



**Komiti Pasifika
Te Ara Paerangi - Future Pathways Green
Paper Submission**

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This submission to MBIE, regarding Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways Green Paper, is a collective response by the members of [Komiti Pasifika](#), the most senior representatives for Pacific across New Zealand’s eight universities. Komiti Pasifika is a sub-committee under Universities New Zealand Te Pūkai Tara and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors Committees (NZVCC), with the role of providing advice and input around decisions, policies and outcomes pertaining to Pacific university students, staff, and Pacific scholarship – across the university sector.

Mālō le soifua. Mālō e lelei. Kia orana. Ni sa bula vinaka. Faka’alofa lahi atu. Taloha ni. Ia orana. Dina namona. Kam na mauri. Aloha pumehana. And warm Pacific greetings.

Komiti Pasifika welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the conversation about how New Zealand’s research system can be more equitable and innovative. This submission represents the collective view of the Komiti. Individuals and universities represented in the Komiti may also make their own submissions as appropriate.

This submission speaks broadly to the themes raised in the Green Paper, but especially addresses key questions regarding Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence yet to be addressed.

Komiti Pasifika acknowledges Māori as Tangata Whenua, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand and the unique rights and roles they hold under Te Tiriti o Waitangi – refer to ‘*Te Kāhui Amokura Submission on Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways on Green Paper*’.

Komiti Pasifika especially acknowledge the importance placed across government agencies, and the education sector on Pacific peoples as a priority learner and equity group. This is reaffirmed within the Education and Training Act 2020,

The MBIE’s recent [Pacific Economic Strategy 2015–2021](#), highlighted its commitment to work across government on key economic outcomes for Pacific. Komiti Pasifika support MBIE’s ongoing priority on Pacific Peoples and their communities, and the transferability of this into the research system.

Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence¹

We call the sector’s attention to the absence of Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence within MBIE’s Green Paper. This lack of acknowledgement neglects equity for Pacific research and researchers, the place of New Zealand in the Pacific region, its links with Pacific nations, and the importance of its RSI in the wider research environment of the Pacific region.

The MBIE’s work within the RSI system needs to ensure that it serves our most vulnerable communities and achieves solutions to some of our country’s biggest issues – equity for Pacific peoples one of the most prominent issues. With the growing population of Pacific people in Aotearoa New Zealand, if we do not work towards a more equitable RSI system, we will see inequity for Pacific widen, and if not prioritised, exacerbated.

More importantly, New Zealand’s RSI should also reflect the value that Pacific research, researchers and research excellence bring. That value lies not in current policy settings and mercurial funding priorities but in the diverse, regionally aware, and fresh perspectives that Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence can bring to projects, institutions, the system and real-time innovation and knowledge transfer.

Pacific researchers are, in many ways, the proverbial canary in the coalmine. The absence of Pacific researchers within the research system is an early warning that equitable outcomes for Pacific research and researchers are not being met within Aotearoa New Zealand, but it is also a sign that the system will be underserving other groups.

¹ *Pacific researchers* are researchers who are of Pacific ethnicity within Aotearoa New Zealand. *Pacific research* is that conducted from the ontological and epistemological standpoint of indigenous Pacific peoples (Naepi, 2019). *Pacific research excellence* refers to what we would define as a critical mass of Pacific researchers who have the necessary research experience and qualifications to lead in research, innovation and knowledge transfer and achieve meaningful funding which allows them to produce equitable outcomes for Pacific people.

The Ministry of Education, through [Education Counts](#), notes that there are 765 Pacific academic and research staff contracted by tertiary education organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand. Of these Pacific academic and research staff: 280 are employed within universities, 215 at Te Pūkenga, 50 at Wānanga and 220 at PTEs².

These Pacific academic and research staff represented only 3.1% of the total research staff employed by tertiary education organisations and only 2% of all academic and research staff across the university sector. Because Pacific people constitute 8.1% of New Zealand's population these figures indicate severe underrepresentation³. The Pacific population is also a young and fast growing one with about half of the population under the age of 22. Pacific children already constitute nearly 10% of the school rolls nationwide⁴. Thus, we can expect current disparities in research and academic to be dramatically increased in decades to come.

