



Te Waka Kura: A Te Ao Māori Framework for Workforce Planning and Development in Te Matau a Māui-Hawke's Bay

PREPARED FOR FOOD AND FIBRE CENTRE OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE
July 2025

**Ko Ngāti Kahungunu te iwi
Ko Takitimu te waka
Ko Te Matau-a-Māui te rohe**



"He Waka Eke Noa"
"We are all in this together"

Foreword Excerpt:

In this kaupapa of workforce development and regional transformation, we stand on the foundation laid by our tīpuna.

We uplift the mauri of this rohe — Te Matau-a-Māui (Hawkes Bay) — by investing in skills, leadership, and collaboration. Guided by Mātauranga Māori and grounded in whakapapa, this report reflects our vision to grow capable, connected, and confident Māori for the future.

CONTENTS

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2.	INTRODUCTION	6
3.	METHODOLOGY.....	7
4.	PRIOR STUDIES	9
5.	PHASE ONE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS.....	9
6.	TE HAUMAKO	11
7.	NATIONAL AND REGIONAL WORKFORCE CONTEXT: AOTEAROA AND TE MATAU A MĀUI	14
8.	TE WAKA KURA.....	17
9.	REGIONAL AND NATIONAL VARIATION	23
10.	MODEL ALIGNMENT	25
11.	STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS	27
12.	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION	28
13.	CONCLUSION	31
14.	DISCLAIMER.....	33
15.	GLOSSARY	33
16.	RESOURCES	34
17.	NGĀ MIHI WHAKAMUTUNGA	36

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents Phase 2 of a multi-phase initiative to reshape workforce planning and development in Te Matau-a-Māui through a uniquely Te Ao Māori lens. Commissioned by the Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence (Food and Fibre CoVE) and led by HTK Group, this kaupapa responds to the region's call for locally informed, culturally grounded frameworks that reflect both the social and economic value of Māori participation in the workforce.

With the Māori economy now valued at over \$32 billion and contributing nearly 9% of Aotearoa's GDP, its role in the future of the nation is undeniable. While established models such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and McKinsey provide useful foundations, Te Waka Kura complements and extends these by weaving in the strengths of Te Ao Māori — relational thinking, intergenerational knowledge, and collective leadership — to shape a workforce development approach that is uniquely grounded in the people and potential of Te Matau-a-Māui.

Findings from the Phase 1 report reinforced the need for a dedicated Māori model. It highlighted the limitations of dominant Western paradigms and called for a workforce approach grounded in Mātauranga Māori. Gaps included insufficient Treaty representation, a lack of regional adaptability, minimal co-design with iwi and hapū, and an absence of intergenerational wellbeing planning.

As of 2024-25, New Zealand's workforce landscape is defined by rising unemployment, a rapidly evolving labour market, and ongoing skill mismatches. Māori youth, in particular, face disproportionate barriers to employment and training. Meanwhile, the Māori economy—built on iwi and hapū enterprises, land trusts, and whānau-driven entrepreneurship—continues to grow, signalling untapped potential if workforce systems can better support Māori aspirations.

Te Waka Kura is more than a framework—it is a metaphorical and practical model that draws its inspiration from the ancestral narrative of the Takitimu waka. The design reflects Māori values such as kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, Mātauranga Māori, rangatiratanga, and ora. Each part of the waka represents a critical element of an inclusive and sustainable workforce system that is central for Māori.

Te Waka Kura:

- Reflects intergenerational thinking.
- Centres Māori leadership and decision-making.
- Fosters collective wellbeing over individual gain.
- Prioritises cultural integrity alongside economic prosperity.

Key Recommendations:

The following are the key recommendations derived from stakeholder engagement and research analysis:

1. **Embed Māori Leadership and Co-Design:** Māori should not only be consulted but be active partners at all levels of decision-making and strategy.
2. **Align Education with Mātauranga Māori:** Incorporate Māori pedagogies, values, and knowledge systems into training pathways.
3. **Develop Culturally Safe Pathways:** Design workplace cultures, processes, and environments that respect and uplift Māori identity.
4. **Address Systemic Inequities:** Implement policies to tackle structural barriers and historic inequities faced by Māori.
5. **Build Strategic Partnerships:** Collaborate across government, industry, hapū and iwi to co-deliver workforce solutions grounded in mana-enhancing relationships.
6. **Measure What Matters:** Go beyond traditional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and include wellbeing, cultural safety, and community engagement as core metrics.

Te Waka Kura is not a cultural veneer applied to existing systems — it is a reimagining of those systems through a Te Ao Māori lens. The inspiration from the Takitimu Waka (Takitimu) provides cultural grounding, narrative strength, and historical continuity, but the waka itself — Te Waka Kura — is newly built, for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities.

This model offers a new navigation system for workforce development in Te Matau a Māui — one that ensures Māori do more than participate in the economy: they lead it, shape it, and thrive within it. It proposes a system where whakapapa, mātauranga, and mana are not just respected — they are embedded at every stage, from planning to practice to policy.

By aligning Te Ao Māori with the functional strengths of traditional Western planning tools (such as those used in OPM and McKinsey models), Te Waka Kura delivers a hybrid, high-trust, high-impact model that is inclusive, responsive, and future-ready.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Whakapapa of Takitimu and Ngāti Kahungunu

The inspiration behind Te Waka Kura draws deeply from the ancestral narrative of the Takitimu Waka (Takitimu)— one of the most revered waka to journey from Hawaiki to Aotearoa. Takitimu, captained by Tamatea Arikinui, was a sacred vessel with a unique purpose. Unlike other voyaging canoes of war or settlement, Takitimu was a waka of knowledge, karakia, and wānanga, carrying tohunga, rangatira, and sacred teachings across the Pacific.¹

Tamatea's voyage laid spiritual and intellectual foundations throughout the land. His journey was not one of conquest, but of establishment — creating spaces for learning, healing, and reflection. His legacy lives on through his descendant Kahungunu, whose leadership and diplomacy helped form the enduring whakapapa of Ngāti Kahungunu, the third largest iwi in Aotearoa. Kahungunu's strategic marriages and settlements embedded enduring values of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and rangatiratanga along the East Coast and throughout Te Matau-a-Māui.²

The story of Takitimu is both literal and metaphorical whakapapa — it connects ancestral journeys to contemporary direction, providing cultural grounding for how Māori move, learn, lead, and thrive.

Modern Implications

Workforce development in Aotearoa is undergoing a pivotal shift. Historically driven by Western frameworks prioritising efficiency and market demand, these models have failed to meaningfully integrate the lived experiences, values, and aspirations of Māori. The result has been a workforce planning system that often alienates Māori or relegates their participation to tokenistic inclusion. As the Māori economy continues to flourish—now contributing more than \$32 billion to New Zealand's GDP—it is imperative that Māori are not just included in workforce development conversations but are positioned to lead them.³

Te Waka Kura: Inspired by Legacy, Built for Now

Te Waka Kura emerges from this legacy but is not a continuation of Takitimu — it is its own waka, built for today. It honours the spirit of Takitimu while navigating modern tides: a future-focused model designed to meet the needs of Māori in a changing world.

¹ Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. “Ngāti Kahungunu.” Last modified February 8, 2005. Retrieved from <https://teara.govt.nz/en/ngati-kahungunu>

² Ibid.

³ RNZ. “New Report Highlights Dramatic Growth in Māori Economy.” February 26, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/544464/new-report-highlights-dramatic-growth-in-maori-economy>

This report introduces **Te Waka Kura: Navigating the Future with Ancestral Guidance** — a framework grounded in Te Ao Māori shaped by the inspiration of Takitimu, but built to address the demands of contemporary workforce development.

Rather than replicating traditional Western planning models such as the OPM or McKinsey models, Te Waka Kura enhances them by adding cultural depth, whakapapa-based strategy, and values-led implementation. It envisions an inclusive, responsive, and kaupapa Māori workforce system that:

- Centres Te Ao Māori across all phases of design, delivery, and evaluation.
- Prioritises collective wellbeing and identity restoration, not just employment metrics.
- Enables Māori to lead and design their own workforce futures, regionally and nationally.

Takitimu as Anchor, Te Waka Kura as Compass

The Takitimu Waka offers the historical anchor — a reminder of our depth, resilience, and vision as navigators, learners, and leaders. But Te Waka Kura is the compass — a forward-facing model that charts new waters in workforce development, grounded in cultural integrity and guided by hapū and marae aspirations.

In practical terms, this means:

- Restoring Māori agency in shaping local workforce ecosystems.
- Measuring success not just through job placements, but through oranga, cultural confidence, and whānau wellbeing.
- Aligning with national strategies like Te Haumako⁴, while providing space for regional adaptation and iwi leadership.

