

Reimagining
a strong **Māori**

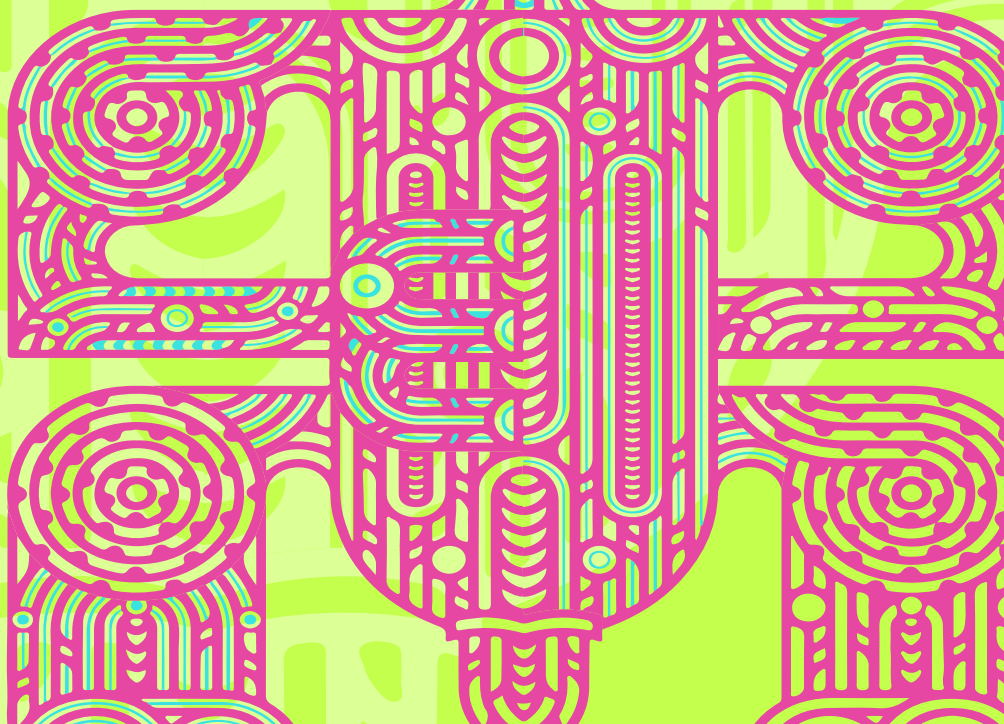
Tech Workforce



MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

FINAL REPORT • 2025

Matihiko Ora. Ka Eke - Ka Toro





Tā Apirana Ngata

E tipu e rea mo ngā
rā o tō ao
Ko tō ringa ki ngā
rākau ā te Pākehā hei
ara mō tō tinana
Ko tō ngākau ki ngā
tāonga a ō tīpuna
Māori
Hei tikitiki mō tō
māhuna
Ko tō wairua ki tō
Atua, Nānā nei ngā
mea katoa

Grow up and thrive for
the days destined to you.
Your hands to the tools
of the Pākehā to provide
physical sustenance,
Your heart to the
treasures of your Māori
ancestors as a diadem
for your brow,
Your soul to your God, to
whom all things belong.

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He Kōrero - Foreword

Whaia te matauranga hei oranga mo tātou

Pursue knowledge for the sake of our wellbeing

Making Everything Achievable wish to acknowledge the interviewees and the contributors to his research who help our people forge new pathways and possibilities in technology. Thank you for ensuring that tech world isn't scary, in fact ensuring that there is space carved out for our thinkers, advocates, philosophers and practitioners.

Many thanks also to our team, those who mulled over hundreds of hours of recordings and our designer Victoria Panasenko who designed this beautiful report. Also many thanks to the designer of our tohu Te Iwihoko Te Rangihirawea and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangī for starting this Mapping the Māori Tech Sector journey with us with our original reports.



He Mihi - Introduction

This report starts with a pātai: what does it take for tangata whenua (people of the land) not just to participate, but to genuinely thrive in Aotearoa's growing tech industry? We knew the answer wasn't going to come just from policies or numbers, it would come from the lived experiences of whānau (family), kaiako (teachers), rangatahi (youth) and those doing the every day mahi.

We gathered kōrero, drawn by the stories of practitioners at the coalface, those building futures, dreaming boldly, and weaving whanau in with every step. They shared what works and what doesn't, about what lifts our people and what holds them back. What we heard was the honest and lived realities whanau māori face whilst navigating te reo matihiko - the language and knowledges of technology.

By elevating those voices, this report sets a clear and purposeful direction ahead. A wero (challenge) to all of us is to build systems that reflect Tikanga Māori values, support whānau aspirations, and make space for these values and leadership in technology both as a driver and foundation.

The reference to the whakatauki from Tā Apirana Ngata "E tipu e rea" is an intentional tribute recognising that for over 160 years tangata whenua have been extraordinarily skillful at adaptation and adoption of various global tools and skills that would ensure our survival. We have learned how to utilise the very best of what the world has to offer and we are now in an exciting phase which acknowledges the profound impact of applying matauranga Māori, mohiotanga Māori - our values, our philosophies and approaches to technology and education as a blueprint for flourishing futures.

However, this hopefulness has been marred by a swift and for many terrifying shifts in the tech and Māori education sector that has seen various organisations shut, many have lost their jobs or had to pivot into new industries to stay afloat. This is important as it affected nearly half of those interviewed for this report.

Let us continue to realise a future in Aotearoa where tangata whenua aren't just part of the digital world, we are leading it! This requires investment, co-ordination and support from all corners of te ao Māori and the Kāwanatanga today.

MEA deeply appreciate the contributors, supporters and team whose hands and experiences have woven together this body of work. Together we are shaping the necessary changes needed, Mō tō tātou mokopuna, mō ngā uri whakaheke - our future generations.



Kaye-Maree Dunn

Director, Making Everything Achievable

Executive Summary

The future of technology in Aotearoa has Māori designers, learners, engineers, and investors at the forefront of development. It is essential we cultivate the conditions to make this happen as quickly and effectively as possible.

Across all the kōrero MEA conducted, the message was clear: the strongest pathways are relational, flexible, and culturally grounded. Programmes that stand out don't just teach technical skills; they create spaces where people feel safe, seen, and supported. Leadership from Māori themselves is essential, ensuring that success is defined on their terms and that outcomes are meaningful for whānau, hapū, and iwi.

Partnerships also matter, but only when they are genuine. Excellence is not about consultation alone, but about co-design and shared responsibility between iwi, educators, employers, government, and communities.

This report invites us to reimagine what excellence looks like, not by fitting Māori into tech, but by enabling Māori to reshape technology in ways that reflect their identity, aspirations, and responsibilities to future generations.

KEY INSIGHTS:

1. **Culturally Grounded Learning:** The most effective programmes weave together kaupapa Māori principles, real-world relevance, and wraparound support. Embedding tikanga and iwi-specific knowledge strengthens identity and builds skills that are transferable to the workforce.
2. **Flexible Pathways:** Micro-credentials and localised validation systems provide modular, accessible learning while preserving cultural integrity.
3. **Addressing Barriers:** Holistic support is essential to overcome systemic challenges such as financial pressures, housing insecurity, and access to digital tools.
4. **Collaborative Relationships:** Long-term, respectful partnerships across iwi, education, government, and industry are critical for sustainable impact.

CONCLUSION:

This report sets out a path for designing programmes that respect cultural identity while meeting real-world employment and business needs. By integrating cultural responsiveness, holistic support, flexible credentialing, and genuine collaboration, stakeholders can create opportunities that equip ākonga Māori to thrive. These efforts are not only an investment in skills but also in the future leadership, well-being, and prosperity of Māori communities.

Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach, gathering in-depth insights from Māori Tech Education and Training sector experts. Over 10 months, MEA conducted semi-structured interviews with various experts, including CEOs, Directors, Kaitiaki, and Kaimahi.

INTERVIEW FORMAT:

MEA interviewed experts using a semi-structured kōrero format, allowing for a balance between guided questions and open-ended discussions. This approach ensured that key themes were explored while providing flexibility to capture unique perspectives and experiences from each participant. The interviews covered topics such as:

- Features of programmes that have worked well for Akonga Māori
- Cultural support mechanisms embedded within these initiatives
- Practical processes for programme design, delivery, and evaluation
- Lessons learned and opportunities for improvement

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS:

The interviews were conducted online and face-to-face to accommodate participants' schedules and locations. These lasted about 60 minutes each and were recorded with participants' consent for transcription and analysis.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION:

Each expert was selected to represent a diversified perspective within the sector, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Māori tech education and training.

ANALYSIS:

MEA used thematic analysis to observe recurring patterns, significant insights, and unique interview recommendations. This process enabled the identification of sector-standard criteria that can inform the design of an optimal programme for Māori.

Key Findings

INSIGHTS CAPTURED IN OUR KŌRERO:

⊗ Holistic and Individualised Approaches to Education

Programmes across the case studies consistently highlight the importance of treating participants as whole individuals rather than mere learners. Initiatives like PurSuit and Talent RISE provide technical training and focus on wellness, emotional resilience, and fostering a sense of identity. These programmes use culturally relevant models such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, ensuring participants are supported in all aspects of their lives.

⊗ Micro-Credentials as a Gateway

Micro-credentials are a game-changer, providing a flexible and targeted way to upskill participants while accommodating their unique cultural and practical needs. The TRM Training programme emphasises the importance of embedding mātauranga Māori within micro-credential frameworks, creating educational opportunities that are both innovative and rooted in traditional knowledge. Dev Academy further showcases how modular learning can be adapted to local and iwi-specific contexts.

⊗ Barriers to Access

The challenges these institutions face, from housing instability and financial barriers to a lack of digital tools, are stark reminders of the systemic inequities these programmes aim to address. Many organisations go the extra mile by providing practical solutions like free laptops, flexible schedules, and ongoing financial support, ensuring participants can focus on learning and growth.

⊗ Cultural Identity as a Strength

Embedding te ao Māori into these initiatives is not just a feature but a foundation. Programmes align tikanga and mātauranga Māori with modern educational tools, creating learning environments that are deeply resonant and empowering for participants. This approach strengthens cultural identity and fosters pride and confidence among Akonga Māori.

UNIQUE AND SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS:

⚙️ Integrated Wellness Frameworks in Learning

Several programmes highlighted how integrating wellness into the learning environment directly improves outcomes. For instance, PurSuit's use of the Whare Tapa Whā Model addresses mental and emotional health and acknowledges the socio-economic factors that impact learning. This approach ensures that participants are better prepared for long-term success.

⚙️ Role of Gaming as an Educational Tool

Gaming, as mentioned in Digital Natives Academy's programme, is a creative way to connect with rangatahi and spark interest in tech-related pathways. This approach explores the potential of hobbies and interests as entry points into formal education, particularly for disengaged learners.

⚙️ Importance of Relatable Facilitators

The Nōna Te Ao programme highlights facilitators' critical role in understanding technical and cultural contexts. The facilitators' ability to manage industry requirements and the unique needs of ākonga Māori ensures a balance between skill acquisition and cultural integrity.

⚙️ Tailoring Programmes to Local Contexts

Dev Academy's regional work illustrates how programmes must be hyper-localised, incorporating iwi priorities and tikanga into the curriculum. This localisation ensures that the learning connects meaningfully with participants while addressing region-specific challenges.

⚙️ Housing Instability and Economic Pressures

Housing instability is an important finding as a barrier to learning. Without secure housing, many participants struggle to engage fully in training programmes. The need for programmes to consider broader social issues affecting participants' learning capacity.

⚙️ Financial Literacy as a Core Competency

Programmes like those led by 3BF emphasise financial literacy as an overlooked foundational skill. Equipping participants with the tools to manage money and understand financial systems can lead to greater independence and career readiness.

⚙️ Challenges in Industry Expectations

The gap between entry-level skills and employer expectations, noted in PurSuit's programmes, highlights a disconnect that requires addressing through better alignment between training content and industry needs. Industry partnerships could play a key role here.

⚙️ Exploring Non-Traditional Validation of Knowledge

Using iwi validation systems instead of relying solely on NZQA accreditation offers a promising approach to formally recognising culturally grounded knowledge. This approach could provide a model for other Indigenous education systems worldwide.

⚙️ Cultural Suppression in Tech Spaces

Many Māori participants feel they must suppress their cultural identities in mainstream tech environments, which is particularly significant. This reinforces the need for culturally safe spaces in both educational and workplace settings.



Recommendations

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

⚙️ Partnerships and Collaboration

Strong partnerships with iwi, industry, government, and educational providers are key to programme success. Collaborative efforts enable resource sharing, co-designed curricula, and smoother transitions into employment. Programmes should also prioritise partnerships that align with shared values, ensuring mutual benefit while amplifying the impact for Māori communities.

⚙️ Building Local Capacity

Regional capacity building is vital for scalability and sustainability. Investing in local expertise, such as training Māori facilitators and educators, ensures that programmes remain culturally grounded and community-driven. Supporting regional hubs and local tech training initiatives helps bridge gaps in access to education and employment opportunities for rangatahi.

⚙️ Pathways to Employment

The transition from training to employment is a critical stage. Clear pathways, such as internships, apprenticeships, and mentoring programmes, help bridge the gap between learning and practical application. Aligning training content with industry needs and engaging employers to create inclusive hiring practices further strengthens these pathways.

⚙️ Addressing Systemic Challenges

The recommendations highlight the need to tackle systemic barriers, such as unconscious bias in hiring, rigid funding models, and the disconnect between industry expectations and participant readiness. Advocacy for policy changes, such as longer-term funding cycles and recognition of alternative qualifications like micro-credentials, is essential to creating a supportive ecosystem.

⚙️ Innovative and Sustainable Funding Models

To ensure longevity, programmes must explore diversified funding streams, including social enterprises, philanthropic partnerships, and government support. Sustainability also involves reducing reliance on external funding by developing revenue-generating initiatives, such as digital products or recruitment platforms.

⦿ Youth Leadership and Engagement

Rangatahi leadership plays a pivotal role in the success of these initiatives. Involving youth leaders in programme co-design ensures relevance and encourages greater engagement. Programmes should also focus on mentorship and role modelling, providing relatable pathways for young Akonga Māori to envision their futures in the tech sector.

⦿ Integration of Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is a critical skill for long-term success. Programmes that integrate practical financial education help participants build independence, manage earnings, and support their whānau. Linking financial literacy to career development ensures it remains relevant and impactful.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

⦿ Localised Validation of Knowledge

Allow iwi and marae-based organisations to validate micro-credentials through their own matanga (experts) or tohunga, which offers a transformative approach to accreditation. This recommendation preserves the cultural integrity of Māori knowledge while ensuring learners receive recognition that resonates within their community. It also explains how indigenous knowledge systems can coexist with formal education frameworks.

⦿ Gaming as an Entry Point to Technology

The innovative use of gaming to connect rangatahi with technology highlights an underexplored avenue for engagement. By leveraging the creative and technical aspects of gaming, programmes can introduce participants to broader career pathways, such as coding, graphic design, or music production. This approach efficiently engages learners who might otherwise feel disconnected from traditional education.

⦿ Focusing on Real-world Problems

Involve rangatahi in solving real-world issues, such as environmental challenges or iwi communication needs, ties education directly to community impact. This approach enhances learning outcomes and reinforces the importance of contributing to whānau and iwi aspirations.

⦿ Strategic Use of Data to Showcase Impact

It is important to use data to demonstrate programme success. This recommendation can help secure ongoing support from funders, employers, and government agencies by providing tangible evidence of the programme's impact on Akonga Māori.

What Does It All Mean?

This research outlines how to make educational and workforce programmes for Akonga Māori successful. Central to this success is integrating te ao Māori values, which ensure that programmes resonate culturally and meet participants' holistic needs.

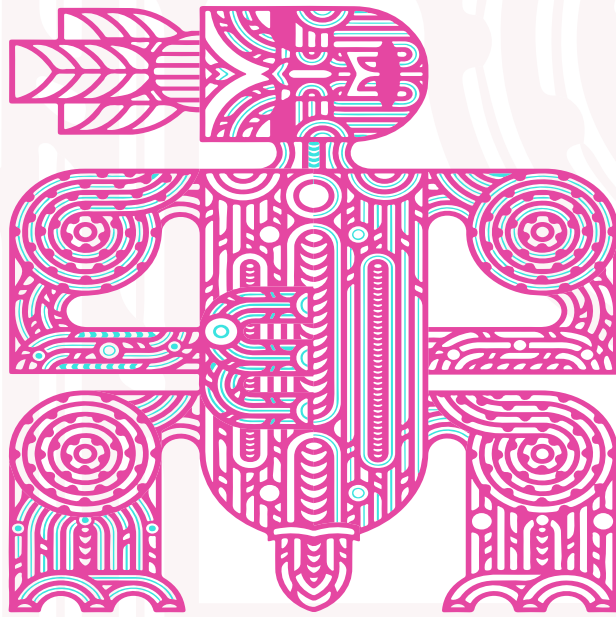
The key insights emphasise that culturally aligned frameworks, flexible learning pathways, and localised validation systems are essential for creating compelling and meaningful programmes. Addressing systemic barriers, such as access to resources, financial instability, and inequitable hiring practices, was consistently highlighted, along with the need for long-term support mechanisms that empower learners beyond the training period.

Collaboration emerged as a recurring theme, focussing on the value of partnerships between iwi, educational providers, government agencies, and private-sector stakeholders. When guided by shared values and mutual respect, such partnerships enhance the reach and impact of programmes while maintaining cultural integrity.

Overall, this research reinforces the importance of programmes grounded in Māori identity, designed flexibly, and supported by robust partnerships. The insights provided a foundation for developing sector-standard criteria and an optimal programme framework. By addressing practical challenges while honouring cultural heritage, stakeholders can create pathways for Akonga Māori to thrive as leaders and innovators in their communities and beyond.

