

# Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland

## LEADERSHIP

### MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION HIGHLY COMMENDED



### THE STORY

He rau ringa e oti ai. With many hands the work is completed.

This whakataukī refers to the importance of working together to achieve a shared goal. To normalise te reo Māori and te ao Māori principles across its Human Resources team, Waipapa Taumata Rau initiated and developed a leadership team to harness the power of the collective, bringing their aspirations to fruition.

Waipapa Taumata Rau is the largest tertiary provider in Aotearoa and, at 68 in the QS World University Rankings, is New Zealand's highest ranked university.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the heart of the university's strategic plan and vision for 2030.

"In the realm of people and culture, these priorities are the catalysts for creating and nurturing a high-performing, diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce," says Dale Harding-Thomas, Kaiārahi Human Resources.

While the university's mahi in this area has seen many gains for a range of underrepresented groups, it is its work normalising te ao Māori aspects that best illustrates the importance and effectiveness of great leadership.

Guided by research showing that a common barrier to leaders starting a journey into bi-cultural initiatives is a lack of knowledge about how to start, the People and Culture Leadership team

decided to invest seriously in te reo and te ao Māori literacy and practice to role model behaviours and allow all HR team members to connect, understand, and incorporate Māori principles into their ways of working.

It set up a Human Resources Leadership Team (HRLT), comprised of eight leaders from different HR functions across Waipapa Taumata Rau. The members of the team have connections to the overall university leadership structure, especially committees, groups, and communities of interest related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The initiative to normalise te reo and te ao Māori started with the appointment of a full-time Kaiārahi, Māori navigator, who is an integral part of the HRLT.

The role is pivotal in supporting the team in speaking and understanding te reo Māori, visualising the impact of decisions from a te ao Māori lens and increasing literacy of te ao Māori aspects and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Kaiārahi also works collaboratively with the leaders to embed Māori principles and values at an operational level.

According to Dale, one of the most notable outcomes of this initiative has been the increased inclusivity and representation of Māori in their workplace. “Using our enhanced capability, our organisation has actively sought to recruit and retain Māori talent and recognise the importance of diverse perspectives and experiences.” In partnership with the Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori, a Māori Staffing Plan has been delivered to increase opportunities for Māori academics and professional staff.

The positive impact extends into the community, enabling the staff to foster relationships with Māori groups in the university.

Dale says that ultimately this approach has helped with the creation of lateral initiatives such as improving capability in recruitment to attract and retain tāngata whenua in the workforce, and adopting te reo principles within the vision for Waipapa Taumata Rau.

“This is a top-down leadership initiative where leaders of different levels ignite curiosity and role model expected values and behaviours. Our purpose was for them to be perceived as active players in normalising the use of Māori lenses in daily life.”

## THE CHALLENGE

To normalise incorporating te reo Māori and te ao Māori principles when developing initiatives across the Human Resources department of Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland.

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## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Initiating and developing the Human Resources Leadership Team
- Appointment of a full-time Kaiārahi | Māori navigator
- Day-to-day coaching from Kaiārahi for leaders and other staff members to support with speaking and understanding te reo Māori, visualising the impact of their decisions from a te ao Māori lens, literacy of te ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, helping all Human Resource functions embed Māori principles and values at an operational level, and advocating for the inclusion of cultural development measures in individual performance assessments
- Every member of Leadership Team receives 90 minutes of coaching every week (30 minutes as a team, 60 minutes one-on-one)
- All staff have completed three-hour weekly training sessions covering Te Tiriti o Waitani and decolonisation for a period of three months

## RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Increased representation of Māori in Human Resources team
- Māori Staffing plan (including recruitment, development, and retention)
- A Māori graduate programme (to create pathways for Māori students to join the workforce)
- The adoption of Māori values and principles to guide the university's formal strategy and leadership principles
- A four-layer rewards and recognition system inspired by Māori concepts
- All members of the wider team (around 100 individuals) have actively engaged with the programme



## KEY LEARNING

Providing leaders with a starting point for their bicultural journey, and expert guidance, support and resources, allow them to act as role models for the wider organisation

