

# Boosting outcomes for Pasifika learners in tertiary education: 2015 research findings



## Introduction

Research and evidence are key drivers to ensure improved Pasifika tertiary education outcomes. The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has an important role in developing, commissioning and disseminating research to support these outcomes. This includes ensuring Pasifika learners attain the knowledge, skills, and qualifications currently offered through the tertiary education system.

This summary highlights the key points from commissioned research to assist tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to improve tertiary education outcomes for Pasifika learners.

## Pasifika learner success: What the research tells us

The TEC commissioned *Doing Better for Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Settings* (TEC 2014)<sup>1</sup> to inform and guide an understanding of what TEOs can do to raise performance for Pasifika learners. The review uses a strength-based approach to understand barriers and enablers to inform planning and decisions by the TEC and TEOs in support of better outcomes for Pasifika.

The key findings show how using quality research can improve the tertiary education system and enable Pasifika learners to achieve at unprecedented levels. The findings also provide the TEC with an evidence base on:

- how TEOs can be more proactive in developing knowledge bases and making evidence-informed decisions to enable improved outcomes
- the importance of TEOs' commitment to, and focus on, strong educational performance for Pasifika
- how effective self-assessment can inform TEOs of how well they are performing to meet the needs of Pasifika learners, families and key stakeholders, and to inform necessary improvements
- the value of relationships with, and involvement of, Pasifika communities and key stakeholders.

“Educators who share their expertise and commitment to care and amend practices are necessary for success by Pasifika peoples in tertiary education.”

## Increasing Pasifika participation in high-growth and high-demand industries

The report *Innovative ways to increase Pasifika participation in high-growth and high-demand industries* (2014)<sup>ii</sup> outlines innovative ways of working with Pasifika learners, families and communities to promote increased interest and participation in high-growth, high-demand industries.

The research identifies key enablers for Pasifika students to gain greater access to and achievement in NCEA pathways that increase the likelihood of tertiary study and employment in high-growth, high-demand areas. Key enablers include:

- ensuring course selection facilitates educational and employment pathways
- providing strategic and data-driven academic counselling
- delivering effective literacy teaching in the core subjects (including the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects).

Interviews with Chief Executives and Workforce Managers identified the qualities they sought for high-demand, high-growth industries. They reported that candidates need to have a tertiary qualification in order to be employed as staff in the core area of their industries, but there was scope for candidates to have a degree in a variety of subjects.



“There was a tendency for some schools (including my own) that if you were Māori or Pasifika there was a generalisation that you didn’t do maths and science.” **Engineering student**



The technical skills required for entry-level positions varied from company to company, but the participants were unanimous that candidates need excellent people skills, be able to work well in teams, be trustworthy, and able to communicate.

Having clear pathways from training to industry and providing greater awareness of industry opportunities to students were identified as key priorities. In particular, students need to be aware of the breadth of disciplines within each industry, and also be aware of the the current and future projected growth and demand in the industries.

“We try to give them a broad base because further on down the line in their career having that experience in different aspects of engineering just makes you a more rounded engineer, more versatile in terms of actually the work you can do.” Employer

“It is about understanding the diversity and richness of Pasifika values and behaviour so as to determine the right course of action and engagement. This means understanding the learner, environment, values and drivers.” PTE

“Effective teachers accept responsibility for their Pasifika student’s learning and expect high levels of achievement.”

## Professional development makes a difference for Pasifika learners

Effective teaching is fundamental to achieving strong outcomes for Pasifika learners in tertiary settings. The findings from the *Professional Development Practices and Needs to Enhance Responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Settings* (Chauvel 2014)<sup>iii</sup> shows that many TEOs are focused on developing staff to ensure responsiveness to Pasifika learners. TEOs have also engaged in related professional development at some level. This professional development is recognised and valued as important.

To drive the consistent, widespread embedding of professional development to enhance responsiveness to Pasifika learners, the research identifies that:

- TEOs need to support the development of teachers already recognised as providing quality education for Pasifika
- external professional development needs to be delivered in ways that make it easier for teaching staff to attend
- tools need to be developed to support TEOs to practically implement the professional development on a micro-level within their own organisations
- good practice initiatives need to be widely captured, shared and disseminated
- TEOs need clear and consistent guidance about what is expected in terms of strong teaching practice and professional development for Pasifika learners.

This summary sheet is part of a series the TEC has published to contribute to the evidence on boosting outcomes for priority learners in tertiary education, including Māori, Pasifika, Youth Transitions and Adult Literacy and Numeracy.



**Tertiary Education Commission**  
**Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua**

<sup>i</sup> *Doing Better for Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Settings* (2014), *A Literature Review*. Tertiary Education Commission

<sup>ii</sup> Woolf Fisher Research Centre, (2014) *Innovative ways to increase Pasifika participation in high-growth and high-demand industries*

<sup>iii</sup> Chauvel, F. (2014) *Professional Development Practices and Needs to Enhance Responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Settings*