This is a call to action for all involved to ensure that future programmes equip rangatahi with skills and empower them to realise their potential, preserving and amplifying the rich heritage of te ao Māori for successive generations.





CASE STUDY

Interviews



PurSuit



© Anaru Ratapu

Anaru RATAPU

*Ngāti Kahungunu
ki te Wairoa,
Rongomaiwāhine,
Ngāti Whātua*

Director
at **PurSuit**



© Moira McGarva-Ratapu

Moira MCGARVA- RATAPU

Ngāti Kahungunu

Chief Executive Officer
at **PurSuit**

**We know it
takes two to
three years
before the *skill
set* reaches
a higher level
needed to be
in a *tech job*.
So, we created
our own
wellness tool...**

“

**If their *home
situation* is
not stable,
it is going to
impact their
learning.**

SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH PURSUIT.



INTRODUCTION:

Moira McGarva-Ratapu and Anaru Ratapu are the passionate leaders behind Pursuit, a Heretaunga-based organisation dedicated to empowering rangatahi through digital skills training and holistic career support. Together, they have built a pathway for young people to gain critical skills and meaningful work opportunities within a culturally supportive framework.

Founded over seven years ago, in October 2017. Pursuit began focusing on pre-employment preparation, CV writing, cover letters, job interview skills, and professional presentation. In its third year, the organisation expanded its scope when approached by HPR to run rangatahi programmes. Today, Pursuit works with 18 to 25-year-olds, delivering innovative programmes like a six-week initiative where participants develop digital solutions to social problems. This hands-on approach teaches coding, web development from scratch, and the application of AI tools to create multilingual content. The programme culminates in a community event where graduates present digital solutions to whānau and local stakeholders.

Moira, CEO of Pursuit, brings a deeply personal understanding of resilience and determination. Having navigated her journey as a single mother on a benefit, she now channels her experiences into creating life-changing opportunities for others. She has past experience in working as a Registered Social Worker for 9 years. Her vision for Pursuit is grounded in a commitment to quality, teamwork, and a belief in the power of good habits to transform lives. Under her leadership, Pursuit teaches technical skills like web development and digital marketing and empowers youth to tackle social issues with these tools. Her focus on customer satisfaction and a Te Ao Māori worldview have set Pursuit apart as a leader in community-driven digital innovation.

Anaru Ratapu, Director at Pursuit, brings over seven years of experience as a Healthy Lifestyle Coach and Health Promoter for a Māori NGO. In 2017, he founded Mahi Kāinga, an online te reo Māori teaching platform, showcasing his dedication to Māori cultural revitalisation and education. He is also a lead developer of Pūnaha Reo, a national te reo Māori language learning platform used in schools across New Zealand, which was a finalist at the NZ HITECH Awards 2025.

At Pursuit, Anaru's creativity and leadership fuel projects like NOHI, the award-winning wellness platform that strengthens community well-being and the organisation's sustainability. His IT and digital strategy expertise underpins Pursuit's ability to deliver high-quality training that meets local needs while fostering personal and community resilience.

Together, Moira and Anaru exemplify the spirit of Pursuit, building a brighter future for rangatahi and whānau across Hawke's Bay, one step at a time.

ANARU AND MOIRA'S WISDOM:

How Their Programme Works and What Has Proven Effective

Pursuit's programme's success lies in its focus on equipping rangatahi with versatile digital skills and fostering practical learning environments. Anaru explains that the digital cadetship programme started two years ago as a 12-week initiative involving ten rangatahi referred by MSD. They trained participants in web development, social media marketing, and customer engagement, among other skills. This multifaceted approach ensures they are not limited to starting their businesses but can contribute meaningfully to various digital roles. "We know it takes two to three years before the skill set reaches a higher level needed to be in a tech job. So, we created our own wellness tool... To employ them into that space rather than sending them out." The organisation has since developed its own internal digital team and a wellness platform, which generates revenue and provides ongoing employment opportunities for programme graduates. This model ensures sustainability and continued growth while addressing the gap in tech employment for rangatahi.

Future-Proofing for Sustainable Impact

To reduce reliance on government contracts, Pursuit began future-proofing by developing marketable digital products two years ago. Moira notes that their wellness solutions, particularly in workplace settings, have garnered significant interest and are becoming a substantial revenue stream. "Now our digital products are making money, and there is a huge interest in wellness, especially in the workplace. We believe that in the next 12 to 24 months, they will surpass the income we earn from contracts." This shift secures financial stability and creates pathways for rangatahi to apply their skills within the organisation, further aligning with Pursuit's mission of long-term community impact.

Design and Development Challenges

Creating a roadmap to integrate micro-credentials into the programme has been a learning curve for Pursuit. The team explored partnerships with other education providers but encountered misalignments in delivery methods and entry-level options. Anaru highlights, "We come with rangatahi from off the couch. So you are trying to transform their mindset to become a web developer in six weeks, and then trying to put them into Yoobee, which is a different kind of system." Instead, the team focused on internal projects that addressed social challenges within the community. Moira explains, "Our next step was to talk to HPR to see if they would sponsor us or give us the ability to bring their digital solutions to life." This approach ensures the programme remains responsive to local needs while supporting rangatahi through financially viable projects.

Pastoral Care: A Cornerstone of the Programme

While the digital training lasts six weeks, Pursuit extends its pastoral care for 12 months, offering a safety net as participants transition into the workforce or further education. Moira emphasises the importance of small cohorts and personalised support, explaining that this ensures genuine outcomes rather than box-ticking exercises. “We support 40 rangatahi every 12 months. They want us to work with small numbers so that we are not just truckloading people through the system, getting a tick box, outcome.” This holistic approach enhances participant success and strengthens community connections, ensuring each rangatahi receives meaningful and sustained support.

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Building Foundational Skills for Rangatahi

A significant challenge lies in preparing rangatahi for employment or further education. Many participants are not ready for high-level tech jobs, often requiring foundational work habits such as accountability, punctuality, and workplace etiquette. Moira explains, “Not all of them are ready for a higher-level job. They may need some other foundation work just to get into the habit of waking up, going to work, being accountable to somebody else other than themselves.” Although the programme boasts an 85% success rate in transitioning participants into education or employment, the gap remains for those outside this success margin, particularly those needing more robust preparatory support to thrive.

Exclusion from Long-Term Career Pathways

The programme aims to provide sustainable career opportunities, yet some rangatahi fall back into casual or seasonal jobs, undermining the goal of creating lasting lifestyle improvements. Moira highlights, “To me, that is not about creating better lifestyles... We would rather have them go back to education and work for the long-term gain of getting a career or a profession rather than sending them to the orchards.” This misalignment between immediate job opportunities and long-term career development reveals a structural gap, particularly for rangatahi, who struggle to meet the requirements for tech roles or higher education.

Housing Instability as a Barrier to Learning

Housing insecurity poses a significant obstacle to rangatahi well-being and learning. Moira describes the dire situation in Hawke's Bay, where transitional housing, homeless shelters, and “affordable” housing options are inaccessible to rangatahi without stable incomes. “If their home situation is not stable, it is going to impact their learning,” Moira says, linking the issue to the holistic well-being framework of the whare tapa whā model. “They have affordable rentals coming up for people with incomes between 91K and 134K, which is none of our rangatahi because they do not have jobs.”

Industry Barriers to Entry-Level Training

The tech industry's preference for highly qualified workers creates another critical gap for rangatahi. Companies like Datacom and Fingermark urgently need employees but demand qualifications far beyond the reach of many programme participants. "There is a gap between entry-level and a fully paid tech job," Moira observes. "Tech companies desperately need workers, but they want qualified workers." This disconnect highlights the need for industry collaboration to develop pathways that support rangatahi from foundational skills to sustainable employment in tech roles.

ANARU AND MOIRA RECOMMEND:

Develop Transitional Pathways for Entry-Level Tech Roles

Design transitional pathways that bridge the gap between foundational training and fully paid tech jobs. This approach could include partnerships with tech companies to create internships or apprenticeships tailored to rangatahi skill levels, allowing them to build industry-relevant experience over time and meet qualification requirements.

Focus on Foundational and Soft Skills Development

Incorporate modules into the programme that emphasise workplace readiness, such as accountability, punctuality, and teamwork. This strategy will better prepare rangatahi for further education and long-term employment.

Provide Holistic Pastoral Care and Support Systems

Extend pastoral care beyond the training period, focusing on long-term mentorship and support to address personal and systemic barriers like housing instability. Include partnerships with local organisations to secure safe and affordable housing options for rangatahi during and after training.

Embed Cultural Relevance in Training Design

Ensure the programme aligns with Māori values and frameworks, such as the whare tapa whā model, to support rangatahi's emotional, social, and cultural well-being alongside skill development. Integrating te ao Māori principles into the curriculum fosters a sense of identity and connection.

Build Internal Sustainability Through Social Enterprise

Develop and scale digital products, like Pursuit's wellness platform, to create self-sustaining funding streams that reduce reliance on government contracts. These products can also serve as practical training and employment opportunities for rangatahi.

Foster Flexibility in Credentialing and Training Structures

Introduce innovative micro-credentialing systems that accommodate the unique needs of Akonga Māori, such as shorter, skill-specific certifications and project-based learning. Collaboration with existing education providers can help overcome cost and administrative barriers while delivering effective learning outcomes.

Redefine Success Metrics to Prioritise Long-Term Outcomes

Shift programme evaluations to focus on long-term career and education outcomes rather than short-term placements in casual or seasonal jobs. Tracking participant progress over multiple years ensures meaningful, sustainable employment or educational pathways.

Advocate for Systemic Change in Tech and Employment Industries

Work with tech companies and government agencies to create inclusive hiring policies that recognise alternative pathways into the workforce. This approach includes recognising micro-credentials and experience-based competencies over traditional qualifications, enabling rangatahi to access entry-level opportunities in the industry.

IN SUMMARY:

Anaru and Moira highlight the critical need for culturally attuned, innovative, and sustainable pathways to uplift Māori rangatahi into the digital economy. Pursuit's model exemplifies how integrating digital skills training with pastoral care and cultural frameworks and focusing on long-term outcomes can empower young people to overcome systemic barriers. Their approach highlights the importance of addressing foundational workplace readiness, providing transitional opportunities into tech roles, and supporting holistic well-being through initiatives like stable housing and culturally relevant training.

The challenges revealed, including gaps in industry pathways, credentialing barriers, and housing instability, demonstrate that successful programmes require collaboration between government agencies, education providers, and tech companies. Solutions like micro-credentialing, industry partnerships, and sustainable funding through social enterprises offer a clear direction for creating scalable and impactful models for Akonga Māori.

To truly optimise training programmes for Māori rangatahi, systemic shifts must be made to recognise diverse learning journeys and lived realities. By embracing these insights and recommendations, stakeholders can build frameworks that equip rangatahi with skills and empower them to thrive as future leaders in the digital world.

TRM Training



Aroha
PUKETAPU

*Te Atiawa and Ngāti
Ruapani*

Pouwhakahaere
at **TRM Training**



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH TRM TRAINING.

“

**Our mahi helps
rangatahi
honour their
identity as
Māori while
building the
skills to thrive
and make
meaningful
contributions to
the world.**

INTRODUCTION:

Aroha Puketapu is a passionate advocate for Māori-centered education and training, dedicated to supporting rangatahi in discovering and developing their unique potential. Deeply connected to her Te Atiawa and Ngāti Ruapani heritage, Aroha's journey began in Waiwhetū Pā, Wellington, where her connection to Māori traditions and her whānau impetus, her commitment to community-focused work.

As the leader of TRM Training, based at Wainuiomata marae, Aroha upholds the moemoeā (vision) of the marae as a hub for rangatahi, whānau, and hāpori. "At the turning of the soil of that marae, rangatahi, whānau, and hāpori were at the centre point of the mahi," Aroha reflects. She recalls the carving of the whare tūpuna, led by tōhunga whakairo Mātua Rangi Hetet, with 17- and 18-year-old rangatahi tāne at the forefront. "We are just taking our place in that strong taura which binds people together," she explains, emphasising the role of the marae as the "epicentre of all things Māori," as Matua Hirini Moko Mead described.

TRM Training centres Māori knowledge and identity, offering courses and micro-credentials rooted in traditional skills like raranga and whakairo. While not NZQA-accredited, these programmes prioritise iwi wisdom to empower rangatahi, helping them find purpose and contribute to their communities. "We equip rangatahi to be rangatira mō āpōpō (leaders of tomorrow)."

Aroha's own journey has been one of resilience and lifelong learning. A second-chance learner, she has a Masters in Adult Education and earned her Bachelor of Education at Kōkiri Marae Seaview. She has worked across the tertiary sector, including iwi-based Private Training Establishments, wānanga, and institutes of technology. Her roles as a CA Māori in the Social Services ITO and with the Tertiary Education Commission have given her extensive insights into education systems and NZQA's influence.

Aroha's vision is to blend practical skills with cultural understanding. "Our mahi helps rangatahi honour their identity as Māori while building the skills to thrive and make meaningful contributions to the world."



AROHA'S WISDOM:

The Role of Micro-Credentials in Upskilling

Aroha believes that micro-credentials offer a unique opportunity for efficient upskilling, either by introducing new knowledge or extending existing expertise. They break down the curriculum into small, focused packages that can contribute to more considerable qualifications, making education more accessible and targeted. "When we develop micro-credentials, we can get straight to the point of a topic or subject. Micro-credentials can focus on new knowledge and extend existing knowledge."

Collaborating with Iwi to Develop Micro-Credentials

Aroha points out that partnerships with iwi have demonstrated micro-credentials' potential to preserve and pass on mātauranga Māori. Through listening and learning about iwi-specific knowledge, she created tailored micro-credentials to support professional development and cultural education. These programmes allow iwi to tell their stories authentically and on their own terms. "It's a great way to tell a story ā-kanohi." Furthermore, micro-credentials can prepare the next generation by formalising knowledge traditionally passed on by rangatira and tohunga. "Micro-credentials give iwi the opportunity to recount their own mātauranga and organise it in a way that allows them to pass it on."

Steps and Costs in Developing Micro-Credentials

This process is straightforward for Aroha. Creating a micro-credential involves deciding on a kaupapa, holding wānanga to align different aspects, defining clear outcomes, and preparing teaching resources. Accreditation through NZQA adds formality, although iwi can choose their own systems for validation. "Drafting to completion of one micro-credential usually costs approximately \$60k," reflecting the importance of valuing subject matter experts, particularly Tohunga.

Community-led Micro-Credentials as a Pathway to Technology

For Aroha, marae-based organisations like TRM Training demonstrate the viability of community-led micro-credential programmes. By blending traditional Māori skills with innovative pedagogy, they encourage rangatahi to explore diverse fields, including technology. "Through TRM Training, we work within this praxis and allow pedagogy ā rangatahi to develop and exist naturally."

Advice for Rangatahi

Aroha encourages rangatahi to honour their personal mana ake and use it to guide their purpose. This grounding in cultural identity is key to contributing meaningfully to their communities. "Find out and follow your own Mana Ake. Take it and run with it, then fulfil your purpose on this earth."

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Reliance on Tertiary Providers and Balancing Accreditation with Cultural Integrity

Aroha highlights the challenge of relying on tertiary providers for NZQA accreditation to develop micro-credentials. This dependency limits the flexibility of iwi or marae-based organisations, which may wish to deliver culturally grounded qualifications without formal tertiary partnerships. While NZQA accreditation offers formal recognition, some iwi prefer using their own matanga or tohunga to validate knowledge, complicating the process. Additionally, marae-based programmes, though culturally aligned, face limitations in scalability and formal recognition within mainstream educational frameworks. “Very few platforms offer free or minimal fees, but any organisation can partner with a tertiary provider to develop micro-credentials. Our organisation offers these to our rangatahi... They are not NZQA accredited because we are marae-based and the epicentre of all things Māori.”

Diversity in Iwi Needs and Characteristics

Aroha highlights that iwi have unique histories, values, and educational priorities, requiring highly tailored micro-credentials. This variability makes designing programmes that resonate equally across different iwi contexts complex. “Iwi have different characteristics and define themselves in many different ways.”

Knowledge Safekeeping

Some mātauranga Māori is traditionally reserved for select individuals chosen by rangatira or tohunga. Ensuring appropriate access to sensitive or sacred knowledge while creating educational programmes presents a delicate challenge. “Sometimes mātauranga of this kind is only privy to a select few chosen by rangatira or tohunga in different disciplines.”

Time and Expertise Commitment

According to Aroha, engaging with subject matter experts, including tohunga, and ensuring their contributions are honoured requires significant time and careful relationship management. Determining appropriate remuneration for their work also adds complexity. “Cost-wise, it is more about the time factor of the subject matter experts involved. When working for iwi, consider how much to pay a tohunga and what payment they will accept.”

AROHA RECOMMENDS:

Strengthen Community Autonomy in Accreditation

To support the development of culturally relevant micro-credentials, iwi and marae-based organisations should be empowered to create and validate their own qualifications. While NZQA accreditation can provide formal recognition, the accreditation process must not undermine the cultural integrity of the knowledge being passed on. Empowering iwi to use their own matanga or tohunga for validation can help maintain the authenticity and local relevance of the knowledge.

Develop Flexible and Accessible Platforms for Māori Knowledge

There is a need for more platforms that offer low-cost or free access to micro-credential development, especially for community-driven initiatives. These platforms should allow iwi and marae-based organisations to design and deliver their own micro-credentials without expensive partnerships with tertiary institutions. Exploring partnerships with existing Māori-led digital initiatives could be a potential solution to bridge this gap.

Balance Cultural Integrity with Formal Recognition

For marae-based organisations that do not seek formal NZQA accreditation, it is important to continue developing micro-credentials that align with Māori knowledge systems while creating pathways for formal recognition when desired. One solution could be a hybrid model where iwi and marae-based programmes can choose to have their micro-credentials independently validated by local experts or accredited by NZQA for broader recognition. This approach would offer the flexibility to honour Māori cultural values while providing opportunities for learners to gain formal qualifications if needed.

