FIRE EMERGENCY NEW ZEALAND
WHAKARATONGA IWI

Can't be what you can't see: Progression and development of women firefighters (career and volunteer)

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30 May 2023

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Notes on key terminology

Firefighters (career and volunteer)

This research was conducted with both career and volunteer firefighters, unless either group is specifically mentioned, the term 'firefighter' refers to both these groups as do the findings reported.

Career progression and development

A central focus of this study is understanding the factors influencing 'career development and progression' of firefighters. The use of the term 'career' in this manner may cause confusion in relation to volunteers, as it is more commonly associated with paid work or 'what you do for a living' (e.g., 'career firefighters'). However, for the purpose of this report 'career progression and development' applies to both groups, referring to the overall time spent developing the firefighter role (regardless of whether paid or volunteer), including training and developments, progression through the ranks, and promotion to leadership roles.

Wahine/Wāhine/Tāne

At the request of Fire and Emergency New Zealand in most cases within this report the terms woman/women have been replaced with wahine/wāhine and the terms man/men with tāne. Fire and Emergency New Zealand is committed to working with Māori as tāngata whenua, which means they are committed to improving our relationships with Māori and our own cultural awareness and understanding. Through this commitment, they also recognise that Māori language is a taonga (treasure) and should be treated as such. The use and promotion of te reo Māori as an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand will help the organisation in its commitment to Māori as tāngata whenua, but also the government's commitment to supporting Māori language revitalisation.

Executive summary

Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Fire and Emergency) is committed to developing a diverse and inclusive work force. While wāhine (women) have played an active role serving in urban and rural fire services since the 1940s, they remain significantly under-represented throughout Fire and Emergency, especially in leadership positions.

Responding to an identified gap in knowledge about career experiences and expectations of the organisation's wāhine firefighters, Fire and Emergency commissioned this mixed-methods study. The primary source of data was a series of interviews with 29 wāhine firefighters.[1] This was supplemented with relevant administrative data to provide background and context to the interview material.

The overall aim of this research project is to foster understanding of wāhine firefighters' experiences in relation to barriers and enablers of their career development and progression, and thereby provide an important input to the changes required to make positive progress.

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1   These wāhine were recruited from throughout Aotearoa and included those with varied career paths (e.g., current volunteer and career firefighters, and those who had progressed onto non-frontline black watch roles or other National Headquarters positions).

Setting the scene

Relevant Fire and Emergency administrative data were analysed to produce a profile of wāhine firefighters within the organisation at the current time, and to show how that profile has changed over time. Key points from inspection of the administrative data (as of 30 June 2022) include the following:

- **Low representation of wāhine** – operational firefighters make-up the majority (72%) of Fire and Emergency's wider workforce, and yet it is this role within the organisation where the lowest levels of female representation are found:

  » wāhine are a minority within career (5.7%) and volunteer (15.0%) firefighting workforces (or 13.5%, when both groups are combined)

  » wāhine firefighters are especially under-represented in leadership roles. Wāhine hold just 3.4% of executive officer leadership roles, 2.3% of paid operational leadership roles (Senior Station Officer/Station Officer) and 5.4% of volunteer firefighter leadership roles (Crew Leader or more senior).

- **Variable but generally slow progress** – the representation of wāhine firefighters has increased over time but, compared to other male-dominated industries, overall progress (particularly for career firefighters) has been slow. Gains in representation reflect a steady increase in the proportion of wāhine firefighters within annual cohorts of new recruits, which is occurring at a higher rate than amongst annual departures. However, progress is uneven, with an uptick in wāhine career firefighters exiting in 2021/22.

- **Shorter length of service for wāhine** – the average length of service of wāhine firefighters is considerably below that of tāne (men). It takes time for wāhine to progress their career, and the tendency for wāhine to have shorter periods of service is limiting the numbers available to move into leadership roles. This is particularly evident for career firefighters where average length of service for tāne is 17.1 years, but for wāhine just 7.7 years.

- **Gender equity indicators poor across countries** – comparison of fire and emergency service data across other countries suggests Aotearoa New Zealand sits somewhere in the mid-range when compared on gender representation in firefighter roles, as well as other gender equity indicators. It seems that all countries could benefit from work to improve the representation and standing of wāhine firefighters.

Currently, there is no readily available and continuously updated set of indicators by which progress can be monitored (e.g., a dashboard of indicators, or regularly produced report), pointing to an area for improvement. Ensuring that data relevant to progression and development of wāhine firefighters are available, published, and regularly monitored, could play an important role in promoting and sustaining change.

Interviews with wāhine firefighters – a complex landscape with variable responses

On completing the interviews with the 29 wāhine, perhaps the most notable finding was the wide variability in the nature of their responses. Significantly, most had high-levels of satisfaction within their respective roles, but their experiences of factors that either hindered or helped them to develop and progress varied greatly. A particular issue – such as brigade leadership – might be experienced by some wāhine as a barrier, while for others it was an enabler. Further, different themes had very different levels of significance across those interviewed.

In making sense of the qualitative data, it became evident that a very complex 'landscape' underpinned the data set. An attempt to represent this complex landscape, including the various dimensions along which such variability in responses was observed, is given in the figure below.

Complex landscape

| FENZ – new organisation and changing landscape | Diverse workforce – career, volunteers, black watch, NHQ | Multiple layers and overlaps | Differences across regions / local communities | Variable responses e.g. conform, confront, leave |

Continuum of experiences

BARRIERS

- Workplace environment
- Leadership
- Training and development
- Work-family balance
- Equipment and infrastructure
- Organisation

ENABLERS

Solutions – multifaceted and integrated

Five background domains emerged as central to the complex landscape upon which this study was conducted (see five tiles along the top). These included the new and evolving nature of the organisation, with much change occurring since the establishment of Fire and Emergency in 2017; the diverse nature of the workforce and the differing working conditions for those in "career land" versus "volunteer land"; the complex and overlapping nature of issues involved; regional differences creating a "postcode lottery" of experiences across and within regions; and finally, and perhaps most significantly, the variability among wāhine not only in what they experienced but in how they typically responded to challenges. This range of responses was particularly evident in comments from wāhine firefighters in response to gender-based differential treatment. The diversity of response can be summed up by example (actual) comments made: "I don't see it", "it doesn't offend me", "I deal with it head on", through to "it exhausts me!".

The interaction of features and resulting variability in wāhine views and experiences meant the barriers and enablers identified in this study were best considered as continuums of experiences, organised into six separate themes (double ended arrows in figure above). In general, there was more variability than consistency in wāhine views and experiences.

Barriers and enablers to career development and progression

Six themes emerged in understanding the key barriers and enablers to the development and career progression of wāhine firefighters. The primary focus was on factors impacting on career progression, although some themes extended into retention of wāhine firefighters as an integral consideration.[2]

Workplace environment

The strongest theme to emerge among the wāhine related to experience of their workplace environment, and in particular the impact of the culture of that workplace.

> **"** I was talking to a friend the other day and I said like… I don't think I'll be accepted as a brigade member. I'm tolerated as a brigade member but, like, I don't know that I'll ever be accepted.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Comments identifying barriers tended to outnumber references to enablers.

- **Barriers** – wāhine experienced non-inclusive environments that were disempowering and unsupportive of their career progression; the existence of sub-cultures or 'tribes' associated with different groups within the workforce served to reduce opportunities for progression and development.

- **Enablers** – these consisted of a mixture of factors that helped them endure the more hostile aspects of their work environment, but also those that were more direct enablers of their career progression; examples included brigades with an overall inclusive nature, and informal mentoring and support from colleagues.

Leadership

The role of leadership emerged as a strong theme among wāhine, both as a barrier and enabler to career progression, depending on the particular skills and attributes of their leaders. This theme had considerable overlap with workplace environment (above), with the brigade leader playing a significant role in how the culture of the brigade developed. Brigade leaders could, however, also have more specific impacts on career progression, in their roles as mentors and as gate-keepers of training and development opportunities.

- **Barriers** – leaders could act as a barrier to both the retention of wāhine and to their career progression. Experiences ranged from blatant discriminatory behaviour by the leaders of the brigade, through to inaction and ineffectiveness, resulting in negative outcomes.

- **Enablers** – encouragingly, it was more common for wāhine to describe leadership in terms of enablement. This occurred through direct actions such as proactive career guidance (e.g., shoulder tapping), coaching before interviews or training courses, or enhanced confidence resulting from affirmation and encouragement.

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2   Retention is integral to firefighters' career progression because the length of service (career and volunteer) is one of the pre-requisites to progressing through the ranks; progression then opens up other career path opportunities within FENZ.

Training and development opportunities

Training and development inevitably were important themes for this study. Within this were experiences of training, particularly courses held at the National Training Centre (NTC), and access to developmental opportunities.

- **Barriers** – negative experiences of training and/or the absence of formal career planning were two significant barriers to the career progression and development of wāhine firefighters. The former was more specific to wāhine, but the lack of career planning and other opportunities appears to apply equally to wāhine and tāne firefighters.

- **Enablers** – there were also several ways training and development opportunities were experienced as enabling. These included openings and opportunity to develop different skills and people networks within the organisation, positive training experiences enhanced by the presence of female trainers, and attendance of other inspirational female-themed professional development opportunities (e.g., conferences).

Work-family balance

Despite a majority of the wāhine interviewed being 'working mothers' at some stage of their careers (approx. 70%), few brought this topic up without prompting. There was a degree of acceptance of the challenges posed of juggling work and family responsibilities, with the sentiment that "you just make it work" commonly voiced. On probing, it became apparent however that childcare was indeed a pervasive issue in relation to career progression for wāhine. Managing childcare responsibilities presented a range of stressful challenges to wāhine firefighters and restricted access to developmental opportunities.

In terms of identifying specific barriers and enablers, most of the discussions centred around the factors that created special difficulties (barriers), as well as strategies that helped wāhine managed these challenges (enablers).

- **Barriers** – special challenges to managing childcare responsibilities included: childcare being expensive and ill-suited to shift workers; the pressures to do overtime and the "massive mum guilt that kicks in"; the burden on families created by residential training courses and the need to travel; challenges of coming back after pregnancy and childbirth. A few wāhine spoke of the impacts of being a firefighter on relationships. Those who raised this, described tensions created by the wāhine working in an (at times) hostile workplace.

- **Enablers** – factors that eased barriers included access to support, keeping family members informed, the availability of different career paths to suit personal circumstances, and – for volunteers – the implementation of local, innovative solutions. The presence of these factors meant wāhine were less likely to be in the position where they had to choose family over career. Whilst these were described as enablers for wāhine, many apply to tāne with caregiving responsibilities.[3]

Equipment and infrastructure

This theme provoked frequent and animated responses, with poor fitting uniforms and protective gear the most common topic of conversation. Many were exasperated with a lack of improvements despite the issue being around for decades. This theme was distinct in that wāhine spoke only of difficulties experienced, with no enabling factors identified.

- **Barriers** – issues with ill-fitting uniforms, protective gear and inadequate fire station facilities created barriers to the retention of wāhine firefighters, as they impacted negatively on job satisfaction. They created health and safety concerns, impeded the ability of wāhine to work efficiently, and made them feel like they didn't belong.

> Nothing is a bigger daily reminder that you don't belong here than the uniforms.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

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3   Of note, none of the wāhine interviewed provided examples of how the Pregnancy in Operational Firefighting Policy (2019) had been an enabler for them, although, several talked positively about the policy and the value of the provisions it provided. It is possible none of the wāhine who participated had had a pregnancy under the policy.

Organisational experiences

In general wāhine had a limited amount to say about Fire and Emergency as an organisation, with a clear disconnect apparent between their own "truck world" and the work of those in NHQ responsible for the broader operation of the organisation. This disconnect was evident in low levels of awareness of (or interest in) organisational priorities and values.[4] When prompted to share thoughts on their experiences of organisational processes, there was recognition of the key role of the organisation in achieving change for wāhine.

'Organisation' as a frame potentially subsumes within it all of the issues dealt with under the theme headings above; those highlighted were additional organisation-related aspects identified by the wāhine and not accounted for within other 'themes'.

- **Barriers** – organisational processes were experienced as inefficient – especially, Human Resources, the complaints resolution process, and implementation of roll outs. The appointment processes in particularly were experienced as unnecessarily lengthy, insufficiently transparent, with a lack of feedback loops when knock backs occurred. The combined effect was felt to be one of de-motivation to participate any further in the process.

- **Enablers** – wāhine recognised the role of the organisation in achieving progress for wāhine, when working conditions were compared to those for wāhine 20, 10, or even 5 years ago. Wāhine also spoke optimistically that Fire and Emergency appeared genuinely committed to improving things, and to developing a diverse and inclusive workforce, which was an important consideration for those wāhine planning a long career within the agency.

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4   The main exception to this being the points of tensions under dispute between the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) and Fire and Emergency as part of the industrial action that was occurring during the period of the fieldwork. For example, there was a fairly common sentiment amongst those on the frontline (both career and volunteers) of "those on the shop floor not being valued".

Supporting career development and progression

Wāhine identified a range of support activities that they felt would facilitate the career development and progression of wāhine firefighters. Comments included types of support wanted, but also views on how best to implement or deliver the support.

Types of support activities

The types of support activities wāhine identified largely revolved around what was needed to address the barriers, or to enhance enablers they had previously identified. Support activities more directly related to career development and progression appear first in the list below, while those important to wāhine but relating more to retention appearing lower down (the ordering below is not intended as to convey any sense of prioritisation):

- **structured career planning advice** – for example, annual performance reviews and professional development planning sessions, with on-going support to achieve career goals identified

- **programmes to develop future leaders** – establish a more systematic approach to identifying and supporting future leaders (including wāhine), including formal mentoring and/or sponsor-type systems

- **accessing developmental opportunities** – ensure equitable access to relevant developmental opportunities (e.g., secondments, deployment opportunities, project work, taking on local representative roles)

- **making learning more attractive** – for example, more females in trainer roles, flexible styles of instruction to suit wāhine, increased use of distance learning where possible, scheduling courses so wāhine have the option of attending with other wāhine

- **supportive and inclusive workplace environment at all levels** – continue this important and complex area of work to enable them to take up opportunities and develop the skills and confidence needed to progress into leadership roles, whilst also maximising their retention

- **develop effective and inclusive leaders** – provide early and on-going opportunities to develop leaderships skills, supporting wāhine to develop and progress into roles they value. Continue/expand the concept of male champions to advocate and model inclusive behaviour

- **ensure access to wāhine networks and mentors** – for support, guidance, inspiration and as a lever for collective action. Provide more support for wāhine to contribute to the work of the WFENZ, increase awareness of achievements, and understand and address misperceptions associated with participation in the network

- **flexible working and support with childcare** – continue to explore options for job/shift sharing to enable more flexible working, provision for childcare that is more suitable/affordable for those on shift work; adopt family-friendly conditions for those attending training courses; and support brigade innovations which offer solutions (e.g., volunteer brigade creche and nannies)

- **address unconscious bias and structural barriers** –removal of unconscious gender bias in language (e.g., more consistent use of firefighter/firefighters than fireman/firemen) and structural barriers in recruitment and appointment processes (e.g., inclusion of wāhine in interview panels, increased transparency around appointments)

- **effective resolution of complaints** – recognise the valuable role WFENZ and Women's Development provide as "safe places" to access confidential advice and support; ensure wāhine feel supported, are made aware of the range of options available to them, and can retain control over decisions impacting them

- **supply of ergonomically suitable clothing and gear** – essential for wāhine to carry out their work safely and effectively, and to feel like they belong. Ensure wāhine are included in the decision-making around equipment procurement, and increase awareness and access to current options to remedy poorly fitting gear (e.g., tailoring, special orders).

