
The Eke Tangaroa programme for Māori and Pasifika early career academics: Past, present, future

Georgina Tuari Stewart*

Welby Ings

Pare Keiha

Wendy Lawson

*Corresponding author email: georgina.stewart@aut.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

Abstract

This commentary reflects on Auckland University of Technology's Eke Tangaroa programme, which aims to increase the number of Māori and Pasifika academic staff of the university and to support them in developing their research careers. The commentary has three parts, representing the past, present and possible future of the programme. The first part (past) is by the two senior professors who came up with the idea in the first place. The second part (present) is by the inaugural and current kaiurungi (navigator) of the programme, also the first author of this commentary. The third part (future) draws on a conversation with the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic, who is responsible for the programme.

Keywords

Māori academic, Pasifika/Pacific academic, early career academic, academic development

Introduction

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) is proud of its Eke Tangaroa programme for recruiting and supporting Māori and Pasifika early career academics, which began in 2015, and is unique among the universities of the country. Each year, the programme recruits and appoints a small cohort of early career Māori and Pasifika academics to Lecturer positions in schools and departments across the university, with significant support from the Vice Chancellor's Office. In 2021, the programme was refreshed: re-named Eke Tangaroa, placed under new leadership by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic (DVCA), and allocated staffing for a part-time academic mentor.

The name of the programme, Eke Tangaroa, evokes an image of navigating the academic ocean; in keeping with this, the appointees are called kaihoe (paddlers) and the mentor is called the kaiurungi (navigator). Eke Tangaroa seeks to increase the number of Māori and Pasifika

academic staff at AUT and enable them to achieve accelerated academic growth to reach their full potential as future stars of Māori and Pacific research. To date, about 35 kaihoe have been appointed in total through the programme, of whom about 25 remain employed at AUT. While most have completed their doctoral studies in New Zealand universities, in some cases kaihoe have been recruited from Australia and the Pacific nations.

The annual recruitment process begins with a call for expressions of interest from the schools and departments to generate a list of discipline areas in which applicants are sought, following a typical academic recruitment process. The numbers of kaihoe appointed each year have been between four and eight. Applicants must be Māori or Indigenous Pacific, and be applying for their first permanent academic position. With the exception of Law, where doctoral qualifications are uncommon, applicants must have either completed a doctorate within six years, or be in examination.

This commentary considers the Eke Tangaroa programme from an AUT-centric perspective and reflects on its past, present, and possible future. It falls into these three parts below, each of a slightly different format. The first part on the beginnings of the programme is based on written responses by Pare Keiha and Welby Ings to three questions posed over email. The second part is personal testimony from the first author, the inaugural kaiurungi. The third part is based on an interview with Wendy Lawson, DVCA responsible for the programme. Pare Keiha provides the final comment.

Beginnings

Pare Keiha and Welby Ings

What started the idea of a programme to appoint Māori and Pasifika doctoral graduates as Lecturers?

Pare: The origins of the programme can be found in early AUT strategic planning documents, which included objectives specifically relevant to Māori and Pacific peoples. It was a request from Professor Welby Ings to the then-Vice Chancellor that ultimately resulted in funding for a university-wide programme to provide opportunities for our own Māori and Pacific PhD graduates to be employed. This was to ensure that our own graduates had a pathway to employment that was clear to them prior to graduation.

Welby: A number of us had observed an opportunity that arose between the university's commitment to grow Māori and Pasifika doctoral graduates and what was, at the time, a poorly-supported trajectory for them into the academy. Very talented people were crossing the doctoral threshold but entering a market that often exploited them. We were finding graduates 'poached,' who lasted a year or two in a bright, shiny sounding job, then found themselves unhappy, unsupported and disillusioned. Many of our programmes, like design, business, tourism, sports medicine, media and communications, were interfacing with areas in the professions that were coming to understand the advantages of highly-qualified Māori and Pasifika graduates. Although they could see the 'need,' however, often they had little understanding of the relational culture that has to wrap around our people if you want the best out of us.

What can you recall of the early years of the programme, before the pandemic hit in 2020?

Welby: Although the initiative was adopted with a degree of optimism by AUT, there was inadequate cultural infrastructure wrapped around it, and the early experiences of appointees were uneven and isolating. Often the new line managers didn't know what Eke Tangaroa was. Workloads were often disproportionate because individuals were being expected to research, teach, and also be 'cultural advisors' – while they were still finding their feet in the academy.

Pare: Parts of the programme were excellent. But it was coordinated through People and Organisation, and reported to a committee chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor. The top Māori and Pacific leaders of the university had little input into the day-to-day oversight. The early experiences of appointees were highly unsatisfactory. Undertakings at appointment were often unknown by appointing managers, or forgotten or ignored. There were few staff to support the development of the research careers of the appointees.