Like any great waka, this work is collective, intentional, and courageous. Every forward stroke honours those who came before and clears the path for those yet to come. In doing so, Te Waka Kura redefines the future of work — not just for Māori, but for Aotearoa.

3. METHODOLOGY

The development of Te Waka Kura was grounded in a culturally rigorous, participatory, and iterative process. Recognising the limitations of traditional research paradigms, this methodology was shaped by a commitment to whakawhanaungatanga, kaupapa Māori research principles, and collective validation. Rather than treating Māori as subjects of inquiry, this process positioned Māori as co-authors of the framework.

Research Analysis

The analysis began by reviewing a range of strategic and policy documents, including:

- Te Haumako⁵: A Māori workforce development framework;

⁴ Muka Tangata. *Te Haumako: Food and Fibre Sector Māori Workforce Development Plan*. 2023.

⁵ Ibid.

- Existing Western workforce planning models: the OPM (Office of Personnel Management) and McKinsey frameworks;
- Phase 1 Workforce Planning and Development report findings⁶; and
- National Māori economic and labour statistics.

Stakeholder Engagement

Central to the process was a series of engagement with Māori stakeholders, including:

- Hapū and marae from Te Matau a Māui;
- Rangatahi currently in training or recently entered the workforce; and
- Māori educators.

Engagements were intentionally relational and kānōhi ki te kānōhi wherever possible. This allowed us to gather kōrero, but also deep whakaaro and mātauranga that shaped the cultural heart of Te Waka Kura.

However, the level of stakeholder engagement did not reach the depth or breadth initially hoped for. In response, surveys were developed and circulated to capture additional feedback in a more accessible and flexible way. While this approach helped surface some insights, it is acknowledged that further engagement may be necessary to fully validate the model and ensure it is reflective of the broader aspirations and perspectives of iwi, hapū, and marae across the entire rohe.

Model Design and Synthesis

Using the imagery of the Takitimu waka as a base concept, each component of the model was mapped against workforce needs and values identified by the stakeholders. These included not only practical goals (employment, training access, leadership development), but cultural and spiritual imperatives (whakapapa, whenua).

The resulting model integrated:

- Māori values as structural elements.
- Practical policy pathways tied to each part of the waka.
- Adaptability to regional contexts and other hapū/iwi narratives.

Validation and Refinement

The draft model was taken back to engaged stakeholders for review. Feedback was gathered via hui, email correspondence, and follow-up interview surveys. Emphasis was placed on:

- Cultural resonance of the waka narrative.
- Strategic clarity.
- Usability across workforce planning systems.
- Potential for local adaptation.

⁶ HTK Group. *Māori Perspectives for Workforce Planning and Development in Hawke's Bay*. 2023.

4. PRIOR STUDIES

In 2023, Food and Fibre CoVE, on behalf of the Hawke's Bay Regional Skills Leadership Group (HB RSLG), commissioned a study into workforce planning and development in Hawke's Bay. Conducted by Skills Consulting Group (SCG), the Workforce Planning and Development Report⁷ was designed to inform the HB RSLG on options to improve workforce outcomes across the rohe. Drawing from national and international methodologies—including the OPM and McKinsey models—the report offered a strategic overview of workforce challenges and provided guidance aligned with best practices.

However, while the SCG Report presented a valuable regional baseline, it did not specifically address the needs, perspectives, or aspirations of local Māori communities. In response, Food and Fibre CoVE commissioned HTK Group to undertake a second, complementary phase of work.

HTK Group was tasked with:

- Identifying where Māori perspectives could have been present within the original SCG report, and how these differ from the perspectives being proposed in this new body of work.
- Highlighting any elements absent from the SCG report that are critical from a Te Ao Māori perspective.
- Providing a contextual overview for each identified element, including:
 - The likely Hawke's Bay Māori perspective(s);
 - Whether perspectives from other iwi/hapū and rohe across the motu might differ, and how;
 - Any relevant caveats necessary to describe, distinguish, or qualify a perspective.

5. PHASE ONE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

The Phase 1 Report⁸ laid the foundation for this kaupapa by identifying key opportunities to enhance current workforce planning models through a Te Ao Māori lens. This early analysis, examined existing frameworks and highlighted both their strengths and the areas where they could be extended to better reflect the aspirations, knowledge, and lived realities of Māori in Te Matau-a-Māui and beyond.

Building from Existing Models: A Foundation for Transformation

The SCG Report⁹ offered valuable insight into current best practices in regional workforce planning. Rooted in global and national methodologies — such as the OPM and McKinsey models — this work contributed a vital starting point for understanding systemic workforce

⁷ Skills Consulting Group. *Workforce Planning and Development Report*, 2023.

⁸ HTK Group. *Māori Perspectives for Workforce Planning and Development in Hawke's Bay*. 2023.

⁹ Skills Consulting Group. *Workforce Planning and Development Report*, 2023.

dynamics across all sectors. However, the report also acknowledged that further perspectives were needed to reflect the cultural and contextual distinctiveness of Māori.

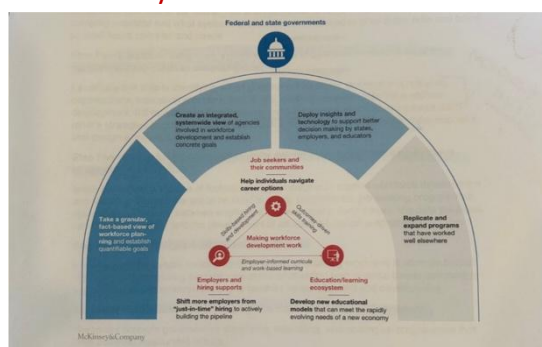
Phase 1 therefore sought to complement and expand upon these models, not by critiquing their validity, but by weaving in principles of Te Ao Māori, and surfacing the opportunities for more holistic, relational, and culturally responsive planning systems.

Recommended Workforce Planning and Development Models:

OPM¹⁰



McKinsey Model¹¹



Key Opportunities for Enrichment

The findings from Phase 1 suggest that incorporating Te Ao Māori into workforce development presents not only a cultural imperative, but a strategic advantage. The following areas were identified as critical for evolution:

- **Mātauranga Māori Integration:** Current workforce models often lack frameworks that reflect Māori ways of knowing and being. There is an opportunity to embed Mātauranga Māori as a guiding force—alongside data and strategy—into all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Regional Relevance:** Existing models are often sector-specific and developed for broader national application. This limits their adaptability to the unique social, economic, and cultural landscapes of rohe such as Te Matau-a-Māui. A regionally grounded, iwi/hapū-informed approach provides a stronger foundation for success.
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi Alignment:** There is an increasing recognition of the need to uphold Te Tiriti responsibilities in workforce planning. Phase 1 highlighted the potential to more explicitly integrate partnership, protection, and participation principles throughout the planning lifecycle.
- **Whānau, Hapū, Iwi Co-Design:** While consultation is commonly practiced, co-design remains underutilised. Phase 1 emphasised the importance of iwi and hapū being at the decision-making table — not just as contributors, but as partners and governors of change.

¹⁰ U.S. Office of Personnel Management. *Workforce Planning Model*. n.d.

¹¹ McKinsey & Company. "Creating an Effective Workforce System for the New Economy." Last modified October 20, 2020.

- **Intergenerational Focus:** Where existing models often focus on short- to medium-term outcomes, Māori perspectives encourage planning across generations — embedding sustainability, legacy, and mokopuna-centred thinking into the system.

Te Ao Māori Worldview: Enhancing, Not Replacing

A central insight of the Phase 1 is that Te Ao Māori approaches are not a rejection of existing systems, but an enrichment of them. They offer a rebalancing: one that values collective wellbeing, cultural identity, and long-term resilience alongside economic metrics.

Key cultural principles highlighted include:

- **Whanaungatanga:** Success is collective. Workforce planning must prioritise connections between people, whānau, and systems.
- **Manaakitanga:** A values-based workforce supports dignity and care for all, particularly those historically excluded from decision-making.
- **Kotahitanga:** Collaboration and consensus — across hapū, iwi, sectors, and agencies — are essential for enduring impact.

Acknowledging Inequities While Focusing on Solutions

Phase 1 also surfaced systemic inequities that persist in education, employment, and leadership pathways for Māori. However, the focus was not on deficit framing. Instead, the kaupapa was clear: to illuminate opportunities to uplift Māori participation by transforming systems to better reflect and support Māori realities.

Rather than retrofitting existing models, Phase 1 proposed designing a parallel but interconnected framework—one that centres tikanga, honours whakapapa, and affirms mana motuhake as fundamental to future workforce resilience.

Towards Phase 2

These findings now inform the work of Phase 2, which will further explore a co-designed Māori workforce development model, Te Waka Kura.

This whenua-first, whakapapa-based perspective will underpin the next phase of Te Waka Kura: shaping a system that recognises Māori not as stakeholders, but as partners of the future of workforce planning and development.

