

MĀORI TRAINEE SUPPORT AND CULTURAL LEAVE GUIDANCE

Purpose

NZCSRH recognises that Māori trainee wellbeing is inseparable from cultural identity, whakapapa, whānau relationships and participation in whānau, hapū, iwi and marae life. Support must therefore extend beyond individualised wellbeing services and address racism, isolation, cultural load, power imbalances and the practical effect of cultural obligations on training.

Research from Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa (Te ORA) and Allen + Clarke demonstrates that Māori trainees and doctors may experience significant cultural loading through the cumulative, often unrecognised expectation that they provide cultural advice, represent Māori perspectives, lead tikanga and equity work, educate colleagues, support other Māori trainees and patients, and respond to racism—alongside their clinical training and existing whānau, hapū, iwi and community responsibilities. This burden may arise from colleges, training providers, clinical teams, patients and communities, and is intensified where there are few Māori colleagues, limited cultural support, short timeframes, or no recognition, remuneration or protected time. Māori doctors may also experience moral injury when they witness racism, culturally unsafe practice or avoidable inequities affecting Māori, yet lack the authority, resources or institutional support to intervene in ways consistent with their professional and cultural obligations. Together, these experiences may contribute to distress, isolation, burnout and disengagement, and should be understood as systemic wellbeing and retention issues rather than individual deficits.

Approach

The College will provide an integrated support model based on manaakitanga, whakawhanaungatanga, tino rangatiratanga, active protection and equity. The model separates culturally safe pastoral support from assessment and performance decision-making wherever practicable and gives Māori trainees choices about who supports them and how support is provided.

- A named Māori clinical and pastoral support person or contracted Māori advisor is available directly to Māori trainees.
- Each Māori trainee is offered an independent Māori mentor, alongside ordinary clinical and educational supervision.
- Māori trainees may opt into or out of Māori peer networks, group wānanga and Māori mentorship at any time without affecting assessment or progression.
- Whakawhanaungatanga occurs at induction and is maintained through regular contact rather than being limited to a single cultural orientation event.
- Trainees may involve whānau or another cultural support person in wellbeing, leave, remediation or dispute discussions where they choose.
- Supervisors receive education on cultural safety, racism, cultural load, tangihanga, whānau obligations and culturally safe responses to difficulty.
- Training sites must demonstrate safe reporting routes, Māori support and flexibility as part of accreditation and monitoring.



Benchmarking against comparable colleges

NZCSRH has drawn on the following current approaches and adapted them for a small, distributed sexual and reproductive health training programme.

College	Relevant feature	NZCSRH adaptation
RNZCGP	A Hauora Māori Clinical Fellow provides clinical and pastoral support to Māori registrars; visiting Māori medical educators are available; Māori registrars can access Māori representative networks and opt in or out.	Named Māori support independent of routine assessment; choice of Māori mentor; access to Māori peer connection; Māori input into curriculum and programme review.
ANZCA	The Indigenous Health Committee includes strong Indigenous representation; MANA provides tautoko and manaaki to Māori trainees and Fellows; flexible and interrupted training mechanisms are available.	Māori governance advice; an opt-in Māori network; culturally safe mentoring; prospective or urgent amendments to training where obligations affect participation.
RANZCO	Structured mentor matching, confidential support and EAP, a Te Tiriti action plan, Māori workforce initiatives, and training-site monitoring and alerts.	Mentor matching at entry; confidential external support; cultural safety included in site standards; escalation where a site does not enable Māori obligations.

Māori trainee support pathway

1. Offer support at entry. At enrolment, every Māori trainee receives information about the Māori advisor, Director of Training, Trainee Liaison Officer, mentoring, peer network, cultural-leave process and external support. Participation in Māori-specific support is voluntary.
2. Establish relationships. The Māori advisor or mentor offers whakawhanaungatanga early in training and agrees the trainee's preferred frequency and method of contact.
3. Maintain safe contact. Wellbeing and cultural safety are discussed at regular intervals, not only when performance concerns arise. The trainee may contact the Māori advisor without first approaching a supervisor.
4. Respond to difficulty. With consent, the advisor and Trainee Liaison Officer help the trainee identify support, cultural, educational, workplace and leave needs and develop a support plan.
5. Protect fairness. The person providing pastoral or cultural support will not ordinarily make summative assessment, disciplinary or appeal decisions about the same trainee.
6. Escalate systems risk. Racism, unsafe supervision, excessive cultural load or repeated refusal to enable reasonable obligations may be escalated through complaints, training-site monitoring or accreditation pathways.



7. Follow up. Agreed actions, training continuity, cultural safety and any retaliation are reviewed with the trainee. De-identified themes inform programme improvement.

Cultural-leave guidance

This guidance enables Māori trainees to meet cultural and whānau obligations while completing the programme's graduate outcomes. It governs NZCSRH educational requirements and programme flexibility. It does not replace employment leave entitlements, which remain governed by legislation, collective or individual employment agreements and employer policies.

Core position There is no arbitrary College cap on cultural absence. The duration and educational response are determined reasonably and case by case, taking account of the obligation, travel, tikanga, wellbeing, service impact, programme requirements and the trainee's circumstances. Graduate outcomes are maintained, but time and method of completion may be adjusted.