Tailor Programmes to Meet Diverse Iwi Needs

Micro-credential development should consider each iwi's diverse needs and characteristics. Tailored approaches allow each iwi to define the focus and scope of their own knowledge areas and ensure that their micro-credentials are meaningful and relevant to their specific cultural context. Involve iwi representatives and knowledge holders at every stage of the process to ensure the outcomes are culturally appropriate and beneficial to the communities they serve.

Support the Development of Local Expertise and Mentorship

Invest in local expertise by providing professional development for matanga, tohunga, and educators to ensure they have the tools and support needed to teach and validate Māori knowledge. This approach can also help pass on traditional knowledge to younger generations, creating opportunities for iwi to groom the next generation of leaders and knowledge-keepers.

Prioritise Collaborative, Cross-Sector Partnerships

To overcome resource limitations and ensure micro-credentials' success, iwi and marae-based organisations should consider collaborative partnerships with other iwi, government bodies, and private sector partners. These partnerships help build a sustainable ecosystem for micro-credential development and provide access to resources, funding, and expertise.

Use Micro-Credentials to Foster Cultural Identity and Leadership Development

Micro-credentials should enhance technical or vocational skills and foster a sense of cultural identity and leadership among rangatahi. Programmes offered by TRM Training are essential in helping young people connect with their roots while developing skills that prepare them for leadership roles. Such programmes offer rangatahi the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their communities and honour their tupuna.

IN SUMMARY:

In this case study, Aroha highlights micro-credentials' potential to empower Māori communities through culturally grounded education and upskilling. The challenges identified—accessibility, the reliance on tertiary providers for accreditation, and balancing Māori knowledge systems with formal qualifications—demonstrate the complexities of developing culturally relevant micro-credentials. However, by advocating for greater flexibility in accreditation processes, strengthening community autonomy, and prioritising culturally appropriate platforms, Māori organisations can create meaningful, formally recognised micro-credentials.

The recommendations presented offer a pathway to overcoming these challenges, fostering collaborative partnerships, supporting local expertise, and tailoring programmes to the diverse needs of iwi and marae. This approach ensures that Māori communities can retain ownership of their knowledge while gaining qualifications necessary for broader societal success. Developing culturally grounded micro-credentials represents a valuable opportunity to transform Māori education, providing rangatahi and whānau with the tools to succeed while preserving their cultural identity. This model can also guide other Indigenous communities aiming to integrate their knowledge systems into formal education frameworks.

3 Bags Full



© Denizen

**Brittany
TEEI**

Te Rarawa, Cook Island

Founder and Managing Director
of **3 Bags Full**



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH 3 BAGS FULL.

“

**Our *rangatahi*
are our
navigators
— they lead,
we guide and
support.**

INTRODUCTION:

It is hard to imagine the challenges Brittany has overcome. Once ranked among the top 50 Junior tennis players in the world, her career was halted by a devastating injury at 14. Through resilience and unwavering whānau support, Brittany found a new purpose: creating opportunities for others.

Her drive to give back was inspired by seeing talented friends excluded from tech roles due to systemic barriers. While running KidsCoin, an online financial literacy program, she began hiring local youth, training them in UX design, and empowering them to contribute directly to the program's development. This grassroots effort grew into a formal digital internship model co-designed with students at Papakura High School. Though the early stages were challenging, the program evolved, integrating micro-credentials and practical learning that opened doors for young people.

During COVID-19, Brittany expanded the initiative to support displaced workers and business owners, injecting over a million dollars into communities through training programmes. As demand grew, she developed a recruitment arm connecting Māori and Pasifika talent with meaningful careers in tech. Along the way, she cultivated partnerships with companies eager to mentor and hire graduates, creating a pathway for sustainable growth and opportunity.

Brittany shares her deep commitment to building pathways for Māori and Pasifika youth in the tech sector. Reflecting on her own journey, she recalls witnessing many talented friends miss out on opportunities simply because they lacked formal qualifications. "I realised that throughout my life, I had actually been around a lot of friends who had been in that situation. So I saw a pattern and thought, "That's kind of not fair because good people are being left out." This experience fuels her passion for creating spaces where skills and potential are recognised beyond traditional metrics. Through 3 Bags Full (3BF), Brittany is breaking barriers, building an inclusive economy, and empowering youth to lead and innovate.



BRITTANY'S WISDOM:

The Role of Tech Skills in Economic Empowerment

For Māori communities, tech skills serve as an economic lever, capable of elevating and complementing existing assets/roles without replacing them. "It is a big behaviour change, it is a big mindset change... it is both." Brittany highlights the potential of tech not just as a skill but as a tool to generate wealth within rohe (regions), emphasising the importance of shifting collective mindsets toward integrating technology alongside traditional practices.

Deep Dive Into the 3BF Programme

Brittany designed the 3BF programme to equip young Māori with digital skills through a carefully structured yet highly flexible model. Initially, participants are placed on a waitlist, reflecting the programme's popularity and the limited funding. The onboarding process is meticulous, involving whānau, teachers, and community leaders to establish a shared understanding of expectations.

Once enrolled, participants sign fixed-term contracts and undertake weekly modules that build foundational digital literacy before branching into specialised areas such as gaming, graphic design, or cryptocurrency. Brittany explains, "Everyone has their own. They start the same, but then they kind of all branch out into whatever it is they want to do." By aligning modules with individual interests, the programme ensures that each participant leaves with technical skills and a clear, personalised pathway into tech.

Post-Programme Outcomes

Brittany explains that graduates of the 3BF programme follow diverse trajectories, ranging from scholarships to advanced training at institutions like Dev Academy or direct employment. The support does not end there. 3BF maintains long-term pastoral care, often working with individuals for years to ensure they thrive in their chosen pathways. Some participants leverage their skills for non-tech aspirations, which shows the programme's adaptability to meet the aspirations of the learner. One standout story involved a young participant who used her earnings to support her whānau, buying her grandfather a phone and teaching him to use it. These narratives highlight the profound social and familial impact of 3BF.

The Programme's Holistic Approach

The programme has a clear philosophy: tailor the learning journey while maintaining quality and accountability. Practical applications include teaching whānau members and documenting the learning, reinforcing individual knowledge while benefiting the wider community. "You've got the learning, you've got the credentials, you've got the financial literacy, and you've got the personal development." This multi-faceted design ensures that participants develop technical competencies, life skills, financial independence, and a sense of community responsibility.

Unique Operational Framework

Brittany notes that the 3BF programme is distinct in its freedom to innovate beyond traditional educational frameworks. By leveraging existing industry credentials from platforms like Salesforce and Xero while incorporating their unique learning modules, the organisation avoids the rigidity of NZQA standards. This flexibility allows them to focus entirely on delivering impactful outcomes rather than fulfilling bureaucratic reporting requirements. “We’re not NZQA. We don’t have the limitations that everyone else does when it comes to delivery and outcomes.”

Individualised Career Pathways

Brittany acknowledges that success looks different for everyone. Some graduates pursue prestigious scholarships or advanced roles in the tech industry, while others find fulfilment in stable, entry-level jobs. “All I can do is provide you with the foundation, the connections, the networks, and confidence, and then I’ll see you later.” This recognition of individual goals ensures that participants are supported in ways that resonate with their personal aspirations.

Adapting Their Programme And Incorporating Youth Leaders

Brittany highlights that their programme adapts its methods to suit local tikanga, values, and whānau dynamics. A key success factor has been leveraging rangatahi leaders who can bridge generational gaps and inspire engagement within their rohe. By equipping rangatahi with leadership skills and aligning the programme with their passions, the initiative ensures that it remains relevant and deeply rooted in local realities.

3BF also incorporates youth leaders into co-designing aspects of the programme, ensuring its delivery resonates with its peers while aligning with iwi’s goals. This approach empowers young participants and strengthens the social fabric of whānau and hapū. “Our rangatahi are our navigators—they lead, we guide and support.” This alignment creates a ripple effect, where the gains made by youth participants extend to their iwi, reinforcing self-determination and collective upliftment.

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

The Philosophy Behind Micro-Credentials and Financial Literacy

Brittany stresses a critical gap in the education-to-employment pipeline, focusing on the “majority in the middle” who often leave school without pathways to traditional qualifications. For them, life experience and non-traditional learning offer untapped opportunities. “My whole whakaaro was, ‘How do we wrap qualifications around life? How do I qualify myself to be alive?’” This innovative mindset reimagines the learning journey as deeply personal and intertwined with daily living. Financial literacy is cited as an essential skill, but a persistent challenge is whether enough investment and participation in such initiatives occur. “It’s nice to have financial literacy, a thing that we all know we need. Do we invest in it? Do we actually get people to do it?”

Challenges in Scaling and Traditional Models

Funding scalability remains the programme’s biggest hurdle. “As soon as a kid hears about it, they want to do it.” However, reliance on a funded model makes it difficult to meet demand. Another challenge is communicating their unique pedagogy to stakeholders who often try to fit them into existing categories. “Everyone tries to put you into a box... but that’s what people are familiar with.”

The tech industry poses challenges, with employers prioritising long-term support over financial subsidies. Smaller businesses require highly specific skill sets, making it crucial to align training with industry cycles and needs. Despite systemic challenges, the programme remains focused on showcasing best practices and offering solutions.

Systemic Challenges and Partner Relationships

For Brittany, broader systemic issues, including unconscious bias and structural racism, persist as barriers to equitable opportunities. However, the organisation has built strong relationships with industry partners, placing over 120 people in jobs. Despite the tech sector’s initial reluctance to accept subsidies, these partnerships have fostered ongoing collaboration, with organisations appreciating the tailored support provided to new hires.

Navigating Iwi Differences and Gaps in Approaches

Another critical insight that Brittany shares involves the diversity of approaches and priorities among iwi. Each iwi has unique needs, challenges, and opportunities, making it vital to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions. The interviewee emphasises the importance of acknowledging these differences and working with iwi in ways that honour their specific aspirations and context. “You can’t just go to one iwi and think you’ve got it sorted for all.”

BRITTANY RECOMMENDS:

Embrace Technology as a Complementary Economic Tool

Māori communities can significantly benefit from incorporating tech skills as a tool to complement existing assets, roles and traditional practices. Initiatives should focus on shifting collective mindsets to view technology as an enabler of economic opportunities without undermining cultural values to achieve this. Educational programmes should emphasise how tech can elevate whānau and iwi aspirations by integrating modern tools with tikanga Māori, creating pathways for wealth generation that align with community priorities.

Maintain a Personalised, Flexible Learning Model

The 3BF programme demonstrates the value of tailoring learning journeys to individual interests and aspirations. Future programmes should adopt a similar approach by building foundational digital literacy and offering modular, interest-driven pathways in specialised fields such as gaming, cryptocurrency, or graphic design. Personalisation ensures that participants develop skills that resonate with their goals while maintaining long-term engagement. Incorporating whānau, teachers, and community leaders into onboarding processes strengthens the support system for learners, setting clear expectations and fostering collective buy-in.

Focus on Holistic Outcomes Beyond Employment

Programmes should expand their focus beyond technical skills to include financial literacy, personal development, and community responsibility. Teaching participants to document and share their learning within their whānau can amplify the ripple effect of individual achievements. Providing long-term pastoral care ensures that graduates continue to thrive, whether pursuing further education, entering the workforce, or applying their skills in other areas of life. These holistic outcomes can build stronger, more resilient communities while addressing systemic barriers to success.

Build a Framework for Scaling

Initiatives should explore diversified funding models, including partnerships with philanthropic organisations, iwi, and private sector stakeholders to address scalability challenges. Communicating the unique pedagogy of these programmes to funders and industry stakeholders is essential to securing buy-in and resources. Additionally, leveraging micro-credentials and industry certifications can align training with smaller businesses' specific needs while maintaining delivery flexibility.

Collaborate with Industry to Foster Mutual Understanding

Strong partnerships with industry are critical for creating sustainable employment pathways. Programmes should continue to work closely with businesses to understand their skill requirements and hiring cycles. Addressing industry concerns, such as the preference for long-term support over subsidies, can enhance collaboration. Regular dialogue with employers ensures that training remains relevant, and showcasing success stories helps bridge gaps in perception and trust.

Address Systemic Barriers Through Advocacy and Adaptation

Programmes must actively address systemic issues, such as unconscious bias and structural racism, by advocating for equitable opportunities within the tech sector. Building industry awareness of the unique challenges faced by Māori communities can foster more inclusive hiring practices. Meanwhile, the flexibility to innovate outside traditional educational frameworks allows programmes to prioritise outcomes over bureaucratic requirements, offering participants impactful learning experiences.

Leverage Rangatahi Leadership and Adapt to Local Needs

Youth leaders are vital in bridging generational gaps and inspiring engagement. Future initiatives should invest in developing rangatahi leadership skills and involve them in co-designing programme components. By aligning activities with the passions of young participants, these programmes can remain relevant and impactful. Acknowledging each iwi's unique needs and priorities ensures that solutions are personalised and respects local tikanga and aspirations.

Integrate Financial Literacy into Core Curriculum

While financial literacy is essential, participation in related initiatives remains inconsistent. Programmes should prioritise financial education as a core component, linking it to practical applications such as managing earnings and supporting whānau. Demonstrating the immediate benefits of financial literacy, such as improved economic independence and stability, can drive greater engagement among participants.

Tailor Approaches to Iwi Differences

Acknowledging and adapting to the diverse priorities of different iwi is critical for creating meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Rather than applying a uniform approach, programmes should engage directly with iwi to understand their aspirations and co-design solutions that reflect their unique contexts. This approach strengthens relationships and ensures that initiatives remain relevant and impactful at a local level.

IN SUMMARY:

The 3BF programme offers a promising model for empowering Māori communities through digital skills development. It combines technical training with essential life skills like financial literacy, leadership, and community responsibility. By personalising the learning experience, the programme addresses the demand for tech talent and fosters individual agency and collective upliftment.

Despite funding limitations, scalability issues, and systemic barriers within the tech industry, the programme's flexibility, innovative pedagogy, and long-term support help it adapt to the diverse needs of Māori communities. Rangatahi leaders are crucial in ensuring the programme stays rooted in local tikanga and resonates with youth participants.

The research objectives exploring the role of tech in economic empowerment, evaluating the 3BF programme's effectiveness, and identifying systemic barriers are addressed through the programme's commitment to innovation and culturally relevant education. By continuing to expand its reach and address funding gaps, the 3BF programme can be a model for bridging the digital divide in Māori communities.



Mission Ready HQ



**Diana
SHARMA**

*Co-founder and Mission Director
of Mission Ready HQ*



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH MISSION READY HQ.

“

The key comment we often hear is, ‘We *never thought this candidate could do as much as they could.*’ It often surprises me that if you *give them a chance*, they would; it’s just that they often don’t get that opportunity

INTRODUCTION:

Diana Sharma's journey began with a simple but powerful goal: to help people succeed in technology careers. With over a decade in the education field, Diana has seen firsthand how challenging it can be for people especially women, Māori, Pasifika, and career-changers to find opportunities in tech. Motivated by this gap, she co-founded Mission Ready HQ, which supports people from all walks of life in launching tech careers, using a "social impact mission as part of their business model."

The idea for Mission Ready HQ emerged from Diana's experiences in various roles, including her work at Unitec, where she formed partnerships with big organisations like IBM to help create pathways into tech. While in these roles, she saw how many people wanted to work in the sector but lacked access to the proper training or connections. Mission Ready fills this gap by offering a fast, supportive way to build skills and gain real-world experience through mentor-led projects.

Today, Mission Ready HQ is New Zealand's fastest-growing tech training provider, with programmes that attract women, Māori, and Pasifika students, who now make up 30% of their cohort. Through partnerships with organisations like Auckland Council, Diana's work opens doors for people who might otherwise not have the chance. For Diana, Mission Ready HQ is about more than just training; it is about creating a fairer, more inclusive tech industry for everyone. "We deliberately or intentionally chose that we wanted to make a positive impact for our most disadvantaged communities."

They embrace inclusivity, striving to support people from diverse backgrounds in their tech journeys. While not a Māori organisation, Mission Ready HQ aims to create an inclusive environment. Diana explains, "We will do everything in our power to support people through the journey. It's important to qualify people and help them decide if this is the right fit for them."



DIANA'S WISDOM:

The Importance of Inclusivity in Technology

Diana emphasises the need to foster an inclusive environment, especially for Māori, Pasifika, and women. Mission Ready HQ has set a KPI to actively increase participation from these groups, creating a space where they feel they can succeed. Without such a foundation, diversity efforts are less likely to succeed; as Diana explains, “We made it a KPI to help more Māori, Pasifika, and women succeed in the tech sector.”

Community Empowerment Through Mission Impact Foundation

A central pillar of Mission Ready HQ's approach is cultivating a “pay it forward” mindset. “Part of the social impact mission and how we got it set up is that we contribute profits to our charity, Mission Impact Foundation, which directly translates into scholarships and funding for those who deserve it.” Diana explained that this philosophy is deeply rooted in their programme, often asking participants, “If we can help you be successful in your life, would you like to contribute back?”

This approach reinforces a community-centred model, promoting collaboration and mutual support. Mission Ready HQ partners with organisations that sponsor its foundation and events, enabling it to cover essential programme costs while expanding its charitable contributions.

Matching Skills with Real-World Impact

Diana points out that Mission Ready HQ takes a candidate-first approach, guiding individuals to make informed career choices and leveraging a unique matching process to align their backgrounds and skills with partner projects. This approach ensures a tailored, mentored learning experience rather than a traditional paid internship. “The unique matching process is a key element that makes us stand out with our partners as well.”

Changing Employer Mindsets Through Real-World Experience

Mission Ready HQ focuses on providing real-world experience to candidates, helping shift employer mindsets by showcasing the untapped potential of recruits. This approach has resulted in a high success rate and greater employer willingness to retain talent. “The key comment we often hear is, ‘We never thought this candidate could do as much as they could.’ It often surprises me that if you give them a chance, they would; it's just that they often don't get that opportunity.”

