



SYNERGIA

Key insights from the Pacific research consultation for Te Ara Paerangi - Future Pathways

Dr Evelyn Marsters

Rosie Hopwood

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the generosity, openness, and honesty of the Pacific researchers who shared their time and experiences during the series of facilitated consultations. The participants were astute and knowledgeable about their experiences, as Pacific peoples, of the Research Science and Innovation (RSI) system. Meitaki maata for sharing your valuable insights to grow the Pacific research workforce and Pacific research excellence.

We would also like to acknowledge the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment Future Pathways team, for placing their trust in us to design and facilitate this consultation process and bring together the key insights into this report.



SYNERGIA

Contents

1. BACKGROUND.....	6
1.1. Consultation design	6
1.2. Overview of consultation and outreach	8
2. TALANOA INSIGHTS.....	10
2.1. Pacific researchers need to see themselves in the RSI system	11
2.2. Develop working definitions of ‘Pacific Research’ and ‘Pacific Researchers’	11
2.3. A Pacific lens needs to be applied to how research impact is acknowledged and celebrated	12
2.4. Position Pacific peoples and their methodologies in all dimensions of the RSI system	13
2.5. The RSI system needs to grow, support, and retain talented Pacific researchers	14
2.6. Reimagine Pacific community members as part of the RSI system	16
2.7. Leverage funding to support Pacific researchers	16
2.8. Explore the opportunity for new institutions within the future RSI system	18
2.9. New approaches to consultation in the future	19
3. RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS.....	20

Acronyms

CRI	Crown Research Institute
CoRE	Centre of Research Excellence
ECR	Early Career Researcher
IRO	Independent Research Organisation
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
PBRF	Performance-Based Research Fund
RSI	Research, Science and Innovation

Glossary

Tagata o le Moana

People of the Pacific

Talanoa

A personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations¹

¹ Vaoleti, T. M. (2006). Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 12.

1. BACKGROUND

In 2021, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) began a multi-year work programme focussed on the future of New Zealand's research, science and innovation (RSI) system. The purpose of this programme is to gather perspectives on the issues facing the RSI system, and, to start conversations about how these issues might be addressed. The programme is guided by the *Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways Green Paper 2021*² and a consultation process which began in late 2021 and concluded in late 2022.

During the analysis of the consultation process, MBIE recognised that the consultation had only captured two substantive submissions³ from Pacific peoples working within the RSI system. As a result, MBIE acknowledged the need to gather perspectives from a broader range of Pacific researchers. Synergia - in association with Dr. Evelyn Marsters from Sound Research - were commissioned to design a targeted consultation which encouraged participation from Pacific researchers and Pacific research users.

1.1. Consultation design

The design of this targeted consultation with Pacific researchers and research users was iterative and co-created between the Te Ara Paerangi team at MBIE and the consultancy team. During the inception phase, the consultation team facilitated a series of workshops with MBIE to explore:

- The limited uptake for participation in the general consultation process amongst Pacific researchers and Pacific research users.
- Using culturally appropriate and contextually relevant engagement processes with Pacific peoples.
- How MBIE can build stronger connections and relationships with Pacific researchers and Pacific research users in the future.

² [Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways Green Paper 2021 \(mbie.govt.nz\)](https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/20877-te-korenga-te-ara-paerangi-future-pathways-green-paper-submission-pdf)

³ Te Korenga – A Research, Science and Innovation System Devoid of Māori and Pacific Genius (Submission by Tagata o le Moana and Māori early career researchers)

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/20877-te-korenga-te-ara-paerangi-future-pathways-green-paper-submission-pdf>