Overall approach to delivery – inclusion and respect

One of the more consistent messages from wāhine in this study was that they did not want special treatment or to be singled out in any way because they were wāhine; instead, they wanted to be seen and valued for their work as firefighters.

> **"**…it doesn't feel good being overlooked, but it doesn't feel good catching the updraft.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

This meant they were generally unsupportive of diversity-led goals achieved through gender-based quotas or targets. Wāhine were, however, supportive of inclusive and equitable practices, where they were not disadvantaged because of their gender.

The views of the wāhine in this study align with that found by some other researchers, which point to the achievement of effective diversity being a long-term proposition that requires commitment to the creation first of an inclusive culture. Achieving an inclusive and respectful workplace will enable wāhine who are progressing their careers to be able to "step up to a place of safety".

The following three aspects of an overarching approach were endorsed by wāhine:

- **initiatives that achieve targeted goals for wāhine but delivered as organisation-wide projects** – most, if not all, of the support activities identified by wāhine could benefit both wāhine and tāne firefighters and so should be delivered as an organisation-wide project without prioritising a single gender
- **expert advice from wāhine needs to be integrated throughout the organisation** – the scale of the work required for wāhine to have equitable access to opportunities to progress their careers needs to be recognised. This requires integrated working across the organisation, with expert advice from wāhine embedded across all processes and work programmes
- **leverage off the strong team-based culture and value placed on high performance** – a focus on how team performance can be enhanced through becoming more diverse, adding a wider range of skills and attributes, will likely be less polarising than simply arguing for more diversity within the workforce simply because it is the "right thing to do".

Concluding remarks

In understanding the barriers and enablers to the career development and progression of wāhine firefighters, this study has found the experiences of wāhine and their responses to these experiences are highly variable (particularly across volunteer brigades). This means wāhine may not need (or want) the same level or types of support and blanket approaches to delivering change may not be effective. It has also confirmed that there is no 'silver bullet' that might rapidly guarantee organisation-wide improvement in the representation of wāhine firefighters in leadership positions. Instead a multiple-pronged attack on the problem is required, with a long-term commitment, and an overarching focus on creating an inclusive culture. While wāhine recognise a genuine commitment by Fire and Emergency to improve the working conditions for wāhine, and to ensure they flourish within it, they are frustrated with the perceived slow speed of progress.

The career experiences of wāhine can be viewed as an important indicator of the broader health of the organisation. When conditions improve for wāhine firefighters, all members of the organisation will likely experience a positive workplace. Identifying and delivering outcomes that can be achieved in the shorter-term (e.g., career planning advice, making training more attractive, providing ergonomically suitable gear and clothing), will be important while longer term critical changes, that underpin many of the other areas of change needed, are progressed (e.g., inclusive and respectful workplace environments with effective and supportive leadership).

> …women absolutely can nail being a firefighter, and working all the way up the ranks, absolutely. What I ultimately wish is that there were greater levels of support for women to do it – because we do it anyway without it, but could you imagine how amazing it would be if women were as supported as the guys are, could you imagine the kind of leaders we would have? Truly extraordinary.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Introduction

This is the final report of the '*Progression and development of women firefighters (career and volunteer) research project*'. The overall aim of this project is to understand wāhine (women) firefighters' views and experiences in relation to barriers and enablers of their career development and progression.

The report begins with a brief background to the research project, along with details of the research aims and approach, to provide important context to the findings that follow.

1.1 Background

Fire and Emergency New Zealand (hereafter, 'Fire and Emergency') is committed to developing a diverse and inclusive work force. While wāhine have played an active role in the provision of urban and rural fire services since the 1940s, they remain significantly under-represented throughout Fire and Emergency, especially in leadership positions.

Fire and Emergency has decided that intelligence-led, evidence-based decision-making should be one of their strategic priorities. In line with this commitment, their first step, to increase organisational knowledge around what can be done to retain and progress a greater number of wāhine firefighters, was to commission a literature review of relevant research. This review was undertaken in 2021 by Suzette Dyer and colleagues. The review drew on national and international literature and summarised what is known about the barriers to and enablers of the career progression of wāhine firefighters, and how these compared to those experienced by wāhine in other male-dominated industries. The review also identified critical gaps in knowledge within this domain (Dyer et al., 2021).[5]

A key observation made by the review was that there was a dearth of knowledge within Fire and Emergency about the career experiences and expectations of the organisation's wāhine firefighters. The review concluded with a recommendation for a qualitative study that centred on the voices and experiences of wāhine firefighters. In response, Fire and Emergency commissioned the current research project and contracted the writer, independent researcher Dr Elaine Mossman, to undertake the work. The overall aim of the current research is to understand wāhine firefighters' (career and volunteer) views and experiences in relation to barriers and enablers of their career development and progression within FENZ.

The project is intended to provide an in-depth understanding of wāhine firefighter experiences, primarily through capturing the voices of these wāhine. Consequently a significant proportion of the report's content is verbatim quotes from the wāhine who kindly agreed to be interviewed.

Fire and Emergency intend to use the findings from this research to formulate effective and appropriate responses to retain, develop and support the career progression of wāhine firefighters. Findings should support the organisation's ability to create equal opportunities and an inclusive culture, supporting wāhine firefighters to progress to roles that they value.

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5   Dyer, S., Hurd, F., & Algera, P. (2021). *Women's Career Progression at Fire and Emergency New Zealand: What is Already Known, and Where are the Gaps? A Literature Review and Agenda for Research*. Fire and Emergency NZ: Wellington.

1.1.1 Existing knowledge of barriers and enablers

There have been a number of studies carried out by Fire and Emergency that touch on experiences of wāhine firefighters (e.g., *Understanding the Volunteer Journey;* Massey University, 2021); *Becoming a Career Firefighter* (Litmus, 2021); *Young People's Perceptions of the Firefighter Role* (Litmus, 2019); *Diversity in Recruitment Evidence Review* (Macdonald, 2019); *Diversity in the Community versus Diversity in the NZFS: Who is Missing and Why* (Wilson & Scanlen, 2016). While some earlier research has focused on recruitment of wāhine volunteers (UMR Research, 2003), there has been no specific focus on wāhine firefighters and their retention and career progression. A recent evaluation did focus on barriers and enablers of the career progression of firefighters into management roles within Fire and Emergency, but due to the lack of wāhine in the senior roles of interest, the study was limited to tāne participants (*Hands up: Anyone for Promotion? Does Fire and Emergency have a challenge advancing firefighters into management roles?* (Scott, 2021)). In sum, the research so far completed by Fire and Emergency provides limited insights into wāhine experiences of career development and progression. Any potentially useful insights have been limited to due to sampling issues (e.g., a high rate of respondents who were tāne) but also, where wāhine are included, concerns were raised around their ability to speak freely, with some reporting fears if adverse reactions if they did so (Dyer et al., 2021).

Insights of relevance were therefore only available either from research on wāhine in other male dominated industries (e.g., Police, Defence) and/or research conducted by fire and emergency services in other jurisdictions. This was essentially the approach taken by Dyer et al's (2021) review, which usefully identified a number of themes common to the challenges faced by wāhine within these organisations. Dyer and colleagues fundamentally concluded that the barriers experienced by women within the fire and emergency sector were similar to those experienced by wāhine in any male-dominated industry. This included experiences of:

- **hostile work environments** – for example bullying, harassment, or behaviours that violate norms of respect, affecting wahine's physical, psychological and economic wellbeing and having detrimental effects on retention, absenteeism, job satisfaction and productivity
- **work-family pressure and lack of flexible working arrangements** – the working environment of male-dominated organisations and industries tends to be unsupportive of the needs of wāhine to integrate work and family responsibilities. As a result, wāhine may experience higher levels of stress in juggling work-home demands, or may decline opportunities for promotion, delay staring a family or elect to remain childless
- **organisational barriers** – often associated with gender stereotypes or wrong perceptions; these structural barriers manifest in wāhine being overlooked for promotion, and resistance to appointment into more senior roles; for some, this may motivate them to exit the occupation or industry.

In addition, overseas research specific to wāhine firefighters identified challenges related specifically to:

- **physical environment and equipment factors** – issues with ill-fitting clothing and equipment, also lack of provision of designated facilities such as toilets, showers and changing rooms, all of which may lower job satisfaction, while also creating health and safety issues.

The impact of these barriers has been a chronic failure to attract sufficient wāhine into the service, and higher levels of turnover for those wāhine who do sign up; all of which culminates in persistently low representation of wāhine firefighters. Wāhine in male-dominated industries such as the fire and emergency sector generally are less likely to be considered for or encouraged to take on leadership roles. Hence, wāhine tend to be concentrated in lower-ranked positions, or in 'traditional' feminine roles such as support workers or clerical/administrators. Finally, it appears that the dearth of wāhine progressing into leadership roles itself acts as barrier to other wāhine pursuing advancement; as Macdonald (2019) asserted, '**you can't be what you can't see**'.

Overcoming the obstacles and barriers that inhibit wāhine progression within the sector almost certainly requires change across a range of fronts. Pathways towards positive change for wāhine identified by Dyer and colleagues generally fell into five key areas:

- targeted recruitment initiatives and processes (e.g., gender targets and quotas)
- reframing fundamental assumptions and expectations of the firefighter role, to better represent the actual skillset required for the modern firefighter
- adjusting equipment and wider work arrangements to better suit wāhine
- leadership development and career support for wāhine
- wider organisational positive culture change.

In addition, enablers specifically associated with progression into senior roles included better access to education and training, timely career planning advice, talent management and succession planning, and enhancing opportunities for networking and mentoring.

As noted above, Dyer et al.'s (2021) review identified a lack of research specifically on wāhine experiences within at Fire and Emergency NZ, especially in relation to career progression of wāhine firefighters, and their perceptions of barriers or enablers.

1.1.2 Fire and Emergency strategic context and related programmes of work

Fire and Emergency's National Strategy 2019–2045 sets out '*Growing our people*' as one of their five strategic priorities. To address this Fire and Emergency has committed to the following objectives:

- build a respectful, inclusive, diverse culture where our people are well equipped to do their jobs, valued, and treated fairly
- ensure our behaviour reflects our values and hold each other to account
- support modern ways of thinking and working, including flexibility for our roles
- equip our people well for their roles, with access to training and opportunities
- train and develop leaders at all levels.

Knowledge generated by this project will contribute to these strategic goals. In particular, findings should enhance understanding of how to improve the workplace experiences of wāhine firefighters, thereby increasing their retention and overall workforce representation. Similarly, insights into how wāhine firefighters are best supported to pursue their development and career aspirations can be used to inform the training and development of wāhine leaders.

Insights from the project will also support a number of existing projects and programmes of work within the organisation, that contribute to Fire and Emergency's goal of 'Growing our People'. A selection of key projects and work programmes the current project intersects with are listed below to provide context in how the research findings of this project may align and assist in their delivery. These include:

- **Positive Workplace Culture** – this programme of work aims to develop a positive workplace culture within Fire and Emergency that is free from bullying and harassment (in response to the critical independent review in 2019 by retired judge Carol Shaw and the more recent follow up review by Belinda Clark KC in 2022). Building a positive workplace culture contributes to a satisfying career experience for wāhine that will support their retention; whilst ensuring wāhine are given equal access to training and promotion opportunities.

- **Kia Toipoto Framework** – male-dominated industries are prone to more significant gender pay gaps than other types of organisations. As a crown entity, Fire and Emergency has a responsibility to be a good employer and implement equal employment opportunity policies and procedures. This includes implementation of the 'Kia Toipoto Public Service Action Plan 2021-24' that aims to close gender, Māori, Pacific and ethnic pay gaps. A key driver of gender pay gaps is the under-representation of women in more senior/leadership roles, therefore understanding how to remove barriers to career progression of wāhine is a top priority of this work programme.

- **Leadership Development Framework** – Tarāwaho Whakawhanake I te Kaiārahitanga (2021) – a new resource to enable positive leadership behaviours to be developed across the organisation and at all levels, which will impact on both career experience and promotional opportunities for women firefighters.

- **Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2018)** – the strategy is based on the principles of promoting a new and positive organisational culture that values inclusivity, diversity, and a sense of belonging. Increasing the representation of women in operational and leadership roles is a central theme within this strategy. The document sets out the need for the Diversity and Inclusion policy, and identifies four strategic priorities, challenges to implementing the strategy and the means to overcome these challenges, and measures of success.

- **Volunteerism Strategy 2019-2029** – volunteers make up the majority of the workforce (85% of all firefighters). This document outlines the approach needed by Fire and Emergency to enable sustainable volunteerism, critical for the effective delivery of fire and emergency services. The recruitment and retention of wāhine volunteers, is a key component of this strategy, together with understanding how to support a good work-life balance and appropriately recognise the value of their work.

1.2 Project focus and research questions

As noted above, a multi-pronged approach will be required from Fire and Emergency to address the current under-representation of wāhine firefighters in operational and leadership roles. Strategies will be required across a range of domains, including: (1) recruitment ; (2) working environment that supports retention; and (3) advancement into leadership and other valued roles. Achieving the latter will see a greater number of wāhine in key decision-making roles, whilst also providing visibility of, and access to, wāhine leaders as role models for new recruits and other wāhine firefighters.

The primary focus of the current study is the third of the above domains: how wāhine firefighters (career and volunteer) can best be supported to progress into leadership positions and other roles they value. Consideration is also given to the second: factors impacting on the retention of the wāhine firefighters with potential to become leaders in the future. This emphasis recognises that retention is an integral concern of career progression, as it is known that wāhine firefighters have a far shorter length of service than tāne firefighters, and therefore, less opportunity to progress through the ranks into leadership roles.

> **The overall aim of the current research is to understand wāhine firefighters' (career and volunteer) views and experiences in relation to the barriers and enablers of their career development and progression.**

The following specific research questions were formulated to assist in meeting the research's overall objective:

1. What does Fire and Emergency data tell us about the current career paths that wāhine firefighters take? How does it differ from tāne firefighters' progression within Fire and Emergency?

2. What are wāhine firefighters' career or development aspirations (or development paths that they value)? How do they align to the values, practices and processes at Fire and Emergency?

3. How do wāhine firefighters perceive and experience development opportunities within Fire and Emergency?

4. How do wāhine firefighters perceive and experience barriers and enablers (both within and outside of the organisation) to career progression, particularly to leadership roles such as officers/brigade leaders and group/district/regional/national managers?

5. What, if any, are the differences between the experiences of career firefighters and volunteer firefighters? Why do these differences exist?

6. What additional support do participants perceive would enhance their career development opportunities at Fire and Emergency?

These research questions informed the design of the methodology, and findings specific to these questions are highlighted as they occur throughout the report.

