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## Mātai ako: Te Tiriti o Waitangi in learning and teaching

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines initiatives within the College of Health at Massey University to embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi in learning and teaching. Situated within broader strategies, it focuses on the Mātai Ako initiative, which supports staff in building an understanding of Te Tiriti, developing competence, and aligning curricula. Drawing on national policy and university commitments, the initiative advances four actions: developing foundational knowledge, offering skill-building workshops, providing pedagogical mentoring, and reviewing curricula. Early outcomes include increased understanding, pedagogical shifts, and identification of next steps, though sustaining systemic change remains a challenge. The initiative is guided by an ethic of open communication, collective growth, and a staged approach that centres mātauranga Māori while respecting diverse starting points. It offers lessons for higher education institutions navigating tensions between Western academic traditions and obligations to Indigenous rights. Despite ongoing challenges, strategic alignment has established a platform for meaningful change.

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Te Tiriti o Waitangi; Indigenous; curriculum development; pedagogy; strategy

## Introduction

Te Tiriti o Waitangi represents an agreement negotiated between hapū Māori (subtribes) and the British Crown in 1840, serving as a foundational constitutional document of Aotearoa New Zealand. Te Tiriti established a partnership between Māori and the British Crown. However, since the signing of Te Tiriti, Māori have continuously protested and fought to actively address breaches of Te Tiriti by the Crown. Historical examples include Hone Heke cutting down the flagpole four times between 1842 and 1844 in protest and Northern tribes angered by British colonial land policies fuelling the beginning of land wars in 1845 (Ballard, 1996; Cox, 1993; Johnson, 2006). Furthermore, the 1850s saw the rise of Te Kingitanga and the establishment of a Māori parliament, Te Kotahitanga. All of these exemplify the continual resistance movements initiated by Māori to assert rangatiratanga. The establishment of the permanent commission of inquiry, the Waitangi

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Tribunal, in 1975 (Waitangi Tribunal, 2019) was charged with investigating and making recommendations on claims brought by Māori relating to actions and omissions of the Crown. As Moana Jackson (2017) attested:

By its very nature, the colonisation of Indigenous peoples has always been an abusive process — if only because the imposition of the colonisers' values and institutions could never be achieved peacefully or with any pretence of good faith. It was always a violent race-based privileging of Pākehā realities, which was only made possible by subordinating those of Māori. No matter how it is achieved — through a legal subterfuge or the brute force of a gun — colonisation is always a dishonourable dispossession (para. 10).

Recognising the ongoing challenges of fully realising the treaty agreement, Massey University has embarked on an ambitious project to honour Te Tiriti across its institutional policies and practices. Perhaps a lofty ambition that is perhaps only matched by the complexity of navigating the interface between honouring Te Tiriti and the goals and expectations of the Western University system. In this work, we acknowledge and seek to support Māori scholars and communities across the tertiary sector, with whom we share a collegial responsibility to socialise and mobilise the provisions and principles underpinned by Te Tiriti. To assist in our Te Tiriti-led approach, we aim to foster agentic institutional change by transforming curricula, pedagogy and student and staff experiences in ways that are critical shifts still needed across Aotearoa New Zealand's higher education settings (Came et al., 2020). The Education and Training Act 2020 articulates the ethical and legal responsibility of the education sector to honour Te Tiriti. Specifically, Section 281 (1)(b) of the Education and Training Act (2020) requires tertiary councils 'to acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti'. This article discusses efforts underway in Massey University's College of Health to align its core learning and teaching practices with Te Tiriti commitments – through curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and professional development and delivery for all its teaching staff.

*Mātai Ako* is one of five key initiatives manifesting our College of Health approach to Massey University's broader Kaiārahi Tiriti project. As a major strategic priority, *Mātai Ako* involves building staff understanding, confidence and capability to embed Te Tiriti-led ideas within learning, teaching and graduate outcomes. This aims to equip graduates across health disciplines as future professionals able to enact Te Tiriti-led practice, as increasingly expected by government policy directions for the education and health sectors. Drawing on key documents, including Te Tiriti itself, the Education and Training Act 2020, and Massey University's strategy and policies, we present the rationale, approach, and initial outcomes of the *Mātai Ako* initiative. We demonstrate a practical model for advancing institutional Te Tiriti capabilities, helping inform other tertiary providers working to meaningfully honour Te Tiriti obligations within a Western academic setting.