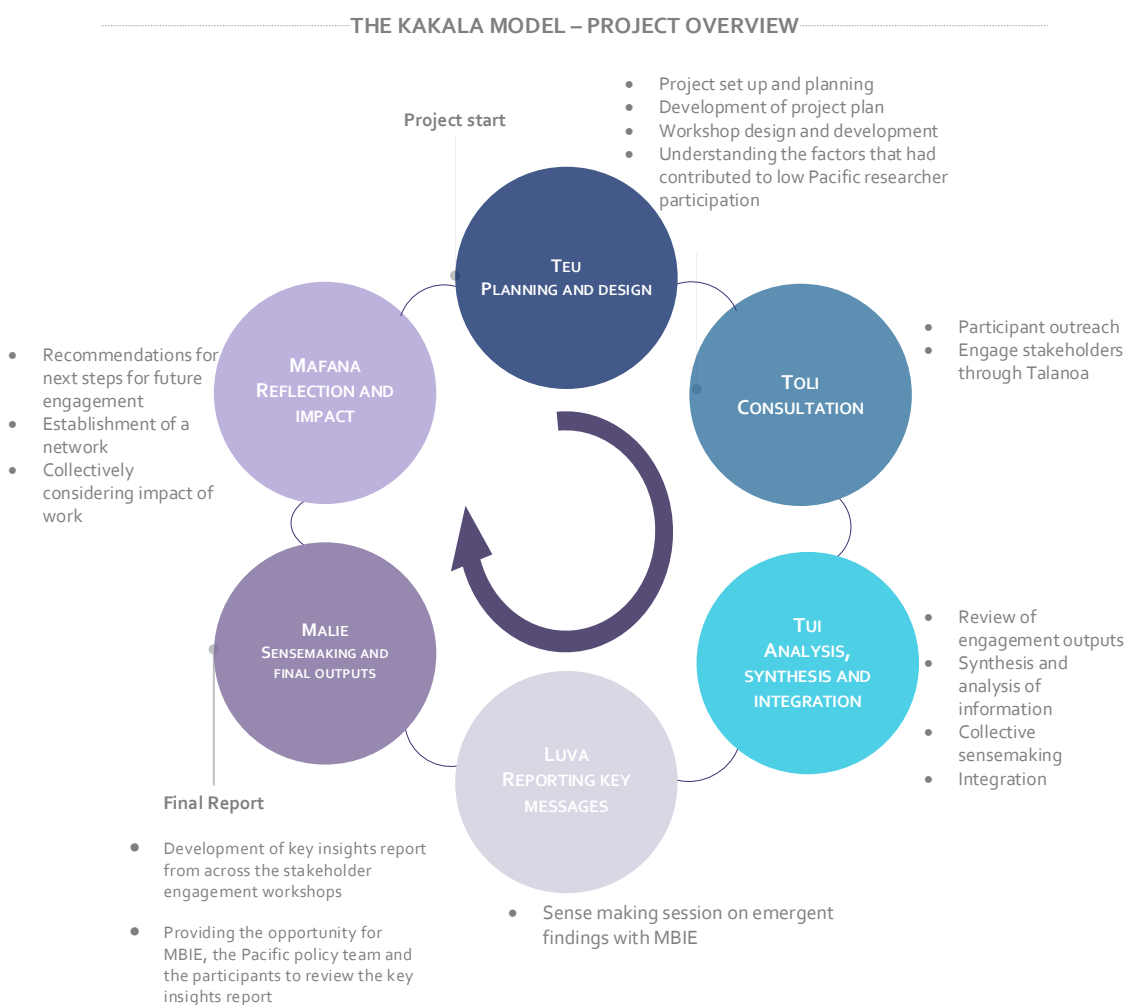
Komiti Pasifika Te Ara Paerangi - Future Pathways Green Paper Submission

<https://www.mbie.govt.nz/science-and-technology/science-and-innovation/research-and-data/te-ara-paerangi-future-pathways/>

Following these initial conversations with MBIE, the consultancy team designed a consultation plan guided by the Kakala Research Framework⁴.

Figure 1 is a simplified visual representation of how the Kakala Research Framework was woven into the consultation approach. The figure also provides a high-level summary of key activities across the consultation.

