



PACIFIC GROWTH PRESENTS

*Pasifika Navigators of Tomorrow*

# RANGATAHI INSIGHTS REPORT

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*What our rangatahi told us about their dreams and what is standing in the way.*

Careers Expo 2026 • Mercury Baypark Stadium • 23 April 2026

Prepared for the Bay of Plenty Pacific Workforce Action Plan



# We acknowledge those who spoke first.

This report is built on the voices of Pacific rangatahi who took the time to write down their dreams and the things in their way at PNOT 2026. Every post-it note is a gift. We treat them with Manaaki, care, respect and gratitude.

This is the philosophy at the centre of Pacific Growth's mahi. The rangatahi who joined us at PNOT 2026 already understand it. Many of them said it themselves, in different words, on yellow and orange paper.

OUR GUIDING  
PROVERB

***“O le tele o sulu, e maua ai  
figota.”***

**Together, we thrive.**

*Samoan*

# Contents at a glance.

0 1

## Introduction

Pacific people in the Bay of Plenty and why this work matters now.

0 2

## About Pacific Growth

Who we are, our vision and our three pillars.

0 3

## Our Approach

The PNOT 2026 activity and our thematic-analysis method.

0 4

## Key Insights

Seven themes drawn from the rangatahi voice.

0 5

## Summary

What it all adds up to the seven insights, woven.

0 6

## Recommendations

Six interlocking moves for the BoP Pacific Workforce Action Plan.



S E C T I O N 0 1

# Introduction

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*Pacific people in the Bay of Plenty and why this work matters now.*



# A young, growing Pacific community in a fast-growing region.

The Bay of Plenty is one of Aotearoa's fastest-growing regions. Within it, the Pacific community is one of the youngest population groups present and will provide a disproportionate share of the BoP's future workforce. Representation, however, is not destiny. Pathways from school into sustainable careers are not yet consistently visible, accessible or supported. If our rangatahi are to occupy the seats their numbers warrant, we have to listen, design and act with their voices at the centre.

**334,140**

Bay of Plenty population at the 2023 Census up 8.3% on 2018.

**24.9 yrs**

Median age of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, vs 38.1 yrs for all NZ.

**8.9%**

Share of NZ's population identifying as Pacific in 2023 (442,632 people).

**30.4%**

Of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa are aged under 15, our future workforce.

*The pipeline of workers: clinicians, tradespeople, teachers, leaders, builders and scientists that the BoP will need over the next decade is already in our schools and on our marae. Many are Pacific.*



SECTION 02

# About Pacific Growth

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*Elevating Pacific people and businesses across the Bay of Plenty.*

## WHO WE ARE

# Our vision, mission and the pillars that hold our mahi.



### OUR VISION

*To realise the aspiration of our ancestors for Pacific families living prosperous futures in Aotearoa for generations to come.*

### OUR MISSION

*To become the go-to connector bringing Pacific people, Pacific businesses and key partners together to deliver better economic success for our communities.*

## THE THREE PILLARS

# 01

### Pacific Business

Capability building, strategic networks and access to commercial opportunity for Pacific entrepreneurs and SMEs.

# 02

### Pacific Workforce

OLA Mai internships and emerging workforce-capability mahi, connecting rangatahi to corporate, professional and trades pathways.

# 03

### Housing

Langa Fale and KT3 community-housing programmes that move Pacific families along the housing continuum and build generational wealth.



SECTION 03

# Our Approach

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*How we listened and how we made sense of what we heard.*



# Pasifika Navigators of Tomorrow Careers Expo 2026.

On 23 April 2026, at Mercury Baypark Stadium, Pacific Growth ran an Insights Gathering Activity inside the PNOT Careers Expo. Across the day, our booth captured authentic responses from rangatahi (students).

This report focuses on the rangatahi voice. The two questions posed to Pacific young people, captured on yellow and orange post-it notes across the day.

*Every voice we captured is anonymous, self-selected and was written in the moment. Throughout this report we treat each one as a gift with manaaki.*

## QUESTION 1 — DREAMS

***What work or career do you dream of doing in the future, and why?***

Listening for: aspirations, role models, sectors of interest, motivations.

