māori and Pacific learners and found that, as a group, they were at levels substantially below those of other students.

This is a major barrier to achievement in the current framework and automatically puts them at a disadvantage. Having low literacy and numeracy skills can mean struggling in silence during course work, losing confidence and quickly becoming disengaged.

That is why we developed a tailored approach. This saw our staff working with Māori and Pacific ākonga who were studying at our vocational schools and who had below optimal numeracy and literacy skills when measured against the TEC assessment tool.

Our focus was on asking them about what they need and how we can help. We wanted to know about their experiences, what they think their barriers were, and what improving numeracy and literacy would mean for them. This helped build stronger connections with students – we understand, we don't judge, and we want to help.

This work has seen a pilot group of Māori and Pacific learners deliver personalised interventions aimed at lifting their numeracy and literacy. The pilot focused on working alongside each student and in a way that worked best for them.

The programme ran alongside the vocational training in which they were enrolled. Pleasingly, 67 percent of students in the pilot, and who identified as Māori, improved by one step in either literacy or numeracy over eight weeks.

The success of this pilot has seen us roll out the programme across NZMA and the New Zealand School of Tourism. We aim to lift all ākonga to the required literacy and numeracy threshold so they can engage more fully in their courses and to support them to feel more confident when they leave us for employment opportunities or higher education pathways.

While numeracy and literacy were already built into all our programmes, the difference with this programme is that it is student-centred, focused on the needs of each individual student, and delivered in a way that they told us works best for them.

The importance of getting this work right, of truly understanding our ākonga, has clearly been demonstrated through the COVID-19 lockdown, where we noticed that Māori and Pacific ākonga were applying for hardship grants at much lower levels than other students. This seemed counterintuitive.

On further investigation, we found that this was because the hardship grant application process asked for information that presented a barrier to our Māori and Pacific learners.

But there is also a culture element at play, with Māori and Pacific less likely to put their hand up for help or feeling whakamā to ask. That is why we introduced a new role – Kaiāwhina – a student advocate role tasked with making sure the voice of our Māori and Pacific students is heard more clearly.

These roles, alongside our other student reps, provide a powerful tool to both challenge and support our thinking and to help us to do better for our Māori and Pacific students.

It is only by committing to doing better that we will achieve our goal of having equitable outcomes for our ākonga. And I think we can agree, that is the goal we should all be working towards and the only acceptable outcome.

Section two

How do we better support underserved learners to thrive in post-secondary education and into employment?

Creating an environment in which Pacific learners can thrive.

Falaniko Tominiko

Director, Pacific Success
Unitec

Improving outcomes for Pacific learners is not a one-size-fits-all approach with 'set and forget' generic policies.

If we want to achieve meaningful, lasting change for Pacific people, tertiary organisations – and ultimately funding bodies – need to redefine what success looks like.

While this will vary across different organisations, ultimately it must be about helping empower Pacific learners to overcome the barriers they might experience so that they succeed in their chosen area of study.

Organisations need to demonstrate a clear and transparent commitment to supporting Pacific learners in the education journey, with an unambiguous plan that delivers on this promise.

This commitment needs to be across the whole student lifecycle – starting with the enrolment process, through to the learning process and then to the eventual graduation.

This means looking at what definition of inclusion and empowerment resonates most with Pacific learners, while educators need to apply a Pacific lens and understand they are teaching not just the individual, but the family and the larger community as well.

"Organisations need to demonstrate a clear and transparent commitment to supporting Pacific learners in the education journey, with an unambiguous plan that delivers on this promise."

And like any commitment, it needs to be led, driven and championed by both the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team. Increasing Pacific learner success must be part of an organisation's overarching strategy and be supported by a specific Pacific Success Strategy, with clear actions and deliverables.

With genuine buy-in from senior leadership, it is more

Photo: Yoobee Colleges Rotorua

> "Wider family commitments, church obligations, caregiving, and the necessity of a part-time job often mean Pacific learners have multiple demands on their time."

likely that the commitment will permeate across all areas of the organisation – both operationally and strategically.

Unfortunately, the responsibility for improving outcomes for Pacific learners is too often offloaded as the responsibility of just one or two teams, usually comprising a small group of senior Pacific staff. This approach not only burdens these staff, but it sidelines an important issue and negates shared ownership for Pacific learning outcomes.

While employing more Pacific staff within tertiary education may seem the quick fix, in reality it is every staff member's responsibility to support all learners. That goes with the job description.

Pacific learning action plans must have buy-in across the entire organisation, and this means that they need to be communicated effectively.

Teams then need to be empowered to create their own unique ways to embrace initiatives and ideas aimed at improving Pacific learning outcomes.

From enrolment, to orientation, to marketing and even the student canteen, every team needs to understand that they have a role to play in making sure all learners feel welcomed, supported and seen.

Sense of belonging.

Tertiary institutions need to reflect on how at home Pacific students feel when they walk onto campus.

This does not need to be complicated. Simple additions like cultural motifs or artworks, as well as wayfinding and greetings in Pacific languages, all help to create a feeling of belonging.

This 'cultural lens' can extend to learning materials and the course curriculum, which should incorporate and reflect the various cultures of the student population and include Māori and Pacific references.

Other initiatives such as celebrating language weeks, including Pacific language into enrolment collateral and hosting cultural culinary events, all help Pacific learners feel included and valued.

It takes a 'nuu'.

Education in Pacific culture really is a family affair. Family and community is everything, which is why it's vital to host events where a student's family feel part of the learning journey.

We know that Pacific students thrive when they are supported by close and extended family. That is why it is crucial for tertiary providers to offer culturally appropriate pastoral care on campus.

Family evenings can help demystify the learning journey and allow teachers to communicate the expectations around study to the wider family in a partnership approach.

Institutions should also identify a staff member as a key liaison person for Pacific families. Having a senior teacher responsible for improving educational outcomes for Pacific learners indicates to families that their needs are seen as a priority.

When a Pacific learner leaves secondary school to attend a larger tertiary institution, they can often feel out of their cultural comfort zone. That is why it is so important to create a welcoming and culturally safe environment.

When education providers can demonstrate that they have taken the time and care to implement support structures that offer wraparound community care for its Pacific learners, they know they are on the right track.

Conflicting priorities.

It's vital that teaching staff do not make assumptions about the needs or lifestyles of Pacific learners. Tertiary providers need to understand that study might not always be a student's highest priority.

If a student falls behind or is absent, the misconception is they have a poor work ethic or aren't serious about study. This view shows a lack of understanding of what their lives look like beyond study.