1.3 Research approach

The research employed a mixed methods approach to address the above research questions, incorporating use of qualitative and quantitative methods and analytical techniques. Primarily, the research endeavoured to highlight the voice and experiences of wāhine firefighters; as listed below, there were four main components to the project, but the principal source of data was interviews with wāhine firefighters:[6]

- a brief scan of the literature and key documents

- interviews with nine key informants (Fire and Emergency internal stakeholders)
- analysis of relevant Fire and Emergency administrative data
- fieldwork interviews with 29 wāhine firefighters

For detailed information on the research approach and limitations, please refer to Appendix A.

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6   An additional intended component was a content analysis of exit survey data, however there was insufficient data available to enable this task to be completed (see Appendix A.3 for more details).

1.4 Structure of report

Following this introductory section of the report, the following structure is used:

- **Section 2.0** – presents key findings of the analysis of Fire and Emergency administrative data, as a useful backdrop to the main findings. This includes current numbers and characteristics of wāhine firefighters within the organisation, how these have changed over time, and some of the key differences when compared to tāne firefighters.

- **Section 3.0** – presents the findings from the primary data for this project, the interviews with wāhine firefighters. This includes an overview of the qualitative data and a discussion of its complexities, followed by the six themes that emerged as key barriers and enablers to development and career progression for wāhine firefighters. These barriers and enablers, discussed in sequence, are workplace environment, leadership, training and development opportunities, work-family balance, equipment and infrastructure, and organisational processes.

  This section features extensive use of verbatim quotes, reflecting the intended aim of capturing the voices and experiences of wāhine firefighters.

- **Section 4.0** – presents suggested supports and remedies that wāhine identified as potentially improving their career development and progression. In addition to specific forms of support, there are also views on how best to implement or deliver the support.

- **Section 5.0** – concludes the report with high-level observations drawn from the main findings.

SECTION 2.0

Quantitative data and setting the scene

This section presents findings from analysis of administrative data held by Fire and Emergency that has relevance to the career progression and development of wāhine firefighters. A profile of wāhine firefighters is presented as they sit within the organisation today and how this has changed over time.

This provides useful context to assist in the interpretation of the interview data presented in the following sections. Measuring and publishing progress on relevant indicators plays an important role in achieving change. The collation of indicators in this section may provide useful benchmark indicators for future monitoring of the wāhine firefighters' retention, career progression and role development.[7]

7   This data was presented in detail in an interim report (dated 20 February 2023), key findings are reproduced in this section of the report.

2.1 Location of wāhine firefighters within the wider organisation

As of 30 June 2022, there were 14,591 individuals within the overall Fire and Emergency workforce, of whom 2,891 were in paid roles and 11,700 in volunteer roles (approx. 20:80 split).[8]

Nearly three-quarters of the entire workforce (72%) are 'operational firefighters' (n=10,468). Of note, it is in this group, the largest component of the organisation's workforce, where the lowest proportional representation of wāhine occurs. As of 30 June 2022 there were just 100 wāhine career firefighters (5.7% of all careers firefighters) and 1,308 wāhine volunteer firefighters (15.0% of all volunteer firefighters). Other types of roles within the organisation include communication centre staff, a range of other staff

roles at NHQ, regional management positions and other support roles.

Figure 2.1 presents the gender break down across these different roles (paid roles in top chart, volunteer below), with the actual number in each role appearing next to the label in the brackets.

Bar charts in figure 2.1 show clearly that the representation of wāhine across both paid and volunteer roles varies considerably, and as with other male-dominated organisations rates of wāhine are higher in non-operational roles for example, wāhine are approaching 50% of National Headquarter roles.

Figure 2.1. Gender of workforce within different Fire and Emergency roles in 2022
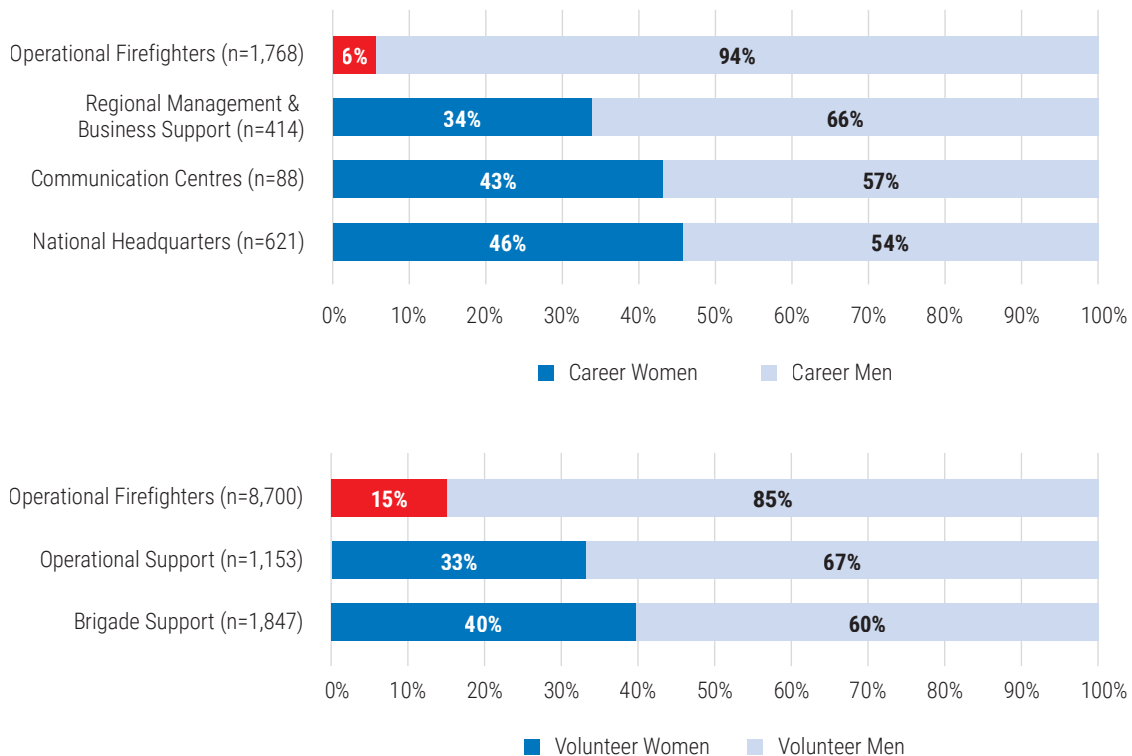
Source: Figures based on data supplied by Human Resources Team as of 30 June 2022. The actual number of individuals in each role appears in brackets next to each label. Non-binary/other not included as less than 1%.

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8   Based on headcounts not FTE. Career trainee or volunteer recruit firefighters are not counted in these figures as they are not considered operational until they have successfully completed training.

2.1.1 Regional location

Representation of wāhine in firefighting roles varies across Fire and Emergency's five regions, and particularly across the 17 districts and over 660 individual fire stations (see Table 2.1). Te Ihu (Upper South Island) has the highest proportion of career wāhine firefighters (7.7%), while Te Hiku (Auckland/ Northland) has the highest proportion of volunteer wāhine firefighters (24.9%). Representation varied even more so across individual districts and brigades. In terms of districts, the Nelson-Marlborough district had highest representation of career wāhine (23.7%), while for volunteers the Northland district had the highest (27.9% of all volunteer roles).

For individual stations the number of wāhine career firefighters ranged from none through to 9 in one larger Nelson-Marlborough station (this station had 38 career firefighters, with wāhine making up 24%).[9] The smallest number of wāhine volunteers in any brigade was one, and the largest 18; the latter figure applies to a large brigade in Queenstown, where wāhine made up 33% the local workforce. In 24 brigades wāhine make up 50% or more of all volunteers, with wāhine out numbering tāne in 13 volunteer brigades, the highest rate being two-thirds at a small brigade on the West Coast, but total numbers were also small (i.e., two wāhine volunteers in a team of three).

Table 2.1. Regional differences in representation of wāhine (career firefighters and all volunteer roles)[1]

	Career firefighters	Volunteers (all roles)
Regions (n=5)	4.9% – 7.7%	16.4 – 24.9%
Te Hiku (Auckland/Northland)	4.9%	24.9%
Nga Tai ki te Puku (Central)	6.1%	23.5%
Te Ūpoko (Lower NI)	5.6%	21.0%
Te Kei (Lower SI)	6.7%	17.4%
Te Ihu (Upper SI)	7.7%	16.4%
Districts (n=17)	2.2% – 23.7%	14.4% – 27.8%
Individual brigades (n=658)[2]	*0 – 25.0%*	*0 – 66.7%*

Table notes:

1 Data supplied by Fire and Emergency, extracted 30 May 2022. Data supplied provided a gender breakdown across all volunteer roles (e.g., operational firefighters, operational support and brigade support).

2 Individual brigade data. The small number of wāhine firefighters in some individual brigades make percentages unreliable (for example some brigades have just 4 members). Figures have been italicised for this reason.

9   A slightly higher proportion was seen in a small station within Waitemata, Te Hiku – Auckland/Northland (25%, 1 out of 4), but the overall small number of firefighters (n=4) makes this percentage unreliable for comparison purposes.

2.2 Demographic characteristics

Available workforce data on firefighters indicate the following:[10]

- **Age** – for both career and volunteer firefighters, the average age for wāhine is younger than that for tāne. Wāhine career firefighters are on average 8 years younger than tāne (38 years for wāhine vs 46 years for tāne), and for volunteer firefighters wāhine are 6 years younger on average (40 years old vs 46 years for tāne). This difference in age in part reflects the significantly longer tenure of tāne firefighters compared to wāhine (see Section 2.4).

- **Ethnicity** – the ethnicity profile of career and volunteer wāhine firefighters is similar. The majority for both groups of wāhine firefighters was 'European' (74% and 71% respectively) with Māori being the next biggest group (16% and 17% respectively). There appeared to be a small difference in those recorded as Pacific People, who make up 7% of the wāhine career fighters but only 1% of the volunteers. For both groups, there appears a broader representation of Māori among wāhine firefighters (16-17%) than has been achieved among tāne firefighters (7-12%) or across the wider organisation (9%).[11]

In recent years Fire and Emergency became aware that not all of their workforce identified as tāne or wāhine, and from 2021 introduced a new recording category of 'gender identity' that included 'gender diverse' as a recording option to account for new employees who identified as gender fluid or any other descriptor beyond a 'male or wāhine' binary. Unfortunately, past and new records are insufficiently reliable to be able to report on the number of firefighters identifying as gender diverse. Hence, for this report statistics have been limited to how wāhine firefighters and compare to tāne firefighters.

10 England collects data on other diversity characteristics of firefighters joining the Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) such as sexual orientation and religion (see www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fire-and-rescue-workforce-and-pensions-statistics-england-april-2019-to-march-2020/fire-and-rescue-workforce-and-pensions-statistics-england-april-2019-to-march-2020#workforce-diversity). Similar data is not currently collected by Fire and Emergency.
11 Total Māori population across the entire Fire and Emergency organisation workforce is 8.1% (or 8.9% if those where ethnicity is recorded as 'unknown' are removed).

2.3 Representation of wāhine in firefighting over time

The first record of wāhine serving as firefighters was in the 1940s; this may have been triggered by so many tāne serving overseas in World War II, which encouraged wāhine to step into many non-traditional roles, including firefighting duties. It was some 40 years later, in 1981, before the first wāhine were accepted as career firefighters.[12] This milestone was achieved only after the New Zealand Fire Service Commission was directed to accept wāhine by the Human Rights Commission, having lost an equity case taken against them by a wahine.

Changes to data collection methodology over time render trend analysis problematic, but time series data suggests that the number of wāhine firefighters has

undergone continuous if slow increase, amongst both career and volunteer workforces. The following graphs are presented separately reflect different reporting periods (Figure 2.2 for pre 2016 and figure 2.3 for post 2016).[13]

In the 2001 New Zealand Fire Service annual report, the number of wāhine career firefighters was reported to be just 14, representing 0.9% of the 1539 career firefighters. This early statistic was the first data point of a decade-long trend reported in the later 2010 New Zealand Fire Service annual report. Of note this same 2010 annual report was the first appearance of a national target for representation of wāhine, which was that wāhine make up 5.5% of operational firefighters.[14]

Figure 2.2. Proportion of wāhine as career firefighters 2001 to 2015 (financial years)
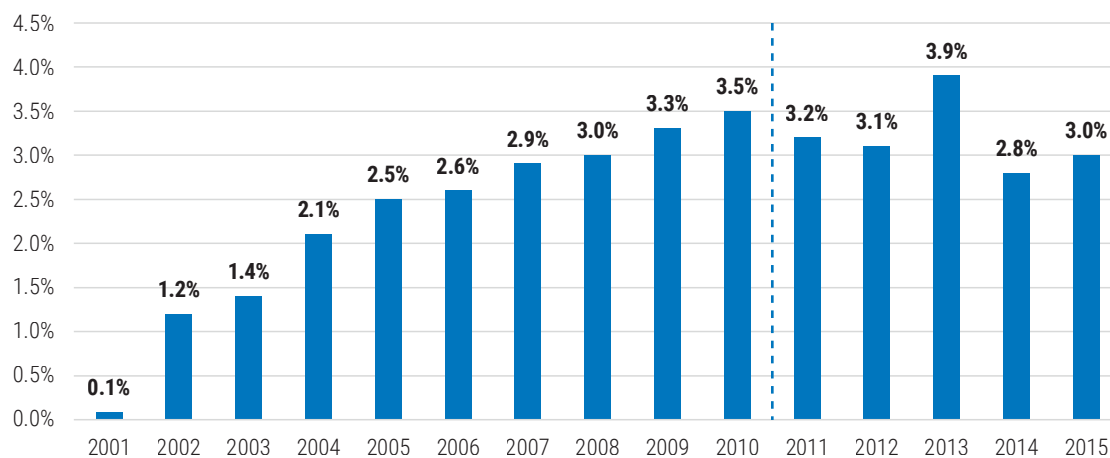
Source: Adapted from figures reported in the New Zealand Fire Service 2001 Annual Report, p28 (2001-2010); and the 2015 Annual Report, p17 (2011-2015).

12 On 4 November 1981, Anne Barry and Elizabeth England completed the Fire Service's recruit course, with overall placings of second and third respectively, becoming New Zealand's first wāhine career firefighters, and the first wāhine career firefighters in Australasia.
13 Data pre-2016 is from available annual reports, data post 2016 was supplied by the Human Resources team.
14 It is not stated in the report if this related specifically to career operational firefighters, but this is the data it was compared to.

As noted above, data on volunteers is known to be particularly unreliable, for a range of reasons: .[15] Noting data reliability limitations, diversity data relating to volunteers was first reported in the 2014 annual report, indicating that in:

- **2013/14** – 14.1% of volunteer firefighters were wāhine; and when career and volunteer firefighters were combined it was 12.1%[16]

- **2014/15** – 14.5% of volunteer firefighters were wāhine; and when career and volunteer firefighters were combined it was 12.5% (2015 Annual Report).

Data in Figure 2.3 provide more reliable updated trends up to 30 June 2022 for both career and volunteer firefighters. This data indicates a slow increase in the representation of wāhine as firefighters over time (both career and volunteers). By 2020, the 2010 target of 5.5% wāhine representation set ten years earlier for career firefighters was finally met and by 2022, out of the 1,768 career firefighters, 100 were wāhine (5.7%), and out of the 8,700 volunteer firefighters, 1,308 were wāhine (15.0%). When figures for both groups are combined, wāhine make up 13.5% of all operational firefighters (career and volunteers combined).

