

Introducing Aroha

Aroha works in one of New Zealand's universities and takes a special interest in Māori and Pacific Island students. Her current role is employability related.

Employability Capabilities

As we start talking I notice that Aroha seems to have multiple industry contacts whose opinions seem to inform her views of employability. She says that employers want to see that students have relevant experience, including experience working in teams and developed communication skills. She notes that students need to be able to communicate and think in the way business people do. They also need to be able to present themselves to business and explain how they can contribute to it.

Aroha also adds a capability that I hadn't heard from any other interviewees. She says we should equip students with the skills to investigate societal needs and how they could join and help communities.

Embedding employability in courses

Aroha is aware of a number of courses where students undertake projects and addressed real world issues. She thinks these courses provided students with opportunities to develop relevant skills.

When I ask about embedding employability in courses, Aroha calls for a shift in mindset from a content focus to one where lecturers ask themselves "how can I help students achieve and what are their needs"? She believes this would place an added burden on over-pressed academic staff and questions whether staff's previous experience actually leaves them unaware of employers needs and whether they are equipped to deliver a broader curriculum.

Aroha is a strong advocate of students getting experiences outside their university courses.

Supporting Māori and Pacific Island students

When I ask about any provisions that are valuable for Māori and Pacific island students, Aroha is reluctant to comment. She rightly points to the diversity within these cohorts. She notes that some Māori students thrive in work placements with Māori organisations and suggests that the whanau culture is familiar and supporting. However, Aroha is also of the view that Māori and Pacific Island students thrive in many other environments, so long as they are made to feel welcome. She shares her view that knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is sometimes missing in organisations and, if they are to make students feel welcome, that this is a substantial omission. Aroha indicates that we should set our students up with realistic expectations and some tactics for dealing with different work environments.

Aroha mentions offering workshops on CV writing and interview techniques have not been of much interest, but organised trips to see large organisations have generated a lot of interest. She says the trips open up students' minds to new possibilities. She says it is important to connect students with a range of employers early in their degrees. She believes that we need to seek out the less active and aware students who leave things too late.

Aroha shares her impression that many Māori and Pacific Island people have the goal of helping others. This motivates their career choices, but they need to be shown a wider array of opportunities that would enable them to meet this goal. She implies that this ethic is not the focus of most employability initiatives. Aroha also says that this could and should be a model way of thinking but in mixed groups this gets lost as Māori and Pacific Island ways of thinking are swamped by the dominant culture.

When asked what theory or philosophy guides her work, Aroha refers to whanaungatanga, a relationship based principal based on belonging and trust.

Researcher notes: This informant has an understanding of employability that is about being able to secure employment on graduation. With regards to employability capabilities, she has similar views to other interviewees and emphasises the importance of teamwork and communication. She also adds the notion of community awareness and action. With regards to the barriers to embedding employability in courses, the informant shares the view of many other interviewees: seeing academics as focused on content, largely unaware of the employment market, time pressed and somewhat over-burdened. This informant adds a new dimension to our understanding of employability, being able to share her views on the particular needs and strengths of Māori and Pacific Island students. Although mildly expressed, her voice is suggesting radical changes in our approach to careers services and the development of our students.