The reality is that many Pacific learners are juggling multiple priorities. Wider family commitments, church obligations, caregiving and the necessity of a part-time job often mean Pacific learners have multiple demands on their time.

Education providers have an obligation to help their students navigate these competing priorities. They can do this by offering flexibility around course structure and assessment models.

To achieve this lasting change, leaders and funders within the tertiary sector need to embrace innovation and maximise course flexibility so that every learner can shine.

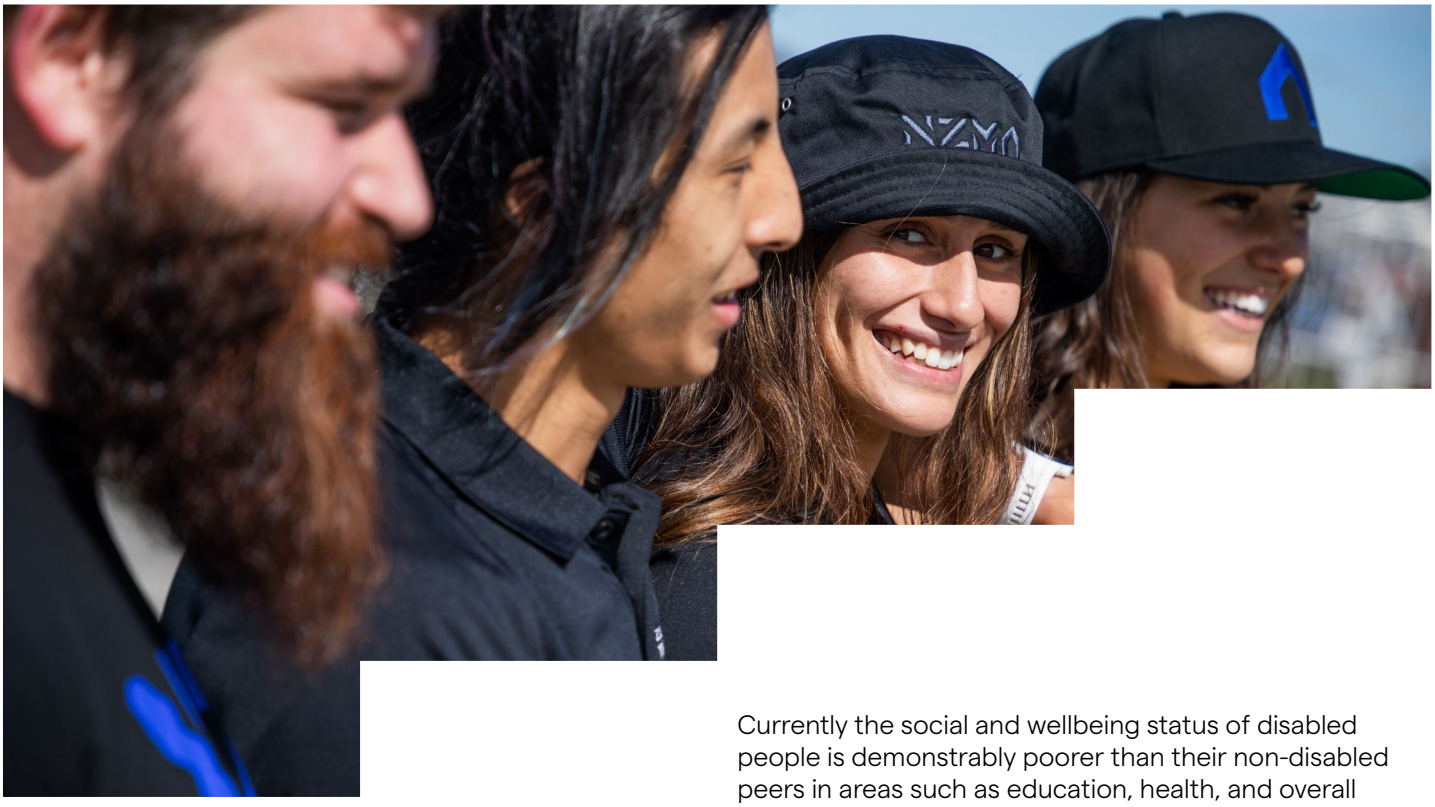
Teaching the whole person sends a clear message to learners: 'You're welcome here, we understand you, and we're committed to your success.'

E felelei manu ae ma'au i l latou ofaga
Birds migrate to environments where they survive and thrive.

Delivering true accessibility will open doors for more disabled learners.

Mojo Mathers

Policy Advisor with Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA)



> "There is no quick way to solve this problem. But it's worth fighting for, because we know lifting tertiary educational outcomes for disabled people will significantly improve their future wellbeing, as well as that of their families and wider society."

Currently the social and wellbeing status of disabled people is demonstrably poorer than their non-disabled peers in areas such as education, health, and overall social participation.

In 2019, 35 percent of Aotearoa's disabled youth were not in education, employment, or training.
This alarming figure increased to 49 percent during 2020, with COVID-19 partly responsible for the rise.

Just let that statistic sink in – it means nearly half of our disabled youth could be facing a lifetime reliant on social welfare.

There is no quick way to solve this problem. But it's worth fighting for, because we know lifting tertiary educational outcomes for disabled people will significantly improve their future wellbeing, as well as that of their families and wider society.

We need a whole system change and we need to consistently implement these changes across the motu. Accessibility is one of the eight general principles of the UN's Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Accessibility, as a concept, is more than the ability to navigate physical environments. It is about equal access to things like public transport, banking, communication services and education

Photo: NZMA Wellington

Strong accessibility standards needed.

In October 2021 the government committed to introducing accessibility legislation. But as this bill delivers a fraction of what the Access Alliance (a New Zealand alliance of disability advocacy groups) asked for, there is a very real risk this legislation won't give education providers sufficient guidance to improve accessibility and lift outcomes.

It is hoped that the incoming accessibility legislation will clarify and strengthen the definition of accessibility in education and beyond. But if the legislation is watered down, or does not contain mechanisms for enforcement, the risk is that tertiary providers will not have the right incentives to make the necessary changes.

Future accessibility legislation needs to set standards for post-secondary providers with a focus on mainstreaming accessibility, which benefits all users. There are many organisations that want to better support disabled people but don't know what to do or how to achieve the needed changes.

If we aren't willing to define what we're aiming for, how can we expect tertiary education providers to know what to do?

Provide specialised career advisors.

Beyond what happens in education settings we need to ensure disabled people are supported in the transition from school to tertiary education, and the transition from tertiary to employment.

