

Auckland University of Technology

DIVERSE TALENT

MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION FINALIST



THE STORY

A programme designed to increase the number of Māori and Pasifika academic staff at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and match the demographics of its student intake, has helped create a career pipeline for doctoral graduates.

AUT is New Zealand's third largest university in terms of total student enrolment, with more than 29,000 students enrolled across three campuses. It has the highest proportion of students who are first in family, linked to its relatively high number of Māori and Pasifika students.

New Zealand universities are under pressure from central funders to increase numbers of Māori and Pasifika academic staff to at least match the demographics of their student intakes. AUT's student population is 12 per cent Māori and 17 per cent Pasifika, but its staff is 4.3 per cent Māori and 3.7 per cent Pasifika.

To address that imbalance, AUT established a programme designed to increase the number of Māori and Pasifika academics by appointing early career academics and supporting them to establish research-active careers.

The programme began in 2015. A review in 2020 saw a name change to Eke Tangaroa and the establishment of a new role of Kaiurungi or navigator, a part-time academic mentor.

On average, each year the programme recruits a cohort of between four and 10 participants who are known as Kaihoe. Appointees are early career academics who have graduated with a doctorate within six years, identify as Māori or Pasifika, and are applying for their first full-time academic position.

“Building our team of people is the first step.”

AUT invests in this programme with salary subsidies from the Vice-Chancellor’s office to the appointing schools for the first three years of employment. Oversight of the programme is provided by a Governance Group, which meets two to three times a year. While the programme is usually for three years, past and present appointees are invited to attend events such as workshops (while numbers allow), enhancing the sense of belonging to a network.

Eke Tangaroa Kaiurungi/Navigator Professor Georgina Tuari Stewart says the programme is built on specific goals.

“The programme is intensive, designed to work with small numbers of individual Kaihoe, unlike an email list or voluntary network, which often seek to attract as many members as possible. Members of the Eke Tangaroa network must fulfil the criteria of being appointed to a lecturer position through the programme, holding a doctoral qualification and seeking to build an academic career.”

A total of 47 Māori and Pasifika early career academics have been appointed through the programme, 33 remain employed at AUT. Most of those who have left have gone to academic careers elsewhere.

Head of School of Science Professor Hannah Buckley says Eke Tangaroa has allowed her to grow the school’s Māori and Pasifika science staff.

“Over the past four years our team has increased from one Māori scientist to two, and from zero Pasifika scientists to three, all recruited through Eke Tangaroa. These staff have been well supported with mentoring and financial support. We have a long way to go before our staffing matches our student profile, but building our team of people is the first step.”

Participants credit the programme with providing the support and guidance that have made their academic careers possible.

“Without the programme, I wouldn’t have the role that I have here at AUT. If you’re interested in an academic career, if you know this is the kind of pathway you want to pursue, then this programme means that you don’t have to go it alone.”

THE CHALLENGE

AUT wanted to increase its numbers of Māori and Pasifika academic staff to bring it in line with the demographics of its student intakes, in order to make a substantive contribution to greater equity and social justice within the university sector of this country.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- A programme developed to increase the number of Māori and Pasifika academics at AUT by appointing early career academics and supporting them to establish research-active academic careers.
- A Kaiurungi/Navigator role developed to be a point of contact for participants and coordinate activities, while also advocating for participants where necessary with their managers and schools within AUT.
- The Kaiurungi is a senior academic, conversant with all academic roles and processes.
- The programme is overseen by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic, thus ensuring the programme is recognised and supported as a key strategic talent initiative for AUT.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- The programme has seen the appointment of 47 Māori and Pasifika early career academics, with 33 remaining employed at AUT.
- Since the programme refresh in 2020, cohorts of five (2021), eight (2022) and 10 (2023) have been appointed in disciplines across the university.
- A workshop on applying for the prestigious Marsden Fast-Start research grant encouraged participants to submit proposals, two of which were funded in the November 2023 round.
- Participants have been promoted up the academic ladder.



KEY LEARNING

Early career academics benefit from a highly supportive environment and receive guidance about the possibilities of an academic career and how to craft their own place in it.

