

**TEU****TERTIARY EDUCATION UNION**
TE HAUTŪ KAHURANGI

TEU FEEDBACK ON TE PŪKENGĀ DRAFT AKO FRAMEWORK (PRE-CONSULTATION)

10 June 2022

Introduction

TEU greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Ako Framework ahead of public consultation. We commend the aspirational nature of the draft Framework and appreciate the comprehensive approach to designing programmes in a way which foregrounds collaboration and reflective practice.

However, following consultation with TEU members, there are several key factors which we think could be improved pertaining to:

- the proposed definition of 'ako' and the ways in which the Ako Framework will align with other Te Pūkenga frameworks and strategies, particularly the goal to embed Mātauranga Māori and Pacific ways of knowing;
- the place and role of kaiako within the Framework;
- the significance of research;
- the use of Universal Design Principles to underpin the Framework; and,
- how the Ako Framework will align with the work of WDCs, RSLGs, NZQA, TEC, and relevant professional bodies.

Defining and embedding 'ako' across Te Pūkenga

The proposed definition of 'ako' includes a reasonable outline of what should constitute the kaiako-ākonga relationship. However, we think there is scope to elaborate on how this definition will align with other Te Pūkenga documentation, particularly regarding the way in which it is framed in relation to a Te Ao Māori narrative. We recognise that the Ako Framework is being co-developed in conjunction with Whiria Te Pūkenga; however, it is not clear how the two documents relate nor how they will be implemented cohesively.

⇒ We recommend that the definition of 'ako' is expanded so that it integrates the notions that:

1. the kaimahi-ākonga relationship is *non-hierarchical* in nature;
2. ako as a shared learning experience acknowledges and involves the knowledge and experiences of both kaiako and ākonga, the conditions of which require adequate time and kaiako with appropriate expertise;
3. the quality of the kaiako-ākonga relationship is strengthened through *reciprocated* open-mindedness, humility, respect, and care;

4. more subtle meanings of ako relate to 'instructing,' 'advising,' 'studying' (sometimes referred to as akoako), and 'practice'; as a noun, ako infers 'lesson';
 5. kaimahi, more broadly, are included in the definition in order to recognise the role and contribution of general staff within the context of ako.
- ⇒ Below are a number of resources that will be worth drawing on to expand the definition of 'ako':
1. [Embedding ako into teaching](#) – AUT
 2. [Ako: Concepts and Learning in the Māori Tradition](#) – Rangimarie Rose Pere
 3. ['Comprehensive Learning Incorporating Ako: A Tertiary Education Approach at Wintec'](#) – by Valle, Khanna, and Prabhu (2018)

Further to these points, Goal 1 of [Te Pae Tawhiti](#) (Greater Relevance of Provision) states that Mātauranga Māori will be “appropriately embedded in programmes of study and prioritised as a learning area available through Te Pūkenga” (p.11). Yet, within the 'Facilitation of Learning' component of the draft Ako Framework, it is noted that “Te Pūkenga learning experiences will have space for, and recognise, Mātauranga Māori and ways of knowing Pacific.” In our view, “hav[ing] space for” and/or “acknowledging” does not constitute “appropriately embedding” Mātauranga Māori in programmes of study.

- ⇒ We recommend revising the draft Framework so that it is worded consistently and aligns with the Te Pūkenga ambition to effectively embed Mātauranga Māori and Pacific ways of knowing.

Likewise, it is unclear how the Ako Framework relates to, or will be implemented in conjunction with, Te Kawa Maiororo Te Pūkenga Academic Regulatory Framework, the aim of the latter being to “ensure the integrity and quality of teaching, learning, and assessment throughout Te Pūkenga network [...]”

- ⇒ We recommend that the Ako Framework includes explicit reference to other relevant documentation indicating the relationship between various Te Pūkenga frameworks as well as the strategy for cohesive implementation.

Ako at the centre

Members have noted that, despite being the Framework for *ako*, much of the detail is clearly focused on ākonga. As such, kaiako do not see themselves and their work explicitly or appropriately reflected in the draft Framework; some feel that it reflects a “deficit” view of their roles, particularly where there are references to a developing a “culture of continuous improvement” (a phrase which reflects neoliberal ideology – i.e., the very thing

Te Pūkenga should be moving beyond). As noted above, ako infers dynamic, collaborative, and reciprocal learning activities between kaiako and ākonga.

