



Kura Waiti Report

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Report Information

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Cover photo

Rangatahi on Waikato River (Photo supplied by Te Toki Voyaging Trust)

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Executive Summary

1. Kura Waiti is a waka-based mātauranga Māori programme that has evolved significantly since its inception, with a clear mission to engage more kura and create a seamless educational pathway leading into Kura Waiti. At the heart of the programme lies a deep commitment to connecting rangatahi with the natural world—especially the Waikato river—through culturally resonant, experiential education. Waka are used not just as a means of connection with the awa, but as a vessel for storytelling and transmission of mātauranga Māori.
2. Since launching in 2022, the programme has expanded its reach and offerings. Since 2022, 22 Kura Māori in the Waikato region have been identified for participation in Kura Waiti (to be confirmed), with a consistent focus on Māori-medium education.
3. The programme's delivery depends on a strong partnership between Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT) and the Waikato Regional Council (WRC). WRC's vision of engaging kura—particularly Māori-medium kura—in hands-on environmental learning has been instrumental in shaping Kura Waiti. WRC supports programme delivery through pūtea (funding), connections with kura and other networks, resource development, and logistical backup, including alternative venues during inclement weather.
4. TTVT leads the on-the-ground delivery and maintains long-standing relationships with many kura, some of which already participate in TTVT's summer paddling initiatives. This familiarity supports strong enrolment and high retention.

Benefits and value of Kura Waiti

The benefits and value of Kura Waiti are broad and multi-dimensional:

- **Rangatahi** gain connection to te taiao, environmental literacy, cultural knowledge, water safety skills, and increased confidence in te reo Māori. The experience affirms Māori identity and aspirations through the presence of Māori role models such as doctors, researchers, and waka leaders.
- **The value to whānau and kura** is from seeing their tamariki thrive in a kaupapa Māori context. Schools gain access to high-quality educational programming that aligns with curriculum goals and enhances te ao Māori integration.
- **Te Toki Voyaging Trust** benefits by extending its reach and reinforcing its role as a community leader in cultural and environmental education. It also strengthens its ties with rangatahi who may continue on the waka pathway into sports, leadership, or environmental advocacy.
- **The value to the wider community and te taiao** comes from cultivating a generation of young people with a deeper understanding of environmental stewardship and Indigenous knowledge systems. The use of te reo Māori is also normalised in scientific and ecological contexts, contributing to language revitalisation.
- **Waikato Regional Council** benefits by fulfilling its commitment to Te Tiriti-based partnerships and engaging meaningfully with tangata whenua in the Māori-medium education and environmental sectors, helping them meet the goals of their strategic

focus area *Whaowhia tō Kete Mātauranga: Advancing Māori Medium Environmental Education*.

- **The value to the Waikato River Authority (WRA)** is being able to give effect to *Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato* (Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River) through a culturally grounded environmental education programme, fostering connection to the awa, environmental stewardship, cultural identity, and leadership, and reaching rangatahi in kura Māori across the Waikato region.

The value proposition for Kura Waiti

Inherent and existing value

Leverage from partnering

5. The investment funders are making in Kura Waiti leverages the considerable existing or inherent value of TTVT's organisation, cultural, social, and knowledge expertise, reputation, professionalism and experience. As a strategic partner in the development of Kura Waiti, TTVT has also had the opportunity and potential to leverage its partnership with WRC and WRA to expand its reach and offerings into Māori-medium schools and communities across the Waikato.

Potential value

Human capital

6. The TTVT approach is expanding rangatahi knowledge, building their human capital (knowledge, skills and well-being), and connections to te taiao, affirming their cultural identity, fostering a sense of care for the river and wider environment, and building their confidence to become environmental kaitiakitanga. This building of human capital has the potential to yield long-lasting benefits for rangatahi, their marae, hapū, iwi, and communities.

Cultural capital

7. The resources and te reo Māori specific to waka, water safety and environmental kaitiakitanga are broadening and widening the language available to rangatahi, whānau, marae, and hapū. The programme is acting as a vehicle to rebirth and reconnect people in a holistic way to waka culture, the river and taonga tuku iho.

Relational social capital

8. Kura Waiti integrates well with existing WRC/WRA strategies and objectives, aligning closely with what current funders are striving for, through shared values, motivation, and target audiences. The trust and quality of the relationships built through the partnership between WRC and TTVT have the potential to support the realisation of key strategies and goals for river restoration, as well as other environmental and cultural aspirations.

Applied and realised value

9. The adaptation of cultural knowledge and expertise to develop an innovative new approach to environmental education represents a form of applied value. There are now new resources and curricula for kura Māori in use across the Waikato. The growth of waka and environmentally specific te reo Māori, which is now being shared with rangatahi across the Waikato, is also a valuable outcome.
10. There are also signals that rangatahi are applying their learning, making connections to their kura mahi, and NCEA Pūtaiao studies, even after only a limited experience in the programme. Rangatahi are also practically engaging in mātauranga taiao outside the classroom, as a result of their participation in Kura Waiti. The progression of a few rangatahi from participants to mentors also signals the future realised value of longer-term outcomes for rangatahi.
11. It's still too early for Kura Waiti to demonstrate some of the longer-term outcomes that are hoped for. Kura Waiti is a new venture, still getting on its feet. The investment to date has effectively been early seed funding.

Transformational value

12. There are aspirations for Kura Waiti to contribute to transformative value beyond careers and demonstrating kaitiakitanga. Transformative value is not out of reach; we have seen the early foundational phases demonstrated in Kura Waiti.
13. To achieve further value, three things are needed:
 - consolidation of the current operational phase
 - coherence of the collective vision, goals and approach by partners
 - commitment by partners and funders to long-term sustainability.

Introduction

14. Kura Waitī has evolved significantly since its inception, with a clear mission to engage more *kura* and create a seamless educational pathway leading into *Kura Waitā*. A fundamental part of this journey involves securing appropriate resources to ensure the programme has the capacity and infrastructure needed for sustainable delivery.
15. This evaluation will inform any decisions about future resourcing. WRC commissioned the evaluation in February 2025.
16. At a joint hui with WRC, TTVT and the evaluation team, it was agreed that the evaluation would answer the following questions:
 - What is the value of Kura Waitī?
 - What's the potential for growth and expansion opportunities for Kura Waitī?
 - What is Kura Waitī's value proposition?

Data Collection

17. From March to early May 2025, the evaluation team¹ undertook the following data collection:
 - Individual and group Interviews with:
 - Tumuaki and kaiako x 5 (includes 1 Kāhui kaitiaki)
 - Kāhui kaitiaki x 2
 - Kaihāpai Hōtaka Mātauranga
 - University of Waikato Interns x 2
 - Kura Waitī Tauira x 15 (2 visits to Kura Waitī / 1 to kura)
 - TTVT kaimahi x 2
 - Waikato Regional Councillors x 2
 - Waikato Regional Council staff x 6
 - Education Review Office staff x 1
 - Other funders include WRA, Trust Waikato x 4
 - Observed Kura Waitī x 3, Waitā / Water safety x 1
 - Reviewed past documentation, reports, and reflections
 - Hui with WRC and TTVT x 2

Analysis

18. Extensive verbatim notes were taken at each interview and the hui held with WRC and TTVT. These notes were summarised by each team member against the key questions. These summaries were then analysed using a thematic analysis process.
19. Case study templates were developed to guide the preparation of three case studies. Two of these feature kura experiences of Kura Waitī.

¹ The evaluation team is made up of Debbie Goodwin, Areta Ranginui Charlton, Greg Koia and Kate McKegg

20. The third is a case study of TTVT, from their perspective. TTVT were invited to prepare a case study of the development of Kura Waiti using the same case study template. This was undertaken through a combination of desk analysis and interviewing of key TTVT personnel.

What is the value of Kura Waitī?

21. We asked all key stakeholders this question. In this section, we summarise the views of all stakeholders on the value of Kura Waitī. We have grouped this feedback according to who has received or may receive value or benefit from Kura Waitī.

Figure 1: Rangatahi with carved waka taua, Te Winika, collectively built by Ngāti Tipa of Tuakau, Ngāti Maru of Hauraki and Ngāti Māhanga (Supplied by Te Toki Voyaging Trust)



What do we mean by value²?

22. Programmes and initiatives create different types of value, depending on the context, the resources available, and the perspectives of various stakeholders. There is **inherent value** that already exists, like the knowledge and skills people bring with them, language and cultural expertise that has been built up over centuries, or intangible things like a person or organisation's reputation.
23. There is also **potential value**. This is created over time and includes such things as building relationships, trust, personal and organisational capabilities, and capacity. Not all potential value is immediately realised because it takes time to create the conditions for any kind of longer-term payoff. Potential value is not a one-off; it needs constant tendering because, without it, making a difference in people's lives or environmental conditions will not be possible. Examples of potential value include building confidence, opening up possibilities for the future for rangatahi, creating linkages and connections across a network, etc.
24. **Realised value** is the value most people and initiatives aim for; it's what we often mean when we ask what difference something made. It includes such things as changes in actions, choices, behaviours, policies, resource flows, or environmental conditions.
25. **Transformational value** occurs when people reframe their assumptions about a system, shift their underlying mental models, beliefs, and assumptions, and redefine what success means.

² Adapted from Wenger et al, (2011) Promoting and assessing value creation in communities and networks: a conceptual framework, Open University, The Netherlands.

26. While there are relationships between different kinds of value, there isn't necessarily a hierarchy of levels or a simple causal chain of value. All aspects of value are important and present, and interact in a dynamic way. Some may be more important at different times, and to different stakeholders.
27. The feedback we received revealed all four kinds of value. Given the short period of time Kura Waiti has been running, and the early stage of its development, it wasn't surprising to find that the majority of value was inherent and potential, with promising signals of the kinds of realised and transformational value possible with the right levels of resources and support.

Value for rangatahi – Developing leaders in te taiao

28. Kura Waiti affords rangatahi an opportunity to learn from experts and develop leadership skills, confidence and a sense of kaitiakitanga. Rangatahi are exposed to learning opportunities and experiences in a positive and empowering environment. They learn a wide range of content and skills they can apply in practical, real-life situations. Their experiences on the river also foster a sense of kaitiakitanga, encouraging them to have a greater respect and appreciation for the river and the broader environment. Furthermore, their experiences enhance contemporary perspectives with traditional knowledge and understandings. Kura Waiti gives greater context for understanding the current state and use of the river, whilst acknowledging taonga tuku iho and the traditional history of the river.
29. Learning in the environment (paddling waka on the awa, identifying plants around the awa, making hīnaki to catch tuna) is seen by kaiako as a distinguishing characteristic of this programme, and a valuable way to learn and gain new knowledge.

Seeing these rangatahi very quickly understand that teamwork is the way to go. Learning how to paddle a waka, and doing it well together, makes the waka move faster, gets them to places they need to go. (TTVT)

30. Kaiako said experiential learning, like being on the water, engages rangatahi and raises their interest in te taiao. Kaiako and others also said that experiencing Kura Waiti promotes leadership among rangatahi, because they gain confidence and recognise opportunities to influence the future.

They carry this in their lives, and make a meaningful contribution to their communities as a result. (WRC)

31. Through Kura Waiti, students see the relevance and manifestation of wider learnings to the environment and te ao Māori.

They are loving what their kids are doing, and the kids are loving what they're doing. At the end of the day, if you have kids that go through and they love this sort of stuff, you are much more likely to find someone who is going to do environmental planning or get involved in being a kaitiaki at their marae, those sorts of things. (WRC)

32. Leadership skills are also being developed in the rangatahi volunteers who support the programme as kaiāwhina, and they are also enabled to gain other skills and certificates.