6. TE HAUMAKO

Te Haumako¹² is not simply a sector plan — it is a living, breathing blueprint for Māori workforce development, grounded in ancestral wisdom, sector realities, and a vision for intergenerational prosperity. Developed by Muka Tangata¹³ for the food and fibre sector, Te Haumako acknowledges Māori not just as participants, but as leaders, innovators, and cultural protectors within Aotearoa's future workforce.

¹² Muka Tangata. *Te Haumako: Food and Fibre Sector Māori Workforce Development Plan*. 2023.

¹³ <https://mukatangata.nz>

Its name, Te Haumako — “the fertile soil” — signals the depth, richness, and readiness of Māori to grow a workforce from within tikanga Māori. As a national strategy, Te Haumako sets out a high-level direction for how the Māori economy and its workforce potential should be nurtured and enabled across Aotearoa.

It was important that this Project recognised Te Haumako not just as context, but as a foundation. The findings and resulting actions recommended by HTK reflect a deliberate effort to demonstrate how Te Waka Kura can give effect to Te Haumako at a local level. This includes practical alignment with its values, regional interpretation of its directives, and targeted actions that bring national aspirations into the day-to-day realities of Te Matau a Māui.

For Te Waka Kura to succeed as a guiding framework, it must not only draw inspiration from Te Haumako, but actively operationalise its vision within this rohe — creating a blueprint for how national Māori workforce strategies can land meaningfully in place-based, hapū/iwi-led contexts.

Key Findings from Te Haumako¹⁴

1. Māori are Essential Contributors to the Sector

- Māori invested over \$23 billion in the food and fibre sector as of 2018.
- Māori form 16% of the workforce in Muka Tangata’s 14 industry areas.
- Nearly 25% of all enrolments in qualifications across these industries are Māori.

Implication for Te Waka Kura:

Te Waka Kura must reflect Māori not as a future workforce – but as a current, substantial, and growing economic force. Māori must be positioned not only as workers, but as owners, designers, and leaders of the system.

2. Tirohanga Māori Enhances Learning Outcomes

- Te Haumako confirms that when Mātauranga Māori, Te Reo, and tikanga are embedded into training, Māori learners thrive.
- Culturally inclusive systems lead to improved completion rates, learner satisfaction, and long-term engagement.
- Keep abreast of what others are doing well and use it—don’t recreate the wheel when it’s not needed.

Implication for Te Waka Kura:

The waka’s navigation system (Mātauranga Māori) must be embedded at every layer: not just content, but delivery methods, assessment models, and tutor capability. Curriculum that reflects the values of whakapapa, whenua, and collective identity should become the norm—not the exception.

3. Māori-Led Solutions Are the Default for Māori Success

- Māori-led programme design, governance, and delivery have been shown to yield more effective and enduring results than externally imposed systems.
- Māori leadership also positively influences non-Māori learners and organisational culture.

¹⁴ Muka Tangata. *Te Haumako: Food and Fibre Sector Māori Workforce Development Plan*. 2023.

Implication for Te Waka Kura:

This aligns with the Rangatiratanga component of the model. Māori-led governance, co-design processes, and resource control should be formalised within all stages of workforce planning—from funding decisions to sector-specific programme development.

4. Support Systems Must Be Holistic

- Māori learners and workers succeed when there are wraparound supports grounded in kaupapa Māori: whānau-based mentoring, spiritual and emotional support, transport, and kai.
- Cultural alienation remains a major barrier to retention and participation in mainstream systems.
- Educational and support services often operate in silos; there needs to be stronger alignment with wider training and support already available in the community.

Implication for Te Waka Kura:

Ngā hoe (manaakitanga) must not just represent supportive environments — they must deliver practical, culturally grounded support systems. Funding and programme design must account for these holistic needs, not treat them as extras.

5. Workforce Systems Need to Reflect Māori Futures

- By 2040, 25% of the workforce under 40 will be Māori.
- The food and fibre sector is seeking more skilled Māori workers, particularly in leadership, technology, and innovation.
- To attract and retain Māori talent, working conditions must be supportive, culturally safe, and sustainable—retention is just as important as recruitment. Collaborate with others across the ecosystem so Māori can contribute meaningfully to existing initiatives, not just new ones—build pathways that align with what’s already in motion.

Implication for Te Waka Kura:

The waka’s destination (Oranga) must prepare the system not for a “Māori-inclusive” future, but for a future where Māori are defining success across industries. Te Waka Kura must support future-focused investment in Māori entrepreneurship, digital skills, and innovation.

How Te Waka Kura Can Integrate Te Haumako’s Core Directives

Te Haumako Directive	Te Waka Kura Integration
Recognise Māori as key economic contributors.	Te Waka Kura positions Māori not as participants, but as leaders in workforce transformation.
Embed mātauranga Māori into all learning systems.	The navigation system of the waka is driven by mātauranga Māori — shaping curriculum, teaching, and delivery.
Prioritise Māori-led governance and co-design.	The Rangatira ensures Māori lead workforce strategy — not just advise on it.
Build holistic support systems around ākonga and kaimahi Māori.	Ngā hoe reflect real-world, wraparound services grounded in kaupapa Māori.

Focus on Māori innovation and future industries.	Te Waka Kura charts a course toward Oranga through entrepreneurship, STEAM pathways, and sustainability.
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Key Recommendations for Integration

1. **Use Te Haumako as a Cultural Compass**
Ensure every stage of Te Waka Kura implementation cross-references Te Haumako principles and actions.
2. **Dual Reporting and Monitoring**
Align performance indicators with both Te Waka Kura and Te Haumako to track cultural, educational, and economic impact.
3. **Sector-Specific Pilots**
Implement waka-based models in selected food and fibre subsectors (e.g., viticulture, dairy, forestry) and evaluate their alignment with Te Haumako actions.
4. **Joint Governance Boards**
Co-establish regional governance groups with representatives from iwi, hapū, Muka Tangata, and training providers to ensure shared oversight.
5. **Invest in Storytelling and Knowledge Transfer**
Honour the oral traditions of Te Haumako by documenting and sharing lived experiences from Māori kaimahi across the sector.

7. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL WORKFORCE CONTEXT: AOTEAROA AND TE MATAU A MĀUI

Aotearoa

Aotearoa's workforce is in a state of flux. The post-pandemic recovery has revealed the fragility of existing workforce systems. Unemployment rates are climbing (4.8% in late 2024), particularly for young and rural workers. The mismatch between industry demand and the current education/training pipeline has created systemic bottlenecks. Vocational sectors such as agriculture, construction, health, and technology are experiencing acute shortages, even as more graduates enter the job market.¹⁵

Automation, climate change, and digitalisation are reshaping entire industries, demanding new skillsets that many communities—especially Māori—are not being adequately prepared for under traditional models.¹⁶ Older workers are exiting the workforce, often without mechanisms in place to transfer their knowledge. Meanwhile, rangatahi workers frequently find themselves unsupported in navigating institutional environments that fail to reflect their identities or aspirations.

The Māori Labour Force

Māori represent approximately 17% of Aotearoa's population but continue to face significant labour market disparities:

- Māori unemployment consistently exceeds national averages.
- Māori youth (15–24) face unemployment rates double that of Pākehā counterparts.

¹⁵ Stats NZ. 'Labour Market Statistics: December 2024 Quarter'. 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.stats.govt.nz/>

¹⁶ Te Puni Kōkiri. 'Māori Futures and Digital Readiness'. 2023.

- Māori are overrepresented in low-wage, insecure, and hazardous work sectors. Yet, despite these systemic barriers, the Māori labour force is a powerful economic engine:
- Māori-owned businesses are increasing in number, particularly in primary industries.
- The Māori economy—valued at over \$32 billion in 2023—continues to expand into sectors like technology, design, and sustainable enterprise.¹⁷

This growth is driven by a values-aligned entrepreneurship, innovative kaupapa Māori education models, and iwi investment strategies. However, for this potential to be fully realised, workforce planning must shift from market efficiency to cultural equity.

The Māori Economy – A Strategic Imperative

The Māori economy has undergone transformative growth in recent decades, anchored in iwi asset development, Treaty settlements, whānau enterprise, and intergenerational investment. With ownership of 50% of aquaculture operations and major stakes in forestry, energy, tourism, and commercial property, Māori entities are reshaping national economic narratives.

This evolution demands a workforce that:

- Reflects Te Ao Māori values.
- Is equipped to steward ancestral lands and waters.
- Can thrive in global markets while maintaining Tikanga Māori.

Workforce planning must therefore not treat the Māori economy as a niche. It is a strategic imperative for national growth. Frameworks such as Te Waka Kura enable workforce systems to uphold Te Ao Māori, protect cultural identity, and unlock both human and economic potential.

