

AUT seminar

19 January 2026

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Te Kāhui Tika Tangata
Human Rights Commission

Areas to cover

- Human Rights Commission
- Why DEI is essential to upholding human rights and meritocracy
- Results from Endeavour programme on productivity gains from increasing workforce diversity



Human Rights Commission

Ka whakamana tangata.

A Life of Dignity for All.

- Governed by the Human Rights Act 1993
- Primary functions (s5 HRA):
 - Advocate and promote respect for, and an understanding and appreciation of, human rights (including human rights dimensions of the Treaty of Waitangi)
 - Encourage maintenance and development of harmonious relations
 - Promote racial equality and cultural diversity, equal employment opportunities (including pay equity) and full and equal employment of the human rights of persons with disabilities

Human Rights Commission

Core activities

- Handle enquiries & complaints
- Legal representation & intervention
- Systemic inquiries & policy advice
- Education, guidance & human rights promotion
- Monitoring, reporting & international engagement

Role of the EEO Commissioner



Gender-based violence

- Lead discussions in the priority area of work
- Provide leadership in the priority area of work
- Monitor and analyse progress
- Work with other bodies to promote EEO

What is DEI?

DEI is a set of tools to create fairer and more productive workplaces where everyone is valued and respected.

- Diversity means recognising and valuing differences among people. This approach is central to human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination
- Equity requires fair treatment and access to equal opportunities. It calls on us to identify and address systemic barriers and historical disadvantages
- Inclusion involves creating environments where people are respected, valued, and able to participate fully. It reflects the human right to take part in decision-making



Pushback

False Claim: “Woke DEI means lowering standards and undermining merit.”

Internationally

- USA 2025 executive orders mandating the end to federal DEI programs.
- Removal of DEI programs and funding from many multi-national companies.
- Culture shift.

Aotearoa New Zealand

- Proposed Public Service Act amendments remove significant aspects of the legislative framework to support DEI in the public sector, such as requirements to:
 - to operate an employment policy that recognises the importance of achieving pay equity.
 - recognise the importance of decisions about remuneration being free from bias.
 - be guided by the principle that the public service should reflect the make up of society and have employment practices that foster inclusion.



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Endeavour programme

Boosting productivity
growth by creating equal
workplaces for all

Oct 2024 – Sept 2029

- A major national science and research funding programme administered by MBIE
- Objective – To support research with high potential to positively transform NZ's economic, environmental and societal outcomes
- Team of researchers from NZ, Germany, Australia and Denmark
- Advisory group from policy and practice

Figure 3: Summary of science aims



Year 1

Examining relationship between workforce diversity and firm-level productivity

- Linked employer-employee data 2001 – 2023
- Mixed international evidence
- Potential benefits – productivity; innovation; wider set of perspectives, skills and networks to support problem solving; improved allocation of women and minorities across high productivity occupations.
- NZ is increasingly diverse

Future workforce projections

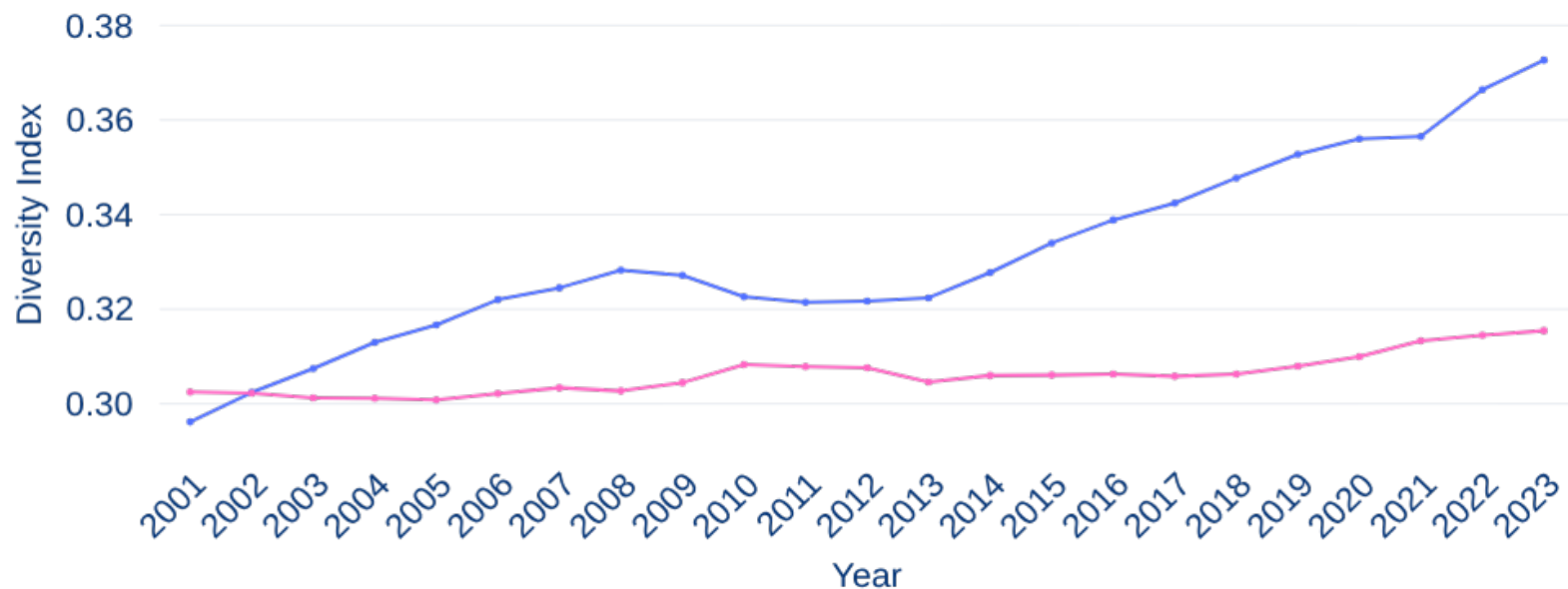
- Māori constituted 17.4% of the working age population (WAP) in 2023
- Expect to comprise 19.9% of WAP by 2048
- 29.6% under 15 in 2023
- Pacific 8.7% (2023 WAP); 11.7% (2048)
- Asians 19.1% (2023 WAP); 37.4% (2048)