And of course, we have our rangatahi / taiohi teenagers who have been coming and helping with the different kaupapa too. So, we have been able to send these younger people from our community to go and do things like first aid courses, day skippers and boat master courses to upskill them in certain ways. This is another outcome besides doing the mātauranga kaupapa with our tamariki when they go out on the awa, but we have another mātauranga strand that we provide for some of the taiohi of Kirikiriroa to pick up some of these other skills and certifications. (TTVT)

The skill base for these people as volunteers puts them in good stead for any future mahi. (TTVT)

Kaitiakitanga and environmental care

33. Learning environmental care strategies through developing kaitiakitanga (guardianship) values is an integral part of the Kura Waiti programme. Developing kaitiakitanga in rangatahi is seen as a key strategy for protecting and looking after te taiao, and in Waikato, this pertains particularly to the awa.

34. Many people feel that connecting rangatahi with their environment is an essential first step to inspiring rangatahi to become active kaitiaki within their taiao.

Seeing our rangatahi realise that we need to take care of the river and where things come from, that in some cases interrupt, harm or destroy the awa. For them to see what happens, they leave with a resolve in some cases to try and make changes in the way they can with friends and whānau in how they treat the awa. (TTVT)

Reindigenising and reconnecting our people, our young people, back to our kaitiakitanga. Connecting our people back to our kaitiaki roles, allowing young people to feel, think, and feel connected to the water again. (Funder)

35. Kura Waiti was described as having the potential to create a generation of "sustainable thinkers" who will "protect and love the environment." Some adults said they felt Kura Waiti fosters in rangatahi the "skills and ability to take action on the things they care about" – it helps them see the relevance of their learning.

Students have a greater appreciation - connecting to the river more, respecting the river more. (Kaiako)

36. Kaiako and rangatahi reinforced this. Kaiako talked about tauira learning about the significance of the river, the environment, river safety skills and gaining a greater respect for the river. Rangatahi talked about learning about the awa, native plants, tuna (eels), water quality, and environmental care. They talked about learning about the maramataka (moon's phases), how to make hīnaki (tuna traps), and rongoā (uses of plant healing properties, such as making kawakawa balm). Rangatahi also expressed a desire to learn more about protecting te taiao "kia ako ētahi momo rautaki ki te tiaki i te ao, i te taiao" (To learn strategies to care for the world, for the environment).
37. Other important aspects of the programme include learning about waka and paddling, how to be safe in the water, including Māori kupu around this knowledge. Learning for some extended to learning about the moana, navigation techniques (kāpehu whetū, the star compass), water safety in the ocean, how to surf, including kupu around the moana and

surfing. For TTVT and kaiako, this progression from the awa to the moana is a natural next step in the programme's learning pathway and development.

38. Several people noted that Kura Waiti is connected to a broader conception of what it means to be Māori, i.e., encompassing cultural practices like "how to hī ika (catch fish), go bush, grow kumara, go hunting." These traditional practices, passed down, represent taonga tuku iho.

Mātauranga Māori is a central and highly valued component of the Kura Waiti programme

39. Kura Waiti is unique in its focus on passing on mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) regarding the environment. This learning, steeped in traditional Māori knowledge and perspectives, was described as distinct from general environmental education and crucial for the cultural development and overall well-being of rangatahi Māori. Kura Waiti is mainly taught in te reo Māori, supporting rangatahi in Māori-medium kura to learn in an authentic way. For rangatahi participants, the learning they experience in Kura Waiti has a "natural connection to kura learnings", with easy connections to curriculum elements, such as the "mōteatea they learn as a kura."
40. Several Māori stakeholders in the evaluation discussed the importance of Kura Waiti for revitalising this knowledge, and the role it is playing in reconnecting rangatahi to mātauranga and kaitiakitanga of te taiao and the awa, including learning about the history of the river and the survival of their tūpuna and mātauranga. This mātauranga is now only held by a few people and will be lost if not passed on.

Kura Waiti is valuable because it creates an entry point to the kōrero for the awa, the taiao, the significance of the awa to the people of the land and the importance of the awa as a resource in terms of the kai it provides and the way it nurtures the land around it. How it cares for the native plants along the edges, whether its medicinal or those to feed people, these are all important and significant to set them on the pathway to care for a resource like this. Not only for Waikato awa but for all waterways, lakes, rivers and coastal maritime resources as well. (TTVT)

41. We heard from kaiako and rangatahi that this connection to taonga tuku iho strengthens and enriches rangatahi cultural identity, knowledge, and overall well-being. It also plays a part in revitalising this knowledge for future generations.
42. The connections between Western science and mātauranga Māori are also made throughout the programme, allowing rangatahi to learn how both Western science and mātauranga Māori provide valid understandings around a kaupapa.

It also starts them on the pathway of understanding the science of environmental care isn't a western science only type of concept but is a concept that is connected to their ancestral ways as well. (TTVT)

The other significance is that they understand mātauranga Māori adds just as much viability as western science and knowledge. This is very important for young kura kaupapa rangatahi and tamariki to understand that mātauranga like this that is normally regarded through a western science lens is just as significant through a mātauranga Māori lens. (TTVT)

43. Kaiako discussed how rangatahi can connect with the science elements of Kura Waiti that relate to their whakapapa, describing this as creating a holistic balance between science and their taha Māori.

The transmission of mātauranga from mātanga to rangatahi

44. Kura Waiti is a kaupapa that is led by well-renowned mātanga and practitioners of mātauranga waka. Utilising te reo Māori these mātanga provide relevant local mātauranga about te taiao and the awa which is a core strength of Kura Waiti. This expertise underpins the success and authenticity of the programme.
45. Several people saw learning from expert knowledge holders or mātanga as a valuable opportunity for cultural enrichment for rangatahi, providing a pathway to revitalising mātauranga, including te reo Māori. This revitalisation of waka and taiao mātauranga is a highly valued component of the initiative.
46. Kura Waiti was described as an investment "in young people and their cultural identity".

It brings their pepehā to life. This project gives an opportunity for Māori children to see what their pepehā is. (Funder)

Learning from mātanga is a powerful mechanism for achieving this, as it provides authentic cultural knowledge and a connection to identity. It also builds confidence and self-respect among rangatahi, potentially guiding them in a positive direction. Exposure to such knowledgeable and respected figures within their culture can deeply empower young Māori.

47. This direct exposure and learning from mātanga was seen as having the potential to open up career pathways and possibilities for rangatahi in areas related to science, kaitiakitanga, mātauranga Māori, vessel construction, carving, and more. Some have continued on with other TTVT kaupapa.

The other part is having these kura and tamariki contacting us after to see if they can be part of the wider TTVT kaupapa through paddling and or sailing. (TTVT)

Value for Kura, whānau, hapū and marae and iwi

48. Kura Waiti aligns with the visions and principles of kura, affirming their values, and it has natural connections to kura learning. There are links to NCEA Pūtaiao, and students can make connections through the environmental state of the river, e.g., rangatahi have noted comparisons to the waters back home (e.g., in Taupō) and links to water testing in streams that students are undertaking at home (e.g., in Tuakau). Whilst it was acknowledged that deeper, more explicit links could be made to individual kura curriculum, the general alignment is apparent to kaiako, tumuaki and whānau, who also see the wider impacts the programme has for their communities.
49. Kura kaiako and tumuaki think highly of Kura Waiti, noting that they can see the enjoyment and benefits for rangatahi, particularly because it is on the river.
50. As discussed above, kura support the view that the programme fosters kaitiakitanga in rangatahi, creating "greater respect for the water" among those rangatahi who participate.

He mauri tō ngā mea katoa (everything has a life force). (Kaiako)

51. Kaiako say it creates a holistic balance between science and taha Māori (things Māori). They say that Kura Waiti aligns with Māori identity, connecting young people to the environment, to the river and contributing to rangatahi cultural identity.
52. Several people expressed the view that by connecting rangatahi to the environment, they will be more likely to be motivated to care for it and to share this learning with other whānau, creating intergenerational connections and benefiting wider whānau, hapū, marae, and iwi. We heard from a few rangatahi that they have shared knowledge learnt from Kura Waiti with siblings and whānau.
53. Kura Waiti maintains a record of rangatahi affiliations to iwi, hapū, and marae, with the aspiration that rangatahi will share their learning with their Waikato hapū and marae in the future. Some people noted the programme's benefits for whānau and the visible links to hapū and iwi, and someone also expressed the view that greater accessibility could be achieved for more whānau, hapū, and iwi if Kura Waiti could move around to the rohe of different iwi.
54. The programme also supports the need for te reo Māori resources in environmental education. Kura Waiti is delivered in te reo Māori and caters to different levels of te reo Māori proficiency.

The feedback that we get is positive. It's positive around the fact that a, it's a programme that is delivered in te reo Māori. (TTVT)

55. Several people talked about the need for kura resources in te reo Māori and how this became an impetus for Kura Waiti. Kura Waiti has developed student booklets to support rangatahi learning beyond the programme and to help kaiako make links with the kura curriculum. A total of 11 workbooks have been created for each term, each focusing on a different aspect of the taiao around the awa³. These were described as helpful, but some felt they could be further developed to encourage deeper learning and reflection.
56. The programme is already fulfilling a vital role in language revitalisation through the engagement of Kura Waiti knowledge holders with Kura Māori, rangatahi, and their whānau. This te reo Māori revitalisation role has the potential to deepen over time, as rangatahi progress through different levels of learning, and share their knowledge with their whānau, hapū, marae and iwi.

The reo benefits because a new aspect of reo use is brought into play for the tamariki in these learning environments. (TTVT)

Value for Waikato Regional Council and Waikato River Authority

Priorities and commitments to iwi and mātauranga Māori

57. The special relationship the five iwi have with the Waikato and Waipā rivers and catchments is expressed through Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato – The Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River, and the role of Te Ture Whaimana as a primary direction-

³ Communication from TTVT

setting document. It acknowledges Te Mana o te Awa concept - the spiritual authority, protective power and prestige of the Waikato River.

58. Waikato Regional Council's (WRC) 2023-2025 Strategic Priorities for Wai/Water connect clean and healthy water and iwi and community aspirations and needs:

Clean water and healthy aquatic ecosystems that meet iwi aspirations and community needs within environmental limits.⁴

59. Waikato River Authority's vision is to improve water quality, health and wellbeing, and reconnect communities to the awa:

Tooku awa koiora me oona pikonga he kura tangihia o te maataamuri.

Our Vision is for a future where a healthy Waikato River sustains abundant life and prosperous communities who, in turn, are all responsible for restoring and protecting the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River, and all it embraces, for generations to come.⁵

60. In line with iwi expectations, the vision requires Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora to use mātauranga Māori alongside Western scientific methods. Furthermore, WRC's strategy Whaowhia tō Kete Mātauranga: Advancing Māori Medium Environmental Education strategy outlines the commitment by Council towards their iwi partners in supporting ongoing Environmental Education for Māori Medium learners.

A unique Māori-medium environmental education programme

61. Kura Waiti is a unique environmental educational programme underpinned by kaupapa Māori. It is regionally based, localised and draws from the expertise of well-renowned mātauranga and practitioners of mātauranga waka.
62. Kura Waiti is also well-aligned with the vision and objectives of WRC and WRA for the awa, wai, and te taiao. Through Māori-medium, it engages rangatahi Māori with these environments, restoring and revitalising mātauranga and connections to the awa and taonga tuku iho.
63. The feedback overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that Kura Waiti supports and encourages rangatahi Māori in Māori-medium to learn how to be kaitiaki of their environments in authentically Māori ways. At least one person commented that, given the scale of the investment and the short timeframe for development and implementation, the benefits are comparable to those of larger, better-funded programmes.
64. Given the growing number of young Māori in the region, and the Council's focus on rangatahi participating "in decisions and actions that affect them,"⁶ Kura Waiti offers the Council an opportunity to engage rangatahi Māori in environmental learning, actions and impacts for the awa that will be important for future environmental states.

Council will never achieve its vision for our region through money and projects alone, needs people movement to achieve Te Ture Whaimana. Need a whole generation of people of a similar mind and who are doing stuff. Kura Waiti is doing that. (WRC)

⁴ [Water — Waikato Regional Council - Strategic direction](#)

⁵ <https://waikatoriver.org.nz/visionandstrategy/>

⁶ [Community connections — Waikato Regional Council - Strategic direction](#)

65. A gap in the provision of environmental education for sustainability in Māori medium schools was highlighted in a previous evaluation. Kura Waiti fills this gap and provides the Council with a concrete expression of its commitment to environmental educational provision for rangatahi in Māori-medium.