This starts with careers advisors taking up specialist training so that they can better support and advise disabled learners on choosing a career path that fits their skills and aspirations.

Careers advisors need to have a sound understanding of the range of barriers a student may face in both tertiary education and in workplaces, and be able to provide advice on how to get around these barriers so they can better assist learners to succeed.

> "Future accessibility legislation needs to set standards for post-secondary providers with a focus on mainstreaming accessibility, which benefits all users."

By imparting pragmatic, helpful advice and a bit of outside-the-box thinking, careers advisors have the potential to help school leavers start their tertiary qualification path on a solid foundation.

Remove barriers to entry that practically bar disabled people.

In addition, providers need to stop making assumptions about what disabled people can or cannot do. Some career paths still have multiple access barriers, which excludes too many disabled people from taking up these courses.

In particular, teaching (ECE through to tertiary), medicine and social work need to ensure that disabled students are not effectively being screened out of these training pathways. It is vital these professions have more disabled people in the workforce, so that they become more reflective of those who use their services.

Can-do attitudes from teaching staff.

I've been told of many incidents of teaching staff creating barriers for post-secondary learners in small and big ways. Examples include lecturers and other teaching staff resisting having their lectures recorded or refusing to provide captioned videos.

Clear accessibility standards would be a breakthrough in this space, but it's also about empowering teaching staff and training them on how to respond to access needs.

There are many small adjustments that make study more accessible for disabled people, which are often met with resistance from teaching staff. When we remove these barriers, we're also often benefitting non-disabled learners.

Better standards for tertiary disability support services.

Currently, the standard of tertiary disability support services varies greatly across the country. Implementing national best practice for student support services means that disabled students would be assured of the level and quality of support offered, wherever they study in New Zealand.

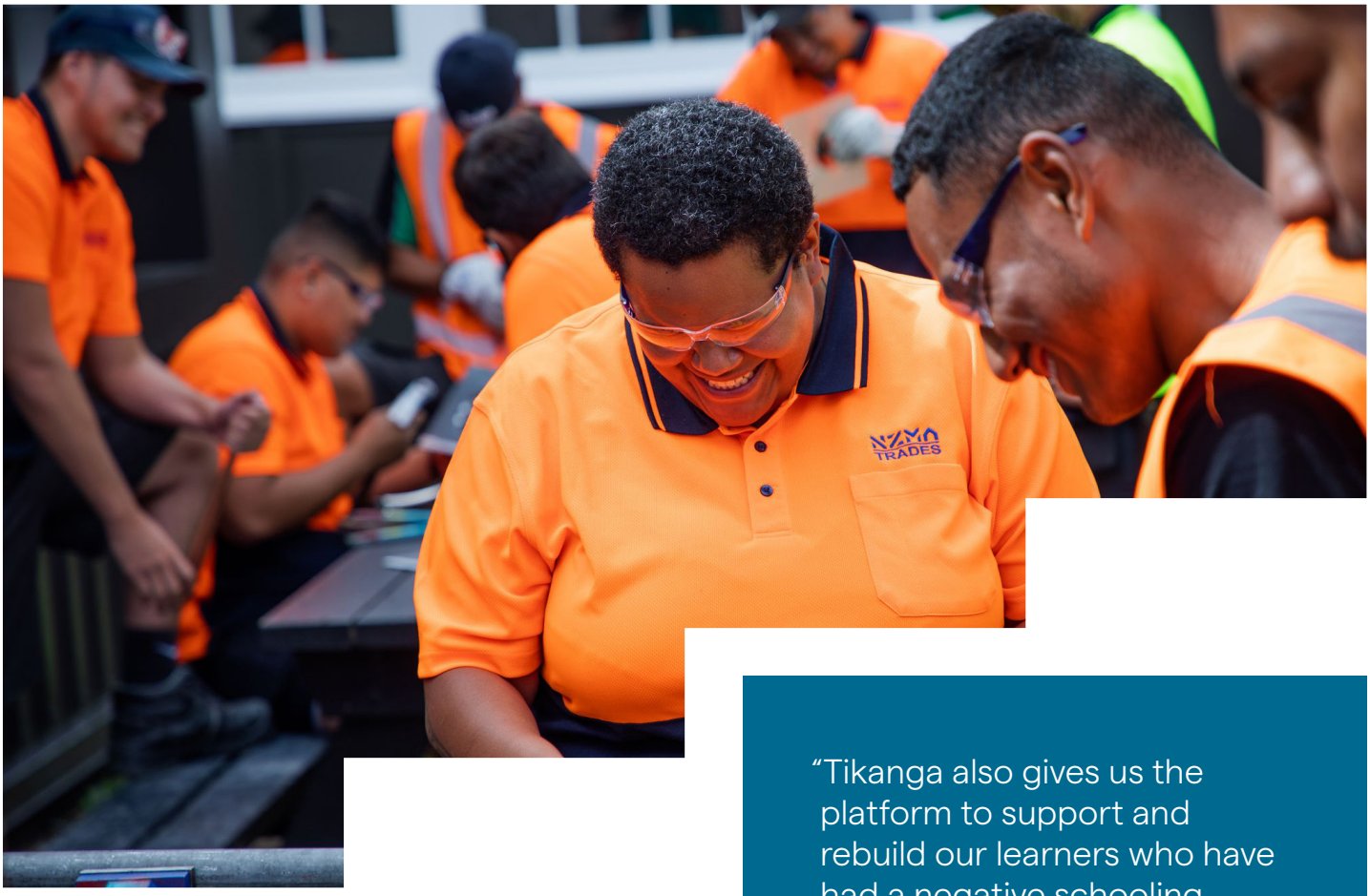
Education is a basic human right. Offering fair and equal access to education for disabled people has countless benefits beyond simply being employed.

While we need social change to achieve equity in the education system, strong accessibility legislation, clear enforceable standards and overhauling our government funding models for disabled students will be the driving force behind whether we can lift educational outcomes for disabled learners.

For more information about DPA visit www.dpa.org.nz.

Embracing tikanga to better engage learners.

Vau Atonio
Campus Manager
NZMA Trades West
Hoani Waititi Marae



> "Tikanga also gives us the platform to support and rebuild our learners who have had a negative schooling experience or may have low self-esteem."

At NZMA, we are forging pathways for second-chance learners in education and training to achieve their goals and aspirations.

We have youth who were unable to connect with the secondary school system. We have young parents who are attempting to re-enter the workforce. We have adults who are learning how to be in a classroom again.