Figure 1: Overview of activities guided by the Kakala model



⁴ Johansson Fua, Seu'Ula (2014) Kakala Research Framework: A Garland in Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education.

1.2. Overview of consultation and outreach

The participant outreach involved a stakeholder mapping exercise and the creation of a database of Pacific researchers and research users, in universities, CRIs and the private sector. This process [see Figure 2] was led by Dr. Evelyn Marsters, an independent researcher of Cook Islands heritage. Expressions of interest were sought by MBIE through email and social media.

37 Pacific researchers registered their interest in the talanoa and were subsequently invited to the scheduled talanoa. Participants in the talanoa represented a range of different Pacific nations, including Fiji, Rotuma, Samoa, Tahiti, Tokelau, Tonga, the Cook Islands and Tuvalu. Both New Zealand-born and Pacific-born researchers were present. The participants also represented different universities, government and non-government organisations, CRIs and self-identified as a range of Early-, Mid-, and Late-Career researchers.

The Te Korenga Early Career Researchers and Komiti Pasifika were also invited to separate talanoa where MBIE could focus on the content of submissions and ask key questions relating to the submissions.

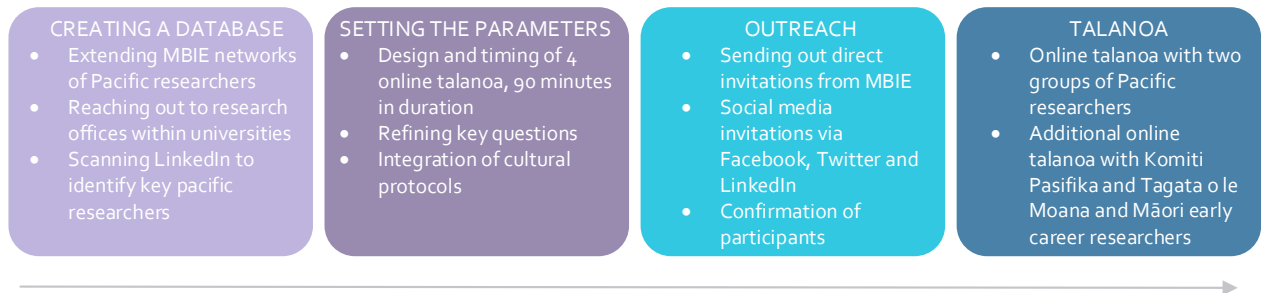
It is important to acknowledge that this consultation is understood to be a significant step towards MBIE building stronger and enduring relationships with Pacific researchers and research users. The outreach was effective in gathering many perspectives; however, more work is needed to reach Pacific researchers and research users in the community, the private sector, CRIs and IROs.

Table 1 Overview of participants

TALANOA 1	TALANOA 2	TE KORENGA EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS	KOMITI PASKIFIKA	TOTAL
11 participants	9 participants	3 participants	4 participants	27 participants ⁵

⁵ Two participants attended two different talanoa

Figure 2 Overview of consultation and outreach



2. TALANOA INSIGHTS

The talanoa participants shared many insights on the changes that need to be made to the RSI system to enable Pacific researchers and research excellence to thrive. During the consultation, it was clear that the participants understood what the current constraints were and how improvements could be implemented to the RSI system. To accurately reflect these perspectives, the insights have been distilled into key changes and possible solutions and/or opportunities for MBIE to consider as part of the Te Ara Paerangi programme⁶. While the insights have been arranged into nine key shifts, connections and interdependencies exist and the analysis of these connections has been noted as a priority for the Future Pathways team at MBIE.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the nine key shifts identified across the consultation process. Each of these key shifts are described and substantiated with supporting solutions and opportunities below.

Figure 3: Key shifts to enable Pacific researchers and research excellence to thrive in the future RSI system



⁶ This section presents the changes and the suggestions as they were presented by the participants, there has been no additional analysis by the consultancy team.