Career pathways

66. Several people commented that Kura Waiti can provide rangatahi with a greater line of sight to future points of engagement with local government and possible career pathways. They noted that Kura Waiti has the potential to inspire rangatahi Māori to pursue careers in environmental science, local governmental and other related fields.
67. Kura Waiti is a highly practical way for rangatahi to make links to local government. For example, the programme connects rangatahi with Kaihāpai Hōtaka Mātauranga, Māori interns, and other kaimahi in the Council. The importance and value of WRC having young Māori interns was noted, particularly their ability to share their skills and talents with communities, specifically engaging Māori communities around different kaupapa.

The succession planning with the interns is a strength. (Funder)

(Intern), young, good for Council, speaks the reo, but is in a range of other kaupapa effective with rangatahi and tamariki - someone from council who speaks te reo and is engaging is so good for Council. (WRC)

Working with partners and kura communities

68. Kura Waiti is also an opportunity for WRC to work with partners (including WRA), build positive iwi relationships, and connect with kura Māori. It is a practical expression of the collaboration that exists. We heard that Kura Waiti is already acting as a "gateway to building relationships with kura" in the future.

Kura Waiti is the first kaupapa that has enabled WRC to connect with Kura Māori. (WRC)

Wide variety of other projects funded by WRA may have some opportunities for connection to Kura Waiti e.g. collecting historical knowledge, restoration projects (esp for future build ons of the programme). (WRC)

69. Core funding for Kura Waiti has been provided through WRC and WRA, along with several other funders (University of Waikato Environmental Research Institute, Trust Waikato, WEL Energy, Department of Conservation and Mercury Energy). Matching funding shows the partners' contribution and commitment to environmental education for Māori, particularly for Māori medium kura. The collaboration with WRC, in particular, has provided crucial in-kind resourcing through the Kaihāpai Hōtaka Mātauranga and other kaimahi, networking and coordination with kura, connection to other WRC and funding resources.

As a start-up community initiative, requiring ongoing funding is always an issue, and so having the support of a level of core funding is acknowledged by some as necessary for longer term sustainability.

How is value created?

70. In this section, we summarise the features of Kura Waitī delivery, including the approach and structure, participation since 2022, and TTVT's people capabilities and capacity.

Figure 2: Rangatahi paddling on the awa (Supplied by Te Toki Voyaging Trust)



How and where is Kura Waitī delivered?

71. Through culturally resonant, experiential learning, through te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori, Te Toki Voyaging Trust has created a programme with the waka as a vessel for storytelling and transmission of mātauranga Māori. This approach transforms what might have been a recreational activity into an opportunity to engage rangatahi in knowledge acquisition tied to identity, environment, and heritage.
72. Located on and around the Waikato awa in central Kirikiriroa, Kura Waitī is an immersive learning experience that bridges the traditional with the contemporary, instilling a sense of place and belonging among participants. Rangatahi are engaged in te taiao, in a way that is culturally resonant and relevant instilling environmental connections and lessons that can lead to greater care for te taiao, for the awa.

The motivation behind the development of the programme from our perspective was a motivation around connecting rangatahi to their environment, specifically the awa, but using a traditional form of engaging and connecting to them by using the waka as storytelling. By doing all those things in that particular way allowed us to start introducing strands of mātauranga Māori which transforms it from going for a waka ride, to a waka ride that is productive in terms of knowledge and outcomes for our tamariki. (TTVT)

Programme structure

73. Kura Waitī is delivered as a one-day, school-specific programme, with participation numbers determined by available resources. Each session typically includes up to 18 taura (students), either from a single kura or split between two kura (9 each), along with up to two kaiako (teachers) per group. The programme currently operates across Terms 1 to 4, reaching 12 kura each term, with the goal of frontloading delivery in the early weeks of the school term.

74. Participation has increased steadily from 2022 to 2024. In 2022, the expected participation was 6 kura across three terms, totalling 162 tauira and 36 kaiako across the year. By 2023 and continuing into 2024, this capacity grew to accommodate 12 kura per term, with approximately 108 tauira and up to 24 kaiako participating each term.
75. Kura Waiti offers a two-year progression for rangatahi, taumata one and taumata two, where learnings from each module of the first year are built upon. Each activity is designed to bridge traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific understanding, offering tauira a culturally grounded yet forward-looking educational experience. The goal is to establish a solid foundation for future engagement through Kura Waiti.
76. Located at the Waikato river in the centre of Kirikiriroa, activities take place on the banks of the river, on the awa, or utilising a nearby community space. The programme activities are not limited to physical waka activities alone. Through a carefully scaffolded curriculum, tauira engage in a range of experiential learning modules each term, focusing on:
 - Kaupapa waka - Waka use and maintenance, teamwork, safety procedures, assembly and disassembly of waka components, history of waka, and learning how to paddle waka on the awa
 - Environmental science informed by mātauranga Māori – the whakapapa, history and life cycle of tuna (eels), observing, trapping and learning about different tuna species, building and using hīnaki
 - Whakapapa of Waikato awa - origin and path of the awa, pepehā, waiata mōteatea and history about the awa, identifying landmarks of significance throughout tira hoe (the paddling journey)
 - Ecological literacy - native plant identification, river care, understanding and making rongoā, and environmental markers (e.g. maramataka, kōkōrangi).

Who participates in Kura Waiti?

77. 22 kura in the Waikato region qualify for Kura Waiti, and 19 kura have participated across the three years of operation, an 86% participation rate. There are new kura each year, and kura who return each year. There are up to 14 kura who have completed the two-year cycle from 2022 to 2024, with those participating rangatahi steadily growing their knowledge over two years⁷.
78. The table below describes the expected participation numbers of kura, tauira and kaiako each year and term. The actual numbers are somewhat less than this, as there are factors that prevent attendance, often at the last minute, like illness, tangi, other marae and hapū-related responsibilities that come up for kura. We heard that for smaller kura, finding and paying for relief kaiako is one of the bigger challenges. Travel arrangements and costs can also be a barrier to attendance.

⁷ One kura was unable to register as it only goes to year 6, and three were registered but withdrew due to lack of numbers, distant locations and logistics. One kura is not yet registered, but hoping to be so in 2025-2028.

Table 1: Expected participation in Waiti – 2022 – 2025

Year	Terms kura Waiti being held	Number of kura per term	Number of taura per term	Total taura	Number of kaiako per term	Total kaiako
2022	2,3,4	6 per term	54 per term	162	12 per term	36
2023	1,2,3,4	12 per term	108 per term	432	24 per term	96
2024	1,2,3,4	12 per term	108 per term	432	24 per term	96
				1080		228

Other hui and events attended by kura and rangatahi

2022

In October 2022, TTVT invited the participating Kura Waiti Kura to Te Hau Kōmaru National Waka Hourua Festival in Kāwhia Moana. It was a week-long event celebrating mātauranga waka hourua, including navigation, sailing exercises and marine care. In total, over 130 taura participated from seven kura.

2023

In 2023, TTVT invited kura from Kura Waiti to the TTVT Matariki programme and the TTVT Mātauranga Festival in Kāwhia. Additionally, TTVT had four taura from Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Whakarewa i te reo ki Tūwharetoa sail from Ōpua Bay of Islands to Tāmaki in November 2023. In total, over 150 taura from eight kura participated.

2024

Trialled Ka Hura Tangata ki Tai, a te reo Māori ocean water safety programme at Whaingāroa (5 wānanga) led by Aotearoa Water Patrol.

Kura Waiti was piloted in December 2024, TTVT ran a Kura Waiti overnight sail on waka Hourua Hine Moana. The 3-day and 2-night voyage in Kāwhia with 10 taura and two kaiako from four different kura was delivered in te reo Māori by TTVT captains and crew. Taura gained hands-on waka hourua skills that incorporated environmental observations.

The people of Kura Waiti

79. The people who support the delivery of Kura Waiti bring value by being authentic, experienced and inspirational for rangatahi.

Everyone who comes and participates from TTVT are all river or ocean people. Not only do they have an intimate understanding of the river from the source to te pūaha, but beyond that into the moana. They are not only river people but ocean people and have voyaged beyond the horizon. So, the experiences that they bring are from over the horizon, and they bring them back and share them with the rangatahi. (TTVT)

Authentic learning. Mātauranga Māori delivered well and authentically. It's pretty different, its unique, not an off the shelf, its Waikato, using the awa which are very unique and special You can see the kids lighting up. An amazing opportunity for the young people. (WRC)

There's a lot of mana that Hoturoa and Turanga bring. Watching it in action is pretty amazing. There's a lot of stuff there that when you think about value proposition it's an amazing opportunity that you're facilitating. (WRC)

80. The core TTVT delivery team currently includes two paid roles, Pou Ārahi and Pou Āwhina (one full-time and one 0.75 FTE):

- Turanga Barclay-Kerr, fulfils the role of Pou Ārahi, leads activities with tauira on the water, and brings invaluable waka mātauranga and skills in youth engagement and education.
- Danielle Moeke-Ferris plays a supporting role as Pou Āwhina, handling much of the administrative coordination, liaising with kura and supporting delivery logistics.

It is important to note that these paid roles are supported by the wider TTVT whānau, including kaimahi, leadership, board of trustees and volunteers:

- Kaiāwhina, a committed volunteer base primarily aged 16–20, support the delivery of activities with tauira on and off the water. These volunteers often go on to complete leadership training and certifications such as first aid or boat master courses, funded through the programme.
 - Namaka Barclay-Kerr is a kaiako who supports the programme's structure to meet curriculum requirements.
 - Noenoe Barclay-Kerr develops the workbooks for tauira and newsletters for whānau.
 - Anna Bertram supports the administration and operations for TTVT and is responsible for reporting back to WRC each term.
81. Crucial to the delivery of Kura Waitī is the support of the WRC Kaihāpai Hōtaka Mātauanga Arna-Rose Solomon-Banks, who initiated the relationship with TTVT and continues to be a driving force behind the programme's development and coordination from the WRC side. Further guiding Kura Waitī is the Kāhui Kaitiaki, an advisory rūpū that oversees the progress and strategic direction of Kura Waitī, offering relevant mātauranga when called upon.

The strength of a Māori expert-led approach in the context of mātauranga revitalisation

82. As discussed earlier, one of Kura Waitī's core strengths is enabling rangatahi to learn from well-renowned mātanga and waka practitioners who can provide relevant local mātauranga about te taiao and the awa in te reo Māori.
83. Te Toki Voyaging Trust brings deep, intergenerational mātauranga to the delivery of Kura Waitī. The Trust's pedagogy is steeped in waka traditions, environmental stewardship, and taiao-centred learning that aligns with both Māori and Western educational paradigms.
84. TTVT can also access mātanga who hold specific mātauranga around other environmental aspects to support the programme. Alongside the experts who coordinate and deliver Kura Waitī regularly, some of the subject experts who have also worked with TTVT include:
- Dr Jess Blackwood is a qualified doctor who understands rongoā and Western medicine. She was brought on to facilitate mātauranga around rongoā, which is accessible around the awa, and how to create it yourself by understanding maramataka and te taiao.
 - Professor James Brock supported the identification of plants and the understanding of what is native and introduced. He taught the rangatahi how to read the signs of what helps the taiao for the awa and what makes it unhealthy.

- Whaea Tangihaere Ormsby and Taroi Rawiri are kaitautoko with the mātauranga for Tuna in te awa o Waikato

85. Given the state of knowledge revitalisation required for future generations, it is vital to champion and protect this knowledge and not take it for granted, recognising that few hold this knowledge.