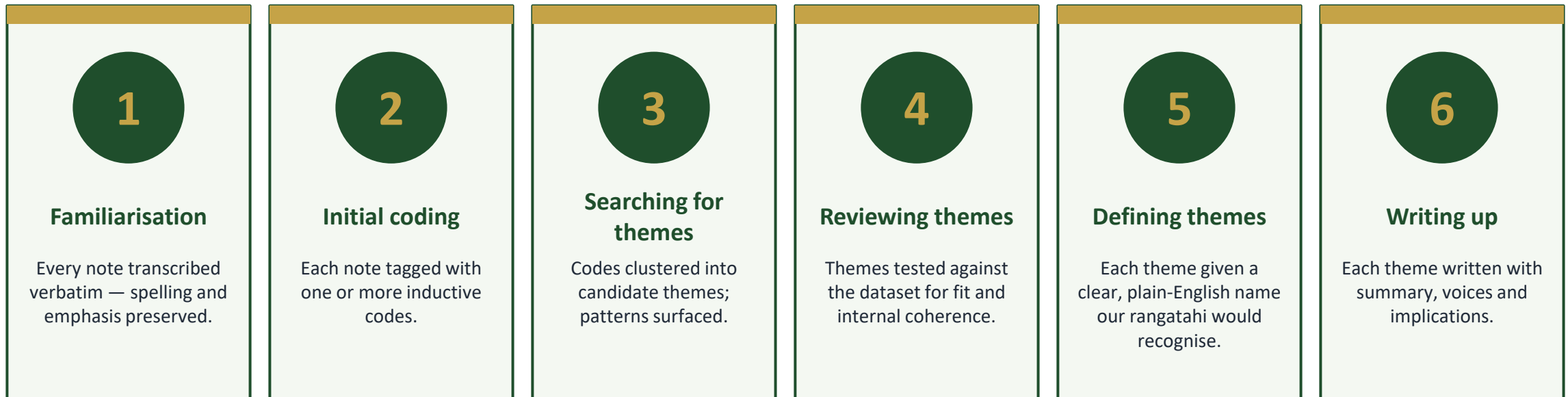
## QUESTION 2 — BARRIERS

***What gets in the way of you achieving your dream career?***

Listening for: financial, structural, internal, family and community-level barriers.

# We used thematic analysis — letting the words shape the categories.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is a flexible qualitative method well-suited to identifying patterns of meaning across short, unstructured responses. It fits the cultural grain of this work, it lets the words of our rangatahi shape the categories rather than forcing their voices into pre-set boxes.



*A note on the voices that follow: the quotes presented in each insight are illustrative composite voices drawn together from multiple post-it notes that shared the same theme and written in language faithful to the cadence and sentiment of what rangatahi actually wrote. They are not single-author quotations.*



SECTION 04

# Key Insights

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*Seven themes drawn from what our rangatahi told us.*

# Pacific rangatahi aspire wide — and they aspire high.

## SUMMARY

There is no single Pacific career story. Across Question 1, rangatahi named over 100 distinct careers, health and care, sport, trades, aviation and travel, business and law, creative arts and media, defence and emergency services, education, science and technology. Aspirations run from cardiothoracic surgeon and lawyer through to hairdresser, builder, pro rugby player and influencer and many sit comfortably at both the professional and trades ends of the same conversation. Any workforce response that privileges only one pathway will leave large portions of our rangatahi behind.

## VOICES

*“I want to be a cardiac surgeon. The kind that fixes hearts. And I want to study at Waikato uni so I'm not too far from home.”*

*“I dream of being a Pasifika teacher. We need more of us in front of the classroom, kids who look like me deserve someone who looks like them.”*

*“Mine's tech and robotics. People don't expect a Pacific kid in that space, that's exactly why I want to be there.”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



**Design a multi-pathway model. Professional, trades, sport-and-service, creative held as equal.**



**Map BoP employer demand to rangatahi interest, prioritising clusters with strong local jobs.**



**Resource the 6–10 year pipelines (surgeon, pilot, lawyer) now not just at the school-leaving moment.**

# Sport, service and storytelling are anchor pathways.

## SUMMARY

Three clusters appeared with disproportionate weight. Professional sport (rugby, NBA/NRL, MMA, boxing). Uniformed and emergency service (army, navy, defence, police, firefighter). And creative-expressive work (musician, actor, music producer, influencer, beauty and tattooing). These are the most culturally resonant pathways for many of our rangatahi, sport carries legacy and identity, service carries duty and contribution, and creative work gives Pacific voice and image visibility. They cannot be dismissed as back-up dreams. For many rangatahi, they are the dream and they need real, resourced career bridges, not polite encouragement.

