

## The Ako Aotearoa Tapatoru Ako Professional Practice Award

Purpose and Whakapapa - Enhancing tertiary education through cultural integration

### Introduction

The Tapatoru Ako Professional Practice Award (“Tapatoru”) was developed by Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, and marks a pivotal advancement for tertiary education and foundation learning. Tapatoru is designed to significantly elevate the success of both educators and learners. This briefing paper outlines the background and purpose of the Tapatoru programme and advocates for broader recognition and further development. It underscores its vital contribution to cultivating a culture of excellence and innovation among tertiary educators across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Tapatoru Ako Professional Practice Award is a significant Manako programme initiative. The Manako programme, formerly known as the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Cultural Capability (ALNACC) programme, continues the Ako Aotearoa partnership with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to enhance educational capability across Aotearoa New Zealand. Embracing our roots and expertise in literacy, numeracy, and both Māori and Pacific cultural capability, Manako expands our commitment to delivering inclusive and effective tertiary education and training.

This paper calls for concerted efforts to further integrate the Tapatoru programme into the national professional development framework, including tertiary teaching qualifications and the Manako programmes and services, ensuring its principles and practices become a cornerstone in shaping an effective, responsive, and diverse teaching and learning community.

### Background of the Tapatoru programme

- » **Historical context and development:** The Tapatoru programme’s genesis was enabled by funding related to the Tertiary Education Commission’s (TEC) strategy and research for literacy and numeracy from 2007–2017. This foundational work underscored the integral roles of Tangata Whenua (people of the land, Māori) and Tangata Tiriti (people of the Treaty, non-Māori) in education, highlighting the significance of research-informed, values-based teaching and learning in Aotearoa New Zealand’s tertiary sector.



- » **Launch and evolution:** The programme was initially commissioned in 2017, developed in 2018, and officially launched in 2019. In a significant expansion in 2021, the programme began to incorporate Pacific values, knowledge, and practices, reflecting Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse educational landscape.
- » **Recent expansion:** In 2022, the Tapatoru programme underwent another trial and relaunch, evolving into a comprehensive professional learning and development framework. This current iteration includes an extensive suite of online tools and resources, further enhancing its accessibility and applicability for tertiary educators.

## Purpose of the Tapatoru programme

- » **Professional teaching award:** The Tapatoru programme confers a prestigious award that recognises and celebrates educators who successfully integrate Māori and Pacific cultural values, along with considerations for Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN), and neurodiversity, into their teaching practices. Tapatoru serves as a benchmark for excellence in culturally responsive and inclusive education.
- » **Capability building and target audience:** The programme is designed to enhance the capabilities of a diverse array of educational professionals. It aims to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively address the unique needs of learners in Aotearoa New Zealand, fostering an inclusive and holistic educational environment.
- » **Assessment methodology:** The assessment for the Tapatoru award is portfolio-based, placing a strong emphasis on reflective practice. This approach allows educators to demonstrate their proficiency and growth in integrating these essential values and practices into their teaching, thereby ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of their capabilities.

## Emphasising cultural values

- » **Focus on the TES priority groups:** The programme places a significant emphasis on developing the capability of tertiary educators to meet the educational needs and aspirations of Māori and Pacific learners. By doing so, it addresses the unique challenges and opportunities these groups face, ensuring that their cultural values are not just recognised, but actively integrated into the fabric of tertiary education and training in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- » **Building confidence in the sector:** The Tapatoru programme plays a pivotal role in instilling confidence of tertiary educators to embed Māori and Pacific cultural values into their everyday teaching and learning. Tapatoru promotes and establishes best practices in embedding LLN, acknowledges and supports neurodiversity, and addresses other key dimensions of adult tertiary teaching. Tapatoru promotes a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and effective educational environment to support the success of all learners, and the diversity of learning and teaching contexts.



## **Integration with other adult tertiary teaching qualifications**

The Tapatoru programme enhances existing qualifications, raising professional standards by integrating its unique values and practices into tertiary education's professional development, fostering inclusivity and cultural awareness in Aotearoa New Zealand's educational landscape.

## **Conclusion**

The Tapatoru Ako Professional Practice Award represents a landmark innovation in Aotearoa New Zealand's tertiary education sector, playing an indispensable role in embedding cultural values within educational practices and elevating the overall quality of teaching and learning practices. This briefing paper strongly advocates for heightened support and recognition of the Tapatoru programme within TEC policy and implementation of learner success plans.