To deliver an education model that serves the diverse needs of our learners, we knew we had to do things differently.

That is why we partnered with Hoani Waititi Marae to establish NZMA's Trades West Campus.

Through our partnership, we are working together to redefine what success looks like. Instead of focussing solely on hard measures and KPIs, our focus is on the student and their needs, ensuring we are doing all we can to help them succeed.

NZMA Trades West eliminates barriers and focuses on engaging learners. Tikanga is the tool that brings everything together and creates a recognisable standard and expectation.

Tikanga also gives us the platform to support and rebuild our learners who have had a negative schooling experience or may have low self-esteem.

With tikanga Māori as the foundation in which we initiate our new relationships with students, stakeholders and the community, we are able to break down barriers that currently exist in the education framework.

Photo: NZMA Trades West

Nurturing the right environment.

I truly believe that if cultural inclusivity is embedded from the outset, outcomes will follow and students will flourish. And at Trades West, I have seen first-hand how one works with the other.

Our philosophy has been about building genuine relationships with students, treating everyone with respect, and understanding that they are all individuals with different dreams, pressures and needs.

That is why I tell my students: 'You need to feel like this is your home, that you'll be safe, because your education will follow.'

This is what helps produce an environment that is supportive and conducive to learning and growth.

This is especially important for our Māori and Pacific students who carry a lot of weight on their shoulders as natives to West Auckland and as the first generation born in New Zealand.

As Māori and Pacific, our students feel an inherent responsibility to their families to make the most of every opportunity and to pave the way for the next generation. They are often the first to pursue post-secondary education in their families, and so it can be easy for them to feel alone and unsure of themselves in these unfamiliar waters.

Our students are striving for generational change, not only in their educational capabilities but also for their families' financial situation.

At NZMA, our role is to support, nurture and enable our tauira to believe that 'they are capable, they are navigators, and that they are prepared to break the mould'.

> "At NZMA, we want every learner to feel seen and heard as an individual. The teaching is not generic; each person warrants a tailored unique approach to meet their needs and background."

Foundation of trust.

Our key objective is for our students is to feel safe when they are on campus, to see our kura as home and to trust that we will be consistent throughout their entire learning journey.

We focus on building mutual trust first. From there, successful learning pathways flow because trust is the cornerstone of everything we are trying to achieve.

This helps foster more unstructured conversations, which rigid adherence to KPIs simply does not allow. Instead, our conversations place the health and wellbeing of the students front and centre – that is what we prioritise.

At NZMA, we want every learner to feel seen and heard as an individual. The teaching is not generic; each person warrants a tailored approach to meet their unique needs and background.

At Trades West, we take a scaffolding approach to learning. This allows tauira the opportunity to build their skills from the ground up, allowing them to make mistakes and most importantly, to build soft skills such as turning up on time, being reliable and working hard – which are just as valuable as their trade skills.

We teach self-accountability, speaking your mind, being on time and having the right tools for the job. It really is that simple, and developing these skills is important to building both competence and confidence. And they are also the skills that every employer values in a team member.

One team, one mission.

We pride ourselves on creating a strong foundation for our tauira. It begins with the relationship we build. We need to be different from the current education system.

Students need to be able to recognise themselves in the staff. Staff need to be able to communicate with their students and be able to relate to their backgrounds.

This helps build a culture of respect, support and aspiration. But it also gives them role models to aspire to, and think, 'Hey, I can do that too.'

For our tauira this embeds possibility, the mindset to overcome, and the knowledge that whatever their prior situation was, it can be changed.

Our tutors live these values, they aren't afraid to challenge the standard quo and they will go above and beyond in their service to show their students they care. They are special human beings, and their individual commitment to tikanga, whanaungatanga and the tuakana teina philosophy, makes us unique. He tangata, he tangata.

My Story: A Māori student's perspective.

Alexia Williams

former student at New Zealand School of Tourism (NZST)

> "The system is afraid to embrace differences and demands conformity. This can hinder Māori learners, who are aiming to achieve their own personal definition of success..."

Leaving school without any formal qualifications, my journey of study with NZST has had its twists and turns – overcoming financial issues and juggling motherhood with full-time work and study. While this might seem challenging, my experience is more the norm than the exception for many young Māori undertaking tertiary study.

Raised by my amazing grandmother, my siblings and I, the six of us, grew up in a Māori-speaking household. However, we were then placed in foster care after our grandmother passed away. Child services decided to label us as 'neglected' because we hadn't been seen by a GP regularly and our English wasn't great. But we were happy and healthy – living in a more holistic traditional Māori way.

Photo: NZMA Porirua

> "Tertiary education and training programmes tend to focus on monetisation, which is a very European view and not an approach Māori would take."

Unfortunately, I see many similar parallels and prejudices that I experienced in my early years existing within Aotearoa's education system. The system is afraid to embrace differences and demands conformity. This can hinder Māori learners, who are aiming to achieve their own personal definition of success, not a Pākehā construct of it.

Education providers need to understand that many Māori do not see the world in the same way that many Pākehā do.

Tertiary education and training programmes tend to focus on monetisation, which is a very European view and not an approach Māori would take. We would instead focus on sustainability and creating experiences that offer a holistic view of our land. We want to promote Māoridom as a unique part of Aotearoa.

More of a noho marae approach integrated into the curriculum would help deliver more authenticity into education programmes. For example, at NZST this might see more marae-immersion programmes and partnerships with iwi and hapū operating in the tourism space. Tribal and business leaders could become guest tutors and offer real insights to students about working in the industry.

This type of approach would also allow young Māori to see role models like them. This approach can also benefit non-Māori students training in tourism, helping them gain a better understanding of our culture that they can use in their future careers. It is also important to remember that many urban Māori are disconnected from their kaupapa, and these types of experiences would help them deepen their connection with their own heritage.

In 2020, I became a kaiāwhina, a new student advocate role at NZST. This was a hugely rewarding role. All of the advocates met regularly as a group and also had the opportunity to feedback to the Heads of Faculty on any issues and offer ideas for improvements. While the feedback was very positive, both from staff and learners, I do think there is more work to do.

COVID-19 put the issue of mental health front and centre for many students. I realised, both in my kaiāwhina role as well as my own situation, that there is a need for tailored Māori mental health support on campus.

For many Māori students, the many pressures outside of study go unspoken. Family, financial, domestic abuse, poverty, access barriers to internet or just paying for transport. As a culture, we are proud and don't want people to know we cannot cope. A neutral objective person to speak to – independent of the faculty and whānau – would be invaluable.

