Taku teina, tōku rangatira. Recruitment, development and retention of Māori and Pasifika in science

Sarah T. Rewi (Ngāpuhi)⁠*, M. R. V. Welford (Moata’a)⁠*, M. Heke (Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa, Te Rawara)⁠b and B. J. Dunphy⁠a,c

⁠aSchool of Biological Sciences; ⁠bSchool of Environment; ⁠cInstitute of Marine Science; Waipapa Taumata Rau The University of Auckland.

The tuākana-teina (older-younger sibling) relationship is one of reciprocity that empowers leadership and support (Amopiu, 2020). In response to the struggles of Māori and Pasifika students within educational institutions, the tuākana-teina relationship has been incorporated to enhance their cultural and academic well-being (Bishop and Glynn, 2003; Callaghan et al., 2018; Oetzel et al., 2021; Parr, 2016). In 1991, based upon this philosophy, Professor Michael Walker began the Tuākana programme within the School of Biological Sciences at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. This paper examines the role of the Tuākana Biology programme in the recruitment, development, and retention of Māori in Science at Waipapa Taumata Rau. Drawing from data and experiences of the programme from its inception to current day students, a secondary data analysis was conducted. Here we identify key components that make Tuākana Biology a success and challenges that restrict its implementation. We found the cultural space and community provided by Tuākana enhances Māori and Pasifika recruitment, development, and retention, positioning Tuākana Biology as a potential solution to Māori and Pasifika success within academia. Lack of funding, staffing capacity, and access to student data are the challenges the programme looks to overcome to realise its full potential.

Keywords: Indigenous; institutional space; Māori and Pasifika equity; higher education; science.

Introduction

Māori and Pasifika remain under-represented in universities throughout New Zealand indicating that Māori and Pasifika students are not being met with only 4.8% of academics identifying as Māori and 1.7% identifying as Pasifika (Naepi et al., 2021). In the natural and physical sciences, Māori and Pasifika students follow this trend with enrolments never increasing above 4% (Naepi et al., 2021). This under-representation is not caused by a lack of available capability but rather by institutional exclusion, racism and hiring heavily influenced by PBRF rankings that is excluding Māori and Pasifika in academia (Naepi et al., 2020, 2021). Despite claims that universities are addressing diversity and equity in regard to Māori staff, there has yet to be an increase of Māori in the academic workforce (McAllister et al., 2019). Similarly, there has been no change in the Pasifika academic workforce who remain under-represented and employed in the lower levels of the academy (Naepi, 2019). It is therefore necessary for universities to commit to genuine and appropriate recruitment, retention, and development of Māori and Pasifika scholars (McAllister et al., 2019).

Moreover, a new generation of career Indigenous researchers are entering these institutions that, if fostered correctly, hold the potential to empower their communities through research that can act as powerful forms of resistance and connection (Rewi et al., 2022). Experiences of current Māori and Pasifika students in the sciences highlighted that excess cultural labour and superficial or unethical inclusion in academic spaces, were preventing them from being their authentic selves. However, despite the tension Pasifika academics experience between western systems of education and pacific pedagogies, Pasifika peoples continue engaging with tertiary education to advance community aspirations (Leenen-Young et al., 2021). These issues identify that the solution to improving representation of Māori and Pasifika in science, and academia, requires an urgent change in the learning environment (McAllister et al., 2022). We argue in this paper that the correct implementation of the tuākana-teina concept has the potential to create such a learning environment that can act as a cultural stronghold for students to develop and reach their potential.

The concept of tuākana-teina describes a significant relationship within Māori society that traces its origins back to the ancestral populations of eastern Polynesia (Amopiu, 2020; Reilly, 2010). It translates literally to the older and younger sibling of same sex, but it can also be applied to whakapapa (genealogical lineage) wherein family lines are organised according to the tuākana or teina status of the common ancestor (Mead, 2016; Reilly, 2010). Tuākana-teina invokes a reciprocity that encourages leadership and wisdom. It is a relationship that is premised upon cooperation, loyalty, and respect, that ideally maintains a moral balance between the tuākana and teina. As such, neither the teina nor tuākana should act in a way that diminishes...
the mana of their counterpart (Amopiu, 2020; Reilly, 2010).