Exploring Cultural Dynamics in Youth Development

Mission Ready HQ has expanded to high school students, revealing nuanced dynamics in confidence and cultural connection, particularly among Māori and Pasifika candidates. “Our Māori candidates are actually more equipped and confident than our Pasifika candidates. I don’t know what to attribute that to perhaps they’re more connected to their roots.”

Bridging the Digital Divide for Māori and Pasifika Candidates

They address the digital access gap for Māori and Pasifika candidates by providing laptops as a token of completion, ensuring they have the necessary tools to continue their career journey. They also work with partners to ensure Wi-Fi access when needed. While the digital tool hurdle is decreasing, it remains an important focus for the organisation. “One of the things we’ve implemented is ensuring we’ve bought a lot of laptops, and when people complete our programs specifically for our Māori and Pasifika candidates we give them away as a token, as a congratulatory sign.”

Boosting Completion Rates and Unlocking Opportunities

Mission Ready HQ has significantly improved completion rates for Māori and Pasifika candidates, now reaching 70%, by offering flexible support and addressing financial barriers by offering a part-time programme for students who need to work and those with financial hurdles. They also actively identify candidates who may not initially disclose their Māori heritage, ensuring they can access scholarships and other opportunities. “There are also some who don’t tell us they’re Māori, and we find out later that they are, which is significant because they could be eligible for scholarships.”

AI’s Impact: Modifying Jobs, Not Replacing Them

Diana points out that AI is reshaping the job market by modifying or amplifying existing roles rather than creating entirely new ones. While it presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for professionals to pivot and add value in new ways, especially by leveraging human skills that AI cannot replicate. “AI is definitely going to have an impact. There’s no doubt about it. The jobs that are being impacted right now will just significantly impact more and more jobs. That’s also very clear.”

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Financial Barriers and Employment Challenges

A significant challenge for Mission Ready HQ has been the inability of micro-credential students to access loans and allowances. While they recently secured approval for a New Zealand Diploma that allows access to these financial supports, financial constraints and employment challenges still impact completion rates and job retention. “Last year, we got approval for a New Zealand Diploma, which stacks at levels four, five, and six micro-credentials, which then allows them to access study link loans and allowances.”

Government Funding Challenges and Policy Shifts

A significant challenge Diana mentioned is navigating government funding complexities, which can limit their ability to scale and expand programmes. Changes in government policies and funding models, such as the shift from UFS to SAC funding, create uncertainty, making it difficult to plan and grow their programs effectively. “We’re hitting the barrier of, ‘Oh no, we can’t confirm the funding,’ or ‘Oh no, we can’t commit to more.’ And if they can’t commit to more, it does mean we can’t do more.”

Navigating PTE Compliance and Market Shifts

Navigating the decision to become a Private Training Establishment (PTE), which involved overcoming compliance and market fluctuations, was another struggling point. Their strategy was to stay flexible, regularly adapting programs based on job market trends, but the PTE decision forced them to pivot within a challenging timeline quickly. “One of the barriers and risks I highlighted at the time was we get stuck with whatever we create, whereas the tech sector is moving so fast, and we need to be able to pivot faster.”

DIANA RECOMMENDS:

Foster an Inclusive Environment

Creating an inclusive space for Māori, Pasifika, and women in tech is critical. An effective programme should prioritise diversity by setting clear participation targets and ensuring these groups feel supported and valued. Intentional efforts must be made to integrate Māori and other underrepresented groups into the tech sector.

Promote Community Empowerment

Adopting a “pay it forward” mindset is crucial for fostering long-term community empowerment. Programmes should incorporate mechanisms like scholarships or funding through a foundation to support future candidates and enhance the programme’s social impact.

Tailored Skills Matching and Mentorship

Programmes should use a candidate-first approach, ensuring participants' skills and backgrounds match appropriate career opportunities. A bespoke matching process ensures that Māori candidates receive a more personalised and meaningful learning experience supported by mentorship and real-world projects aligned with their aspirations.

Provide Real-World Experience to Shift Employer Mindsets

Offering real-world experience is essential to showcasing the untapped potential of Māori candidates. Providing opportunities to demonstrate their skills helps shift employer perceptions, increasing job retention and enhancing the candidates' confidence in their abilities.

Address Digital Access Barriers

Bridging the digital divide is key to ensuring Māori candidates have the tools they need to succeed. Programmes should provide laptops and ensure Wi-Fi access for those who need it, helping overcome digital barriers and enabling continued learning and career development.

Support Completion Rates with Flexible Structures

Flexible learning models, such as part-time programmes, can improve completion rates for Māori candidates. Financial barriers should be addressed through scholarships, grants, or part-time work opportunities, and proactive identification of Māori candidates can ensure they access all available resources and opportunities.

Integrate Cultural Support Mechanisms

Programmes should integrate cultural support mechanisms that enhance Māori candidates' confidence and success. This includes mentorship from Māori professionals, offering a culturally responsive curriculum, and creating opportunities for candidates to connect with their cultural roots.

Navigate Financial and Government Policy Challenges

Programmes must work to overcome financial barriers by advocating for policies that support micro-credentials and provide access to financial support such as study loans and allowances. Engaging with government agencies to secure approval for qualifications can ensure access to these crucial resources.

Be Agile in Response to Market Shifts

Programmes should be adaptable to meet the changing demands of the job market, particularly in fast-paced sectors like tech. Training providers can ensure Māori candidates acquire skills that match the industry's current needs by building flexibility into the programme design.

Engage in Strategic Partnerships to Overcome Funding and Compliance Barriers

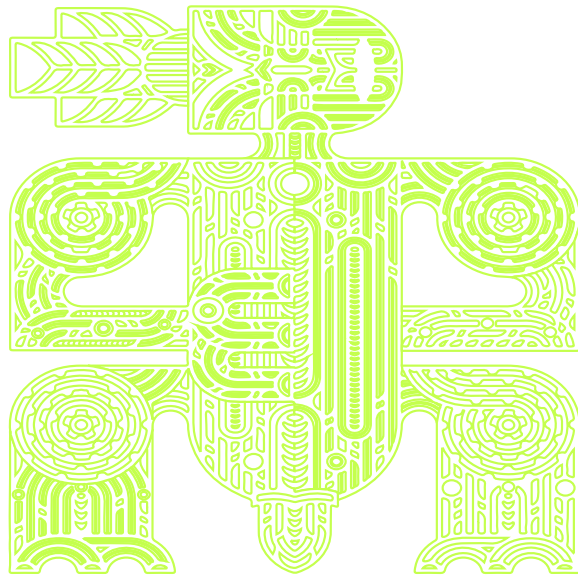
Developing partnerships with other organisations can help address funding and compliance challenges. Collaboration between the public and private sector partners can provide essential support, such as event sponsorships and programme cost coverage, helping ensure programme sustainability.

IN SUMMARY:

Mission Ready HQ exemplifies how targeted, inclusive education and training can create meaningful opportunities for Māori, Pasifika, and women in the tech industry. Diana and her team have opened doors for individuals who traditionally face barriers to entering the tech sector by creating an inclusive environment and tailoring the support they provide. The unique model of matching skills with real-world experience, combined with a strong emphasis on community empowerment through the Mission Impact Foundation, has proven effective in improving completion rates and shifting employer mindsets toward underrepresented candidates.

However, significant challenges remain, particularly around financial constraints, government funding complexities, and the fast-evolving tech industry. Addressing these barriers through strategic partnerships, flexible learning structures, and ongoing advocacy for policy reform will be crucial in scaling the impact of programs like Mission Ready HQ. Additionally, integrating cultural support mechanisms and bridging the digital divide will ensure that Māori and Pasifika candidates are empowered to thrive in their careers and contribute to a more inclusive, diverse workforce.

Ultimately, Mission Ready HQ's commitment to creating a fairer, more inclusive tech industry aligns with broader goals of societal transformation, and its innovative approach offers valuable insights for other organisations aiming to make a lasting impact on the lives of people from all walks of life.



Dev Academy Aotearoa



**Dougal
STOTT**

*Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahungunu, &
Ngāti Tūwharetoa*

*Former General Manager
of **Dev Academy Aotearoa***



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH DEV ACADEMY AOTEAROA

*Dougal was working with Dev Academy
at the time of this interview and has
since moved onto other mahi.*

“

**It is important
to build a
conductive
learning
environment
that balances
cultural
obligations with
educational
goals.**

INTRODUCTION:

Dougal Stott, the former General Manager at Dev Academy Aotearoa, has poured over 20 years into uplifting Māori education, youth development, and entrepreneurship. Originally hailing from Ōtautahi and now calling Kaitaia home, his journey took a pivotal turn in 2013 when he joined Dev Academy. This place resonated with his vision of increasing Māori representation in tech.

Over the past decade, Dougal and the Dev Academy whānau have trained over a thousand junior software developers across Aotearoa, including 150–200 Māori students, a contribution he is immensely proud of. He credits this success to the unwavering support of the Dev Academy team, who empowered him to champion initiatives in Māori tech education.

Dougal has been instrumental in shaping a tech learning environment where students acquire technical skills and essential qualities like teamwork, empathy, and resilience. His personal connections with each student reflect his commitment to manaakitanga and whakawhanaungatanga. Despite his achievements, he remains a strong advocate for ensuring that work in Māori spaces is designed, delivered, and assessed by Māori. “Sometimes these things need to be designed, delivered, assessed, and reviewed by Māori. That’s just the way it is,” he emphasises, reflecting his belief in empowering others to lead within their own communities.

Dougal’s vision is to create a tech sector that embraces Māori culture and values, where everyone can thrive. He often says, “Aotearoa, New Zealand, needs a new way of learning that enhances our strong and fast-growing tech sector while fostering resilience and kindness in our society.” He believes technology can potentially drive Māori innovation and identity, and it shines through in everything he does, making a lasting impact on his work.



DOUGAL'S WISDOM:

Celebrating Open Source and Qualification Success

Dougal explains that one of the standout features of the Dev Academy programme is its open-source curriculum, which allows for widespread sharing and adaptation. This ethos extends to their remarkable achievement of developing and getting approval for their own qualifications in record time. The pride in creating a Level 5 and 6 National Certificate in Web Development and Applied Software Development reflects their dedication to accessible education. A quote that captures this sentiment is. "We were able to develop our own qualifications and get them approved through Toi Mai, TEC, and NZQA in about six months, one of the fastest times for a provider to achieve that."

Exploring Regional Partnerships and Co-Design

Dev Academy's initiative to partner with iwi and work in regional areas like Gisborne, Whanganui, and Christchurch emphasises the importance of localised curriculum design. Through co-creation, the programme seeks to integrate iwi-specific priorities and resources into the curriculum, ensuring cultural alignment and relevance. "In regards to our current boot camp... Could this be delivered on marae? Could this be delivered in partnership with iwi? We bring our tech but redesign from an iwi curriculum."

Strengthening Through Collaboration

Collaboration is a key pillar for Dev Academy, with a strong belief in collective progress within the Māori tech ecosystem. By forming alliances and sharing expertise, they aim to enhance the broader outcomes for Māori in technology. "Personally, I don't care if Māori come to Dev Academy as long as they go somewhere in tech. I just want to see more of our people working in this space."

Addressing Foundational Barriers and Building Practical Pathways

Dougal acknowledges Māori students' unique challenges, emphasising flexibility and pastoral care. Dev Academy aims to build a conducive learning environment that balances cultural obligations with educational goals. "For many of our whānau, just getting up in the morning is a win. Because we're such a whānau-centric people when things happen... We drop everything and go. And I'll work my ass off to get you over the line because that sort of stuff is important."

Creating Impactful, Community-Driven Projects

Dougal and the Dev Academy team aspire to channel student efforts into projects that address real-world problems for Māori communities. These initiatives are designed to demonstrate the practical applications of tech in solving pressing issues while fostering a sense of purpose among students. “I would love to funnel our Māori students...into building things that matter—not just creating projects for my GitHub but developing awesome communication tools for my hapū.”

Integrating a Te Ao Māori Lens

Incorporating te ao Māori values into the programme signifies a shift toward a more culturally responsive and community-focused approach. By replacing elements like yoga with kapa haka and introducing marae visits, the curriculum becomes more aligned with Māori traditions and aspirations. “Out goes yoga, out goes mindfulness; in comes kapa haka, in comes waiata, in comes the connection with the community.”

Enabling Local Empowerment Through Micro-credentials

To ensure sustainability and scalability, the Dev Academy team is exploring the creation of teaching micro-credentials. These certifications empower graduates to deliver programmes in their communities, thereby fostering local leadership and self-reliance. “It’s more about empowering training and empowering others to get that done.”

Advocating for a Unified Māori Tech Ecosystem

The vision of a coordinated Māori tech ecosystem underpins many of Dev Academy’s initiatives. By working together and leveraging collective strengths, they aim to streamline efforts and achieve a more significant impact. “If we could identify our lane and say, ‘I’ll focus on this strand,’ while others contribute to their part, we could achieve something awesome.”

Building a National Employment Pathway

Dev Academy is focused on connecting rangatahi with employment opportunities through a national employers’ group. This initiative aligns tech education with tangible career pathways, addressing gaps in readiness among employers and graduates. “When we go to Whanganui... We’re meeting with employers around Whanganui, connecting with anyone who wants to meet in that space.”

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Challenges with TEC and Funding Structures

One of the most pressing challenges expressed in this interview is the rigid and short-term nature of funding provided by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). The six-month funding cycle creates significant barriers to long-term planning and sustainability for training providers. The unpredictability and limitations of funding allocations often only a fraction of what is needed make it nearly impossible to effectively budget or forecast, impacting the ability to retain staff and build capacity. Dougal shares how these constraints led to losing Māori staff they had mentored and invested in, as restructuring left no space for their roles. “We apply for X amount of dollars, and they give us half, or maybe a third often just a third of what we all wanted. That can be really hard from a training provider’s perspective, making it difficult to forecast and keep the doors open.”

Gaps in Readiness for Rangatahi

The transition from regional education to higher learning is marked by a significant gap in readiness among rangatahi. Many young people lack the foundational skills to move into Level 5 or Level 6 programmes, which impedes their progression in the tech sector. Dougal notes that designing foundational courses at Levels 1–4 could address this gap and provide a smoother pathway for learners. This readiness gap highlights the need for tailored educational pathways that recognise the starting points of Akonga Māori, bridging the divide between initial engagement and advanced learning opportunities.

Low Capability and Capacity in Regions

Regional tech hubs are grappling with a lack of capability and capacity to deliver consistent programmes, even when resources are available. Recruiting qualified instructors to teach in these areas remains a significant hurdle. This issue is compounded by the challenges of sustaining motivation among learners and guiding them from training into employment. “It’s not that they don’t want to be able to deliver things. Many of them have the resources, but being able to get people to the regions and to be able to teach is extremely difficult.”

Whānau-Centric Challenges in Learning

For Akonga Māori, whānau responsibilities often precede education, creating interruptions in training. While a strength in many respects, this cultural dynamic can be a barrier when not adequately understood or accommodated by providers. Dougal described how life events such as tangihanga (funerals) or family illness frequently disrupt learning: “For many of our whānau, just getting up in the morning is a win. But because we’re such a whānau-centric people, when things happen whether it’s mum being sick, dad, auntie, uncle, or a tangihanga we drop everything and go.”

Sustainability and Loss of Relationships

A recurring frustration is the difficulty in maintaining the relationships and progress built over time due to funding constraints and external pressures. Dougal laments how staff and relationships built through Dev Academy were lost during tough times, reflecting on the broader challenge of sustaining momentum in the face of financial and structural instability. “Even last year, when things got tough, a majority of those people walked away purely because of that, which is a bit of a shame.”

DOUGAL RECOMMENDS:

Reform TEC Funding Structures for Sustainability

Advocate for changes to the TEC funding system for longer-term planning and stability. This could include extending funding cycles beyond six months, providing funding aligned with realistic forecasting, and ensuring that allocations better reflect the actual programme delivery costs. Stable funding structures will enable training providers to retain staff, build capacity, and focus on learner success.

Develop Foundational Pathways for Rangatahi

Design and implement Level 1–4 foundational bootcamp-style programmes tailored to the needs of rangatahi transitioning from regional education into higher learning or employment in the tech sector. These programmes should focus on bridging readiness gaps, offering technical and foundational life skills, and ensuring learners can confidently progress to higher-level programmes.

Strengthen Regional Capacity for Tech Education

Support regional tech hubs by recruiting and retaining skilled educators through incentive programmes or collaborative efforts with iwi. Additionally, initiatives should be created that provide ongoing professional development and mentoring for regional educators, helping to address capability gaps in delivering high-quality tech training.

Culturally Responsive Training Models

Adopt flexible and culturally grounded training models that accommodate the realities of Akonga Māori, such as part-time options and mechanisms to support learners during whānau-related disruptions. Providers should embed tikanga Māori into programme delivery and actively engage with whānau to foster a supportive learning environment.

Leverage Technology to Solve Real-World Issues

Encourage learners to develop tech solutions that address iwi and community priorities, such as environmental challenges or communication needs. This approach enhances engagement and demonstrates technology's practical and transformative potential within whānau and iwi contexts.

Build Collaborative Relationships with Iwi and Providers

Facilitate forums or partnerships where iwi, training providers, and other stakeholders can co-design solutions. This would include identifying skill gaps, setting priorities, and ensuring educational programmes align with iwi aspirations and community needs. Establishing strong relationships and ongoing dialogue will ensure that programmes remain relevant and practical.