It is also important that education providers allow for more flexibility, understanding the different situations people face. It can be incredibly demoralising for students to receive bad attendance due to circumstances beyond their control.

But it is also important that we share success stories like mine to inspire and attract more Māori into higher education.

Integrating Māori success stories into case studies, marketing plans and inclusion policies would help achieve this. Young people want to see their own potential reflected back at them, knowing education providers welcome people like them and that they will be supported to succeed.

My future is bright, as I will be travelling to the States to begin a paid internship with the Florida Ritz Carlton Hotel in January 2022. But not everyone is as lucky as me. This did not fall into my lap, I networked, and I worked hard to make it happen. Now my dream is to give back and mentor other young Māori achieve their dreams.

> "It is also important that education providers allow for more flexibility, understanding the different situations people face. It can be incredibly demoralising to receive bad attendance due to circumstances beyond their control."

Photo: The Culinary Collective

My Story: A Tongan student's story.

Mele Koula Ahomana
Student

My life story and journey in higher education has had some speed bumps and bends along the way. However, I want to share my experiences – having moved to New Zealand from Tonga as a child – to illustrate what can be achieved with firm encouragement and personal perseverance – it may just take a little longer than for some others.

> "At school, I felt shame and embarrassment because I needed to keep raising my hand and asking for help."

A fish out of water

Arriving in New Zealand from Tonga with my parents and three siblings at age eight was a little overwhelming and scary. I spoke no English, so primary and secondary school were challenging times for me. There were many language and cultural barriers, and I ended up leaving school without any qualifications.

It may sound odd, but Auckland was a culture shock. At school, I felt shame and embarrassment because I needed to keep raising my hand and asking for help. I just did not understand the concepts the teacher was conveying. My school did not have many Pacific teachers, so I had few role models who knew what I was going through. I felt alienated and, in some ways, I just zoned out of learning by high school.

Photo: Culinary Collective Sylvia Park

> "Even the experience to travel to Papatoetoe to attend the sewing course was a huge strain initially. My parents helped me with the transport costs, but I would not eat the entire day then come home for dinner to help save money."

I hope things have changed now, but for those Pacific children new to Aotearoa, I would recommend specialised support and English tutors to assist them throughout their schooling life. Providing this type of support from preschool to high school would be a huge helping hand. If this was standard practice, then recent arrivals to New Zealand would not start off on the back foot but be in a better place to gain core skills, like numeracy and literacy, that are needed to succeed in higher education.

After high school, I was lucky to be offered a scholarship to complete a sewing course and gain my NCEA Level 2 qualification. I really enjoyed it, but I was not able to complete the course as I wanted to help my family financially. By now, my two older brothers were married and had moved out, so I needed to make my contribution. This is very common in Pacific culture – we will put the family's needs ahead of our own.

Even the experience of travelling to Papatoetoe to attend the sewing course was a huge strain initially. My parents helped me with the transport costs, but I would not eat the entire day then come home for dinner to help save money. I even felt quite guilty taking money from my parents to do the course.

Next, I worked in an aged care home, but in the back of my mind I was driven to continue my education. I also got married during this period. I felt so blessed by my new family, as my father-in-law is a teacher and he hugely encouraged me to continue my study.

Old school, new school.

In 2020, I faced the situation and enrolled at NZMA to complete my Level 4 and 5 Diploma in ECE. It was a proud moment for me.

It is interesting to reflect on my own family's views at the time. Dad was supportive, however, my mum was a little hesitant about me going back to study. In her view, I had a steady job and was married, so why rock the boat now and go back to square one?

When I arrived on campus at NZMA, I felt welcome from day one. There were tapa cloths, people greeting me in my language, many other Pacific students, and tutors to support me – it felt safe. The environment was a big part of helping me settle in there. It was such a welcome change to my memories of primary and secondary school – a trauma that was still lingering in the back of my mind.

Bursting with pride.

When the big graduation day came and I received my diploma, it all felt so worth it.

My parents were in tears and the joy in their eyes was indescribable. My Dad was glowing with pride, as I am the first in the family to gain a tertiary qualification. Right now, I work at an early childhood centre in Pukekohe caring for children on the spectrum. This is a specialisation I would love to continue at university. I find it hugely rewarding.

If I were to talk to my 16-year-old self now I would say Mele, do not give up. Continue your study. Aim high as this is not only for you, but also for your family, parents, and your own children. You can be a role model for them.

When I think about my future, I feel excited and hopeful. I want to start my own family, of course, but I also want to continue my studies with a doctorate degree, as I am a huge believer in the power of education to open opportunities for one's future – the sky's the limit!

> "My parents were in tears and the joy in their eyes was indescribable. My Dad was glowing with pride, as I am the first in the family to gain a tertiary qualification."

My story: The challenges of post-secondary education for those living with disabilities.

Ronan McConney
Student

Ronan, 19, lives with cerebral palsy, which affects his movement and posture.

Ronan has graduated with a Level 3 Certificate in Health Studies at New Zealand Management Academies in Manukau through their Trades Academy Health programme for secondary schools.

From there, Ronan gained his Level 4 Health Studies qualification with NZMA. Now enrolled at AUT, Ronan is studying towards a Bachelor of Health Science, majoring in Paramedicine.

The last two years have been hard.

Like many people with disabilities, I prefer face-to-face learning. This suits my needs and my learning style but the pandemic has prevented me being in class for long periods.

With online learning becoming the new normal, I think it's important people with disabilities are provided with more support.

> "To ensure our needs are being met, I think its important schools and universities provide regular checkins and flexibility for people with disabilities – especially around deadlines."

Our needs are not always met through distance learning. It's harder for our voices to be heard, and for our tutors to identify when we are struggling.

We can't always work at the same speed as students who don't have a disability. It's not fair that we are already at a disadvantage and it is hard trying to keep up.

To ensure our needs are being met, it's important schools and universities provide regular check-ins and flexibility for people with disabilities – especially around deadlines.

A computer helps me get information down easier than a pen and paper, however, it's not easy for me to navigate all the different programs and type as quickly as everybody else.

Photo: NZMA Manukau

> "But what people with disabilities need most is an education system that prepares us for the workforce to achieve our dreams and goals – and to do that we need adequate and individual support."

Thankfully, during my time at NZMA, most of my tutors were very accommodating to my slower than normal work pace.

I have now started at AUT, where there is a disability support worker onsite who does an awesome job helping take some of the pressure off me when things get a bit too much. This means I can focus on my study and not have to worry so much about the things that everyone else takes for granted.