As authors of this article, we acknowledge the importance of positioning ourselves in relation to this work. Our writing team comprises members who identify as Māori, Pākehā and Tauīwi, reflecting the collaborative and cross-cultural nature of our work. The broader Kaiārahi project from which *Mātai Ako* emerges is led by the Pūkenga Tiriti at Massey University, situated within the Office of the DVC Māori. While the majority of Kaiārahi Tiriti across the university are Tāngata Whenua, the team also includes Tāngata Tiriti (Pākehā, Tāngata Moana, and

Tauīwi). Our diverse backgrounds inform our approach, bringing together multiple perspectives while remaining grounded in a commitment to uphold Te Tiriti obligations within our institutional context. We recognise that our positions as academic and professional staff within a Western University system influence how we engage with this work, and we remain mindful of both the responsibilities and limitations that this entails.

Our practice described in this article is informed by several interconnected theoretical frameworks that guide our approach to Te Tiriti within the university context. Central to our practice is a Te Tiriti-based framework that centres Māori sovereignty and Indigenous rights, recognising the foundational role of Te Tiriti in establishing a relationship where power is shared while preserving distinct status and positions (Waitangi Tribunal, 2014). Our approach is further grounded in critical pedagogy, which acknowledges power relations in educational settings and conceptualises education as a site for transformative action (see Freire, 1970/1996). This aligns with our goal of developing critical consciousness among staff and students regarding Te Tiriti responsibilities. Additionally, we draw on decolonial approaches that seek to transform institutional structures, challenging Western academic models while creating space for Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being (see Smith, 1997, 2012; V. M. H. Tawhai, 2020). These theoretical perspectives collectively inform the development of the Mātai Ako initiative and the broader Kaiārahi Tiriti project, shaping how we design learning experiences, develop curricula, and engage with Māori and non-Māori in this work. Our practice is also aligned with international frameworks, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), which affirms in Article 14 that ‘Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning’ (p. 13).

## Te tiriti o Waitangi and policy context

Te Tiriti o Waitangi, signed in 1840 between rangatira Māori (chiefs) and representatives of the British Crown, is a foundational constitutional document in Aotearoa New Zealand. Before Te Tiriti, Māori exercised tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) as autonomous iwi (tribe) and hapū over their lands and people. However, with the acceleration of European settlement, tensions emerged over land and resources. While Te Tiriti is generally considered a document created partly to protect Māori interests, it also gave the British Crown a form of authority to manage British subjects due to the rapid colonial expansion of British settlement (Waitangi Tribunal, 2014). In this respect, Te Tiriti signifies the Crown’s authority over British subjects rather than the common misinterpretation that Māori ceded sovereignty. As Kaiārahi Tiriti at Massey University, we affirm that Māori never ceded sovereignty when Te Tiriti was signed. A fairer representation is that our rangatira fiercely rejected the notion of colonial nation-making assimilation and viewed it merely as a treaty of cessation that promised the retention of independent and autonomous citizenship. In this light, Te Tiriti represented a relationship where the Crown and Māori would share power while preserving their distinct status and positions.

Te Tiriti, written in te reo Māori, and the Treaty of Waitangi, an English language text, differ significantly in their wording, intent, and interpretation. The *contra proferentem* principle states that if there is any uncertainty or ambiguity in a document, it should be understood in a way that is not favourable to the party who wrote or proposed that part of the document (Waitangi Tribunal, 2015). Aligning with international law and Waitangi Tribunal rulings, Massey University gives precedence to Te Tiriti as the version signed by most rangatira Māori (Massey University, 2023). While several significant inconsistencies exist between the four articles of the Māori and English texts, there is a general agreement that both outline a set of provisions forming the basis of an intended partnership. Over time, higher-level principles have been developed, partly to bridge textual differences and encapsulate Te Tiriti's underlying spirit of partnership. However, contemporary principles should remain anchored to the specific articles and terms within Te Tiriti itself.

While Te Tiriti promised to guarantee Māori rangatiratanga over their lands and treasures, these assurances have been repeatedly violated since its inception, resulting in extensive land alienation and rights violations. The consistent abrogation of Te Tiriti's inherent principles and provisions has produced enduring inequities between Māori and Pākehā (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019; Waitangi Tribunal, 2019). This remains a damning legacy of our colonial history and complex relationship with the British Crown. For this reason, among others, we contend that the treaty principles must be continuously re-examined (see The Report on the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, Waitangi Tribunal report, 2023, p. 18) if indeed the 'spirit' of partnership and good faith underpinning Te Tiriti is to serve as an applied diplomatic and political instrument. The aspirational vision at Te Tiriti's core continues to shape efforts to build a just and equitable Aotearoa New Zealand. At Massey University, we aim to honour Te Tiriti by aligning strategies and actions with the provisions and principles. This approach enables a deeper commitment to Te Tiriti's fundamental purpose.

