

Case study - Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park

**PREPARED FOR FOOD AND FIBRE CENTRE OF VOCATIONAL
EXCELLENCE**

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BACKGROUND

The Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence (FFCoVE) is committed to supporting vocational education innovation and excellence within the Food and Fibre sector. It does this by promoting quality initiatives that result in positive outcomes for learners, employers, employees, iwi Māori and other stakeholders within the industry and beyond.

By showcasing these initiatives, the Food and Fibre CoVE encourages greater collaboration across the Primary sector, provides a platform for shared practice and innovation, and increases knowledge for all of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

With this kaupapa in mind, this paper provides a case study of the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park (the Park) as an example of successful innovation and development that supports people, businesses, industry, and the Northland region to achieve better economic and social outcomes. This paper outlines the design, operational model and outcomes of the Park and measures these against the Vocational Excellence Framework¹.

We know from previous research that Parks or “Hubs” are a popular model for connecting jobseekers and employers while providing opportunities for skills development, promoting business growth, and supporting community cohesion.

The Park was chosen as a case study as it champions these values and seeks to support its community through workforce development, education and training programmes, research and development and supports existing and emerging businesses to grow and prosper.

Overview of the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park

The Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park is about growing people, innovation, and enterprise. The Park aims to connect local people, businesses, and industry to create opportunities for growth and development that provide tangible benefits for all while being value based, and sustainable.

The Park is a 240- hectare rural site located just outside of Kaikohe. It is owned by Far North Holdings Limited and works in partnership with Northland Inc, Ngati Rangi, local businesses and national organisations.

The total cost of Stage One development was \$48 Million, which consisted of \$19.5M from the Provincial Growth Fund, \$8M from Ngāpuhi Assist Holdings Company investment in Kaikohe Berry Fruit operation and \$20.5M from Far North Holdings Limited.

The Park was officially opened in June 2023. As such it is still imbedding its operating model, and learning and evolving as it moves into Stage Two of its development.

The Park has been established to be a centre of innovative business practices. Its vision is to increase investment and wealth in the region by:

- attracting businesses to the Park and supporting their development and growth,
- creating employment for the local community and region,
- delivering education and training opportunities,

¹ [The Vocational Excellence Framework](#)

- championing a circular economy model², leading to increased environmental sustainability,
- providing a space for research and development, and
- adding to overall regional capability development.

This focus on business development, innovation and sustainability ensures businesses and people are provided with the best possible opportunity for growth.

THE OPERATING MODEL

The Park offers a unique operating model based strongly on shared values and vision. Businesses and organisations choosing to operate within the Park are strongly encouraged to adhere to these values and share similar principles and philosophies in terms of how they operate.

The following provides an overview of the Park's operating model, examples of established businesses and organisations currently in the Park and how these businesses run within the parameters of the model.

Shared services and hot desks

The Park provides shared facilities for businesses and organisations. Examples of some of the businesses currently located at the Park include research and product development laboratories, education providers, Horticulture businesses, Government Organisations and Māori owned businesses.

The Mahinga Innovation Centre provides hot desks and meeting rooms for organisations and businesses to hire on a permanent and part-time/casual basis. Facilities include dedicated front of house staff, video conferencing facilities, kitchen, and stationary facilities as well as a privately operated on-site cafe.

Co-working spaces within the Centre provides the opportunity for organisations to work alongside each other to encourage sharing, knowledge transfer and collaboration. This means businesses have access to shared resources, helping to reduce overall business costs.

² a [circular economy](#) is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible.

Further business support is offered by Northland Inc. through access to Business Growth Advisors. These Advisors are available to organisations within the Park to help them work through their business needs and provide the tools, mentorship, advice, and expertise bespoke to each business.



The circular economy model that underpins the operation of the Park is also evident at the Mahinga centre. Businesses onsite are encouraged to ensure all waste is used to its maximum value and where possible is renewable, reusable, or recycled.

Collective collaboration

The Park strongly encourages collaboration between business and organisations located within the Park. The Park encourages active partnerships and knowledge sharing between organisations and provides facilities that support this cooperation.

Through this form of collaboration, the Park hopes to enable opportunities for businesses to innovate, collaborate and network with other like-minded organisations. By working in proximity, businesses can share ideas, resources, and expertise.

An example of this cooperative approach is the Natural products cluster.

CASE STUDY: Natural Products cluster

The Natural Products cluster is made up of 14 natural therapy companies that have formed a collective. The cluster aims to share resources, experiences and learn and support each other's business practices.

Businesses in the cluster share access to laboratory space within the Mahinga Centre and range from small homebased start-ups to larger established brands ready for export distribution.



The cluster is overseen by Suzanne Hall a successful entrepreneur and business owner, with years of experience in the cosmetics industry. Suzanne supports these businesses through direct mentoring and through connecting them to each other.

Businesses can share experiences, learn best practice methods, innovate, and work with each other for mutual benefit.

Products produced at the Park are distributed to shops, salons, spas and airports throughout New Zealand and the world.

While the inputs for many products are sourced from around New Zealand and overseas, businesses also use some of the natural ingredients growing in and around the Park which promotes the symbiotic relationship between the natural environment, and the Park.

While the cluster approach provides a great example of collective collaboration to support business growth and innovation, it's not without its challenges

Some of the smaller business owners are new to running businesses and don't yet have the experience necessary to build and develop their products. This means more intensive support has been required through mentoring and business support than originally anticipated.

However, with Te Pūkenga being based onsite at the Park, the cluster is now exploring opportunities to upskill through courses offered at Te Pūkenga.