Within education, the philosophies of tuākana-teina have been incorporated as a model of learning to address the often-isolating experiences of Māori in mainstream programmes (Callaghan et al., 2018; Cowie, 2015; Oetzel et al., 2021). The relationship between tuākana and teina, implemented as older and younger mentoring, acts as a cultural anchor that enhances well-being and social connectedness for Māori in mainstream science education (Callaghan et al., 2018; Oetzel et al., 2021). Such a framework affirms the validity, and creates an avenue for the respect and normalisation of Māori worldviews, knowledge, and communities to exist within these spaces (Oetzel et al., 2021). The resulting environment empowers the learning and growth of those students involved. Yet, like many theoretical frameworks, the practical application of the tuākana-teina relationship is not always appropriate, indeed at times even harmful. Often, tuākana are positioned as the expert or more knowledgeable person with the teina as the novice, as seen in Cowie (2015) and Cowie and Trevethan (2020). Whilst this is not necessarily incorrect, for those that do not intimately understand this concept, this framing of tuākana and teina can infer a superiority and inferiority dynamic to the relationship. Thus, creating an imbalance between the two. It disregards the value of knowledge teina bring to the relationship whilst assuming tuākana have little to learn or gain. This perspective is ignorant of the reciprocal nature of tuākana-teina which is vital in generating culturally appropriate and highly effective collective learning communities. The very nature of this reciprocity is a core concept in Polynesian educational philosophy known as ‘ako’, meaning both to teach and to learn. Subsequently, the term ‘ako’ appears in both the term for teacher (kaaitoko) and student (akonga). This suggests that the status of students and teachers are interchangeable and fluid (Karaka-Clarke et al., 2021). Creating learning communities that are grounded in ako is crucial to Māori and Pasifika youth success by addressing both their cultural and academic needs (Marshall, 2014; McDonald, 2011; Morrison and Vaiōleti, 2011).

Whilst there is a hierarchical nature to tuākana-teina, it does not signify a power imbalance but rather acknowledges differing roles that each must play within the relationship. For instance, the tuākana as the first-born child is considered tapu (sacred) which gives them precedence and authority over duties and knowledge considered sacred (Reilly, 2010). In comparison the teina is less constrained by the requirements of tapu and are therefore able to undertake differing tasks. Subsequently teina were important economic leaders in pre-colonial society. Reilly (2010) summarises this concept by identifying it is the tuākana who holds the mana, but it is the teina, the doer, who gives it substance. This acknowledges the complementary skill sets that tuākana and teina have and equally values their unique contributions. It is this cooperation that is the true strength of the tuākana-teina relationship.

Founded by Professor Michael Walker, the Tuākana Biology Programme started in 1991 within the School of Biological Sciences at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. Tuākana Biology is a learning community premised on the core concept of tuākana-teina. It provides a space where students feel connected through relationships that are grounded in common cultural values. Namely, prioritising their identity as Indigenous members of their communities before acknowledging their academic position within the institution. This assists students in navigating their academic journeys from an empowerment perspective rather than one of deficit. Consequently, creating an environment that fosters their personal and academic growth by meeting their social, cultural, and academic needs. Over the last 30 years, Tuākana Biology has supported hundreds of Māori and Pasifika students through their studies. The legacy of Tuākana Biology can be seen in the success of students that have passed through the programme. Evidence for this is detailed in the Māori and Pasifika student data section. The importance of Māori academics, such as Professor Michael Walker, for young Māori students cannot be overstated. As supervisors they act as a guide for postgraduate students and early career researchers, promoting student retention (Rewi et al., 2022). More importantly, their presence influences the implementation of Indigenous values and aspirations within career development which in turn contributes to Indigenous recruitment, development, and retention (Smith, 2007; Staniland et al., 2020).

Materials and Methods

Secondary data analysis, or the analysis of data collected by others, was the method used for this research. It utilises existing data for a purpose that differs from the original research (Johnston, 2014; Tripathy, 2013). Two advantages of using secondary data analysis are the efficiency and cost-effectiveness which provides more resource to explore the relevance of the data (Johnston, 2014; Tripathy, 2013). Another advantage is that it draws from knowledge and experience that may not otherwise be available. Secondary data analysis considers the purpose of the original study; who collected the information; when, what and how the information was collected; and the consistency of the information’s source with other available sources (Johnston, 2014). A collection of documents relevant to the inception of Tuākana Biology in 1991 were analysed to determine the origins of the programme. Documents were organised into three categories: data pertaining to Māori or Pasifika students; correspondence (letters, memorandums, etc.); and programmes/initiatives involved in Māori or Pasifika inequity. Of interest was the context that gave rise to the programme’s establishment and its effectiveness as a strategy to address Māori and Pasifika inequities in science. Due to the large number of files, only key documents were scanned and included in the appendices. These documents were chosen by current Tuākana Biology coordinators based upon their relevance to the timeline of the programme’s inception. The criteria for these documents included initial communications; descriptive summaries of Māori and Pasifika student data; examples of external communications; notable reports; and descriptions of pre-existing initiatives.

