

## Tomorrow's Workforce Award Winner:

### Aurecon

Video Link <https://vimeo.com/104979442>

Maori cadetship programme brings benefits for business and community.

New Zealand's workforce is growing older and more culturally diverse with each passing year, with those at entry level increasingly young workers of Māori and Pacific Island heritage. This trend will continue to grow with predictions that by 2026 the proportion of the population identifying as Māori, Pacific Island or Asian will be 42 per cent.

The worrying element of this story is the impact that this will have on the skilled talent pool available to business, as currently in excess of 50 per cent of Māori and Pasifika boys leave school without any qualifications at all and are ill equipped to enter the workforce. National unemployment amongst Māori youth stands at approximately 22 per cent, compared to approximately 9.5 per cent amongst youth of European descent.

Aurecon is an organisation that provides engineering, management and specialist technical services for public and private sector clients globally. With an office network extending across 27 countries, Aurecon has been involved in projects in over 80 countries across Africa, Asia Pacific, the Middle East and the Americas and employs around 7500 people throughout 12 industry groups.

In 2012, Neil Barr, Office Manager for Australia and New Zealand at Aurecon, was frustrated by the figures and decided to bring to life a vision for reducing unemployment amongst underprivileged indigenous youth in New Zealand. The initiative, to create opportunities for Māori youth to participate in Aurecon sponsored cadetships; providing both on the job training and financial support for the completion of a relevant qualification.

"I have a personal problem with youth unemployment and lost potential. My own view is that the most economically beneficial untapped natural resource that New Zealand has sits between the ears of our young people; but tapping that well of talent is a challenge."

Neil was able to consider how he could affect positive change and the idea of Māori cadetships evolved. Partnerships were established with Ngāi Tahu for cadetships in the Christchurch office, and Waikato Tainui in the Auckland and Hamilton offices.

Aurecon provides engineering, management and specialist technical services for public and private sector clients globally, including two iwi clients with whom the organisation have partnered for this initiative.

As an organisation Aurecon strives to create an inclusive work environment for all, regardless of difference, with a diversity program that includes LGBTI initiatives, gender equality, cultural celebration, disability care, and generations in Aurecon which includes Limelight - the voice of Aurecon's Emerging Professionals. Of the 600 strong workforce in New Zealand, close to 20 per cent are under 25 years old, representing a significant portion of their operational delivery arm.

The cadetships initiative hasn't only been about creating employment opportunities for Māori youth in New Zealand. Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu has a statutory role in the recovery and rebuild of Christchurch and Aurecon took the opportunity to be directly involved in

supporting Ngāi Tahu youth to be actively engaged in the recovery and rebuild process and take on leadership roles.

Based on detailed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) which set out the relationship agreement, the initiative drives a common purpose of supporting the growth of employment opportunities for young Māori whilst ensuring sustainability of Aurecon's future workforce.

Parties to the MOU's committed to supporting the development of Māori capability through activities such as, partnering with local iwi and co-designing initiatives; working with Māori communities to recruit and select potential candidates; developing a relationship with local and regional polytechnics; extending pastoral care arrangements into the workplace and growing an awareness of Māori heritage.

In August 2013 a second Memorandum of Understanding was entered into with Waikato Tainui to provide career opportunities for budding engineering technicians and drafters in Aurecon's Auckland and Hamilton offices. The Waikato Tainui Memorandum of Understanding is endorsed by Waikato Tainui Chief Executive Officer, Parekawhia McLean.

"We have all benefited from this experience and have gained greater appreciation for these partnerships as we develop and strengthen our relationship with Waikato Tainui."

"With their help, we have identified a couple of good kids that need a break. We have employed them as cadets, we will train them, help them establish the basics of a working career, and help effect positive change in their lives so that their future families can start life in a stronger position", said Neil Barr.

One year on and the results are already a positive reinforcement of this collaboration. The initiative has resulted in a greater connection between Aurecon's people and Māori culture and a greater mutual respect for cultural issues.

In addition to building a better understanding of the challenges faced in the area of Māori employment, it has challenged thinking around how Aurecon recruit and support young staff across the business. This has led to the development of a formal Aurecon cadet policy and programme, providing cadets across the global business with the opportunity to complete required study for an appropriate qualification whilst gaining experience in a professional services environment.

Four cadets have now been recruited by Aurecon as part of the 'earn while you learn' positions available to Ngāi Tahu in the Christchurch office. All are extremely grateful for the opportunity and support they have been given to start a career.

Max Tiweka, a civil engineering cadet, says that the cadetship programme was more of a "back-up plan" when he first heard about it at school.

"In my last year of school I started to realise that I needed experience; it was this and the free education that prompted me to apply."

"Now I learn from others at work and it's good to see that the programme is changing for the better. I feel that I am adding to my team and that I am valued as a team member".

Tā Mark Solomon, Chairman of the iwi authority and a proud supporter of the programme, said cadets will ultimately gain certification in a profession of their chosen technical field.

“The cadetships create a significant opportunity for Ngāi Tahu whānau to gain a meaningful career and contribute to the recovery of Canterbury.”

Aurecon’s target is to employ four Māori cadets each year, providing four more opportunities to positively influence lives, increase valuable resources for rebuilding Christchurch, improve levels of cultural awareness and continue to strengthen relationships with iwi. With so many successes in such a short space of time, the future looks bright for Aurecon’s cadets.