Key learnings to date

86. Several key learnings emerged. Each of the learnings are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 3: Rangatahi at Parapara garden, Hamilton Gardens (Supplied by Te Toki Voyaging Trust)



Goal and outcome clarity between Kura Waiti and funders

87. We found that there are several perspectives on what the goals, future aspirations, and outcomes of Kura Waiti might be. There is a mix of short, medium and long-term goals, as well as overlapping goals and aspirations, which result in a lack of clarity among key stakeholders about the programme's purpose and change pathway.
88. The following goals and aspirations have been collated from the documents shared with us and the discussions we had with all stakeholders:
- provide opportunities for rangatahi to experience their awa
 - share kōrero tuku iho to connect rangatahi to a sense of purpose and identity
 - deepening taurira connection to te taiao
 - developing rangatahi knowledge about the awa, its history, and the mātauranga associated with wai, awa, waka, plant and food sources, taonga tuku iho, water (and marine) science, water safety, etc.
 - developing rangatahi kaitiakitanga for the awa by teaching rangatahi why, where and how they can protect, restore and revitalise our waterways
 - developing waka ama skills and tikanga
 - leadership development for rangatahi
 - action competence/empowerment
 - mātauranga development and revitalisation
 - rangatahi sharing their knowledge and having an impact in their hapū/marae/iwi
 - passing on mātauranga/taonga tuku iho to current and future generations
 - developing career pathways in environmental science and local government
 - addressing the under-representation of Māori in environmental science
 - advance mātauranga Māori environmental education
 - honour Te Tiriti relationships

- strengthen relationships between WRC and kura Māori
 - support kura Māori with environmental learning in a way that recognises te reo Māori, tikanga and mātauranga
 - address the Te Ture Whaimana
 - strengthen Joint Management Agreement obligations and iwi aspirations in their iwi Environmental plans
 - develop and lift Kura Waitā.
89. Currently, Kura Waitī uses a range of strategies to meet some of these goals, including 1) through Māori-medium, actively engaging rangatahi in immersive experiential learning of taiao mātauranga, 2) providing connections to Māori mātanga and tuākana that inspire rangatahi and provide examples of leadership and career opportunities, 3) deepening knowledge and skills through scaffolding learning over two years (which assumes that tauira engage in most of the learning sessions), 4) providing opportunities to connect to other spaces and kaupapa (e.g., Kura Waitā, TTVT waka kaupapa) that create opportunities for whanaungatanga and learning.
90. Kura Waitī provides rangatahi with key moments of learning through connections to te taiao and Waikato awa. Mātanga and tuākana transmit mātauranga and taonga tuku iho to rangatahi in the hopes of inspiring future kaitiaki who will continue to learn about, care for, and connect with, their awa.
91. There are also several WRC and WRA strategies and focus areas, as well as kura objectives that have a strong alignment with Kura Waitī; however, these have not been brought together to create shared clarity about the purpose and future development pathways for Kura Waitī and their funders and partners.
92. Having a shared view of the current and potential value of Kura Waitī and its potential contribution to future outcomes will help TTVT, funders, partners and kura with the ongoing development of the programme. For example, there are many views about what could be included in future iterations of the programme, but given all the goals and suggestions, expanding the content and reach of the programme in the absence of a shared development strategy risks diluting the current programme's achievements.

Water quality – discussions in the early days – but not seen that enacted lately. Would be something really useful to integrate into the programme. Should be wider than water testing, have someone talk about the water quality issues we're facing and why. Talk about the dams, Waikato Tainui settlement – 210 million invested in cleaning up the river. Touching on that history. Some of the contaminants we find in our water. How they got there, what to look for when out swimming. (Funder)

Scaling, expanding and improving

93. Many people offered numerous ideas about how Kura Waitī could be expanded in future iterations, which clearly demonstrated the interest and passion for this initiative, as well as people's vision for its growth.
94. Some of the suggestions about programme improvement or extension included:
- increasing the environmental science and water quality testing and content, adding restoration work, and enhancing water safety content

- increased focus on the weaving of Western science and mātauranga Māori that relates to the awa
- ensuring community aspirations are included in the future direction of the programme
- deepening the experience for those rangatahi who demonstrate keenness and aptitude, potentially selecting them for more advanced learning as they get older.
- having more days on the programme to support deeper rangatahi learning. Some people felt four days across a year was too limited, with suggestions about ways this could be achieved, including holding two or three-day noho
- increasing the number of rangatahi and kura going through the programme. Some wanted to see more rangatahi participating in the programme. One option suggested for greater reach was extending the programme to wharekura students
- expanding the programme to whānau, hapū, and iwi
- expanding the reach of the programme, offering a version of the programme to English medium schools, for both Māori and non-Māori, and/or working with te reo/rumaki rangatahi who speak te reo Māori. We heard that TTVT are trialling a more bilingual offering to Māori kura who are not full immersion schools.
- It was noted that a different model of delivery for mainstream schools and non-Māori students would be required, compared to working with kura, given the programme is currently delivered in te reo Māori with a key focus on mātauranga transmission.

Partnerships: Relationships and partnerships are the key to growth

95. Creating and growing the value of Kura Waiti has been highly dependent on the quality of relationships and partnerships formed between TTVT, WRC, WRA and others. TTVT were praised for their existing collaborations. Existing funders appreciate the partnership they have with TTVT, where respective roles and responsibilities have enabled a positive working relationship.
96. It was clear that the many partnerships and relationships created through the development of River Schools, which preceded the Kura Waiti programme, have been supported by Council staff and key personnel with context-specific knowledge and networks. The importance of these relational roles should not be downplayed, as it is a key contribution to the quality of the partnership between WRC and TTVT.
97. The nurturing of current and potential partnerships is seen as essential for future sustainability and growth. This includes continuing to foster relationships with kura to ensure the programme meets their needs, WRA/WRC to ensure there is consolidation around vision, goals and contributions as well as resourcing and reciprocity, and other experts/organisations that contribute mātauranga, e.g., integration of environmental content such as water testing elements, NIWA contribution, University internships, TTVT kaiāwhina, as well as other iwi authorities and entities.

Programme consolidation and sustainability

98. One of the strongest suggestions that emerged from discussions about improvement and change was the need for programme consolidation and sustainability before any further development or extension. It was persuasively argued by several people that consolidating foundational programme knowledge and experience around the Waikato awa, with a focus

on developing rangatahi leadership in kaitiakitanga specifically for the awa, would be beneficial before extending to other kaupapa, such as Kura Waitā. Retaining a focus on the core, including funders associated with Waikato awa, will ensure that the offering to kura is working well across the range of kura in the Waikato.

99. Part of the rationale for consolidation was that the current initiative has only been in operation for a short time, and it is still developing and adapting its delivery and operational model. There were words of caution against growing too quickly. Additionally, given that this is one of the only programmes of its type targeting Māori-medium kura, some felt it was essential to ensure the delivery model meets kura needs before expanding or extending.
100. At this point in the programme's development, the value of the human resource within Kura Waitā was identified as a key strength. However, it raises questions about the sustainability of the current delivery model for the future, particularly if the programme expands. There is a desire among those closely connected to the design and delivery of the programme to protect and support the sustainability of the programme for the benefit of rangatahi and Kura Māori, for te ao Māori and the revitalisation of mātauranga.
101. Creating a platform for consolidation was a strong sentiment before future growth could be considered. We have heard that TTVT's reliance on relatively short-term funding, combined with the need for additional financial support, poses a challenge to longer-term continuity and acts as a barrier to further development. A sustainable programme requires a stable funding model.
102. We heard from some that the programme is perceived as expensive. However, others argued that Kura Waitā is one of a kind. Without it, kura and rangatahi Māori attending these kura would not receive specific environmental mātauranga in culturally relevant ways that strengthen their connection to Waikato awa, te taiao, and to kaitiakitanga.
103. The value it is already providing in filling a gap in learning and knowledge for rangatahi attending Māori-medium kura is considered priceless by some, not least because of its unique contribution to mātauranga and te reo Māori revitalisation.
104. We heard a range of options for consolidating the programme. These are described below.

Deepening and localising Kura Waitā

105. There is recognition by some stakeholders that Kura Waitā and TTVT are part of a vital revitalisation process for Māori. This is a highly valued component of the initiative. People were keen to see the consolidation and deepening of te reo Māori and mātauranga being learned. Expanding the use of Māori-specific terminology in the everyday worlds of rangatahi was described as giving "breadth of language is what our kids deserve."
106. There is great interest in further deepening and consolidating the mātauranga being learned in Kura Waitā. Paddling around different areas of the Waikato, learning more about new and other environments, was a suggestion made by rangatahi.

Kia haere ki etahi wāhi hou ki te ako mō te taiao. Kia kāore te noho ki te wāhi ōrite (To travel to new places to learn about the environment. Not stay in the same place). (Tauira)

*Hoe waka ki ngā wāhi rerekē o Waikato (Paddle waka in different places of Waikato).
(Tauira)*

107. This was something that some felt would also support kura who are the furthest away from Kirikiriroa, making it easier to transport rangatahi to the programme. Several people expressed aspirations for rangatahi to experience Kura Waiti “on their takiwā of the awa.” This aspiration also envisioned the revitalisation of local kōrero tuku iho, providing the opportunity for kura to learn further localised mātauranga that deeply connects to their own rohe.
108. Another suggestion for localising the programme was to connect with others who are providing similar kaupapa on te taiao. We have heard that there is demand for this type of programming, with some kura and communities wanting to establish similar initiatives. Hapū/iwi/kura are sharing locally specific mātauranga with their people, such as kōrero around moana, geothermal, and ngahere, and there may be opportunities for Kura Waiti to share their model and learning, and foster and support hapū/iwi-specific mātauranga programmes led by hapū/iwi/kura in their own regions.

Improving transitions

109. This suggestion included working closely with kura to improve the transition and learning opportunities from taumata one and two. To improve this transition and learning, people told us that it’s important to develop a realistic understanding of what kura and rangatahi can commit to. It appears that some kura do not bring the same rangatahi to Kura Waiti sessions, and this has implications for the kind of sessions that are provided. Some kura may also want to engage differently in the programme, given their logistical challenges, rather than the current offering of four sessions per year. In an attempt to make the programme more adaptable for kura realities, in 2024 TTVT trialled a one-year Kura Waiti programme, Te Kounga o Kura Waiti, that consisted of both taumata one and two learnings for rangatahi. Ensuring flexibility and negotiation with kura while keeping the programme’s aims to grow kaitiakitanga and leaders will be important.

Opportunities for rangatahi to engage with the WRC and other partners

110. Whilst several people mentioned that Kura Waiti can bridge rangatahi engagement with local government and possible career pathways, this was an aspect to be strengthened. Suggestions made included providing more intentional opportunities in Kura Waiti for rangatahi to visit WRC and potentially other partners to observe and connect with Māori interns and other Māori staff. These suggestions recognise the potential Kura Waiti has to inspire rangatahi to pursue careers in environmental science, local government, and other related fields in the future.

The role of the interns and kaiāwhina

111. It was widely recognised that the WRC interns are a valuable addition to the programme and the WRC. Interns play a role as mentors to the rangatahi, supporting them to make connections between their Kura Waiti experience, other kaupapa and networks in te ao Māori as well as future learning and career opportunities.

112. The WRC interns could also play a greater role in connecting rangatahi to local government and connecting people within the Council with the programme. For future planning, defining the role of the WRC interns and their wider contribution to the programme, for rangatahi, and within the Council would be recommended.
113. The TTVT kaiāwhina who support the implementation of Kura Waiti have also been a crucial part of the programme, both in providing mentorship as tuākana and in developing their own learning, skills and cultural connections. It was reported that a number of the kaiāwhina (who were mostly rangatahi with waka ama experience) were able to comfortably teach rangatahi by the end of their first year. Ensuring these kaiāwhina are recognised as a core part of the programme's future development is advised as they promote succession of the kaupapa.