Figure 2.3. Proportion of wāhine as career and volunteer firefighters 2016 to 2022 (financial years)
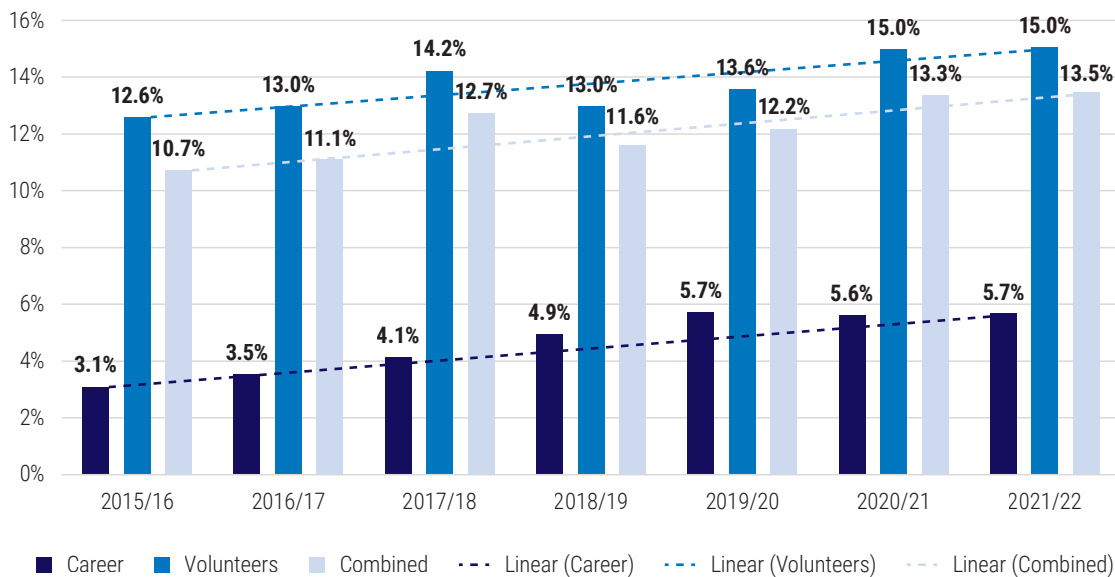
Source: Data supplied by Fire and Emergency Human Resources team, based on data used for annual reports. Note data on volunteers is less reliable than for career firefighters and should be reviewed with caution.

15 It was only after July 2017 that rural volunteers were added to the database, allowing Fire and Emergency a full view of all volunteers subsumed within FENZ.
16 In 2013/14 targets for representation of women for career, volunteers and combined groups of firefighters were all 5.5% wāhine.

While comparison of Aotearoa New Zealand's statistics with other nations is fraught, available data suggests Aotearoa New Zealand sits somewhere in the mid-range compared to other countries on gender representation in firefighter roles (see Table 2.2). All countries have consistently low levels of wāhine representation as firefighters in operational and leadership roles.

For career firefighters, available data indicate that Aotearoa New Zealand has a higher level of representation of wāhine (5.7%) than the US (4.2%) and Canada (4.4%), but lower than the rate for firefighters (employed full-time and on-call) in England in 2020 (7.0%).[17]

The more comparable Australian fire and emergency data indicate that Aotearoa New Zealand has a higher wāhine participation rate than Fire Rescue Victoria (4.7%) and South Australia Metropolitan Fire Service (4.3%), but lower than in Fire and Rescue NSW (10.2%), Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (11.7%); remarkably, the Tasmania Fire Service reports a rate of 28.7%.

For volunteer firefighters, fewer comparisons are available, but Aotearoa New Zealand has a higher level of representation of wāhine (15.0%) than in the US (10.2%). Relative to comparable Australian fire and emergency agencies, Aotearoa New Zealand has a slightly higher rate than the Country Fire Authority Victoria (14.8%), but lower than the NSW Rural Fire Service (23.7%).

Table 2.2. Percentage of wāhine in fire and emergency roles across jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Career firefighters	Volunteer firefighters	Combined (career and volunteer)	Organisation wide
Aotearoa NZ (2021/22)	5.7%	15.0%	13.5%	20.5%
England (2020)[18]	7.0%	–	–	17.3%
US (2019)[19]	4.2%	10.2%	8%	-
Canada (2017)[20]	4.4%	–	–	–
Australia (2020/21)[21]				
Group sector average (n=29)	–	–	20.8%	21.6%
Comparable services[22]	4.3 – 28.7%[23]	14.8 – 23.7%[24]	18.7%[25]	6.8 – 26.8%

Notes: Australian data is sourced from the Champions of Change Impact Reports, comparable services data uses data from specific Fire and Emergency Services that are more comparable to Fire and Emergency NZ. See footnotes for more details.

17 The English figure of 7% appears to include women firefighters employed on an 'on-call' basis (an on-call firefighter responds when required during their 'on-call' hours, sometimes called Retained Duty System).
18 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fire-and-rescue-workforce-and-pensions-statistics-england-april-2019-to-march-2020/fire-and-rescue-workforce-and-pensions-statistics-england-april-2019-to-march-2020#workforce-diversity
19 www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Emergency-Responders/US-fire-department-profile
20 Based on 2016 census data see Gouliquer, L., Poulin, C., & McWilliams, J. (2020). Othering of full-time and volunteer women firefighters in the Canadian Fire Services. Qualitative Sociology Review, 16(3), 48-69.
21 championsofchangecoalition.org/resource/champions-of-change-coalition-2021-impact-report/
22 Comparable agencies were those that included services similar to Fire and Emergency NZ including firefighting services along with responding to other emergencies including motor vehicle accidents, medical emergencies, hazardous substances, severe weather events and natural disasters.
23 More comparable agencies that reported career frontline firefighters included Fire and Emergency NSW (10.2%), Fire Rescue Victoria (4.7%), Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (11.7%), South Australia Metropolitan Fire Service (4.3%), Tasmania Fire Service (28.7%).
24 Comparable agencies that reported data on volunteer firefighters included the Country Fire Authority Victoria (14.8%), and NSW Rural Fire Service (23.7%). Note, an early report from 2015 suggested women make up 12-24% of all volunteers across Australian fire agencies (www.afac.com.au/auxiliary/article/keeping-your-recruits-boosting-volunteer-retention).
25 Comparable agencies that reported combined data included the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Western Australia (18.7%).

2.4 Length of service

The length of service of wāhine firefighters compared to tāne is a variable that potentially impacts overall representation levels and career progression (see section 2.6). If wāhine have comparatively shorter careers, relatively more wāhine will need to be recruited to replace those who exit. Also, of particular relevance to this research project, is that shorter lengths of service mean wāhine have less opportunity to progress through grades, given that time in the role is a critical factor for progression through the ranks.

Figure 2.4 presents the average length of service for wāhine compared to tāne firefighters, and shows a stark difference with wāhine firefighters having a significantly shorter time in their role on average. This is particularly evident for career firefighters where the average length of service for wāhine is just 7.7 years, compared to 17.1 years for tāne firefighters.

Figure 2.4. Average length of service for wāhine firefighters compared to tāne

Average length of service in years

■ Women   ■ Men
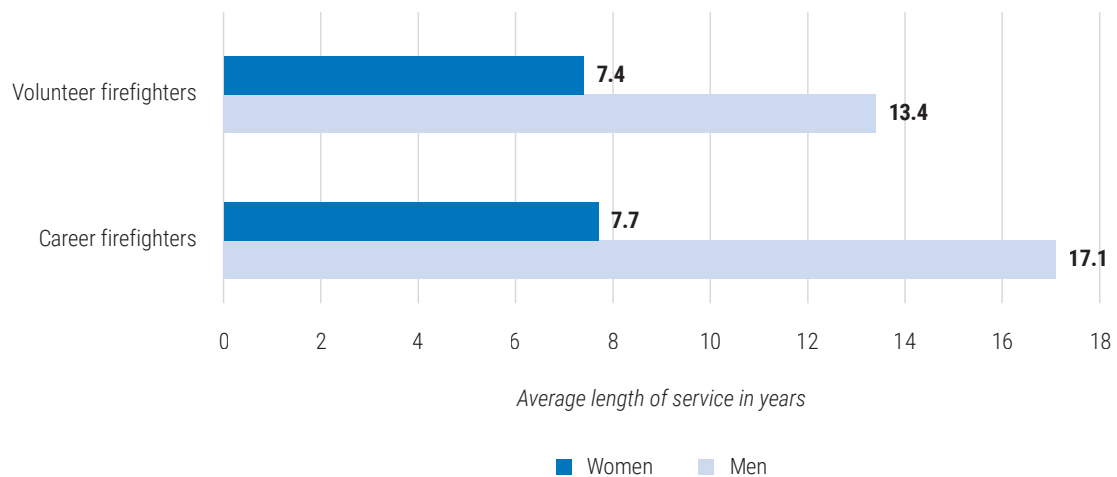
Source: Supplied by Human Resources team based on analysis for 2022 annual report, based on data as of 30 June 2022. Note data on length of service for volunteers is less reliable with difficulties in keeping records up to date for those who take a break and then return.

2.5 Recruitment and overall rates of attrition

Increasing the overall representation of wāhine firefighters requires either more wāhine to be recruited as firefighters, reducing the rate at which wāhine firefighters exit the workforce or, (ideally), a combination of the two. As seen above, the shorter average length of service for wāhine, points to higher rates of early exits.

Figure 2.5 presents the relative proportion of wāhine (compared to tāne) that completed career and volunteer recruits' courses and therefore became firefighters, for each year from 2011 through to 2022 (financial years).[26]

There have been efforts to increase the number of wāhine recruited in recent years,[27] and success with this objective is evident in Figure 2.5, with a general increase over time seen in the proportion of completers both the career and volunteer courses who are wāhine. This is particularly evident for career recruit courses since 2016 through to 2020. The relative proportion of wāhine completing both types of course dipped in 2022, but still remained higher than pre-2015 levels, and importantly is higher than the overall rate of representation of career wāhine (5.7%) and volunteer wāhine at 15.0% (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 2.5. Proportion of recruits completing training courses who are wāhine
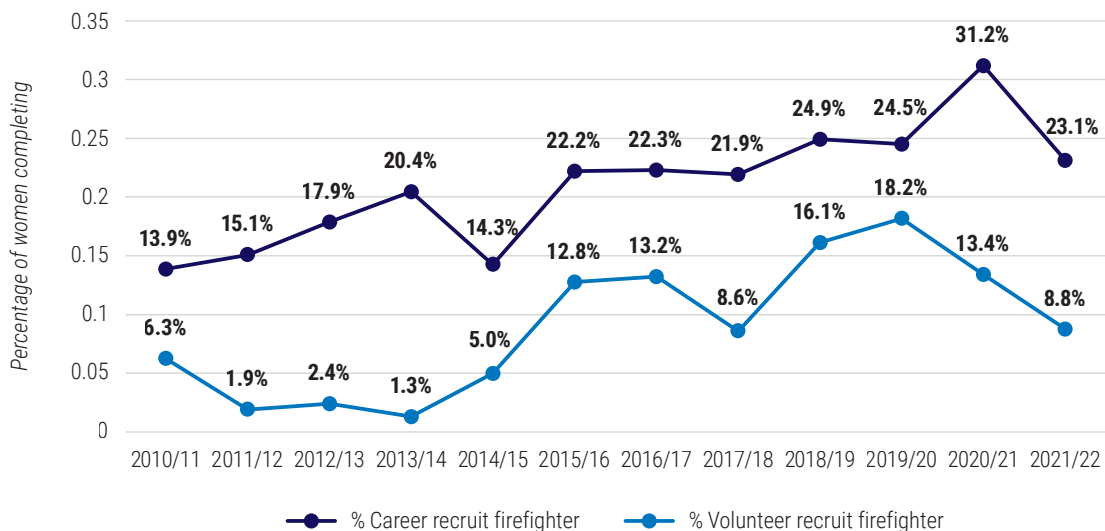
Source: Based on data supplied by Fire and Emergency – RCT 5 years (course)V5. Percentages are the number of wāhine as a percentage of the total number of tāne and wāhine completing courses for each year ending 30 June 2022. It is unclear if Covid-19 impacted on the delivery of recruits training courses.

26 Data on wāhine who applied to be career firefighters, and the number of those recruits accepted for training, was unavailable. The teams within Fire and Emergency that could supply this data had insufficient capacity due to priority demands of supplying data for OIAs.
27 These included targeted social media campaigns (2018/19) and the trialling of a 'boot camp' (2019) to help under-represented recruits (including women) prepare for the fitness test (see www.fireandemergency.nz/assets/Documents/About-FENZ/Key-documents/FENZ-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf).

A more complete picture of progress is achieved by also considering attrition rates, where the number of those exiting is considered as proportion of those currently in the role (which includes any new recruits).

This is presented in Figure 2.6, where the overall attrition is the number of people who left in the last 12 months divided by the number of people employed/in the role in the same year.[28]

Figure 2.6a. Overall rate of attrition of volunteer wāhine compared to tāne firefighters
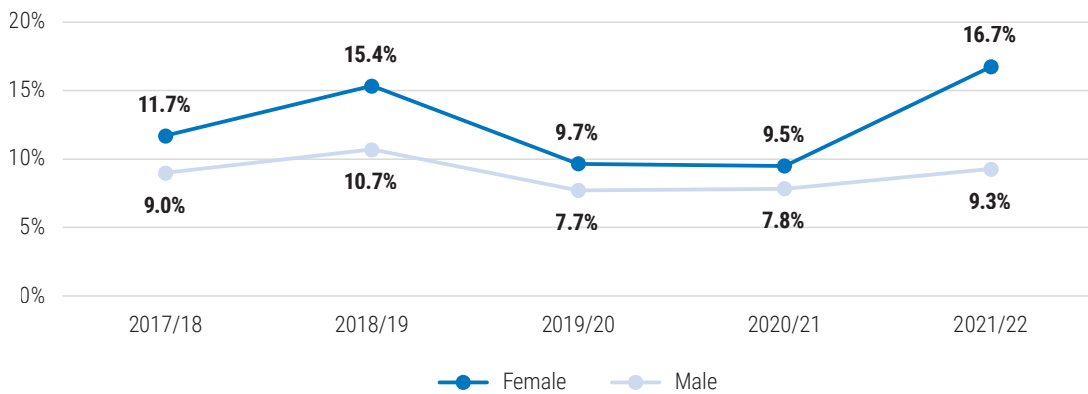
Figure 2.6b. Overall rate of attrition of career wāhine compared to tāne firefighters
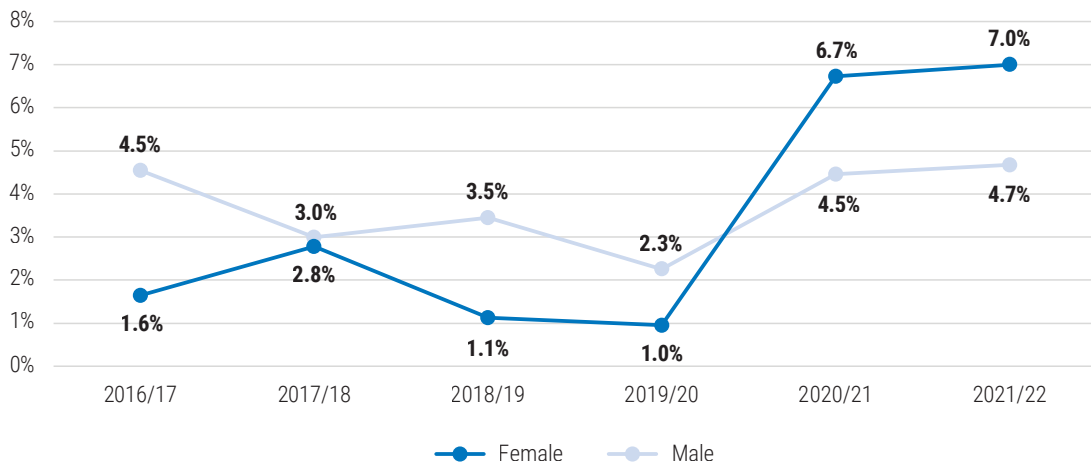
Notes: Figures based on data sourced from Fire and Emergency Human Resources Team, rate of attrition is the number of people who left in the last 12 months divided by the number of people employed/in the role. Data based on financial years ending 30 June 2022. Volunteer attrition may be impacted by changes in data recording. Any exits due to Covid-19 vaccination mandate would appear in 21/22 financial year.