## VOICES

*“Pro rugby, that's the dream. For my family, for my village, for everyone who put me on this pitch.”*

*“I want to join the army and make a difference. Not just be in the army, actually do something with it.”*

*“Music producing for film and media. There's a Pacific story to tell, and I want to be the one putting the sound to it.”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



**Build sport-to-career bridges with regional unions and academies. Pair elite pathways with NCEA, trades and tertiary completion.**



**Treat NZDF, Police and FENZ as a serious pathway pillar, formal partnerships, integrated into OLA Mai.**



**Establish a creative-industries strand, production, beauty, hospitality, digital content, recognised as legitimate Pacific careers.**

# Aspirations are anchored in family and culture.

## SUMMARY

A clear thread runs through every aspiration: career success is rarely framed as individual achievement. Rangatahi tied their dreams to family, community and cultural identity. Being a Pasifika teacher, building houses in Tonga, becoming the greatest Poly doctor, giving back to family. In our context, careers are not just about what an individual will do; they are about what an extended whānau will become. For some, that also means staying close to home, choosing Waikato over Auckland to keep that anchor intact. This is both a powerful asset and a delicate design constraint.

## VOICES

*“Chartered accountant and giving back to my family. They're the reason I'm chasing it. They should feel it when I get there.”*

*“Building houses in Tonga, with all the tools. I want to take my trade home.”*

*“Being one of the greatest Poly doctors in the world. Not just any doctor, a Poly one. There aren't enough of us yet.”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



Engage families as co-decision-makers, information evenings designed with parents, grandparents and aiga in the room.



Privilege regional-first pathways when an equally good route exists in BoP/Waikato, make that the default offer.



Build an explicit “give-back” loop, alumni mentoring next cohorts turns a cultural value into a workforce mechanism.

# Money is the gatekeeper: pervasive, repeated, stacked.

## SUMMARY

If thematic frequency tells us anything, it is this. Money was by far the most repeated single barrier our rangatahi named appearing more than fifteen times, often by itself, sometimes underlined, sometimes circled. Adjacent codes amplify the picture: student loans, financial support, expenses, having no money, too broke, money grades. Money is named as a barrier roughly twice as often as the next most common single barrier. It cuts across every aspiration cluster, the aspiring surgeon and the aspiring rugby player named the same gatekeeper. It is not one barrier among many; it is the precondition that sits underneath all the others.

## VOICES

*“Money. That's it. Money's the thing.”*

*“It's not even one thing, it's money, then student loans, then expenses, then how do I help at home and study at the same time.”*

*“Sometimes I can't focus because I'm thinking about money. How am I supposed to dream when I'm worried about now?”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



**Front-load financial support, every internship, apprenticeship and tertiary placement paid from day one, not as a reward at the end.**



**Build a BoP Pacific Workforce Scholarship Fund co-funded with anchor employers and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples.**



**Embed financial literacy and student-loan navigation into Years 11–13 wraparound and track affordability as a primary outcome.**

# The second wall is internal: confidence, mindset, fear of failure.

## SUMMARY

After money, the next dominant theme is internal. Confidence was repeated half a dozen times. Self-doubt, fear of failure, not believing in myself, not good enough yet, scared to mess up, my mindset, my attitude, worrying about what other people will think these notes appeared again and again, sometimes with the rangatahi writing both the barrier and the antidote on the same piece of paper. These barriers are invisible in academic transcripts and skills audits, but they stop young people cold. Critically, our rangatahi are largely owning these themselves, that ownership is also a powerful asset.

## VOICES

*“Confidence. Fear of failure. That's what gets me not the work, not the school, just me getting in my own way.”*

*“I worry about what other people will think. Even when I know what I want to do, I'm scared to mess it up in front of them.”*

*“I keep telling myself, 'Start believing in yourself.' I wrote it on the same note as 'not believing in myself', both at the same time.”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



Make confidence-building an explicit programme component, extend OLA Manuia upstream into Year 11–12 outreach and downstream into in-placement coaching.



Pair every rangatahi with a Pacific role model, visibility solves a confidence barrier that information cannot.



Train educators and employers in growth-mindset language and normalise wellbeing support through trusted Pacific providers.

# Family is both the anchor and the pull.

## SUMMARY

Family appears on both sides of the conversation. When rangatahi described their dreams, family was the reason they wanted a career to give back, to support, to honour. When they described their barriers, family appeared again as the pull to stay close, the weight of expectation, the responsibility of being the eldest, the difficulty of leaving people you love. This is not a contradiction. It is a single Pacific reality with two faces. Pathways that require extended physical separation from whānau hit a real cultural barrier. Pathways that ignore family entirely will under-deliver.