Funding and resourcing to sustain the businesses within the cluster is also limited. While businesses pay a small fee to cover lab expenses and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) certification this doesn't cover all the related business costs.

To fully support this Cluster model, alternative funding and resourcing avenues need to be obtained to make the model more sustainable going forward.

Overall, the cluster model provides a good example of how like-minded businesses can work together to learn and grow, share resources and foster innovation, and collaborate on shared challenges to boost business momentum, build communities of practice, and support emerging businesses.

Circular economy and sustainability

The Park is unique given that it's founded on circular economy principles. This restorative and regenerative design allows for the sustainable elimination of waste and enables businesses to reuse products and materials at their highest value, as well as regenerate natural systems.

The Park is leading by example in this regard and could act as a model for other similar organisations, Hubs etc. to emulate.

This sustainability approach encourages businesses to think differently about how they manage their waste and resources and creates opportunities for businesses to collaborate and leverage their by-products. From a business point of view this helps reduce costs and enables businesses to benefit from each other while lessening the strain on local infrastructure thereby making a positive social and environmental impact.

An example of this in action is the use of water from the Matawii Dam located on the Park. Water from the dam can be used as the water source for the Park and eventually for the horticultural businesses located onsite as well as emergency firefighting and back up water for Kaikohe in times of drought. The water from the dam provides a reliable water source and means the lands surrounding the Park can be better utilized for horticultural purposes.

In turn, the horticulture businesses, will eventually provide their by-products to other businesses within the Park, for example ingredients used in the development of natural products for the Natural Therapy Cluster.

Workforce development: creating local employment opportunities

Te Tai Tokerau faces many economic and social challenges with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and a predominately young and growing population. The development of the Park provides an ideal vehicle through which to address some of the needs of the region.

The establishment of businesses and location of education providers on site presents a means to employment and education for those seeking work and training. The challenge for the Park is how to promote, leverage and facilitate those opportunities for the benefit of the region and its people.

Stage One of development saw the construction of the main buildings and infrastructure, the opening of the Matawii Dam and the first businesses to the Park. This created initial job opportunities for locals and laid the foundation for future opportunities.

Critical to promoting and ensuring the success of the Park is the Skills and Employment Co-ordinator. Based at the Park, their role is to work with individuals, businesses, industry, and the community to make connections and act as a trusted advisor that understands each player's needs. They can connect the right people or organisations to each other, to meet whatever needs are required, be that work-placement, recruitment, funding opportunities or other demands.

A main priority of the Park is creating employment opportunities for locals who are either unemployed or underemployed and linking them to employers within the Park. Any identified skill development and training can be further supported by the education providers located onsite, or if necessary, the Skills and Employment Coordinator can connect to other existing providers. Skills acquisition and recognition is prioritised over educational qualifications.

The Park also supports Māori owned and run businesses. Āteanui Limited a whānau-based company was one of the first businesses to move some of their production to the Park. Āteanui Limited has used land within the Park to grow peruperu (Māori potatoes) which has also contributed to the regeneration of traditional forms of Māori farming.

CASE STUDY: Āteanui Limited – Peruperu potential

Āteanui is the name of a Kaikohe based whānau company that can be interpreted to mean, 'Space of Potential'. Moana Timoko and Tahu Warmington (owner/operators) alongside their whānau have created spaces that enhance learning potential, including Te Wā Kaikohe.

Te Wā Kaikohe started as an education hub that supported the educational achievement of whānau and tamariki of all ages with particularly successful results for NCEA ākonga. That kaupapa has recently been put to rest to allow the whānau to mobilise their services and to focus more of their time on cultivating peruperu (Māori potatoes). The peruperu journey began in 2020 by planting and growing 1000 seeds/tubers to establish a peruperu seed bank. They have since grown these seeds/tubers to over 150,000+.



The whānau grow on their own whenua and also started leasing a plot on the Park in 2022. Other crops like corn and kamokamo are cultivated to separate the different strands of the peruperu. Options are currently being discussed to move around different plots of land on a two-year cycle to allow the whenua to replenish between growing phases.

Throughout the last three years peruperu, kamokamo and corn have been distributed as koha for a number of whānau kaupapa including hura kōhatu (unveilings) and tangihanga. Some peruperu have been sold to help pay some of their workers. The whānau are also exploring innovative waste product options including the development of a range of spirit beverages; cleaning products and peruperu gas for their machinery and equipment.

The Maramataka Māori (the Māori calendar) guides the way Āteanui do business. This includes observing tohu (signs) from the environment and adhering to traditional mahinga kai practices. The whānau offer educational wānanga (learning sessions) to the community and have also created learning opportunities for ākonga (students) from Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Kaikohe. Āteanui have supported the ākonga to build up their own bank of peruperu seeds/tubers over the past two years.

Āteanui Limited have created an investment model for whānau that will provide kai and/or additional revenue for those local to the region. More recently Moana and Tahu were able to share their investment model with approximately 200 men as they were invited on the Matariki Public Holiday to the Northland Region Corrections Facility. The kaupapa of their kōrero was also focussed on how they apply their traditional learnings of Puanga/Matariki and the Maramataka to their business operations. This experience has triggered meaningful inspiration for the whānau of Āteanui Limited and will certainly influence their future endeavours.

Education and Training

One of the key components of the Park is an emphasis on education, training, and skill development. As part of its ethos, the Park is committed to supporting on-the-job learning, vocational education, work placement, and the formal recognition of skills.