Invest in Sustainable Workforce Pipelines

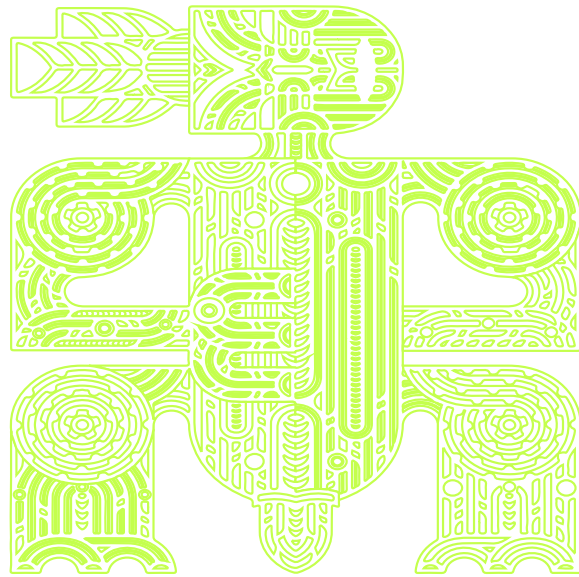
Implement measures to ensure the retention and growth of Māori staff within training organisations. This could include mentoring pathways, leadership development programmes, and strategies to mitigate the impact of funding fluctuations. Providers can strengthen their capacity to deliver impactful programmes by building and sustaining a skilled workforce.

IN SUMMARY:

Dougal highlights the challenges Māori-focused tech education providers face, particularly with short-term funding cycles and structural barriers from the TEC. Despite these obstacles, there is a strong commitment to empowering rangatahi through tech education. The key issues limited funding, readiness gaps, and regional capacity are met with determination to overcome them and create meaningful pathways for Akonga Māori.

The recommendations focus on long-term, sustainable funding, creating comprehensive learning pathways, and strengthening regional teaching capacity. The core of these solutions is collaboration between education providers, iwi, government, and communities. Building lasting relationships and offering flexible, culturally relevant programmes will ensure Akonga Māori see themselves reflected in tech and feel empowered to shape their futures.

By embracing this approach, we can ensure that Māori not only thrive in the digital world but also lead the way in transforming the tech sector to be more inclusive and relevant to its communities.



Rea



Nathan BRYANT-TAUKIRI

*Kāi Tahu, Rangitāne o Wairau,
Waikato-Tainui*

*Chief Executive / Toihau
of Rea*



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH REA.

“

It might be something going on for the learner — maybe they're *disengaged*, maybe they don't have the *kaitiaki* (guidance) they need, or maybe it's as simple as they haven't been shown a *clear path* yet.

INTRODUCTION:

Nathan Bryant-Taukiri is the Chief Executive of Rea, an organisation focused on empowering rangatahi to thrive within Te Ao Māori and the rapidly evolving tech landscape. Growing up in Ōtautahi (Christchurch) without a strong connection to his Māori heritage, Nathan navigated a system centred around Pākehā values, achieving success but often feeling disconnected from his Taha Māori - his cultural identity. This experience inspired him to reconnect with his roots, blending his heritage with a forward-looking vision.

In 2020, Nathan had a pivotal realisation: his journey of success had provided for his family. It advanced his career, yet it had come at the cost of embracing his entire identity. He knew he was not alone in feeling a lack of belonging, and this understanding fueled his commitment to supporting others on a similar path. Nathan created Rea to provide accessible pathways into technology careers, especially for communities needing extra support. He aimed to ensure that others could succeed in their profession while staying true to their identities and cultural heritage.

NATHAN'S WISDOM:

Partnerships

Establishing and nurturing partnerships has been a key focus for Nathan and his team in recent months, especially when organisations are already engaging with the same communities. By pooling resources and aligning efforts, these partnerships create better opportunities to support shared goals. This approach is beginning to yield tangible benefits. However, maintaining and deepening these partnerships requires ongoing effort and intentionality, mainly when working within culturally specific contexts like those involving Māori. “Lately we’ve been really leaning into partnerships—it just makes sense. We’re already engaging with the same communities, so it’s like, how can we actually support each other in a way that adds value for everyone?”

Collaboration in the Tech Sector

Nathan believes collaboration among micro-credential providers becomes more feasible and meaningful when tackling complex, high-stakes challenges. Easier problems often fail to generate the motivation needed to foster partnerships, as organisations see little need to share resources or knowledge. However, complex problems demand innovative solutions, naturally encouraging providers to collaborate, share insights, and create collective impact. “If everyone’s finding something easy, there’s no opportunity for collaboration. Motivation is basically zip, but hard stuff’s different.”

Transitioning Youth to Employment

For Nathan, a key aspect of youth development programmes is ensuring that the transition from learning to employment is seamless and intentional. Clear handoff points within the learner's journey provide opportunities for growth while avoiding overwhelming expectations. Meeting participants where they are and aligning program goals with their readiness helps them experience meaningful progress. Programmes should also emphasise journey planning, ensuring realistic and supportive pathways toward employment. "There's a clear handoff point... knowing that this one naturally comes next or could naturally come next."

Modularisation as a Next Step

Nathan explains that the following steps to enhance Rea's programme's flexibility and accessibility involve modularising its structure. By breaking the curriculum into distinct modules, the programme can align more effectively with emerging trends like digital badging and micro-credentials. This approach allows participants to engage with content at their own pace and increases the potential for scaling the programme across diverse contexts and learner needs. "We're about to go through a modularising path to unbundle what we're doing and break it into modules."

Strategic Partnerships for Long-Term Impact

Nathan points out that building strategic relationships with large organisations like Spark, demonstrates the potential for small-scale efforts to evolve into transformational, system-wide initiatives. Achieving this level of collaboration requires persistence, patience, and a long-term vision, as it can take years for these partnerships to mature. Once established, such collaborations can provide the proof of concept needed to scale impact across sectors and communities. "Spark... are now strategic in their relationships. They've got their Chief Executive buy-in, and it's seen as strategically important."

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Rangatahi Commitment

Nathan believes engaging rangatahi in programmes is significantly more challenging than other groups, as they often face unique barriers such as struggles with school, developmental changes, and a lack of readiness to commit fully. Despite these challenges, providing consistent support and finding ways to boost their confidence and involvement are essential to ensuring their success. Recognising these struggles allows for designing programs that better meet their needs, offering a pathway to greater engagement. "The kids, they're not super ready to commit to anything. They might be struggling at school and with hormones. Maybe what they need is a boost."

Funding Challenges

Nathan emphasises that access to sustainable funding remains a significant obstacle for impactful programmes, particularly when age restrictions and rigid timelines limit who can participate. For example, many successful participants fall outside age thresholds, highlighting the need for flexibility in funding criteria. Without reliable financial support, programmes like Ignite face the risk of discontinuation despite their proven value. This highlights the importance of finding diverse funding streams for Nathan to ensure long-term programme viability. “We might have to sunset our Ignite programme because no one can pay for it. Even though it’s so good, if TPK doesn’t provide funding, it’s over.”. This is a risk for Māori tech initiatives who need Government support to enable these programmes to thrive.

Preparing and Supporting Youth for Employment

Supporting youth in their employment journeys often involves addressing critical moments of risk and need. These challenges could range from disengagement to a lack of proper guidance during pivotal transitions. Effective support systems require collaboration across stakeholders to share the burdens of cost and risk, ensuring learners are guided through these difficulties without derailing their progress. Building a stronger support structure can mitigate these barriers and provide a more reliable pathway to employment. “It might be something going on for the learner—maybe they’re disengaged, maybe they don’t have the kaitiaki (guidance) they need, or maybe it’s as simple as they haven’t been shown a clear path yet.”

Funding and Offering Micro-Credentials

Nathan stresses that the financial model for micro-credentials is deeply flawed, with programmes often receiving only partial funding while requiring significant investment in time and resources. The lack of broader funding mechanisms, such as StudyLink, mainly affects learners from underrepresented communities like Pasifika, making these programs less accessible. Providers must develop complementary revenue streams or risk undervaluing their offerings due to financial constraints. “You only really get half of your money from the micro-credential path. You need a method to fund the other 50%. And that’s tough.”

Struggles in Sustaining Māori and Pasifika Initiatives

The sustainability of Māori and Pasifika-focused programmes face significant barriers, including insufficient funding mechanisms, learner challenges, and employer hesitancy. Organisations often rely on non-Māori and non-Pasifika programs to generate the necessary revenue to maintain these initiatives. Without alternative funding models, these culturally significant programmes risk being downscaled or integrated into other business structures, threatening their impact and independence. “The only way we will remain focused on this impact is if our non-Māori, non-Pasifika initiatives go well.”

NATHAN RECOMMENDS:

Strengthen and Sustain Strategic Partnerships

Foster strategic partnerships that align objectives and pool resources to serve shared communities. Long-term collaborations, particularly with large organisations, can create scalable and systemic impact when supported by leadership buy-in and proof of concept. These partnerships are especially critical for initiatives in culturally specific contexts like Māori development.

Tailor Programs to Meet Youth Needs

Design programmes that address the unique challenges faced by rangatahi, including school struggles and developmental transitions. Incorporate confidence-building initiatives, incremental commitments, and tailored support systems to improve engagement. Clear handoff points and realistic growth pathways should be established to support successful transitions from education to employment.

Develop Flexible and Sustainable Funding Models

Advocate for more adaptable funding mechanisms for diverse participant needs, such as age flexibility and financial barriers for underrepresented communities. Diversify revenue streams, pairing culturally focused programmes with complementary non-Māori and non-Pasifika initiatives to ensure long-term sustainability. Address gaps in funding for micro-credentials by exploring innovative revenue-sharing models to offset limitations.

Enhance Collaboration to Solve Complex Problems

Encourage collaboration among micro-credential providers and other stakeholders to address high-stakes challenges. Their joint efforts can lead to more innovative solutions, particularly when individual providers lack the resources to make meaningful changes independently.

Adopt Modular and Scalable Program Designs

Transition to modular programme structures that align with digital badging and micro-credential trends. Modularisation enhances accessibility, scalability, and customisation, meeting diverse learner needs while maintaining quality and allowing learners to engage at their own pace.

Provide Robust Support Systems for Youth Employment

Build comprehensive support frameworks that include mentorship, real-time engagement strategies, and shared risk management. These systems should be designed to address challenges that arise during transitions to employment and provide sustained guidance to ensure positive outcomes for learners.

Sustain and Scale Māori and Pasifika Initiatives

Use innovative funding strategies to sustain high-impact programmes focused on Māori and Pasifika communities. When necessary, embed these programmes within broader organisational frameworks or collaborate with aligned businesses to maintain cultural integrity while ensuring financial viability.

IN SUMMARY:

Nathan highlights the challenges and opportunities in designing and implementing culturally responsive programmes that empower Māori communities while addressing systemic barriers. Success hinges on building strong partnerships, tailoring programmes to meet the unique needs of rangatahi, and creating sustainable funding models. By fostering collaboration, adopting innovative approaches to programme design, and ensuring robust support systems, these initiatives can drive a positive impact and provide pathways for Māori and Pasifika communities to thrive.

Ultimately, the key to long-term success is embracing a holistic approach combining cultural authenticity, strategic collaboration, and sustainable resourcing. By meeting participants where they are and providing realistic, step-by-step opportunities for growth, these programmes can serve as a blueprint for impactful, scalable solutions. The learnings and recommendations from this case study offer actionable steps for stakeholders to refine their practices and contribute to a future where education, employment, and cultural empowerment go hand in hand.



Digital Natives Academy



© Nikolasa Biasiny-Tule

Nikolasa BIASINY-TULE

Puerto Rican, Dutch

*Chief Executive Officer
of Digital Natives Academy*



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH DIGITAL NATIVES ACADEMY.

“

You go in thinking it's about *skills*... then you realise it's about feeding them, ensuring they're cared for, and creating a *safe space* where they can thrive...

They can't learn if they're unwell, so our foundation level programmes are about *wellness and hauora*, while the other half is about *academics*.

INTRODUCTION:

Nikolasa Biasiny-Tule is a visionary leader with extensive experience in digital spaces, especially within Indigenous communities. She holds a Master's in Public Policy and Administration with Honours from Waikato University and spent five years lecturing at the School of Māori and Pacific Development, shaping future leaders in these fields. As the Founding Director of TangataWhenua.com, one of Aotearoa's pioneering Māori news portals launched in 2002, as tauīwi Nikolasa has sought to support the elevation of Māori voices in the digital landscape. She serves on the New Zealand Esports Federation Board, chairs the Women's Esports Subcommittee, and represents New Zealand internationally.

Nikolasa is also the CEO of the Native Institute of Digital Technology (Native Tech) and the CEO of Digital Natives Academy (DNA), a non-profit established in 2014 to spark imaginations and transform lives. Her journey into the digital space began with her partner, Potaua, after spending time in South Korea. Reflecting on their global experiences, they saw the potential for change through technology and identified a gap in Māori representation in the digital world. The turning point came after the passing of Koro Hirini Melbourne when media outlets extensively covered the death of Charisma the Horse but barely mentioned Koro Hirini. This contrast highlighted the need for a platform to ensure the values of whānau were represented in the digital age.

This led to the creation of TangataWhenua.com and the eventual founding of DNA. Their work started small, with just the two of them managing pānui, social media, and websites long before the rise of platforms like Facebook or Māori TV. Their commitment to amplifying Māori voices and navigating the complexities of the digital space eventually led to the realisation that Māori communities needed greater access to digital skills. DNA was born from this understanding, aiming to break down barriers and create opportunities for whānau in the digital world.

DNA's mission is to inspire the next generation of digital leaders through coding, game development, cyber security, artificial intelligence esports, and Internet governance, grounded in a Te Ao Māori worldview. Over time, DNA has evolved into a sanctuary for societal outliers, fostering whānau, friendship, and belonging while bridging traditional knowledge with digital advancement.



NIKOLASA'S WISDOM:

The Genesis of Innovation and Funding Realities

Nikolasa's journey with DNA began with self-funding and a deep commitment to the kaupapa, with every dollar reinvested into building capacity. The Ka Hao Fund marked a pivotal moment, enabling them to expand, equip better resources, and establish a foundational team. This support catalysed a transition from individual efforts to collaborative growth. "The Ka Hao Fund came out, which allowed us to level up... That was the first time we could actually do what we really wanted to do."

Nurturing Students Amid Life Challenges

Nikolasa shared that what started as a focus on skills and pathways evolved into addressing fundamental needs like food, shelter, and emotional safety. Recognising the students' struggles led to creating a holistic care framework. This approach required putting the right people in leadership roles and securing funding for comprehensive support systems, including social workers and pastoral care. "You go in thinking it's about skills... then you realise it's about feeding them, ensuring they're cared for, and creating a safe space where they can thrive."

Building Sustainability Through Income Streams

Creating a sustainable organisation meant diversifying revenue streams, aligning with the kaupapa, and reducing reliance on external funding. Nikolasa explains that establishing a PTE became a cornerstone, supported by customised NZQA accredited programmes tailored to regional strengths. "What are the different revenue streams we can create to support the wider kaupapa? The Private Training Establishment (PTE) became one of those critical streams."

Embedding Wellness in Learning

Their programme's evolution integrated wellness and hauora with academic pursuits, acknowledging that students cannot learn effectively without addressing their well-being. This dual focus on wellness and skills became the foundation for the programme's success. "They can't learn if they're unwell, so our foundation level programmes are about wellness and hauora, while the other half is about academics."

Expansion and Collaboration Across Regions

Expanding the kaupapa to other regions required leveraging a network of skilled professionals and tailoring programmes to local contexts. This collaborative approach acknowledged the challenges of scaling and ensured alignment with community needs. "We knew that we couldn't just go here, copy, paste—that won't work. We were figuring out how to do that properly."

A Holistic Vision for Growth

The vision evolved from creating a hub to fostering a biosphere, a self-sustaining system integrating critical elements for growth. This approach emphasised long-term development, innovation, and adaptability to ensure the kaupapa's sustainability. "We need something where we can add all the key critical elements, and it will grow... that's what we're developing."

Gaming as a Pathway to Tech

Nikolasa highlights that gaming is a meaningful way to connect with rangatahi, offering insights into their interests and aspirations while exposing them to various pathways in tech. The tutors, who are gamers themselves, use shared language and culture to engage students. Elements of game development that are more creative and technical, such as music production, provide entry points for students who may not have access to computers or other resources. This approach is structured into levels, starting from foundational skills to advanced qualifications, ensuring students are supported at their own pace. "It's about understanding how games draw them in to show them all those different pathways... It's the creative side, the technical side, and everything in between."

Needed Support from the Crown

Access to digital tools and mentorship remains a significant barrier for Māori communities, particularly in rural regions. Nikolasa highlights the need for infrastructural investments and localised pathways to prevent skilled youth from leaving their communities for work opportunities elsewhere. Positive male role models have been instrumental in transforming at-risk boys into engaged learners by fostering emotional well-being. "Most of them don't live with other men or uncles, so they lack role models... Now they're going out into the world feeling just a bit more relaxed and chill about what's to come."

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Cultural Barriers and Opportunities for Māori

Despite systemic biases in accessing key projects, building capacity in creative industries and 3D animation opened new opportunities for Māori. Competing against entrenched norms required strategic partnerships and persistence. "There's so little mahi in Rotorua around this space, and it all goes to Pākehā... we're slowly getting into that space and competing."

The Intensive Process of Establishing a Private Training Establishment

Based on Nikolasa's experience, setting up a PTE involved navigating a labyrinth of paperwork and demonstrating financial viability for years without guaranteed funding. Overcoming these hurdles

required meticulous planning and persistence, underscoring the commitment to creating a lasting impact. “It was an insane amount of work... you have to show existing funding and be financially viable for 2 years at the very least before you can even begin.”

Access to Resources

Access to digital tools and mentorship remains a pressing issue, especially in smaller towns. Nikolasa shares her experiences working with rangatahi and highlights the need for technology and expertise to support their journeys into tech. “That’s the biggest gap we see is just access, right? It’s still in 2024.”

Economic Investment

The conversation turns to the need for more significant investment in Māori-led initiatives. Nikolasa is passionate about advocating for policies prioritising Indigenous enterprises, believing this will foster local economic growth and reduce the need for young people to leave their communities. “Without investment in the Māori economy, they won’t see growth.”

