Pacific Aviation & Airport Services Talanoa 2024

RINGA HORA
Services
Workforce Development Council

> **"** We're pioneers of navigation and exploration. Our ancestors worked in teams of great sizes to design and build vessels that they would command across seas, using the stars to guide them. We have Pacific trailblazers leading a range of industries and the aerospace industry is one we were made to be a part of."
>
> **Ioane Fiso** *Graduate Mechanical & Aerospace Engineer*

Welcome

Ringa Hora Services Workforce Development Council held our first industry talanoa for Pacific aviation and airport services in Mangere, South Auckland; home to the largest collection of people from Polynesia and other parts of the Pacific. Pacific representatives from the industry, high school and tertiary students, and Ringa Hora staff were warmly welcomed at the Ara Auckland Airport Jobs and Skills Hub – a stone's throw away from Aotearoa's largest international and domestic airports. In true Pacific form, the day began and concluded with lotu | karakia. The talanoa was the first time Ringa Hora has been able to welcome Pacific representatives from the aviation and airport services industry and community to gather and talanoa about their insights and aspirations for the industry in Aotearoa. The event provided a forum for Pacific in aviation and airport services, educational providers, high school and tertiary students as well as interested partners to participate in talanoa. Throughout the day, the group identified challenges and provided future thinking for Pacific within the industry. Participants, along with panel experts, shared their experiences, examples, and opportunities for identifying and approaching challenges, as well as ways to support the current and future Pacific workforce.

Focus of the talanoa

The aim of the talanoa was to hear about the lived experiences of Pacific people in aviation and airport services, specifically what Pacific people bring to the industry and what their career journey looks like now and in the future. The talanoa explored Pacific aspirations for pathways, careers and training, barriers and challenges, and possible actions for Pacific to succeed in aviation and airport services.

What we heard

Panel talanoa summary:

Panelists:

- Unaloto Mataele – Aviation Ground Operations Manager, JNP Aviation
- Arieta Tubuka – Senior Communication, Navigational & Surveillance Technician, Airways New Zealand
- Blake Tagi – Flight training student, Student at St Peter's College (Auckland)
- Ioane Fiso (Guest speaker) – Graduate Mechanical & Aerospace Engineer, University of Canterbury

Pacific communities have a rich tradition of voyaging and reaching for the stars, symbolising a spirit of exploration, navigation and ambition. There is a growing presence of Pacific individuals in leadership roles, as well as those stepping up as role models, demonstrating that Pacific people are capable of excelling in various fields, including the aerospace industry. However, despite the progress, there remains a lack of entry paths for young Pacific people into the aviation and airport services industry and businesses in general, emphasising the need for more opportunities and collaboration between employers, secondary schools and tertiary providers to ensure that Pacific people are equipped with the right skills, qualifications and support to pursue meaningful career paths.

Companies like Airways are actively working to enhance diversity in their recruitment efforts, aiming to include Māori, Pacific, and women in their workforce. Employers, in general, could focus on providing avenues for individuals to progress from entry-level positions to more senior roles, fostering a culture of advancement, growth and support within the workplace.

Young Pacific individuals often face fears and self-doubt, believing they need higher qualifications or exceptional intelligence to succeed. It is crucial for them to take risks, step out of their comfort zones, and

understand that failures are part of the learning process, that this can be part of their progression within the industry, and that they can be supported by their communities. Both our younger panellists, Blake Tagi, who at the age of 12 has already begun his journey to become a pilot, and Ioane Fiso (guest speaker), who is in the early stages of his career in the aerospace industry as a recent graduate, exemplify this mindset. Arieta's story of living next to her local airport, witnessing planes constantly overhead, and aspiring to fly one or be involved with in some form demonstrates the importance of taking risks and stepping out of one's comfort zones. Cultivating an ambitious and growth mindset is essential in pursuing career aspirations, backed with the right support systems from aiga, family and community networks.

The panel also discussed Pacific peoples' tendency to be hesitant in sharing or speaking about their achievements, emphasising the importance of humility. However, they also highlighted the need to speak up in certain contexts because no one else will do it for you. The conversation emphasised the importance of being a role model for others by balancing humility with the confidence to share accomplishments when necessary.

Our younger panellists also strongly encouraged the use of social media platforms to promote opportunities, share career journeys, and attract youth to the aviation and airport services industry. An attitude that exemplifies a new, vibrant Pacific identity that is unapologetically "loud and proudly Pacific" in Aotearoa. The use of technology and channels is important to help attract and promote accessible pathways to a wider audience in keeping pace with change.