For example, she told me about a voice recorded note-taking software that has really made things easier for me.

I wish every student with a disability had a support worker. It is help like this that can make all the difference.

I didn't always get this kind of help at secondary school. I was the only student with cerebral palsy at my school and it was very challenging at times. I was not well supported emotionally.

Schools need to be more understanding and should provide better support for people with disabilities to help us maintain our confidence and stay positive.

My mum tried to get a teacher's aide to support me but was told the school did not have the funding to provide that sort of support. My mum even offered to come to the school to be my aide, free of charge, and was told "no".

My teachers said I had a good brain and didn't need any extra help, but this totally ignored the physical challenges I was going through and its impact on my mental health.

This makes no sense. Every student like me should have dedicated support at school. We have the same right to education as everyone else. The funding should have been found.

The fact I made it to university is down to my own hard work and determination, and not from any support I got from the education system.

I am a success story, but there will be many others like me who haven't been able to go to university because they didn't get the help they needed in secondary or primary school.

I believe disabled learners can do anything they put their mind to, and I hope my academic and extracurricular achievements show people just that.

I can't wait to work in the health sector, not only because that's my dream career, but also to challenge some of the stereotypes that exist for people with disabilities.

That is why I am committed to giving back to the community outside of my studies and to being a positive role model to inspire others.

I have been a St John Cadet since 2009 working through the Gold-level achievement badges to obtain my Grand Prior Award.

I have been involved in Scouts since 2010 and have achieved the Bronze-, Silver- and Gold-level pathfinder badges and attained the Chief Scout Award, which was presented at the World Scout Jamboree in the USA. Since joining Venturers, I have gone on to achieve my Queen Scout Award to be presented soon. While in Scouts I have achieved my Bronze DofE Hillary Award and am currently working on my Gold.

My achievements show just how capable and driven people with disabilities are.

I think we can bring many strengths to a job – such as empathy, patience and first-hand experience in overcoming obstacles every day. This brings with it a special type of resilience which all people with a disability have – a unique point of difference.

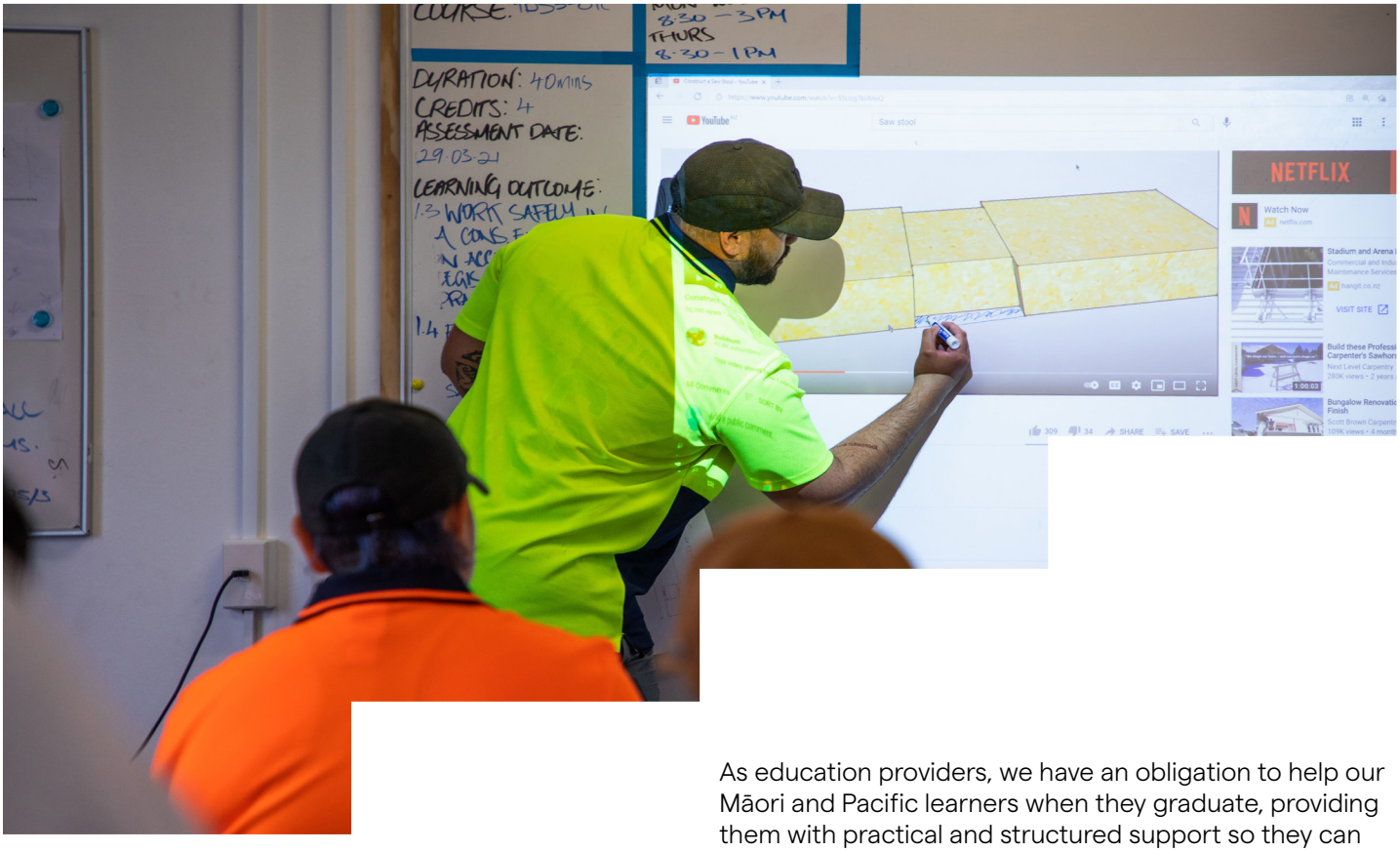
But what people with disabilities need most is an education system that prepares us for the workforce and helps us to achieve our dreams and goals – and to do that we need adequate and individualised support.

> "I wish every student with a disability had a support worker. It is help like this that can make all the difference."

Preparing our Pacific and Māori Graduates to Transition Successfully into Employment.

Rachel Evans

Head of Product and Stakeholder Engagement, NZMA



> "One of the greatest challenges that many Māori and Pacific encounter when they transition out of study is that they have being brought-up to be humble and not to blow their own trumpet."

As education providers, we have an obligation to help our Māori and Pacific learners when they graduate, providing them with practical and structured support so they can successfully transition from study into employment.