The goal is to have learning and development occurring in the Park across all participating businesses and organisations. To help facilitate this, the Park has two education providers, Te Pūkenga and Regent Training permanently located onsite. This means students from Kaikohe and the surrounding towns, don't have to travel to either Kerikeri or Whangarei to gain access to further education and qualifications.

Te Pūkenga

Te Pūkenga has a campus located at the Park with classroom space and workshops, including automotive and building facilities. Having Te Pūkenga at the Park provides education opportunities for students but also access to industry, businesses and research and development organisations.

While training and skill acquisition needs to be of value to both individuals and employers it also needs to consider labour market trends and desired workforce/business outcomes. It is therefore advantageous to have Te Pūkenga based at the Park, with access to a national network of provision that it can tap into for the overall benefit of businesses and learners. It can provide learning and professional development opportunities that compliment and meet the needs of those organisations based at the Park while providing formal qualifications for locals that are immediately valuable and transferable across businesses and sectors.

While Te Pūkenga is still building its suite of provision, currently it offers a range of study programmes, including automotive and mechanical engineering, carpentry and construction, Te Reo Māori, apiculture, commercial road transport, and sports exercise.

They also have strong links with the local Kura in Kaikohe providing work experience for year 12-13 Rangatahi who work at reception greeting guests and provide administrative support. The students are paid for their work.

The Park is also the home of Regent Training which provides further options for students to staircase through different levels of study.

Regent Training

Regent Training is a Private Training Establishment that caters for mostly NZQF Level 1 and 2 learning. It supports rangatahi from the area who have had little or no formal education and provides a space for them to learn within a whānau support structure that is culturally safe and able to meet their learning needs and aspirations.

The campus serves the Kaikohe area but also provides transport for learners from as far away as Paihia, Kawakawa and Opononi.

Learners at Regent Training have recently helped to build houses on the Park for community and social housing initiatives. This learning has been further supported by Te Pūkenga and has provided valuable learning opportunities for rangatahi studying at these providers.

Opportunities into employment and further education include regional businesses and pathways to Te Pūkenga and other Private Training Establishments. Each learner has their own graduation plan developed specifically for them by their tutor to help support them once they are ready to take their next steps.

Other learning opportunities

The Park also has links with other education providers including, People Potential, Te Tai Tokerau trades training, and QRC tourism and hospitality, based in Queenstown.

Furthermore, the Park has a good working relationship with the Northland Region Corrections Facility which is located just down the road from the Park. The Park has facilitated learning and work opportunities for those being held under Corrections' supervision which has included work on construction and infrastructure within the Park.

CASE STUDY: Kaikohe Berry Fruit Limited Partnership

Kaikohe Berryfruit (KBLP) is one of the first companies to be operational at the Park. The company was founded in 2021 and is in a partnership between Ngāpuhi Asset Holding company and Far North Holdings Ltd.



The company's objective is to be a sustainable and productive berry growing operation that delivers employment opportunities for the local community.

The company operates 10 hectares of growing tunnels making it one of the biggest covered berry operations in the country. KBLP is striving to provide year-round employment for as many staff as possible and having access to water from the Matawii dam allows KBLP to plan further horticultural planting on their site.

KBLP currently employs approximately 12 permanent staff, however the seasonal nature of the business means this number increases to around 80 during their peak harvest time.

KBLP have worked closely with the Park and its Skills & Employment Coordinator (SEC) since its establishment. the SEC has worked with them and MSD to help find local workers, providing recruitment services, and funding advice as well as pastoral care and on-boarding services for newly hired employees.

The fruit the company produces is sold as fresh berries in local Kaikohe supermarkets as well as around the greater North Island. Having the produce sold locally demonstrates the direct value the company and its employees add to the economy and community.

Where possible, the company also supports ongoing training and development of its staff. Some have gained qualifications like forklift licenses and working at heights certificates, while training on the job has provided upskilling opportunities and led to more skilled orchard workers.

During the off season the company and the Park have worked together to source alternative work placements where possible, to support workers when there isn't enough fruit processing work available. This approach to work rotation will continue once other businesses on the Park are fully established and operational following Stage two development.

ATTRACTING MORE BUSINESSES TO THE PARK

With the Park now open and the initial businesses up and running the Park is looking to the next stage of development. The aim of Stage Two is to attract more businesses and embed the Park's operating model.

The Park is a significant investment in the future of Northland and the presence of more new and existing businesses in the Park will promote further economic growth for the region. Stage Two of the development will further strengthen the Park's capabilities and make it an even more attractive destination for businesses and entrepreneurs.

A significant part of Stage Two is building a case for the development of more manufacturing and processing to be based at the Park.

The Park is currently working on a business case to build a shared food and beverage manufacturing facility. This facility will enable local companies to process their own produce and ingredients ready for distribution and sale. Currently businesses in the region must transport their raw materials to other parts of the country to have them manufactured. Having a manufacturing facility at the Park will help reduce cost barriers for those business, lower emissions and create employment opportunities for locals.

The Park is in the process of consulting with industry to ensure any food and beverage facility built at the Park aligns with their manufacturing and business needs.

As part of this initiative, the Park is partnering with the FoodBowl (part of the NZ Food and Innovation Network) to use a temporary manufacturing plant at Opuia as a graduation facility for food and beverage production. The FoodBowl is currently based in Auckland is a testing and early-stage manufacturing facility. Some of its customers are struggling to find affordable manufacturing facilities once they are ready to leave the FoodBowl. Supporting the development of a graduation facility at the Park will help to alleviate this pressure and enable it to support more businesses to produce new and innovative food and beverage products.