## The education and training act 2020

The Education and Training Act 2020 has undergone significant revisions, including a new section that recognises the Crown's responsibilities to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Education and Training Act 2020, s. 9). This articulates the Crown's duties as a treaty partner to actively promote and protect Te Tiriti rights and develop educational settings that respectfully reflect the Māori-Crown relationships. These changes strengthen the education system's obligations in two key ways. First, they consolidate the main treaty provisions into one location, clarifying responsibilities for the sector. Outlining the key provisions within the Act demonstrates the Crown's duty to give effect to Te Tiriti across the education sector. Second, the language shifts from a vague requirement to 'acknowledge' Te Tiriti towards terms like 'honouring' and 'giving effect'. This heightens the imperative for deliberate, dedicated policies and practices realising Te Tiriti. The Act outlines provisions that must translate from rhetoric into action if Te Tiriti is to be meaningfully upheld.

## Institutional approach to Te Tiriti o waitangi

Massey University recognises the paramount importance of honouring Te Tiriti across all aspects of the institution. As the foundation for our future direction, Te Tiriti and its associated principles are reflected across all of Massey University's four pou (strategic pillars) (Massey University, 2021a): Pou Tangata (People), Pou Rangahau (Research), Pou Ako (Learning and Teaching), and Pou Hono (Connection). The strategy states:

As a Tiriti-led University, we are committed to demonstrating authentic leadership in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand as we uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of our nation, and its principles through our practice. We see this as a critical requirement to advance more inclusive and socially progressive outcomes for Aotearoa New Zealand. We will achieve this by providing well-resourced Te Tiriti education, including research, teaching and collaborations that emphasise Te Tiriti-informed partnerships. This will support staff in implementing practices that reflect these responsibilities and ultimately benefit our students, who will graduate with an enhanced knowledge, understanding and awareness of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its place in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. This will also enable university governance models, policies, procedures, and regulations to be developed in accordance with our Te Tiriti responsibilities. (Massey University, 2021a, p. 6)

The university's Te Tiriti o Waitangi policy (Massey University, 2023) provides a comprehensive framework that guides the implementation of Te Tiriti principles and provisions across all university functions. The policy explicitly articulates five key provisions drawn from Te Tiriti articles and their associated principles, with direct applications for teaching and learning (Massey University, 2023):

- (1) Kāwanatanga (Article 1): The principles of good governance, fiduciary duty, and partnership are expressed through 'giving effect to Te Tiriti through the design and content of our curricula, pedagogies, and academic decision-making, and teaching and learning approaches, regulations, and procedures' (p. 6). The policy commits to 'decision-making, funding and resource allocation cognisant of Māori development goals as determined by Māori' (p. 2) in teaching and learning contexts. It emphasises partnerships with specific iwi for each campus to inform educational approaches.
- (2) Tino rangatiratanga (Article 2): The principles of Māori authority, autonomy and self-determination are upheld through 'recognition of the right, and support of, Māori to determine, represent and advance Māori development goals, priorities, needs and aspirations both at and through the work of the University' (p. 3). The policy supports the 'ongoing development of Māori leadership and expertise at and through the work of the University, for the greater realisation of Māori self-determination' (p. 3), which includes teaching and curriculum leadership.
- (3) Taonga (Article 2): The principles of active protection and development are enacted through 'recognition of, and provisions for, the right of Māori learners to access taonga Māori as valued and everyday aspects of teaching, learning, research, and life at the University' (p. 3). The policy commits explicitly to 'efforts to actively restore, revitalise and protect' taonga Māori, including mātauranga Māori and ako Māori in teaching practices (p. 3).

- (4) Ngā tikanga katoa rite tahi (Article 3): The principles of access, participation, options, equity and equal outcomes are advanced through ‘ongoing provision of and investment in kaupapa Māori pathways of study’ (p. 3) and ‘ongoing provision of, and investment in, and exploration of practices, services, initiatives and activities known to improve tertiary outcomes for Māori learners’ (p. 4).
- (5) Te ritenga Māori (Article 4): The principle of honouring Māori cultural-spiritual values and practices is upheld through ‘recognition of the centrality of Māori philosophies and worldviews’ (p. 4) to inform teaching approaches education and a commitment to ‘nurture the wellbeing and potential of Māori learners throughout all aspects of university life’ (p. 4).

The policy assigns responsibility for implementing these commitments to all leaders and managers of the University, requiring that Te Tiriti initiatives be ‘accounted for in their annual planning and reporting’ (p. 4). This creates a clear accountability framework for ensuring that strategic aspirations translate into concrete actions across all levels of the institution.