Reflecting on my journey with Kura Waiti, has been deeply enriching. Teaching waka ama, rongoa, Maori maramataka, and native plants has not only shared knowledge but also sparked my own learning. This experience deepened my connection to my heritage and the environment, blending tradition with modern understanding. (Kaiāwhina)

I contributed to the kaupapa by sharing my pūkenga and mātauranga with tamariki. I guided them in the proper techniques for lashing the waka and demonstrated the correct ways to hoe. It was rewarding to support their learning and help them build confidence in Waka Ama, ensuring the kaupapa continues to thrive for future generations. (Kaiāwhina)

I gained a whole new set of pūkenga about being an kaimahi and what it takes to thrive in the workforce. I developed a deeper understanding of time management, reporting to our kaiwhakahaere daily, and ensuring I am prepared for each day. These experiences have been invaluable in my growth both on and off the water. (Kaiāwhina)

Coordination functions

114. The coordination functions currently supported by WRC are crucial to the programme's success. The importance of having expertise to bridge relationships across WRC, as well as TTVT, Kura, iwi, and funders, was highlighted by several people. This coordinating function currently sits within WRC, and the current coordinator, Arna-Rose, was singled out as exemplifying this expertise.
115. The support functions within TTVT, including coordination and ongoing resource development, were also identified as essential for achieving the effective and efficient operation of the programme.
116. These logistical and relational supports are key for future programme delivery and will need to be sustained to ensure operations run as smoothly as possible.

Extending learning in kura

117. The strength of Kura Waiti lies in its human resources, specifically the expertise, experience, and depth of knowledge that the facilitators possess. A critical point of difference from other initiatives is that Kura Waiti experts deliver and facilitate knowledge transfer and development directly with rangatahi, rather than having material developed by experts and delivered by others. That being said, placing such high importance on the facilitator creates

a risk of dependency on their availability. This is somewhat mitigated by the workbooks that are provided as part of Kura Waiti.

118. However, the workbooks only consolidate the learning; we heard that they don't provide much opportunity to extend the learning. It was suggested that a teacher resource to accompany the student workbook could support the extension and embedding of learning. Furthermore, explicit links to kura curriculum or national curriculum documents kura could scaffold the Kura Waiti kaupapa and learning.
119. People suggested there could be benefits to the wider kura if Kura Waiti was better integrated into kura curriculum. To expand on the idea of more explicit links to kura and the national curriculum, it was suggested that TTVT could attend (or hold) Teacher Only Days as an opportunity to plan and integrate Kura Waiti into kaiako and kura planning, both logistically and pedagogically. This would allow for targeted and meaningful learning that is complementary and localised kura specific learning.

*There's more opportunity to influence, encourage, support and create space for rangatahi.
(Key Stakeholder)*

Challenges for kura

120. Kura and other interviewees noted several challenges to their participation in the programme. Kura's policies and procedures for risk assessments are extensive and time-consuming, which can inhibit participation, especially when dates are communicated with inadequate time to prepare. Furthermore, there are logistical challenges around sourcing relief for a kaiako for the whole day, especially if the cohort is small. Fortunately, there is a strong culture of health and safety within the TTVT personnel.
121. Another key challenge for kura is the logistics of getting tauira to the Kura Waiti programme base in Kirikiriroa. These challenges include the distance they are from Kirikiriroa meaning they have long travel times e.g., some kura are up to two hours away, meaning four hours travel in a single day, the ability for kura to provide relief teachers and drivers, providing vehicles, late communication both ways (i.e. booked sessions being too late, or letting TTVT know that they are not able to attend on the day due to urgent kaupapa).
122. It was observed that a core issue has been kura not turning up on the day, and with late notice of non-attendance. This was described as probably one of the most challenging aspects of programme delivery.
123. The majority of participants strongly recommended increasing the number of days to participate, whether in a wānanga format or through more regular one-day interactions. It was also proposed that larger cohorts would suit some of the kura context better due to logistical and organisational issues within kura.
124. It was also noted that navigating these challenges requires excellent relationships with kura. We heard that this requires a certain amount of kura 'know-how,' i.e., knowing who to talk to, how and when to engage with them, and how to work around kura operations, schedules, and challenges.

The value proposition of Kura Waiti

125. In this section, we summarise what we have learned about what *kinds* of value are being created by Kura Waiti, for whom, how that value is created, and what factors may influence the value created⁸.

Figure 4: Rangatahi learning about kōkōrangī Māori, Māori astronomy with Dr Jess (Supplied by Te Toki Voyaging Trust)



What value is created and for whom?

Everyone benefits. The schools benefit because it's another way of introducing mātauranga Māori to their rangatahi. WRC benefits because it shows their ability to engage in a partnership—tangata Tiriti way of doing things. TTVT benefits because it builds the TTVT profile in the community, but also reinforces to the community the environmental messages that TTVT promotes in the years it has been in operation. The community in general benefits because we are creating a generation of young people who have a better understanding of what needs to be done to take care of the taiao. The reo benefits because a new aspect of reo use is brought into play for the tamariki in these learning environments. (TTVT)

Inherent or existing value

126. The investment funders are making in Kura Waiti leverages the considerable existing or inherent value of TTVT's organisation, cultural, social, and knowledge expertise, reputation, professionalism and experience. Additionally, the choice of TTVT as a partner enhances the likelihood that the initiative will bring about sustainable change, as the cultural contexts and values of TTVT align with those intended to benefit from them. Projects that are delivered not *for* or *with* people, but *by* those with similar cultures and languages, are known to catalyse better outcomes⁹.
127. As a strategic partner in the development of Kura Waiti, TTVT also has had the opportunity and potential to leverage its partnership with WRC and WRA to grow its reach and offering into Māori-medium schools and communities across the Waikato. The partnership is built

⁸ King, J. (2021). Expanding theory-based evaluation: incorporating value creation in a theory of change. Evaluation and Program Planning. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2021.101963>

⁹ Wehipeihana, N. (2019). Increasing cultural competence in support of indigenous-led evaluation: a necessary step toward indigenous-led evaluation. Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 34(2), 368-384.

upon the considerable social, cultural, environmental, spiritual, human and economic value of both partners, and this was reinforced by those we spoke to. The nurturing of the relationships within this partnership has created a platform for generating significant potential value, in the form of social, cultural, and human capital, with longer-term changes and transformational value emerging but requiring more time to be realised.

Potential value

128. This collaboration is creating significant value for rangatahi and their marae, hapū, iwi, and communities. The highly engaging, experiential learning of Kura Waitī prioritises the application of skills in meaningful contexts for rangatahi, where experts transmit knowledge through action. This approach is expanding rangatahi knowledge, building their human capital (knowledge, skills and well-being), and connections to te taiao, affirming their cultural identity, fostering a sense of care for the river and wider environment, and building their confidence to become environmental kaitiakitanga. Investing in culturally specific learning and knowledge capabilities builds human capital, a form of potential value that yields long-lasting benefits for rangatahi, their marae, hapū, iwi, and communities.
129. For kura, Kura Waitī is highly valued. It is a uniquely targeted, low-cost initiative that is underpinned by te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and mātauranga Māori, filling a gap for Māori-speaking and Māori-thinking students, who are currently underserved due to a lack of targeted initiatives of this nature. The resources and te reo Māori specific to waka, water safety and environmental kaitiakitanga are broadening and widening the language available to rangatahi, whānau, marae, and hapū. The programme is acting as a vehicle to rebirth and reconnect people in a holistic way to waka culture, the river and taonga tuku iho. Currently, the programme is described as more of a foundation for initiating learning about specific mātauranga, but everyone has aspirations for deepening the learning, especially its role in advancing te reo Māori and revitalising mātauranga.

Kaitiakitanga would be their everyday...for the environment...for wai...they will be the kaitiaki...the width and breadth of language is what our kids deserve. (Key stakeholder)

130. Whilst there are challenges around timetabling, travel, and consistent participation for kura, these are known issues, and ongoing work is being done by the partners, so that rangatahi can reap the full benefits of the programme.
131. The relationships and social capital built through partnerships between WRC and TTVT to support the realisation of key strategies and goals for river restoration, as well as other broader environmental and cultural aspirations, are also a key form of potential value. Kura Waitī integrates well with existing WRC/WRA strategies and objectives, aligning closely with what current funders are striving for, through shared values, motivation, and target audiences. As discussed above, the current reach of the programme is already providing numerous benefits for rangatahi, kura, and communities across the Waikato. The potential of Kura Waitī to grow into Kura Waitā feels like a natural progression.

Applied and realised value

132. Adapting and applying the knowledge and expertise of TTVT to Kura Waitī is a form of applied value. Adapting and applying this knowledge in different contexts has led to changes, innovations, new practices, tools, and resources. For example, Kura Waitī has

developed new curricula and resources for kura to strengthen learning. TTVT is also adapting and innovating with programme delivery, such as expanding access to specialist mātaunga, to deepen the quality of learning for rangatahi, utilising rangatahi kaiāwhina and interns as tuākana, and developing new te reo Māori resource booklets.

133. Kaiako pointed to examples of rangatahi applying their learning, making connections to their kura mahi, and NCEA Pūtaiao studies, even after limited experience in the programme. Rangatahi also confirmed that they are able to practically engage in mātauranga taiao outside the classroom, as a result of their participation in Kura Waiti, and that their participation has had a lasting impact.
134. And there is no doubt from the feedback we received from rangatahi that the programme is engaging, and they would love more; more time to expand their learning about voyaging, more content around strategies to care for the environment, and more chances to return.

Kia ako i ētahi momo rautaki ki te tiaki i te ao, i te taiao (To learn strategies to care for the world, for the environment). (Tauria)

Kia ako i ngā moutere i tae ngā waka hourua (To learn about the islands the voyaging waka went to). (Tauria)

Pirangi au kia hoki te wharekura ki tēnei momo kaupapa, nā te mea he pai ngā akoranga (I want the school to return this kaupapa because of the learning). (Tauria)

135. There are signs of other forms of applied and realised value, such as the feedback we received about growing waka and environmentally specific te reo Māori, and the rangatahi who, having been contributing to the programme for a couple of years, are becoming mentors with TTVT.
136. However, it's still too early for Kura Waiti to demonstrate some of the longer-term outcomes that are hoped for. Kura Waiti is a new venture, still getting on its feet; it needs more time, so that rangatahi going through the programme today can mature and demonstrate the ripple effect of Kura Waiti on their future life and career choices. The investment to date has effectively been early seed funding, and there are still some programming and operational issues to work through so that the aspirations of all those with a stake in the programme can be realised.
137. As discussed earlier in the report, one of the hopes of some stakeholders is that Kura Waiti will open up career pathways and options for rangatahi, supporting and enabling them to transition into environmental sciences and other related careers. Beyond this, the longer-term aspiration is to increase the number of Māori in environmental science as well as the potential for taking up kaitiakitanga roles within hapū, marae, and iwi contexts.

Transformational value

138. There are aspirations for Kura Waiti to contribute to transformative value beyond careers and demonstrating kaitiakitanga. People talked of advancing mātauranga Māori education and revitalising waka, water and navigation mātauranga as well as te reo Māori. Creating this kind of transformative value is a long game, requiring enduring commitments from all those in the Kura Waiti ecosystem. Transformative value is not out of reach, we have seen the early foundational phases strongly demonstrated in Kura Waiti, the significant

engagement and support for the programme, positive learning outcomes, and a desire to grow this offering deeper as well as having a more expansive reach.

139. However, to realise further value, three key objectives require focus: first, consolidating the current operational phase through stronger engagement and alignment with kura needs; second, ensuring coherence in the collective vision and approach among partners; and third, fostering commitment and desire among partners and funders for long-term sustainability. Following this, ongoing learning, adaptation, and planning for the subsequent growth of new offerings, such as Kura Waitā, can be undertaken.

Case Studies

Three case studies were developed to support the evaluation.

1. The first case study was prepared by Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT) with support from Greg Koia. The evaluators provided TTVT with a case study template and a set of guiding questions, enabling them to speak in their own voice about their history, development and outcomes.
2. The second and third case studies highlight the experiences of Kura Māori who have participated in Kura Waitī - Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Pūaha o Waikato & Te Kura o Hirangi. Areta Ranginui Charlton prepared these two cases.
3. All three case studies follow a similar format, beginning with some context and history, then a description of activities and delivery experiences, and then a section on the outcomes of participation in Kura Waitī. All the cases also have a final concluding section.