2.1. Pacific researchers need to see themselves in the RSI system

What needs to change:

The RSI system needs to be responsive to, and respectful of, culturally diverse research practices and research methodologies, cultural protocols and languages. The RSI system also needs to provide opportunities for Pacific researchers to build collaborative and non-competitive relationships to support the growth of Pacific research and Pacific researchers within the RSI system.

How this change can be supported:

- The RSI system in Aotearoa New Zealand has an obligation to connect with and support the research priorities of the Pacific region. Pacific researchers are well positioned to lead and extend research into the Pacific region.
- The New Zealand RSI system needs to align with and be aware of New Zealand's Pacific special relationships, such as those with Samoa and the Realm Countries.
- Stronger relationships and understanding of mutual benefits need to be developed between Pacific researchers and between different research entities.
- The future RSI system needs to genuinely integrate new research opportunities that are grounded in Pacific methodologies, concepts and processes.

2.2. Develop working definitions of 'Pacific Research' and 'Pacific Researchers'

What needs to change:

The RSI system needs to be understood by Pacific researchers in a way that reflects Pacific ways of knowing and working. There also needs to be a consensus on how the concepts of 'Pacific research' and 'Pacific researchers' are defined, and how these definitions are applied across the RSI system to provide access to funding, education pipelines, and celebrating research excellence and impact.

How this change can be supported:

This change can be supported by MBIE working with Pacific researchers to create a definition of 'Pacific research' and 'Pacific researchers'. The process should be driven by ongoing conversations to ensure that the definition is dynamic, aligns

with definitions in other sectors in New Zealand, and includes models and frameworks that can be applied in different research settings. The conversations will need to consider:

- The inequities that exist about what academic knowledge is published, when it is published, and how Pacific researchers are recognised for their contribution.
- The appropriate and correct ways of applying Pacific concepts, protocols and processes.

2.3. A Pacific lens needs to be applied to how research impact is acknowledged and celebrated

What needs to change

The RSI system needs to recognise and celebrate Pacific research excellence as it is understood and celebrated by Pacific researchers. There are diverse understandings of 'research excellence' amongst Pacific researchers, and there is also an emerging conversation about how 'research excellence' relates to 'research impact'. The diversity of understanding Pacific research excellence and research impact needs to be incorporated into the RSI system.

How this change can be supported:

There are mechanisms that could enable a deeper understanding of, and promote and enable, Pacific research excellence and research impact. These include:

- Aligning research funding with questions and topics which have been developed by Pacific researchers, for Pacific researchers. This includes incorporating Pacific methodologies, budgets, and timeframes which are culturally and contextually relevant to research.
- The positive impacts on communities as a result of research needs to be considered as a measure of excellence. There needs to be more attention given to how research impact can be evidenced and acknowledged.
- Decision-makers at the highest level must see the need for Pacific researchers in governance roles in institutions and be open to discussing the obstacles faced by Pacific research leaders to advance. With more Pacific representation at the governance level, it will ensure that there is accurate reporting on equity, cultural competence, institutional racism, and research leadership. Pacific research leaders at the governance table can also advance the use of Pacific research methodologies and hold space for future generations of Pacific researchers.

2.4. Position Pacific peoples and their methodologies in all dimensions of the RSI system

What needs to change

The RSI system needs to support the integration of existing and emerging Pacific methodologies in research across all disciplines of research and allow for the integration of Pacific ontologies. Pacific peoples and their methodologies need to be integrated into the entire system for the future RSI system to grow and flourish.

How this change can be supported

- Pacific knowledge systems must be elevated to a position where they are understood as rigorous and valid approaches in the RSI system. This includes moving beyond the recognition of Pacific knowledge systems in the fields of social sciences and recognising the value of Pacific knowledge systems in science, information and technology, engineering, health, architecture, and economics.
- Research funding must include opportunities for Pacific research that explore topics which cannot be scientifically measured.
- Future research must look beyond the inclusion of culture and include Pacific understandings and practices of spirituality. This includes attaching academic rigour to concepts of spirituality within Pacific research.