28 This analysis does not account for women career firefighters who progress onto regional management roles and are no longer counted as 'firefighters' in the HRIS system.

Overall rates of attrition for both tāne and wāhine are significantly lower for career firefighters relative to volunteers, reflective of the varying nature of the two roles (volunteering can be impacted by changes in personal circumstances including changes in other work commitments).

Overall rates of attrition for wāhine career firefighters have tended to fluctuate, being lower than tāne up until 2019/20 but from this point increasing sharply and becoming higher than that of tāne firefighters, reaching 7.0% overall attrition as of 30 June 2022.[29] This is one percentage point higher than the overall level of representation of wāhine at 5.7% and will impact negatively on the small gains that were being made since 2015/16.

Overall rates of attrition for wāhine volunteers have been consistently higher than for tāne volunteer firefighters, with a sharp increase in the most recent report in 2021/22.[30] As with career wāhine firefighters, this last recording point is a concern, being higher than the overall level of representation of wāhine as firefighters which was 15.0% as of 30 June 2022.[31]

29 There has been an increase in exits for both tāne and women, anecdotal suggestions indicate this is likely due to a combination of the enforcement of the Covid-19 vaccination mandates, impact of industrial action and the implementation of the new regional management structure.

30 The 21/22 figure may be impacted by exits due to Covid-19 vaccination mandate, but also a refresh of data records on volunteer firefighters, which were reviewed to assess vaccination status, identified a number of volunteers that had exited in previous years but whose records had not been updated.

31 Data on volunteer exits should be viewed with caution due to less reliable record keeping of those exiting. For example 2021 volunteer records were reviewed to assess vaccination status and identified a number of volunteers that had exited in previous years but whose records had not been updated at the time. However, assuming any inaccuracies affect tāne and wāhine data similarly the general trends should still hold true

2.6 Representation of wāhine in leadership roles

Across the organisation wāhine are under-represented in leadership roles. However, when other paid business groups are considered, again it is the operational firefighter group that has the most significant under-representation of wāhine (see figure 2.7. where wāhine hold just 2% of career firefighter leadership roles).

Figure 2.7. Gender representation in paid management roles across the organisation
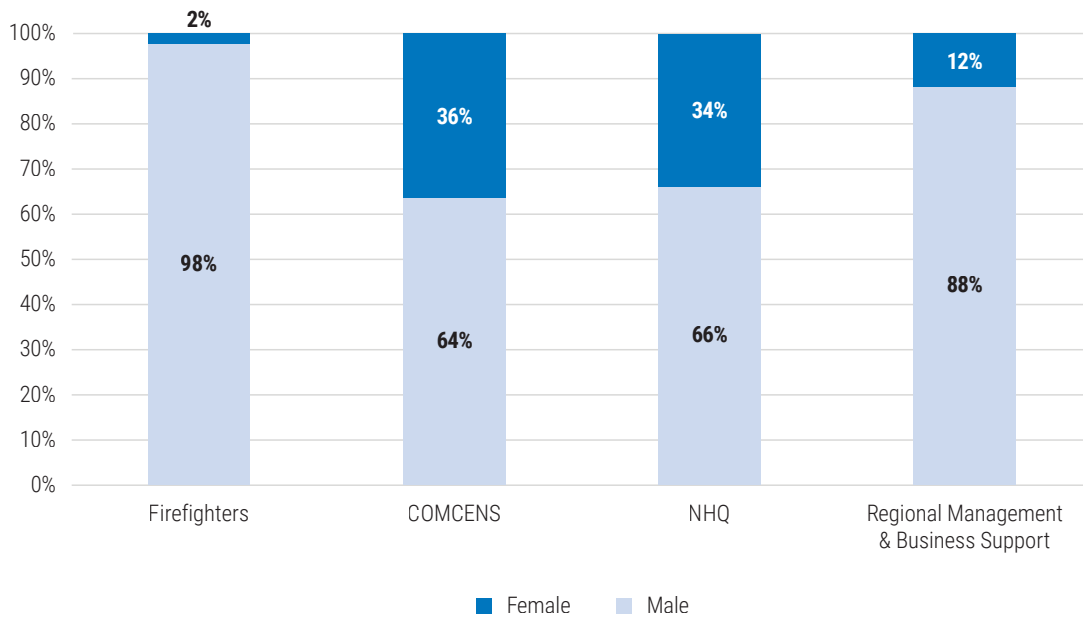
Source: Fire and Emergency Human Resources Team December 2022. Note in this figure, management roles for firefighters relates to the roles of Station Officers and Senior Station Officers. Executive Officer roles (e.g., Group Manager and District Manager) are counted under Regional Management.

Figures 2.8 and 2.9 takes a closer look at the rates of representation of wāhine firefighters (career and volunteer) within each progressive developmental step.

For career firefighters (figure 2.8) the percentage of wāhine are presented across three different career progression phases and each level within:

- Executive Officers (e.g., District Managers and Group Managers)[32]
- operational firefighters in leadership roles (e.g., Senior Station Officer and Station Officer)
- non-manager firefighters (e.g., Senior firefighter, Qualified Firefighter, Firefighter, Trainee Firefighter).

Figure 2.8. Career Firefighters – gender representation with career progression
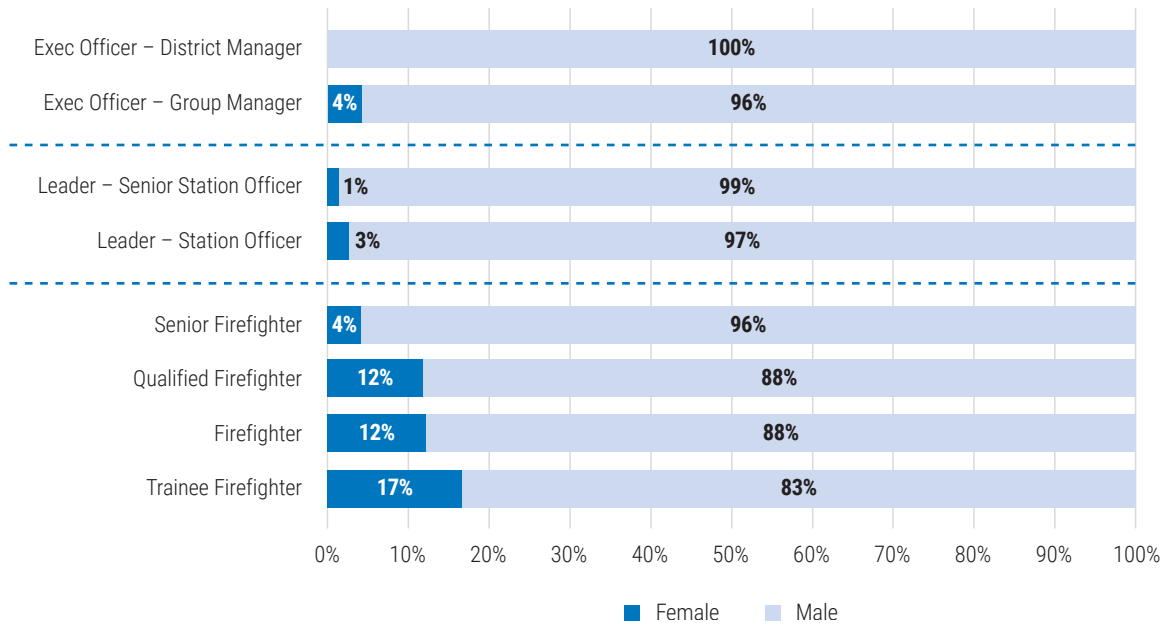
Note: Figure based on data supplied by Human Resources in December 2022 and is based on head counts of those with specific job titles using their substantive role as of 30 June 2022.

Figure 2.9. Volunteer Firefighters, gender representation with career progression
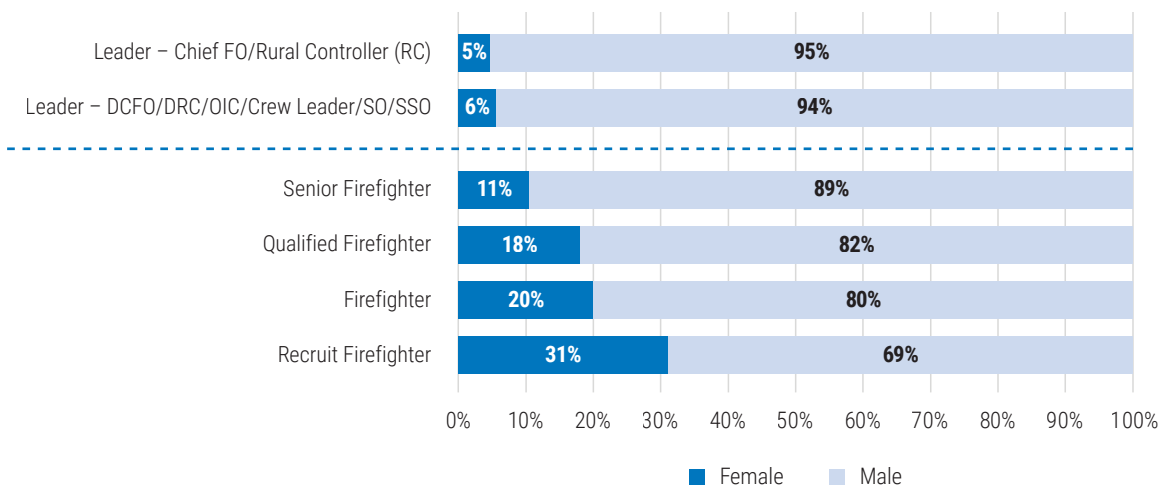
Note: Figure based on head counts of job title descriptions as of 30 June 2022. Executive Officer roles are paid roles and not applicable to volunteer firefighters. RC=Rural Controller, DCFO = Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DRC = Deputy Rural Controller, OIC=Officer in Charge, SSO=Senior Station Officer, SO=Station Officer.

32 Note these Executive Officer Roles are not considered operational roles.

As presented in section 2.1, overall wāhine make up around 5.7% of career firefighters (not including Executive Officer roles) and 15.0% of volunteer firefighters. This means for both career and volunteer firefighters, wāhine are especially under-represented in leadership roles, relative to their representation in earlier progression steps.

For volunteers (Figure 2.9) the representation of wāhine decreases with each step, while for career firefighters the trend is not quite so linear. The trend is slightly reversed with Group Managers (paid Executive Officer role) where 4.2% were wāhine as of 30 June 2022 (3 out of 68 positions),[33] a slightly higher percentage compared to the two steps below where just 1.4% of Senior Station Officers (2 out of 139 positions) and 2.7% of Station Officers (8 out of 293 positions) were wāhine. There were no wāhine in the most senior Executive Officer role (District Manager) so, overall, wāhine hold just 3.4% of all Executive Officer roles.[34]

The progression of wāhine into the Executive Officer Group Manager roles is encouraging; however, the low numbers of wāhine in Senior Station Officer or Station Officer roles suggests that when they are recruited into Executive Officer roles, their numbers in these other operational leadership roles are reduced further, perpetuating the continued low representation – and visibility – of wāhine in operational firefighting leadership roles.

The relatively greater representation of wāhine in lower levels suggests the firefighter talent pipeline is improving, most likely reflecting the increased effort to recruit more wāhine firefighters. However, the figures also suggest the possibility that many of these wāhine are experiencing barriers to progression, are therefore 'stuck' on these lower levels, and/or are exiting before they get the opportunity to rise into senior leadership roles.

As noted earlier (see section 2.4), the length of tenure or service of wāhine firefighters remains considerably less than tāne which inevitably impacts on career progression. Career firefighters are required to have two years in the role before becoming eligible for progression. This effectively means that it takes 10 years in the Firefighter role to be eligible to become a Senior Station Officer, and the current average tenure for wāhine firefighters is just 7.7 years (see earlier Figure 2.4).

As already noted earlier there are a number of challenges to comparing Aotearoa New Zealand's Fire and Emergency data with that of other countries. Published data for other countries suggest similarly low representation of wāhine in leadership roles. Canadian data reported that in 2015, 4% of fire chiefs and senior officers were wāhine (volunteer and career firefighters combined).[35] More recent data on English firefighters shows a mixed story with regards to the rank levels of wāhine. The highest and lowest ranks (brigade managers and firefighters) show above average proportions of wāhine (7.2% and 8.2% respectively). The middle ranks (area manager, group manager, station manager, watch manager and crew manager) all showed proportions of wāhine lower than the 7% average (from 3.9% to 6.4%).[36]

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33 Women held 3 out of 71 Group Manager positions. In total there are 77 Executive Officer roles, so women hold 3.4% of all Executive Officer roles.

34 Region Managers are also considered Executive Officers but these positions are counted under 'Regional Management and Support'. There are five Region Managers, and all are tāne. Since collation of data for this report, a wahine has been appointed within the Executive Leadership Team, holding the rank of Deputy National Commander.

35 Statistics Canada (2017) cited by Gouliquer et al. (2020).

36 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fire-and-rescue-workforce-and-pensions-statistics-england-april-2019-to-march-2020/fire-and-rescue-workforce-and-pensions-statistics-england-april-2019-to-march-2020#workforce-diversity.

2.6.1 Wāhine firefighters in leadership roles over time

Records suggest it was 2008 when the first wahine career firefighter held the rank of Station Officer, with the same individual becoming the first Senior Station Officer in 2015 (at which time six other wāhine career firefighters held the rank of Station Officer).[37] As of 30 June 2022, there were eight career wāhine holding the position of Station Officer and two Senior Station Officers. With the re-structure in 2021, for the first time three wāhine were appointed into the Executive

Officer role of Group Manager.[38] More recently, another significant milestone was achieved with the appointment in 2022 of the first wahine Deputy National Commander.

