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[Home](#) / [Kahu](#)

University of Auckland announces partnership with Te Matatini kapa haka festival

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The University of Auckland has signalled a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, announcing the sponsorship of Aotearoa's leading celebration of national kapa haka excellence, Te Matatini.

Professor Te Kawehau Hoskins, vice-Chancellor Māori, said that being able to announce the partnership during Te Wiki o te Reo Māori (Māori Language Week) was particularly appropriate given that kapa haka was acknowledged as a key role in the revitalisation of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori.

Hoskins acknowledged a university 2020 strategy, Taumata Teitei, that brought a focus to te ao Māori principles of manaakitanga (respect), whanaungatanga (connections) and aitiakitanga (guardianship).

"These values very much reflect in this partnership with Te Matatini."

"It's been 50 years since the first Te Matatini festival, and we also acknowledge 50 years since the petition to Government to have te reo Māori revitalised in schools," she said.

"It's a fine year for a celebration."

Te Matatini chief executive Carl Ross has welcomed the partnership.

"There is overwhelming evidence of the positive contributions that kapa haka makes to the educational outcomes of students who actively participate," he said.

University of Auckland is hosting the event, which will be held at Eden Park from February 22-25. A 5th anniversary celebration at the festival, the Mātauranga Village, will showcase the impact of education.

P Te Matatini, the most significant cultural festival for Māori performing arts, is held every two years in a different location. It is one of the most highly anticipated events for performers and kapa haka fans around the world. It was last held in Tāmaki Makaurau in 2002 and before that in 1981.

It attracts thousands of people in the audience, up to one-million viewers online and hundreds of performers.

A recent petition from Te Pāti Māori slammed the Government's funding allocation for Te Matatini in comparison to other arts, such as the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Budget 2022 included \$1.1 billion for Māori-focused initiatives, with a \$1 million a year boost to funding for Te Matatini.

This was the biggest increase in funding for Te Matatini, and took the total annual funding to \$2.9m.

However, Waititi said the Royal NZ Ballet also got a funding boost. It was allocated \$7.5m over the next four years, and would now get \$8.1m per year.

The competing Matatini teams must first qualify at regional level, and then deliver a seven-part 30-minute performance in the hunt for the supreme title of Toa Whakaihuwaka.

Auckland-based reigning champions Ngā Tumanako will defend the title they won in 2019, in Wellington. The Covid-19 pandemic cancelled the 2021 festival.