Having a manufacturing facility in the region will hopefully encourage bigger companies to move their production to Northland. The principles of a circular economy will also mean these companies can participate in bioprocessing at the facility. This will allow their by-products to be used by other businesses, for example, in things like, cosmetics, agricultural and horticultural products, fermentation, and waste-to-energy.

Other potential business opportunities coming to the Park include coffee processing, Manuka honey production, a shared brewing and fermentation cluster, expansion of the Natural products cluster, more construction activity including prefab housing, joinery, and a potential digital industry partnership with Chorus. They are also planning on soon opening a second laboratory dedicated to scientific research into Māori based Rongoā.

ALIGNMENT TO VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

In 2021, the FFCoVE as part of their 'Taking Stock' Project produced the Vocational Excellence Framework (the Framework). Based around a set of rubrics, the Framework provides a benchmark for the sector and providers to assess elements of their delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the strive for excellence.

The development of the Framework was based on the results of an international best practice literature review, and the rubrics then validated with New Zealand industry and VET providers.

We have applied this Framework to the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park focusing on rubrics³ most relevant to operation of the Park. These rubrics are:

- Work-based learning
- Employers and industry bodies
- Underserved learners
- Adult learners and career changes
- Ākonga Māori

The Framework provides a reference for excellence in the VET system however, it is not a precise evaluation tool. Because the Park isn't an education provider as such it doesn't fit neatly into the Framework and its rubrics, in particular the quality and compliance-based measures. However, the Park does provide connections to education providers, industry, and champions workforce development that supports VET services. The results of the Framework evaluation therefore are an indication of excellence only as opposed to a definitive evaluation of excellence.

Our review of the Park against the Framework found a majority of Acceptable or Good ratings. It should be noted however, that the Park has only been open and operational since June 2023 and as such it is still to fully establish itself. Once fully operational it is possible that more rubrics would be applicable or rate higher against the Framework.

The Park performs at either an Acceptable or Good rating across the Work-Based Learning, Employers and Industry Bodies, Adult Learners and Career Changers, Under Served Learners and Ākonga Māori rubrics.

The Park's values encourage employers and employees to access wider learning opportunities, including workplace-based learning, and opportunities for career progression leading to full time permanent employment for the employee or opportunities for self-employment. Furthermore, it encourages participating Employers and Industry to embed professional development and upskilling for their employees and to provide workplace-based training.

Once more companies are established and operational at the Park it is likely that there will be more occasions for employees and employers to participate in further workplace based training and development. This would include supporting adult learners and career changes to develop new skills and to explore other career pathways within the different organisations based at the Park.

³Appendix One contains the Excellence Framework and relevant rubrics.

In terms of Ākonga Māori the Park has built strong relationships with local Iwi and Hapu. It has tikanga Māori embedded in many of its operational functions, and mātauranga Māori is at the forefront of many of its supported initiatives.

Underserved learners are currently being supported by the two education providers based at the Park, Te Pūkenga and Regent Training. The Park works with these providers to support under-served learners providing them opportunities to explore career pathways and supporting equitable access to education and employment services.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park is a significant advancement opportunity for Northland and has the potential to yield many positive outcomes for the region for years to come. The Park is innovative in its approach to business growth, workforce development, research and development, sustainable eco-systems and its relationship with mana whenua and the local community.

The key to its continued success lies in attracting more businesses that are willing to buy-into these co-operative principles. However, encouraging more businesses to establish themselves at the Park is not simply a case of 'if you build it, they will come': businesses require more than buildings and infrastructure.

Businesses will seek a guarantee that their commercial needs will be maximised through the collaborative and co-operative network and activities they can access at the Park, such as sound talent management and recruitment strategies, training and development, business mentoring, and investment in research and development.

As the Park is newly established and just now entering Stage Two of its development, more time is required to fully evaluate the impact the Park will have on the region. However, its current model for supporting businesses and people has the potential be ground breaking and to act as an exemplar for other similar initiatives.

Success breeds success, and in this the Park will need continued investment from its stakeholders and new businesses to build upon its current service offerings and to realise its potential as a game changing, transformational organisation for Te Tai Tokerau.

It is recommended that the Food and Fibre CoVE continue to support the Park by championing this model and promoting the Park to its industry partners, national and local government and the wider Food and Fibre sector.

ADDENDUM: FOSTERING INNOVATION, COLLABORATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY – AN UPDATE ON THE NGAWHA INOVATION AND ENTERPRISE PARK

The initial case study exploring the model used by Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park (the Park) was well received by the sector. Interest in Ngawha as an example of innovative development and implementation has been valuable to the food and fibre sector to consider as many other regions are interested in establishing similar education and employment 'Hub' concepts. To capitalise on this interest, we have undertaken a follow-up interview with the Park's Chief Connector and Skills Employment Coordinator.

This follow-up aims to review the Park's progress as it enters the next stage of development and establishment, including, new initiatives underway, any changes implemented, success and growth, any challenges encountered, and lessons learned.

The current model

Over the past 10 months, the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park has demonstrated its potential as a transformative initiative for the Northland region. During this time, the Park has faced challenges but has continued to evolve and expand while maintaining their core model which continues to be underpinned by:

Collaboration and Cooperative Principles:

- The Park has evolved through a collaborative effort involving the council, mana whenua, local businesses, and the regional economic development agency.
- The operating model is focused on fostering collaboration and helping to solve industry problems.

Community Engagement and Alignment:

- The Park can be described as an organic partnership that supports, the aspirations of locals, mana whenua and wider the Northland community.
- It provides opportunities for local people, iwi Māori, businesses, and innovation to generate opportunities for the community.