2.5. The RSI system needs to grow, support, and retain talented Pacific researchers

What needs to change

The RSI system needs to grow the research workforce pipeline, provide secure employment which supports Pacific researchers, and have a strategy to retain Pacific research talent within the system. The talanoa participants openly shared some of their experiences of the RSI system from the position of a Pacific researcher and shared many possible future support mechanisms. These have been arranged below in Table 3.

Table 3 Possible mechanisms for growing, supporting, and retaining the Pacific research workforce

GROW THE RESEARCH WORKFORCE PIPELINE	PROVIDE SECURE EMPLOYMENT	SUPPORT PACIFIC RESEARCHERS IN THE WORKFORCE	RETAIN PACIFIC RESEARCH TALENT
Grow Pacific NCEA success to provide pathways to higher learning.	Create stable employment pathways from education and skills attainment to the labour force.	Provide opportunities for Pacific researchers to define their own research interests that are separate to, and/or integrate topics that are dedicated to addressing issues of inequality and inequity.	Provide “sponsors” for Pacific researchers that provide support and wisdom about navigating employment and success within research institutions.
Grow PhD and post-doctoral positions in all disciplines at universities.	Find alternatives to research contracts and short-term contracts in universities.	Prepare researchers with the skills and competencies they need to advance their careers in the RSI system, such as grant funding applications, CV development, interview skills, and how to navigate remuneration and performance conversations.	Provide opportunities for Pacific researchers to develop strong collegial collaborations and be included in important governance and policy conversations as part of their role - not unpaid and on top of expected duties.
Consider funding research that is developed and delivered by community researchers, as an alternative to individual scholarships.	Match the numbers of PhD enrolment and completion with employment roles within universities.	Create a separate funding pool with iterative rounds which support the development of skills needed to apply for and manage research projects at different scales.	
Design a research strategy that supports the integration of Pacific methodologies in research across all disciplines.	Evaluate the strengths and challenges of cohort hiring models.	The ‘value’ of mentoring programmes such as the tuakana and teina models needs to align with appropriate remuneration of the individuals that lead the mentoring programmes and those that provide the mentorship.	

2.6. Reimagine Pacific community members as part of the RSI system

What needs to change

Community networks are invaluable to Pacific research. Pacific communities contribute to the RSI system by identifying and prioritising research topics, participating in research, and using research to advance community development.

The talanoa participants advocated for the Pacific community being considered less as an end user or target audience of research and more as research knowledge holders.

How this change can be supported

Opportunities exist for the Pacific community to contribute to the RSI system by:

- Facilitating knowledge exchange between communities, researchers, and institutions.
- Growing the number of Pacific community researchers, because community members already understand the processes involved in Pacific research, language, the people, and the community issues.
- Paying community members for providing career mentorship to Pacific researchers, input to research design, and as knowledge holders.
- Positioning community members as leading the design of research.
- Clearly communicating the purpose of research funding to the community
- Listening to and meeting the expectations of Pacific communities.
- Recognising community members for their ability to build and nurture positive relationships between research institutions and Pacific communities.

2.7. Leverage funding to support Pacific researchers

What needs to change

Future funding models need to be designed with a lens to grow, enable, and advance the Pacific research workforce.

How this change can be supported

The Pacific researchers were forthright about the current challenges and barriers to obtaining funding and working within funded research projects. Table 4 outlines the barriers to funding and challenges of working within funded research projects.

