



UMEIA TE MARO KURA

Rebuilding Our Future: Language, Culture,
and Identity in Cook Islands Education
5th – 8th May 2025



SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW:

This symposium will unite key groups—young people, educators, government and ministry leaders, parents and communities, and language and cultural experts. Through keynote addresses, panel discussions, and facilitated plenary sessions, participants will collaboratively shape the future of education in the Cook Islands, prioritising cultural revitalisation, language preservation, and the value of education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SYMPOSIUM:

- **Reignite the Value of Education:**

Unite the Cook Islands community around the importance of education, language, and identity

- **Facilitate Collaborative Discussions:**

Ensure diverse perspectives shape educational revitalisation

- **Develop the Education Model:**

Define how mainstream schools embed language and culture and how Heritage-Based Schools function.

- **Chart a Clear Path Forward:**

Provide a solid framework for the Ministry of Education to implement systemic changes that strengthen indigenous education.

- **Deliver Clear Outcomes Each Day:**

Each session will build towards a structured Statement of Need, Vision Statement, Curriculum Elements, Implementation Blueprint, and Commitment Framework.

Day 1: Opening & Inspiration

Reconnecting with Our Past to Build the Future

Objective for the Day:

To explore how indigenous knowledge, language, and storytelling can shape innovative, future-focused education systems.

Through our keynotes, participants will be challenged to reimagine schooling models that reflect the unique cultural heritage of the Cook Islands — including the establishment of immersion or heritage-based schools grounded in indigenous worldviews.

These models must not only revitalise identity, language, and cultural practice but also prepare students to succeed globally through recognised qualifications such as NCEA, ensuring both cultural integrity and future opportunity.



Day 1: Opening & Inspiration

Reconnecting with Our Past to Build the Future



Sir Ian Taylor

*“The Past is Present:
Building Tomorrow with
Indigenous Voices”*

Sir Ian will explore how indigenous knowledge systems can be honoured, preserved, and reimagined through new digital platforms, including AI and online tools.

His keynote will show how innovation and technology, when driven by cultural values, can become powerful vehicles for education — connecting younger generations to ancestral wisdom in future- facing formats.

This approach offers potential for Cook Islands immersion models, enabling learners to engage with local reo, culture, and knowledge in ways that are dynamic, accessible, and scalable across our islands and diaspora.



Hilda Halkyard-Harawira

*“Reconnecting with our past to
grow future generations”*

Hilda will share her personal journey and lived experience in the Māori education movement, including the establishment and growth of kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori.

Her keynote will explore how community-led, immersion-based schooling can restore language, identity, and pride — and what lessons the Cook Islands might draw as we consider heritage-based education models rooted in our own reo, values, and cultural foundations.

Day 1: Opening & Inspiration

Reconnecting with Our Past to Build the Future

Morning Collective Session

Welcome & Opening Prayer

MC Mr Emile Kairua & Bishop Pere

Welcome Address

Hon. Tingika Elikana

Opening Address

Cultural Revitalisation through Education –

Ezekiela Tuatea Tatuava-Enjoy - A voice from students

Te Kaumaiti Travel Tou Ariki

Keynote Address:

Sir Ian Taylor

Keynote Address:

Hilda Halkyard-Harawira

Afternoon Panel & Plenary Discussion

Key Outcome:

A shared commitment to embedding indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural values at the heart of Cook Islands education — including support for the development of heritage-based or immersion schools grounded in local identity.

Panel Topic:

“Cultural Revitalisation in Education: From Vaka to Virtual”

Local perspectives on how we embed Cook Islands knowledge, language, and identity into the education system — and the tools, spaces, and models that can support this.

Panelists:

Facilitator: Mr Henry Herman

Mr Tuingariki Short, Mr Ian Tairea, Ms Vaine Wichman, Mr James Puati, Ms Chiavanni Le'Mon

Objective for the day:

To deepen understanding of how education sustains cultural identity, connection, and belonging across borders, especially within transnational Cook Islands' communities.

Building on Day 1's call to embed indigenous knowledge in local education systems, this day explores how education can also serve as a bridge between generations and nations — holding together cultural communities dispersed across the globe.