Figure 2.10 uses available Fire and Emergency data to show how the representation of wāhine in leadership roles has changed from 2015/16. This analysis is limited to operational firefighting roles where there has been sufficient consistency in job titles to enable analysis only from 2015/16 onwards.[39]

Figure 2.10. Representation of wāhine firefighters in leadership roles over time
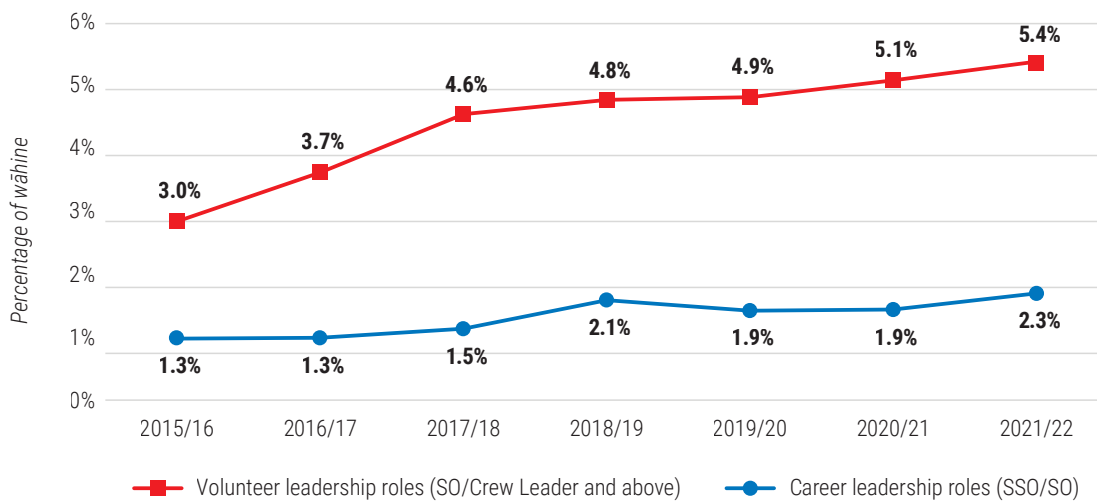
Note: Figure based on data supplied by Human Resources in December 2022 and is based on head counts using substantive role. Data pre-2017/18 is based on records managed by the New Zealand Fire Service.

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37 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_firefighting#New_Zealand

38 In 2021 Fire and Emergency underwent a major restructure. Prior to the new structure, Fire and Emergency maintained a similar leadership structure to the organisations that preceded it. Area managers led urban focused brigades and stations, and principal rural fire officers led rurally focused brigades. Under the new structure, all brigades and stations sit together under their respective newly appointed District Managers.

39 Figure 5.3 excludes progression of women into Executive Officer roles (e.g., Group Managers or District Managers) as these roles and titles have changed over time, including a major re-structure in 2021.

Wāhine have been better represented in volunteer leadership roles (as of 30 June 2022, 5.4% compared to just 2.3% for career firefighter), however, for both volunteers and career leadership roles, overall representation of wāhine is low and progress has been slow. For wāhine career firefighters over the last seven years there has been little improvement in those holding operational leadership roles (i.e., Senior Station Officer and Station Officer). From 2015/16 to 2017/18 around 1% of operational firefighters were in leadership roles, then in 2018/19 it rose slightly to 1.5%, then 2% and to have fluctuated since then around 2%. In the last four years there have been just ten wāhine holding these positions (7-8 Station Officers and 2-3 Senior Station Officers).

In terms of tracking career progression, current data unfortunately do not allow the tracking of the career progression of frontline career firefighters who have progressed into non-frontline roles such as black watch roles and/or other NHQ manager roles. This means the meaningful progression of wāhine into Group Manager roles, other National Manager roles at NHQ or other more senior black watch manager roles (e.g., Community Risk Manager) is currently not visible. Improving data recording to better monitor career progression of wāhine firefighters more broadly within the organisation will support improved understanding of this issue (along with improved data on leadership progression of wāhine volunteer firefighters).

2.7 Equity indicators

There are a number of other gender equity indicators of relevance to the career progression and development of wāhine firefighters that are useful for monitoring progress. These include:

- gender balance in recruitment, retention and promotions
- flexible and inclusive employment experiences
- gender pay equity

Available data in relation to these indicators is largely based on an organisation-wide view as opposed to firefighters specifically. This data is regularly collected and published through the 'Champions of Change' initiative which allows Fire and Emergency New Zealand's performance to be compared to Australian state and territory services (i.e., within the frame of the Australian and New Zealand National Council for Fire and Emergency Services / AFAC). More details on this initiative including the latest published reporting on indicators listed above appears in Appendix B together with recent Fire and Emergency analysis of gender pay gap data (Kia Toipoto work programme).

A few summary points in relation to these gender equity indicators appear below:

- **Recruitment, retention and promotions** – Fire and Emergency organisation-wide performance in achieving gender balance in recruitment, retention and promotion are similar to the AFAC group average of 29 other Australian fire and emergency service agencies. An exception was for new hires, where representation of wāhine at Fire and Emergency was well-below the group average (just 24% compared to the AFAC group average of 37%).

- **Flexible and inclusive employment experiences** – in this regard Fire and Emergency's performance is positive compared to the AFAC group average on experiences of an inclusive employment culture and belief that it is safe to raise issues of sexual harassment without fear of victimisation or negative career implications. However, Fire and Emergency fares less well on the percentage of exits during or at the end of parental leave, and in confidence in the organisation's zero tolerance to sexual harassment.

- **Gender pay equity (firefighters)** – a key driver of gender pay gaps is the under-representation of wāhine in more senior/leadership roles. Fire and Emergency's Kia Toipoto gender and ethnic pay gap data for 2022 shows that overall the gender salary pay gap for career firefighters is 7.2% in favour of tāne. Analysis of the percentage of tāne and wāhine career firefighters in lower, middle and top steps of each pay grade finds wāhine are not progressing through their qualification steps within the grades and are over-represented in the lower levels of their grade.

Barriers and enablers to development and career progression

This section presents the findings from the primary source of data for this project, the interviews with wāhine firefighters. It features extensive use of verbatim quotes, reflecting the intended aim of capturing the voices and experiences of wāhine firefighters.

The section begins with an overview of the qualitative data set, introducing some of its complexities, before outlining the six themes that emerged as key barriers and enablers to development and career progression for wāhine firefighters. These themes are:

- workplace environment
- leadership
- training and development opportunities
- work-family balance
- equipment and infrastructure
- organisational processes.

Before presenting the findings related to the themes, it is useful to note that the strength of qualitative research is its ability to reveal the complexity of lived experiences. It also enables capture of the full range of views and experiences of those participating. The qualitative research methods used in this study however cannot quantify the frequency or extent of particular experiences (e.g., what proportion of wāhine firefighters could be expected to experience a particular barrier or enabler).

3.1 Complex landscape – overview of qualitative dataset

Having completed interviews with all 29 wāhine, perhaps the most notable finding was the variability in their responses. Significantly, most had high-levels of satisfaction within their respective roles, but experiences of things that either hindered or helped them to develop and progress varied greatly. A particular issue – such as brigade leadership – might be experienced by some wāhine as a barrier, while for others it was an enabler. Further, different themes had very different levels of significance for individuals across those interviewed.

In making sense of the qualitative data, it became evident that a very complex 'landscape' underpinned the data set. This complex landscape and the factors contributing to its complexity, and appearing

to produce such variable responses from those interviewed, are presented graphically in figure 3.1.

There were five background features to this study (see top tiles in figure 3.1) that created a complex landscape upon which this study was conducted, all having potential impacts on the experiences of wāhine firefighters. The interaction of these features and the resulting variability in the wāhine views and experiences meant the barriers and enablers to career development and progression identified in this study were best considered as continuums of experiences on six separate themes (i.e., the six double ended arrows in figure above). In general, there was more variability than consistency in wāhine views and experiences.

Figure 3.1. Overview of qualitative dataset

Complex landscape

| FENZ – new organisation and changing landscape | Diverse workforce – career, volunteers, black watch, NHQ | Multiple layers and overlaps | Differences across regions / local communities | Variable responses e.g. conform, confront, leave |

Continuum of experiences

BARRIERS

- Workplace environment
- Leadership
- Training and development
- Work-family balance
- Equipment and infrastructure
- Organisation

ENABLERS

Solutions – multifaceted and integrated

Awareness of these background features are critical for adequate interpretation and analysis of the interview data. These five features and their significance were:

- **Fire and Emergency New Zealand** (itself) – the agency is a relatively new organisation. It was established in 2017 with the amalgamation of 40 existing rural and urban firefighter organisations.[40] This required the melding together of a number of different cultures and sub-cultures of organisations, each with their own histories and traditions. This process of merging is on-going, and is accompanied by significant changes to the way the new crown agency operates. This has included the re-structuring of significant features such as the roles and titles of key leadership positions, which continue to be rolled-out. Consequently, it should be kept in mind that the current study took place during a time of change. Further, experiences described by wāhine, varied depending on the phase of their career. For example, training or leadership experiences that occurred 10 or 15 years ago are likely to be very different to those of 5 years ago, and those experienced within the recent past.

- **Diversity of the workforce** – whilst the overall organisation has amalgamated, the workforce continues to comprise multiple distinct groups, with vastly differing working environments and experiences (e.g., career firefighters, volunteer firefighters, those who have progressed to black watch or other NHQ roles). The extent of the differences was evident in interviewees' referring to different 'lands' and 'worlds' when describing experiences e.g., how things in "career land" differed from "volunteer land"; references to what it was like for those in "truck world" compared to those living in the "world of NHQ".

- **Multiple overlaps** – as an area of study, the career progression and development of wāhine firefighters does not fit tidily into one box. This was evident in the number of related and over-lapping programmes of work currently underway within Fire and Emergency: for example, the Positive Workplace Culture, Kio Toipoto (Gender Pay gap work) and Volunteer Engagement (see section 1.1.2 for more details). The analysis of interview data often required multiple lenses to these to be in play in order to unpack the relevance of particular wāhine experiences to these work programmes and priority areas.

- **Regional differences** – a great deal of variability in the experiences of wāhine seemed related to the specific region, district or individual brigade within which they worked. Early stakeholder consultation forewarned the researcher that views and perceptions of interviewees would vary depending on whether the interviewee was currently or previously located in one of the 'good areas' or the 'bad areas'. Being aware of this kind of variation, and its unique impact on wāhine experiences, was an integral focus for the current research.

- **Individual response style of wāhine** – the final and perhaps most significant feature with relevance to interpretation of the interview data was differences among wāhine in how they characteristically responded to challenges, frustration and difficulty. Habitual response styles could variously be labelled as to 'ignore', 'conform', 'confront' or 'leave'. This important variability in individual response style is discussed in detail in section 3.1.1 below.

These features also mean the experiences of wāhine firefighters in Aotearoa New Zealand are likely to differ to those documented in overseas research (or research carried out in Aotearoa New Zealand at an earlier time).

3.1.1 Variable responses and a continuum of experiences

This section takes a moment to unpack the variability in wāhine responses, noting there could be differences in:

- what *was experienced* by wāhine;
- how wāhine *responded* to experiences; and
- how wāhine might *describe* their experiences.

Of the 29 wāhine interviewed, there were generally high levels of satisfaction with their roles: most appeared to genuinely love being a firefighter. As will become evident, in most cases it was not being a firefighter *per se*, but the organisational and relational aspects surrounding the role where issues arose, and which could impact on overall levels of satisfaction.

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the firefighter role specifically on a five point scale, one wahine replied enthusiastically:

> I'd give it 6 [out of 5]! Honestly, I love what I do and I've always – – I've never been in a position where I don't look forward to going to work. I love doing the overtime, I love doing this stuff!
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Wāhine spoke of enjoying a role where they could help others, and to "make someone's day better", they loved the excitement and adrenaline rush of callouts, and for many they enjoyed the camaraderie they experienced within their team.

Those in black watch and/or manager roles tended to be more equivocal; high workloads and inefficiencies encountered at an organisational level were usually cited as impacting levels of satisfaction.

However, in terms of the specific challenges to career progression wāhine had faced, there was a huge variety of experiences. When asked about barriers to career progression experienced, some wāhine struggled to identify any, asserting instead that they had had a "really good journey". At the other end of the spectrum, some wāhine described highly aversive experiences such as repeated discrimination, bullying and humiliation (see section 3.2.1) – all the while maintaining a positive view of their role as firefighters. For most, experiences were more mixed, featuring positive and negative experiences.

These diverse experiences among wāhine resulted from differing response styles, differences in background and personal characteristics, and the degree wāhine felt comfortable to speak of negative experiences within their brigade

Making sense of these hugely diverse experiences was helped by trying to tease apart differences in the actual experiences from the characteristic response styles of the wāhine to the experiences.

Differing responses

The literature review by Dyers and colleagues (2021) included some findings specifically to do with common responses (or coping mechanisms) to challenges faced by wāhine in male-dominated industries, such as firefighting services. It appears that the most common response is simply remaining silent, grounded in a belief that speaking up would not be productive, but instead worsen the problem. Other recognised strategies included:

- **conforming** – wāhine alter their behaviour to fit in with the accepted norms, described by some as "becoming one of the boys";
- **confronting existing norms** – for some wāhine, the preferred response was to actively confront – directly "calling out" inappropriate behaviour, language or decisions, even to the extent of challenging inequitable organisational policies; and
- **leaving** – where women remove themselves from the situation, which could be through moving to a different team or region, by making themselves less visible, or simply leaving the job altogether.

This range of responses was evident in comments from wāhine firefighters particularly in response to gender-based differential treatment. Comments made included "I don't see it", "it doesn't offend me", through to "it exhausts me!". However, "I deal with it head on" was also commonly expressed.

Hence, in cases where workplace dynamics might be similar, wāhine will inevitably view and describe them differently. One wahine was aware her response had changed over time as a form of adaptation: she explained "I joined to be firefighter – but had to become a feminist!".

Individual differences in background or personality

In terms of managing or coping with gender-based challenges, some wāhine spoke of how they felt different backgrounds or personality made a difference:

- **backgrounds** – reported as helpful in navigating the male-dominated workplace/brigades included being brought up in a household with several brothers, having worked in other male-dominated industries (e.g., Police, defence, engineering) or being part of a male-dominated "rugby family" and their extended social networks

- **personality** – other wāhine referred to personal characteristics that had helped them to deal with gender-based barriers encountered. These included, being highly competitive, wanting to excel and therefore persisting despite challenges; "I'd walk away, but I don't want them to win". Others claimed to thrive on challenges, that knock-backs spurred them to come back "even more determined".

On the face of it, understanding such resilience factors has limited practical value, as they are difficult to 'operationalise' for use in, for example, a targeted recruitment strategy. Nevertheless, they point to the conclusion that, within the current operating environment and culture, only a limited proportion of wāhine (with such characteristics) will flourish and thrive as firefighters.

Fear of 'speaking up'

One final aspect that warrants mention, before moving onto the main findings, was the varying degrees to which wāhine felt comfortable speaking out in response to (or about) negative experiences. Other researchers and reviewers have suggested that reluctance or inability of wāhine to 'speak up' arose from fears of having their concerns dismissed or trivialised, or of negative repercussions (Campuzano, 2019; Clark, 2022; Dyers et al., 2021; Gouliquer et al., 2020; Shaw, 2019; Wilson & Scanlen, 2016).