Whilst important for identifying the current state of Māori and Pasifika engagement in science, quantitative data
is limited in its ability to investigate experiences relevant to
the context in which the data was collected (Rahman, 2017). This
can be balanced by the deeper insights and context provided from a more qualitative approach. When engaging
with Indigenous data, it is important to understand the cultural context of the data and engage with the communities
from which the data is collected (Te Mana Raraunga Māori Data Sovereignty Network, 2018). It was therefore
important to us that we engaged with past and present members of the Tuakana Biology programme to draw upon
their experiences to evaluate our data. Their insights are a true reflection of the programme. Incorporating narratives
into research is what Nadar (2019) refers to as ‘data with soul’. This not only provides context to our analysis but
also holds the academy accountable to its research theories and practices by highlighting how students experience their
implementation.

Results
Professor Michael Walker’s files were reviewed and organ-
ised into three categories: Māori and Pasifika student data,
correspondence, and initiatives. These documents encapsu-
late the events that lead to the inception of the Tuakana pro-
gramme within the School of Biological Sciences at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland in 1991. Under-
standing the history of Tuakana Biology and motivations for
its establishment, lends important insights to guide current
and future efforts for the programme. The analysis of these
files provides these insights and highlights strategies that
were successful for the programme during its inception.

Māori and Pasifika Student Data
In response to the Science Faculty Māori Equity Commit-
tee report to all science staff in May 1990, data was collated
relevant to Māori student numbers in papers; Māori stu-
dent needs; Māori student demonstrator numbers; the pres-
ence of Nga Tauira Puaho (Māori students in Science) on
staff-student committees; assistance for Māori students; and
Māori content in undergraduate papers (see Appendix A).

Correspondence
Letters of correspondence identified key areas that were in-
hibiting Māori and Pasifika student success at university.
These came from other institutions within the tertiary sec-
tory of Aotearoa, New Zealand. For instance, one letter from
Te Tairawhiti Polytechnic highlighted the importance of the
environment that staff and students work in rather than at-
ttempts to “honour the treaty of Waitangi or put-up bilingual
signage”. It acknowledged that this form of feedback does
not carry weight with scientists, despite being vital to how
Māori experience their workplace (see Appendix A). Simi-
larly, a letter to the Vice Chancellor of The University of
Auckland from staff members across the Faculty of Science
in 1991, outlined the commitment of the University to pro-
vide such educational opportunities for Māori (see Appendix
E). This letter also identified that Māori staff were the key
to fulfilling the potential of Māori students, yet “distress-
ingly low ratios” of Māori staff persisted across all faculties.
It called for the acknowledgement of Māori knowledge, at-
tributing the lack of relevance of science for Māori to the
monocultural nature of the university.

Such initiatives require an enormous amount of support. Reflected in efforts from staff both within and outside the
Department of Biology that contributed to the creation of
Tuakana Biology. For example, Appendix F shows corre-
spondence between Professor Michael Walker and Associate
Professor Jack Grant-Mackie, a pakeha ally, of the Geology
Department discussing the need for equitable funding. In
fact, in response to the Science Faculty Māori Equity Commit-
tee request for Māori data a total of 26 submissions were
received (see Appendix G), highlighting the need for part-
nership rather than the current deficit model. Submissions
called for meaningful context to Māori within the curricu-
larum, an increase in Māori staff and leaders, and sensitivity
and awareness of Māori culture within the institution. Vary-
ing departments within the Faculty of Science contributed
to this, including the Departments of Psychology, Geogra-
phy and Chemistry (see Appendix H; I; J; and K).

Multiple faculties were also involved such as the Faculty
of Law raising concerns around overloading, burn-out, crit-
icisms of tokenism, and the monocultural view of what con-
stitutes ‘qualifications’, particularly when Māori staff were
hired individually (see Appendix L). Correspondence with

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other tertiary institutions including the University of Otago (see Appendix M) and Manukau Polytechnic (see Appendix N) also provided data that contributed to the establishment of the Tuakana Biology programme.