This point is illustrated with regard to decision-making where the Framework states that “Decisions are made in the best interests of outcomes for our ākonga,” as opposed to in service of ako (as per the framing of technologies within the Digital Ecosystem: “Our technologies support and enable the ākonga, kaiako/kaimahi, employer relationships *in service of ako*”). On this point, it is worth noting that kaimahi conditions of work – including the capacity to establish and foster the kaiako-ākonga relationship – are ākonga’ conditions of learning.

- ⇒ We recommend revising relevant components of the Ako Framework so that it is clear that the Framework is being developed and implemented in the service of ako.

The draft Framework also notes that “Assessments will be flexible, able to be individually tailored, and culturally appropriate, whilst meeting industry expectations and academic standards.” There appears to be a tension here between, on one hand, facilitating learning that meets the needs of individual ākonga and, on the other, producing outcomes that are requisite to the standards of industry and the academy. It is difficult to see how this tension will be navigated pragmatically when the new network will involve high numbers of ākonga at any given time. Unless Te Pūkenga drastically increases its kaimahi numbers and capability, the endeavour to provide individualised learning pathways for ākonga will not be realised.

Similarly, providing “high-quality assessment feedback, that ākonga can readily engage with and benefit from” requires reasonable kaiako:ākonga class ratios as well as robust professional development opportunities for kaiako.

- ⇒ We recommend that greater attention is given to addressing the abovementioned tension between providing for individual ākonga needs and academic and industry requirements for quality and consistency.
- ⇒ We recommend Te Pūkenga prioritises addressing the current problems throughout the network pertaining to unreasonable workloads – failure to address this issue will limit the degree to which the ambitions outlined in the draft Ako Framework – if not the wider ambitions of Te Pūkenga as a whole – are able to be realised.

Kaiako throughout the sector consider themselves as more than “facilitators” and/or “coaches.” Although we agree that it is important to empower ākonga to be the agents of

their own growth and learning, quality ako and educational outcomes require kaiako with extensive experience and expertise to impart conceptual, theoretical, and practical knowledge; it is not enough to simply facilitate the self-directed learning of ākonga. Related to this point, there appears to be an absence of provisions within the Framework that are focused on training employers so that they are in a position to train ākonga from an educational, as opposed to industry-informed, perspective.

- ⇒ We recommend re-thinking the conceptualisation of kaimahi as ‘facilitators’ and/or ‘coaches’ in order to account for the more holistic educational role that kaimahi undertake in practice.

The matrix-like outline of the Ako Framework caused concern as it is not clear whether this means discrete teams of kaimahi will each be tied to a sole element of the Framework – i.e., will one team deal with ‘curriculum and assessment,’ another with ‘quality,’ and yet another with ‘facilitation of learning’? It is our view that Te Pūkenga must avoid establishing a Framework which results in siloed teams of kaimahi.

- ⇒ We recommend that clarity is provided pertaining to the way in which the matrix-like structure of the Ako Framework is intended to transpire in practice
- ⇒ We recommend that implementation of the Ako Framework does not result in siloed teams of kaimahi each operationalising a sole element of the Framework

The significance of research

Applied and technological research should be seen as a fundamentally important component of the work that kaiako undertake within the vocational education sector. As such, members noted that there is considerable scope to elaborate on this aspect of the draft Framework.

Research across the vocational education sector should transpire in a way which goes beyond simply informing teaching; research within this context needs to be explicitly connected to the interests and needs of ākonga, kaiako, kaimahi, whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, employers, and industry.

The Ako Framework should include a definition of research – potentially linked to the definition that is being developed as part of the current [review of the PBRF](#) – which accommodates different models of research and is conducive to research being an inherent part of the work that kaiako undertake; research should include activities pertaining to broader scholarship such as keeping up-to-date with relevant literature and pedagogical innovations. In other words, we must avoid, firstly, treating research either as a “tick-box exercise” or “nice to have,” and, secondly, implementing a system which

results in a division between kaiako that either teach or research – kaiako must be in a position to work across both areas. In the interests of epistemological diversity and the embedding of Mātauranga Māori and Pacific ways of knowing, explicit reference should be made to related research methodologies and teaching pedagogies within the Ako Framework.

