

Marsden PhD Scholarship (Māori-Led) – Relational reciprocity: Learning from values-led organisations and their members to inform psychological contract research

Closing date: 16 March 2026

Purpose

We invite applications for a Marsden-funded PhD scholarship to contribute to a project on how organisations and their members can maintain constructive relationships that withstand ongoing changes at societal, organisational, and individual levels. The PhD student will be based at Auckland University of Technology in Aotearoa New Zealand. The research team is made up of Professor Helena Cooper-Thomas, Associate Professor Peter McGhee (Te Aupōuri), Dr. Paulette Brazzale (Te Atiawa, Taranaki Whānui, Taranaki), and Dr James Greenslade-Yeats. Supported by the Marsden Fund Council from Government funding, managed by Royal Society Te Apārangi.

Project overview

The PhD scholarship is part of a larger Marsden – Te Pūtea Rangahau funded project that asks: *How do values-led organisations and their members maintain constructive reciprocal exchange relationships that withstand ongoing changes at societal, organisational, and individual levels?* This project has a theoretical focus on the psychological contract, the perception that organisations and individuals have of the reciprocal promises and obligations they share in the work relationship. However, organisational changes can lead to breaches of expectations, disrupt the psychological contract, and result in negative outcomes for members and the organisation. Our project focuses on perceptions of the psychological contract in values-led organisations experiencing change. We will investigate this question in three research streams: Māori organisations, faith-based organisations, and non-profit organisations. This research aims to enrich theorising and advice on psychological contracts during change by providing the perspectives of values-based organisations and their members. Please see these links: [Marsden Fund Awards 2025](#) and their media release on our project: [I never asked for this: How employees and employers maintain healthy relationships during times of social change](#).

This PhD research project will be in the Māori organisations stream, looking at the reciprocal relationships between kaimahi and the organisation. This is a qualitative research project, exploring the perspectives of the organisation and its kaimahi as they navigate change. Kaupapa Māori principles will be fundamental to this research.

This project is within the Business School disciplines of management, organisational psychology, organisational change, leadership, and human resource management. The ideal candidate will have an academic and research background in management, organisational psychology, human resource management, Māori studies, Indigenous studies, sociology, or other relevant disciplines. They will have experience in qualitative research and a commitment to organisational research that applies kaupapa Māori research principles.

The successful PhD student will commence their doctorate studies in 2026, preferably in the May intake.

PhD Student Role

The successful PhD student will work under the supervision of Associate Professor Peter McGhee (Te Aupōuri) and Dr. Paulette Brazzale (Te Atiawa, Taranaki Whānui, Taranaki). The PhD researcher will have some flexibility in the methodology, participants, and focus to suit their expertise and areas of interest. Nonetheless, to fulfil our Marsden grant commitments, the research will focus on exploring perceptions of the reciprocal relationships between kaimahi and Māori organisations grounded in tikanga. A short expression of interest proposal is required to demonstrate how you would like to approach the PhD and to demonstrate your academic writing skills. Please note that the PhD must address the project's main research question, apply kaupapa Māori principles, and investigate this with Māori organisations.

We encourage you to reach out to either Professor Helena Cooper Thomas (helena.cooper.thomas@aut.ac.nz), Associate Professor Peter McGhee (peter.mcghee@aut.ac.nz), or Dr. Paulette Brazzale (paulette.brazzale@aut.ac.nz) with any queries about the project or guidance on your application.

Amount and type of award

The successful applicant will receive a scholarship which includes:

- A stipend of \$35,000 per annum for up to three years (subject to satisfactory progress)
- Support for course tuition fees (at the domestic rate) plus the compulsory student services fee

Tenure

The tenure is three years (subject to satisfactory progress).

Eligibility criteria

- Applicants must be of New Zealand Māori descent.
- Have an excellent academic record, strong academic references, and have demonstrated the potential for high-quality research.
- Applicants must fulfil all conditions of the Doctoral Programme at AUT University, which can be found on the AUT University website www.aut.ac.nz. This includes having completed the required academic qualifications for direct entry. For information on how to commence your application for admission to the doctoral programme, contact the Graduate Research School doctoral.and.mphil.admissions@aut.ac.nz .
- Cultural expertise relevant to the research.
- Qualitative research experience.
- Reside in Aotearoa New Zealand or are willing to reside in Aotearoa New Zealand for the duration of their doctorate.
- The attainment of this scholarship is conditional on acceptance into the AUT doctoral programme.