Te Mātau a Māui

Demographics and Labour Market Participation

As of the 2023 Census, Māori comprise 28.6% of the population in Te Mātau a Māui, compared to 17.8% nationally.¹⁸ This makes Te Mātau a Māui one of the regions with the highest proportion of Māori in Aotearoa. This demographic strength must be matched with workforce development models that reflect Māori aspirations, economic roles, and lived realities.

Labour force participation rates indicate broader disparities. While the general unemployment rate in Te Mātau a Māui stood at 3.7% in the fourth quarter of 2023, Māori unemployment in the rohe remains significantly higher—estimated at 8.7% in early 2025.¹⁹ Nationally, Māori aged 15–24 face unemployment rates more than double those of their Pākehā counterparts.²⁰ These patterns suggest systemic disconnection between Māori workforce readiness and current employment structures.

¹⁷ RNZ. "New Report Highlights Dramatic Growth in Māori Economy." February 26, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/544464/new-report-highlights-dramatic-growth-in-maori-economy>

¹⁸ Stats NZ, *2023 Census population counts by ethnic group and Māori descent*, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/>.

¹⁹ Stats NZ, *Business employment data: June 2024 quarter*, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/business-employment-data-june-2024-quarter/>.

²⁰ Stats NZ, *Labour market statistics (December 2023 quarter)*, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-december-2023-quarter/>.

Further compounding this issue is the rurality of much of Te Mātau a Māui rohe, which adds geographic and infrastructural challenges to workforce access. Limited transport, digital divides, and inconsistent service delivery can disproportionately affect Māori living in more remote areas. This makes locally responsive, culturally grounded workforce development critical—not only for equity, but for regional productivity.

Sectoral Employment and Economic Contributions

Māori in Te Mātau a Māui are deeply embedded in the rohe's key economic sectors: agriculture, horticulture, forestry, fisheries, and food processing. These industries are the backbone of the regional economy and increasingly dependent on a stable, skilled workforce. In these sectors, Māori are not only employees—they are also landowners, producers, and investors.

Nationally, Māori collectives own over 50% of aquaculture operations and hold significant equity in forestry and farming.²¹ Between 2018 and 2023, the value of Māori assets in sheep and beef farming alone increased by \$100 million, totalling \$7.2 billion.²² In Te Mātau a Māui specifically, iwi and Māori land trusts have made strategic investments in premium apple varieties, vineyard development, irrigation infrastructure, and export logistics.²³ These ventures provide direct employment, stimulate secondary industries, and reinvest in community wellbeing.

Despite these strengths, Māori remain overrepresented in the region's most precarious work. Seasonal, low-wage, and high-risk roles—such as fruit picking, meat processing, and forestry—remain heavily Māori-populated.²⁴ Workforce planning must address this imbalance by enabling Māori progression into skilled, secure, and higher-value employment pathways within industries they already underpin.

Education and Skills Development

Education remains the cornerstone of long-term workforce transformation. In 2023, there were 12,228 ākonga Māori enrolled across Te Mātau a Māui schools, kura kaupapa, and tertiary institutions.²⁵ However, Māori retention and achievement rates in secondary and tertiary education still lag behind national averages. The pipeline from school to work is often fragmented for ākonga Māori—especially where curricula and environments do not reflect Te Ao Māori values.

Regional programmes like Te Toka Māori and Pasifika Trades Training are helping bridge this gap. These initiatives offer not just vocational training but wraparound support services—mentoring, transport, financial assistance—that address the holistic needs of ākonga

²¹ BERL, *The Māori Economy 2023*, commissioned by MBIE, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/3qqfcrcu/m%C4%81ori-economy-2023-mbie-berl.pdf>.

²² Stats NZ, *Tatauranga umanga Māori – Statistics on Māori businesses: 2023*, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.stats.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Tatauranga-umanga-Maori-Statistics-on-Maori-businesses/TUM-Statistics-on-Maori-businesses-2023-English/Download-data/>.

²³ Treasury NZ, *Primary Sector Industry Profile: Apples & Pears*, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2024-05/pc-inq-is-dr-147-nz-apples-and-pears-incorporated-horticulture-new-zealand-incorporated-attachment-1.pdf>.

²⁴ Stats NZ, *Occupation and industry by ethnic group and region (2023)*, custom dataset accessed May 29, 2025.

²⁵ Education Counts, *Regional Education Profile: Hawke's Bay 2023*, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/know-your-region/region/student-population/trends?region=6>.

Māori.²⁶ However, the scale of these programmes remains limited compared to the regional need.

In workforce terms, education must be more than a qualification pathway—it must enable identity-affirming growth. Embedding Mātauranga Māori into mainstream education and training can strengthen cultural identity and confidence while enhancing skills development. This is especially relevant in sectors where cultural expertise is a strength—such as environmental management, regenerative agriculture, tourism, and health.

To realise long-term regional resilience, Te Mātau a Māui must invest in intergenerational Māori workforce development. That means planning not just for today’s labour needs, but for mokopuna to lead tomorrow’s economy.

Implications for Workforce Planning

To meet this moment, workforce development strategies must:

- Embrace cultural identity as a strength, not a barrier;
- Prioritise holistic wellbeing, not just productivity;
- Develop pathways from secondary to tertiary education that are kaupapa Māori in approach; and
- Create leadership pipelines for Māori across every industry.

Te Waka Kura addresses these imperatives not only through structural reform, but through cultural reimagining. It recognises that workforce development is not about fitting Māori into an existing system, but designing a system where Māori naturally belong and thrive.

In short: what is good for Māori is good for Aotearoa. The current climate presents not only challenges, but the opportunity to redefine the future of work.

8. TE WAKA KURA

“Te Waka Kura: Navigating the Future with Ancestral Guidance”

Te Waka Kura was not chosen lightly — it is both a metaphor and a model, drawing inspiration from the legacy of the Takitimu waka while standing as its own vessel, built to carry the aspirations of Māori workforce development into the future.

Waka symbolises collective movement, purpose, and navigation. It speaks to a shared journey — where every paddle stroke is part of a unified effort to shape a thriving future. It also embodies the relational, strategic, and intergenerational approach that Te Ao Māori offers to workforce planning.

Kura is a word rich in meaning. It refers not only to knowledge and learning but also to something sacred and treasured. In naming the framework Te Waka Kura, the intent was to

²⁶ EIT, *Māori and Pasifika Trades Training*, Eastern Institute of Technology, accessed May 29, 2025, <https://www.eit.ac.nz/subject-areas/maori-pasifika-trades-training/>.

create a vessel that carries more than policy — it carries whakapapa, mātauranga, values, and the mauri of hapū, marae who gave life to this kaupapa.

While it honours Takitimu, the sacred waka of Ngāti Kahungunu that brought knowledge and karakia to these shores, Te Waka Kura is not simply a continuation — it is a new waka, born of this time, facing forward. It acknowledges the past while forging a path forward for Māori workforce transformation — one that restores mana, embeds tikanga, and creates space for mokopuna to thrive.

Not Another Wheel: A Culturally Grounded Framework

In the early design stages of this workforce development framework, a deliberate choice was made: not to replicate another Western-style circular model with Māori kupu overlaid. Many planning tools in Aotearoa rely on stylised diagrams — wheels, pyramids, or flowcharts — that incorporate Te Reo Māori but fail to embody Te Ao Māori thinking in form or function.

Te Waka Kura was instead designed as something culturally grounded, visually authentic, and spiritually resonant — a waka.

Why a Waka?

The waka represents movement, purpose, connection, and collective responsibility — values that align closely with Te Ao Māori narratives. Where traditional Western models are static and linear, the waka is dynamic, adaptable, and relational. It moves in unison. It requires many roles. It carries legacies forward.

A waka is:

- A symbol of interdependence — every person plays a vital role;
- A vessel of whakapapa and ancestral memory — embedding journeys of exploration, leadership, and transformation; and
- A vehicle of strategy and navigation — guided by mātauranga, wānanga, and spiritual insight.

Drawing Inspiration from Takitimu

In the process of shaping this model, various symbolic forms were explored — including the wharenuī to represent collective structure, aroha as the heart of care, and a taiaha as a symbol of strength and protection. Each carried cultural weight. However, it was the Takitimu waka that offered the most fitting inspiration — both in terms of place and narrative.

Takitimu, the ancestral waka of Ngāti Kahungunu, was captained by Tamatea Arikinui, and is revered for its sacred purpose. It carried tohunga, karakia, and wānanga — voyaging not for conquest, but for the transmission of knowledge and spiritual leadership.

Its legacy continues through Kahungunu, whose leadership shaped the third largest iwi in Aotearoa. The voyage of Takitimu embodies values central to this framework:

- The importance of mātauranga and wānanga in guiding journeys;

- The power of strategic settlement and whanaungatanga in building strong communities; and
- The enduring influence of leadership and service across generations.