Cultural Suppression

Many Māori feel they must suppress their cultural identities in mainstream tech environments. Nikolasa recognises this as a significant barrier, especially for rangatahi from kura education backgrounds, and she champions the importance of creating inclusive spaces that celebrate cultural diversity. “We can’t continue to go to others for support in the aspirations of our kids if we can do that ourselves.”

Lack of Clear Pathways

The absence of clear career and fast evolving pathways in the tech sector challenges rangatahi and their whānau. Nikolasa calls for the establishment of understandable and accessible trajectories that motivate young people to pursue technology education with confidence. “What they might need in New Plymouth is going to be different to what they need here in Rotorua. So key is focusing on the core skills, tenacity, resilience, having a growth mindset and being capable will allow rangatahi to take on any type of mahi they dream of.

Developing tailored solutions to meet local industry needs is essential to creating meaningful pathways into tech for Rangatahi Māori. Many communities lack opportunities to apply newly acquired tech skills locally, leading to a mismatch between training and employment. Māori entities are urged to invest in growing the Māori economy and overcoming systemic biases, which often favour non-Māori project managers and networks. Building trust and demonstrating capability have been crucial for securing opportunities. “We had to fight for this 3D project because a Pākehā was going to take it... We showed that we could, and then they believed in us.”

NIKOLASA RECOMMENDS:

Support Long-term Capacity Building Through Dedicated Funding

Access to funding like the Ka Hao Fund was pivotal in allowing the transition from individual to collaborative efforts. Increasing funding opportunities for Indigenous enterprises enables organisations to invest resources, establish foundational teams, and scale operations while staying aligned with kaupapa.

Address Holistic Needs for Learner Success

Programmes should extend beyond skill-building to address foundational needs such as food, pastoral care, and emotional well-being. Employing social workers, providing wraparound pastoral care, and creating safe, nurturing spaces for learners that create a sense of belonging are all essential to supporting rangatahi on their learning journeys.

Enable Sustainable Growth Through Revenue Diversification

Encouraging Māori-led entities to explore diversified revenue streams, such as establishing PTEs and micro-credentials tailored to local strengths, can reduce reliance on external funding and support broader community aspirations, but requires significant access to investment and experienced and well trained staff.

Incorporate Wellness into Educational Frameworks

Integrating wellness and hauora with academic pursuits should become a core feature of learning environments to ensure learners can achieve their full potential. Addressing health and wellness is as critical as teaching technical skills to Rangatahi Māori.

Invest in Digital Infrastructure and Mentorship

To overcome inequities in digital access, the Crown should invest in infrastructure, tools, and mentoring initiatives, especially in rural areas. Localised pathways and programmes must cater to community-specific needs to enable rangatahi to remain connected to their regions while pursuing technology careers.

Foster Culturally Safe Learning and Work Environments

Create inclusive spaces in tech and education where Māori cultural identities are celebrated, not suppressed. This can encourage rangatahi from kura education backgrounds to pursue careers in tech while preserving their cultural authenticity.

Build Clear and Localised Pathways into Technology

Develop region-specific solutions that align with local industry needs, ensuring rangatahi have tangible opportunities to apply newly learned skills in their communities. Collaboration between iwi, businesses, and educational entities is vital to bridging the gap between training and employment.

Promote Equity in Creative Industries

Māori entities should be supported to compete for high-value creative projects, addressing systemic biases that favour non-Māori organisations. Building trust through proven capability is key to breaking into entrenched industries and creating equitable opportunities.

Advocate for Increased Economic Investment in Māori-led Initiatives

Policies and funding streams must prioritise Māori enterprises to foster local economic growth, enable rangatahi to remain within their communities, and provide sustainable pathways into technology and other sectors.

Leverage Gaming as an Entry Point to Technology Careers

Recognise the potential of gaming to introduce rangatahi to creative and technical aspects of technology. Design tiered programmes that integrate foundational skills with advanced qualifications, ensuring students can progress at their own pace.

IN SUMMARY:

Nikolasa's journey with DNA exemplifies the transformative potential of Māori-led initiatives centring on kaupapa-driven approaches, holistic care, and innovative education models. Her story highlights the challenges and opportunities of creating sustainable pathways for rangatahi into technology and other creative industries while addressing the broader needs of wellness, cultural identity, and economic empowerment. DNA has demonstrated the power of culturally aligned, region-specific solutions through adaptive strategies like revenue diversification, tailored programme delivery, and leveraging gaming as a gateway to tech.

However, systemic barriers remain access to digital resources, funding inequities, and cultural suppression in mainstream sectors continue to limit opportunities for Māori communities. Nikolasa's experience highlights the importance of robust support from the Crown, including infrastructural investment, mentorship, and localised pathways, to address these gaps. Empowering Māori to lead, innovate, and sustain initiatives that align with their values is essential for fostering long-term community resilience and ensuring rangatahi have equitable opportunities to thrive.

This case study serves as a call to action for stakeholders across sectors to champion Indigenous solutions, amplify the impact of Māori enterprises, and co-create a future where Māori knowledge, values, and innovation are celebrated as integral to Aotearoa's success. Nikolasa's vision for a self-sustaining biosphere encapsulates the enduring spirit of kaitiakitanga and the transformative power of mātauranga Māori in shaping pathways to a brighter, more equitable future.



Nōna Te Ao



© Atlantic Fellows

Sammy HUGHES

Te Whakatōhea, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, Leimatua (Vava'u)

*Chief Executive Officer
of Nōna Te Ao*



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH NŌNA TE AO.

“

We're creating the framing and the *framework* and infrastructure that's needed for the work to happen... we bring our whānau *together*, do a *mass collaboration*, and then take them away for that week to mould them.

INTRODUCTION:

Sammy is a passionate advocate for social change and education, serving as the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Nōna Te Ao Charitable Trust. This national charity is committed to creating equitable educational and employment outcomes for rural Indigenous communities. With a notable career, Sammy has earned recognition as part of the University of Auckland's 40 Under 40 and previously held roles such as Chief Adviser of New Zealand's Curriculum and Senior Manager of Business Transformation at Ernst & Young (NZ/Oceania).

In his role at Nōna Te Ao, Sammy believes education can be a powerful catalyst for change. He embodies the essence of the Māori proverb: Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere; ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōna te ao "The forest belongs to the bird who feasts on the miro berry; the world belongs to the bird who feasts on education." This philosophy inspires his approach, urging individuals to explore knowledge's vast possibilities.

Nōna Te Ao tirelessly empowers Indigenous peoples to take charge of their futures by revealing their many pathways. Sammy and his team focus on breaking down barriers and providing comprehensive support, ensuring individuals have the resources and encouragement to succeed once they embark on their chosen paths. Sammy believes that when communities dream big, it is his role to help turn those dreams into reality.



SAMMY'S WISDOM:

Nona Te Ao's Role in Collaborative Projects

Nona Te Ao is crucial in facilitating the development and delivery of a large-scale community programme involving multiple partners. Their approach is centred around creating the necessary framework and infrastructure for the initiative, allowing for widespread collaboration across various sectors, such as technology, education, and business. This includes integrating major industry players like Microsoft and AWS, which contribute to providing micro-credentials for participants. The collaborative nature of this project highlights the importance of building strong partnerships, particularly when working with international entities unfamiliar with the local market. "We're creating the framing and the framework and infrastructure that's needed for the work to happen... we bring our whānau together, do a mass collaboration, and then take them away for that week to mould them."

Pathway Programme Approach and Flexibility

The programme is designed to cater to diverse pathways, from technical and medical fields to engineering and architecture, reflecting the flexibility required to meet the varying needs of participants. This adaptability is key to the programme's success, ensuring it can pivot to incorporate new partners and industries. The approach is experimental, with pilot programmes like degree apprenticeships providing an opportunity to assess what works in real-time. Sammy emphasises the importance of realistic promises: "My biggest concern is not selling people things you can't promise. Do not tell people that you're going to give them these things when they don't exist." This highlights the need for clear, achievable outcomes in training programmes.

Sammy knows that honesty is crucial in training and internship programmes. "Your job is to go get jobs, and then when people come, put them in those jobs." This approach builds trust and empowers Rangatahi Māori with realistic pathways to meaningful employment.

Transitioning to Employment After the Programme

A key component of the programme is ensuring that participants transition smoothly from training into employment. For those who may not immediately secure a job after completing the programme, a bespoke follow-up programme supports them individually. This includes offering scholarships for further study or assistance in starting a business. "If you're going to promise them that you're going to give them something, make sure you have it, and that's what we did." This illustrates the importance of having clear pathways and guarantees for participants, ensuring they are not left without support after the programme.

Facilitators' Role and Qualifications

The quality of facilitators is a critical element in the programme's success. Sammy highlights the distinction between industry experts and skilled educators, noting that while industry professionals have valuable knowledge, they may not always be equipped to teach effectively. This highlights the need for qualified educators who can help students cross the gap between theory and practical application. "Industry people do industry. That is how it works. Some specific people teach in the industry, and you just got to figure out who those people are, who's good." The programme strives to involve the right people, ensuring that those who facilitate training have the expertise and the ability to teach.

Data-Driven Impact

Sammy believes that showing tangible results can make a big difference. "I've always been a big believer that words in Pākehā aren't the thing to get across, but you can show them the numbers and data." This practical perspective focuses on the outcomes of initiatives that matter, especially when seeking support for Māori programmes. It is about turning aspirations into real achievements grounded in measurable impact.

Support for Grassroots Initiatives

Sammy's passion for grassroots programmes shines through when discussing their importance. "I saw the ability to fund those kinds of programmes and provide infrastructure to power them up." He understands that local initiatives are the heartbeat of communities, and supporting them goes beyond just funding; it is about lifting voices and giving people the tools they need to succeed.

Loose Change Case Study as a Model for Community Programmes

The Loose Change programme provides a compelling example of how community-driven initiatives can be supported and scaled. Initially, a grassroots effort that started in collaboration with a former professional sportsman, the programme grew significantly through Sammy's intervention, which provided funding and infrastructure to expand its reach. The programme now serves schools and provides valuable training and community engagement, illustrating the impact of leveraging local talent and resources. "The impacts and outcomes of this particular programme have just been so massive." This example highlights the potential for community programmes to scale when given the proper support, infrastructure, and funding.

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Greed and Collaboration

One of the challenges that Sammy identifies within collaborative projects is the impact of greed, which can undermine the effectiveness of partnerships and community initiatives. In particular, they note how introducing financial incentives can sometimes shift the focus away from the collective vision. Sammy's experience has shown that when shared values and a common purpose drive collaboration, it is more likely to succeed. "Māori are good generally at collaborating until pūtea comes in... it's Pākehā tenets of greed that come in." Māori-led initiatives can overcome these challenges and drive more meaningful outcomes by focusing on the greater good.

Ensuring Successful Employment Outcomes After the Programme

Another challenge Sammy mentions is ensuring participants successfully transition into employment after completing the programme. While the programme offers support, including scholarships and opportunities for further training, there is an additional barrier for those who cannot secure employment or decide not to pursue traditional career paths. Additionally, the difficulty of finding qualified facilitators for training and the need for continuous infrastructure expansion also pose challenges. "That's one of the biggest drawbacks to Tiaki Global's programme, is that they pay for their staff to facilitate it... People who are in the industry, it doesn't make them mean they can teach it." This underlines the complexity of balancing job readiness with the necessary support systems and qualified personnel.

Managing Large-Scale Funding in Pacific Collaborations

Sammy highlights the importance of careful financial management when collaborating with Pacific nations, stressing the need for buffer systems to handle large-scale projects responsibly. He explains that despite the challenges, much of the misappropriated money from international projects is often redirected into essential sectors like health, education, and infrastructure. "You have to have buffer systems... I tried to push Deloitte and their Pacific consultancy to do it because they had the largest Pacific consultancy, and they were not doing any work in the Pacific for that reason." This illustrates buffer systems' critical role in ensuring funds are allocated effectively and do not overwhelm the local economy or governance structures.

SAMMY RECOMMENDS:

Build Strong Collaborative Frameworks

Foster collaboration by establishing clear, structured frameworks and infrastructure that support widespread partnerships. Engaging with local and international entities, such as Microsoft and AWS, can provide valuable resources while aligning with the local context. Sammy's approach shows that successful collaborations require careful planning and a strong network of diverse partners to ensure the smooth delivery of large-scale community programmes.

Ensure Realistic and Achievable Outcomes

Set clear, achievable goals for participants, ensuring that promises are realistic and well-supported by resources. Build pathways that cater to individual needs, such as job placements, scholarships, or entrepreneurial support. Sammy's emphasis on honesty in programme promises helps establish trust and provides participants with meaningful opportunities, which is critical for long-term success.

Provide Tailored Post-Programme Support

Implement a flexible follow-up programme that supports participants who struggle to transition into employment. This could include individual coaching, scholarship opportunities, and further study or entrepreneurship pathways. Offering continued support after the programme ensures no participant is left without options, increasing their chances of success.

Invest in Quality Facilitators

Focus on hiring qualified educators with teaching skills rather than relying solely on industry experts. Facilitators should have industry knowledge and the ability to teach and engage participants effectively. Sammy's point that industry professionals may lack the pedagogical expertise required to teach effectively highlights the need to prioritise skilled educators who can bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Leverage Data for Impact Measurement

Collect and present data to demonstrate the tangible outcomes of community programmes. This approach is crucial for securing ongoing support and funding, as it provides a concrete measure of success. Sammy's belief in the power of data-driven results aligns with the need to prove the efficacy of initiatives, especially when seeking additional funding or partnerships.

Support Grassroots Initiatives with Infrastructure and Funding

Provide grassroots initiatives with the necessary funding and infrastructure to scale effectively. Supporting local talent and empowering community-driven projects can significantly impact long-term development. The success of the Loose Change programme shows how grassroots efforts can grow and serve larger communities when provided with the right resources.

Navigate Financial Challenges in Pacific Collaborations

Ensure the implementation of buffer systems to manage large-scale funding and reduce the risk of misappropriation. This approach is crucial for handling funds responsibly and preventing local economic disruption. Sammy's experience with Pacific collaborations demonstrates the importance of financial safeguards, ensuring that funds support essential sectors like education and infrastructure rather than overwhelming the local economy.

Address Greed in Collaborative Partnerships

When entering collaborative projects, focus on shared values and collective purpose. Be mindful of the potential for financial incentives to detract from the initiative's primary mission. Sammy's observation that greed can undermine the integrity of collaborations highlights the need to prioritise the common good over individual gain to ensure that partnerships remain focused on positive outcomes for the community.

IN SUMMARY:

Sammy highlights the key lessons and practices derived from Nona Te Ao's approach to facilitating large-scale community programmes, focusing on Rangatahi Māori development and workforce integration. The insights shared by Sammy reminds us of the importance of creating robust frameworks for collaboration, ensuring realistic and achievable outcomes for participants, and fostering long-term support structures to guarantee successful transitions into employment or further educational pursuits. The challenges identified, such as securing qualified facilitators, managing the complexities of large-scale funding, and addressing the potential for greed to undermine collaborative efforts, provide valuable lessons for future initiatives in the Māori and Pacific community development space.

This case study provides practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of community-driven programmes. These include prioritising realistic goal-setting, investing in skilled educators, implementing data-driven strategies for impact measurement, and offering continuous support for participants after they complete their training. Also, the case studies emphasises the importance of navigating financial and partnership challenges, particularly in collaborative settings, by focusing on collective purpose and shared values.

Initiatives led by our interviewees succeed because they adapt, learn from past experiences, and continually refine their approach. By addressing the barriers identified and applying the recommended strategies, future programmes can provide meaningful and sustainable outcomes for Rangatahi Māori, fostering greater economic inclusion and empowerment across communities.



Talent RISE



**Taylor-Rose
LEALAISALANOA**

*Ngāti Porou, Fasito'otai,
Vaito'omuli Palauli*

*Former Kaitiaki
at **Talent RISE***



**Jade
KOPUA**

*Ngati Porou, Ngāti
Tūwharetoa, Tainui-Waikato*

*Former Kaimahi and Youth
Programme Coordinator
at **Talent RISE***

**Everything we
do is for and by
young people.
We want
them to feel
like **they own
the process.**
Giving them
that **sense
of agency**
is really
important.**

“

**My mahi is not
an ordinary
mahi it's a
chance for me
to **keep the fire**
burning inside
our Rangatahi,
where we
can see them
succeed to the
**best of their
abilities!****

SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH TALENT RISE.



At the time of this interview, Taylor-Rose and Jade were part of the Talent RISE team in Wellington, which since has been closed due to funding and structural changes, a reflection of why sustained strategic support and investment are critical for long-term impact.

INTRODUCTION:

Taylor-Rose, a vibrant Samoan, Māori, and European descent spirit, proudly calls Porirua her home. After graduating from Te Auaha Institute of Creativity with a Bachelor of Creativity in Music, she stood at the daunting crossroads of entering the workforce with little experience. But everything changed in 2022 when she completed the Talent RISE work-readiness programme, which equipped her with vital skills and sparked a newfound confidence. Now, as a Kaitiaki and Youth Programme Manager at Talent RISE, Taylor-Rose channels her own journey to empower young people navigating their career paths. “Every young person has something meaningful to contribute,” she says, passionately advocating for opportunities to celebrate their unique identities.

Reflecting on her experience, Taylor-Rose shares, “I graduated from the Talent RISE programme at the beginning of 2022. Since then, I’ve been fortunate to support Jess in developing the programme, helping many young people, especially our Māori and Pasifika students.”

Jade Kopua, Kaimahi and Youth Programme Coordinator at Talent RISE Wellington, is joining her in this mission. Jade completed the programme at the end of 2022 and stepped into the role of co-facilitator in January 2024. “I’m just learning the ropes,” she says enthusiastically, drawing on her experience as a programme graduate to connect with and inspire young people. Over the past year, Jade has co-facilitated five-week work readiness programmes to empower young Māori and Pasifika NEET Rangatahi to build their capabilities, thrive, and develop self-confidence.