Application requirements

Applicants must complete the AUT PhD Scholarship application online. It is not possible to submit incomplete scholarship applications through the online application process. In order for the application to be submitted, applicants must complete all sections and request the required support statements. Incomplete applications will not be forwarded to the selection panel. The following will need to be uploaded and submitted with the on-line Application Form:

- A cover letter highlighting your research experience and your motivations for and goals in undertaking a PhD in this project (no more than 1 page).
- A brief (no more than 2 pages) curriculum vitae.
- Academic transcripts and certificates for any previous tertiary study completed at a university other than AUT.
- A brief expression of interest proposal outlining how you would like to approach this research and your rationale for this approach. The expression of interest proposal will include the following:
 - Proposed Topic/Title
 - Rationale and significance of the PhD study
 - Research question to be investigated
 - Design of the study including the methodology and research technique(s) to be employed in the study
 - Research benefits
 - References

- **Note:** the expression of interest proposal must be no longer than **2 pages (1,000 words) plus a maximum of 1 page for references**. If a longer document is provided, you will be asked to revise the document to meet the requirements.
- Reports from two academic referees. Applicants must not submit referee's reports directly; applicants must send a request to their nominated referees from the online application system. Please advise your referees that they will be receiving an email requesting a reference statement. Applicants can submit the application without referees' statements. However, the application will be considered ineligible and will not be released to selection panels without the required reference statements.

Selection process

Applications will be considered by the project's investigators, Professor Helena Cooper Thomas, Associate Professor Peter McGhee, Dr Paulette Brazzale, and the Business Faculty Associate Dean Postgraduate.

Selection will be based on demonstrated strength in the following:

- the applicant's academic record.
- the applicant's past research experience and publication record (if appropriate).
- the applicant's expression of interest proposal
- the referees' statements.

The selection panel's decision will be final.

The scholarship will not be awarded if the selection panel is of the opinion that the applicants are not of sufficient merit; the position may then be re-advertised.

Conditions of acceptance and appointment

- The award of the scholarship is conditional on the recipient gaining entry to and enrolling in an AUT Doctor of Philosophy programme. The Scholarship cannot be commenced until and unless admission to the Doctoral Programme has been achieved. Applicants must fulfil all admission requirements for the Doctoral Programme in AUT. These can be found on the AUT website <https://www.aut.ac.nz/courses/doctor-of-philosophy> .
- The start date will depend on the completion of AUT University enrolment.
- The stipend cannot be released until the successful applicant is enrolled in the PhD programme at AUT.
- The successful applicant must be prepared to commit full-time to their programme of research.

- The successful applicant will be required to sign an AUT Research Scholarship Contract.
- This scholarship may not be held in conjunction with any other scholarship without the approval of the selection panel and the Scholarships Office.
- Recipients must be resident in New Zealand to receive stipend payments. Stipends will not be paid to students living offshore. Reasonable annual holiday leave overseas of no more than four weeks is acceptable.
- Scholarship payments will not be made retrospectively.
- Recipients will not normally be approved to hold employment for more than 20 hours per week and will be expected to declare their employment. The discretion regarding whether permission is granted for the Scholar to undertake paid employment is at the sole discretion of the University, via application through the Head of the Scholarships Office.
- The scholarship cannot be deferred.
- Recipients must be enrolled continuously in their programme of study. Suspension requests must be made in writing to the Scholarships Office.
- The scholar must move from provisional to full registration (PGR9) within the timeframe outlined in the AUT Postgraduate Handbook.
- The University Scholarships Committee may at any time suspend or terminate the Scholarship if it determines the Scholar is not diligently pursuing the programme or making satisfactory progress or has failed to comply with any of the terms and conditions on which the Scholarship was awarded.