Cultural obligations covered

Cultural leave or educational flexibility may be requested for:

- tangihanga, including extended whānau and people connected through whakapapa or significant whanaungatanga
- marae-based responsibilities, pōwhiri, hui, wānanga, unveilings and other significant tikanga obligations
- whānau caregiving, advocacy or support where the trainee has a cultural responsibility
- hapū or iwi responsibilities and significant community events
- roles arising from the trainee's relationship with Māori communities, organisations or kaupapa Māori services
- other obligations the trainee identifies as important to cultural identity and wellbeing.

The College will not require a trainee to prove the closeness of a whakapapa or whanaungatanga relationship using narrow nuclear-family definitions. The trainee's explanation will normally be sufficient.

Request process

1. The trainee contacts the Director of Training, Trainee Liaison Officer or Māori advisor as soon as reasonably practicable. Urgent requests may be made orally, by text or through a whānau or support person and confirmed later.
2. Only information necessary to arrange the absence and protect training is requested. Detailed personal, whakapapa or cultural information is not required unless the trainee chooses to provide it.
3. Urgent tangihanga requests are prioritised and a provisional response is provided as soon as practicable, normally the same working day. Other requests are normally decided within five working days.
4. The College and trainee agree the dates, communication plan, immediate assessment implications, employer contact and any support required.
5. The College records the educational decision securely and shares information only with those who need it. Cultural details are not disclosed to an employer or site without consent unless required for safety or law.

Available arrangements

- rescheduling teaching, supervision, examinations or workplace-based assessments



- extending an assessment deadline or granting special consideration
- remote participation where appropriate and desired by the trainee
- temporary modification of placement, clinical or service commitments
- part-time training, interruption of training or extension of the training period
- recognition of equivalent learning completed before or after the absence
- a return-to-training plan after a longer absence, focused on support and current competence rather than punishment.

A trainee will not be required to complete non-essential work during tangihanga or another significant cultural obligation. Missed requirements will be replaced only where necessary to demonstrate an outstanding programme outcome. Any extension will be the minimum reasonably required and will be explained in writing.

Employer and training-site coordination

Because the College may not be the trainee's employer, the trainee may need separate employer approval for paid or unpaid leave. NZCSRH will provide a supporting letter where requested, advocate for a culturally safe response and clarify the educational flexibility it has approved.

Training sites are expected to:

- respond promptly and respectfully to cultural-leave requests
- avoid demanding unnecessary evidence or applying narrower family definitions than the trainee's cultural reality
- protect the trainee from adverse assessment, lost opportunities or retaliation
- coordinate service cover without placing the burden solely on the trainee
- work with the College on rescheduling supervision and learning
- escalate unresolved service or employment issues through appropriate organisational channels.

A site's repeated failure to respond safely or flexibly may be reviewed as a training-environment concern under the College's monitoring and accreditation processes.

Assessment and progression safeguards

- Cultural leave does not lower the graduate outcomes required for safe independent practice.
- Absence itself is not evidence of poor engagement, professionalism or commitment.
- Assessors receive only the information necessary to apply an approved adjustment.
- Where an assessment is affected, the trainee is offered rescheduling or special consideration without penalty beyond unavoidable programme costs or time requirements.
- Progression decisions distinguish competence from time away and consider whether equivalent evidence already exists.
- The trainee may seek review if they believe a request or adjustment was handled unfairly or without cultural safety.

Roles and responsibilities

Māori advisor or Māori clinical/pastoral support person

- provide culturally safe, confidential support and help the trainee identify preferred options
- advise the College on tikanga and cultural safety with the trainee's consent



- support return to training and identify patterns requiring systemic action.

Trainee Liaison Officer

- provide a contact outside immediate supervision and assessment
- help coordinate support, leave, training adjustments and complaint pathways
- monitor whether the trainee experiences disadvantage or retaliation.

Director of Training

- approve educational flexibility promptly and consistently
- coordinate with supervisors and employers using the minimum necessary information
- document reasons, agreed adjustments and review dates.

Supervisors and training sites

- respond with manaakitanga, maintain confidentiality and implement agreed arrangements
- protect learning continuity and avoid punitive make-up requirements
- seek advice rather than questioning the legitimacy of an unfamiliar cultural obligation.

Privacy and cultural safety

Information about whakapapa, whānau, tangihanga, iwi or marae responsibilities may be sensitive. The College will use the minimum necessary information, provide the trainee with choices about disclosure and support, and consider whether de-identified reporting could still identify a trainee in a small cohort.

The trainee may request that a matter is discussed using tikanga-informed processes, that karakia or whakawhanaungatanga is included, or that whānau or a cultural support person attends. These options remain voluntary and must be implemented in a way that is safe and fair to all participants.

Monitoring and continuous improvement

The Education Advisory Committee will receive de-identified information at least annually on:

- whether every Māori trainee was offered Māori support and mentoring
- uptake and accessibility of support, without treating non-use as a deficit
- timeliness and outcomes of cultural-leave requests
- assessment, progression, interruption and withdrawal patterns
- trainee feedback on cultural safety, racism, cultural load and confidence in reporting
- training-site concerns and corrective actions
- changes made as a result of Māori trainee and Māori advisor feedback.

Because cohorts will initially be small, quantitative data will be interpreted cautiously and will not be published until a sufficient number of Māori trainees have fed back to de-identify trainees. Māori trainees and Māori advisors will participate in review of the framework, and the Board will receive agreed actions and assurance of completion.

Policy Owner	NZCSRH Educational Advisory Committee
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