Te Waka Kura: A Waka of Its Own

While Te Waka Kura draws deep inspiration from the stories and legacy of Takitimu, it is not a replica or direct continuation of that waka. It is its own waka — born of this time, created to carry the aspirations of a modern Māori workforce, and shaped by contemporary challenges and opportunities.

Like Takitimu, Te Waka Kura is sacred in intent, designed to carry not only people but principles — kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga, whanaungatanga, and mātauranga Māori. But it also responds to the lived realities of now: digital transformation, economic equity, cultural reclamation, and intergenerational planning.

The Sacred Waka of Transformation

Te Waka Kura symbolises a new voyage — one that honours the past while carving a path forward. It is built to traverse the modern labour market with the same courage and clarity as the ancestral waka that inspired it.

It represents a shift from deficit-driven policy to whakapapa-based planning.

It reframes workforce development as more than job matching — it becomes an act of cultural alignment, identity restoration, and Māori-led strategy.

It does not simply replace Western models like OPM or McKinsey — it builds on their strengths while reimagining their purpose through a Te Ao Māori lens. Te Waka Kura adds cultural depth, intergenerational perspective, and values-based leadership to existing frameworks. It is a waka that moves not by force, but by collective effort — guided by the tīpuna and propelled by the aspirations of hapū, marae and iwi.

Bridging Ancestral Wisdom with Contemporary Models

To build a workforce development model that is inclusive, resilient, and culturally grounded, Te Waka Kura draws on the proven strengths of existing Western frameworks — such as the OPM and McKinsey models — and adds depth through the values and wisdom of Te Ao Māori. It does not replace these frameworks; instead, it expands them, embedding kaupapa Māori into strategy, systems, and outcomes.

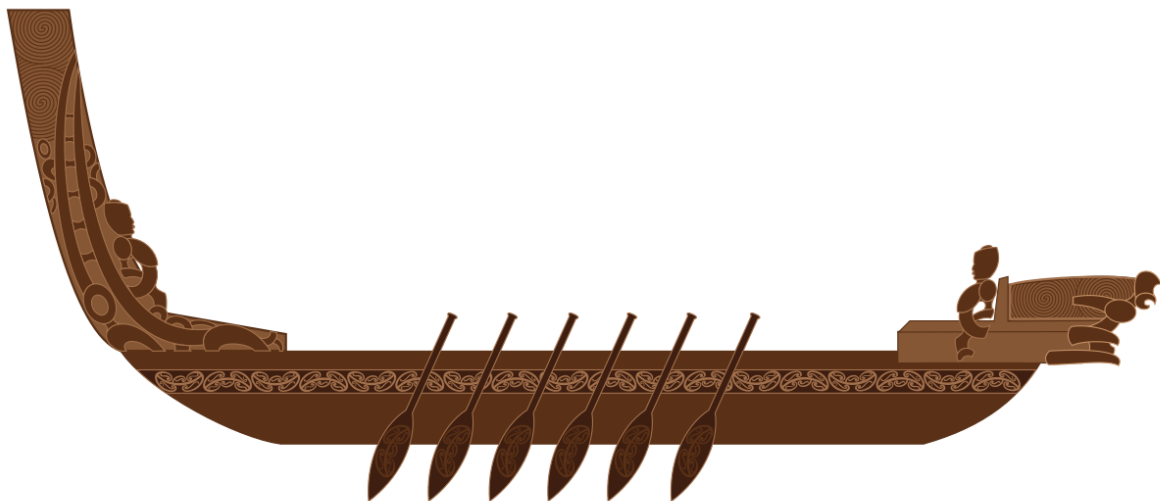
Through this integration, Te Waka Kura strengthens these models in the following ways:

1. Strategic Planning (as framed in OPM) is enhanced by kaitiakitanga — a deep commitment to guardianship, sustainability, and long-term thinking. Like the deliberate, spiritually prepared voyage of Takitimu, workforce planning must consider both ecological and intergenerational wellbeing.
2. Talent Optimisation (a central focus in McKinsey) is amplified by manaakitanga — the active expression of support, care, and collective responsibility. This ensures that workforce systems nurture people holistically, supporting Māori identity, safety, and belonging in every step of the employment journey.

3. Efficiency and Adaptability, key pillars in both models, are deepened through whanaungatanga and Mātauranga Māori — placing value on trusted relationships, cultural knowledge, and long-term success over short-term gains. Like the enduring legacy of Takitimu, Te Waka Kura prioritises knowledge transfer, community investment, and connected leadership.


Te Waka Kura doesn't reject the architecture of Western planning models—it enriches them. It brings cultural context, relational accountability, and Māori-led insight into spaces traditionally defined by transactional logic. In doing so, it offers a hybrid model capable of meeting contemporary workforce demands while being grounded in place, people, and whakapapa.



Te Waka Kura


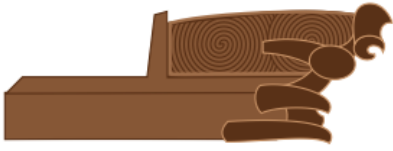


Te Waka Kura uses the structure and symbolism of a waka to frame an approach to workforce planning grounded in Te Ao Māori. Each part of the waka represents a distinct principle, linked to a function within workforce systems. Unlike circular frameworks that simply substitute Māori values for generic categories, the waka actively reflects cultural meaning, collective movement, and strategic navigation toward oranga.

In contrast to the OPM model, which takes a linear, skills supply-and-demand approach, or the McKinsey model, which focuses on internal organisational alignment, Te Waka Kura is relational, intergenerational, and whenua-bound. It integrates values with structure, action with meaning.

<p>Te Taurapa: Kaitiakitanga (Stewardship and Sustainability)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guardianship of people, knowledge, and resources across generations; • Responsibility to protect whenua, taiao, and whakapapa; • Planning for long-term intergenerational outcomes; and • Anchoring workforce strategy in sustainability and balance. 	<p>Role in the Waka: The guide. Without a steady hand at the stern, the waka cannot stay on course or navigate through challenge.</p> <p>Workforce Meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embeds long-term sustainability in planning, beyond short-term employment cycles. • Acknowledges Māori responsibility to future generations — mokopuna and whenua alike. • Planning isn't just economic — it's cultural, environmental, and spiritual. <p>Examples of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in land-based industries that integrate Mātauranga Māori, such as regenerative farming or rongoā Māori. • Workforce investment strategies that factor in environmental justice and papakāinga development. • Planning frameworks that address climate resilience, whenua restoration, and succession of land-related skills. <p>OPM/McKinsey Alignment: OPM focuses on workforce demand forecasting. Te Waka Kura integrates that with intergenerational forecasting and ecological resilience. McKinsey prioritises structure — here, te taurapa is the values-based structure that sustains the entire system.</p>
<p>Ngā Hoe: Manaakitanga (Pastoral Care)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active expression of collective care and responsibility; • Providing practical and emotional support in workforce systems; • Uplifting others through mentoring, guidance, and whānau-based support; and • Ensuring safe, inclusive, culturally grounded learning and working environments 	<p>Role in the Waka: The propulsion — without paddles, the waka goes nowhere.</p> <p>Workforce Meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises the importance of wraparound supports, not just technical training. • Addresses social determinants of success: transport, housing, mental health, and cultural inclusion. • Care is a system function, not a side service. <p>Examples of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing employment pathways that include whānau navigators, kaiārahi, and pastoral support. • Requiring that publicly funded training providers deliver cultural safety programmes. • Reducing barriers to participation: transport vouchers, child care stipends, whānau-based delivery. <p>OPM/McKinsey Alignment: OPM focuses on worker readiness — Te Waka Kura expands this by recognising life readiness. McKinsey speaks to “shared values”, manaakitanga is a lived value expressed through systemic care.</p>
<p>Te Kōhiwi (The Heart of the Waka): Whanaungatanga</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrality of relationships to Māori wellbeing and decision-making; 	<p>Role in the Waka: The centre of connection — the beating heart that binds the crew.</p> <p>Workforce Meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making is relational, not transactional.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective accountability and shared success; • Trust-based partnerships with whānau, hapū, iwi, and providers; and • Recognising the value of connection over individual achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success is measured collectively — by whānau, hapū, and iwi outcomes. • Planning includes time for kōrero, relationship-building, and collective consent. <p>Examples of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing governance groups that include kaumātua, hapū reps, and rangatahi to provide guidance and oversight. • Co-designing career pathways with iwi, hapū, industry, and education partners, not just employers. • Embedding whakawhanaungatanga into hiring, onboarding, and mentoring processes. <p>OPM/McKinsey Alignment: Where McKinsey focuses on “skills” and “systems,” whanaungatanga emphasises networks and obligations — people over processes. OPM tracks labour market movement; Te Waka Kura tracks collective movement toward shared goals.</p>
<p>The Navigation System: Mātauranga Māori</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Māori knowledge systems guide direction and decision-making; • Integration of ancestral wisdom with future-focused innovation; • Valuing oral traditions, spiritual insight, and environmental awareness; and • Ensuring curriculum and evaluation are grounded in kaupapa Māori 	<p>Role in the Waka: Provides direction, insight, and understanding of knowledge.</p> <p>Workforce Meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge isn’t neutral. Mātauranga Māori brings cultural legitimacy and strategic clarity. • Workforce planning includes traditional knowledge alongside technical forecasting. • Indigenous evaluation models centre lived experience and narrative, not just metrics. <p>Examples of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using maramataka to guide seasonal workforce rhythms in agriculture or kai gathering. • Developing iwi/hapū-led micro credentials in carving, navigation, healing, and māra kai. • Applying kaupapa Māori evaluation methods to measure success by oranga, mana, and community trust. <p>OPM/McKinsey Alignment: Where OPM uses quantitative modelling, Mātauranga Māori provides contextual, ethical, and ancestral insight. McKinsey talks about “style” — Mātauranga Māori is not style; it is the strategic compass.</p>
<p>Te Rangatira: Rangatiratanga (Leadership and Authority)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Māori self-determination in planning, funding, and decision-making; • Leadership as a form of service, mana-enhancement, and vision; • Empowering iwi/hapū-led governance and rangatahi succession pathways; and 	<p>Role in the Waka: The steerer. Holds accountability, leads with vision, and keeps the waka aligned.</p> <p>Workforce Meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Māori must be a partner in strategy, not just be consulted after decisions are made. • Leadership is about mana-enhancement, not authority. • Rangatiratanga in workforce planning includes budget control, decision veto, and narrative sovereignty. <p>Examples of Application:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding space for Māori voices to lead, not just participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating co-governance structures for workforce planning that are hapū or iwi led. • Establishing regional Māori workforce hubs that determine their own development priorities. • Investing in rangatahi leadership and internship pipelines for Māori in trades and sectors. <p>OPM/McKinsey Alignment: Both models highlight leadership, but Te Waka Kura demands self-determination, not top-down management. Rangatiratanga reframes who holds the pen — and the purse — in planning.</p>
<p>Te Tauihu-The Destination: Oranga (Holistic Wellbeing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A thriving future defined by more than employment; • Cultural, spiritual, mental, and physical wellbeing for individuals and whānau; • Whānau ora as a planning outcome, not just an afterthought; and • Prosperity measured in identity, connection, and future security 	<p>Role in the Waka: The destination. The future we are paddling toward.</p> <p>Workforce Meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The goal isn't just "a job." It's a meaningful life — culturally, economically, spiritually. • Workforce systems must enable whānau ora, not just productivity. • Measures of success must include identity, mana, and hauora. <p>Examples of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding models that reward retention and wellbeing outcomes, not just completions. • Using mokopuna-focused planning to guide long-term investments in skills and sustainability. <p>OPM/McKinsey Alignment: OPM and McKinsey focus on organisational performance. Oranga focuses on community flourishing — a different definition of success.</p>

