

PACIFIC INDUSTRY LEO

LEO AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

to Tertiary Education Commission for construction and infrastructure training investment in 2027



WAIHANGA ARA RAU

**Construction and
Infrastructure**

Workforce Development Council

We are made up of **small businesses and sole traders**

5,913

total Pacific enterprises



are sole traders



are in Onsite Construction



have been in operation for 6+ years



have 3 or less employees

We are a **young and growing workforce**

26,560

total Pacific Construction and Infrastructure workforce

34%

Growth of Pacific C&I workforce 2015-23

62%

are based in Auckland

11%

are women

57%

are 34 yrs old or younger

7.1%

of the overall C&I workforce is Pacific

We are **not staying** in the sector for **long periods**

77%

of Pacific newcomers to the Construction and Infrastructure sector are staying less than 3 years

PACIFIC INDUSTRY LEO

The narratives outlined below are critical talanoa priorities described in the Pacific Strategic Reference Group (PSRG) workplan over the last quarter.

However, in light of the transition to the ISBs, the PSRG advocated to see these insights elevated and lifted to be more strategically aligned and facing to ensure priorities will be championed and owned by the construction and infrastructure sector, going forward.

Introducing Industry LEO strategy

Opening Word

Shaped and amplified by diverse sector voice (LEO¹) of Pacific Peoples in the construction and infrastructure sector, this strategy outlines a blueprint to grow, support, and elevate the Pacific workforce in New Zealand's construction and infrastructure sector.

It is collectively designed to align with Waihangā Ara Rau WDC's (workforce development council) transition to the developing Industry Skill Boards (ISBs²), and other relevant entities, and governance frameworks to ensure Pacific peoples are fully included, equipped, and empowered to lead and thrive in the changing vocational educational training (VET) landscape.

Moreover, this information serves as a strategic reference for industry leadership, decision-makers, governance, SRG (strategic reference groups), human resource professionals, policy influencers, professional associations, provider educators, and other influential bodies.

Vision

A thriving Pacific workforce that is skilled, resilient, and influential in shaping New Zealand's construction and infrastructure future.

We do this by empowering and amplifying Industry LEO to create the critical systems shifts, conditions, and responsive leadership to enable Pacific learners and the workforce to thrive in construction and infrastructure, anchored in equity, innovation, and transformation.

Rationale

To meet construction and infrastructure demands, while cultivating an environment where the Pacific workforce and enterprises are valued, respected and thriving.

¹ LEO means or represents the voice of Pacific.

² ISBs (Industry Skill Boards) – Construction, Infrastructure, Electrotechnology

The landscape

The construction sector in New Zealand is experiencing significant growth, with a notable focus on supporting the Pacific workforce through targeted initiatives and development plans. Despite the growth, the construction sector faces challenges, including a lack of long-term planning and skill shortages. Addressing these issues is critical for sustaining workforce growth and ensuring that Pacific workers can thrive in the industry. The increasing workforce diversity, with notable representation from Māori, Pacific, and Asian ethnicities, reflects the sector's evolving demographic landscape.

What will success and excellence look like for Pacific?

We embed the Mana Moana Outcomes framework³ to provide Pacific-focussed skills leadership, qualifications, and quality assurance to drive the realisation of our vision based on Pacific values⁴.

What makes the Industry LEO strategy distinct in its purpose is that it is grounded in cultural values and drivers from the Mana Moana Outcomes framework, and proverbs from the Pacific to anchor its core priorities.

1. Culturally responsive education and training

- Embed Pacific values, culture, and identity into vocational education environments.
- Promote Pacific success stories to shift perceptions and inspire participation.
- Support cultural capability initiatives within training providers and workplaces.

2. Activating leadership pathways

To increase cultural responsiveness in the sector, Pacific leadership must be fostered at all levels, from learners, tutors, and institutional governance.

- Pacific academic and leadership pipelines, e.g. create talent development programmes for Pacific staff to progress from tutor to senior academic or leadership roles.
- Mentoring and fellowship opportunities, e.g. partner with Ako Aotearoa or TEC to support Pacific-focused educational fellowships and mentoring networks.
- Pasifika leadership networks, e.g. establish internal Pasifika staff caucuses that feed into governance and strategy, supported with paid time and decision-making access.
- Showcasing Pacific leadership models, e.g. use case studies of Pacific collective leadership (e.g. Vā, talanoa-based leadership) in staff development.