“My mahi is not an ordinary mahi it’s a chance for me to keep the fire burning inside our Rangatahi, where we can see them succeed to the best of their abilities!” Jade explains, emphasising her passion for fostering growth in the future leaders of her community.

Together, Taylor-Rose and Jade create a warm and welcoming space, combining their journeys to uplift and inspire the next generation in their communities.



TAYLOR-ROSE AND JADE'S WISDOM:

Culturally Inclusive Work Readiness Programme

In 2018, Kaiārahi of Talent Rise Jessica Te Moananui developed a work readiness programme incorporating kaupapa Māori principles to support Māori and Pasifika youth. Jess's leadership in integrating Māori culture into the program created an environment where participants could connect with their whakapapa while gaining the skills needed for the workforce. Taylor-Rose contributed by expanding the programme to support Pasifika youth better, drawing from her own Samoan heritage. The programme fosters a culturally inclusive environment that helps young people retain and apply their cultural knowledge as they transition into the workforce. "I think it's a really good opportunity, especially for our young people, to feel a little bit more connected to their own whakapapa and really acknowledge where they come from, as well as giving them the right pathways and tools to help them on their journey moving forward."

Curriculum Structure and What Works

Talent RISE's curriculum seems to hit the mark when preparing young people for tech roles. Their readiness programme is broken into weekly workshops, each focusing on a specific theme. The first week is all about motivation. Taylor-Rose shared, "We focus on building whakawhanaungatanga and helping them establish relationships with their peers. Many of these young people are entering an unfamiliar corporate environment and don't know what to expect. We try to make them feel more settled and comfortable and give them some foundation points to build on for the next few weeks." This first week is all about easing their nerves so they feel like they belong before diving into the more technical stuff.

In the second week, the programme focuses on health and wellness. It uses holistic models like Te Whare Tapa Whā and Fonofale Pasifika to build resilience and provide tools for managing challenges as they transition into employment.

Week three is dedicated to CV development, where participants identify their skills and experiences, building confidence and self-awareness. The fourth week focuses on interview preparation, with interactive workshops to help participants practice presenting themselves effectively.

The final week involves reviewing employment agreements, revisiting past workshops, and celebrating achievements with a graduation ceremony. The programme is delivered in small groups of 5-7 young people, ensuring personalised support and better outcomes.

Post-Workshop Support and Pastoral Care

A standout feature of Talent RISE is the ongoing support they offer after the workshops. Taylor-Rose talked about how they help participants with job searching, creating CVs, and writing cover letters. She also mentioned that motivational Zoom calls have been super helpful, especially when someone is feeling down or discouraged. “We make sure to stay in touch, keep them motivated, and let them know they’re not alone in this process,” she said. This level of support ensures that participants feel backed up even after the workshops are done as they move forward in their career journeys.

RISE Australia’s InterTech Internship Initiative

Talent RISE is also working on initiatives like the InterTech internship, where interns are prepped for roles within the company. Taylor-Rose noted, “The more we engage with companies, the more doors we open for our rangatahi.” It’s not just about getting young people into tech it is about giving them the skills and connections they need to secure long-term roles in the industry.

Personal Growth and Career Development

Jade highlights the value of teaching and supporting peers who are close in age, making the learning process more relatable and compelling. She shares her journey of gaining confidence through the programme, noting how she went from being shy and withdrawn to confidently engaging with programme partners. Talent Rise helped her navigate the challenges of finding a job in her field, providing support that enabled her to complete her first year of youth work studies. Now, she feels empowered to give back and help others facing similar challenges. “By the end of the five weeks, boom, I was talking to programme partners that have definitely helped build my confidence up.”

Taylor-Rose reflects on her transformation from being shy and introverted to gaining confidence in her abilities. She credits much of her growth to Jess’s support and teaching methods, who guided her by allowing her to learn through hands-on experience. Taylor-Rose adopted some of Jess’s facilitation techniques and integrated them into her own teaching style. She acknowledges the importance of being pushed outside her comfort zone, which helped her develop confidence and skills in her role, marking significant growth in her professional journey. “There’s been a lot of growth opportunities over the past two years, and a lot of what has helped me has been just kind of pushing me to just give it a go and see what works best for me.”

Facilitation Methods and Approach

They talked about their facilitation methods, and what really stands out is their focus on making the programme as relatable as possible for young people. “Everything we do is for, and by, young people. We want them to feel like they own the process. Giving them that sense of agency is really important,” she said. Their approach is flexible, allowing for the unique needs of each participant, and they keep following up after the programme to make sure everyone stays on track. Their ethos is straightforward: the programme is “run by young people for young people.”

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Overcoming Biases and Unlocking Youth Potential in the Workforce

Taylor-Rose and Jade emphasise the significant barriers young people face in the workforce, particularly biases tied to age and background. Despite completing programmes that prepare them to “hit the ground running,” many youths struggle to find employers willing to give them a chance. They stress the importance of creating safe and more culturally diverse workspaces that cater to unique perspectives and skills rangatahi brings.

As Taylor-Rose notes, the challenge is finding employers who can look past these biases and offer that crucial first opportunity. She highlights the vast potential within the youth she has encountered. “There are so many talented young people that we’ve worked alongside. It’s just about finding the right people who will give them that first handout or that first opportunity.”

Challenges in Transitioning Youth to Employment

One of the key barriers identified is the difficulty transitioning young people from programme completion to securing employment, especially given the challenging job market. Despite comprehensive pastoral care, including frequent check-ins, career planning, and support with job applications, many youths struggle to find roles, impacting their confidence and motivation. The team remains committed to providing ongoing encouragement and tailored support. “As it stands, the job market has been quite difficult. It’s been really hard for our young people, in particular, to get into work... But we are still trying our best to keep pushing our young people to stay motivated.”

TAYLOR-ROSE AND JADE RECOMMEND:

Integrate Kaupapa Māori Principles in Programme Design

Talent RISE's culturally inclusive curriculum, which incorporates kaupapa Māori principles, effectively supports Māori and Pasifika youth by helping them connect with their whakapapa while gaining work-readiness skills. Future programmes should embed Māori frameworks such as Te Whare Tapa Whā to ensure cultural alignment, fostering personal and professional growth by enabling participants to retain and apply cultural knowledge as they transition into the workforce.

Facilitate Holistic Support Through Post-Programme Pastoral Care

The ongoing support offered through Talent RISE's pastoral care phase, including frequent check-ins, career planning, and job application assistance, helps participants stay motivated and supported after programme completion. To enhance this, programmes should formalise structured pastoral care phases, providing consistent follow-ups, tailored action plans, and resources that boost participants' employability and confidence.

Address Hiring Biases and Advocate for Culturally Diverse Workplaces

Despite their readiness and potential, youth face significant barriers, such as age-related biases and limited culturally inclusive workplaces. Programmes should actively engage with employers to raise awareness about the value of diversity, offering bias training as part of employer onboarding and building partnerships with businesses committed to hiring from diverse backgrounds, thereby improving opportunities for rangatahi.

Customise Learning and Facilitation Approaches

Flexible and adaptive facilitation methods, led by young facilitators, create relatable learning environments that empower participants and build confidence. Programmes should develop facilitator training to ensure culturally aligned, participant-centric teaching styles that meet the diverse needs of rangatahi, incorporating peer mentoring and cultural knowledge to enhance relatability and learning outcomes.

Expand Pathways for Continuous Learning and Career Development

Limited entry-level job opportunities and restricted access to roles requiring further training can hinder participants' progress. To address this, programmes should partner with educational institutions and employers to create clear pathways for further study and work placements, offering accredited learning credits or micro-credentials to support career advancement and lifelong learning.

Celebrate and Showcase Youth Potential

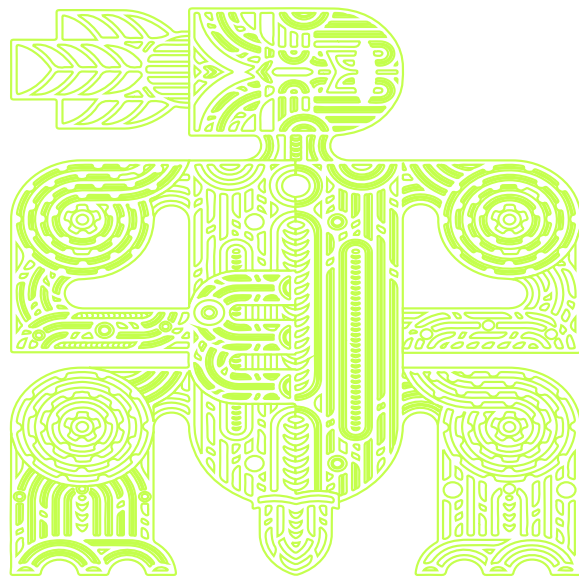
Graduation ceremonies and the recognition of personal development milestones instil pride and confidence in participants. Programmes should continue celebrating these achievements, incorporating cultural elements that resonate with Māori participants while showcasing success stories to inspire current participants and demonstrate the programme's impact to potential employers.

IN SUMMARY:

The Talent RISE programme demonstrates a powerful model for nurturing young talent, especially among Māori and Pasifika communities. A culturally inclusive curriculum, tailored pastoral care, and a supportive environment equip participants with vital skills, confidence, and a strong sense of identity. The programme's unique approach—led by young people, for young people—helps participants build resilience and transition more smoothly into the workforce.

However, systemic challenges remain. Biases in hiring practices and a competitive job market create significant barriers for youth seeking their first opportunities. Despite these obstacles, Talent RISE remains steadfast in its mission, fostering personal and professional growth while advocating for more inclusive workplaces. As Taylor-Rose eloquently states, "Every young person has something meaningful to contribute," which shows the programme's belief in the untapped potential of youth.

Through its ongoing commitment, Talent RISE not only uplifts individual participants but also challenges industries to rethink their approach to hiring, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.



Toi Kai Rawa



Jay
TIHEMA

Ngāti Apa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa

*Operations Manager
of Toi Kai Rawa*



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“

There's work to do in helping them *move past conditioning* and self-limiting beliefs. We can *reframe perceived weaknesses* as strengths.

For example, being haututū isn't about being seen as mischievous and unfocused – it can be a gift because you're *curious* and don't just accept things at face value.

INTRODUCTION:

Jay Tihema, of Ngāti Apa and Ngāti Tūwharetoa descent, brings a deeply personal and community-rooted perspective to his role as Programme Lead - Special Projects (Hihiko) with Toi Kai Rawa. Born in Whanganui and now based in Tauranga Moana, Jay's journey into educational leadership is shaped by lived experience, practical insight, and an unwavering commitment to empowering rangatahi Māori.

Jay's professional path did not begin in classrooms or policy spaces. It started on factory floors, in labouring jobs, and through the lived realities of being a young parent. "I dropped out of school when I was 16... but I didn't really care what I was doing as long as I was providing and paying the bills," Jay shared. But his early entry into fatherhood, paired with a growing sense of responsibility to the next generation, sparked a deeper drive to uplift Māori youth. "Being a dad made it relevant to think about how I can better serve and support our young people coming through."

That desire became his calling. From working as a Youth Case Manager at MSD to supporting secondary and tertiary students across more than 40 schools, youth programmes and educational institutions in the Bay of Plenty, Jay has seen the gaps in the education and employment systems first-hand. "It made it clear for me in terms of where the system is failing - in the lack of support mechanisms and relevant industry training that meets young people where they are."

This insight now informs his leadership at Toi Kai Rawa, where Jay spearheads Hihiko Te Rawa Auaha, a programme designed to uplift Māori communities through tailored STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) engagement. Working alongside kura, whānau, and community providers, Hihiko is about more than just devices and digital skills; it is about equitable access, cultural grounding, and building the confidence and capability of Māori to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

As Operations Manager, Jay also plays a key role in Toi Kai Rawa's wider ecosystem of innovation and rangatahi development, including initiatives like Toi Ki Tua (a summer internship programme for Māori tertiary students), He Rangatahi, He Anamata (a youth leadership summit), and Whai Mahi (a vocational pathway programme). Each initiative is part of a cohesive strategy to ignite potential, amplify indigenous talent, and ensure Māori youth are not just included but are leading in future-focused sectors.

Through this case study, Jay's reflections offer valuable insight into the design, delivery, and cultural responsiveness required to build successful education-to-employment pathways for Māori. His voice reinforces a central truth in the development of optimal Māori programmes: success comes not only from content, but from context - meeting rangatahi on their terms, valuing who they are, and walking alongside them toward who they're becoming.

JAY'S WISDOM:

Meeting Rangatahi Where They Are

A central insight is the importance of designing education and employment pathways that acknowledge the lived realities of Māori youth, many of whom don't follow linear, traditional trajectories. Jay notes that mainstream approaches often don't reflect or respect the diverse starting points of Māori learners. "There's work to do in helping them move past conditioning and self-limiting beliefs. We can reframe perceived weaknesses as strengths. For example, being haututū isn't about being seen as mischievous and unfocused – it can be a gift because you're curious and don't just accept things at face value."

Valuing Transferable and Informal Skills

There is a strong recognition that formal qualifications don't always capture the skills, curiosity, and innovation that many rangatahi already demonstrate. Designing assessment criteria that also honour self-taught, autodidactic learning is essential. "If you've been tutu-ing with computers... pulling them apart, putting them back together to build your understanding... in a lot of cases that's more valuable than hundreds of students doing the same sorts of programmes with a one-size-fits-all curriculum that often lacks real-world application."

Embracing Nonlinear Pathways

Māori learners need to be supported in exploring multiple career pathways rather than being pushed into a singular, predetermined route. Lifelong learning and adaptability should be embedded into programme design. "They're not being taught that it's possible to have a 'portfolio' career, for those it might suit. Rangatahi deserve greater exposure and awareness of how else they can decide their futures."

Recognising Industry's Role and Responsibility

Programmes must also challenge industry to do more than just tick diversity boxes. True partnership means creating reciprocal spaces where Māori can thrive and feel a sense of belonging. "Many rangatahi need to learn accountability, but some employers are just extractive... for various reasons, some just want more brown faces into their roles without actually creating an environment conducive to their development."

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

The Need for Culturally Grounded, Real-World Learning

Rangatahi often thrive when programmes are relevant, hands-on, and values-aligned. Successful models provide exposure to industry realities while prioritising cultural responsiveness. However, culturally safe learning environments must prepare young people for the workplace realities they may encounter. “We’ve had interns and learners face openly racist employers who say the right things publicly, but show no alignment in practice. That makes it difficult for rangatahi to thrive in workplaces that undermine their identity from the outset.”

Breaking Down Silos and Building Collaboration

Effective support systems require genuine collaboration across schools, whānau, communities, industry, and government. Factors such as traditional practices and funding structures often discourage partnership and perpetuate competition, ego, and isolation. “Collaboration is a word that gets thrown around a lot, but I don’t think many people know how to do it meaningfully... until we get on the same page, it’s going to be real hard.”

Strengthening Whānau Engagement

Whānau remain central to a rangatahi’s success, but many parents and caregivers feel alienated by education systems due to past trauma or lack of familiarity with modern career paths. Providing support for whānau to understand and navigate these systems is vital. “Sometimes kids’ parents will ask, ‘Do you offer things like this for adults as well?’ Because we never learned any of this sort of stuff.”

Investing in Capability; Not Just Credentials

The system should shift from only valuing credentials to valuing capability. That means building confidence, networks, and ‘human’ skills that allow young people to adapt and thrive as industries change. “We’ve been talking around skills being the new currency for years... but no one on a significant level is teaching young people how to use them. Many still struggle to identify, develop and articulate them in ways relevant to the real world.”

Building Infrastructure for Equity and Visibility

Many isolated and rural Māori communities don’t have access to the same opportunities and services. There’s a need for systems and tools that increase visibility of what’s available, enabling communities to connect with programmes and providers. “Schools don’t even know who’s doing the sorts of things that they want, let alone being able to access them.”

Developing Sector Standards That Reflect Māori Realities

Standardised approaches to learning and assessment often miss the mark for Māori. An optimal model must consider the lived experiences of learners, the skills they already bring, and the conditions required to thrive. “I would love to see a lot more investment in responding to where our young people are at... not just getting them into the next thing out of convenience, or because the government says it’s important.”

JAY RECOMMENDS:

Recognise Informal and Self-Directed Learning

Develop assessment frameworks that acknowledge learning outside of formal institutions, including self-directed learning, community engagement, marae-based knowledge transmission, digital experimentation, and entrepreneurial activity. Many Māori learners gain significant skills through non-traditional routes. These capabilities should be made visible and creditable.

Embed Cultural Identity and Values

Integrate cultural markers of success into learning systems, ensuring that these are reflected in spaces, processes, and assessments. Recognise contributions to whānau, hapū, iwi, and community alongside individual achievements, with Māori success being inherently collective and identity-affirming. Rangatahi thrive when their identities become the pathway to success, rather than a barrier to overcome.

Enable Youth-Led Programme Design

Get rangatahi involved in how programmes are designed, delivered, and evaluated early and often, with genuine power-sharing from organisations and decision-makers. Authentic outcomes happen when rangatahi have agency over the decisions that affect them. “We can provide support and guidance as necessary, then just get out of their way.”

Invest in NEETs and Alternative Pathways

Ensure learners outside mainstream education receive equal recognition, and aren’t penalised for system failures that didn’t meet their needs to begin with. Foster strong industry engagement and include criteria that recognise self-started projects, entrepreneurship and community-based initiatives. “These rangatahi have the same potential as those in traditional education, and their opportunities should reflect that.”

Develop Skills Through Culturally Grounded, Experiential Learning

Develop essential future-ready capabilities through culturally grounded, experiential learning that integrates play-based, interactive and practical methods. Te Ao Māori approaches that emphasise holistic thinking, relational problem-solving, and intergenerational knowledge systems provide advantages in developing critical thinking and skills valued even in global labour markets. Skills development should connect directly to real-world scenarios where rangatahi can immediately apply learning while drawing strength from indigenous ways of knowing.