Development and Implementation of Kura Waitī – Te Toki Voyaging Trust

Introduction

Kura Waitī, delivered through a partnership between Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT) and the Waikato Regional Council (WRC), provides culturally grounded environmental education to rangatahi in kura kaupapa Māori across the Waikato region. Rooted in mātauranga Māori, the programme uses waka-based learning experiences to connect young people to the Waikato River, fostering environmental stewardship, cultural identity, and leadership. This case study explores the structure, delivery, and impact of Kura Waitī and Kura Waitā, highlighting the unique value of TTVT's kaupapa and identifying opportunities for future development.

Section 1: Situation & Context

Programme Journey to Date

The waka-based mātauranga Māori programme has evolved significantly since its inception, with a clear mission to engage more *kura* and create a seamless educational pathway leading into *Kura Waitā*. A fundamental part of this journey involves securing appropriate resources to ensure the programme has the capacity and infrastructure needed for sustainable delivery.

Since launching in 2022, the programme has expanded its reach and offerings considerably. Initially implemented across **6 kura** in Term 2 of 2022, it included **54 tauira (students)** and **12 kaiako (teachers)** per term. By 2023 and continuing into 2024, the programme had doubled in scale, with **12 kura participating per term**, reaching **108 tauira and up to 24 kaiako**.

Across these years, **22 Kura** in the Waikato region have been identified as qualifying for participation in *Kura Waitī* (to be confirmed), with a consistent focus on Māori-medium education and no participation from mainstream schools.

The programme's delivery is enriched through a series of progressively advanced learning modules. Eleven unique workbooks have been developed—each tailored to a specific term—and focus on different aspects of the local environment surrounding the river. These resources support a staircased approach to learning, where each stage builds upon the previous year's knowledge, ensuring tamariki grow their understanding in a meaningful and connected way.

Motivation for Development

At the heart of the programme lies a deep commitment to connecting rangatahi with the natural world—especially the river—through culturally resonant, experiential education.

The waka was chosen not just as a mode of transport, but as a vessel for storytelling and transmission of mātauranga Māori.

This method transforms what might have been a recreational activity into an opportunity to engage tamariki in knowledge acquisition tied to identity, environment, and heritage. The approach has allowed for an immersive learning experience that bridges the traditional with the contemporary, instilling a sense of place and belonging among participants.

Key Stakeholders and Contributors

The programme is a collaboration among several organisations and individuals who have played critical roles in its establishment and ongoing delivery. The key institutional stakeholders include **Waikato Regional Council (WRC)**, **Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT)**, and the **participating kura** across the Waikato region.

Among the key individuals:

- **Arna-Rose** initiated the relationship with TTVT and continues to be a driving force behind the programme's development and coordination.
- **Turanga** brings invaluable skills in youth engagement and education, leading activities with tamariki on the water.
- **Danielle** handles much of the administrative coordination, liaising with kura and supporting delivery logistics.
- Local **rangatahi/taiohi** also contribute, taking on leadership roles and receiving additional training (e.g., **first aid, Day Skipper, and Boat Master certifications**), which supports their development and provides a secondary strand of educational impact beyond the core programme.

Significant Milestones and Events

Since 2022, several key milestones have marked the growth and transformation of the programme:

- **Launch of Kura Waitī in 2022:** In its first year, the programme operated in Terms 2, 3, and 4, reaching **54 tauira** and **12 kaiako per term** from 6 kura.
- **Te Hau Kōmaru National Waka Hourua Festival (October 2022):** Participating kura were invited to a week-long cultural event in Kāwhia Moana, focused on waka hourua navigation, sailing, and marine care.
 - Attendees included:
 - *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Bernard Fergusson*: 8 tauira
 - *Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa*: 50 tauira
 - *Te Wharekura o Maniapoto*: 50 tauira
 - 5 tauira from 4 other kura, including:
 - *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Puaha o Waikato*

- *Te Kura o Rangiriri*
- *Te Wharekura o Te Rau Aroha*
- *Te Wharekura o Ngā Purapura o te Aroha*
- **Expansion in 2023:** The programme doubled in size, with **12 kura**, **108 tauira**, and **up to 24 kaiako** participating per term. Events this year included:
 - The **TTVT Matariki Programme** (specific data pending)
 - The **TTVT Mātauranga Festival** in Kāwhia, attended by 133 tauira from 8 kura:
 - *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Bernard Fergusson*: 19
 - *Te Wharekura o Manaia*: 7
 - *Te Kura o Ngāti Haua*: 21
 - *Te Wharekura o Te Rau Aroha*: 20
 - *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Whakarewa i te reo ki Tūwharetoa*: 20
 - *Benneydale School*: 9
 - *Ngā Taiātea Wharekura*: 15
 - *Tōku Māpihi Maurea Kura Kaupapa Māori*: 22
- **Notable Achievement (November 2023):** Four tauira from *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Whakarewa i te reo ki Tūwharetoa* sailed from Ōpua (Bay of Islands) to Tāmaki Makaurau, showcasing the depth of their training and cultural engagement.
- **Kura Waitā Overnight Sail (December 2024):** A significant next step in the pathway, this 3-day, 2-night immersive waka experience in Kāwhia involved **10 tauira and 2 kaiako** from 4 kura, indicating successful progression from foundational to advanced levels of the programme.

Section 2: Kura Waitā Activities and Delivery

Participant Engagement and Programme Structure

Kura Waitā is delivered as a one-day, school-specific programme, with participation numbers determined by available resources. Each session typically includes up to 18 tauira (students), either from a single kura or split between two kura (9 each), along with up to two kaiako (teachers) per group. The programme currently operates across Terms 1 to 4, reaching 12 kura each term, with the goal of frontloading delivery in the early weeks of the school term.

Between 2022 and 2024, participation has steadily increased. In 2022, 6 kura participated across three terms, totalling 162 tauira and 36 kaiako across the year. By 2023 and continuing into 2024, this grew to 12 kura per term, with approximately 108 tauira and up to 24 kaiako participating each term.

The programme is not limited to physical waka activities alone. Through a carefully scaffolded curriculum, tauira engage in a range of experiential learning modules, including:

- Waka navigation, teamwork, and safety procedures
- Assembly and disassembly of waka components
- Environmental science informed by mātauranga Māori
- Ecological literacy, including native plant identification and awa (river) care

Each activity is designed to bridge traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific understanding, offering tauira a culturally grounded yet forward-looking educational experience. The goal is to build a strong foundation for further engagement through Kura Waitā.

Mātauranga Contribution of Te Toki Voyaging Trust

Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT) brings deep, intergenerational mātauranga to the delivery of Kura Waitī. The Trust's pedagogy is steeped in waka traditions, environmental stewardship, and taiao-centred learning that aligns with both Māori and western educational paradigms. This mātauranga is lived knowledge—embodied by kaiako and kaimahi who have grown up immersed in waka culture, and who whakapapa to the awa and moana they teach about.

Beyond pedagogy, TTVT also contributes critical infrastructure, including waka, paddles, safety equipment, and human resources spanning health professionals, scientists, and local knowledge holders. This holistic approach ensures a culturally safe and intellectually rigorous programme for all participants.

Community and Stakeholder Feedback

Feedback from kura, whānau, and tauira has been overwhelmingly positive. The programme's delivery in te reo Māori is a particularly valued aspect, enabling kaupapa Māori learning environments to flourish. The flexibility of the facilitators to cater for varying language proficiencies ensures inclusivity for all tauira.

Other highly rated elements include the quality of safety protocols, the clarity and usefulness of workbooks, and the meaningfulness of the mātauranga shared. To date, no significant negative feedback has been reported, suggesting the programme resonates strongly with its participants.

Coordination, Delivery, and Partnership with WRC

The programme's delivery depends on a strong partnership between TTVT and the Waikato Regional Council (WRC). WRC's vision of engaging kura—particularly Kura Kaupapa Māori—in hands-on environmental learning has been instrumental in shaping Kura Waitī. WRC supports programme delivery through pūtea (funding), resource development, and logistical backup including alternative venues during inclement weather.

TTVT leads the on-the-ground delivery and maintains long-standing relationships with many kura, some of which already participate in TTVT's summer paddling initiatives. This familiarity supports strong enrolment and high retention.

Human Resources and Operational Capacity

The core delivery team currently includes two paid roles (one full-time and one 0.75 FTE), supported by a large and committed volunteer base—primarily aged 16–20. These volunteers often go on to complete leadership training and certifications such as first aid or boat master courses, funded through the programme.

In addition to the main team, the programme is supported by a range of kaiāwhina and subject experts, including:

- **Namaka Barclay-Kerr** – Programme structure and curriculum alignment
- **Anna Bertram** – Administrative support and WRC reporting
- **Noenoe Barclay-Kerr** – Workbook development and whānau communication
- **Dr Jess Blackwood** – Rongoā mātauranga and maramataka integration
- **Professor James Brock** – Native flora education and taiao analysis
- **Whaea Tangihaere Ormsby and Taroī Rawiri** – Mātauranga on tuna and the Waikato River

Evolution of the Programme

Since its inception, Kura Waitī has evolved from a single-day experience into a scaffolded learning journey that encourages continuity among tauira across years. This shift was driven in part by the realisation that some kura were initially sending a different cohort each time, sometimes using the programme as a behavioural management tool rather than an educational opportunity. Clear communication and expectations have since ensured participating kura commit to consistent cohorts, enabling progression into Kura Waitā.

Resources have also evolved. Workbooks, developed and refined annually by a dedicated team, reflect both seasonal environmental themes and increased academic rigour.

Challenges and Responses

Resourcing remains the programme’s central limitation—particularly in terms of waka availability, staffing, and operational funding. Despite high demand, expansion is constrained without increased human and material capacity. A minimum staffing increase to two full-time roles, two 0.75 FTEs, and one 0.25 FTE would be necessary to scale the programme to 10 additional kura.

Weather presents another operational challenge. However, strong collaboration with WRC ensures delivery continuity through alternative venues and programming flexibility.

Section 3: Kura Waitī Kura Waitā Outcomes

Key Achievements and Impact on Rangatahi

Since its inception, Kura Waitī and its continuation pathway, Kura Waitā, have delivered significant educational, cultural, and environmental outcomes. One of the most tangible

markers of success is the high level of engagement from rangatahi in both the hands-on activities and supporting educational materials, such as the specially developed workbooks. These workbooks reinforce learning and provide a bridge between experiential activity and mātauranga Māori, while also helping tamariki internalise key environmental and cultural messages.

Rangatahi quickly learn the value of collective effort—how effective teamwork results in a more responsive, faster-moving waka. This metaphor extends beyond paddling, reinforcing broader principles of collaboration, responsibility, and kaitiakitanga (environmental guardianship). Tauira also begin to develop critical thinking around the health of the awa, gaining awareness of human impacts and what changes are needed to restore and protect waterways.

Importantly, the programme opens up new ways of understanding science through a Māori worldview. Concepts such as taiao, pūtaiao, and maramataka become tools for both cultural identity and scientific inquiry. Many tauira leave the programme inspired to carry these lessons home, sharing what they've learned with their whānau and local communities.

Some rangatahi and their kura have subsequently expressed interest in further involvement with Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT), such as through waka paddling or sailing programmes. This interest signals a sustained connection to the kaupapa beyond the initial one-day programme.

Programme Beneficiaries and Long-Term Benefits

The benefits of Kura Waiti are broad and multi-dimensional:

- **Rangatahi** gain environmental literacy, cultural knowledge, water safety skills, and increased confidence in te reo Māori. The experience affirms Māori identity and aspirations through the presence of Māori role models such as doctors, researchers, and waka leaders.
- **Whānau and kura** benefit from seeing their tamariki thrive in a kaupapa Māori context. Schools gain access to high-quality educational programming that aligns with curriculum goals and enhances te ao Māori integration.
- **Te Toki Voyaging Trust** benefits by extending its reach and reinforcing its role as a community leader in cultural and environmental education. It also strengthens its ties with rangatahi who may continue on the waka pathway into sports, leadership, or environmental advocacy.
- **The wider community and taiao** benefit from the cultivation of a generation of young people with a deeper understanding of environmental stewardship and indigenous knowledge systems. The use of te reo Māori is also normalised in scientific and ecological contexts, contributing to language revitalisation.
- **Waikato Regional Council (WRC)** benefits by fulfilling its commitment to Tiriti-based partnerships and engaging meaningfully with tangata whenua in the education and environmental sectors.