In order for this to occur, Te Pūkenga will need to address current workload issues as well as ensure that adequate infrastructure – e.g., up-to-date library facilities and databases (etc.) – and mechanisms for co-ordination across the new network are in place.

Following this, the ‘Capability’ component of the Ako Framework will need to include explicit reference to professional development or kaimahi focused on research, as well as support for new kaiako to take up research in areas that they already have experience in. Additionally, research should involve opportunities for collegial collaboration between kaiako, as well as between kaiako with ākonga – ākonga will benefit from such opportunities and this will be an improvement on current protocols which often see ākonga receive training in research methodologies from a theoretical perspective with no practical experience until they enter postgraduate study.

In the interests of the ‘reflective practice’ aspect of the Ako Framework, there is also scope to establish research projects which examine the implications and results of implementing the Ako Framework itself – this could also apply to other frameworks and strategies that are currently being developed and implemented by Te Pūkenga.

⇒ We recommend that:

1. The Ako Framework acknowledges research as a fundamentally important aspect of what kaimahi do as part of their mahi;
2. The Ako Framework includes a definition of research which explicitly embeds Mātauranga Māori and Pacific ways of knowing, and acknowledges that research is to be connected to the interests and needs of ākonga, kaiako, kaimahi, whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, employers, and industry;
3. The ‘Capability’ component of the Ako Framework provides professional development opportunities for kaiako specifically related to research as well as opportunities for kaiako-kaiako and kaiako-ākonga collaboration;
4. The Ako Framework must be implemented in a way which avoids a division of labour between ‘teaching’ and ‘research’ kaimahi;
5. Te Pūkenga address current workload issues and ensure adequate infrastructure is in place so that the working and learning environment of the network is conducive to research being carried out.

Universal Design Principles

The draft Framework states that “We will use assistive technologies that provide disabled people more equality of opportunity to develop skills in technology, while also reducing the barriers for employers to hire disabled people.”

If Te Pūkenga is to achieve its goal of creating a network of vocational education that works for those that have been traditionally underserved by the education system, the Ako Framework should be conducive to equality of opportunity, as opposed to simply “more equality” than what is currently the case. Likewise, the aim of the Framework should be to *remove*, rather than simply reduce, barriers that constrain employers in their capacity to hire people that have been traditionally underserved by the system, including those kaimahi and ākonga living with disabilities.

⇒ We recommend that [Universal Design Principles](#) are used to underpin the Ako Framework

Alignment with other parts of the network

Similar to the issues outlined above regarding alignment between the Ako Framework and other frameworks and strategies being developed and implemented by Te Pūkenga, members are unclear on how the Ako Framework will be implemented in relation to the work of entities that are part of the vocational education network yet are situated outside of Te Pūkenga. For example, where part of the [function](#) of the Workforce Development Councils is to develop skill standards and qualifications, it is not clear whether the way in which these functions are carried out will also be guided by the Ako Framework.

Additionally, members have noted that reference to Modes of Delivery within the draft Framework do not align with how the Modes are stipulated in [recent documentation](#) from the Tertiary Education Commission pertaining to the Unified Funding System. Whereas the draft Framework alludes to ‘On-the-job,’ ‘Face-to-face,’ ‘OFL distance,’ and ‘Virtual Campus,’ the Unified Funding System includes the following Modes:

- Provider-based
- Provider-based: extramural
- Work-based
- Work-based: pathway to work
- Assessment and verification

⇒ We recommend that the Modes of Delivery, as outlined in the draft Ako Framework, ensure the purposeful specificity of delivery modes as they relate to the types of funded programmes set out in the Unified Funding System.

Additionally, we assume there will be implications for the Ako Framework relative to the work being undertaken by NZQA, Regional Skills Leadership Groups, and other relevant professional bodies.

⇒ We recommend that clarity is provided relative to the intended ways in which the Ako Framework will work in conjunction with the work of other parts of the network of vocational education.

Conclusion

Again, TEU greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Ako Framework. We look forward to continuing to engage throughout the formal consultation period.