In learning and teaching, these strategic aspirations are operationalised through Paerangi, the university’s learning and teaching plan (Massey University, 2021b) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi policy (Massey University, 2023). Paerangi translates Massey University’s commitment to being a Te Tiriti-led university into concrete actions with specific timeframes and assigned responsibilities. As Paerangi states: “As a Tiriti-led university, we will enable the determination of Māori-led aspirations, the active use of te reo Māori, the vitality and wellbeing of all people and our environment in order to give full and authentic expression to the eminence of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Massey University, 2021b, p. 2). Paerangi established a clear implementation framework with specific actions assigned to designated university roles and timeframes. For example, by the end of 2020, leaders were tasked to ‘consult and collaborate in partnership with Māori to guide course and programme development’ (Massey University, 2021b, p. 16). Similarly, university leaders were assigned the responsibility to invest in a new integrated professional development programme focused explicitly on being “Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led by the end of 2020 (Massey University, 2021b, p. 22).

Together, Massey University’s Strategy, Paerangi Learning and Teaching Plan, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi Policy establish a comprehensive framework that guides the implementation of Te Tiriti in teaching and learning. These documents not only articulate the aspirational goals but also assign specific responsibilities, establish clear timeframes, and allocate resources to ensure meaningful progress towards becoming a Te Tiriti-led university.

By embedding Te Tiriti across multiple domains, Massey University aims to fulfil its obligations to Māori and empower staff and students to understand Te Tiriti’s relevance. This multi-level approach aims to honour the Te Tiriti covenant throughout the institution.

### **Massey University graduate profile**

Massey University’s commitment to Te Tiriti spans strategic priorities and operational practices. This is evident in efforts to ground curricula, pedagogy, and assessment in

Te Tiriti. This approach is embodied in Massey University's Graduate Profile, which states that all graduates will understand Te Tiriti while knowing how to apply their learning: 'Our graduates have an enhanced level of understanding and awareness of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its place in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand and know how to incorporate this into their professional practice' (Massey University, nd, para 1).

This explicit commitment to Te Tiriti understanding and application aligns with a growing global movement to embed Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within higher education graduate outcomes. Graduate profiles represent a university's formal declaration of the qualities, skills, and understandings students should develop during their studies (Wong et al., 2022). These statements serve as public commitments and curriculum design frameworks that signal institutional values and priorities. The inclusion of Te Tiriti understandings as a core attribute for all Massey University graduates reflects what Stein and Andreotti (2016) describe as moving beyond superficial inclusion approaches towards more substantive engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems. In the graduate profile, Massey University positions Te Tiriti as fundamental to professional competence across disciplines. While many universities internationally have incorporated cultural competence or Indigenous knowledge awareness into learning (Kruse et al., 2018), Massey University's approach is distinctive in establishing a specific Te Tiriti-based obligation and relationship as foundational to graduate capabilities. This creates what Jones (2009) describes as a contextualised rather than generic graduate attribute – one that gains meaning through its specific social, cultural and disciplinary contexts. Massey University's graduate profile links high-level strategy to curriculum documents and programme objectives, expecting students to complete their qualifications with the knowledge and skills to enact Te Tiriti in their work and communities. Achieving this requires creating learning opportunities for students to actively build an understanding of Te Tiriti, its history and development, and its implications. This connects to what Oliver and Jorre de St Jorre (2018) describe as assurance of learning – ensuring that graduate attributes are meaningfully developed and assessed rather than merely proclaimed. The profile then serves as a mechanism for accountability and curriculum alignment.

### **Te tiriti o Waitangi in teaching and learning**

The practical application of Te Tiriti in learning and teaching contexts requires thoughtful translation of high-level strategic commitments into everyday educational practices. He Mahinga Tiriti (R. Tawhai, 2021) was developed as a framework to support this translation, connecting key provisions and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi with tangible applications in curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and assessment practices. Developed through collaborative engagement with Māori expertise across the university, this framework offers staff contextual guidance on embedding Te Tiriti o Waitangi within their specific disciplinary areas. [Table 1](#) outlines these connections between Te Tiriti o Waitangi provisions, principles and their practical applications in teaching and learning environments.