Table 4 Funding barriers for Pacific researchers

BARRIERS TO OBTAINING FUNDING	
There is not enough information sharing between peers and across organisations about research funding opportunities, especially for ECRs.	Competitiveness does not enable working collaboratively across academic institutes. The institutional boundaries are a barrier for collaboration between Pacific researchers who compete for funding.
Application processes can appear intimidating and require a high level of expertise that ECRs may not have yet developed.	The “playing field” is not equal and ECRs are at a disadvantage in the marketplace when competing against non-Pacific consultancy firms.
CHALLENGES WORKING WITHIN FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS	
There are often tensions between Pacific ways of working and budgets and timeframes that are set by the research fund contract.	The contribution of Pacific researchers within funded research projects with non-Pacific colleagues are not always appropriately acknowledged.
Pacific researchers are not resourced to the same level as their non-Pacific peers.	Cost recovery is an unfair process that overburdens ECRs that also must teach, contribute to and publish research.

The talanoa participants identified possible solutions to these barriers and challenges. Future funding models should consider:

- Providing innovative ways for MBIE and other funders to share information about how the research fund application process works, the expectations, and the support that can be provided.
- Ringfencing funding for Pacific research in a manner similar to the Health Research Council.
- Looking carefully at the mechanisms that enable or disable effective participation in funding for Pacific researchers inside of, and outside of research institutions.
- Creating opportunities for funding which support face-to-face experiences to nurture relationships across and within different cohorts of Pacific researchers such as students, ECRs, Pacific research leadership, and consultants.
- Creating a mentoring programme for advancing the skills of ECRs for research fund applications.
- More flexibility in terms of cost recovery, overheads, and how research projects are staffed, such as bringing in different types of competencies and capabilities.

- Creating transparency around how the equity grants in the tertiary sector are being used to deliver on their commitments to growing institutional research capacity.
- Holding institutions to account for positive changes to PBRF and how they are fostering Pacific research and Pacific researchers.

2.8. Explore the opportunity for new institutions within the future RSI system

The Komiti Pasifika written submission advocates strongly for a cross-Pacific research institution/centre to accelerate and standardise support for Pacific researchers across the academic institutions and to foster collaboration between Pacific researchers. During the talanoa with Komiti Pasifika members, this innovation was discussed with a view to gather more knowledge on the function of a new institution.

What needs to change:

There needs to be a Pacific institution/centre led by Pacific researchers and Pacific research allies. Leaders and researchers need to come together to develop a strategy to integrate Pacific research into the RSI system. This Pacific institute/centre could be a function of the RSI system which supports Pacific researchers and research, as well as undertaking research.

How can this change be supported?

- Commit resource to exploring the opportunities and the costs involved in developing a Centre of Research Excellence (CoRE) or a Pacific research institution/centre.
- Evaluate what mechanisms a Pacific research institution/centre needs to adopt to build research capacity and capability and address equity for Pacific peoples.
- Commit resource to explore the possible options for a Pacific research institution/centre. Existing ideas include:
 - a virtual centre
 - creating a space and place where all universities are equal partners
 - create a separate Pacific entity under a council that solidifies commitment.

2.9. New approaches to consultation in the future

While this consultation process was able to activate positive relationships between Pacific researchers and MBIE, future engagement needs to reach more of the Pacific research workforce and focus on strengthening existing relationships. During the talanoa, the participants provided many insights that could assist MBIE with future Pacific consultation processes.

What needs to change

The networks connecting Pacific researchers and MBIE need to include Pacific researchers in the private sector, Pacific researchers located in the Pacific region, and Pacific researchers working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM] related fields. This network should be regularly nurtured and supported by MBIE to ensure that frequent and on-going conversations can provide deeper insight into the position and experiences of Pacific peoples with the RSI system.

The burden of formal submission writing needs to be acknowledged as a task that requires considerable time and resource. At the moment, submissions are completed over and above employment duties, which can be a disincentive for Pacific researchers to participate.

More engagement from MBIE is required leading up to formal submissions processes to ensure that the submitters understand the context, process, and how the submissions feed into policy development.