In conducting interviews for this study, wāhine were aware of and spoke about negative repercussions that inhibited them in speaking out:

> If you put your head above the parapet, it's going to get knocked off. That's my experience in this organisation.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Another wahine career firefighter, when asked if she would complain in response to inappropriate behaviour, suggested that stigma rapidly attached to any wāhine speaking out, that such individuals risked being categorised as a "troublemaker". As she explained "you don't want to be that girl!".

However, also evident was an apparent desire amongst some wāhine to "not make a fuss", to underplay challenges or barriers experienced. There appeared to be two factors behind the reluctance to speak openly about negative experiences: (1) a widely held assumption that the nature of the firefighter role required a "thick skin" if the individual was to function and cope with constant exposure to 'bad stuff' (e.g., death and injury through car crashes);[41] also (2) the high value placed by firefighters on a team-centred culture, within which complaining or "making waves" was viewed as disloyalty to the team (Shaw, 2019).

The latter sentiment was referred to by a number of wāhine, including one career firefighter who described pressures she and other firefighters faced in becoming accepted as part of the team or 'in crowd':

> "…you work so hard, …once you are part of the 'in crowd' it's great – [but the] people who are not part of the 'in crowd' – no one wants to be over there. …people who 'call it out' are walking the gangplank.

With these dynamics at play, it is likely findings presented underestimate the full extent of challenges encountered by wāhine firefighters.

41 See Dyer et al. (2021) and Shaw (2019)

3.2 Workplace environment

How wāhine experienced the workplace environment arose as the strongest theme in this study, in understanding factors influencing their career progression.[42] Much of this centred around what might be described as the culture within the workplace.[43] For example, experiences of bullying, harassment or misogynistic attitudes meant that some wāhine lost confidence, felt excluded from promotions, or could be triggered with the desire simply to leave.

Dyer and colleagues (2021) identified 'hostile work environment' as one of three main factors acting as a barrier to career progression for wāhine in male-dominated industries, including firefighting. Recent reviews have repeatedly picked up on negative workplace culture as being widespread across Fire and Emergency. For example, Judge Coral Shaw's independent review concluded there was "no doubt that bullying and harassment is a feature of the FENZ workplace, at all levels, and across all regions" (2019, p.18). A follow-up review three years later, while noting there were undoubtedly many positives about the workplace culture, found "evidence that very poor behaviours remain in FENZ that are both harming people and tarnishing FENZ's reputation" (Clark, 2022, p.4).

The most recent Fire and Emergency People's survey conducted in 2021/22 revealed mixed views amongst those who responded. Findings were typically positive in relation to firefighters' immediate team or brigade, but less so in relation to the wider organisation. For example, across the more than 300 volunteer and career wāhine firefighters who completed the survey, 73% and 86% respectively agreed that '*my brigade/ team had a respectful and inclusive culture*'; however, career firefighters in particular were less positive about organisation-wide culture, with just over half (52%) agreeing that '*Fire and Emergency NZ had a respectful and inclusive culture*'.

These mixed results mirror similarly divergent views found by other researchers, where wāhine firefighters identified aspects of workplace culture and the social experience as both barriers and enablers (Dyer et al, 2021; Wilson and Scanlan, 2016). As is already apparent, such findings are broadly in line with those of this study also.

A range of positive and negative experiences were described by wāhine in relation to their workplace environment

Of the 29 wāhine interviewed for this study, experiences of the immediate workplace environment included negative and positive experiences that varied in intensity. These experiences could be described as following a bell curve, with a minority of wāhine experiencing the most positive and negative workplace environments, but with most wāhine somewhere in between.

Two wāhine described their experience of working within a brigade in terms of pervasive hostility, bullying and discriminatory-type acts towards them. These brigades were described by one, with considerable understatement, as "not very female-friendly".

For others negative experiences of bullying and disrespectful behaviour were recalled, such as a tāne who had refused to be on the same watch/go out on calls with wāhine, although these were now safely relegated to the past, and not features of their current experience.

Those whose experiences featured pervasive hostility mentioned that in contrast to the majority, there were just 'one or two' brigade members inclined to be supportive. However, more common among wāhine was the experiences of a generally supportive crew which contained one or two troublesome or disrespectful individuals:

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42 The workplace environment wāhine spoke of included their experiences at the brigades/stations/offices, when out on call-outs or conducting other roles (e.g., community risk reduction, fire investigations), during after-work social activities with brigade members and/or when attending training courses.

43 Creating a positive and healthy culture within any workplace is a sizeable topic; reflected in the need for Fire and Emergency to establish a dedicated programme of work – the Positive Workplace Culture Programme. This study takes a narrower focus and considers the role of culture specifically in how it acts as a barrier or enabler to wāhine firefighter career development and progression.

> I guess I was accepted by everyone ... I think the majority, but there was still enough people there to make it a little bit hard and uncomfortable.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Typical examples of objectionable behaviour included tāne crew members who refused to take instruction from a higher-ranking wāhine or made derogatory comments both overtly or covertly. Descriptions of sexual harassment were far less common, but were mentioned by a few such as unfounded accusations of sexual favours with trainers, tāne colleagues trying it on during training courses, or sexualised comments such as "your bum looks good in those tights".

Also common were experiences of more subtle hostility – such being referred to as a "fireman"; being responded to as "sir" at roll call; asides about "the witches' club" when attendance at WFENZ activities was mentioned.

At the other end of the spectrum, the workplace environment was experienced by several wāhine as entirely positive. One such individual stated:

> We've had a really good journey. We've had men who have supported us, been patient, been kind. So I haven't had to deal with any of that behaviour actually.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

As noted earlier, the aim of qualitative research such as this is not to quantify the extent of different experiences but rather to explore the nature and range of experiences. Doing so makes it clear that wāhine do not have similar experiences, or need (or want) the same changes. That said, it is also important to note that even if the proportion of negative workplaces is low, this ought not be regarded as either acceptable or not a risk for creating serious adverse consequences for the individuals affected.

3.2.1 Barriers – non inclusive brigades, closed groups and the pecking order

This section considers how negative workplace environments acted as a barrier to wāhine firefighters, where non-inclusive environments were experienced by wāhine as disempowering and obstructive in terms of career progression. The existence of cliques and factions (or 'tribes') associated with different workforce groups further impeded opportunities for progression and development. These negative workplace environments were experienced by both career and volunteer wāhine, but were more prevalent and at times extreme within the volunteer brigades as described by a wahine who had experience in both groups:

> " I think like the big difference is that if something is not right in the career side you can generally do something about it. Whereas, if something is not right in the volunteers, like it will just brew and brew and brew, and there's no real hierarchy to address the issues. That's not to say that the career side is completely perfect, because I've had a few issues through that as well. But it's definitely 100 times worse on the volunteer side, yeah.

Wāhine experienced non-inclusive environments that were disempowering and unsupportive of their career progression

Non-inclusiveness is identified as a feature of the workplace environment where wāhine felt themselves to be consistently excluded from being fully accepted as *bona fide* members of the team. Non-inclusiveness manifested itself in scepticism or hostility in response to promotions, the constant felt need to 'prove oneself', and encountering the impermeable barrier to entry into the 'old boys' club'.

Push-back/backlash against those who progress

A particularly common phenomenon experienced by wāhine was backlash received (or anticipated) if selected for developmental opportunities, or promoted to a higher level. Common reactions from other brigade members (sometimes including other wāhine) were 'you only got that job because you're female' or (even more insultingly) "sleeping with the boss'. As described by two career wāhine:

> Yeah. I mean there is plenty of that there, and every promotion I've had now you know people are gonna say she only got it, like cos she's got a vagina!
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

> It's really hard when you're a minority group not to feel if you do have success, … you are kind of made to feel like it was just because you're a woman. When I got the job, that's what I was initially made to feel.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

In some cases this discouragement could be delivered by colleagues in a manner that was not necessarily meant as an intentional pushback. An example was a conversation experienced by a career firefighter after being accepted for a selection interview:

> *Now look, dear, we just don't want you to get your hopes up. You know that they're only interviewing you because of the quota, because you tick a box, you know, we just don't want you to get your feelings hurt.*

Sometimes, backlash came in the form of cutting jokes or via being talked about behind people's backs. As one described it, "you don't hear it to your face, but there are the keyboard warriors". Another common way hostility was communicated was through displays of disrespect. One volunteer wahine spoke of feeling upset at the reception she received at the award night for her recent promotion.

> " …there was quite a bit of pushback when I did get the promotion of [volunteer leader]… the day the chief announced it and gave me my epaulets. I had two people out of the brigade of 18 clap.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

The underlying message that wāhine repeatedly pick up on is that any career progression for them was a sign of tokenism. Unsurprisingly, this type of backlash meant many wāhine were reluctant to put themselves forward, particularly if it involved them becoming the first female in that particular role. One career wahine described her experiences of progression as taking a toll, of "getting absolutely smashed". Nevertheless, she resolved to become "a bit of a battering ram", motivated in part by making the path easier for other wāhine to also push through.

Detrimental impacts on career progression were highlighted by another career wahine who explained that, whilst she loved her current role, she consciously chose against seeking to become the first wahine station officer in her area because she "knew the station was just not ready… they wouldn't have coped". Another career wahine described a similar scenario currently holding her back:

The biggest thing for me at the moment is getting my officer's and applying for an officer's job and getting it, and then having the people questioning whether I got it because I was a female. … I don't want to be the first female. …a couple of officers are like, "But you're that person", and I'm like, "But I don't want to be because it's just exhausting to get that feedback … deep down I know that I'm good enough to be there but it's all about that shit that you get that comes with it and, as I say, I just can't be bothered.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Pressure to prove yourself

As has been found elsewhere (e.g., Wilson and Scanlen, 2016), wāhine firefighters commonly sensed from their tāne colleagues that they were being constantly being scrutinised and "tested". This typically led to a felt need to work extra hard, to prove they were "good enough".

> I kind of feel like, you know, and I know this is just my perspective, but I feel like I've had to work three times as hard to prove that I'm not even as good as a male. But it's just how I felt. Like I've had to prove myself every step of the way.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

This kind of unreasonable expectation was actually made explicit to one volunteer wahine at an advanced training course. The sole wahine on the course, she recalls the trainer's words:

> " He said to me "Women in the fire service need to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good."
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

The negative impact of this on her confidence was evident in her response:

> *And I was like, looking at him and I just was, like, I'm f****d … I'm gonna fail. Because I'm never gonna be able to meet that standard.*

Associated with the pressure to perform was a heightened fear of making mistakes.

> *You don't want to screw up, because then it's "oh [it's because] she's a woman."*
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Another wahine gave the following as an example of their treatment by a senior officer:

> [He was] constantly testing me … physically testing me. … things like I was regularly having to fireman's-carry people, which he wasn't expecting from the others. Or he'd deliberately come up with a difficult drill, really just to test me and to prove that [I was] not able to do something …
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Years later a colleague apologised for not speaking up for her when she was "going through that".

Inevitably, these kinds of experiences dent the individual's confidence , causing some of the interviewed wāhine to back away from career progression, for others diminishing their desire to remain in the service.

The existence of sub-cultures or 'tribes' associated with different groups within the workforce served to reduce opportunities for progression and development of wāhine

Shaw (2019) described the emergence of 'sub-cultures' or 'tribes' within large and complex organisations such as Fire and Emergency as both inevitable and, to an extent, necessary. Participants in Shaw's independent review referred to tensions between these sub-cultures as contributing to, or aggravating impulses towards bullying and harassment. In terms of the focus of this study, tribes and sub-groups were experienced by wāhine as both real, and as impediments to their career path opportunities. Wāhine described a sense of encountering closed groups that were very difficult to penetrate, as well a "pecking order" where, as females, they seemed doomed to sit at the bottom.

Pecking order

Many wāhine, particularly volunteers and/or those in rural locations, were aware of both formal and informal hierarchies within the various workforce divisions. Career firefighters were positioned above volunteers, and those operating in urban locations were above those who were rural. Other attributes that seemingly lowered one's position in the pecking order included holding a non-operational role (e.g., black watch, administration).

Consequently, wāhine who were volunteers, stationed in a rural area or with only wildfire expertise, typically struggled to have their experience, skills and expertise recognised. This then disadvantaged them when applying for new roles or courses:

> …and so for things like career progression, how do you even, it just feels sometimes like if you're a rural woman, you're right at the bottom of the pile.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

> Yeah, and it's definitely, I'm sorry to say, it's one thing that as a female as much as I go now, "I don't have to work harder", I do have to work harder and I have to prove myself cause apart from having the 'I'm a volunteer' written on the forehead. I'm a volunteer – that's a female – and rural. So that's like the trifecta and I've gotta work twice as hard.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Closed groups

When wāhine were asked about the types of career path they would like to pursue, a common barrier identified was the perception that these paths were pre-populated by 'insiders' who formed cliques, and who were resistant to entry by 'outsiders'; breaking into these closed groups was "all about who you know". For many wāhine, being a minority group, the likelihood of having the right connections was low.

Examples of career paths and developmental opportunities that wāhine in the study experienced as closed in this manner included Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), the training role, and special deployments:

> *That was a whole other issue [getting on deployments], everyone getting in the back door, and it was who you knew at the time, not who you were or not your experience as a firefighter. They were choosing their mates to go.*
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Also sub-groups within groups (e.g., training) could be experienced as closed, as experienced at the National Training Centre by one career firefighter/trainer:

> We're the 'BA' [Breathing Apparatus] group, or the 'live fire' group or we're the 'career' trainers ….And you don't belong here. So we're not gonna welcome you'. … I don't know why you would do that. We're all trainers and we're all in it for the same customers, right?

The barrier of seemingly closed groups was further described by another career wahine who had the goal of becoming a trainer:

> Yeah, [training] would be my natural slot; but it's a really hard gig to get into because it's quite cliquey and it's a boys' club, so it becomes who you know. … If you're in the right region and you've got a female to tap into then you've got a shot. If you don't, it's near impossible.

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3.2.2 Enablers – inclusive brigades, mentors, allies and wāhine networks

As noted in section 3.1.1, the team-centred culture within brigades is highly valued, and commonly features as central to job satisfaction as a firefighter. For example, one career wāhine described "what I love about the job is the people". Some wāhine stated that this aspect of their workplace environment was significant in supporting their career development. A mixture of related factors helped them endure the more challenging aspects of the work, but also more directly enabled career progression; this included brigades that demonstrated a genuinely inclusive nature, as well as the presence of informal mentoring and support from individuals within a brigade.

Inclusive brigades provided equitable support for the career development of all members of the brigade

Illustrating the variability in responses noted earlier, career and volunteer wāhine experienced the culture of their brigade as inclusive and supportive of the development. The sense of inclusivity was most commonly experienced among volunteer brigades.