**Table 1.** He mahinga Te tiriti (R. Tawhai, 2021).

| Article | Provision  | Principle  | Application in learning and teaching   |
|---------|--|--|--|
| 1       | Kāwanatanga  | Good governance and partnership                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider obligations to Māori. For example, how does this course progress Māori aspirations in tertiary education? Reflect this in course content.</li> <li>● Engage Māori expertise from in the discipline to advise on content development.</li> <li>● Commit resources to engaging Māori expertise and developing necessary content.</li> <li>● Ensure content is balanced, strengths-based and appropriate for Māori and non-Māori.</li> </ul>  |
| 2       | Tino rangatiratanga  | Māori autonomy<br>Self-determination<br>Partnerships         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acknowledge and protect authority of Māori to decide on and determine appropriate Māori content.</li> <li>● Incorporate Māori aspirations for content, as identified through relationships and plans.</li> <li>● Consider and include the views of Māori collectives at Massey on course content.</li> <li>● Contribute to research and teaching to advance positive outcomes for whānau, hapū, and iwi.</li> <li>● Promote Aotearoa contexts and focus on improving the experience of individuals and local communities.</li> </ul>  |
| 2       | Taonga<br>Active protection of treasures                                     | Active protection<br>Development                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Commit to embedding content that positively reflects Māori knowledge, values, perspectives and aspirations.</li> <li>● Include course content by Māori and Indigenous authors.</li> <li>● Ensure research from non-Indigenous authors who engage with mātauranga Māori is properly vetted by appropriate Māori expertise before selecting their work.</li> <li>● Actively promote the use of te reo Māori, as aligned with Massey University's Matua Reo Kaupapa – Māori Language Policy.</li> </ul>  |
| 3       | Ngā tikanga katoa rite tahi<br>Access, participation, equity, equal outcomes | Access, participation<br>Options<br>Equity<br>Equal outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate student-focused learning experiences and provide opportunities for self-directed learning and research aligned with students' knowledge aspirations.</li> <li>● Recognise diverse student realities and commitments outside study that may limit capacity. Allow time to learn new technologies.</li> <li>● Embed content that genuinely reflects Māori cultural experiences and knowledges.</li> <li>● Design course sites that promote equity, considering student accessibility to internet and materials.</li> <li>● Encourage but consider costs of hui ā-kānohi (face-to-face meetings). Facilitate remote participation when possible.</li> <li>● Provide advanced tutorials for excelling students and remedial help for those who are not yet on track with their learning. Offer opportunities for students who wish to deepen their understanding further.</li> </ul> |
| 4       | Ngā whakapono katoa, ngā ritenga Māori<br>Māori spiritual values and customs | Honouring Māori<br>spiritual values and practices            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include strength-based Māori resources that demonstrate and celebrate success.</li> <li>● Use respectful language to describe Māori systems of understanding, and avoid othering terms.</li> <li>● Co-design with affected communities on appropriately addressing difficult subjects such as racism or trauma. Provide warnings and lead-in to minimise harm.</li> </ul>   |

## The kaiārahi tiriti project

The University-wide Kaiārahi Tiriti Project aims to build staff capabilities to advance Massey University's Te Tiriti commitments. Building on existing efforts by the Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori, it provides targeted support for the distinct teaching, research, and support needs of diverse academic and service units. Kaiārahi Tiriti teams in each college and service area focus on discipline-specific requirements for teaching, research and student support. The kaiārahi teams provide professional development, assist with integrating treaty principles into curricula and pedagogy, offer research advice on Te Tiriti-focused scholarship, and support student recruitment, retention and achievement initiatives. The project facilitates staff to enact Te Tiriti responsibilities in ways that suit their context.

The Kaiārahi Tiriti role requires specific skills to support this work effectively. Through our experience, effective Kaiārahi Tiriti demonstrate several key capabilities. Deep knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including historical context, provisions, principles, and contemporary applications within higher education settings, is fundamental. Equally important are strong reflective praxis (theory and practice) and clear positionality – understanding one's relationship to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and how this informs one's approach to the work. Cultural competence and pedagogical versatility enable Kaiārahi to work effectively with both Māori and non-Māori colleagues, adapting approaches to diverse starting points and learning needs. Advanced facilitation skills are essential for navigating complex conversations about colonisation, sovereignty, and institutional change, including the ability to work constructively with resistance, strong emotions, and varying levels of understanding. Curriculum expertise allows Kaiārahi Tiriti to translate Te Tiriti provisions and principles into discipline-specific contexts and learning outcomes. Relationship-building capabilities foster support networks and connect staff with appropriate resources and communities of practice. These relationships are grounded in an ethic of care that centres aroha and openness. Kaiārahi Tiriti bring a relational presence, meeting colleagues where they are and develop trust and safety. Additionally, change management skills help colleagues move from theoretical understanding to applied practice within their teaching, research, and service roles. To develop these capabilities, Massey University provides structured professional development through the Kaiārahi Tiriti programme, which includes wānanga on Te Tiriti o Waitangi praxis, curricula, pedagogy, and ongoing support systems. This investment in Kaiārahi Tiriti capability building is essential for institutions committed to authentic Te Tiriti o Waitangi implementation.

The College of Health has established a Kaiārahi Tiriti team, releasing three members from 0.2FTE of current duties to serve as dedicated Te Tiriti leaders. Alongside university-wide priorities, the College of Health Kaiārahi Tiriti team formulated five key priority areas of focus (mentioned earlier). These focus areas are:

- (1) Mahi Tahi: Shared understanding of Te Tiriti in the College of Health.
- (2) Whakatipuranga: Te Tiriti-led research supervision in the College of Health.
- (3) He Ara Tika: College of Health ethics review process.
- (4) Te Tūāpapa: College of Health Te Tiriti Statement of Commitment and;
- (5) Mātai Ako: Te Tiriti-led learning and teaching in the College of Health.