Programmes and Initiatives

Key initiatives already active at the University of Auckland prior to Tuakana Biology also played an important role in establishing the programme. Nga Tauiira Puaho (Māori students in science) was one such initiative that highlighted the importance of a student voice for engagement (see Appendix A). A Faculty of Science committee on Māori equity was also established to investigate how the faculty could contribute as other faculties within the university that were already actively addressing the issue (Appendix O).

University wide programmes such as HERO were also working toward Māori and Pasifika equity. HERO was instrumental in the collection of students data and conducted a workshop in May 1990 to present their statistics to the Faculty of Science and address the needs of Māori students (Appendix A). An interfaculty staff initiative also gathered during this time inclusive of academics from disciplines varying from Anatomy to Zoology. Their purpose was to develop departmental structures to better reflect the needs of Māori students (see Appendix P). University of Auckland’s Medical School provided a model of success with their Māori and Pasifika Admission Scheme (MAPAS) operating since 1972 (see Appendix Q). Other initiatives addressing Māori inequities included a Māori Advisory Council (Te Kaunihera Maori Kaitohutohu) in the Faculty of Medical Health Sciences, and a bicultural committee in the department of psychology.

With lessons learned from the support of these programmes and initiatives, the Tuakana programme emerged as a bespoke solution for the Department of Biological Sciences. Aimed at improving retention, tutorials (although attended by staff) were largely led by graduate and senior Māori and Pasifika students. Impacts of tutorials were seen immediately with pass rates of two papers being 13% and 14% higher in 1991 compared with 1990 (see Appendix R). Many students attending the tutorials improved their grades substantially during the year with grades being 5-10% higher and pass rates 37% and 25% higher compared with students who did not attend. The engagement and success for Māori and Pasifika student performance is detailed in Appendix C. After such a successful first year, the Tuakana Biology programme looked to make improvements for 1992. Specifically, gaining access to student information for those who identify as Māori (and Pasifika) and seeking proper funding to support tutorials (Appendix R).

Discussion

Recruitment

From the files examined above, discrepancy between Māori and non-Māori pass rates highlights the Māori equity issues that students experienced at the University of Auckland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, immediately following the first iteration of Tuakana Biology tutorials, increases in pass rates, grades, and enrolments of Māori and Pasifika students was observed. Reflected in these documents are lessons still pertinent today, where the importance of creating academic spaces where Māori and Pasifika cultures thrive is paramount. Māori academic success expands beyond the need for the education of individuals to secure their economic futures. Education and culture are inseparable, and the integration of Māori culture can only be achieved through culturally appropriate educational programs (Hook, 2007). Similarly, Pasifika learning is enhanced when cultural values, language, identities, and knowledge are an implicit component of educational practices (Fletcher et al., 2009).

Today recruitment for Māori and Pasifika in the natural and physical sciences remains stubbornly low; with a call that Māori undergraduate enrolment requires more investment (Naepi et al., 2021). Pasifika education also currently experiences this drop in student engagement due to exclusion of Pacific pedagogy, languages, cultures, and relationships (Matapo and McFall-McCaffery, 2022). For us working in Tuakana Biology it is all about ‘space’ where the concept ‘for Māori by Māori’ and ‘for Pasifika by Pasifika’ has greater resonance. We continue to combat the deficit perception of the programme as merely a remedial or support system. Whilst Tuakana Biology finds its roots as an equity initiative, our language and actions have evolved along the lines of an empowerment perspective. Tuakana has emphasised the importance of space as vital to Māori and Pasifika development by increasing student positivity and participation. However, it is not just the physical rooms that are important but the intangible space for students to ‘be’ unapologetically Māori or Pasifika. A space to sit, eat, cry, and laugh unimpeded. To show that we are not nameless, faceless individuals on a roll - but an integral and vibrant face in the room.

It is also important to note the unique relationship that exists between Māori and Pasifika peoples. Like Māori, Pasifika education is a strategic priority for the Ministry of Education, yet Pasifika agendas in the institution continue to be undervalued, undermined, and under-resourced (Fa’avae, 2022). Although our connections predate colonization, our current positionalities under a colonial state cannot be ignored (Leenen-Young et al., 2021). In spaces such as tertiary institutions, Māori and Pasifika often must compete for limited funding to support our individual concerns and initiatives (Kidman and Chu, 2019). This reality is acknowledged by Tuakana Biology in accepting that successful education outcomes can differ between all cultures throughout the Pacific. Yet we also hold fast to the ancient ties that connect our peoples. We see the separation of Māori and Pasifika as a division of hosts and visitors rather than one of ethnicity because in our shared knowledge and cultural histories we also have many similarities. Whilst Kidman and Chu (2019) critique the romanticisation of this relationship, Tuakana Biology actively works to balance the
cultural needs of all our tuākana and teina. This is reflected in the representation of our staff, leadership positions, and allocation of resources. This centring of Māori and Pasifika relationships is an intentional act by Tuākana Biology as it fosters an environment that creates a space for students of all Polynesian backgrounds. The subsequent community that has developed from this is crucial for making newly recruited students more comfortable in the space and in their cultural identities.

