

Supporting Pacific Trainees and Apprentices: Guidance for Employers

At ServiceIQ, we know that strong employer support is vital for Pacific learners to thrive in their apprenticeships and training programs. The following information is designed to help you, as an employer, create an environment in which your Pacific employees feel valued, understood, and empowered to succeed.

1. Why Pacific Learner Support Matters

- ▶ **Commitment to Equity and Inclusion**

Pacific communities place strong emphasis on communal wellbeing, reciprocity, and respect. When employers intentionally support Pacific learners, they are not only strengthening individual success but also contributing to healthier workplaces and communities.

- ▶ **Improved Retention and Performance**

Pacific learners who feel respected and understood are more likely to stay engaged, complete their qualifications, and become reliable, contributing members of the team.

- ▶ **Increasing Cultural Competency**

By actively building awareness of Pacific values and learning styles, your organisation gains broader cultural competency – this benefits all staff, customers, and stakeholders.

2. Understanding Pacific Cultural Values

While every individual is unique, many Pacific cultures share certain values that can influence how learners engage at work and in training:

- ▶ **Aiga / Kainga (Family and Extended Family)**

- ▶ Family obligations and community connections often come first; allowing space for learners to attend family events or ceremonies can demonstrate respect.
- ▶ Offer flexible scheduling where possible – morning or afternoon shifts, or rearranging duties around significant family events (e.g. maliu, putu, celebrations).

- ▶ **Collectivism and Team Oriented Mindset**

- ▶ Pacific learners often thrive in environments where collaboration and sharing are encouraged.
- ▶ Build team activities or group-based problem solving sessions into on-the-job training.

- ▶ **Respect and Hierarchy (Fa'aaloalo, Faka'apa'apa, etc.)**
 - ▶ Communicate in a way that honours respect: acknowledge seniority, speak politely, and use formal greetings when appropriate (e.g., “Talofa,” “Mālō e lelei,” “Bula vinaka”).
 - ▶ If you have Pacific staff members in leadership or mentoring roles, involve them in bridging communication between trainers and learners.
- ▶ **Oral and Visual Learning Styles**
 - ▶ Incorporate talanoa (storytelling) and demonstrate tasks rather than relying solely on written manuals.
 - ▶ Use short, illustrative video clips or hands-on demonstrations when introducing new skills.

3. Practical Steps to Support Pacific learners

- ▶ **Onboarding and Early Orientation**
 - ▶ **Welcome Talanoa Session**

Schedule a brief group or one-on-one talanoa (informal conversation) in the first week to establish personal rapport. Ask about aspirations, family commitments, and preferred ways to learn.
 - ▶ **Mentor Matching**

If possible, connect Pacific trainees with a Pacific or culturally aware mentor who understands their background and can act as an advocate.
- ▶ **Communication and Feedback**
 - ▶ **Regular Check-Ins**

Conduct scheduled weekly or fortnightly check-ins to ask: “How are things going? Are there any family commitments coming up?” Ensure the learner feels heard.
 - ▶ **Use Clear, Respectful Language**

When providing feedback, frame comments positively (e.g., “Great effort on that task—next time, try to...”). Pacific learners often respond best when guidance is delivered with affirmation.
 - ▶ **Invite Questions**

Explicitly encourage them to ask questions at any time, remind them that “no question is a silly question.” This reduces fear of “losing face” when they’re unsure.
- ▶ **Workplace Culture and Environment**
 - ▶ **Acknowledge Cultural Celebrations**

Where possible, accommodate attendance at significant Pacific events (e.g. church roles, cultural festivals, Pacific Language Weeks).
 - ▶ **Promote Aiga / Kainga Friendly Policies**

If your workplace offers flexible leave (e.g. cultural leave, bereavement leave for extended aiga / kainga), make sure Pacific employees know how to access it.
 - ▶ **Celebrate Milestones Together**

Recognise qualification achievements, birthdays, or New Year celebrations (e.g., Tongan New Year) in a way that’s respectful but not excessive – perhaps holding a small morning tea.

► Learning and Skill Development

► Blend Learning Modalities

Provide both written handouts and visual demonstrations, follow up with an in-person walkthrough of key concepts.

► Group Problem-Solving

Create small “learning pods” where two or three trainees can work collaboratively on a task. Pacific learners often gain confidence when learning alongside peers.

► Regular Progress Mapping

Together with the trainee and the assigned ServiceIQ Sector Advisor, map out clear milestones (for example: “By Week 4, achieve ‘x’ number of modules submitted; by Week 12, completed the certificate”). Having visible progress charts (on a whiteboard or digital wall) helps maintain motivation.

► Cultural Responsiveness in Assessment

► Flexible Assessment Scheduling

If a Pacific learner needs to travel for a family event, liaise with your ServiceIQ Sector Advisor to reschedule workplace observations/verifications/appointments.

► Acknowledge Oral Contributions

In situations where a practical demonstration is required, consider allowing learners to explain their process first before writing anything. This will help create confidence in answering the questions and honours oral-first communication style.

4. Building a Long-Term, Sustainable Approach

► Invest in Cultural Competency Training

Consider organising a brief workshop (1–2 hours) for all frontline supervisors and HR staff. A basic understanding of Pacific values can dramatically improve retention.

► Review and Adapt Policies Regularly

Every 6 months, check your workplace policies (e.g., leave entitlements, uniform requirements, shift rostering) through a Pacific lens. Check if there are unintended barriers?

► Encourage Pacific Employee/Learner Networks

If you have several Pacific employees/learners, help them form an informal network or peer group meeting once a month during lunchtime (similar to lunch and learn sessions) to share tips, celebrate culture, and offer mutual support.

► Collect Feedback from Pacific Learners

When a Pacific learner completes their qualification or apprenticeship, ask for a brief exit talanoa to obtain feedback. Ask questions: What worked well? What could have been improved? Feed this back into your continuous improvement processes.