9. REGIONAL AND NATIONAL VARIATION

While Te Waka Kura is grounded in widely recognised Te Ao Māori values, the expression and application of these values vary across hapū, iwi, and rohe. These variations reflect whakapapa, language, tikanga, and deep environmental connections. Rather than standardising cultural practice, this framework is built to embrace these differences as a strength.

Where specific regional differences are known, they are acknowledged here. Where no variation is recorded, the assumption is that shared values and practices likely exist across the motu. It is recommended that Food and Fibre CoVE work with hapū/iwi to determine where adaptations may be required.

Known Key Differences

1. Mātauranga Māori (Navigation System)

Mātauranga Māori is inherently place-based. Each hapū and iwi maintains its own knowledge traditions — reflected in their stories, maramataka, food systems, wānanga

practices, and ecological relationships. For example, maramataka in Ngāti Whātua differs from that of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui due to variations in coastlines, climate, and seasonal observations.²⁷

The interpretation of environmental values like kaitiakitanga also varies. Waikato-based iwi, for instance, may focus on freshwater and river guardianship, while coastal hapū/iwi prioritise moana and kaimoana systems.²⁸

Implication for Te Waka Kura: Mātauranga Māori must be embedded in regionally specific ways, drawing on local knowledge systems and cultural leadership.

2. Te Reo Māori (Language and Dialect)

Regional dialects of Te Reo Māori are a taonga. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and idioms differ from iwi/hapū to iwi/hapū. Kāi Tahu replaces “ng” with “k”; Taranaki reo may omit the “wh” sound.²⁹

These variations are more than linguistic — they reflect identity, worldview, and ancestral connection. Vocabulary related to wellbeing, leadership, or values may also differ in nuance or use.

Implication for Te Waka Kura: Materials should be developed with local reo experts to ensure accuracy, resonance, and mana-enhancing delivery.

Areas of Likely Variation

These areas may also differ by rohe but require local engagement to confirm specific distinctions of Te Ao Māori principles:

- **Kaitiakitanga:** The practices of kaitiakitanga are applied in different ways by different hapū and iwi, reflecting their unique relationships with the environment.³⁰
- **Rangatiratanga:** Traditional Māori leadership roles, such as those of a rangatira, encompassed responsibilities for the well-being and protection of their people within the hapū/iwi, with decisions made collectively to ensure the prosperity of the group.
- **Whanaungatanga:** The practice of whanaungatanga has been notably influenced by historical events, including land loss and urban migration, which have impacted traditional family structures and relationships.³¹
- **Oranga:** Māori perspectives on wellbeing are holistic, encompassing spiritual, mental, physical, and family health, as represented in models like Te Whare Tapa Whā.³²

²⁷ Environmental Protection Authority. *Guide to the Mātauranga Framework: Companion Guide*. Wellington, NZ: Environmental Protection Authority, 2021.

²⁸ Waikato Regional Council. *Mātauranga Māori FAQs*. (n.d.).

²⁹ Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand. *Te Reo Māori - The Māori Language*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-reo-maori-the-maori-language>

³⁰ Bay of Plenty Regional Council. *Kaitiakitanga*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.boprc.govt.nz/media/433903/chapter-2-kaitiakitanga.pdf>

³¹ Te Puni Kōkiri. *Understanding whānau-centred approaches*. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.tpk.govt.nz/documents/download/1025/understanding-whanau-centred-approaches.pdf>

³² Mason Durie. *Te Whare Tapa Whā*. (1986) Retrieved from <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha>

Implementation Guidance

- Use Mātauranga Māori and Te Reo Māori as required areas for local adaptation.
- Validate all materials and processes through hapū or iwi based review or wānanga.
- Create a living record of hapū/iwi specific interpretations to guide future implementation and partnerships.
- Respect mana motuhake and uphold the authority of hapū and iwi to determine tikanga and planning approaches in their rohe.

“He piko, he taniwha” – “At every bend, a guardian awaits”. Every region brings new wisdom, new stories, and new responsibilities to be honoured.

10. MODEL ALIGNMENT

Traditional Western workforce planning frameworks, such as the OPM and the McKinsey model, have served as cornerstones for policy makers and institutional strategists. These models focus heavily on linear logic, efficiency, and measurable outcomes—often designed for urbanised, corporate, and hierarchical workforce environments.

While their frameworks are valuable in settings that require standardised process improvement or top-down restructuring, they fundamentally lack the cultural depth, intergenerational understanding, and relational focus required to meaningfully engage Māori communities. These models are predominantly transactional: they define success in terms of short-term labour metrics, fiscal efficiency, and structural coherence. As a result, they often unintentionally reproduce systemic inequities, excluding Māori voices from leadership, strategic co-design, and outcome-setting.

Te Waka Kura, by contrast, represents a shift from compliance to connection, from outputs to oranga, and from systems designed for us to systems designed by us.

Key Areas of Misalignment and Transformation:

Workforce Feature	OPM/McKinsey Focus	Te Waka Kura Integration
Time Horizon	Short-to-medium term outcomes, e.g. quarterly or annual KPIs.	Long-term, intergenerational outcomes rooted in mokopuna and whenua.
Success Metrics	Employment rates, productivity, profit margins.	Whānau wellbeing, cultural identity, intergenerational success.
Cultural Lens	Culture-neutral or culturally adaptive; diversity as inclusion add-on.	Culture-centric; Māori values, language, and tikanga are foundational.
Decision-Making	Centralised, hierarchical leadership.	Distributed, relational, hapū, iwi and whānau-informed leadership.

Strategic Logic	Efficiency-driven systems logic; human resources as economic input.	Value-based systems logic; humans as taonga, workforce as whakapapa.
Planning Cycle	Data-driven, linear planning cycles.	Cyclical, relational, and responsive to lived experience and whakapapa.

