

Artificial intelligence, unionism, and the future of tertiary education

Friday 31 October 2025

Hosted by Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union

WELCOME

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the landscape of tertiary education – influencing how we teach, learn, research, and organise our work. These shifts raise profound questions about the future of quality, accessible, publicly funded tertiary education.

This conference examines these questions through the lens of TEU's mātāpono. Our five mātāpono – Mana Mahi (decent work), Mana Taurite (equity), Mana Taiao (environmental justice), Mana Tiriti (Tiriti-relationships), and Mana Mātauranga (quality tertiary education) – define the core areas at the heart of TEU's daily work. Applied to the emergence of AI, they highlight the breadth of both challenges and possibilities facing our tertiary education sector.

The challenges posed by AI are too great for any one person or institution to confront alone. They demand shared understanding, coordinated strategy, and collective action. In coming together here, we affirm that the future of tertiary education – and the role of AI within it – must be shaped by staff, students, and communities in service of the public good.

Many thanks go to our panelists and the Conference Organising Committee – their expertise, commitment, and hard work have brought this conference to life.



TEU

TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION
TE HAUTŪ KAHURANGI

Panels

MANA MAHI – keeping decent work at the centre as AI reshapes tertiary education

How do we ensure AI enhances, rather than erodes, the dignity of our work? This panel confronts the impact of AI on labour as a matter of social choice. Join the kōrero as we move from understanding AI's capabilities and its threats to decent work in tertiary education, toward a proactive agenda for unionists, leaders, and policy makers to protect and strengthen our dignity in work.

MANA TAURITE – exploring how AI can support equity and inclusion across tertiary education

Artificial intelligence is increasingly becoming prevalent in higher education. Alongside some uncertainty, there is also some good news about AI. Concerns revolve around inequity in higher education and whether the patterns of hierarchy will raise the AI algorithm even higher. However, there are some ways AI is providing equal and accessible opportunities. Can AI be utilised to narrow some gaps? Our panelists will explore this question and more.

MANA TAIAO – ensuring AI in tertiary education aligns with climate action and environmental justice

This panel explores the implications for te taiao of growing use of generative AI. Rapidly increasing use of AI powered tools, agentic AI, and related developments leave a growing environmental footprint. Key impacts include land use change, carbon emissions, energy consumption, and water consumption. Speakers in this the panel will share research and critical analysis of the environmental footprint of generative AI use by staff and students in tertiary education.

MANA TIRITI – navigating the relationship between AI, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the future of tertiary education

This panel will discuss AI development with regard to Te Tiriti o Waitangi relations. It highlights the need for Māori development of AI that cuts through speculative hype surrounding large language models and the religious and fantastical narratives that fuel an unsustainable financial bubble in the development of those models. Toward Māori AI development, the speakers seek the strengthening of data sovereignty, the addressing of algorithmic bias, and the protection of Māori knowledge.

The presentations envision Māori forms of AI that develop from emerging technologies co-designed with Māori communities, built through collaborative artifact creation and ethical algorithmic practices, and grounded in Tiriti obligations at every stage of AI design. A focus on these matters will help ensure that technical, economic, and cultural barriers do not hinder Māori AI development.

MANA MĀTAURANGA – harnessing AI to strengthen teaching, learning, and research, and uphold public tertiary education

As AI reshapes education, how do we uphold mana mātauranga – the belief that tertiary learning serves the public good? This panel of experts will examine how kaiako, who truly know their ākonga, can nurture critical thinking skills and guide ethical engagement with AI. Together, they'll explore how assessments must evolve as individual capabilities expand, ensuring technology strengthens – rather than diminishes – the human imagination at the heart of learning.