Were there aspects that caused you concern from the start, and if so, please tell us a bit more about that?

Welby: While I am deeply proud of our university for taking the initiative, because we were at the vanguard, there were concerns that surfaced. We saw increasingly that Eke Tangaroa had to have wrapped around it a closer level of personal mentoring and a higher level of institutional knowledge. Initially, the initiative was assigned to the HR unit of AUT, but because this is so generic, the necessary sense of connection and reinforcement—the whanaungatanga—was largely dissolved. Appointed staff often felt isolated and responsible for things that they could not know, or advise on.

When something grown culturally is dislocated from its source, and repositioned organisationally, you sometimes have to go and retrieve it. We needed to wrap greater warmth and human attention around people who were new employees in the university—and who were suddenly being expected to shoulder more responsibility than their non-Māori/Pasifika colleagues. To have mentors who are able to support new staff, sometimes advocating for them if they feel vulnerable, has helped enormously. Knowing and remaining in contact with other new staff on the programme (across the university) is also helping.

Pare: At AUT, we were the first university to specifically set aside a budget for the appointment of new and emerging Māori and Pacific academics. That is something we should rightly celebrate. After the second intake, however, it became clear that all was not quite right. Mentoring academic careers requires willing, competent and experienced senior academics, dedicated to the success of the next generation. The establishment of the role of kaiurungi has been the most significant development to date. It does indeed take a village to raise a child.

The present: Kaiurungi viewpoint

Georgina Tuari Stewart

In August 2021, I started in my new role as the inaugural kaiurungi on the Eke Tangaroa programme. I did some forensic reading, had some conversations, and began to form a picture of what had been happening with the ECAs (Early Career Academics) appointed through the programme. The attrition rate was about one in three. There were reports of Māori and Pasifika academics being told they were 'plastic' or 'only here because you're brown.' Some had been assigned to teach outside of their own area of expertise, which is unfair to any new lecturer and contravened the terms of the appointment. Some were being expected to furnish material involving culture on demand for their whole school. Some were erroneously treated as temporary 'post-doc' appointments or constantly expected to 'fill gaps' in teaching programmes.

2022 was my first recruitment round with the programme, and recruitment matters intruded nearly every day between June – October, despite only being one day per week in the role. I re-wrote all the documentation to remove deficit undertones, and make clearer the aim and mission of the programme. Each year I will convene the new cohort in early February, once they are all on board, to begin to get to know one another, and cover some of the basics of an academic job—its three dimensions of teaching, research and academic citizenship; how to make their profile show on the public facing AUT website; some initial goals, etc.

I coach them on saying ‘no’ to unreasonable demands, inviting them to use me as a buffer when necessary. I run workshops for the kaihoe on topics such as applying for external research grants, applying for promotion, or academic writing, to which I invite the best experts I know of at AUT. I work with them individually to offer detailed, timely feedback on their application drafts, or support them with writing research outputs. Individual kaihoe can contact me at any time for support or advice on matters related to their work.

To sum up, AUT has led the way for nearly a decade with this programme of recruiting annual cohorts of Māori and Pasifika early career academics, yet many or most of those who have been appointed have been: swamped by unreasonable demands (such as providing pastoral care to large numbers of students without workload recognition); tossed on the heavy surf of implicit racism; and/or left adrift as emerging researchers, with neither time nor support provided for publishing from their thesis, and getting underway with developing their own personal programme of research and scholarship.

I think that every new academic needs collegial support and mentoring, and it is my pleasure and privilege to navigate the Eke Tangaroa programme. The role of kaiurungi is a good fit with my personal combination of skills and experience, and the programme is achieving positive results (see Stewart et al., 2023).

Eke Tangaroa Futures

Wendy Lawson – interviewed by Georgina Stewart

Georgina: What were your initial impressions of the Eke Tangaroa programme when you started at AUT in September 2021?

Wendy: Coming into my new role at AUT as DVC Academic, my initial impressions of the programme made me genuinely excited to be responsible for it as part of my portfolio, and to have the opportunity to work with you. Then, when I was looking into the data about who’s been appointed and how long they’ve lasted, it became clear that all was not rosy. I knew the programme was under review and that you had just been appointed in an inaugural role. So I knew it was a time of change for the programme. I did feel like it was a programme that made a difference.

But when I arrived, I was surprised to find out that AUT had no strategy for Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi), no overarching picture into which Eke Tangaroa or other initiatives fitted. I began to understand that there was a hunger for an overarching framework. There was a lot of action - individual staff or groups of staff were doing a lot of things, but without some kind of framework or umbrella for taking those actions. I think that lack of an overarching framework had impacted on Eke Tangaroa. It was one of those programmes with very good intentions, but which hadn’t quite been working in the way it was intended. That may be related to the lack of an overarching framework of how AUT saw itself in relation to Te Tiriti, and to its responsibilities for Pasifika peoples of New Zealand.