Illustrative Examples of Impact

A number of stories highlight the lasting impact of the programme. Rangatahi who initially arrive unfamiliar with the awa often leave with the ability to:

- Identify native and introduced plant species
- Recognise toxic or invasive weeds
- Understand the threats posed by non-native fish species to indigenous ecosystems
- Use te reo Māori confidently, even if initially hesitant

One common observation is that many taura begin the day speaking primarily in English. However, through immersion and interaction with fluent kaimahi and kaiako, they shift toward predominantly using te reo Māori by the end of the day—often with pride and enthusiasm. This spontaneous shift illustrates the empowering and affirming nature of the environment created by the programme.

Participant Sentiment and Inspiring Moments

Informal feedback suggests that rangatahi consistently enjoy the programme. Observational data—from facial expressions, body language, and willingness to participate—indicates high levels of investment and enjoyment. Whānau and kaiako have also expressed gratitude for the opportunity and frequently note how much their tamariki enjoyed the day.

What rangatahi find most inspiring is the opportunity to meet Māori professionals in science and health—doctors, botanists, and environmental experts who reflect their own identities. These role models show rangatahi that they too can pursue careers in these fields while staying grounded in te ao Māori.

Challenges and Mitigations

140. Initial concerns often stem from unfamiliarity with the awa and apprehension about water safety. These are effectively addressed through clear health and safety protocols, pre-activity briefings, and visible measures such as life jackets, qualified staff, and well-maintained equipment. Once participants understand that their wellbeing is prioritised, those concerns quickly dissipate.

Section 4: The Value Proposition for Kura Waiti

Te Toki Voyaging Trust – Unique Strengths as Kaitiaki

Te Toki Voyaging Trust (TTVT) brings a depth of lived experience and cultural knowledge to Kura Waiti and Kura Waitā that is both rare and powerful. All kaimahi and kaiako involved are intimately connected to the waterways, with a deep understanding of the Waikato River—from its source to its mouth—and extending into the moana. These are people of the river and ocean; many have voyaged beyond the horizon and returned with knowledge that expands the worldview of the rangatahi they now guide.

This experience base is not merely technical but interwoven with whakapapa, mātauranga Māori, and a legacy of environmental guardianship. TTVT's strength also lies in its expansive network of experts and tohunga. Through this network, the programme is enriched by specialists in kaupapa Māori, environmental science, traditional navigation, and education, each contributing their part to a holistic and engaging learning experience.

Significant Milestones and Their Importance

Among the most significant achievements of the programme is simply enabling rangatahi to experience and build confidence on the awa. For many, this is their first meaningful encounter with the river as a living, dynamic entity. It transforms what may have been perceived as an inaccessible or intimidating environment into a space of learning, connection, and cultural identity.

Equally significant is the paradigm shift that occurs when rangatahi come to see that mātauranga Māori is not secondary to Western science, but equally valid and insightful. The programme reinforces that traditional Māori knowledge systems offer robust, empirical understandings of the environment, which can be used in tandem with—or independently from—Western scientific methods. For kura kaupapa Māori students, this validation of their cultural worldview is deeply affirming and supports their confidence in both academic and cultural contexts.

Value of the Programme and Its Stakeholders

Kura Waiti and Kura Waitā serve as essential entry points for rangatahi to engage meaningfully with te taiao through the lens of te ao Māori. The programme makes accessible the stories, science, and spiritual connections associated with the awa—its history, its resources, and its role in sustaining both the people and the landscape.

Rangatahi learn the significance of native flora along the riverbanks, including plants used for rongoā (traditional healing) and kai. These insights foster a sense of responsibility and kaitiakitanga not only toward the Waikato River but toward all freshwater and coastal ecosystems. The value extends beyond the participants to whānau, kura, and the wider community, who benefit from a generation more connected to and informed about the taiao.

Opportunities for Growth and Enhancement

While the current programme delivers significant outcomes, there are clear opportunities for further development. A key area for growth lies in resourcing—particularly the development of bespoke educational materials that align with the kaupapa and enhance rangatahi learning.

Investment in creating curriculum-aligned resources tailored to the themes of the programme—such as native plant identification, water quality testing, rongoā extraction, and tuna (eel) conservation—would add considerable depth. These resources would support both in-session learning and post-programme engagement, ensuring long-term retention and application of mātauranga.

Funding to support the involvement of expert collaborators, curriculum designers, and kaimahi would strengthen the overall delivery of the programme and allow for ongoing innovation. This investment is vital to scaling the programme while maintaining its integrity and cultural authenticity.

Conclusion

Kura Waitī represents a pioneering model of cultural and environmental education grounded in mātauranga Māori. Led by Te Toki Voyaging Trust in partnership with Waikato Regional Council, the programme builds a bridge between ancestral knowledge and contemporary science, empowering rangatahi to take their place as the next generation of kaitiaki. As the programme grows, it offers a blueprint for integrating cultural identity, environmental care, and indigenous leadership in education systems across Aotearoa.

The Conclusion

1 1 3 1 3



Figure 5: Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa location within the WRC boundary

Figure 3. Continued

Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa is a kura-ā-iwi (Māori medium kura that has localised curricula that align with the values of Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa) located in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton and is home to 270 tauira from primary to high school ages. Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa is one of several kura in Kirikiriroa that have engaged with Kura Waiti.

Intermediate-aged tauira from Years 7-9 have engaged with Kura Waiti over the past two years, with many of them participating in both Taumata 1 and 2 of the programme. Kaiako consider tauira attendance in Kura Waiti as a privilege and an investment, and select tauira based on their passion for te taiao and interest in sharing knowledge with their classes and friends.

Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa has a unique relationship with Kura Waitī, as the kura has participated in the programme since the first pilot programme. Additionally, two of their kaiako have been involved with the programme’s establishment since its inception, one supporting the programme development during the 2021 River Schools pilot and another providing education expertise within the Te Toki Kura Waitī whānau.

References

Te Whare Kura o Kirikiriroa tauira described attending Kura Waiti at the Waikato awa in Kirikiriroa. The programme activities engaged tauira in places on or along the river, including Te Whare Taonga o Waikato Museum, the Hamilton Gardens and various parts of the ngahere (bush) on its banks.

The Kura Waiti base is a short distance from the kura, which makes attending simpler. As expected for a small kura, there are other logistical elements necessary to ensure tauira can attend. Small cohorts attending Kura Waiti (i.e., nine tauira) mean releasing kaiako from a small kura can be logistically challenging, while larger cohorts would be easier. Kaiako

further described that logistics and procedures mean that kura participation is dependent on pre-planning, having advanced dates allowing for easier alignment with the preset kura calendar.

Kaiako note there is huge value in the kura being able to “just turn up and participate” [Kaiako] in Kura Waiti particularly when all rauemi (resources), teaching and safety elements are taken care of by the programme. This is much appreciated by Kaiako.

The tauira were able to recall many waka and taiao-related activities about their experience with Kura Waiti.

I haere mātou ki te awa me te hoe waka, takaro kēmu hoki ki te kura. I ako i ngā wāhanga o te waka hoki. I whakawhanaungatanga ki ēra atu kura me te ako pehea te hanga beeswax, te korero e pā ana ki te marama. I haere mātou ki ngā māra mō te rā katoa me te ako e pā ana ki ngā rau rerekē me te hīkoi ki roto i te ngahere tiro ai ki ngā rau.

(We went to the river to paddle waka, played games and went back to school. We learnt about the parts of the waka as well. We did whakawhanaungatanga with the other kura, learnt how to make beeswax (Kawakawa balm) and kōrero about the moon. We went to the gardens for the whole day to learn about the different plants, and walk through the bush to look at all the trees) [Tauira]

Whilst waka kaupapa is a central component of Kura Waiti, tauira enjoyed participating in new activities that connected them to kōrero tuku iho (xxx) and the taiao. These included:

- Making kawakawa balm

Ki te hanga i te kawakawa. Ko toku wāhanga tino pai ko te wā i mahi (Making kawakawa balm. That was my favourite part of the programme). [Tauira]

- Making and using hīnaki (eel traps), feeding and touching tuna (eel).
- Exploring the Waikato awa from aboard the waka and also on its banks.
- Visiting tupuna waka (ancient waka?) Te Winika at Te Whare Taonga o Waikato Museum.
- Enjoying playing games and participating in whakawhanaungatanga with other kura.
- Visiting the Hamilton Gardens to look at different types of native trees.
- Participating in tira hoe and waka ama.

Outcomes and impact – fostering mātauranga taiao

Kura Waiti has made a clear impact on tauira from Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa. Kaiako see how it has raised the awareness about the awa amongst the students and about the mauri of everything “he mauri tō ngā mea katoa (everything has a life force)” [Kaiako]. The real-life experiences on the river were highlighted as fostering kaitiakitanga amongst the tauira, with tauira who expressed interest in learning more about the taiao:

Kia ako i etahi momo rautaki ki te tiaki i te ao, i te taiao (To learn strategies to care for the world, for the environment) [Tauira]

Kura Waiti has provided students with new mātauranga taiao. This learning sticks with them as they were able to retain information after a long time after the programme (two years). They were able to share this new information with others in detail. Students describe learnings about:

- Rongoā Māori, it's benefits and how to make rongoā using kawakawa leaves.

I ako mātou i pewhea te hanga i te pani kawakawa, i whakaatu tētahi wāhine me pewhea te hanga, me whaiho mo te toru rā. I ako mātou te hanga rongoā Māori mai i te kawakawa. I whakamarama rātou he aha ai he pai te kawakawa mō te tinana (We learnt how to make the kawakawa balm, a lady showed how to make it, that we must leave it for three days. We learnt how to make rongoā Māori from the kawakawa. They showed us why kawakawa is good for your body). [Tauira]

- Maramataka Māori, the role and the phases of the moon.

I akonga mātau ko te ako i ngā rereketanga, i nga ingoa o nga marama (We learnt about the phases and the names of the moon). [Tauira]

- The traditional stories of the tuna, their lifecycles, different species and experiencing traditional practices related to tuna.

I ako i ngā pakiwaitara o te tuna, i whangai i ngā tuna. Ka haere te tuna ki te au o te awa. (Learnt the stories of the tuna, we feed the tuna. The tuna travel with the currents of the river) [Tauira]

Ako pehea ki te hanga hīnaki (Learnt how to make an eel trap). [Tauira]

- Learning about, preparing and paddling waka ama, waka taua, waka kopapa, waka hourua.