Enable Cross-Sector Collaboration

Co-design assessment standards with educators, iwi, industry, youth workers, and whānau to ensure they reflect diverse needs and lived realities. Include regional voices in national standard-setting. A holistic understanding of Māori learner journeys requires input from all parts of the ecosystem. “I would love to see more purposeful interconnection and fewer walls between education, industry, community, iwi and hapū.”

Support Nonlinear Career Navigation

Allow development to reflect iterative, portfolio-style learning where multiple projects, roles, and experiences are accumulated over time and across settings. Build rangatahi knowledge and confidence to navigate career paths seamlessly in an ever-evolving future workforce, equipping them to determine their own futures. “The game is always changing, but our education needs to adapt faster to change with it”.

Transform Economic Pathways and Employment Systems

Address structural barriers in employment, entrepreneurship, and wealth-building that limit rangatahi economic participation regardless of educational achievement. Support Māori-led business development, create authentic career pathway partnerships with Māori enterprises, and challenge discriminatory hiring practices. Ensure educational credentials translate into meaningful economic opportunities within Te Ao Māori and broader economic systems.

Build Digital Capability with Community-Led Infrastructure

Develop digital literacy and technology skills through community-led approaches that prioritise local needs and values. Increase investment in under-resourced regions with limited access, ensuring digital infrastructure development is guided by and accountable to the communities it serves, rather than imposed by external priorities.

Build Educator and Community Capability

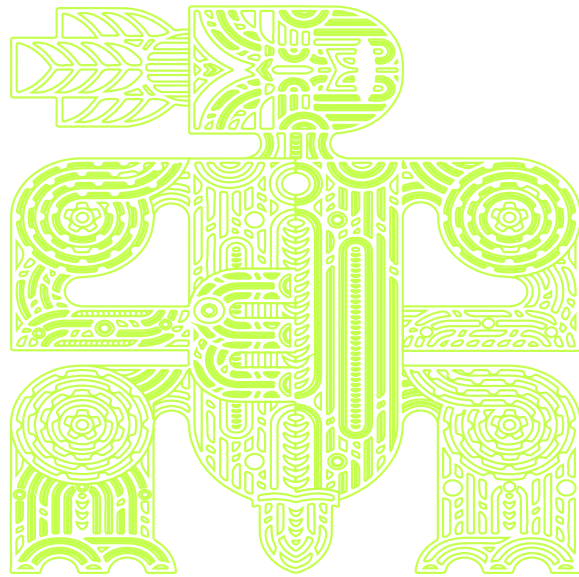
Invest in “train-the-trainer” models that equip educators and community assessors to identify Māori learner potential beyond grades. Incorporate Māori career theory, cultural frameworks, digital capability and wellbeing tools. Formalise community-based assessment through activities such as wānanga, project-based learning and local mentorships. “None of us can do it alone... we need to build the trust and take time to work toward what true collaboration looks like.”

IN SUMMARY:

Jay’s reflections reveal the urgent need to redesign education and workforce pathways to better reflect the realities of Māori learners. Current systems often overlook the value of informal learning, cultural identity, and the nonlinear journeys that many rangatahi experience. His work across kura, communities, and industry reinforces the importance of programmes that are flexible, culturally grounded, and focused on real-world relevance.

To create optimal programmes for Māori, assessment criteria must move beyond traditional measures of success. They should recognise transferable skills, lived experiences, and contributions to whānau and community. Culturally safe environments, stronger collaboration across sectors, and responsive infrastructure are all essential to this shift.

This case study underscores that meaningful change will come from designing alongside Māori; centering their needs, strengths, and aspirations to ensure they can confidently navigate and shape the future.



Oranga Matihiko



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**Morehu
RANSFIELD**

Te Ātiawa, Taranaki

*Executive Director
of Oranga Matihiko*



SCAN THE CODE
TO CONNECT
WITH ORANGA MATIHIKO.

“

Gaming taught me how to read. I learned my literacy through the dialogue on Final Fantasy VII. I learned numeracy *through games* like Shining Force II—strategy, statistics, all of that. It made me realise that *learning doesn't have to look the same* for everyone.

INTRODUCTION:

With over 18 years of teaching experience across the Māori education sector, Morehu (Taranaki Tutaru, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kahungunu Ki Heretaunga) has emerged as a tech-educator and innovator driven by a vision, which is equipping the next generation of Māori learners with the tools and belief to succeed, both culturally and digitally. As the founder of Oranga Matihiko, a kaupapa that began as a targeted learning initiative and has since grown into a full-fledged community movement, Morehu has demonstrated how mātauranga Māori and digital literacy can work together to ignite rangatahi potential.

Morehu's teaching journey, deeply rooted in his identity as a "Parihaka baby," has spanned alternative education, mainstream schooling, and kura kaupapa Māori. His reflections are a powerful lens into the challenges and opportunities in designing culturally sustaining education systems for Māori. "Gaming taught me how to read. I learned my literacy through the dialogue on Final Fantasy VII. I learned numeracy through games like Shining Force II—strategy, statistics, all of that. It made me realise that learning doesn't have to look the same for everyone."

Raised between marae life and urban communities, Morehu credits much of his educational resilience to his kuia Kuini Frances Tuuta (Nee Tito Graham), who instilled in him the value of te reo me ōna tikanga. It was this foundation, strengthened through his tertiary studies at Te Wānanga Takiura and tested in classrooms across the motu, that helped shape his distinct approach to learning. "I had both the privileges and struggles of living in two worlds. I was marae-raised, but I also lived in the hood. That duality taught me how to navigate systems and question them."

In his time at Te Kura Tuarua o Ngāmotu (Spotswood College), Morehu developed and refined Ahurewa, a programme under the Oranga Matihiko umbrella, aimed at lifting pass rates in NCEA-level te reo Māori by aligning learning pathways with the needs of vocational and non-traditional learners. He credits his success not only to personal experience, but to those who backed him. "I did everything wrong for about eight or nine years before I finally got it right... but I learned. I was lucky to have people like Nikola Ngārewa and Mark Bowden believe in me, give me room to fail, and space to innovate."

What sets Morehu apart is his commitment to disrupting what he calls the "Institutional Paradigm," reframing education through a te ao Māori worldview. He is clear about the systemic barriers Māori face, from colonisation to economic exclusion, and he approaches digital inclusion not just as a technical issue, but a cultural and structural one.

His journey highlights the importance of whakapapa-based pedagogy that honours cultural identity, flexible learning pathways that support both academic and vocational success, and tools that meet learners where they are, often outside traditional classroom structures. Most importantly, it reinforces the need for Māori educators to lead the transformation of systems designed for Māori. "For us, the kaupapa started in te ao Māori it wasn't something we added on at the end. That's why it works."

Morehu's case exemplifies how grounded cultural values, creative curriculum design, and a relentless commitment to learner success can come together to challenge the status quo, and offer a new blueprint for Māori education in the digital age.

MOREHU'S WISDOM:

A Learning Path Rooted in Te Ao Māori

For Morehu, education has never been separate from identity. His upbringing in Parihaka, surrounded by kaupapa Māori and raised between the pā and "the hood," instilled a foundational connection to both community and culture. These dual worlds offered both privilege and challenge, shaping how he would later design educational programmes that reflect the realities of Māori learners. His kuia, a major influence, grounded him in te reo me ōna tikanga a commitment that continued through to tertiary education and into his teaching career. "I had both the privileges and struggles of living in two worlds... it was a matter of weighing up the two, along with living in a mixture of mainstream and bilingual education."

Gaming as a Gateway to Literacy and Numeracy

Unconventional learning played a pivotal role in Morehu's development. While formal schooling often failed to engage him, video games sparked a lifelong passion for technology and learning. Through gaming, he gained essential skills reading dialogue taught him literacy, and role-playing games introduced him to complex numeracy and strategic thinking. This lived experience gave him a unique perspective on how learning can be made meaningful for Māori youth through familiar and engaging mediums. "It was gaming that taught me literacy and numeracy. I learned how to read through reading dialogue in Final Fantasy Seven... I learned statistics through strategy games like Shining Force II."

The Power of Whakapapa and Storytelling in Education

Storytelling emerged early in Morehu's life as both a strength and a survival tool. While he struggled to stay focused on the blackboard, his ability to imagine, create, and write stories was recognised and encouraged by his kaiako. That early recognition shaped his teaching philosophy and later helped him design learning environments that honour imagination, whakapapa, and indigenous narratives. "My kaiako would always compliment my imaginary side, my fictional side, when it came to writing stories. That was definitely something I enjoyed."

A New Norm: Critical Pedagogy and Social Justice In Education

Morehu's teaching and educational philosophy are inspired by the work of Dr. Ann Milne, particularly her thesis in *Colouring in the White Spaces*. Her critique of mainstream schooling articulates the hegemonic systems that marginalise Māori and Pasifika learners. Through his experiences at Te Whānau O Tupuranga - Kia Aroha College, Morehu focuses on challenging the inequities of education in Aotearoa. He has extended these principles into the realms of digital equity, vocational transformation, and kaupapa Māori-led system design.

From Learning What Doesn't Work to Designing What Does

After teaching at a range of institutions, including Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and Witt, Morehu returned to his former high school, Te Kura Tuarua o Ngāmotu (Spotswood College). It was here that he refined his practice, often by getting it wrong. He candidly reflects on nearly a decade of trial and error within the NCEA system before finding success, learning the value of reflection, humility, and the importance of having leaders who believe in your potential. "I learned how to do everything wrong. I did everything wrong for a good eight, maybe nine years before I finally got it right... Those experiences taught me a lot. They humbled me. They helped me grow."

Ahurewa: Building Culturally Responsive Pathways for Success

Born out of necessity and compassion, the Ahurewa programme was developed by Morehu in response to low achievement rates in te reo Māori. Recognising that many of his students came from vocational pathways, he designed a curriculum that addressed their realities, blending academic rigour with practical relevance, all grounded in kaupapa Māori. His approach challenges the status quo and calls for an educational model that is not only inclusive but transformational. "Te reo Māori is an academic subject, but we had a lot of vocational taura coming through. Ahurewa was a response to that. We needed something that met them where they were."

A Call for Structural Shift: The Institutional Paradigm

Central to Morehu's vision is what he terms an "Institutional Paradigm Shift," a deliberate move away from mainstream models that often fail Māori, toward frameworks grounded in te ao Māori. His educational philosophy is shaped by critical thinking around colonisation, marginalisation, and the social forces that continue to affect Māori communities. Through Oranga Matihiko and Ahurewa, he is helping to reimagine what success looks like for Māori in the digital age. "It gave me a different worldview... I identify that as what I call an Institutional Paradigm Shift—looking at education differently and not being caught up in the mainstream system."

TAUĀRAI - BARRIERS:

Navigating Two Worlds: Cultural and Socioeconomic Tensions

Growing up between the marae at Parihaka and an urban “hood” environment, Morehu was constantly balancing different realities. This dual existence meant he had to reconcile the richness of his cultural upbringing with the pressures and limitations of mainstream societal structures. The contrast between te ao Māori and mainstream life created a tension that many Māori learners still face today—needing to code-switch and adapt while often feeling unsupported in either space.

Mainstream Education Systems Not Fit for Purpose

Throughout his own schooling and teaching journey, Morehu observed that mainstream education systems were not designed with Māori learners in mind. He experienced first-hand how the structure and delivery of curriculum often excluded or overlooked Māori ways of knowing, doing, and being. It was clear to him that the system’s rigid focus on academic benchmarks failed to accommodate the diverse strengths of his students—particularly those from vocational or non-traditional backgrounds.

Initial Failures Within the NCEA Framework

During his early years of teaching at Spotswood College, Morehu openly admits he struggled to navigate the complexities of the NCEA system. These early attempts at applying the framework to support Māori students were unsuccessful, as he had not yet developed culturally responsive strategies. This period of trial and error lasted nearly a decade, highlighting how difficult it can be for even committed educators to work effectively within an inflexible and often inappropriate system.

Lack of Alignment Between Subject Content and Learner Pathways

A key issue Morehu encountered was the disconnect between te reo Māori as an academic subject and the needs of his largely vocational tauira. Many students entering te reo Māori classes had strong cultural motivation but lacked interest or strength in traditional academic assessment. The curriculum and assessment design did not reflect their aspirations or learning styles, making engagement and success difficult to sustain.

Systemic Marginalisation and Structural Barriers

Beyond the classroom, Morehu identifies broader societal issues that continue to impact Māori education. The legacies of colonisation, economic exploitation, and marginalisation remain embedded in the structures Māori must navigate daily. These forces aren't just historical they manifest in under-resourcing, biased expectations, and a lack of agency for Māori educators and communities in decision-making spaces.

Limited Support and Initial Doubt from Institutions

Although he eventually found champions who believed in his vision, Morehu's early experiences were marked by institutional doubt and a lack of support. His progression into leadership roles was not straightforward, and he often had to prove his capability multiple times before gaining the trust and space to implement his ideas. This underlines the common challenge many Māori educators face: needing to demonstrate excellence in unsupportive environments before being given authority or autonomy.

MOREHU RECOMMENDS:

Begin with Kaupapa Māori as the Foundation

Programmes should be developed with kaupapa Māori principles at their core. Māori values, knowledge systems, and leadership must shape programme design from the beginning. Assessments and learning credits should reflect Māori understandings of success, which include cultural identity, community contribution, and the development of relationships, not just academic performance.

Recognise Diverse Literacies and Learning Pathways

Many Māori learners gain literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills through alternative pathways such as gaming, storytelling, or hands-on practice. These learning modes should be acknowledged and legitimised in assessment structures. Flexible and creative approaches should be used to capture the full range of skills and knowledge that Māori learners bring.

Provide Dual Pathways for Academic and Vocational Learners

Te reo Māori and other cultural subjects often attract vocational learners who may not be suited to traditional academic assessments. Programmes should include alternative pathways for achievement that reflect both academic rigour and practical application. This approach helps ensure that a wider range of learners are supported and recognised.

Value Cultural Knowledge and Community Contribution in Credit Allocation

Learning credits should capture more than academic performance. They should also acknowledge lived experience, cultural practice, and the application of Māori knowledge in real-world contexts such as involvement in iwi, hapū, or marae development. These contributions are vital to Māori development and should be recognised as formal learning.

Strengthen Educator Capability to Support Māori Learners

Teachers and programme designers need professional development that equips them to work within culturally sustaining frameworks. Many educators are not adequately prepared to navigate or transform systems to better support Māori learners. Investing in training that builds cultural competency and supports co-design with Māori communities is essential.

Embrace Iterative and Reflective Learning Models

Rigid success/failure models are not always appropriate. Programmes should adopt an approach that allows for reflection, adaptation, and reattempts. Supporting growth over time better reflects how learning occurs in Māori contexts, where the process of becoming is valued as much as the outcome.

Address Systemic and Structural Barriers

Meaningful change requires addressing the wider forces that shape education for Māori, including the effects of colonisation, marginalisation, and underrepresentation. Programme and assessment design must be part of a broader commitment to structural change and Māori-led innovation in education.

IN SUMMARY:

Morehu's journey offers a powerful example of how culturally grounded, learner-centred approaches can challenge and transform the mainstream education system. Through his lived experience as a Māori learner and educator, he has developed innovative solutions like Oranga Matihiko and Ahurewa that respond directly to the needs of Māori students, particularly those navigating both academic and vocational pathways.

His work illustrates that effective educational programmes for Māori must begin with kaupapa Māori, embrace diverse learning styles, and offer flexible, meaningful assessments. It also highlights the importance of educator development, community involvement, and systemic change to ensure that Māori learners are not only included in education, but are empowered by it.

By centering te ao Māori and valuing holistic definitions of success, Morehu's case provides a clear, actionable framework for designing an optimal learning and assessment system, one that enables Māori to thrive with identity, purpose, and dignity.



Morehu and Oranga Matihiko Moments

Accolades and Resources



[DNA/Native Tech - Oranga Matihiko Reference](#)



[Oranga Matihiko Stuff Article 2022](#)



[Te Reo O Te Uru Interview 2024](#)



[Kiwibank Local Hero Of The Year Award 2024/2025](#)



[Te Hāpori Matihiko 2025 Award Finalist - Kaupapa](#)



[Te Hāpori Matihiko Award Finalist - Emergent Icon](#)



[Oranga Matihiko Strategic Plan](#)



[Oranga Matihiko Flyer](#)

Next Steps From Here

To all the interviewees, once again, many thanks for all your amazing work in our communities. We will share this report with key Ministers and Iwi as we actively encourage Iwi to build their own Technology and Data strategies and investment plans. Despite our current period of funding and policy instability, we proactively encourage our communities to build our own solutions and seek collaborations, not only here in Aotearoa, but also with other nations including ASEAN countries where education is a major investment focus for their young workforce.

Other organisations and kaupapa we want to shout out (because they are also amazing doing great mahi in our communities)



[Fibre Fale](#)



[Tech Step](#)



[NGEN Room](#)



[Victory Up](#)



[Whitihiko ki te
Ao -Te Wānanga
o Raukawa Pera
Bartlett](#)



[Tech Taniwha](#)

Do keep in touch with MEA, follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) and you can download our Mapping the Māori Tech Sector by scanning the QR code here:



He Tono

We actively encourage all readers to consider signing up to Te Hāpori Matihiko, an organisation dedicated to supporting Māori in tech to thrive.



Read their recent Māori in Digitech Futures Report:



Join the Takiaho Movement

Lee Timutimu, one of our key tech rangatira and advocates, is leading this kaupapa that seeks to highlight the lack of digital equity for Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, specifically ensuring digital equity and sovereignty for all Māori.

Scan this QR code to learn more and get involved:



Reimagining
a strong **Māori** **Tech**
Workforce