One of the things I'm really clear about, and you and I share this view very strongly, is that this programme is not about finding people who are Māori and Pasifika to help their White colleagues with their research grants, or do two lectures on Te Tiriti or Pacific health, or take responsibility for supporting all the Māori and Pacific students in their programmes. The aim of Eke Tangaroa is to support them to be academics in and of themselves, with their own research programmes, which may or may not be cultural. An individual Māori or Pacific staff member may or may not be engaged in research with cultural dimensions, or dimensions relating to Māori or Pacific knowledge systems.

It goes the other way, as well, according to what I've seen in my previous roles at other universities. I've witnessed academic staff who are Māori being disrespected by other Māori for not being 'Māori enough' and everything that leads to, which is not a pretty or happy place. I'm thinking of a particular former colleague who was a really good departmental citizen type of person. He spent a lot of his time helping our Pākehā colleagues with consultation, many consultations, and cultural moments and events, ongoing. All of which was to the detriment of his progress in his own career. His appointment predated the growth of the university around Tiriti matters - I'm talking about going on a multi-year journey towards really understanding what Te Tiriti means. As the institution went on that journey, the situation became worse for him, because it provided the opportunity for other Māori to disrespect him for being 'not Māori enough' in terms of cultural capital, such as fluency in te reo Māori (the Māori language).

***Georgina:* What are your hopes and ambitions for the programme - where do you see it going in the future?**

Wendy: The programme has moved slightly from its original concept focused on providing opportunities for AUT's own Māori and Pasifika doctoral graduates. It's still early career focused, but we advertise and recruit externally, including internationally. I'm really conscious, however, that it's important that we don't solidify expectations of Māori and Pasifika academics as being junior. It used to be that women academics were often automatically assumed to be junior, and I experienced some of those effects earlier in my academic career. I see the dynamics as being similar.

Some recent data about AUT staffing is showing that the proportion of Māori in professorial roles is the same as the overall proportion of Māori academic staff – so that's balanced, at least. For Pacific staff, that is not the case. The overall number of Pacific staff has increased, but the proportion of senior Pacific academics is much lower than the overall proportion of Pacific academic staff. In other words, our Pacific academic staff is mainly in the junior academic grades.

It is still only a concept or a dream, but one of my aspirations for the future is to see a programme similar to Eke Tangaroa being established, which is aimed at senior academics – professors and associate professors – who are Māori and Pasifika. In the meantime, one of the things that's going on is that we are evolving the programme. We're making small changes and improvements all the time, right? We've tweaked the criteria to get really clear about, for example, what we mean by 'Pacific.' What does early career mean? Let's do our due diligence. So there's a process of continual improvement going on, which you and I work on in every single meeting that we have.

There's more work to do with the heads and those who are responsible for the kaihoe. We need to keep working on the documentation and guidelines, hold annual workshops and meetings with the heads, bring them on board with the programme and what we are trying to achieve. Going forward, we will be seeking only one appointment per school in any recruitment round. And something we're starting to explore is accountability. We might consider how many

kaihoe a school has appointed in the past, and how those kaihoe have progressed, as part of our criteria for considering the expressions of interest.

I'm really pleased that although AUT has been through tricky times financially, like a lot of the universities in the country, we did not even consider putting Eke Tangaroa aside, even at the most difficult times. We've just been through the most difficult couple of years. Who knows what will happen in the future, but in neither of those years was it even mooted that we would put it aside, that we wouldn't stand by it, and its mission. It's so important, and I think we are only just starting to see what it can achieve. I'm proud of the programme, and excited to see where we can take it in the next few years.

Final comment

Pare Keiha

On 1 October 2021, then-Minister of Education Chris Hipkins summarised changes to the design of the PBRF in a letter to the Chair of the Tertiary Education Commission, headed *Determination of Design of Funding Mechanism: Performance-Based Research Fund*, the summary of changes included;

- Refreshing the PBRF guiding principles to better reflect the partnership between the Crown and Māori, and to promote equity, diversity and inclusiveness;
- Supporting Māori researchers and research in the PBRF by increasing the subject area weighting for Evidence Portfolios assessed by the Māori Knowledge and Development panel from 1 to 3, and applying a funding weighting of 2.5 for Evidence Portfolios submitted by Māori staff;
- Supporting Pacific researchers and research in the PBRF by increasing the subject area weighting for Evidence Portfolios assessed by the Pacific Research panel from 1 to 2.5 and applying a funding weighting of 2 for Evidence Portfolios submitted by Pacific staff.

As a university, we now have every economic incentive to recruit and retain new and emerging Māori and Pacific researchers. What we have yet to develop is a systemic whole-of-university approach to take advantage of those incentives. The strategic relevance of Eke Tangaroa cannot be underestimated.

Conflicts of Interest

None to declare.

Reference

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