If the research environment is not producing Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence - i.e., for a priority group in research - the system itself may not be as robust, equitable and innovative as we would like to think. A thriving New Zealand RSI will produce diversity and inclusion and demonstrate aspects of a healthy research ecosystem. It will reflect something like an expanded [linked innovation model](#) where innovative, world-changing research results from greater diversity and new thinking in research projects, institutions and systems that provide targeted and conscious opportunities for Pacific researchers to grow their careers and research excellence.

At the forefront of the MBIE's work is the need to foster a system that meets the needs of its people and communities in the present and in generations to come. As New Zealand's research sector seeks to be innovative, world-changing, and knowledge-intensive, it must remain aligned with the needs of its own communities, peoples, and nation. This will ultimately produce research, researchers and research excellence that align with priorities in education, health, social services, employment, home ownership and other areas of human well-being. Alignment within the research sector with government priorities can produce more equitable, innovative, and fit-for-purpose solutions and outcomes. For instance, achieving the aspirational United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that many organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly committing to, will require and be enhanced by partnering with diverse stakeholders - including Pacific stakeholders and end-users, on research that also addresses local needs.

We submit that the following crucial questions must be asked at this early stage and not later:

- What does equity in the RSI look like for Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence?
- How can we engage with Pacific people and communities to better create equity?
- How can we create a linked innovation model through equity and diversity?
- What research needs to be undertaken to take an evidence-based approach to these challenges?
- What mechanisms are needed to ensure that we can achieve an equitable research system?
- What role will governance play in producing a more equitable system for Pacific people and communities?

² <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/resources>

³ Based on 2018 census retrieved from Stats NZ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples>

⁴ Total school enrollment for 2021 was 826572. Pacific enrolment is 81177. Retrieved from <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/school-rolls>

The wider question the Green Paper and these questions raise is whether our system will serve the needs of Aotearoa's people and whether it will be an equitable one.

What does equity in the RSI look like for Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence?

Our research system will reflect equity for Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence when Pacific research, researchers and research excellence are thriving as if in a healthy ecosystem.

This ecosystem will grow equity as it nurtures and grows Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence. The ecosystem will itself better reflect equity when it reflects a strategic and intentional embedding of equitable practices, processes, and priorities.

The underrepresentation of Pacific researchers and research excellence is an obvious opportunity to future-proof our RSI to meet the needs of coming generations. To achieve equity, we need to 'grow' a critical mass of Pacific researchers that are aligned with government and equity priorities who can, with other Pacific researchers contribute to equity for Pacific Peoples across various sectors. Research excellence will be manifest in Pacific researchers across fields, as leaders in fields, and members of PBRF panels, and through links with communities and similar advantages. To implement these shifts in the research system, take time and thus, our thinking needs to be decades and generations ahead. It must anticipate the realities of 'invisible cultural labour' and the 'double duty' of cultural leadership.

Funding streams and funding initiatives should include effective mechanisms for growing Pacific researchers at an early-career and even pre-career stage – e.g., summer research scholarships for undergraduate students. Projects should, as much as possible, employ underrepresented researchers and grow the next generation of researchers. To avoid a mere tick-box exercise, meaningful and ongoing relationships with Pacific people - as researchers, end-users, and sources of academic rigor; need to be cultivated. Funding mechanisms should anticipate long-term gains, include opportunities for future employment or incentives for employment, be targeted to produce a pipeline of Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence. Funders should be willing, to be flexible to provide opportunities to promising researchers whose contribution to community is evident, and who have the potential to contribute to uplifting Pacific communities through research, given the incredibly low number of Pacific researchers available at any given time.

However, we must go beyond thinking of equity on a project-by-project or even a funder-by-funder basis. This amounts to an ad hoc approach to deeply seated and complex systemic issues that will take all of us to address. Too many Pacific researchers within our RSI, for instance, are on fixed, short-term contracts that create an inequitable employment uncertainty and transient presence in institutions. Low numbers or absence in many fields also represent the failure of a much larger system of disparities coming from other sectors. For example, if we have a disparate number of Pacific learners leaving the secondary school sector without NCEA Level 3 in STEAM subjects, there will be fewer Pacific researchers in STEAM fields at the postgraduate level.