Non-Māori and non-Pasifika also play an important role in creating these spaces for student recruitment. However, it is important for them to take responsibility for informing themselves, creating their initiatives and keeping the relevant Māori and Pasifika collectives informed (Appendix H). Creating cultural spaces requires organisations to examine themselves and the impact of their own institutional culture on others. This requires reflection upon their own assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and structures to hold themselves accountable for providing culturally safe environments (Curtis et al., 2019). Such spaces will naturally attract Māori and Pasifika as they can achieve educational equity and academic excellence within them.

**Development**

Tuākana Biology is only one of many solutions developed in tertiary institutions throughout Aotearoa, New Zealand to overcome Māori and Pasifika inequities. Within Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland, other programmes, and initiatives such as MAPAS (Māori and Pasifika Admission Scheme from the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences), and HERO (Higher Education Research Office) were active prior to the Tuākana Biology programme. These initiatives played an important role in the design of Tuākana Biology as they assisted in data collection and modelled various approaches.

Correspondence documents show significant collaboration with these initiatives, demonstrating communication across the university’s departments, faculties, and even with other tertiary institutions. These communications highlighted the need for student engagement and the ongoing challenge of requiring and securing funding for creating these cultural education spaces (e.g., Appendix F). However, it is the extensive collaboration that is most remarkable about the origins of Tuākana Biology. It reflects the collective approach that continues to resonate throughout the programme. Prompting active discussions with the wider academic community allows the collective to determine their own needs and aspirations. Furthermore, these networks are crucial to student development. They create a broad range of pathways and opportunities for Māori and Pasifika to build their own network relationships. This collaboration also reiterates the role of non-Māori and non-Pasifika. In accordance with the partnership outlined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, nurturing Māori students is not solely the responsibility of Māori staff. It is up to all of us to instigate practical systems to achieve positive action (Whatarirī, 1991).

Indigenous role-modelling, teaching, and leadership are key social factors that contribute to Māori and Pasifika educational development and success (Mayeda et al., 2014). This is where the emphasis of tuākana-teina in Tuākana Biology is particularly relevant. It places students into leadership roles early in their academic journeys by positioning them as tutors, mentors, and coordinators. In doing so, the tuākana develop a range of skills whilst the teina are modelled successful pathways that feel attainable and relatable. Thus, the shared experience between the students is beneficial to both the tuākana and teina. To us, this practical implementation of tuākana-teina places emphasis on the ‘sibling’ relationship, i.e., that tuākana and teina are the same generation and thus have similar experiences and responsibilities.

Indeed, this aligns with many of the factors of educational success for Pasifika identified by Chu et al. (2013). The structure of the programme creates a ‘learning village’ space within the School of Biological Sciences where students can create respectful and meaningful relationships with each other, their mentors, and teaching staff that engage with the programme. In this space Tuākana Biology is also committed to the hiring of only Māori and Pasifika (where possible) to keep these cultures embedded in the learning space as well as providing strong leadership and important role models for younger students.

In contrast, other educational initiatives have emphasised the older-younger dynamic of the tuākana-teina concept. Often reflected through an expert-novice relationship that aligns more readily with the hierarchical structure of the tertiary education system. Tuākana Biology attempts to resist this structure by using a tuākana-teina model which places Māori and Pasifika within reciprocal relationships. We posit that this creates a space for students, staff, and researchers to express themselves, and consequently thrive. Due to this, they develop their individual identities within the Tuākana Biology learning community which then disseminates out to their communities beyond the walls of the institution. Tertiary education is a priority for Māori and Pasifika as it also improves outcomes for their communities (Theodore et al., 2018). Therefore, the impacts and success of students belonging to the Tuākana programme cannot be measured solely by their development and achievements at university.