Programme

9.00am	Whakatau Welcome	Dr Julie Douglas	TEU Te Tumu Whakarae National Co-President – Tiriti
9.05am	AI and the union movement	Jack Foster	Te Kauae Kaimahi New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
9.20am	Mana Mahi Keeping decent work at the centre as AI reshapes tertiary education	Hansi Gunasinghe Dr Leon Salter Java Grant (facilitator)	Southern Institute of Technology University of Auckland University of Auckland
10.15am	Paramanawa Morning tea		
10.30am	Mana Taurite Exploring how AI can support equity and inclusion across tertiary education	Dr Andrew Lensen Dr Ally Gibson Prof Stephen Marshall Roya Gorjifard (facilitator)	Victoria University of Wellington Victoria University of Wellington Victoria University of Wellington Victoria University of Wellington
11.25am	Mana Taiao Ensuring AI in tertiary education aligns with climate action and environmental justice	Prof Ruth Irwin Sasha Maher Simon McCallum Christine Cheyne (facilitator)	RMIT University of Auckland Victoria University of Wellington Toi Ohomai Rotorua
12.20pm	Kai o te rānui Lunch		
12.50pm	Mana Tiriti Navigating the relationship between AI, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the future of tertiary education	Brendon Shaw Dr Kevin Shedlock Olivier Jutel Warwick Tie (facilitator)	Papatoetoe North School Victoria University of Wellington University of Otago Massey University
1.45pm	Paramanawa Afternoon tea		
1.55pm	Mana Mātauranga Harnessing AI to strengthen teaching, learning, and research, and uphold public tertiary education	Dr Selena Chan Dr Shahper Richter Warwick Tie Traci Meek-Reid (facilitator)	Ara Institute of Technology University of Auckland Massey University Southern Institute of Technology
2.50pm	Conference reflections Bringing it all together: TEU's role in shaping AI in tertiary education	Conference Organising Committee Dr Julie Douglas (facilitator)	
3.00pm	Whakawātea Conference close	Dr Julie Douglas	TEU Te Tumu Whakarae National Co-President – Tiriti

Panelists



Dr Julie Douglas

Te Hautū Kahurangi | Tertiary Education Union

Julie is a Senior Lecturer at Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | Auckland University of Technology with research interests in unions, social justice, and social change. She is currently TEU's Te Tumu Whakarae – Tiriti | National Co-President – Tiriti.



Jack Foster

Te Kauae Kaimahi New Zealand Council of Trade Unions

Jack is a Policy Analyst at Te Kauae Kaimahi New Zealand Council of Trade Unions. He holds a PhD in sociology from Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington and edited Counterfutures journal from 2018-2022.



Hansi Gunasinghe

Southern Institute of Technology

Hansi Gunasinghe is an IT Tutor at the Southern Institute of Technology in Invercargill, with ten years of tertiary education experience across Aotearoa New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and China. She earned a PhD in Computer Science from Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato | University of Waikato in 2024. Her research focuses on AI and machine learning, with current work applying these methods in healthcare and education.



Dr Leon Salter

Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

Dr Leon Salter is a Senior Lecturer in Communication at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. His research is on the intersections of digital technology, work, and precarity. He convenes the University of Auckland branch AI Working Group.



Dr Andrew Lensen

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

Dr Andrew Lensen is a Senior Lecturer and the Programme Director of Artificial Intelligence at Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington, where he specialises in explainable and interdisciplinary AI. His research explores AI's social and ethical implications, with applications in ecology, healthcare, public policy, and more. Dr Lensen is an active science communicator, frequently contributing op-eds, interviews, and expert commentary on AI topics.

Panelists



Dr Ally Gibson

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

Dr Ally Gibson is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Director of Health Psychology in Te Puna Hauora | School of Health at Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington. Ally's research currently focuses on examining the implications and impact of AI for qualitative research.



Prof Stephen Marshall

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

Professor Stephen Marshall (PFHEA) is Director at the Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) Centre for Academic Development. Stephen leads VUW learning and teaching initiatives and researches in the areas of organisational change in higher education, plagiarism and academic integrity, extended reality, artificial intelligence, and the development of policy and strategy supporting the effective use of technology for learning and teaching. He is co-editor and special issues editor for the top ranked journal Higher Education Research and Development and he is a faculty member of the biennial ACOE Learning Technologies Leadership Institute.



Ruth Irwin

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Ruth was Professor of Education at the University of Aberdeen and Head of Department at the University of Fiji. She has also worked in business ethics at Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | Auckland University of Technology and philosophy and political theory at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. Ruth's latest book is Economic Futures: Climate Change and Modernity (2024).



Sasha Maher

Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

Sasha is Lecturer in Sustainability at the Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland Business School and an economic anthropologist whose research focuses on the organisation and governance of carbon finance, markets, and climate leadership. She explores questions of governance and leadership through political economic and anthropological lenses, employing ethnographic, qualitative approaches. She advised an environmental NGO and spent over a decade working in global agribusiness and is an Affiliate at Motu Economic and Public Policy Research, the Circular Economy Beacon, and the Centre for Climate, Biodiversity, and Society at the University of Auckland.



