

## Holding space for the future: Educator capability, and inclusive learning and teaching beyond 2025

### Introduction: A legacy and a turning point

The Manako programme has been a cornerstone of the commitment Ako Aotearoa has to equity, inclusion, and learner success in foundation education in Aotearoa New Zealand. As we close 2025, we acknowledge a profound shift: Ako Aotearoa will cease operations by 19 December 2025, following the Government's decision to withdraw funding. Combined with other challenges, the sector stands at a pivotal moment. The final reports from the Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) and ConCoVE, and earlier reports from the Food and Fibre CoVE, have articulated a shared vision for vocational education – one that is industry-led, learner-centric, and future-ready.

Findings from the Ako Aotearoa sector strategy report demonstrate that sustained leadership, resourcing, and advocacy are essential for the success of tertiary education organisations (TEOs). Teaching excellence, collaboration, and thought leadership remain vital to the health of the tertiary sector.

This briefing paper is both a reflection and a call to action, honouring the mahi that has gone before, while holding space for the aspirations that must guide the sector in 2026 and beyond.



## 2025: What we learned

The WDC, ConCoVE, and the Food and Fibre CoVE's reports and [newsletters](#) share a vision for vocational education that resonates deeply with the kaupapa of Ako Aotearoa and Manako:

» **Industry voice and co-design:**

» Qualifications shaped by employers and educators together.

» **Equity as a system driver:**

» Māori-Crown partnerships, Pacific learner success, and inclusive funding models.

» **Future skills and technology:**

» Preparing for automation, AI, and sustainability-driven industries.

» **Learner-centric pathways:**

» Flexible, stackable credentials and pastoral care embedded in delivery.

» **Integrated, data-driven ecosystem:**

» Labour market insights and predictive analytics for agile responses.

The four final recommendations from the Ako Aotearoa [sector strategy report](#) are:

» **Resourcing and policy:**

» Collaboration to ensure sustainable teaching excellence, including ring-fenced funding for staff professional learning and development, and time allocation.

» **Advocacy and sector voice:**

» Ensure sector needs and priorities are understood and addressed through centralised, sector-wide leadership.

» **Frameworks with flexibility:**

» Co-design national capability frameworks, enabling local adaptation and innovation.

» **Cultural commitments:**

» Authentic integration of Māori and Pacific approaches throughout teaching, organisational strategy, and collaboration.

These themes reflect a sector moving beyond transactional training toward transformational learning, where capability, culture, and creativity intersect.



## Foregrounding 2026: Aspirations and inspirations

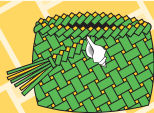
2026 is not just another year; it is a threshold moment. Global frameworks, such as OECD's [PIAAC](#), UNESCO's [Futures of Education](#), and the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDG 4: Quality Education](#)), [call for systems](#) that are inclusive, future-focused, and resilient. For the sector, this means:

- » **Strengthening language, literacy, and numeracy teaching:**
  - » ensuring learners build the foundational skills needed for participation in education, work, and the community.
- » **Embedding digital and sustainability literacies:**
  - » in foundational learning, ensuring educators can teach for a world shaped by AI and climate imperatives.
- » **Championing cultural competency:**
  - » as a core capability - honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Pacific worldviews as drivers of innovation.
- » **Designing flexible learning pathways:**
  - » that allow learners to move seamlessly between education and employment, supported by pastoral care and wraparound services.
- » **Leveraging data for equity:**
  - » using analytics not just for efficiency but to identify and address barriers for marginalised learners.

## Implications for educator capability

Educator capability is central to this vision. Key priorities include:

- » **Access to continuous professional development opportunities:**
  - » Providing educators with access to high-quality opportunities for ongoing professional development, which is evidence-based, research-informed, and relevant to their practice.
- » **Flexible pathways for educator capability building:**
  - » Empowering educators to design their individual professional learning pathways, which align with their needs and role.
- » **Adaptive pedagogy:**
  - » Teaching for uncertainty, complexity, and diversity.
- » **Digital fluency:**
  - » Integrating technology meaningfully, not as an add-on.
- » **Cultural responsiveness:**
  - » Embedding kaupapa Māori, Pacific pedagogies, and culturally inclusive practices in everyday practice.
- » **Evidence-informed practice:**
  - » Using data to personalise learning and improve outcomes.



These educator capability priorities are not technical skills alone; they are dispositions for a future where education is relational, inclusive, and transformative. Some organisations may lack the capacity to deliver specialised professional learning and development to their staff, due to factors such as small staffing numbers or limited internal expertise in the required areas.

## The role of Manako: A legacy for the sector

Although Manako will not exist in 2026, its legacy endures. Manako has:

- » **elevated equity and inclusion** as non-negotiable principles
- » **built educator capability** through professional learning and culturally responsive frameworks.
- » **connected communities** across tertiary education, industry, and learners.

As Ako Aotearoa closes, the challenge is clear: **Who will hold this space?**

The sector must ensure that the principles Manako championed – equity, learner voice, and teaching excellence – remain central to future strategies.



## Conclusion: A call to action

The whole education sector is transitioning to the future space of 2026:

- » Early Childhood Education
- » Primary and Secondary education
- » Vocational education
- » University education
- » Work-based learning
- » Adult and Community education
- » Foundation education
- » Teachers and teacher training

These changes impact organisations' time, finances, security, and capability. Staff may not be able to access professional learning and development due to lack of internal training and upskilling opportunities or a lack of resources. There may be no coordinated approach to address all the sector's needs. Quality assurance of professional learning and development opportunities may decline, and internal capability may diminish due to budget constraints.

The cessation of Ako Aotearoa is a loss of convening power and expertise for the tertiary education sector. Yet it is also an invitation: to imagine education not as a static systems, but as a living ecosystem – **responsive, inclusive, and future-ready**. The work of Manako and Ako Aotearoa must inform what comes next. Let us carry forward the kaupapa, the relationships, and the vision that Ako Aotearoa has helped drive in our sector for nearly two decades. How we do that and who fills the void are questions that remain unanswered at the end of 2025.