**Retention**

As Tuākana Biology enters its 32nd year, recruitment and development efforts continue to be successful, leaving retention of Māori and Pasifika as the main challenge. Retaining undergraduate students through their postgraduate studies, and further through to their doctoral studies is not currently a robust pathway for Tuākana Biology. This trend is reflected in the literature with retention and enrolment of Māori and Pasifika students requiring further inquiry and investment (Naepi et al., 2021). Subsequently, improving Māori and Pasifika retention is a nationally recognised challenge for tertiary education (Wilson et al., 2011). The number of Māori and Pasifika holding doctorates, whilst increasing, still remains well below parity. Thus, the need for retention and leadership of Māori and Pasifika in academia has never been greater (Naepi et al., 2020; Whitini et al., 2013). Relationships between Māori supervisors and Māori
doctoral students tends to impact retention (Smith, 2007). The same trend is seen with Pasifika (Carter et al., 2018). Students’ first-year experience is also an important element in retention and degree completion (van der Meer et al., 2010).

For Tuakana Biology, successful implementation of the programme is constrained by three current challenges: access to students and their data; funding; and staffing capacity. Funding and staffing is especially essential for the retention of Māori and Pasifika. Despite Auckland being the largest Polynesian city there remains a severely low ratio of Māori and Pasifika staff at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. Currently the few who are hired experience burnout or receive criticism of fulfilling a token Māori staffing role (Appendix L). There is a clear requirement for departments to commit to funding for Māori and Pasifika appointments and for resources and training of non-Māori and non-Pasifika staff in these initiatives (Appendix H). Without these staff the needs of Māori and Pasifika cannot be met which is a barrier to them realising their full potential (Appendix E). Internationally, institutions have found cluster hiring has improved retention of staff of colour and reduced feelings of isolation by providing social networks (Sgoutas-Emch et al., 2016). With cohorts of talented students continually moving through the Tuakana programme, we heartily support this strategy. From a tuakana-teina perspective, when a talented teina does not feel, or is not recognised, they will move over to another whānau to which they are related (Reilly, 2010). Similarly, when our students are not provided with the opportunities deserving of their abilities, retention failure is inevitable.

Since its inception, Tuakana Biology has worked with minimal funding but has still managed to achieve great success (Appendix S). Inconsistent funding has also posed issues throughout the programmes’ duration (Appendix C). Without the appropriate funding, the Tuakana programme cannot progress past providing the bare minimum for its community. Funding is required to expand outreach and develop new initiatives. Its purpose is to support the growth of a programme rather than maintaining the status quo (Earne and Sherk, 2013). Furthermore, greater, and longer-term funding are important facilitators for recruiting and retaining researchers (Thomson et al., 2006). In the early 1990s, changes in Government funding saw the university re-evaluating its allocation of resources and the potential for positive action to redress funding for Māori and Pasifika initiatives (Appendix R). Once again, these changes are occurring with ‘Taumata Teitei - Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan 2025’ (Waipapa Taumata Rau The University of Auckland, 2020). Taumata Teitei outlines the university’s commitment to grow Māori and Pasifika transdisciplinary scholarship and invest in equity objectives for the Māori and Pasifika research workforce. They also aim to strengthen relationships with Māori and Pasifika communities and build capabilities in Vision Mātauranga driven research and research impact. Herein lies the potential for funding and resource allocation to improve the quality of service that Tuakana Biology can deliver to retain Māori and Pasifika students.

**Conclusion**

Tuakana Biology is a learning community that provides a cultural space which connects Māori and Pasifika through their academic journeys. This is achieved through the programme’s implementation of the tuakana-teina concept, premised upon the shared experiences and responsibilities of Māori and Pasifika in the institution. The Tuakana programme aims to foster leadership and empower pathways of success for students modelled by their peers. For over 30 years Tuakana Biology has successfully engaged with Māori and Pasifika in the School of Biological Sciences at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. After a successful first year of improving Māori and Pasifika pass rates and average grades, the Tuakana programme looked to make improvements for 1992. Access to students and their data; funding for optimised capability; and staffing for improved capacity were identified as key requirements for the programme’s success. In 2023 these remain unchanged. Understanding the history and journey of Tuakana Biology helps to inform decisions and optimise the programme to adapt to the needs of the community. In this light, we position Tuakana Biology as a structural pathway to Māori and Pasifika success within academia. Moving forward our ambitions are to continue enhancing Māori and Pasifika recruitment, development, and retention to build generations of successful Māori and Pasifika scientists.

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