Moreover, there is a need to enhance awareness of the diverse and engaging job roles within the aviation and airport services industry, other than pilots, engineers and flight crews, such as the multifaceted responsibilities of airport services such as baggage handlers, ground staff and traffic control technicians.

The story of Una, initially the only Pacific staff member at Gisborne Airport, who has since, through his extensive networks, brought in 15 Tongan staff into various roles over eight years, exemplifies the potential for Pacific individuals to pave the way for their communities and create lasting impacts on the industry. This narrative underscores the significance of representation, mentorship, networks, and community support in fostering diversity and inclusion within the workforce.

Teamwork is emphasised in aviation and airport services, highlighting its importance in ensuring safe departure and arrival of flights and contributing to overall operational success. The Pacific cultural ethos of unity and collective support mirrors the collaborative environment that the aviation and airport services industry should strive for, where every member is empowered to contribute to the collective success, a value that is innately part of being Pacific.

“ Pacific culture you know, bringing people together, communicate with people. If someone needs help you'll reach out to help that person, you know, for us, the Pacific culture is very important.”

Talanoa workshops

For the talanoa group workshops, attendees were divided into groups to discuss two key issues: what Pacific people bring to the aviation and airport services industry, and what the career path for Pacific individuals in this industry looks like now and in the future.

Talanoa 1: What do Pacific People in Aotearoa bring to the Aviation & Airport Services industry?

Unique Strengths and Values of Pacific People
The participants discussed the unique strengths and values that Pacific People bring to the workplace, such as loyalty, resilience, diversity of thought, openness to change, humour, connection, teamwork and a strong sense of community. They highlighted the importance of maintaining cultural values and traditions while still being able to integrate into various industries. Respect for elders and those in positions of authority, regardless of their formal roles, is emphasised as a core value.

Cultural values and personal attributes:

Pacific people bring a unique blend of cultural values and personal attributes that can greatly enrich the aviation and airport industry. They include hard work, resilience, kindness, trust, loyalty, creativity, passion, empathy, skill, love, acceptance, humility, transparency, adaptability, respect, humour, initiative, faith, and cultural values. Other attributes include kinship connections, hospitality, and tautua (service) as well as a strong sense of community are fundamental attributes that Pacific people bring to the table, fostering strong, supportive, and

collaborative environments. As noted above, their deep respect for elders and authority figures contributes to a culture of mentorship and guidance.

These qualities form the foundation of their contributions to the industry and future workforce of Aotearoa. They foster positive and productive team dynamics, that contributes to strong work ethics and commitment while promoting a supportive and inclusive workplace culture.

Diversity of thought, and innovation and identity:

Participants felt that Pacific people bring fresh perspectives, innovative problem-solving, and a vibrant workplace culture to the aviation and airport services industry. Their presence not only enhances diversity through their unique identities and backgrounds but also contributes to a more inclusive and representative workforce. The involvement of more Pacific people in this industry equips the sector to face global challenges by drawing on their rich cultural insights and adaptive skills to navigate complex environments effectively.

Pacific individuals are known for their authenticity and strong emphasis on building and maintaining genuine relationships, which strengthens connections within teams and with stakeholders. Their unique cultural perspectives enhance collaboration and teamwork, driving innovation and creative solutions. This cultural richness creates a dynamic and engaging workplace, promoting a healthy and positive environment for all employees.

The presence of Pacific people in aviation and airport services reflects a commitment to inclusivity and representation, ensuring that the workforce mirrors the diversity of the communities they serve. This not only enhances the industry's social responsibility but also lays the foundation for a cohesive and forward-thinking aviation and airport services sector. In essence, Pacific people in aviation and airport services can help drive progress and excellence.

Community and family roles:

Within their communities and families, Pacific people play pivotal roles as mentors, role models, and caregivers. They uphold generational living and provide vital community support and pastoral care. Their involvement extends to leadership positions within churches and community organisations, where they transfer knowledge and uphold a uniquely Pacific worldview that values things such as respect, pride, loyalty, and honesty. These diverse skills make them invaluable in addressing the needs of a global clientele and adapting to the ever-evolving demands of the industry.

Youth perspective:

Pacific youth participants talked about bringing a fresh perspective characterised by leadership, cultural unity, and a commitment to community service and causes bigger than themselves. They emphasised respect, values guided by faith, and a strong sense of responsibility towards family and community. Their communication skills, confidence, and reliance on familial and community support underscore their readiness to contribute effectively to the Aviation & Airport Services industry.