How this change can be supported

- Growing and nurturing Pacific relationships takes time. MBIE needs to commit resource to ongoing relationship-building between Pacific researchers and MBIE to ensure that they are part of the Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways programme moving forward.
- Communication tools and conversations should be tailored for different audiences.
- The possibilities of providing resource for Pacific researchers to commit time to the submission process should be considered.
- Future engagements on Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways need to consider different audiences and different levels of understanding of government policy processes. Communication tools and conversations should be tailored for diverse audiences.

3. RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

The voices of the talanoa participants have provided valuable insights and identified that there are nine key shifts which need to be incorporated into the future design of the RSI system to ensure the success of Pacific researchers and Pacific research. The key shifts are:

1. Increase the visibility of, and the integration of Pacific researchers and Pacific research users into the RSI system.
2. Rethink how Pacific research excellence is defined and celebrated
3. Apply a Pacific lens to how research impact is acknowledged and celebrated.
4. Genuinely integrate Pacific methodologies, research practices and cultural protocols in the RSI system.
5. Grow the Pacific research pipeline and support Pacific researchers within the RSI system.
6. Recognise the value and contribution of the Pacific community to the RSI system.
7. Design research funding models to grow, enable and advance the Pacific research workforce.
8. Explore new opportunities for a Pacific led function of the RSI system
9. Commit resource to ongoing and regular engagement with Pacific researchers and research users.

Moving forward, the reform of the RSI system needs to systematically prioritise processes which support the key shifts identified by the talanoa participants. It is important to note that further analysis is needed to evaluate the strength of the suggestions proposed by the talanoa participants as well as the interconnections and dependencies. The next step in the analysis process should leverage off relationships which have been built via this consultation process and undertake future analysis alongside Pacific researchers and Pacific research users. To guide this process, the key shifts have been aligned with Te Ara Paerangi focus areas alongside a set of practical next steps in Table 5.

Future engagement between MBIE and Pacific researchers and Pacific research users needs to genuinely demonstrate gratitude and reciprocity, incorporate Pacific cultural protocols when nurturing relationships, and respect the perspectives and wisdom of the Pacific researchers and Pacific research users who share their knowledge.

Table 5 Identified key shifts aligned with Te Ara Paerangi focus areas

FOCUS AREA	KEY SHIFT	NEXT STEP
Systems; Priorities, Infrastructure	Increase the visibility of, and the integration of Pacific researchers and Pacific research users into the RSI system [Shift 1].	- Co-design a definition and framework for 'Pacific research'
Knowledge systems	Genuinely integrate Pacific methodologies, research practices and cultural protocols into the RSI system [Shift 4].	- Ensure the future RSI system can embrace multiple knowledge systems - Explore how Pacific research and Pacific researchers relate to Te Tiriti and Mātauranga
Funding, Priorities	Design research funding models to grow, enable and advance the Pacific research workforce [Shift 7]. Rethink how Pacific research excellence is defined and celebrated [Shift 2 and Shift 3].	- Improve equity and access to, and support for Pacific research funds - Explore notions of 'Pacific research excellence'
Workforce	Grow the Pacific research pipeline and support Pacific researchers within the RSI system [Shift 5].	- Address barriers in current funding models - Evaluate targeted support to Pacific researchers - Grow the pipeline of Pacific researchers - Mentor, sponsor, and support Pacific researchers and leaders
Institution, knowledge utilisation, system function, workforce	Explore new opportunities for a Pacific led function of the RSI system and/or a Pacific research institute/centre [Shift 8]. Recognise the value and contribution of the Pacific community to the RSI system [Shift 6].	- Explore opportunities to build co-ordination, collaboration, and capacity building - Explore opportunities to support Pacific research
Te Ara Paerangi engagement processes	Commit resource to ongoing and regular engagement with Pacific researchers and research users [Shift 9].	- Prioritise engagement with Pacific researchers and research users with the future design of the RSI system