How can we engage with Pacific people and communities in order to create equity?

Pacific people in Aotearoa represent a diverse group of cultures, languages, and communities with a common heritage in the indigenous peoples of Moana-nui-a-kiwa. Many come from or have heritage from countries with complex historico-legal relationships with the Crown, including Samoa, Niue, the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Kiribati. Others are descended from communities who witnessed

blackbirding,⁵ environmental destruction⁶ and the Dawn Raids.⁷ Today, this diverse group is too often identified by deficit, disparities, discrimination⁸ and adjacent research priorities.

However, Pacific people should be vital partners, co-designers, agents, and end-users in research. Engagement with Pacific people should reflect this more dynamic positioning, as well as genuine relationships and Pacific values – such as those espoused by the NZ Health Research Council including key principles such as respect, reciprocity, participation, and the capacity building of Pacific Peoples⁹.

Engagement will not merely be a ticked-box exercise but will wrestle with the difficult questions. It will tackle tougher issues such as data sovereignty and Pacific communities and questions of equity arising from language of publication.¹⁰ The conversation will take a Pacific form such as *talanoa*, that is, interactive dialogue that allows everyone involved to feel safe and a deep sense of belonging to the conversations had, and for critical discussion to be shared with the hopes of reaching a solution¹¹. Pacific people will be able to speak freely as researchers, leaders, subjects, and end-users. Pacific knowledges and methodologies will be treated equitably. Pacific voices will act as a form of academic rigour.

How might equity and diversity enhance innovation and knowledge transfer?

A sustainable research ecosystem will look like an expanded *linked innovation* model.

A study by the University of Navarra IESE Business School, of 3381 research centres in 107 countries over four years, found that those that were sustainable followed a “linked innovation” model, featuring three main stages of research: research as discovery, transformation as invention, and commercialization as innovation. In linked innovation, *push research* connects with *pull innovation* partially by bringing a diverse group of stakeholders to the table in the first phase.¹²

To grow Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence, we need to create a thriving and innovative research ecosystem with adapted and expanded features of linked innovation. This model would connect with Pacific stakeholders from the outset and include:

- Research as diverse discovery, transformation as invention and complex social and economic outcomes as innovation
- Push research that connects with pull innovation through academic rigor, social impact, and economic value

⁵ G Horne *White Pacific: US Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu: UH Press, 2007); S Hamilton *The Stolen Island* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016).

⁶ Teaiwa, K. (2015). Ruining Pacific islands: Australia's phosphate imperialism. *Australian Historical Studies*, 46(3), 374-391.

⁷ M Anae *The Platform: The Radical Legacy of the Polynesian Panthers* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2020)

⁸ See, for instance, NZ Human Rights Commission *Talanoa: Human rights issues for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Wellington, 2020), pp 6-7; Western Samoa Act 1961; *Lesa v Attorney-General* [1982] 1 NZLR 165 (PC); and Citizenship (Western Samoa) Act 1982; J Haar, *Exploring the Ethnic Pay Gap in the Public Services: Voices from the Rito* (Wellington, Pou Mātāwaka, 2019).

⁹ Health Research Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. (2004). *Pacific Health Research Guidelines*.

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/Pacific_health_research_guidelines.pdf

¹⁰ Hemi, K. V., & Aporosa, S. A. (2021). In Our Language: Imagining a Pacific research journal in terms of language and stakeholder position and engagement. *Waikato Journal of Education: Special Issue: Talanoa Vā: Honouring Pacific Research and Online Engagement*, 26, 45-62.

¹¹ Vaoletj, T. M. (2006). *Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research*. *Waikato journal of education*, 12.

¹² Siota, J., Davila, T., & Contijoch, X. (2020) *Technology Transfer: Commercializing Discoveries at Research Centers Through Linked Innovation*. Retrieved from <https://media.iese.edu/research/pdfs/ST-0519-E.pdf>

- Collaborative research communities of diverse stakeholders that come to the table with heterogenous knowledge

Not unlike design thinking, this model offers us the chance to hear different voices in research, acquire fresh perspectives and to *ideate* together. Innovation is, literally, about creating something new and not relying on the same processes or understandings that will inevitably produce the same result.