Leadership and innovation:

Pacific people are known for their can-do attitude, upbeat nature, and strong work ethic. They embody loyalty, service (tautua), and a dedication to encouraging diverse and inclusive workplaces. Their leadership style emphasises leading by example, drawing from their upbringing that instils a sense of responsibility to serve and provide for others.

> "When we hear aviation, we only think of three things, pilot, aircraft engineer and flight attendants. But they don't see like the baggage handlers, they don't see the technicians, those that are behind the scenes, to make it safe for a plane departing an airport and arriving to the other airport... I believe we need to create more awareness into our communities, into our church, our school, and tell them what we do in the aviation industry."

Talanoa 2: What does the career journey for Pacific People look like in the Aviation & Airport Services industry?

Challenges and barriers faced by Pacific people

The participants acknowledged the challenges and barriers faced by Pacific People in pursuing careers, particularly in industries like aviation and airport services. These include mindset shifts, lack of awareness about opportunities, financial constraints, location barriers, and the need for more visible role models and mentors. They also discussed the importance of cultural awareness, responsibility on social media, and the potential impact of past actions on future opportunities.

Systemic barriers:

Participants highlighted that the underrepresentation of Pacific people in the aviation and airport services industry particularly in leadership roles stems from limited access to information, financial constraints, and societal perceptions and assumptions. Cultural values conflicting with career aspirations, and the lack of role models perpetuate this underrepresentation. For the youth participants, the lack of visible Pacific leaders and role models in the industry perpetuated a cycle of underrepresentation and that 'if I can't see it, I can't be it'. Seeing themselves reflected in successful individuals is essential for youth to envision a future where they can thrive.

Participants also believed that Pacific people are also battling with perceptions and judgements from others within the industry of what they can achieve, which can be a barrier, and can limit them. This is further complicated by a lack of awareness about diverse career pathways and the resources available to support their career progression within the aviation and airport services industry.

> "You know, most people when you say I work at the airport, people will say oh, yeah. You fly a plane, you're a flight attendant? But with me, I say that without me the plane might not go anywhere."

Financial constraints and geographic challenges:

Dealing with financial barriers was a dominant theme for many Pacific participants. It hinders access to education, training, and resources, making career advancement difficult. One major challenge is the high cost of pilot training and licensing[1], causing many individuals to either drop out entirely or pursue alternative pathways into the industry, sacrificing time, money, and, most importantly, their hopes and dreams of becoming a pilot. Providing advice and support on navigating the system, managing expectations, and accessing available financial assistance packages could better prepare those entering or considering a career in the aviation and airport services industry.

Additionally, geographic relocation for career opportunities can be particularly challenging for those with close family and community ties and goes against their ability to fulfil cultural obligations and responsibilities.

Cultural tax:

The constant need to explain and advocate for cultural practices, beliefs, and values can be exhausting and often leads to feeling unseen and unheard. Navigating these cultural obligations within a workplace can be challenging. There is a need for better understanding and support from employers. Often cultural duties require the provision of money and/or specific cultural gifts (i.e. tapa, fine mats etc) and in most cases require some to take time off work to fulfil these cultural and familial duties.

Participants also highlighted that these traditional cultural values and expectations can sometimes act as a barrier to pursuing certain career paths. Family obligations and the desire to support the family or community can make it difficult to prioritise personal aspirations. It should be noted that the inability to fulfil cultural duties and obligations can carry stigma within many Pacific communities. When individuals are unable to meet these expectations, it can often lead to feelings of shame, criticism, or ostracism from the community, making it important for support systems in workplaces to be in place to help individuals balance their cultural obligations with work-life demands.

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1 Costs for pilot training and licences can vary depending on several factors, including the flight school and any additional training or flight tests that may be required. The International Aviation Academy of New Zealand provides the following costs for pilot training and licences: Private Pilot Licencing ($28,200), Commercial Pilot Licensing ($75,000 - $85,000), Airline Transport Pilot License ($80,000-$100,000) and Integrated Flight Training Programs ($120,000-$150,000). Note: These costs are not covered by the student loans scheme. https://flighttraining.co.nz/

> **The industry has just as much to gain as the Pasifika aspiring to be a part of it. The work ethic, drive, and intellect I have seen from Pasifika would be a brutal force for the rapid progression of our aviation and aerospace industries should we strive to be more involved."** *Ioane Fiso*

Strategies for overcoming challenges and supporting success

Participants discussed strategies to overcome challenges and support the success of Pacific people across various industries. Key strategies include promoting career pathways through outreach programmes, ensuring cultural transparency and consistency, challenging cultural appropriation and tokenism, and increasing visibility and representation in decision making, governance and leadership roles. Emphasis was placed on sharing relatable success stories, fostering a growth mindset, and creating supportive environments through mentorship and networking.