Method using linked employer-employee data

- Production function estimated to obtain firm-level total factor productivity (TFP)
- Diversity measured via fractionalisation (gender and ethnicity indexes)
- Regress TFP on workforce diversity
 - Including controls for workforce composition, and year x industry fixed effects



Diversity Indices Over Time



Gender Index:

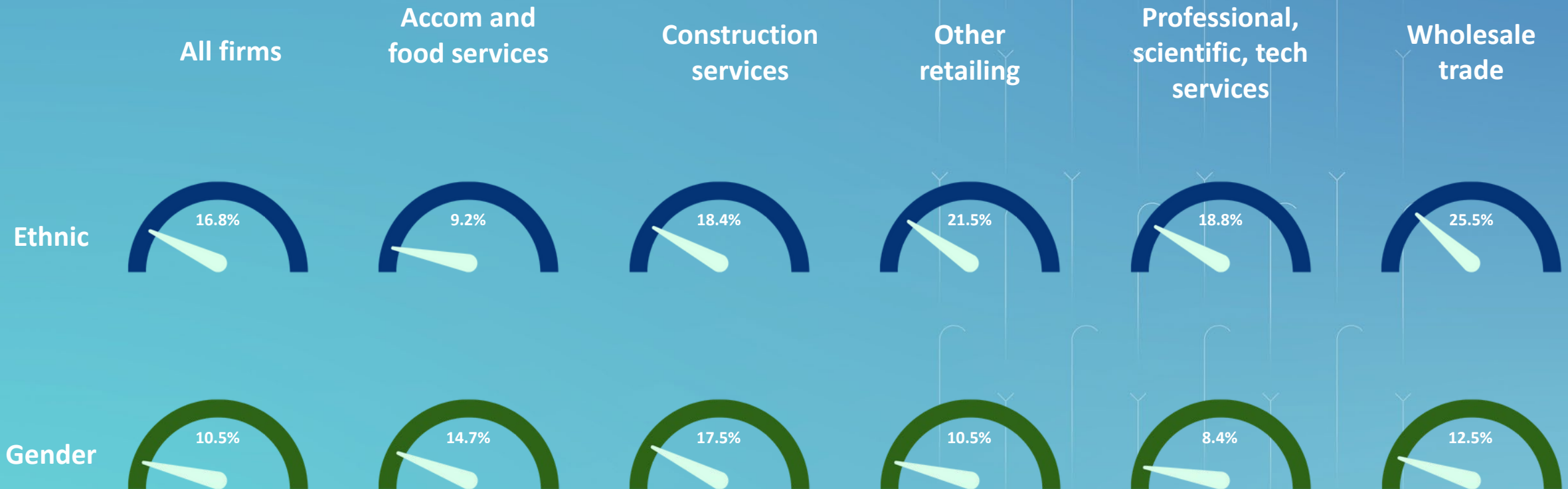
- 2 groups
- '0' → only one group is represented
- '0.5' → both groups equally represented

Ethnic Index:

- 5 groups: European; Māori; Asian; Pacific; Other
- '0' → only one group is represented
- '0.8' → all five groups are equally represented

Effects on productivity:

For every 0.1 increase in ethnic or gender diversity, total factor productivity rises by ...



Conclusions

- **DEI is not ideology — it is how human rights and meritocracy are put into practice.**

Removing bias and systemic barriers is essential for fair access to opportunity

- **The current pushback against DEI has real consequences.**

It undermines non-discrimination, erodes trust in fairness, and risks weakening productivity and social cohesion

- **The evidence is clear: diversity is good for productivity.**

New Zealand data show that more diverse workforces are associated with significantly higher firm-level productivity