## The mātai ako initiative

The Mātai Ako initiative aims to enhance staff competency in Te Tiriti-led teaching and learning within the College of Health. The term *Mātai Ako* integrates two key concepts – Mātai, meaning ‘to inspect, examine, investigate, scan, observe, note’ (Te Aka, n.d.-a), and also denoting a ‘field of study’, and Ako, meaning ‘to learn, study, instruct, teach, advise’ (Te Aka, n.d.-b). Together, Mātai Ako encompasses the intent of teaching and learning grounded in a Te Tiriti perspective, including integrating Māori pedagogies and reviewing curricula to normalise the College of Health’s commitment to Te Tiriti. This builds on early work by the College of Health to incorporate mātauranga Māori into curricula, such as the Master of Public Health. This involved incorporating Māori knowledge, values, and belief systems into the design and implementation of the curriculum (Severinsen et al., 2023). Mātai Ako further develops staff capabilities to meaningfully interweave understandings and perspectives flowing from Te Tiriti throughout learning and teaching practices across programmes (see Table 2).

Mātai Ako employs four key actions. Firstly, a dedicated Te Tiriti online resource to facilitate self-directed staff learning on foundational knowledge. The resource guides learners through the history, context, intentions and implications of Te Tiriti for teaching and research. Staff across the University possess varying levels of confidence and experience with Te Tiriti. The asynchronous, self-access nature of the online learning environment allows people to engage with resources at their own pace and level of comfort while engaging in active online learning (Ng, 2015). Using an online LMS (learning management system) also allows learners ubiquitous access to resources they can engage with as and when they have the capacity (Haniya & Rusch, 2017) and return to as often as they need. The online resource allows staff to interact as a community of learners (de Lima et al., 2019; Fehrman & Watson, 2020; Garrison et al., 2010) to share ideas of how these might be practically realised in various areas of the institution, including across different subject areas, co-creating solutions in relation to their specific contexts. The learning resource focuses on applying learning about Te Tiriti in the authentic and meaningful context of one’s professional output (Herrington et al., 2014) and enacted within their communities of practice (Wilson & Meyers, 2000) where co-creating ways to apply Te Tiriti allows individual learners to benefit from the contributions of other learners (Mayes, 2019). Secondly, kaiārahi facilitate teaching and learning wānanga for staff to

**Table 2.** Mātai Ako: Te Tiriti-led learning and teaching in the college of health.

| Goal   | Actions   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Develop College of Health staff competency in Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led teaching and learning | Co-creating shared understandings of Te Tiriti-led teaching and learning practice | 1. Kaiārahi Tiriti Aspirations staff Stream site<br>2. Teaching and learning wānanga for the College of Health staff  |
|  | Embedding Māori pedagogy in courses   | 3. Kaiārahi provide support to the College of Health teaching staff on the implementation of the Whakapiri pedagogical framework in courses   |
|  | Aligning curricula to Te Tiriti o Waitangi  | 4. Kaiārahi review College of Health courses to evaluate the integration of Te Tiriti, hauora Māori, and Indigenous health in course prescriptions, learning outcomes and graduate attributes |

develop practical skills in Te Tiriti pedagogy. These have covered te reo Māori, foundations and application of Māori pedagogies, and Te Tiriti-aligned course design. Thirdly, specialist teaching guidance from kaiārahi supports the effective implementation of Māori pedagogical approaches, such as the Whakapiri engagement model (Moriarty et al., 2022). Fourthly, a formal review of existing course prescriptions, learning outcomes, and graduate attributes related to hauora Māori and Te Tiriti will ensure alignment with Te Tiriti goals. Through online resourcing and wānanga, pedagogical mentoring, and curriculum review, Mātai Ako focuses on enriching staff confidence and competence. This aims to catalyse meaningful, authentic, relevant learning experiences that align with the University’s Te Tiriti responsibilities.

### Course review

The Mātai Ako initiative will review all courses within the College of Health from the Schools of Health Sciences, Social Work, Sport and Exercise, and Nursing. The preliminary analysis will involve three steps:

- Examine whether the course prescription and learning outcomes currently reference Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori knowledge, Indigenous peoples, or related concepts.
- Assess the scope to incorporate or enhance these elements within the course.
- For courses with gaps, co-develop revised learning outcomes aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi in collaboration with Māori academics, stakeholders, and learning advisors.

This review will identify courses integrating Te Tiriti and mātauranga Māori and opportunities to strengthen alignment across other courses (see Table 3). By taking a systematic approach to analysing and revising curricula, the Mātai Ako initiative will enable movement towards the university’s commitment. The review process draws on internal expertise while providing staff guidance to develop courses and programmes that honour Te Tiriti.