Sustainability and Circular Economy:

- The Park functions on the principle of a circular economy, designed with sustainability in mind to enable on-site businesses to reuse and regenerate.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship:

- The Park aims to expand the economic potential of the region, by providing a place where locally produced resources can be manufactured and adding value to existing businesses through innovative approaches.
- It provides facilities like the Mahinga Innovation Centre to foster a collaborative and innovative environment.

The Park has actively promoted its model and offerings to businesses and has continued to support people in the region through new education, training, and employment initiatives. The model remains the cornerstone of the Parks values and is the basis for its business decisions. Any new businesses looking to establish themselves at the Park are often drawn to the Park because of its operating model and ethos.

Challenges faced by the Park

The Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park has experienced several challenges including inducting new businesses into the Park and navigating funding and regulatory requirements.

While the Park has seen strong interest from businesses wanting to be part of the Park, they have struggled to secure permanent tenants, largely due to economic factors as the lingering result of Covid, and economic recession.

In particular, the rising cost of living has significantly impacted businesses, making it difficult for them, particularly start-ups, to commit to leases and scale up their operations at the Park. The lack of tenants has affected the Park's ability to build more buildings to accommodate more tenants.

The Park has also reported receiving less support over the past 10 months from its owner, Far North Holdings Limited (FNHL), as it also experiences the same financial pressures as other businesses. Contributing to this is that FNHL's focus is split across other important projects, particularly housing provision, and their relatively small team. The regional economic development agency, Northland Inc, has provided reception support to activate the Mahinga Innovation Centre, but has had few resources to contribute to the activation and tenancies of the wider Park. Finding resources to provide dedicated staff to activate, promote, and develop the Park's vision has been a significant challenge.

Meeting key performance indicators (KPIs) set by funders has also proven difficult for the Park, as the dynamic nature of their work requires them to pivot and focus on different priorities throughout the year in response to evolving industry needs. This can mean the Park may miss the mark on certain KPIs funders were expecting to be met.

Furthermore, the key staff roles at the Park, such as the workforce development and business engagement positions, do not fit neatly within the core business of either FNHL or Northland Inc.

As connectors, facilitators, and knowledge brokers, these positions are crucial to the Park's success, but they are not easily funded through the Park's lease revenue at this early stage. The lack of a dedicated operating entity for the Park, that a range of philanthropic and commercial organisations can fund directly, has made it challenging to secure sustainable funding for these core positions.

These funding challenges are further exacerbated by the current climate of cost-saving and budget cuts across both government and local government levels, making it increasingly difficult to secure the necessary resources to support these critical connecting and facilitation roles.

To help address some of these challenges, the Ngawha team is exploring a joint venture between FNHL and Northland Inc., which could provide access to additional sources of philanthropic funding to support staff and further development.

The Skills and Employment Coordinator role remains important

To ensure that any businesses that locate at the Park have access to the workforce and skills they require, the Park has a Skills and Employment Coordinator. Having this service available is viewed by many businesses as essential when considering locating there permanently.

The Coordinator's role is multi-faceted: acting as a work broker to keep seasonal employees in continuous work so that businesses have a workforce when they need it; to connect businesses and workers to vocational training providers to ensure that they are able to acquire the skills to do the work businesses need; and to work with the local schools to show ākonga pathways to careers that were previously unavailable to them in the region. As an essential resource, the Coordinator has fostered connections between various industries, educational institutions, and employment opportunities.

Their efforts have positively impacted the community, particularly in opening up people's perceptions to different career pathways and technologies. This has been achieved through engaging industry, promoting the education, and training opportunities available as part of the Park and creating and furthering employment opportunities in the region. The following provides some examples of events and initiatives championed by the Skills and Employment Coordinator and other key staff members.

Industry Engagement

The Park has hosted a number of events over the past 10 months aimed at raising awareness and at increasing business opportunities.

“Food and beverage offer the biggest opportunity for growth in Northland and has significant potential to increase its productivity and grow its contribution to the national economy” (Far North Holdings Ltd CEO, 2024)

As part of their development plan the Park continues to work towards completing and initiating a shared food and beverage manufacturing facility (Food North) targeted at growing businesses that are not yet large enough to financially afford their own individual premises and equipment. This scale-up facility will enable F&B businesses to grow to a point where they are large enough to require and afford their own manufacturing premises. Food North will also be able to support businesses in scaling up production, refining their production processes, testing new products, and accessing advanced manufacturing equipment.

To garner support and interest in this initiative, the Park has run a series of hui to update interested parties on the facility's potential for manufacturing, collaboration, and business growth, as well as showcase how the facility would support education and employment.

They have received 20 letters of support from businesses enabling them to model demand and a business case has been completed, pending an economic impact assessment. They are aiming to have funding secured by September 2024 with a view to having the facility open by the end of 2026.

The manufacturing facility will continue to champion the Park's sustainable ethos by installing solar panels and organic composting. As part of the design the Park is looking into underground heat exchange systems using water from the Dam to cool and heat the facility.

The Park has also hosted a "Northland Specialty Coffee Industry Hui", in February 2024, providing a platform for industry players to connect, share knowledge, and explore opportunities for growth. The Park may well be the best location for a shared processing

facility for specialty coffee and to enable the processing of by-products into high value bio active ingredients and functional food.

The expertise required to grow the best plants to meet specialty grade coffee and to develop and process high-tech ingredients will provide skilled pathways to employment and increase the opportunities from STEM subjects at school. The industry is at the very early stages of development and there are a few hurdles to overcome to scale it up, but the Park remains committed to supporting this industry as it develops.