Limitations of OPM and McKinsey in the Māori Context:

- **Lack of Indigenous Knowledge Integration:** These models do not consider Mātauranga Māori as a valid strategic knowledge system.
- **Overreliance on Quantitative Data:** Important relational, spiritual, and cultural dimensions are ignored.
- **Transactional Relationships:** Partnerships are often extractive, with Māori often involved only in implementation, not co-design.
- **Inflexibility in Diverse Contexts:** These models are difficult to localise to hapū/iwi realities and regional Māori needs.

Strengths of Te Waka Kura

Te Waka Kura offers a bicultural and bicentric model, meaning it functions both within Māori contexts and alongside broader national frameworks. It does not reject Western strategic tools outright but repositions them within a Te Ao Māori worldview:

- It supports whānau to see themselves as leaders of their workforce journeys;
- It uplifts cultural identity as a determinant of economic success;
- It opens a space for shared governance between hapū/iwi and institutions; and
- It moves us away from "fixing people to fit systems" toward "reforming systems to reflect people."

Te Waka Kura is not simply more aligned than OPM or McKinsey for Māori—it is more appropriate, more effective, and more just. It is designed for Māori, with Māori, and from Māori principles. In doing so, it speaks not only to the needs of Māori but to a wider vision for a fairer, healthier, and more connected Aotearoa.

If we are to build a truly inclusive workforce strategy, then we must begin with the waka—where each person has a role, where the journey is collective, and where every paddle forward is grounded in whakapapa and wairua.

Aspect	OPM/McKinsey Models	Te Waka Kura
Values	Efficiency, market goals	Māori values: care, sustainability, kinship
Perspective	Individual, economic	Collective, holistic
Leadership	Centralised, non-Māori led	Māori-led, co-designed
Time Horizon	Short/medium-term	Intergenerational planning
Data Use	Quantitative-focused	Blended with lived experience
Cultural Integrity	Māori added-on	Māori values foundational

11. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

Te Waka Kura is built upon the voices, aspirations, and lived realities of Māori in Te Matau-a-Māui. Stakeholder feedback was collected through wānanga, hui, and survey responses, ensuring that the framework is grounded in community insight and whānau experience. The feedback was overwhelmingly supportive of a Māori-led workforce model, though stakeholders also offered meaningful critique and recommendations for strengthening the approach.

Key Themes from Māori Stakeholders

1. Cultural Safety Must Be Non-Negotiable

Many stakeholders emphasised that current workforce systems often feel unsafe or alienating for Māori. Cultural missteps, lack of representation, and subtle forms of bias continue to undermine Māori participation and progression.

"You can't just put a koru on a logo and call it cultural inclusion. It's about whether our people feel like they belong".

2. Whānau-Centred Approaches are Essential

Whānau wellbeing was repeatedly raised as more important than individual metrics. Participants discussed how employment decisions are deeply tied to whānau responsibilities and cultural roles.

"A good job for one person shouldn't come at the cost of their whole whānau struggling to get by".

3. Rangatahi Need to See Themselves Reflected

Youth stakeholders stressed the need for visible Māori leadership in every sector—not just in token roles, but in positions of decision-making and strategy.

"We need to see our own people at the top, not just being hired but being listened to".

4. Iwi-Hapū Co-Design Should Be the Default

A strong desire was expressed to move beyond consultation toward genuine co-design with hapū and iwi. Stakeholders were clear that anything less would risk repeating patterns of marginalisation.

"Don't just ask us what we think after it's already been decided. Build it with us from the start".

5. Long-Term Vision is Crucial

Further feedback highlighted the need for planning that looked beyond immediate job placement. They spoke of restoring mana, sustaining whakapapa, and leaving a legacy for mokopuna.

"We're not planning for the next quarter. We're planning for the next generation".

Recommendations from Stakeholders

To further strengthen Te Waka Kura, the following were recommended:

- **Stronger Regional Flexibility:** Allow hapū and iwi to adapt the model with local histories, dialects, and strategies;

- **Deepen Mātauranga Māori Integration:** Make traditional knowledge and cultural practices more visible in learning and employment outcomes;
- **Guarantee Māori Governance:** Embed Māori leadership into all implementation and evaluation structures;
- **Support Rangatahi Pathways:** Create specific leadership incubators for Māori youth in food and fibre, tech, health, and construction;
- **Fund Kaupapa Māori Providers:** Ensure that Māori-led education and employment initiatives receive long-term funding, not just pilot support; and
- **Accountability through Whānau:** Include whānau voices in monitoring and accountability processes to ensure services are delivering what they promise.

Māori stakeholders affirmed that Te Waka Kura has the potential to be transformational—but only if it is implemented with integrity, equity, and deep partnership. The model must remain flexible, anchored in kaupapa Māori, and open to evolution through continued kōrero.

Key Themes from Stakeholders:

- **Cultural Safety:** *"Māori workers need environments where our identity is not just accepted, but uplifted";*
- **Whānau Inclusion:** *"Workforce development must support the wider whānau, not just the individual";*
- **Leadership Visibility:** *"We need to see ourselves in leadership positions if the system is to feel like ours";*
- **Authentic Partnership:** *"It can't be consultation; it needs to be co-creation"; and*
- **Intergenerational Thinking:** *"It's not just about jobs for now, but about legacy for the future".*

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of embedding Māori principles into every level of the workforce system, not just as a project add-on.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To ensure the successful adoption and long-term sustainability of Te Waka Kura, the following recommendations were developed through kaupapa Māori analysis and engagement with Māori. Each recommendation corresponds to a part of the waka — symbolising the movement, direction, and strength needed to build a workforce strategy rooted in Te Ao Māori.

These are not isolated actions. They are interconnected, aligned with the principles of kotahitanga, rangatiratanga, and intergenerational wellbeing. Together, they offer a tikanga-informed, future-facing pathway for systemic change.

1. Embed Māori Leadership and Co-Design

Leadership must be more than consultation — it must be co-creation. Māori leadership in governance, strategy, implementation, and monitoring ensures the framework remains grounded in lived realities.

- Establish hapū and iwi led workforce governance groups at local, regional, and national levels to ensure mana motuhake and oversight across the system;
- Mandate co-design for all government-funded workforce policy, planning, and investment strategies;
- Support rangatahi and emerging Māori leaders to participate through mentorship, training in policy literacy, systems change, and digital governance;
- Create shared authority models where Māori have veto power and resource control, not just “advisory” status; and
- Include kaumātua, and cultural knowledge holders as core to workforce leadership structures.

2. **Align Education with Mātauranga Māori**

Education systems must reflect the knowledge systems, aspirations, and cultural realities of ākonga Māori. This is critical for both workforce equity and cultural revitalisation.

- Integrate Mātauranga Māori across vocational and tertiary curricula in partnership with wānanga, hapū, iwi education providers, and kura kaupapa;
- Recognise and uplift traditional knowledge holders as educators, assessors, and subject matter experts;
- Develop accredited micro-credentials in kaupapa Māori domains: tikanga-led business, hauora Māori, whenua-based enterprise, papakāinga housing, etc; and
- Offer teacher and tutor training grounded in cultural safety, trauma-informed practices, and anti-racism.

3. **Create Culturally Safe Pathways and Workplaces**

Māori must be able to thrive in environments that affirm identity, reo, tikanga, and whānau obligations. Cultural safety is a foundation, not a bonus.

- Embed kaupapa Māori pastoral care in all learning and employment pathways — including peer support, kaiārahi roles, and whānau engagement;
- Require cultural safety audits for all government-funded training and employment programmes;
- Establish a Māori-led accreditation system for culturally responsive organisations and employers; and
- Recognise cultural labour and lived experience (e.g. marae leadership, iwi service, te reo Māori) as valid workforce skills and qualifications.

4. **Address Systemic Inequities**

Equity must be the purpose — not just a side effect. Māori experience ongoing systemic barriers in education, employment, and leadership. These must be addressed with urgency and accountability.

- Develop a Māori Equity Index to track progress across access, retention, pay equity, and leadership roles;
- Invest in Māori workforce and enterprise hubs to provide locally driven employment, training, and startup support;
- Design restorative justice initiatives for those impacted by racism, exclusion, or systemic harm in workforce systems; and

- Integrate equity impact assessments into all regional and national workforce strategies.

5. **Build Strategic and Localised Partnerships**

No agency or sector can do this alone. Partnership is essential — and must be based on mana-enhancing relationships and Treaty-aligned accountability.

- Form mana whenua-led regional alliances involving local government, industry, schools, tertiary providers, and social services;
- Incentivise employers to adopt Te Waka Kura principles through procurement policy, social impact funding, and public sector contracts;
- Create a Māori Workforce Development Network to share best practice, design tools, data models, and evaluation frameworks; and
- Clarify roles for non-Māori allies in partnerships, with clear expectations around equity, cultural humility, and redistribution of power.