Empowering Pacific Potential:

Participants spoke of encouraging individuals to dream big and foster a growth mindset. Empowering Pacific individuals to envision and create their own pathways is essential. Building self-belief and encouraging ambition is crucial. Participants felt that adopting a growth mindset and supporting them to embrace new challenges would encourage Pacific peoples to step outside their comfort zones.

Advocating for increased representation and visibility of Pacific People in leadership roles is essential for breaking the cycle of underrepresentation and serves to inspire and guide the next generation. A diverse leadership reflects varied perspectives, driving innovation and ensuring that Pacific viewpoints are included in decision-making processes.

Recognising and integrating Pacific culture into workplaces would be invaluable. Acknowledging and celebrating Pacific culture as a strength and superpower, integrating it into workplaces, and valuing its unique perspectives are vital to attract and retain a strong Pacific workforce within the industry. If employers are seen as inclusive and understanding of the cultural backgrounds of their Pacific staff, and respond positively, it would show Pacific people that they are valued and can bring their whole selves to work.

Increasing cultural transparency and promoting an inclusive culture within organisations are crucial for creating a supportive environment for Pacific People. This includes challenging cultural appropriation and tokenism and ensuring cultural values are respected and integrated into the organisational fabric.

> **"** *[For the Pacific youth]* It's in our blood to be able to contribute to this field... I just want to start by sharing that I think Pacific are capable of success... we've got [Pacific] trailblazers that have put themselves at the pinnacle of a variety of fields. And so why can't the rest of us do that?"

Targeted support and advocacy:

To address the unique challenges faced by Pacific people, it is essential to develop tailored initiatives and programmes such as scholarships, Pacific-specific mentorship programmes, and career guidance. Providing mentorship and support systems specifically for Pacific individuals is vital for navigating the aviation and airport services industry's challenges. Sharing relatable success stories and fostering a growth mindset can inspire and motivate Pacific individuals, empowering them to pursue their career aspirations. Developing initiatives for mentorship and leadership training can support Pacific people in navigating industry challenges and achieving success.

Promoting career pathways through outreach programmes such as the Inspiring the Future Aotearoa programme[2], social media engagement, and community initiatives can effectively highlight career opportunities within the aviation and airport services industry. It is crucial to incorporate cultural sensitivity and diversity into recruitment and training programmes, ensuring they are inclusive and responsive to Pacific needs. This approach not only benefits Pacific individuals but also enriches the industry with diverse perspectives.

Advocating for inclusive policies at all levels of the aviation and airport services industry is necessary to create a supportive environment where Pacific people can thrive and their voices are heard and valued, creating a more equitable and diverse industry.

Investing in youth initiatives is another key strategy. Providing young Pacific individuals with mentorship, role models, and practical guidance helps them navigate their career paths and develop the confidence and skills needed to succeed. By supporting youth, we lay the foundation for a new generation of Pacific leaders in the aviation and airport services industry, changing the trajectory of our future as Pacific people.

Collaboration and community engagement:

Success in the aviation and airport services industry for Pacific people requires a collective effort from employers, educational institutions, government agencies, and community leaders to create supportive ecosystems. This involves building partnerships, sharing resources, celebrating Pacific successes within the industry, and being vulnerable and open to positive change. Embracing Pacific cultures, challenging biases, promoting inclusion, and supporting Pacific talent through mentorship and guidance are crucial steps. Allocating resources to support Pacific educational and career aspirations is also vital.

Finally, building a legacy of success for Pacific people in the aviation and airport services industry involves embracing the richness of Pacific culture, encouraging inclusivity, and empowering individuals to reach their full potential. This contributes to a more robust, innovative, and inclusive aviation and airport services industry, benefiting everyone involved.

2 The Inspiring the Future programme is one of TEC's priority workstreams to help deliver on the Career System Strategy to 'raise New Zealanders' education level and their skills and aspirations to meet the demands of work now and in the future'.