The Park continues to host other industry and business throughout the year. These are generally aimed to sharing knowledge and innovative practice, connecting businesses to each other, and championing business growth opportunities.

Education and Training

One of the Park's key contributions to Te Tai Tokerau is the championing of education and training opportunities for young people, job seekers and the under-employed.

The Park has opened up opportunities for locals to experience different industries and career options strengthened by education and training.

One example of where the Park has hosted and promoted opportunities for young people to experience other industries is Techstep⁴. This event aimed to expose secondary students (year 9 and 10) to diverse industries, encouraging them to explore various career options by attracting companies from digital and IT, horticulture, forestry, and aviation sectors. The aim was to broaden their knowledge of the types of jobs available using technology and encourage young people to think about the education subjects required for them to work within that sector.

The event was designed to engage and inspire attendees by showcasing the types of technological innovation happening in the region and Aotearoa.

"If this is something they are interested in, they can align all their subjects so they can make it their career pathway." Regan Haika, Akoranga mahi ā-rehe Te Tai Tokerau

"Having a chance to bring something like this back to Te Tai Tokerau is wonderful for all of us. We're super passionate about STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths) and youth in Northland, and even if we create only one or two jobs, we can expose young Northlanders to this sort of technology."
(Sean Johnson, CE Merlin Labs NZ, (Graaf, 2023))

The Park serves a crucial function by bridging the gap between schools, training providers, and various industries. It provides a platform to showcase diverse career opportunities that may not be readily accessible to local students and job seekers. This exposure facilitates connections and opens doors for exploration into different professional fields. For example, the Park has had recent discussions with aviation trainers in Blenheim (NMIT, Te Pūkenga), exploring the possibility of bringing aviation and maritime courses to the mid-North region supported by Northtec, Te Pūkenga.

Furthermore, the Park's efforts extend to connecting educational institutions with businesses to ensure that training programmes meet the needs of the local industry. For instance, the Park has facilitated conversations between Merlin Labs, a company developing autonomous freight planes, and local training providers (Te Pūkenga) to explore opportunities for aviation and

⁴ <https://www.techstep.nz/techevents/>

maritime training in the region. This collaboration ensures that learners have access to exciting new industries and relevant training without having to leave the area, ultimately contributing to the region's economic development.

The Park also has a good working relationship with the Department of Corrections, located close to the Park. Currently Corrections has inmates working on construction skills on site at the Park, with feedback indicating a high level of enthusiasm from the participants. There are currently nine inmates involved in programmes aimed at teaching them construction and building skills. There is capacity to more than double the number of inmates in training.

The Park's goal is to expand the Corrections programme and the other trades training programmes to offer a wider range of trade skills, beyond just carpentry. This would allow inmates who may not be interested in or suited for construction work to still participate and develop other practical skills and knowledge. By diversifying the trades available, the programme aims to engage a broader spectrum of inmates and provide them with a more comprehensive set of vocational skills to aid in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society and the workforce upon release.

Meeting employer and job seeker needs

One of the most rewarding aspects of the Park is the positive impact the Park's staff are having on the local community, and most importantly, the Rangatahi (young people) in the region. The opportunities presented to young people through the Park's initiatives allow them to be exposed to a wider range of industries and career pathways beyond the traditional options available in the area.

Having a dedicated Skills and Employment Coordinator, who is deeply connected to the community and understands the challenges facing local people, means the Park can direct meaningful conversations with young people and help guide them towards exciting and successful career prospects.

"they (young people) are thinking more broadly...they're actually thinking about what they would like to do. Some of them are thinking entrepreneurially... saying I want to start my own business, and so they're dreaming." (Roberta, Skills and Employment Coordinator, Ngawha Innovation and Business Park)

Another key advantage of having a Coordinator is that it allows the Park to be more responsive to commercial timeframes that businesses operate within.

The Coordinator plays a crucial role in connecting businesses with jobseekers, particularly those from underemployed or seasonal worker cohorts. By maintaining a database of skilled workers and their availability, the Coordinator can quickly match businesses with suitable candidates. This approach has proven successful in recent recruitment drives, such as the Kaikohe BerryFruit recruitment, where almost 400 people applied for 40 plus jobs and for other orchards looking for staff at short notice to harvest crops.

Unlike national or local government organisations, which are sometimes seen as slow to respond, the Coordinator is able to quickly connect businesses with the workers they need, even on short notice. This is particularly valuable in an industry where time is of the essence.

Having an extensive network and database of skilled workers allows the Coordinator to quickly identify and mobilise the right people for the job. Businesses can pick up the phone, request a specific number of workers, and the Coordinator is able to have them on-site and ready to go within a matter of days.

Furthermore, the Coordinator's understanding of the local employment landscape and their ability to align job seekers with the right opportunities is a real value-add to the community. They are not just a passive intermediary, but an active partner in ensuring the viability and success of the businesses in the district. In a region where the regional agencies are struggling to keep up with the demands of the local business community, the Coordinator's bespoke approach and commitment to meeting the needs of both employers and employees make them a valuable asset.

Conclusion

This revisiting of the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park has provided valuable insights into the challenges and evolution of the Park's model as it enters the next stage of development. Despite still being in a relatively new phase of implementation, the Park has continued to be underpinned by its core model of collaboration, community engagement, sustainability, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

The Park has actively promoted its model and offerings to businesses, including plans for the shared food and beverage manufacturing facility. Through this active promotion the Park has helped raise awareness, increase business opportunities, and facilitated connections between industries.