**Table 3.** Examples of course learning outcome amendments.

| Course   | Original learning outcomes  | Amended learning outcomes   |
|--|---|---|
| 231107 Social Determinants of Health                 | 2. Describe the impact of social determinants on health outcomes and health inequalities.                     | 2. Discuss social determinants in relation to health outcomes, health inequities and Te Tiriti o Waitangi   |
| 250205 Principles and Practice of Epidemiology (TBC) | None  | Discuss Māori and Indigenous perspectives in epidemiology, including how data is collected, analysed, interpreted and translated (New learning outcome) |
| 147317 Disability in Society                         | None  | 5. Analyse intersections of disability, ethnicity, and culture in Aotearoa New Zealand and the role of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.                            |
| 231818 Public Health Praxis                          | None  | 3. Critically reflect on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its relevance to public health practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.                                      |
| 231106 Introduction to Public Health                 | 6. Describe the relevance of the Treaty of Waitangi to the practice of public health in Aotearoa/New Zealand. | 2. Examine the role of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in public health practice.  |

## Discussion

### *Progress and collaborative approaches*

The Mātai Ako initiative shows promise for progressing Te Tiriti-led learning and teaching within the College of Health, albeit with more work ahead. Sustained collective effort will be imperative to build shared understandings, foster institutional change, and uphold responsibilities to Māori students and communities. The coordinated focus on capability building and curriculum review has established a platform, but momentum must continue across the College. Efforts thus far have included facilitating wānanga to grow staff fluency, collaborating with course coordinators to utilise Māori pedagogies, and embedding Te Tiriti in course prescriptions and learning outcomes. These collaborations have increased understanding, initiated pedagogical shifts, and identified the next steps for deeper integration. Our approach aligns with transformative praxis in Indigenous education, where institutional change requires both structural modifications and shifts in understanding (reference). Our experiences reinforce that meaningful embedding of Indigenous knowledge and approaches requires sustained, deliberate effort across multiple institutional levels, alongside dedicated resources and cultural capability building among staff.

The Kaiārahi Tiriti space invites open, constructive challenges as we collectively navigate new understandings. Embracing this wero (challenge) will enrich our knowledge and strengthen relationships through respectful listening and shared learning. Together, we can foster a deeper appreciation for Te Tiriti and its significance in shaping our shared future. This collaborative approach reflects what Jones (2012) describes as ‘working the hyphen’ at the Māori-Pākehā cultural interface, acknowledging that this space of engagement contains both tension and possibility. This space requires careful negotiation of power dynamics and recognition of Indigenous autonomy over knowledge.

### *Challenges in Te Tiriti work*

Engaging deeply with Te Tiriti can be an emotional and challenging undertaking for Pākehā, Tauīwi and Māori, albeit for different reasons. For Māori, exploring Te Tiriti can elicit a mixture of emotions, including anger, grief, frustration, and hope, as it highlights the ongoing journey for tino rangatiratanga and the restoration of rights. For non-Māori, examining the complexities of Te Tiriti and its history and significance often elicits discomfort as it reveals the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation in Aotearoa (Hotere-Barnes, 2015). It should challenge deeply held beliefs, privileges, and preconceptions, but this discomfort can signal growth as Pākehā, Tauīwi, and Māori gain awareness. This discomfort signals the potential for growth if non-Māori can remain open, making space for Māori voices without becoming defensive. Authentic Te Tiriti praxis requires sitting with unease to build awareness and systemic change (Came et al., 2020). A cautious, staged approach is essential to ensure the understanding, capacity, and capability required to teach Te Tiriti content appropriately. Moving too quickly risks superficial implementation lacking meaning. Staff confidence and skills will grow with time and experience. Sustaining momentum will require challenging systemic barriers,

making space for self-reflection, and communicating openly about the journey (Came et al., 2020; Hotere-Barnes, 2015).

### *Institutional scope and curriculum redevelopment*

In this spirit, the Mātai Ako initiative gains strength by being situated within a broader university-wide strategy and programme of work. Support from senior leadership and targeted resourcing enables progress. The wider Kaiārahi Tiriti project builds crucial collective capability building across functions while backing initiatives like Mātai Ako. Though local action is vital, institutional alignment signals that this is no isolated project but part of a comprehensive effort to honour Te Tiriti. Backing across leadership levels demonstrates serious intent to realise change, and this momentum and consistency of messaging help sustain the journey. This institutional approach in honouring Te Tiriti, specifically the importance of strategic alignment and strong leadership support, is a critical success factor.