Solutions / Proposals

Ideas for action

- Promote career pathways and opportunities in the aviation and airport services industry through outreach programmes, social media, and community engagement.
- Actively encourage the use of social media to share relatable stories and successes of Pacific people in these industries, aiming to inspire and motivate the next generation, particularly Pacific youth.
- Increase cultural awareness and transparency within organisations to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Pacific people.
- Provide mentorship, leadership training, and support systems to help Pacific people navigate challenges and achieve success in the aviation and airport services industry.
- Advocate for increased representation and visibility of Pacific people in leadership roles, decision-making positions, and governance within the aviation and airport services industry.
- Explore financial assistance options, such as scholarships and cadetship programmes, to address financial barriers for Pacific people pursuing aviation and airport services careers.
- Foster a growth mindset and encourage Pacific people to dream big, create their own pathways, and believe in their abilities to succeed in the aviation and airport services industry.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to incorporate practical training, cultural awareness, and career exposure into curricula to better prepare Pacific people for careers in aviation and airport services.

Conclusions:

The journey for Pacific people in Aotearoa's aviation and airport services industry is about creating an enduring legacy, emphasising diversity as a strength, challenging assumptions, and creating environments where everyone feels valued, heard and respected. Continuous progress requires open dialogue, regular reflection and evaluation, addressing challenges as they arise. By focusing on the things highlighted from this Pacific Aviation & Airport Services Talanoa, the Aviation & Airport Services industry in Aotearoa can harness the full potential and possibilities of Pacific peoples, enriching the sector and contributing to a more inclusive and prosperous future for all.

Next steps

1. Explore interest and support for further Pacific in Aviation and airport services connection and development opportunities.
2. Further engage with people unable to attend, to include their insights in our work.
3. Identify Pacific people in the Aviation and Airport Services sector willing to be interviewed as role models for youth and those looking to enter the sector.
4. Continue to broker engagements and relationships across the Aviation & Airport Services industry to further support entry and development of Pacific people in Aviation & Airport Services.

The Pacific Aviation & Airport Services Talanoa is part of Ringa Hora's process to identify the needs of the Service sector as we shape Workforce Development Industry Action Plans (WDIAP's) which will be released in mid-2024. We are also working with Industry across several projects to enable industry voice to create and influence positive change. These projects include Te Manu Arataki Leadership, Shaping the Future of Service Skills (Waihangatia te Āmua Ao) Māori and Pacific Transformation & Engagement Plans, among other initiatives. We look forward to continuing this work and welcome further Industry guidance and information.

Ringa Hora remains committed to addressing the needs of learners who have been underserved by vocational education, predominantly Māori, Pacific, and Tangata Whaikaha (Disabled Peoples). A key focus of our work is developing methods of increasing access and reducing barriers for underserved learners to empower and assist them in realising their potential through training and employment.

Acknowledgement must be given to our talanoa attendees for their time and valuable input, sharing their experiences and industry knowledge with our team to shape a brighter future for the aviation and airport services workforce and industry as a whole. We look forward to our relationship developing further as the journey of workforce development moves forward.

Appendix 1

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Simi Ligaliga	Air New Zealand
Joella Goodwin	Air New Zealand
Nicolas Brown	Air New Zealand
Miriam Te Hira	Air New Zealand
Arieta Tubuka	Airways Ltd
Jo Lal	Airways Ltd
Shawn Ras	Airways Ltd
Greg Chase	Airwork Group
David Campbell	Airwork Group
Naca Nabunobuno	Auckland Airport Services
Feao Neiufi	Fat Fathers with Wings
Ioane Fiso	Guest Speaker -Youth voice
Una Mataele	JNP Aviation
Josh Payne	JNP Aviation
Sitiveni Kunaika	Manukau Institute of Technology
Taitu'uga Ed Hendrikse	Manurewa High School
Students x6	Manurewa High School
Alivani Veiqaravi	Massey University
Blake Tagi	Panel speaker
Eli Tagi	Parent rep/support
Manuesina Mahina-Fujimoto	New Zealand School of Tourism
Detroit Pitman-Gerrard	New Zealand School of Tourism
King Fue	New Zealand School of Tourism
Tabitha Ma'u	New Zealand School of Tourism
Sala Manū	New Zealand School of Tourism
Julio Faavae	New Zealand School of Tourism
Una Taiono	New Zealand School of Tourism
Muffy Masoe	New Zealand School of Tourism
Luse Taoa-Penaia	New Zealand School of Tourism
Aaron Nuualiitia	New Zealand School of Tourism
Hannah Mallard	NZALPA
Mereisi Wilikibau	N/A
Jeffrey Moeakiola	Puatala Training (LM4 Group)
Vesi Vaimoso	Puatala Training (LM4 Group)
Sam Nonoa	Puatala Training (LM4 Group)
Reverend Suiva'aia Te'o	Sinoti Samoa Methodist Church - Mangere Central Samoan Parish
Manu Palelei	Skills Update
Libby Wright	WeMana