Those businesses already established at the Park continue to grow and develop. The on-site training providers, Regent, and Te Pūkenga, are seeing more students enrolled and making connections with industry to deliver programmes aligned with innovative businesses, exposing Rangatahi to a variety of career options outside of traditional job opportunities.

Pivotal to this is the Park's staff. Their roles are invaluable in terms of facilitating relationships, connecting businesses with job seekers, and aligning training programmes with industry needs.

However, the Park continues to face hurdles in obtaining sustainable funding, to support staff roles. An increasingly tight economic environment, the time it is taking to secure new businesses at the Park (many of whom are start-ups looking for their own investment to grow), and reduced support available from the Park's owners and the regional economic development agency have all contributed to the Park's funding challenges.

Long term sustainability of the Park's activation will only be achieved once there are sufficient businesses at the Park to enable the staff and their activation activities to be funded. The Park is continuing to explore options that will enable it to raise philanthropic, government, impact, and commercial funding to support its ongoing development.

Despite the challenging environment, the Park's staff continue to be its biggest asset, working to connect and promote the Park's model and resources to support and grow businesses and provide education and employment opportunities for the local community.

As the Park navigates this phase of its development, it will be essential to address the funding and resource constraints to ensure the long-term viability of its operating model. While the funding challenges persist, the Park's model remains compelling to businesses and continues to generate positive outcomes for the local community, driving economic and personal successes. By building on this momentum, the Park can continue to sustain and provide growth opportunities for businesses and enable exciting opportunities for the people of Northland.

Appendix One: The Food and Fibre Vocational Excellence Framework

The following tables include the rubrics used to measure Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park against the Excellence Framework.

For more information on the Taking Stock Literature Review please refer to the Food and Fibre CoVE website: <https://foodandfibrecove.nz/knowledgebase/ffcove-kb/vocational-education/taking-stock-literature-review/>

Work-based Learning			
Attribute	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Participation Work-based learning encourages participation from employees and placement students by addressing barriers, particularly amongst underserved learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solutions to participation barriers are sought, when a barrier is identified (e.g., academic opportunities to upskill in numeracy and literacy). Pastoral care is provided to nurture confidence and connection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to participation are monitored by employer and training advisors. Employer and training advisors are highly skilled in pastoral care. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to participation are actively addressed by employer and training advisors (e.g., prior learning is assessed for tailored offering; hybrid offerings available across learning institutions to suit learners' circumstances). Employer and training advisors are particularly skilled in pastoral care for underserved learners.
Access Employers are committed to upskilling employees and actively facilitate work-based learning opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees have opportunity to access wider learning opportunities (e.g., digital resources). 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes are facilitated through the employer and supported by external training advisors. Programmes are flexible to meet learners' circumstances. Programmes are assessed using quality assurance processes. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes are actively facilitated through employer and supported by external training advisors. Partners with external training advisors.
Skills and competencies Work-based learning develops technical competency, wider employability, career progression, and industry permeability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees develop technical competency aligned with on-the-job tasks. Programme aligns with minimum standards of practice. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees achieve quality assured and industry recognised credentials. Employees upskill in soft skills. 	<i>As for Good, plus.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee career progression enhances industry permeability.

Employers and Industry Bodies

Attribute	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Participation Employers are involved in, and value, VET opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are aware of, and access, training opportunities for employees. Engage with appropriate training providers. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to the wider training network (e.g., support local or regional skills initiatives, involved with training design). 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a leadership approach to labour market training (e.g., is involved with VET reference groups). Are actively involved in public-private partnerships (PPP).
Access Employers are aware of workforce training needs and actively support employees to upskill.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are aware of organisation and employee training needs as a whole, and seek opportunities to upskill employees accordingly. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make efforts to support employees with specific learning needs. Empower employees to continually upskill. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively enable employee participation in training by removing barriers. Empower employees to seek additional training for current and future employment.
Systems Employers use good processes and systems to define and deliver workforce training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand quality training products and services. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document training needs and responses in a written training plan. Partner with communities and education stakeholders to develop training opportunities (e.g., flexible work experience partnerships). 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are actively engaged in defining and delivering quality training products and services. Are part of a community and/or industry body that prioritises workforce training.
Skills and credentials Employers have the skills and credentials to contribute to the training process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the necessary subject-matter skills to pass on to their own employees. Can identify learning and career pathways for their employees. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have good skills in training their employees. Contribute to learners' pastoral care and training needs. Are involved in the development of quality employee training products and services (is involved with national qualification development and reviews). 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have recognised credentials in training their employees.

Underserved Learners

Underserved learners include all learners that currently experience inequitable outcomes including, but not exhaustively, Māori, Pacific, neurodiverse, physically disabled, learners with low literacy and numeracy; Examples of local and representative groups and organisations here include iwi, industry and employers.

Attribute	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Access There is equity of access to learning programmes; time and location barriers are removed; the needs of diverse, underserved learners have been listened to, understood and acted upon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System builds towards equity of access based on targets where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools and actions have been put in place to address barriers to enrolment (e.g., support to complete forms, provision for remedial foundation skills in numeracy and literacy, etc.). Alternate modes of delivery are available to meet the needs of the learner. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> System consults with learners, local and representative groups and organisations to improve equity of access where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to enrolments are reduced. Targets are community influenced. Modes of delivery are flexible to meet the needs of the learner. The learner pathways for groups of 'like' learners are considered in programme development. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> System integrates input from learners, local and representative groups and organisations to achieve equity of access where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to enrolment are consistently overcome. Modes of delivery are fully flexible and can adapt to meet the needs of the learner. Programmes are developed to be learner-centric and customised to learners' needs.
Participation There is equity in the opportunity of participation; the needs of diverse, underserved learners have been listened to, understood and acted upon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some tools and actions have been put in place to build towards parity of participation considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to learning (e.g., financial support, transport, cost of living, using assisted technologies, etc). Learners' needs (e.g., cultural, physical, social, neurological). 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools and actions have been developed through consultation with learners, local and representative groups and organisations. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools and actions are actively developed and reviewed to build towards parity of participation with learners, local and representative groups, and organisations. Connections between 'like' learners are actively facilitated.