Ako e pa ana ki nga momo wāhanga rerekē o te waka ama me te waka taua, waka kopapa. (Learnt about the different parts of the waka ama, and waka taua, waka kopapa) [Tauira]

Ko te kapehu ko tetahi momo taonga ka whakamahia e ngā kaiwhakaterere waka, kia mōhio rātou kei te haere rātou ki hea ki roto i te moana. Arā i runga i te kapehu whetu he raki, uru, rawhiti, tonga. Ka whakamahi rātau hoki i te wai, kia mōhio rātau kei te haere rātau ki hea, nō reira i te wā he mahana te wai, kei te tata tae rātau ki tētahi moutere

(The kapehu is a type of instrument that waka navigators use, so they know where they are going in the ocean. On the kapehu whetū is north, west, east, south. They also use the waka, so they know where they are going, so when the water is warm they are getting close to an island). [Tauira]

- Learning about different native trees and plants, how to identify them

I ako matou i nga raurau rerekē. I hereia e Te Toki i a matau ki te ngahere i te taha o te Hamilton gardens ki te whakaatu i a matau i ngā rau rerekē – ko te rākau kōwhai, te rākau kawakawa, te rākau kahikatea, he mamaku, he raukawa. I tuhi mātau i ngā rau katoa me ētahi whakamārama

(We learnt about the different native plants. Te Toki took us to the forest next to the Hamilton Gardens to show us the different trees – the kōwhai tree, the kawakawa bush, the

kahikatea tree, the mamaku, the raukawa. We wrote down all the plants and some of the explanations). Tauira

Kaiako feel that connecting with other kura Māori at Kura Waitī, is beneficial and something the tauira don't always get to do. Tauira expressed this as an enjoyable part of the experience and were interested in growing the opportunities for whakawhanaungatanga with other kura Māori:

Kia whakawhanaunga ki era kura kaua e waiho i a mātou e noho ki to mataou ake kura kia mātou ano. (We want to connect with other kura, not just staying with our own kura). [Tauira]

Opportunities to increase impact

Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa kaiako have been involved in Kura Waitī since the pilot and because of this, they hold great vision for growing and strengthening Kura Waitī. Kaiako see great synergy between the curriculum of Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa and the Kura Waitī learning outcomes which could be leveraged for greater impact. Feedback indicated that benefits to the wider kura could occur if Kura Waitī was better integrated into kura curriculums. This could include specific links to curriculum documents and pre-planning with kaiako and kura, ensuring they are aware of dates and content so learnings can be better aligned with their teaching of the curriculum. This could potentially promote deeper learning, by ensuring Kaiako having greater awareness so they could expand on the learnings within the kura environment.

Tauira were interested in having the opportunity to paddle around different areas of Waikato awa, and visit new areas to learn about the environment:

Kia haere ki ētahi wāhi hou ki te ako mō te taiao. Kia kāore te noho ki te wāhi ōrite (To travel to new places to learn about the environment. Not stay in the same place). [Tauira]

The Kaiako elaborated on this idea of expanding the programme within other rohe and proposed exploring opportunities for localised programmes. This could make a place for different kura to have a kaitiaki role over their part of the river, and to share knowledge about the awa through water testing, making group comparisons, and sharing their unique kōrero tuku iho pertaining to their rohe.

Hei whakakapi – a trusted and wanted programme

Kura Waitī is described as a flexible and adaptable programme that is well organised, creating a trusted relationship with kura. Te Toki is a trusted provider of mātauranga taiao education for Māori tauira, and kaiako know the teaching will be delivered in authentic cultural environments where tikanga and reo Māori is upheld to a high standard.

The value of Kura Waitī is described as a programme where tauira learn from mātanga waka (waka experts) who have access to waka ama, waka tangata, waka hourua and rauemi that supports the transmission of kōrero tuku iho. Access to mātanga waka is a valuable opportunity for kura, Kaiako and their tauira to learn from as this can be difficult to access without relationships within local communities. The connections and relationships made

through the Kaihāpai Hotaka Mātauranga at Waikato Regional Council as well as the funding made available mean that kura and their students are able to access a unique mātauranga based programme that is based on connecting to and looking after te taiao and the awa.

Kura Waitī offers great value to Te Wharekura o Kirikiriroa tauira, particularly the mātauranga taiao that they gain from practical activities within the programme. Participating in mātauranga taiao outside of the classroom has had a lasting impact on the tauira:

Pirangi au kia hoki te wharekura ki tēnei momo kaupapa, nā te mea he pai ngā akoranga (I want the school to return this kaupapa because of the learning). [Tauira]

He wheako rawe i rata ahau ki ngā mahi, ina ka taea ka mahi anō (It was a great experience, I really enjoyed the activities and would do it again if possible). [Tauira]

Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Pūaha o Waikato & Te Kura o Hirangi

Introduction

This case study explores the initial experience of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Pūaha o Waikato & Te Kura o Hirangi with the kaupapa of Kura Waiti. Based at the Waikato awa in Kirikiriroa, this first Kura Waiti session was observed by evaluators in March 2025. This kōrero weaves together information gathered during this experience from tauira, kaiako and evaluator field notes.

Situation and context – Kura from either end of the Waikato awa

Travelling a great distance to attend Kura Waiti, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Pūaha o Waikato and Te Kura o Hirangi came from the Northern and Southern most points of the Waikato River to attend Kura Waiti in Kirikiriroa for the first time together in Term One, 2025.

Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Pūaha o Waikato (TKKM o Te Pūaha o Waikato) is located at the mouth of the awa at Port Waikato which is also at the Northern boundary of the Waikato Regional Council (WRC). TKKM o Te Pūaha o Waikato is a Te Aho Matua (Māori medium kura that is led by Te Aho Matua philosophy and principles and affiliated to the governing body Te Rūnanga Nui o Ngā Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa) kura home to 41 primary and intermediate aged tauira. Whilst tauira from TKKM o Te Pūaha o Waikato live near the awa of Waikato, kaiako shared that many have not been on the awa before. Nine of these tauira and two kaiako joined Kura Waiti from TKKM o Te Pūaha o Waikato, travelling a three-hour return trip to attend the kaupapa for the day.

Te Kura o Hirangi (TK o Hirangi) is located at the Southernmost boundary of the WRC region, near the origins of the Waikato awa at Tūrangi. TK o Hirangi is a Kura-ā-iwi (Māori medium kura that has localised curricula that align with the values of Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa) with 278 tauira from primary to high school. Three high school-aged tauira and one kaiako from TK o Hirangi travelled five hours return to join the Kura Waiti programme for the day.

The kura arrived at the Waikato awa, and the day couldn't have been more perfect, with the sun shining down and reflecting off the river's rippling currents. The tauira were excited, laughing, and chatting away in te reo Māori despite the long journey and early morning start to participate in Kura Waiti.



Figure 6: TKKM o Te Pūaha o Waikato (Northern point) and Te Kura o Hirangi (Southern point) location within the WRC region

Activities and delivery – Waka ama foundations

Led by tikanga, the tauira began their first day at Kura Waitī with karakia and whakawhanaungatanga. This involved getting to know the Kura Waitī kaimahi and other students, followed by paramanawa (morning tea) before changing their kākahu to be ready for the first session. Students and kaiako then participated in activities learning about waka ama. For many tauira, this was a new experience:

*Ko te waa tuatahi i hoea waka au (This was the first time I paddled a waka).
[Tauira]*



Figure 7: Matua Turanga sharing his mātauranga waka with the tauira.

Delivered in te reo Māori, learning the foundations of waka ama included teaching tauira about safety equipment that needs to be used, such as the importance of life jackets and also learning the ingoa Māori of all the different parts that make up a waka ama. The rangatahi were fully engaged in the new learnings, listening intently to all the new kupu used to describe the waka.

I whakarite ngā poraka whakahaumarū (We prepared the life-jackets). [Tauira]

Matua Tūranga demonstrated how to lash the waka, describing this as the modern way of how their tūpuna would have lashed the waka, and tauira then experienced hands-on how to rig the waka using aukaha (lashing). With the help of the rangatahi kaiawhina who volunteer their time to help on the programme, the tauira prepared the waka for paddling on the awa. Some the tauira felt confident to lash the waka on their own, others looked for help from the kaiāwhina, and they all critiqued one another's skills as they went along.



Figure 8: Tauira rigging the waka using aukaha.

Once the two waka were ready, the tauira were shown how to hoe waka, how to hold a hoe, and what the correct paddle stroke and taki (timing) are before loading out the waka onto the awa.

*I ako ahau me pewhea te pupuri hoe kia tika (I learnt how to hold the paddle properly).
[Tauira]*

I ako me peewhea te hoe ki ngā taha mauī, matau (We learnt how to paddle on each side of the waka, left, right). [Tauira]

Tauira and kaiako spent most of the day on the waka and on the awa, learning how to paddle by going for a long hoe up the awa towards the Hamilton Gardens. On the waka, tauira experienced how

paddling against the current at the start of their hoe upstream was a lot harder than when they paddle back down river, and also felt how the waka moves faster the better they are in time and focused on their hoe.

*He māmā te hoe i tō mātou hokinga mai.
Enagri ahua uaua i te timatanga o te
wehenga (It was easy to paddle on the
way back (down stream). But it was kind
of difficult at the start (going upstream)).
[Tauira]*

Tauira shared how physically demanding waka ama is, but clearly enjoyed this new experience. For their last activities on the awa, the two waka competed in a series of races, which included lots of competitive banter, laughter and high-fives from tauira as they had fun on the awa.

I te reihi engari i hinga (We raced but we lost). [Tauira]

To wrap up the day, the tauira helped load the waka out of the awa put them away, including all of the life jackets and hoe. As a part of their mahi kāinga (home work), they were each provided pukamahi (workbooks) that covered all the learnings from the day. The next Kura Waiti session aims to build on these basics of waka ama and layer in new learnings about the awa.



Figure 9: Tauira learning the basics of paddling with the help of the kaiāwhina.

Outcomes and impact – Hands-on experience connecting with the awa



Figure 10: Tauira and kaiako loading out the waka onto the river.

Tauira described positive experiences at Kura Waiti that revolved around their learnings regarding paddling, and the enjoyment of participating in the waka ama activities alongside other tauira and kura.

He rawe te hoe waka. He pai te wai, harikoa au i te wā i mahi hoe (Paddling is awesome. The water was nice, I was happy when I was paddling). [Tauira]

Rawe te haerenga i te katakata i menemene (I enjoyed this trip because of the laughter and smiles). [Tauira]

Whanaungatanga amongst kura Māori was an evident outcome; the tauira got to know and work together more with each other and with kaiāwhina as the day progressed. Bringing together the TKKM o Te Pūaha o Waikato kura and the older TK o Hirangi tauira with the kaiāwhina created a tuakana-teina relationship amongst the two different age groups, where the tuakana provided leadership and encouraged the younger tauira.

Pai ki ahau ki te hoe waka ki te taha o ngā tamariki nō Te Pūaha o Waikato (I enjoyed paddling with the children from Te Pūaha o Waikato). [Tauira]

I te whakarongo ki ngā tohutohu o ngā whaea, matua me ngā kaiako hoki. He pai te hoe waka ki te taha o ngā tamariki (Listened to the instructions of Whaea, Matua and the teachers as well. It was cool to paddle alongside the other tamariki). [Tauira]

Overall, the learning that tauira from both kura described directly related to paddling waka ama as this was the foundational first session with Kura Waitī;

I ako ahau e peewhea te hoe waka, i ako hoki i ngā wahanga o te waka me ngā ingoa o ēera wahanga (I learnt how to paddle a waka. I also learnt the different parts of the waka and the names of those parts). [Tauira]

Kaiako were able to draw clear links between tauira experiences at Kura Waitī and their learning at kura, such as water testing that tauira participate in within their rohe, and their NCEA pūtaiao (science) studies. Kaiako described that Kura Waitī equips students by connecting them to the Waikato awa, as well as making comparisons of the environmental state of the river with the awa back home. This gives them insight into awa states, and why these are different, helping them to begin asking questions about their taiao.

Kaiako saw the value of Kura Waitī during this first engagement, highlighting how the kaupapa contributes to the creation of kaitiaki, fostering tauira responsibility to the environment and promoting greater respect for the wai. The ability to connect the history and whakapapa of the awa, with science elements was described by kaiako as instilling a holistic balance of perspectives between Western science and their taha Māori.



Figure 11: Tauira paddling on the Waikato river.

Hei whakakapi

Kura Waitī offers space for tauira Māori to connect with one another, the taiao, and kōrero tuku iho (history and stories of the awa). These elements are interlinked with their

learnings back at their kura. Even after just one session, the value of the programme is clearly visible by kaiako, and tauira alike.

There is a distinct value that tauira, kaiako and kura gained from participating in Kura Waitī, which they expressed as exposure to authentic learning environments that combine mātauranga Māori and Western science.

For the majority of tauira, paddling waka ama was new to them; however, they felt comfortable in the learning setting and being in the environment. The value of delivering the kaupapa in familiar and authentic cultural and environmental settings and using te reo Māori and tikanga are important for learning.

Kaiako are keen for their students to participate in Kura Waitī even more.