The discussions will inform how the Cook Islands might design education systems that nurture identity both at home and abroad, ensuring continuity, unity, and pride wherever Cook Islanders live.

Day 2: Understanding the Landscape

Bridging Generations: Education & Nation-Building in Diasporic Communities



Prof. Nicolas Lewis

*“Education and nation building:
Holding Cultural Communities
Together”*

Professor Nick Lewis will explore the potential of education in contemporary Cook Islands nation building.

National education systems have always been about nation building. But, what does that mean in nations whose peoples are now spread far and wide, where societies and economies are no longer neatly bounded by island territories, and where transnational cultural ties and economic relationships have become increasingly determining of local fates and vice-versa.

Nick will ask what this interdependency means for education in the Cook Islands, what role education might play in strengthening the imagined nation of Cook Islanders in the world, and why a vibrant culture is so central.

Day 2: Understanding the Landscape

Bridging Generations: Education & Nation-Building in Diasporic Communities

Morning Collective Session

Welcome & Opening Prayer

MC Mr Emile Kairua & Papa Orometua

Recap on Day 1

Mr Ngavaevae Papatua

Keynote Address:

Prof. Nicolas Lewis

Afternoon Panel & Plenary Discussion

Key Outcome:

A clearer understanding of the needs and realities of Cook Islands communities in the diaspora, and agreement on the importance of creating education systems and cultural connections that unify Cook Islanders at home and abroad.

Panel Topic:

Connecting Across Oceans:

“How Do We Stay One People? - Perspectives on sustaining identity, language, and cultural belonging for Cook Islanders abroad and at home”.

Panelists:

Facilitator: Mr Ngavaevae Papatua

*Mr Renall Vogel, Ms Annique Davis, Ms Elizabeth Wright-Koteka,
Ms Piakura Passifield, Hon. Tingika Elikana, Ms Angela Beehr*

Objective for the Day:

To challenge Cook Islands leaders, educators, and communities to recognise the value of their existing sovereignty, language, and cultural identity, and to take proactive steps to strengthen and protect these taonga in the face of modernisation, global pressures, and shifting social values.

This keynote will provoke reflection on the risks of cultural erosion and inspire a renewed commitment to community led development, intergenerational responsibility, and the active exercise of mana motuhake in shaping the nation's future.

Day 3: Developing Solutions & Pathways

Ko te Kaveinga o Tō Tātou Iti Tangata: Shaping Our Future From Our Cultural Core



Hone Harawira

*“Don’t Wait to Reclaim
What You Still Have”*

Hone Harawira will deliver a bold and unapologetic call to action — urging Cook Islands communities to recognise the value of what still exists: our reo, our culture, our identity, and our right to lead our own solutions.

Drawing from his years as a grassroots activist, educator, and champion for Māori sovereignty and immersion education, Hone will challenge us to stop waiting for permission, and instead stand in our own mana to shape the future of education and development.

This keynote will provoke honest reflection about what we may lose if we delay, and who we must become to protect what matters. It will centre the importance of community ownership, intergenerational responsibility, and cultural courage, reminding us that true transformation begins not with systems imposed from outside — but with bold leadership from within.

Day 3: Developing Solutions & Pathways

Ko te Kaveinga o Tō Tātou Iti Tangata: Shaping Our Future From Our Cultural Core

Morning Collective Session

Welcome & Opening Prayer

MC Mr Emile Kairua & Papa Orometua

Recap on Day 2

Mr Ngavaevae Papatua

Keynote Address:

Hone Harawira

Afternoon Panel & Plenary Discussion

Key Outcome:

A collective recognition that Cook Islands communities must actively lead and shape their own educational and cultural future, with renewed courage to challenge systems and drive community-based change

Panel Topic:

“Are We Leading Our Own Future, or Letting Others Lead It for Us?”

Voices from the Cook Islands on the current state of community leadership, cultural protection, and education reform.”

Panelists:

Facilitator: Mr Ngavaevae Papatua

*Rev Tere Marsters, Ms Cecilia Short, Mr Teina Rongo,
Ms Narelle Huata, , Hon. Tina Browne, Mr Mike Tavioni*

Day 4: Defining the Education Model

Designing and Implementing Dual Education Streams for Cultural Revitalization

Objective for the Day:

To inspire bold, context-specific educational transformation by showcasing how culturally grounded models — including immersion schools, dual pathways, and vehicles like sport, language, and the arts — can drive academic excellence, cultural revitalisation, and holistic success.