Simon McCallum

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

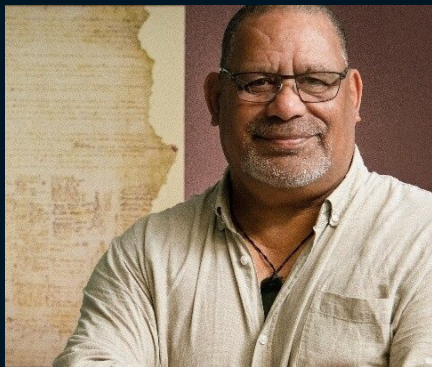
Simon has been teaching Computer Science since 1999 with Game specific courses from 2004. At undergraduate level he has taught everything from Game Design, with a focus on system design, to GPU programming and Multithreaded optimisation. For graduate-level research, he focuses on Serious Games, mainly Games for Health and Games for Education. Simon's research projects include mobile apps for Carbon Footprint reduction, apps and gamification for visualising energy use, and games for understanding ener

Panelists



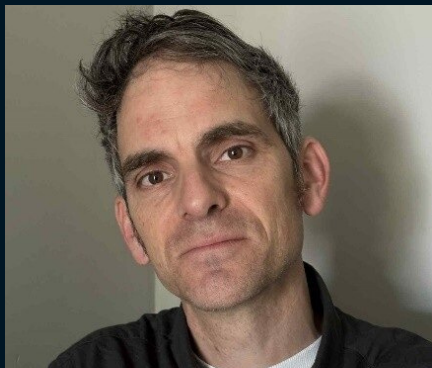
Brendon Shaw
Papatoetoe North School

Brendon is a primary and tertiary educator, co-founder of the New Zealand AI Education Community of Practice, and PhD student researching effective AI implementation and use in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. He bridges hands-on, classroom-based practice with knowledge of the most current research and trends in AIED, and works alongside AI-focused educators across practice, research, and policy groups. Brendon is particularly interested in exploring ways AI can be introduced responsibly within indigenous spaces, ensuring these technologies honour and preserve the cultural, social, and linguistic integrity of Māori and uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.



Dr Kevin Shedlock
Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

Kevin is a Lecturer with the School of Engineering and Computer Science at Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington. His research is focused on the construction of Indigenous-focused IT artefacts that are immersive, interactive, and intelligent, while remaining critically aware of the significant challenges they present within Indigenous contexts. Dr Shedlock conducts research on Indigenous digital artefacts such as database repositories that store tribal knowledge, digital and environmental surveillance tools, virtual reality interactions, and emerging AI systems that attempt to solve interesting but complex problems for the community.



Olivier Jutel
Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka | University of Otago

Olivier's work is centred on the geopolitics of digital media and emerging technologies. In his first post at the University of the South Pacific he saw the importance of the developing world to American narratives of network freedom and NGO experiments in Fintech. Emerging technologies continue to be dominated by colonial logics of abundance and the venture capitalist dream of 'blue oceans'. Olivier's work has looked at blockchain in the developing world as an extension of American techno-colonialism. More recently he has written about the Network State movement of venture and crypto nomads, which Gizmodo has dubbed the "Worst New Trend of 2024."



Dr Selena Chan
Ara Institute of Canterbury

Dr Selena Chan taught baking for many years before becoming an educational developer at Ara Institute of Canterbury. Her research has focused mainly on the pedagogy of vocational education including technology-enhanced learning and vocational education systems. Presently, she leads the AI@Ara project, working to build AI literacies and integrating AI into programmes across all levels of learning and diverse disciplines.



Dr Shahper Richter
Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

Dr Shahper Richter is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. She works at the intersection of digital marketing, education, and emerging technologies. With a strong focus on making AI understandable and usable in real-world settings, she brings a practical, down-to-earth approach to conversations about digital change.

Panelists



Warwick Tie

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa | Massey University

Warwick's work at Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa | Massey University as a sociologist has seen him study what happens when peace-makers fight, across fields including law, political policing and human rights. With the eruption of AI, his attention turned. He has helped set up a research group to examine how capitalism is changing with AI and teaches an undergraduate course that looks at AI through its relations with economy, work, regulation, culture, environment and language.

Conference Organising Committee

Christine Cheyne

Roya Gorjifard

Java Grant

Traci Meek-Reid

Regan Potangaroa

Warwick Tie

Toi Ohomai Rotorua

Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington

Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland

Southern Institute of Technology

Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau | AUT

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa | Massey University



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