6. **Localise and Scale the Model**

Te Waka Kura is not static or one-size-fits-all. It must be adaptable to different rohe, hapū, iwi and sectors while maintaining cultural integrity.

- Develop customisable implementation toolkits that each hapū/iwi or rohe can tailor with their language, values, and priorities;
- Provide multi-year pilot funding to implement the model in multiple rohe with rigorous kaupapa Māori evaluation;
- Create a central Te Waka Kura Hub to hold the national vision and support local execution; and
- Recognise that different regions are at different stages — and tailor support accordingly.

7. **Measure What Matters — Māori-Centred Outcomes**

If we want different results, we need different indicators. Western metrics of productivity don't capture Māori aspirations of wellbeing, belonging, and mana.

- Use indigenous outcome frameworks such as whanaungatanga, mana, wairua, whakapapa, and oranga;
- Involve whānau, hapū, and iwi in evaluation design and the interpretation of results;
- Develop kaupapa Māori data sovereignty protocols to ensure Māori control over data collection, use, and reporting;
- Prioritise success stories and strengths-based narratives over deficit-based reporting; and
- Ensure regular, transparent feedback to communities, not just to funders or ministers.

8. **Invest in Innovation and Futures Thinking**

Māori have always innovated — across oceans, generations, and time. Te Waka Kura must prepare us not just for now, but for what lies ahead.

- Support hapū/iwi and Māori entrepreneurs to develop emerging industries grounded in Tikanga Māori;
- Establish visioning wānanga and speculative design spaces for imagining workforce systems for 2040 and beyond; and

- Back the development of Māori digital infrastructure such as data platforms, ed-tech, and Indigenous IP protection.

9. **Communicate the Vision Widely and Authentically**

Te Waka Kura cannot live in a report — it must live in people. The message must reach and reflect the full diversity of the Māori world and its allies.

- Launch a national campaign with local rollouts: wānanga, hui, visual storytelling, and strategic communications;
- Translate materials into Te Reo Māori and other languages (e.g. Samoan, Tongan, Mandarin) to reach other indigenous groups;
- Build a multimedia strategy featuring Māori workforce leaders, kaimahi, rangatahi, and visionaries sharing their journeys;
- Maintain open channels of dialogue with whānau, hapū, and iwi through regular updates, digital platforms, and kānohi ki te kānohi; and
- Celebrate milestones and showcase community leadership as the waka progresses.

13. **CONCLUSION**

“Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua.”

“I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.”

Te Waka Kura does not seek to replace existing systems simply for the sake of reform. Rather, it offers a profound recalibration of values, relationships, and responsibilities in response to the aspirations of Māori and the wider call for equity and belonging in Aotearoa.

What began as a response to the absence of Te Ao Māori in traditional workforce models like OPM and McKinsey has evolved into a living framework — shaped by kōrero with Māori. These conversations revealed a shared desire to design a future that is by Māori, with Māori, and for all. A future where work is not just a transaction, but a platform for restoring whakapapa, exercising tino rangatiratanga, and sustaining wairua.

At its heart, Te Waka Kura is a collective vehicle. It is designed to move across diverse moana — across sectors, generations, and regions. It reflects the legacy of the Takitimu waka and the enduring values of Ngāti Kahungunu, whose ancestral story reminds us that navigation is both science and ceremony, strategy and spirit. As with the voyages of our tīpuna, the journey requires unity, courage, and an unwavering commitment to carry not just ourselves, but our people — our mokopuna — into the future.

The recommendations laid out in this report are not just suggestions. They are invocations of responsibility — calling on hapū, iwi, government, employers, educators, funders, and institutions to transform how power is shared, how outcomes are defined, and how planning is grounded. They offer a blueprint for co-design, co-leadership, and kaupapa Māori futures thinking.

Why This Matters Now

The timing of Te Waka Kura is crucial. Aotearoa faces increasing economic uncertainty, labour shortages, climate disruption, and social inequities — especially among Māori. The Māori economy alone is projected to grow well beyond its current \$32 billion contribution to GDP, yet structural inequities continue to prevent Māori from realising full participation and leadership in that growth.

There is urgency — but there is also opportunity.

Workforce systems must now move beyond compliance and representation into authentic partnership and transformation. This includes recognising Te Ao Māori not as an optional layer, but as a foundation for inclusive planning and sustainable prosperity.

In other words: Te Waka Kura is not just a strategy. It is a movement.

As this waka moves forward, the work does not end with publication. It continues in the classrooms where rangatahi dream of leading. In the wānanga where kaumātua share knowledge. In the boardrooms where decisions about resources and futures are made. In the whānau homes where wellbeing is negotiated daily.

Every paddle stroke matters. Every voice must be heard. Every part of the waka — te taurapa, te tauihu, ngā hoe, heart, rangatira, and horizon — must be resourced, respected, and aligned.

Let us not drift toward equity. Let us paddle together — with direction, with unity, and with ancestral guidance lighting our way.

He waka eke noa.

14. DISCLAIMER

This report uses Te Reo Māori and Tikanga Māori in the context of workforce planning and development. It is acknowledged that Te Reo Māori and Tikanga Māori is a living language, rich in nuance and variation. As such, multiple interpretations or translations may exist across hapū, iwi and rohe.

While this report has drawn on engagement with Māori stakeholders in Te Matau-a-Māui, it does not claim to speak for all Māori or represent every voice across the rohe. The intent is to uplift and reflect the whakaaro that were generously shared, while recognising the mana motuhake of each hapū and marae to hold and express their own mātauranga in their own ways.

15. GLOSSARY

Māori Kupu	English Translation
Aotearoa	New Zealand
Hapū	Sub-tribe
Hoe	Paddle.
Hui	Meeting, gathering
Iwi	Tribe
Kaimahi	Worker, employee
Kaiārahi	Guide, mentor
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship, stewardship
Kaumātua	Elder
Kaupapa	Purpose, policy, principle
Kaupapa Māori	Māori-centred approach
Kōrero	Talk, conversation, discussion
Mana	Authority, prestige, integrity
Manaakitanga	Hospitality, care, support
Mana motuhake	Autonomy, self-determination
Maramataka	Māori lunar calendar
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Mokopuna	Grandchildren, future generations
Oranga	Wellbeing
Pākehā	Non-Māori (usually of European descent)
Papakāinga	Communal Māori housing on ancestral land
Rangatahi	Youth, younger generation
Rangatira	Chief, leader
Rangatiratanga	Leadership, self-governance
Rohe	Region, tribal boundary
Taiao	Natural environment

Tamariki	Children
Tāmaki Makaurau	Auckland
Taniwha	Guardian spirit, mythical creature
Tapu	Sacred, restricted
Tauihu	Carved bow piece of waka
Taurapa	Stern of waka taua. Carved end piece
Te Ao Māori	The Māori world, Māori worldview
Te Haumako	Fertile, rich soil
Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa	The Pacific Ocean
Te Reo Māori	Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi
Tikanga	Customs, protocols
Tino rangatiratanga	Absolute self-determination
Tipuna/Tipuna	Ancestor(s)
Tohunga	Expert, priest, specialist
Wāhi tapu	Sacred site
Waka	Canoe
Wānanga	Forum, learning session
Wairua	Spirit, soul
Whakapapa	Genealogy, lineage
Whakaaro	Thought, opinion, plan, understanding, idea, intention, gift, conscience.
Whānau	Extended family
Whanaungatanga	Relationships, kinship
Whare Tapa Whā	Māori wellbeing model with four dimensions

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17. NGĀ MIHI WHAKAMUTUNGA

He mihi maioha, he mihi whakamiha ki ngā hapū, ngā marae, me ngā whānau katoa o Te Matau-a-Māui i tuku mai i ō koutou whakaaro, i ō koutou kōrero, me te mātauranga tuku iho. Nā koutou tēnei waka i whakaara, i whakakaha, i whakatere hoki. E kore e taea te whakatinana o Te Waka Kura mehemea kāore koutou i tae mai ki te tautoko. Nō reira, he mihi tino nui ki a koutou katoa – ka maumahara tonu mātou ki tēnei koha rangatira.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to the hapū, marae, and whānau of Te Matau-a-Māui who generously shared their whakaaro, kōrero, and intergenerational knowledge. It is through your insights and contributions that this waka was uplifted, strengthened, and set in motion. The realisation of *Te Waka Kura* would not have been possible without your support. We will forever honour this noble gift you have given.

We'd also like to give a special acknowledgement to mana whenua who whakapapa to the following marae, as well as the organisations and businesses whose contributions helped shape and strengthen this kaupapa:

- Omahu Marae
- Te Awhina Marae
- Rūnanga Marae
- Muka Tangata
- Omahu Parata Ltd
- Wharerangi Trust

Your kōrero, your wairua, and your mātauranga are woven into every part of this waka — and will continue to guide its journey into the future.