These keynotes will challenge participants to reimagine Cook Islands education as a system that nurtures identity, empowers learners, and prepares the next generation to thrive both locally and globally.



Kelvin Davis

“Designing Education Models that Honour Culture and Lift Achievement”

A keynote exploring how successful indigenous education models (particularly Māori) have merged cultural revitalisation with academic excellence. This session will unpack the potential for the Cook Islands to implement dual education streams — including immersion and heritage-based schools — that nurture identity, while aligning with qualifications like NCEA.



Nathan & Yvette Durie

“Building Culturally Grounded, High-Performance Education Models”

This keynote will showcase models of excellence that integrate culture, academic success, leadership, wellbeing — and sport. Drawing on their leadership at Manukura and St Stephen's (TIPENE), they will explore how sport and other culturally relevant tools can transform schooling environments.

The address will encourage Cook Islands educators and leaders to use our own strengths — from sport, arts, cultural practice, language immersion, place-based learning, and community partnerships — to build schools that are centres of excellence grounded in who we are. The idea of academies or specialised learning hubs tailored to each island's cultural assets and youth aspirations will also be explored.

Day 4: Defining the Education Model

Designing and Implementing Dual Education Streams for Cultural Revitalization

Morning Collective Session

Welcome & Opening Prayer

MC Mr Emile Kairua & Papa Orometua

Recap on Day 3

Mr Ngavaevae Papatua

Keynote Address:

Kelvin Davis

Keynote Address:

Nathan & Yvette Durie

Afternoon Panel & Plenary Discussion

Key Outcome:

A locally informed vision for a dual-stream education model that honours cultural revitalisation while ensuring global qualifications, with key principles and priorities identified for future development

Panel Topic:

Designing Our Own Path: What Should a Dual Education System Look Like Here?

“Community-driven visions for how heritage and global learning can coexist in Cook Islands education.”

Panelists:

Facilitator: Mr Ngavaevae Papatua

Mr Wallace Aroita, Mr Michael Papatua, Ms Tetangi Matapo,

Mr Leausalilo Schannel van Dijken, Mrs Sieni Tiraa-Ivaiti, Mr Michael Mokai

Daily Programme Structure

Day 1: Reconnecting with Our Past to Build the Future

8:30 am Opening Ceremony and Welcome
10:15 am Keynote 1 – Sir Ian Taylor
11:00 am Morning Tea
11:20 am Keynote 2 – Hilda Halkyard-Harawira
12:05 pm Plenary Q&A with Both Keynote Speakers
12:30 pm Lunch Break
1:15 pm Panel Discussion and Open floor – Cultural Revitalisation in Education: From Vaka to Virtual
2:50 pm Day Wrap-Up

Day 2: Bridging Generations – Diaspora and Connection

9:30 am Welcome and Recap
10:15 am Keynote – Professor Nicholas Lewis
11:00 am Morning Tea
11:20 am Reflections and Plenary Q&A
12:20 pm Lunch Break
1:15 pm Panel Discussion and Open floor – Connecting Across Oceans
2:50 pm Summary and Closing

Day 3: Shaping Our Future From Our Cultural Core

9:30 am Welcome and Recap
10:15 am Keynote – Hone Harawira
11:00 am Morning Tea
11:20 am Reflection Panel + Q&A
12:20 pm Lunch Break
1:15 pm Panel Discussion and Open floor – Are We Leading Our Own Future?
2:50 pm Daily Wrap-Up

Day 4: Designing and Committing to a Dual-Pathway Future

9:30 am Welcome and Recap
10:15 am Keynote 1 – Kelvin Davis
11:00 am Morning Tea
11:20 am Keynote 2 – Nathan & Yvette Durie
12:05 pm Plenary Q&A
12:30 pm Lunch Break
1:15 pm Panel Discussion and Open floor – Designing Our Own Path
2:40 pm Closing Ceremony – Sealing the Vaerua