There are several places where push research can connect with pull innovation in terms of Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence, including climate change, STEAM participation, health, housing, and workforce considerations, and achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The key for us will be to ensure that we have diverse stakeholders coming to the table from the first phase of the linked innovation model.

Other ethical benefits of such a model might include increased trust in researchers and research methods amongst low-trust Pacific communities and the production of knowledge and solutions that benefit Pacific end-users and build Pacific research, researchers, and excellence. An ethical approach would require that critical issues in engaging with Pacific people through research, such as data sovereignty, be addressed.

What mechanisms are needed to ensure that we can achieve an equitable research system?

To strategically produce greater equity, engage with Pacific people in research and take an evidence-based and systemic approach it is important to mitigate the unfair competition created by the funding environment for Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence. One way to do this would be to establish a national strategic body whose dual role would be to provide leadership national strategic development and to grow Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence throughout the sector.

For the price of a CoRE, this organisational body could do so much more than a CoRE and be more sustainable. It would need to be as independent as possible to ensure that Pacific researchers across all universities and in all fields – including STEAM and other fields of concern – would be able to benefit. This body could be funded and monitored by the proposed NZ Research Council rather than being housed at any one university. This body would, like a CoRE, carry out research and develop Pacific research, researchers and research excellence. Unlike a CoRE, it could do so without universities and other tertiary institutions could avoid competitive bidding and meet on common ground. This would be Aotearoa’s Pacific research centre of excellence.

Research and other activities undertaken by this body would counter traditionally ad hoc and piecemeal approaches that have not produced sustainable equity. This approach could be data-informed and collaborative. The body itself, through projects of national significance, could act as incubator and accelerator of equity, as well as innovation and knowledge transfer.

Other mechanisms and responsibilities that will be necessary and could fall under this body include:

- Ongoing research to assess issues and impact of missing and low numbers of Pacific researchers and what it will take to create change
- Other strategic research projects of national importance regarding Pacific peoples that grow Pacific research, researchers, and research excellence
- Provision of advice for decision makers and development of policy, guidelines, training and other resources for funders, institutions, and centres on how to create sustainable change and pipelines

- Creation of digital and other resources for funders and researchers to enhance equity, knowledge transfer and innovation
- Seeding funding for each university to embed initiatives that build pipelines of success for Pacific researchers in institutions
- A monitoring system to track progress against metrics of success across the RSI
- Pipeline scholarships to grow Pacific researchers

What role will governance play in producing a more equitable system for Pacific people and communities?

Please refer to Appendix 1: Equity for Pacific peoples in the New Zealand research system.

With the above in mind, we are supportive of the proposal for an independent research council made in the 'Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways Green Paper Submission by Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara'. Komiti Pasifika also propose that an Aotearoa New Zealand Centre for Pacific Research be created as a branch of the proposed research council. The establishment of this body would contribute to the delivery of equitable outcomes for Pacific communities across the research sector, potentially building generations of active, high performing, versatile Pacific researchers and consequently more community and solution focussed Pacific research.

Funding from the independent research council would be dedicated to the Centre and the Centre would be represented on the Council, that is, at the governance table. This would allow alignment and a reporting line between the work of the Centre and the independent research council.

Ultimately, this body could provide a focal point for strategic approaches and solutions, increasing and supporting Pacific researchers, and enhancing Pacific research in Aotearoa New Zealand, for Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.

Komiti Pasifika are grateful for this opportunity to contribute to discussions on Aotearoa New Zealand's research system's future and look forward to future conversations where we can contribute our perspectives, expertise, and insights as the Pacific leaders of New Zealand's eight universities.

Mālō lava. Mālō 'aupito. Meitaki maata. Vinaka vakalevu, Fakaauae lahi. Fakafetai lasi. Māuruuru roa. Tanikiu. Ko bati n rab'a. Mahalo nui loa. And many thanks of the Pacific.

Appendix 1: Equity for Pacific Peoples in the New Zealand research system.

