

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Tomorrow's Workforce

Less than two per cent of New Zealand's policy workers identify as Pasifika, which means a growing proportion of the workforce isn't represented when important decisions are made.

That didn't sit well with the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (MBIE) and led to the development of an internship programme to attract young Pacific people to highly skilled jobs in the public sector.

The Tupu Tai programme reflects the Ministry's vision of 'Growing New Zealand for All' by building a workforce that reflects New Zealand's diversity. In a number of Pacific dialects, Tupu means 'to grow' and Tai means 'tide', and together translates to 'growing tide'.

Manager Pacific Policy Matalena Leauepepe says the programme has the dual benefit of creating roles for young Pacific people, and also helping build Pacific perspectives into public sector policy development.

"Under-representation in policy and the urgent need to build a better pipeline for Pacific people to enter into policy and skilled roles was the impetus for creating Tupu Tai. This programme is a part of an innovative suite of MBIE initiatives aiming to comprehensively boost Pacific representation in the public and private sector, in roles that are highly skilled, highly paid and where Pacific people currently have low representation," she says.

The family of initiatives includes Tupu Tai, Tupu Toa and Tupu Tek. Tupu Tai caters to public sector policy internships, Tupu Toa to private sector corporate internships and Tupu Tek to tech sector internships.

"MBIE also recognised that growing the Pacific presence within the public sector could not be done by a single agency, it needed commitment from across the public sector to have a significant impact. MBIE took an active role seeking partnerships from across the public sector to become a part of the Tupu Tai Programme," says Matalena.

The programme has expanded over the past three years and now involves nine different agencies, with MBIE leading the programme in a coordination role. This includes seeking out internships with public sector and internal MBIE partners, coordinating the recruitment and selection process, and planning and hosting events.

The initiative has been actively supported by Chief Executive Carolyn Tremain and the senior leadership team. A key part of the Ministry's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2017 - 2021 includes sustaining the Tupu Tai programme.



“This support was most visible during special sessions scattered across the 10-week internship programme where each Senior Leadership Team member would speak to the interns about their careers, answer their questions and give career advice. A unique highlight for the Tupu Tai interns was when Chief Executive Carolyn Tremain shared her personal story and life learnings. For the interns this demonstrated MBIE’s strong support of Tupu Tai and its drive to increase Pacific voices in the public sector,” says Matalena.

Tupu Tai has increased the ministry’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, and encouraged it to reconsider some of its recruitment practices.



“Tupu Tai has introduced the notion of setting a wider set of competencies during the recruitment and selection process for MBIE’s internship and graduate programmes. This is to consider leadership (church, sports, cultural roles) and voluntary experiences, language competencies, and community roles,” says Matalena.

“In doing this, MBIE is demonstrating that it values the different experiences, leadership roles and cultural backgrounds that all people bring with them. This helps to ensure that we are bringing into the public sector a wider set of skills and lived experiences which can enrich our ability to look at issues from a wide set of world views and perspectives.”

Interns who have completed the programme report it has given them a strong start in their careers by providing the opportunity to gain professional experience and build networks. Of the 18 interns who participated in the programme in 2017, five had graduated and were looking for jobs during their internships. By the end of their internship, three were offered jobs in the public sector and one in the private sector.

In their evaluation forms, interns shared that Tupu Tai had given them the real-life experience and confidence they needed to apply for jobs.

One intern says, ““Because of Tupu Tai, we got to spend the summer working on policy issues and not on the factory floor. Because of Tupu Tai we got to do work that felt important and we got paid a decent wage, which meant we could help our families.”

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