In my role, I see first-hand the range of obstacles many learners face when they complete their studies. That is why I am proud to be part of an organisation that is willing to proactively look at what it can do to better support learners to overcome the barriers they might encounter.

Challenging cultural norms.

One of the greatest challenges many Māori and Pacific learners encounter when they transition out of study is that they have being brought up to be humble and not to blow their own trumpet.

The proverb Kāore te kūmara e kōrero mō tōna ake reka (the kūmara does not speak of its own sweetness) – captures the cultural norm of many young Polynesians perfectly. But this also makes selling oneself in a competitive job interview a challenging and daunting prospect.

Photo: NZMA Trades West

Being Māori, I know first-hand that culturally we are not wired to hold individualistic views. It's simply not in our DNA. Instead, Māori are defined by their hapū, whānau and iwi, and this concept is even stronger within many Pacific cultures, where the priority is the family and not the individual.

As a result, many Māori and Pacific graduates can find themselves struggling in a job interview. Selling their skills to a prospective employer does not come as naturally as it might to many Pākehā.

It's about being life ready.

To help our learners gain their first job, we start working with them early – often when they first arrive on campus. Our tutors are critical in helping students prepare for the workforce by helping them develop crucial life skills and communication techniques.

But to do this effectively, tutors need to focus on developing strong and trusted relationships with students, and to do so in a way that takes the students cultural backgrounds into account. Respect is key in helping create a strong connection. When speaking to Māori and Pacific students, our message needs to be simple and consistent – I am doing this because I care about you.

This approach needs to radiate throughout our educational institutions. It's critical that all staff are singing the same waiata – from the sales team, to tutors, to management. Consistency of message is key and it must come from the heart.

To help students transition into the workforce, we also need to focus on ensuring we are teaching them the softer skills that employers value. Academic qualifications will only get you so far if you don't have the soft skills to accompany them.

That is why we are continually looking at how we can better integrate the delivery of the teaching of these skills into our courses. It also means that we need to focus on ensuring we are hiring the right tutors. We want staff who embrace the opportunity to grow the person, who want to help students leave our campuses as better people than when they arrived, armed with the skills that employers are demanding. In that way, we can help set students up for life.

But it takes time, and an open teaching style, to support learners to develop many of these soft skills. Resilience and communication, for example, are essential, but open and robust conversations do not come naturally to many Māori and Pacific. This runs deep in our culture – know your place, don't talk back and show respect.

Setting the next gen up for success.

Robust and open discussions, which are common around the Pākehā dinner table, simply don't happen in many Māori or Pacific settings. That is why we're acutely aware of the need to cultivate opportunities in our classrooms for learners to express and own their opinions.

And to support this, it is important the workforce is reflective of the students we're teaching. We want our students to be able to relate to and see themselves in the tutors we employ. We are privileged to have a high number of Māori and Pacific students and this means we need to be aiming to also have a high number of Māori and Pacific teaching staff.

But this is more than just having tutors who can speak te reo, it is about having the staff who understand, respect and acknowledge our students' cultures. That is why it is critical for all staff to be culturally competent. Unfortunately, cultural disconnect is a real thing and it is more likely to occur when there is a divergence between staff and students.

When you have a culturally competent and engaged workforce, who want to work with students to help them grow, develop and thrive, you will find magic happens. You create the environment that allows real change to occur and you can set the next generation up for success.

That is what all tertiary education providers should be aiming for.

"Unfortunately cultural disconnect is a real thing and it is more likely to occur when there is a divergence between staff and students."

Talanoa Ako: Talking about education and learning.

Gabrielle-Sisifo Makisi

Manager Strategy and Integration, Parent Information and Community Intelligence, Ministry of Education

"Pacific do not underperform in education because they are not capable but rather the system does not fully serve us."

I have been an educator and advocated for equitable education outcomes for Pacific communities for over 30 years, from a classroom teacher to middle manager in schools to now a Ministry of education official.

Pacific do not underperform in education because they are not capable but rather the system does not fully serve us. A crucial factor for raising achievement is the building

Photo: NZMA Rotorua

of equitable partnerships between schools, parents, families, and communities in order to encourage and support the learner's education journey. To do this, Pacific parents, families, and communities need to strengthen their knowledge of the education system so they can champion their children's learning.

As a diasporic population, Pacific need to re-imagine their role in their children's learning journeys to include spiritual (tapua'I) support and more practical support such as advocating. This would be achieved through building knowledge about what is required at every level of the pathway from early learning to university and employment.

Our parents need to know how to engage fully with such areas as the NCEA system, how to read reports, what questions they need to ask to get support and how to support their children's literacy and numeracy, time-management, revision, pathways and career choices. These are key components of the Ministry's Talanoa Ako programme. This programme supports Pacific to build their knowledge so they can support their children and build relationships and partnerships with schools.

> "We are embarking on generational change here – allowing parents, students and families to access and participate in lifelong learning now and in the future."

Resources such as the Talanoa Ako Guided Resources and Tapasa support schools to build their Pacific capability so they are responsive to Pacific and ensure all their learners are in an environment inducive to success. One size does not fit all.

What Pacific told us.

The Talanoa Ako programme was evaluated using Pacific methods and methodologies which resulted in over 1,600 in depth Talanoa. Key areas identified of importance by this 'voice' which need to be part of an 'As and By Pacific' holistic solution to underachievement were:

- A system which is founded on Identity, language, and culture – Curriculum and pedagogy.
- Improved access for Pacific – Curriculum, learning and community and sector support.
- Pacific visibility in the pathway – Teachers, curriculum, role models and mentors.
- Attention to Pacific wellbeing, that success is determined by a holistic approach which includes mental health.
- Response and attention to racism in the system.

Talanoa Ako – Pacific led solutions.

The Talanoa Ako programme is creating real change for Pacific communities by ensuring that Pacific parents, families, and communities can become champions of their children's learning journeys by building their knowledge of the education sector. Not only that, parents are given the support to pursue their own education – undertaking tertiary study to build confidence in their own knowledge and be a role model for their children. We are embarking on generational change here – allowing parents, students and families to access and participate in lifelong learning now and in the future.

Talanoa Ako is part of the Ministry of Education's Action plan for Pacific education 2020-2030 and has won the Sunpix people's choice awards two years running in 2019 and 2020. We are very proud of this achievement as the award is nominated and voted for by Pacific communities and shows the value of and support for this As and By programme. This programme has grown the confidence of Pacific in culturally safe environments to feel safe to learn, be informed and have the capability to debate and discuss their children's learning with educational experts in their Pacific language or English. It continues to be informed by a Pacific evaluation process.

