

# West Coast Conservation Training and Employment Hub a model for New Zealand learning

The Westport-based Conservation Training and Employment Hub was officially opened at the end of March, bringing together West Coast employers, learners, mana whenua, local government and the vocational training sector to address local environmental needs and support the regional economy.

The Hub is a fantastic example of what can be achieved under New Zealand's new direction for vocational education – the Te Pūkenga model which brings together tertiary providers across the country and puts the emphasis on the learner, cross-sector collaboration and partnerships.



Tai Poutini Polytechnic Board Chair Rebecca Keoghan explains how the Polytechnic is using the Hub as a model for what can be achieved under Te Pūkenga.

## Why is the West Coast Conservation Training and Employment Hub important to the rest of New Zealand?

The Hub is a direct response to a need within the local community. Conservation employers with critical work to do on the West Coast were asking Tai Poutini Polytechnic for support in finding the skilled workers they needed to get the job done.

We were in a unique position to respond to this need with the support and significant resource of a nationwide network of Te Pūkenga vocational training providers focused on putting learners at the centre.

We drew on regional industry knowledge and community input to establish the local need, then looked outward and sought support from our education partners around the country to help make it happen.

## What's special about the establishment of the Hub?

The individual opportunities provided by the Hub are many, but the key benefits can be explained in two categories: creating opportunities for learning and economic growth on the West Coast, and harnessing the power of our position in a new, national approach to vocational education and training.

By spear-heading a coordinated, focused approach to conservation and biodiversity training on the West Coast, Tai Poutini Polytechnic is able to lead an innovative piece of work that creates cross-region connections, supports employment and business growth, addresses critical environmental issues and creates opportunities for a new green economy on the West Coast.

This then provides a model, or template, for other regions around the country who might be in a similar position.

## How will other regions benefit from the West Coast Hub concept?

Just as we were able to partner with other tertiary providers around the country and draw on their experience to make the Hub happen, in future we expect to be called-on to support other regions in their own journeys to address local training and employment needs.

We recognise the significance of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be a part of major change to vocational education in New Zealand and we want to make the most of that change. The reforms actively encourage us to take

action to make the learning journey seamless for learners, it also means we have access to skills and knowledge from across the country through the Te Pūkenga network – making learning much more accessible for places like the West Coast.

There is also the added benefit that we can all learn from each other. If a project is started in one part of Aotearoa then the learnings and details can be shared with others to quick start similar projects in other parts of the motu.

## What exactly is the Conservation Training and Employment Hub?

It's still early days, but the Hub is a concept that brings together learners, employers, industry, trainers, mana whenua and community support agencies to ultimately address a local need and boost economic development through the establishment of a green economy on the West Coast.

West Coast conservation employers have been asking Tai Poutini Polytechnic for support in training and upskilling the people they need to deliver regional projects and drive environmental outcomes. We spent time talking about the local need and thrashed out ideas and options for how we supported the conservation and biodiversity work.

It's different because of the level of collaboration and partnership. This is a model of learning and development for the future that pulls on the best of what the new national model of vocational training can offer. All together we are sharing our knowledge, skills and resources to support outcomes for learners and employers.

## How is Te Pūkenga involved?

We are all now Te Pūkenga – so instead of simply working with our regional stakeholders and coming up with a solution that met the local need, Tai Poutini Polytechnic could relatively easily leverage resourcing and support from other institutes to work out exactly how we delivered on that need and how it could be modelled for the future.

Having access to our Te Pūkenga leaders was also hugely valuable to advance and promote the model as a way to benefit the West Coast and the rest of New Zealand.

## What are the key drivers of this work?

There are a range of opportunities created by the Hub's establishment, key are:

- Responding to a regional employment and industry need for skills workers to progress local work.
- Leveraging the power of the new Te Pūkenga model to seek outcomes that are of mutual benefit to learners, employers and the wider community.
- Creating seamless learning pathways that offer opportunities for learners to succeed.

- Positioning the West Coast as a leader under the new vocational training model and providing a pilot for how other regions might approach similar issues.
- Creating and developing partnerships that will endure and support future projects.

## How do you ensure that this work happens?

We've put in place a clear governance and leadership structure to drive activity and ensure oversight. We're lucky to have some clever people with key contacts on both our Steering Group and our Working Group.

The Steering Group is made up of local influencers, Te Pūkenga leaders, iwi, and representatives of four other national vocational education providers and they are tasked with oversight and direction. The Working Group is focused on operations – the “how” of making the Hub concept happen. Already they have put in place a phased plan for the roll-out of the Hub. We've opening a physical location in Westport – which has close proximity to examples of some of the most important emerging global conservation and climate issues. The bricks-and-mortar location gives solidity to the concept, but the aim is that the Hub becomes a truly flexible and virtual place for learning and development. Right now, work is underway on establishing the first programmes through introducing a series of micro-credential courses which will eventually develop into a full programme of learning alongside flagship local projects.

This is an opportunity to model and test regional vocational education and training linked with iwi, community and government agencies. It involves activating and enabling different parts of the network in support of the operating model of Te Pūkenga. Northtec, WBL, OPNZ, NMIT, Primary ITO, TPP, iwi, mana whenua, DoC, Buller District Council, Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP), local employers, the high school, and Development West Coast are working together to address this high priority for Aotearoa.

## What happens next?

We're already working at pace on the roll-out of the programmes and projects that will make up the core of the Hub's activity. This is a collaborative process, so we expect the ideas to change and morph as we progress. Our aim is to have micro-credential learning in place later this year and by the end of 2022 have progressed the first flagship project – a local example of how the learning and training is actually making a difference in the real work. So watch this space for more...