The Mātai Ako initiative moves away from siloed inclusion of Māori content, offering a pathway for integrated, scaffolded learning about Te Tiriti (Coombe et al., 2017). It takes a collaborative, mapped approach to embedding Te Tiriti within curricula. Learning outcomes will be co-developed with course coordinators and stakeholders to align with relevant sector competencies. This will equip graduates with the knowledge and skills needed for Te Tiriti-based practice in their discipline. Rather than limiting Te Tiriti education to stand-alone lectures, a coordinated curriculum enables students to progressively build Te Tiriti knowledge and skills. This signals a shift from superficial additions towards decolonisation and Indigenisation of programmes (Severinsen et al., 2021). By reviewing and formally embedding Te Tiriti outcomes across qualifications, Mātai Ako can also meet rising sector expectations. Even where Te Tiriti content already features, explicitly outlining enduring learning experiences situates Te Tiriti understanding as essential. Mapping learning outcomes promotes cohesion for engaging with treaty histories, provisions, principles and implications. Students can develop conceptual understandings and applied competencies within their discipline as they advance through their studies, anchored by mātauranga Māori. This integrated approach allows learners to experience Te Tiriti learning throughout their core learning. Embedding opportunities to engage with Te Tiriti across core curricula is key to actualising the Graduate Profile, equipping students to address health inequities and work with Māori communities as a basic expectation.

### *Sustaining transformation*

Ongoing wānanga and up-to-date resources are vital for building staff capability and enriching understanding of Te Tiriti over time. As understandings of the Te Tiriti evolve, the staff online site and regular wānanga will support staff to remain current. It is crucial that Te Tiriti learning does not remain static but reflects new insights and centres Māori voices. By making space for sustained engagement, the College of Health can nurture a culture where Te Tiriti is embraced as an ongoing journey rather than a one-off compliance exercise. Providing collaborative spaces to learn, discuss and deepen understanding collectively over time is essential to building authentic Te Tiriti partnerships.

Ultimately, realising Te Tiriti aspirations within health education necessitates long-term, concerted transformation across multiple domains to create structural and systemic change and recentre mātauranga Māori and Te Tiriti. Our experience with Mātai Ako illustrates both the possibilities and challenges of this work, offering insights for other institutions undertaking similar journeys towards honouring Indigenous rights and knowledge systems within higher education contexts.

## Conclusion

The experiences and insights that we have shared aim to encourage and guide the Te Tiriti-inspired efforts of many others seeking transformative change. Using Te Tiriti as an orienting framework, our work aims to enable staff and students to embrace mātauranga Māori and culture, actively engage with Māori as Tangata Whenua, and recognise their evolving relationship with Te Tiriti. This will support both Māori and non-Māori to reflect on Te Tiriti, whether as Tangata Whenua or Tangata Tiriti. Fundamentally, Te Tiriti presents a beautiful invitation to collectively create a renewed vision for Aotearoa based on Te Tiriti. Rather than viewing Te Tiriti obligations as a burden, this framing highlights the exciting potential Te Tiriti offers if we approach it with open and creative minds. The journey ahead requires continued courage.

We strive to align teaching and learning practices with Te Tiriti's ethos of relationships, rangatiratanga, and equity. This approach aims to enhance pedagogy, equip students with competencies to apply Te Tiriti in their future work and enable meaningful engagement with Māori communities. It is important to emphasise the broader benefits this journey offers everyone. Engaging with our collective history provides opportunities to address the ongoing impacts of intergenerational colonial trauma. Building shared understandings creates pathways towards healing and reconciliation that will allow all of Aotearoa to move forward. This work is worthwhile but holds inherent value in understanding who we are, where we have come from, and who we want to be together. Te Tiriti provides a framework for that collaborative way forward.

## Disclosure statement

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## Glossary of Māori terms

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| hapū              | subtribe   |
| hauora            | health and wellbeing                               |
| Hui ā-kānohi      | face-to-face meeting                               |
| iwi               | tribe  |
| kaiārahi          | leader, guide                                      |
| kāwangatanga      | governorship                                       |
| Māori             | Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand         |
| appendixMātai ako | learning and teaching from a Te Tiriti perspective |
| mātauranga Māori  | Māori knowledge systems                            |
| Pākehā            | New Zealander of European settler descent          |

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| pou                  | pillar  |
| rangatira            | chief   |
| rangatiratanga       | self-determination  |
| Tangata Whenua       | People of the land  |
| Tangata Tiriti       | People of the Tiriti  |
| taonga               | treasure, anything prized   |
| Tauīwi               | Ffrefigner, immigrants  |
| te reo Maori         | Māori language  |
| Te Tiriti o Waitangi | Māori (the Indigenous peoples) have a national treaty negotiated with the colonising British Crown and signed in 1840. The treaty, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, guarantees continued Māori sovereignty, protects Māori interests, promotes Māori wellbeing, and guaranteed the Crown limited governance. |
| tino rangatiratanga  | self-determination, sovereignty   |
| wānanga              | seminar, discussion   |
| wero                 | challenge   |
| whānau               | extended family group   |