As and By Pacific.

As and By Pacific is the model of design, development, delivery, and evaluation utilised by Talanoa Ako and its related initiatives. The development of this Pacific response began in 2012 from what Pacific told us through the national fono. This was built upon from the Talanoa Ako evaluations and tested by Talanoa groups. The programme is delivered and adapted to fit the communities it serves.

Pacific communities told us that until equitable partnerships are normalised between them and education providers and agencies, there is an uneven power dynamic. An As and By Pacific approach was said to be more effective as it responds to the needs of Pacific and empowers parents, families and communities to take control of their success. 'As Pacific' means creating a Pacific centric environment which is culturally safe, for example, the use of Pacific languages and Pacific protocols. 'By Pacific' means delivering programmes through credible community leaders and experts.

Through collective knowledge 'As and By Pacific,' we can create lifelong change as it is led by Pacific in their communities and families and therefore more sustainable and able to be systematised. It is not about creating scholarship programmes and lowering tertiary study entry requirements, it's about listening to what Pacific want and need. This means creating a system embedded with Pacific knowledge, research, experiences and culture from the ground up.

"Gaps in Pacific students' achievement will persist unless universities and other institutions adopt a system-wide approach to equity which is based on Pacific knowledge, that is culturally safe and utilises an As and By Pacific Framework."

A system-wide approach to equity.

Gaps in Pacific students' achievement will persist unless universities and other institutions adopt a system-wide approach to equity which is based on Pacific knowledge, that is culturally safe and utilises an As and By Pacific Framework.

Education providers can do their part by embedding best practice in their policies and recruiting the right people. This involves deliberately strengthening the Pacific capability of non-Pacific and building Pacific capacity across their institutions.

The Talanoa Ako programme, related initiatives and evaluation findings provide useful insights to enhance this process and ensure Pacific people are involved in major decision-making to enable them to achieve 'As and By Pacific.'

Pacific are motivated, enthusiastic, and ready to be a part of the educational solution to underachievement from an appreciative inquiry model of framing that involves building on existing strengths. Pacific success is achieving as Pacific, strong in our identities, languages and cultures and western knowledge and ways of being. As a result, able to compete and excel in Aotearoa.

Section three

Considerations for change.

Conclusion.

There is a clear need for change so that we can reduce the number of underserved ākonga in Aotearoa.

As has been demonstrated, by focusing our efforts on improving educational outcomes for all learners, we can realise immense economic and social benefits.

If we lift identifiable underserved ākonga to achieve at the current national average, we would be lifting more than 66,000 Kiwis aged between 25 and 49 years old. This would deliver an economic benefit of almost $11 billion over 30 years, after adjusting for labour force participation.

But the case for change isn't only economic, it is also moral. New Zealand prides itself on having a world-class universal education system. But that means every New Zealander, regardless of their socio-economic standing, ethnicity, or health status, should have the same opportunity to succeed in our education system.

Unfortunately, the statistics show that this is not currently the case. Our education system is failing too many Māori, Pacific and people with disabilities. That is why we find these groups over-represented amongst Aotearoa's underserved ākonga.

In undertaking this research, UP Education had the privilege of talking to a wide range of stakeholders – policymakers, academics support groups, educators and students – who generously shared their experiences and insights.

We found a surprising consensus about the changes required to lift the educational outcomes of more Māori, Pacific and disabled learners.

Across the sector, we need to invest in a diverse set of learning environments, public and private, that are accessible and welcoming to different learners. These need to reflect the different cultures of Aotearoa's population, as well as tailor teaching and learning approaches that meet the individual needs of students. We require all staff members, no matter their role, to understand that they have an important part to play in supporting and connecting with all ākonga.

We need to do better at keeping students engaged in education at secondary school by encouraging them to embrace their passions and interests, and our schools need to teach students life skills and provide them with meaningful qualifications so that they are ready for the

Photo: Yoobee Colleges

> "Adopting and investing in tried and tested learning programmes that have been codesigned with Māori, Pacific, and disabled communities to create system-wide change for underserved learners."

workforce. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work.

Students need to see themselves reflected in their course materials and amongst the teaching workforce, and we need to ensure the education workforce has been provided adequate cultural training. Too often, underserved learners fall victim to low expectations.

And we need to understand that many students are facing a number of barriers and competing priorities. That is why we have to work proactively with not only them, but their whānau and community, in true partnership, to build trust and ensure they are supported to succeed.

Other suggested considerations for change to reduce the number of underserved ākonga include:

- Adopting and investing in tried and tested learning programmes that have been codesigned with Māori, Pacific and disabled communities to create system-wide change for underserved learners.
- Investing and implementing tailored learning plans that focus on each individual ākonga, identifying their barriers to education and developing a strategy to address these.
- Introducing improved wraparound services – social workers, counsellors, support workers and careers advisors – dedicated to working with hard-to-reach students.
- Introducing accessibility legislation with clear standards for post-secondary education providers with a focus on mainstreaming accessibility.
- Implementing national best practice for support services that work regularly with students at risk of being underserved in education.
- Encouraging innovation and flexibility in the post-secondary education sector with the implementation of incentives to improve educational outcomes for hard-to-reach learners.
- Increasing the visibility of Māori, Pacific and people with disabilities in the education sector through a focused recruitment strategy and workforce development strategy.
- Facilitating education providers to partner with iwi to deliver education programmes through marae, with a tikanga-based learning approach.
- Providing improved mechanisms for Māori, Pacific and disabled students to have a stronger voice on decisions and strategies that impact them.
- Ensuring the teaching of soft and life skills is built into all courses, so that all ākonga leave a course not only academically qualified but also work-ready.
- Expanding vocational trades training into more secondary schools through partnership with tertiary providers, with the aim of keeping more young people engaged with education.
- Undertaking a review of curriculums so that they are immersive and culturally inclusive. Ensure course materials reflect a modern New Zealand and that all students can see themselves in the material they are learning from.
- Creating a sense of belonging and positive learning environment through cultural motifs, artworks, posters and wayfinding that make all students feel welcome.

We hope these insights and recommendations go some way to contributing to a conversation about practical steps that can be taken to ensure our education system can better meet the needs of more Māori, Pacific and people with disabilities.

Finally, UP Education would like to thank all those who contributed so generously to the development of this report.

Poipoia te kākano kia puawai
Nurture the seed and it will blossom.

EDUCATION