

*E le mafai ona e suia le ala matagi, ae mafai ona e suia le la o lou va'a*  
*You cannot change the direction of the wind, but you can change the sail of a waka*

- Samoan proverb

## **Pathways to capability building in foundation education: Discussion paper**

### **Introduction**

In March 2021 Ako Aotearoa's Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Cultural Capability (ALNACC) team delivered a presentation to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and a range of sector stakeholders to help inform the Government's review of foundation education.<sup>1</sup> We shared current issues, challenges and opportunities in foundation-level teaching and learning and discussed the way forward in building sector capability. One of the key discussion items was the fact that educators need more flexible pathways to capability building. This was further explained in our 'Context Review', which provides a review of national and international literature, policy documentation, and research findings.<sup>2</sup> This discussion paper provides an overview of the capability building pathways as a basis for further discussion with key stakeholders.

### **Building educator capability in a changing tertiary education landscape**

The world of work is changing rapidly, due to technological, economic, environmental and demographic developments. This has caused a transformation in skills needs, which has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. To navigate this fluctuating environment, learners need to be lifelong and agentic learners with *transversal skills* that are in increasing demand in the labour market. These are skills that are needed to adapt to change, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, critical thinking, organisation, resilience, digital literacy and adaptability.

The Tertiary Education Strategy<sup>3</sup> (TES) sets out the objectives for supporting learner success and achieving equitable outcomes. The most important factor in learner success is having quality educators, including teachers, trainers and support services.

Educators will have to prepare their learners for the changing world of work, create learner-centred teaching and learning environments focused on learner wellbeing, equity and inclusion, and build the Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills that are key to developing their learners' transversal and vocational skills.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ako.ac.nz/about-us/alnacc/resources-and-clips-for-the-presentation-at-tec-on-31-march-2021>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ako.ac.nz/assets/Uploads/Context-Review-Building-capability-in-foundation-sector\\_final.pdf](https://ako.ac.nz/assets/Uploads/Context-Review-Building-capability-in-foundation-sector_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/the-statement-of-national-education-and-learning-priorities-nelp-and-the-tertiary-education-strategy-tes/#about-nelp-tes>

Educators themselves need to be lifelong learners to keep up-to-date with effective teaching strategies, keep learners engaged in learning, and apply culturally inclusive approaches.

If we are able to engage educators in continuous professional learning and development and provide them with flexible options that are aligned with the range of roles and contexts in tertiary education and training, we will build the best possible foundation for learner success.

### **Diversity in the sector calls for more flexible options**

The foundation education sector is characterised by diversity. Learners have diverse needs, including learning difficulties, LLN needs, neurodiversity, and social, emotional and cultural needs. Educator contexts are also marked by diversity. Educators operate in a wide variety of roles and contexts, including vocational education, intensive literacy and numeracy, ESOL, workplace LLN, programme management, industry training, community-based education, learning support, pastoral care, and instructional design.

The standard qualification for educators in foundation education has traditionally been the New Zealand Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Education (NZCALNE). Until recently this was the minimum requirement set by TEC for these educators. However, qualification enrolments and completions are low, and insufficient to build wider sector capability. Also, feedback from the sector shows that this one-size-fits-all approach is ill-suited to the capability building needs of the sector. Instead, more flexible options are needed, so that educators can design the capability building pathway that aligns with their role and their practice.

Thankfully, we now have a range of options available to support professional learning and development for foundation education. In addition to the NZCALNE, the educator development landscape has expanded through the introduction of micro-credentials, digital badges and Tapatoru awards.

### **What is the Tapatoru?**

The Tapatoru Foundation Learning Professional Standards Framework (Tapatoru) is a whole-organisation approach to building educational capability, including in supporting and engaging Māori and Pacific learners. It is a learner-centred framework, focused on meeting the holistic needs of learners. It promotes values-based teaching and will help tertiary education organisations (TEOs) achieve the TEC's targets of ending disparity and achieving equity.

TEOs that register for the Tapatoru make a commitment to ensuring their staff meet the minimum standards for teaching practice, knowledge and values. These organisations commit to ongoing professional development of staff, which is vital for learner success.

The Tapatoru framework is designed to support sustainable professional development capability within organisations through our experts providing coaching and mentoring a team of in-house professional development advisors, who can help support continuous staff development in their organisation.

The Tapatoru constitutes a strengths-based approach to capability building as it acknowledges and validates existing educator expertise, while at the same time identifying knowledge gaps and professional development needs. Educators are guided by our experts through a reflective process which helps them identify the professional development options that best suit their needs, so that they can design a pathway for further capability development.

### **Scenarios of capability building pathways**

For example, new educators in vocational education tend to have an industry background. They have the industry knowledge and experience needed, but are new to teaching and embedding literacy and numeracy into their delivery. These educators could start their pathway by gaining a digital badge. They enrol in an introductory four-week course, which introduces them to embedded literacy and numeracy approaches, evidence-based resources and frameworks, and ways of meeting the needs of Māori and Pacific learners. This may give them the confidence they need to enrol in the NZCALNE.

Educators who have achieved the NZCALNE and who have a few years of teaching experience also need to engage in continuous professional development. For these people the Tapatoru may be the best option to continue their learning pathway. Through the Tapatoru they engage in the reflective process to identify what they are doing well, and what the gaps in their expertise and knowledge may be. While an experienced educator may be teaching literacy and numeracy very well, they may need to build their capability in engaging Māori and Pacific learners, so a course on enhancing cultural capability could be the next step in their learning pathway.

A third scenario is the Training Advisor, or those who will be engaged in industry training post-RoVE. Uptake of the NZCALNE by this cohort has been minimal, as the qualification is not relevant to their practice. Training Advisors have been able to achieve digital badges and build their capability in supporting apprentices by enrolling in courses targeted to their context.

Digital badges and micro-credentials offer more bite-sized professional learning options for those who are not ready to engage in a qualification, or those for whom the qualification is

not relevant. The Tapatoru helps guide people towards a qualification or professional development course in that, through the Tapatoru process, educators receive guidance and support in designing the capability building pathway that is aligned with their individual needs and their teaching context.

### **Focus questions**

Building educator capability and providing quality education is vital for the achievement of the TES objectives. To ensure professional learning and development options are available that are fit-for-purpose and suited to the diverse needs of the sector we propose discussing the following focus questions at our next stakeholder meeting:

1. Educators in foundation education are currently expected to hold an ‘appropriate qualification’.<sup>4</sup> What does this mean in today’s environment? Uptake of professional development would improve if digital badges, micro-credentials and Tapatoru were acknowledged as valid alternatives to, or pathways towards, a qualification. How can we achieve this and how can this be signalled to the sector?
2. Uptake of professional development is patchy, with some TEOs making a genuine commitment, and others failing to support their staff to engage in professional development. How can we best encourage and support engagement in continuous professional development by all TEOs?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Forms-templates-and-guides/2020-Funding-Conditions-Catalogue-V4.pdf>