

POSITION DESCRIPTION

CHIEF EXECUTIVE – ARA INSTITUTE OF CANTERBURY (ARA)

DETAILS

Role title: Chief Executive - Ara Institute of Canterbury

Reports to: Chair, Ara Institute of Canterbury Council

Location: Christchurch, New Zealand

Delegations: Executive delegations granted by the Ara Institute of Canterbury Council, including full operational, financial, academic, and strategic authority as governed by the Education and Training Act 2020, the Crown Entities Act 2004, and the Employment Relations Act 2000.

ABOUT INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY AND POLYTECHNICS

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) are public tertiary education organisations delivering vocational education and training services to learners across New Zealand. ITPs operate under the Education and Training Act 2020, following the disestablishment of Te Pūkenga, as part of structural reform to reinstate regional leadership, strengthen governance, and return decision-making authority closer to communities and industries.

Each ITP is responsible for delivering a full range of vocational education programmes, including certificate, diploma, and degree-level qualifications, as well as work-based learning, professional training, and industry-specific micro-credentials.

ITPs are large, multi-campus organisations with diverse student cohorts and multi-layered staffing structures, encompassing academic, administrative, support, and executive leadership teams. These institutions manage significant physical assets including buildings, specialist training facilities, and technology infrastructure.

Ara Institute of Canterbury is one of New Zealand's largest ITPs and operates multiple campuses in Canterbury.

An ITP's statutory responsibilities include:

- Delivering high-quality academic programmes and maintaining NZQA quality assurance.
- Ensuring equitable access and learner success for all student groups, including vulnerable communities including prior achievement, Māori and Pasifika and disabled learners;
- Managing public funding and commercial revenue streams in a financially sustainable and accountable manner;
- Maintaining robust governance, public reporting, and compliance frameworks in line with Crown entity standards;
- Ensuring employment practices and organisational culture align with obligations under the Employment Relations Act 2000 and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

ROLE PURPOSE

The Chief Executive (Designate) is accountable for the full leadership and management of the Ara Institute of Canterbury (Ara), ensuring all operational, financial, academic, and public accountability functions are delivered effectively and sustainably from 1 January 2026.

Initially the Chief Executive is responsible, for re-establishing Ara as an independent entity by ensure that it meets all statutory requirements and community expectations. This includes ensuring the continued smooth transfer of staff, students, assets, systems, and governance processes while safeguarding education delivery and student wellbeing.

The role requires large-scale organisational leadership: setting strategic direction, overseeing academic governance, managing financial resources, leading multi-layered leadership teams, and building robust stakeholder relationships across industry, government, iwi/Māori partners, and the community. Working collaboratively with other ITPs

The Chief Executive must ensure that Ara operates as a financially sustainable, academically credible, and socially responsive public institution. This includes managing risk, maintaining compliance with all legislative frameworks, and leading organisational culture and people development across a broad and diverse workforce.

The Chief Executive is fully accountable to the Ara Council for all aspects of organisational leadership, performance, and compliance, including delivery against strategic objectives, achievement of key performance indicators, financial sustainability, and academic quality.

This accountability covers statutory obligations, employment relations, asset and infrastructure management, risk management, and equity outcomes. The Chief Executive is responsible to the Council for maintaining robust organisational culture, upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, ensuring good employer practices, and providing free, frank, and timely advice that enables effective governance decision-making.

ABOUT THE ROLE

The Chief Executive carries full responsibility for establishing and leading Ara as an independent statutory organisation. The Chief Executive must ensure robust academic governance processes are in place, maintaining programme quality and compliance with NZQA requirements across all delivery sites. This includes managing curriculum development, teaching and learning innovation, assessment, and moderation systems.

Alongside academic responsibilities, the Chief Executive is accountable for financial leadership at a level consistent with large public institutions. This involves overseeing public funding from TEC, managing commercial revenue streams, and maintaining capital asset portfolios, including facilities and infrastructure.

The Chief Executive must lead organisational design, workforce planning, employment relations, and staff wellbeing frameworks, ensuring alignment with the Employment Relations Act 2000 and Crown entity expectations for good employer conduct.

Public accountability is a core focus. The Chief Executive is responsible for transparent reporting to the Ara Council, TEC, Ministers, and other oversight agencies. This includes regular performance reporting on financial health, student outcomes, equity measures, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Community and stakeholder engagement forms a critical part of the role. The role involves direct engagement Industry representatives, regional industries, employers, and community organisations to ensure education delivery meets current and emerging workforce needs.

The Chief Executive is fully accountable to the Council for the overall performance of the organisation, delivering against strategic priorities, operational requirements, and key performance indicators as formally set and reviewed by the Board. This includes ensuring that organisational objectives are met within approved financial parameters and that all statutory obligations are consistently upheld.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Professional Qualifications and Experience:

This role requires an executive with extensive experience leading large public sector or tertiary education organisations, preferably at Chief Executive or equivalent level.

Candidates must demonstrate a thorough understanding of tertiary education delivery, academic governance, and public sector financial management frameworks in the New Zealand context. Experience managing multi-campus, multi-site operations with complex staffing structures are essential.

Candidates must also show experience in leading structural or organisational transitions, including managing asset transfers, workforce integration, and system establishment within a Crown entity or equivalent context.

Understanding and experience with New Zealand's public accountability frameworks, including the Education and Training Act 2020, Crown Entities Act 2004, and Employment Relations Act 2000, is required.

Leadership Capabilities:

The Chief Executive (Designate) must demonstrate capacity to:

- Lead large-scale organisational strategy while ensuring operational detail and performance are maintained.
- Provide clear advice and support to the Ara Council;
- Manage substantial financial resources, including public funding, revenue generation, and capital asset portfolios;
- Lead complex people structures, managing multiple leadership layers and workforce planning needs;
- Oversee academic programme delivery and compliance at scale;
- Engage effectively with diverse stakeholders, including Māori and iwi partners, regional industries, central government agencies, and community organisations.

Attributes and Approach:

The Chief Executive must operate with a high level of integrity, public sector discipline, and strategic foresight. A structured, outcome-focused, and evidence-based leadership approach is essential.

This role requires a leader who is equally comfortable with high-level governance engagement and day-to-day organisational management, ensuring that both strategic direction and operational performance meet the highest standards of public service, academic quality, and financial sustainability.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The Chief Executive must operate with integrity, impartiality, and accountability at all times. A structured, analytical, and outcome-focused approach is required, along with resilience in managing ambiguity and organisational change.

The Chief Executive moves fluently between public sector governance expectations and industry-led decision-making, ensuring both are balanced and reflected in all organisational activities.

The Chief Executive is required to undertake national and international travel and be prepared to work outside regular office hours as necessary to meet the demands of the role and maintain stakeholder engagement.

- Must meet all legal eligibility requirements under the Crown Entities Act 2004 and Education and Training Act 2020.
- Subject to Police vetting and full declaration of any potential or actual conflicts of interest.
- Required to undertake regular national and regional travel, including attendance at all Ara campus sites.