³ Mana Moana Outcomes Framework – designed to support WDC's functions to lift excellence for Pacific

⁴ Mana Moana Outcomes Framework values have been articulated by WDC Pacific staff and are aligned with the values in the All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing strategy, Lalanga Fou.

3. Targeted training

- Embedded in programmes, e.g. allocate pastoral care staff (Pacific navigators or learning advisors) directly into construction and trades programmes to support ākonga (learners) from day one.
- Cultural Competency Training for all staff/kaimahi, e.g. deliver Pasifika-led training that includes key cultural concepts, pronunciation, protocols, and inclusive pedagogy.
- Culturally-affirming curriculum design, e.g. embed Pasifika narratives, values (e.g. respect, reciprocity, service), and Pacific guest speakers into course content.
- Use of TEC Ōritetanga Dashboard for early intervention, e.g. regularly review Pacific learner data (retention, progression, engagement) at the programme level to drive early outreach.
- -*Successfully achieved with Pacific Parity data to inform BEST Practice (Assurance) on the Industry LEO webpage.
- Equitable access to resources, e.g. provide Pacific learners with transport subsidies, kai, study packs, and digital devices through targeted hardship funds.
- Expand micro-credentials and flexible learning formats tailored to Pacific learners.
- Ensure pastoral care and assessment practices are culturally responsive and adaptable.
- Invest in career pathway visibility through campaigns and community engagement.

4. Creating and resourcing pathways

- Pacific learners often face systemic barriers in accessing tertiary education, including financial strain, digital divide, cultural disconnection, and curriculum misalignment.
- Well-resourced, culturally appropriate pathways are essential to Pacific learners' retention and success.

5. Pacific business and enterprise development

- Support Pacific-owned businesses through procurement opportunities and business directories.
- Provide platforms for business support and mentoring, especially for sole traders.
- Enhance access to tendering and social procurement initiatives for Pacific enterprises.

6. Systemic representation and leadership

- Increase Pacific representation in governance, advisory boards, and decision-making bodies.
- Collaborate with Pacific strategic reference groups across industry to align TEC's investment plans with Pacific aspirations, e.g. ConCove, BECCA.
- Monitor Pacific learner outcomes to inform continuous improvement and accountability.

7. Workforce development and skills alignment

- Invest in upskilling for emerging technologies, sustainability practices, and digital tools.
- Support industry-led training ecosystems that merge formal education with real-world experience.
- Address demographic challenges by attracting and retaining young Pacific talent through clear career pathways.

8. Infrastructure investment with Pacific inclusion

- Leverage the \$6 billion infrastructure package to create jobs and business opportunities for Pacific communities.
- Ensure Pacific participation across all roles, from trades to engineering, finance, and project management.
- Maintain a consistent infrastructure pipeline to avoid workforce instability and migration.

“The infrastructure sector’s been struggling. There’ll be a lot of Pasifika people with jobs and businesses in and around infrastructure across the sector. When we talk about infrastructure, we’re not just talking about people on the tools,” Nick Leggett, Chief Executive of Infrastructure New Zealand.

9. Strengthen Pacific pipelines

- Culturally responsive and long-term workforce development planning.

Challenge⁵

While Pacific Peoples represent 6% of the construction sector workforce (up from 4% in 2018), Pacific ⁶ākonga (learners) remain under-represented in high-growth and trades-related tertiary programmes. With nearly 200,000 new homes forecast over the next six years, the tertiary sector must act now to increase Pacific learner participation and progression in construction, engineering, and related fields.

⁵Advancing Pasifika Success in Tertiary Education, Weltec – Whitireia

FUNDING PRIORITIES

To better support long-term Pacific learner and workforce success, the VET system must:

1. Invest in Pacific talent early through schools, families, and communities.
2. Embed Pacific leadership at all levels, i.e. from classroom to boardroom.
3. Align curriculum and support systems with Pacific values rather than expecting ākonga to adapt to dominant models.
4. Use data as tools for empowerment, e.g., by identifying barriers early and acting quickly.
5. Resource what works – pilot, scale, and sustain successful Pacific-led initiatives.