## VOICES

*“As the eldest, I have responsibilities to help my family. That doesn't disappear just because I want to study somewhere else.”*

*“Going to uni means leaving and I don't want to leave. I don't want to be away from my loved ones, missing home.”*

*“Money's part of it, but it's also the attachment to my whānau. I can't just pack up and go, that's not how we do things.”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



Build the BoP into the centre of the offer and deliver locally where you can; cohort-travel and return-to-region structures where you cannot.



Design eldest-sibling supports flexible scheduling, family income support, sibling care arrangements through partners.



Connect career pathways back to community, alumni networks and give-back programmes close the loop the rangatahi are already asking for.

# The pathway itself is invisible “I don't know what I don't know.”

## SUMMARY

Cutting across the barrier voices is a quieter but pervasive theme: rangatahi don't always know how to get from where they are to where they want to be. Lack of knowledge, no connections, no work experience, limited opportunities, no openings, can't get into the job and one note in particular that captures it perfectly: I'm not in the physics class because I didn't know I needed it to become a doctor. The aspiration was clear long before the route. Even when the dream is named, the pathway is invisible.

## VOICES

*“I didn't know I needed physics. Now I want to be a doctor and I'm not in the class and it's too late to fix it this year.”*

*“It's not that I don't want it. It's that I don't know how to get it. No connections. No work experience. No idea where to start.”*

*“I see what I want, but I can't see the way there.”*

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PLAN



**Publish a co-designed BoP Pacific Pathways Map every priority career traced backwards from destination to Year 9 starting point.**



**Embed Pacific Growth Navigators in priority secondary schools at the choice points (Year 9 subjects, Year 11 NCEA, Year 13 transition).**



**Launch a regional Pacific Workforce Hub for short-term experience, shadows, tasters, holiday work, closing the no-experience gap directly.**



SECTION 05

# Summary & Recommendations

*Seven insights, six moves, what we do next, together.*



# Seven insights, woven.

*Our rangatahi are not lacking ambition. They are clear-eyed, broad-ranging and culturally grounded in their dreams. The barriers they named are stackable, money, self-belief, family pull and pathway invisibility compound. Single-lever interventions will not move the needle.*

**01** Aspire wide and high

**02** Sport, service & storytelling

**03** Anchored in family & culture

**04** Money is the gatekeeper

**05** The internal wall

**06** Family: anchor & pull

**07** Pathway invisibility

*The Pacific Workforce Action Plan must address all four pressure-points together — money, mindset, whānau, and pathway visibility.*

# Six moves to anchor the BoP Pacific Workforce Action Plan.



## RECOMMENDATION 01

### Adopt a multi-pathway architecture

Build the Action Plan around four equal pathways, Professional, Trades & Technical, Sport & Service, and Creative & Hospitality.

*Anchored in: Insights 1, 2*

## RECOMMENDATION 02

### Front-load financial access

Establish a BoP Pacific Workforce Scholarship Fund. Mandate paid components in every placement. Track affordability as an outcome.

*Anchored in: Insight 4*

## RECOMMENDATION 03

### Place a Navigator in every priority school

A trusted Pacific person inside the school at every choice point, Year 9 subjects, Year 11 NCEA, Year 13 transition.

*Anchored in: Insights 3, 5, 6, 7*

## RECOMMENDATION 04

### Build the BoP Pacific Pathways Map

A co-designed, freely accessible map tracing every priority career back to subject prerequisites and Year 9 starting points.

*Anchored in: Insight 7*

## RECOMMENDATION 05

### Activate role-models and alumni

A Pacific Professional Mentor Pool. Every rangatahi within reach of someone who has walked their pathway. Visible give-back loops.

*Anchored in: Insights 3, 5, 6*

## RECOMMENDATION 06

### Design with whānau, not just for rangatahi

Family-centred design across every layer, co-hosted hui, regional-first defaults, eldest-sibling supports, return-to-region structures.

*Anchored in: Insights 3, 6*



## A FINAL WORD

**Our rangatahi were generous with us at PNOT 2026.**

*They handed us their dreams and their fears on yellow and orange paper.*

The least we owe them in return is a Workforce Action Plan that listens —  
and a region that builds the pathways their voices have already mapped.

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*“O le tele o sulu, e maua ai figota” — Together, we thrive.*