Attribute	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Systems Curriculum and learning environment is responsive to the needs of different underserved learner segments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers reflect on current practice and put in place tools to close the outcomes gap. Poor quality practices in institutions or workplaces are identified. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers demonstrate progress in reducing the outcomes gap. Learners, local and representative groups, and organisations are consulted on programme design and delivery. Outcomes are flexible and consistent with regional and national expectations. Educators are equipped and capable to deliver for all learners' needs. Previous learning experience is considered when developing individual learner pathways. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers close the outcomes gap; there is parity in outcomes between underserved learners and all other learners. Poor quality practices in institutions or workplaces are monitored and addressed. Learners, local and representative groups, and organisations input into programme design and delivery. Learning materials, resources and curriculum are culturally relevant and tailored to meet the intersectional needs of learners.

Adult Learners and Career Changers

Attribute	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Participation Acknowledges demand amongst adult learners and career changers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanisms exist for adult learners and career changers to participate in learning. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult learners and career changers have equal opportunities to participate in learning. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barriers to participation are mitigated (e.g., cost flexibility, learners' life-stage needs, opportunity cost of participation is minimised). Employers recognise and nurture skill potential in employees.
Access Modes of delivery and individual learning plans cater to the specific access needs of adult learners and career changers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible modes of study and support are available to accommodate different learners' needs. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual learning plans are tailored to the needs and circumstances of adult learners and career changers (e.g., prior learning is recognised, transitional support is available for learners with limited prior academic or employment experience). 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully flexible modes of study and support are available.
Systems Programme design is flexible and adapted to suit adult learners and career changer needs and acknowledge prior experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible and discrete learning is available (e.g., modular bitesize courses). 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible, discrete and stackable learning is available such as modular bitesize courses that can be aggregated into larger skills packages (e.g., micro-credentials stack to become full qualifications). Individual skills are recognised (e.g., badging framework). 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior learning and experience is recognised (e.g., connections are made and recognised between formal, non-formal and informal education systems).

Ākonga Māori

Attributes	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Systems Systems led change for Māori by Māori delivers exceptional learning experiences and aspired to learning outcomes through responsive practices and relevant provision.	Provider is aware of need to improve practices and provision to enhance outcomes for ākonga Māori, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsiveness of their practice. • Relevance of the provision. • Involving mana whenua, whānau, community and Māori organisation. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> Provider understands the role of practices and provision in enhancing outcomes for ākonga Māori and prioritises addressing unmet needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with ākonga, mana whenua, whānau and community. • Incorporating tikanga Māori, te reo Māori and Mātauranga as appropriate. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> Provider has put in place practices and provision that enable ākonga Māori to achieve aspired outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocal relationship with mana whenua, whānau and Māori organisations. • Māori pedagogy utilised across the system.
Access The lifelong learning needs of ākonga Māori inform processes, practices and provision.	Provider acknowledges barriers of access for ākonga Māori: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment processes are improved • Programmes have built in numeracy, literacy and financial management options. • Alternate modes of delivery are available to meet the needs of the learner. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> Provider seeks to understand and mitigate barriers to access by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring gaps in provision and uptake by level and area of study. • Engaging with ākonga, mana whenua, whānau, community and industry. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> Provider has put in place provision and processes that enable equitable access for ākonga Māori. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes are developed that support iwi / hapū / whānau initiatives and aspirations.
Participation Manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and taukana-teina are incorporated to build a sense of belonging and trust.	Provider acknowledges the unmet needs of ākonga Māori that lead to disparity in participation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g., financial support, transport, cost of living, use of assisted technologies, age of learner, industry image. Provider puts in place some practices to meet cultural needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g., a strong induction to set tone and expectations. 	<i>As for Acceptable, plus</i> Provider understands the importance of cultural competency for participation: Manaakitanga and whanaungatanga are understood and reflected in practices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mana motuhake of the ākonga is acknowledged (e.g. individual learning plan is developed to set up for success). • Tuakana-teina is nurtured. • Kanohi ki te kanohi is encouraged (if possible) as part of a flexible, multi-mode programme. • Kaupapa Māori specific services and spaces are available. 	<i>As for Good, plus</i> Provider has embedded culturally competent processes that enable Māori to be successful as Māori.

Attributes	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Skills and competencies Reciprocal relationships and cultural competency ensure relevant, responsive programmes and enhance learner outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educator acknowledges the importance of balancing their teaching practice with regionally specific Mātauranga Māori. Educator knows how to access support for learner's cultural needs. 	<p><i>As for Acceptable, plus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educator understands the importance of: Incorporating Mātauranga Māori into their programming. Building relationships with mana whenua / iwi to enable the sharing of that knowledge. 	<p><i>As for Good, plus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educator has a strong reciprocal relationship with mana whenua / iwi, respectful of each other's expertise. Mātauranga Māori content is woven with integrity into the programme led by mana whenua / iwi.