Unlike the nationally coordinated recruitment process for career firefighters, volunteers are recruited directly from the local communities within which they operate. As such, there is localised control over who is accepted. Unsurprisingly, existing members appear inclined to recruit people 'like us'. As a black watch wāhine observed, somewhat humorously:

> …each brigade I would visit, they had an entirely different culture. So, like, one of them it was like they all had mullets, and they all had like greasy oily hands, you know, they had obviously been working with engines and motors and things like that all day. And then like only 10 minutes up the road, the next brigade, they were all farmers, and so there was this line of red band gumboots at the station door. And then the following brigade it was all the females, it was the farmer's wives, they had a massive population of females in their brigade, and it was so funny! You could just, if you met one brigade member, you've pretty much meet them all.

Such homogeneity appears, within some teams, to promote an inclusive culture. Interviewees who had had this kind of experience reported that their brigades treated everyone equally, that nobody was judged for making a mistake, and all members were encouraged to learn and develop. One volunteer firefighter described her brigade in similar terms, as encouraging members to develop skills and to grow as professionals. Teams with this kind of culture meant members did not worry about being penalised for making mistakes. This volunteer contrasted the positive culture of her current brigade to her experiences of a previous brigade, where sexist attitudes created a fear of failure that held her back from trying new things:

> **"**…that type of difference really impacts on an individual's ability to grow because in your mind, in your behaviour, you've got a lot of energy focused on protecting yourself [and not wanting to make a mistake] … which I've never felt here … And that gives you more confidence or more ability to step up and to grow, to become better in your field of expertise.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Allies and mentors within brigades enabled wāhine to endure the more hostile aspects of their work environment and supported their career development

The nature and quality of the daily interactions with individual work colleagues also contributes significantly to how the work environment is experienced. Where a team culture was not uniformly inclusive, wāhine reported that even if just one or two colleagues were supportive and encouraging, they were better able to endure the more challenging aspects they encountered.

Several wāhine spoke of this importance of 'allies' within the brigade. As one volunteer described, having one or two supportive colleagues enabled her to "cope with the bad ones". This was especially valuable when those colleagues could be trusted as "having their back", and were willing to stand up for the wāhine.

> So we have got some real awesome males that are sticking up for some of the females because we, in ourselves, don't feel that we could address it, so we've got that happening, yeah.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Some wāhine did not always want colleagues to 'call out' inappropriate behaviour on their behalf; for them, what was most important was getting the validation from someone they respected, and confirmation that what they were experiencing was inappropriate. The value of this was described by the following volunteer firefighter:

> And so [my ally] came and stood next to me and said, "look, do you want me to deal with this? Because I will stand him to attention, and I will have words". And I said no, no, that's fine. … I will deal with it …. But I suppose knowing there is someone like [my ally] in the brigade who sees things like that and sees them as unacceptable that is a really good support.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

In regard to personal development and career progression, there were several examples of wāhine who remarked on the value of peer support and informal mentoring they had received:

> " …when I see what's happening around the country with other women that have gone up the ranks, it's having someone by your side and kind of peer mentoring you and that peer support type thing. Yes, you've people at the top encouraging but I think when its right beside you, you've got the people supporting you as you go.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

> *… some people are very good at encouraging giving feedback and constructive feedback, you know, not just saying things like, "Oh, no, you can't do that". … You know, they kind of have a quiet word to you if they feel that there's something not quite right or maybe you've said something that's a little bit on the nose. … they might come and give you a word of advice or encouragement to do things slightly differently or to have a look at something from a different angle. They check in with you just to see how things are going and how you feel things are going and, yeah, I think they're just – – they're almost like role models, these people, as well.*
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

A couple of career wāhine also described the value to them of having fellow crew members with whom they could 'buddy up' as they progressed with training. Studying together was more enjoyable, and attending courses with a colleague was easier for wāhine who may otherwise be attending courses as the only female (see 3.4.1).

Wāhine firefighter networks provided a safe place to access support and advice, whilst also enabling contact with inspiring role models

For wāhine who either had no support from within their brigade and/or were feeling generally isolated due to their minority status, the Women in Fire and Emergency Network (WFENZ) was reported as hugely valuable. Whilst not all wāhine felt the need to engage with WFENZ, those who did often reported that the support they received through the network was a factor in their retention. For others their progression was supported by through their access to inspiring wāhine role models.

WFENZ was regarded as a 'safe place' to go for support and help to resolve workplace issues (see 3.7.1). From a mental well-being perspective, this kind of access to other wāhine, many of whom had dealt with similar challenges, could be critical. One mentioned that they received validation of their perceptions and feelings, that they were not imagining things, and that their responses were understandable and appropriate:

"

… there's nothing worse than feeling like, you know almost gas-lighted, where you feel like you're the problem because no one else has got a problem it's always me, I'm always the problem child, why do I feel this way, and no one recognizes that what you're going through isn't your fault necessarily. … but the network helped me. … because I've heard other stories similar to mine and that's what made me realize that I wasn't alone and perhaps it wasn't really all my fault that I was experiencing these things. And yeah, that was a very cathartic experience actually sitting in on that meeting.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Having access to wāhine role models was at times also 'inspirational':

> Cos here I am, here with some amazing woman doing some amazing things in our organization and so getting to see them and rub shoulders with them like that, that's been phenomenal… like for me, I find that just fills my cup.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for wāhine to be disparaged for engaging with WFENZ. The network appeared caught in the crossfire, where wāhine felt they had to choose between WFENZ or being they were no longer 'part of the in crowd'.

> …[WFENZ] it was almost viewed as a secret society… I know some brigades. [this guy] outright said to the females. "Don't join. If you join, you're not one of us." And so there was a lot of pressure on lots of different females to not be involved. Yeah. So I think a lot of people were apprehensive and maybe still are apprehensive to be seen as an active part of WFENZ …'I joke with the guys – [when they say] there's no special men's group – I say "yes there is, it's called the NZFS [FENZ]!

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

3.3 Leadership

Quality of leadership emerged as strong theme among wāhine, both as a barrier and enabler to career progression. The particular skills, attributes and character of the team leaders was regarded as being highly influential. Leadership of course is a significant aspect of the workplace environment, as just discussed, as the brigade leader could play a very important role in determining how the culture of their brigade developed. Brigade leaders could, however, also have more direct impacts on career progression, especially insofar as they are willing to serve as mentors, and as gate keepers of training and development opportunities.

When referring to the influence of leaders, most wāhine in this study talked about their immediate "boss" that led the crew (e.g., Station Officers, Senior Station Officers), or the "Chief" in charge of volunteer stations. A few mentioned their experience of leadership with reference to regional managers. In this context no one raised ideas about the impact of wider organisational leadership such as the executive leadership team or other senior leaders at NHQ.

The importance of effective leadership across all emergency services and first responders is well-established recognising this, Fire and Emergency has recently developed a Leadership Development Framework, to support the development of positive leadership behaviours across all levels of the organisation.

3.3.1 Barriers – ineffective or discriminatory leaders

In terms of leaders acting as barriers to retention of wāhine and their career progression, experiences range from blatant discriminatory behaviour through to negative outcomes due to inaction or ineffective leaderships skills.

Blatant discrimination by some leaders limited opportunities for wāhine to develop their career

The establishment of Fire and Emergency through the amalgamation of services is widely regarded as having improved levels of professionalism amongst leaders. Some of this came about because many of the "older guys" retired, but also through new standards of behaviour being implemented (see section 3.7.2). Nevertheless, "old school" leaders hung on in many locations, particularly amongst the volunteer workforce. A wahine with prior firefighting experience spoke of waiting for two years before being allowed "onto the trucks". Prior to that her chief has limited her involvement to a stereotypical female admin-support role.

Another wahine described being in conversation with her Chief and Deputy Chief Officer where, after observing a wahine struggling with a particular aspect of training, in front of her one remarked to the other:

> " See this is why I hate females, I wish we didn't have any.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Some wāhine sensed differential treatment when leaders over-looked them for a vacant position despite being the only member of the crew suitably qualified. One described attending qualification-related training but, in contrast to all other tāne members of the crew when attending this and previous courses, she received no supportive phone call from her boss.

Some leaders lacked the skills to be effective, and their actions (or inaction) resulted in negative outcomes for wāhine

Sometimes the problems with leaders seemed based not so much in dismissiveness or hostility but in simple lack of leadership skills. In many such cases, wāhine might attempt to resolve issues by bringing them to the attention of their leader, but the response made things worse. For example, one career wāhine raised concerns of bullying behaviour with her leader. Subsequently, she found herself being led into a room in which all the other firefighters were already present. The leader then instructed them as a group to "sort it out amongst yourselves". For this wahine, the outcome was dire; she felt she had been:

> …left to the wolves … I felt quite hung out to dry in a way, and it never got sorted out.

Another talented volunteer wāhine came close to leaving the service following a similar situation. She had raised concerns with her Chief over persistent discriminatory language and behaviour encountered from another brigade member:

> " … the whole way it was handled was just so wrong. All I wanted him to do was just to have a word and say you know, just, "You can't do that. Just treat her like everybody else". But getting hauled into his office and made to apologise when there was him, the Deputy and the Chief in there and no support from my side. … I left the station that night in tears … I was just about out the door. I was just about gone … and I stopped and I thought, "No". So I walked back in again. … I thought, "f**k you, you're not going to get rid of me that easy".

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

A career wāhine provided a further example from a few years ago where a tāne firefighter had refused to "ride on the truck" with her. She described how, rather than confronting his inappropriate behaviour, the manager dealt with the problem by rotating crew members around so that she wasn't on the same truck as the tāne.

For other wāhine, the problem was simply a lack of action by the leader. An example of this was provided by a volunteer wāhine firefighter:

> Yeah, probably the most disappointing thing I've found … was so many of the people knew and did nothing. And I think that's what I find frustrating. It's actually there are so many people further up the tree … who knew that I was struggling, who knew the issues, that this was really tough brigade for a female … And they did nothing. You know, like they sat by and watched. And so they'll say things like, oh, you know, like you've survived issues that nobody else has had to … and you kind of go, … but why haven't you done something about it when you're the leadership team and you're very aware that there's going on.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Lack of action on specific complaints is a missed opportunity to resolve problems and improve team culture. Fortunately, other wāhine spoke of senior leaders who "led from the top", who "hushed the nay-sayers" thereby were able to positively influence the culture of a brigade and region.

3.3.2 Enablers – supportive and empowering leaders

Encouragingly, it was more common for wāhine to describe positive, rather than negative experiences of leadership. Some mentioned leaders who 'shoulder tapped' them for promotions, who provided coaching before interviews, and briefings in advance of training. Such encouraging experiences had the effect of enhancing confidence and satisfaction in their role.

Supportive and empowering leaders enabled wāhine to reach their potential

The significance of being exposed to a supportive leader was described by one wahine as a "watershed moment" in her career. Having transferred from a brigade where she had felt unsupported and isolated, for the first time she found:

> "
> …a very strong supporter. Who was, you know, further up the chain than me and was able to give me lots of good pointers and help me out with some of my confidence issues. … he supports many people and he supports all the women in our brigade, … he's extremely vocal about diversity and inclusion and about the 'codes of conduct' and the right culture for the brigade and is proactive … he 'walks the walk'.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

This supportive leader went on to become the leader of the brigade and was able to further drive culture change from that more influential position.

Other wāhine also gave examples of direct support they had received from leaders including career guidance, the provision of coaching, and tailored training so they could practice scenarios and other skills they needed before heading off on a qualification course.

> … I've had some really good people supporting me in the background, so many leaders that I've had the conversations with … that helped me to succeed through the ranks. And you know the last manager that I had was really good, like he was happy to get coaching for me to help … applying for a new role."
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Others described the positive impact on their careers of being exposed to supportive and proactive "bosses". This included wāhine being 'shoulder tapped' by their immediate bosses and/or regional management to take on temporary roles, or encouragement to apply for permanent positions that they would not otherwise have considered.

This proactive support appeared particularly important for wāhine who may have had their confidence dented due to their exposure to a hostile work environment and the constant feeling of "needing to be twice as good" (see section 3.2.1). As a result some wāhine found it helpful to have a "pushy" boss.

> … I have had people encourage me. …all of the times I've stepped up a role …. so both of those last times, people would have asked me three or four times to apply and in the end my immediate managers almost bullied me … maybe don't say that! ..but they were just quite forthright and just said look, I am done listening to your excuses, these applications close in two weeks and I expect to see yours on my desk, like I mean they didn't go straight to that point, there was a lot of encouragement cos I had every excuse under the sun and I would not have done it, if it hadn't been for those people that really pushed me to step up.
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

However, whilst some wāhine appreciated an extra push, ultimately, most wāhine did not want special treatment. Most simply wanted and appreciated a leader who treated them equally, and enabled them to get on and do the job.

> When I get out of the truck and I'm driving there will be comments, "Oh, my God, there's a girl driving the truck", and my boss is like, "Where? I just see a blue uniform I don't see a girl". So he's been really good about that sort of thing.
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Another clear example of a leader demonstrating this type of equitable behaviour was given by a career wahine firefighter. She described being deployed as part of a large-scale deployment to a vegetation fire, where she found herself to be the only wahine among hundreds of tāne firefighters. She observed that some of these tāne appeared far less fit, or experienced, than herself. However, over two successive daily briefings, in front of everyone, the incident management assigned specifically to her jobs that were the physically non-demanding and requiring little experience (e.g., taking the TIC camera to go over the hot spots and driving the four-wheel drive behind the bulldozer to do safety). Fortunately, her crew leader, "without kerfuffle" stepped in on both occasions and reassigned these tasks to another crew member, commenting to management "she is needed to do other more important things than that". This was not about special treatment, it was about a leader trying to allocate resources most effectively for the task at hand.

3.4 Training and development opportunities

Considering the focus here on wāhine career progression it is no surprise that experiences of training and development emerged strongly as a theme. Issues that arose related to this theme included experiences while on training courses, particularly those held at the National Training Centre (NTC), formal career planning and professional development plans, and access to developmental opportunities such as secondments.

3.4.1 Barriers – unpleasant training experiences, a lack of career planning and opportunities

Negative experiences while undergoing training, and the lack of formal career planning, were mentioned on numerous occasions as barriers to career progression and development for wāhine firefighters. The former issue contained elements specific to wāhine, but the latter – lack of career planning and opportunities – appears to be relevant for both wāhine and tāne firefighters.

Unpleasant experiences of training discouraged wāhine from pursuing these developmental opportunities

Many wāhine reported unpleasant experiences associated with attending training and qualification courses at the National Training Centre. There was no complaint with the high standards expected of those who trained at NTC, which were generally viewed very positively but wāhine often felt isolated and unfairly targeted by trainers. Reports included being subject to aggressive shouting, and acts that seemed intended to inflict humiliation. Such scenarios are clearly at odds with the goal of encouraging career progression.

Both volunteer and career wāhine were inclined to describe the culture at NTC as "toxic". Similar to hostile work environments described earlier, many examples were given by wāhine where they felt unfairly tested, "set up to fail", and consequently terrified of making mistakes.

> "…we're all in the trucks ready to go to an assessment. They pull me off in front of everyone, take me to the table – – in front of all my peers who were sitting in the trucks for re-assessment, and said, "If you fail this assessment then you'll be red carded". Meanwhile, I'm absolutely stressed. I get in the truck, I felt like crying but I'm like, "No. Okay, we're going now". And luckily I passed that assessment.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

When attempting demanding tasks for the first time or struggling with particularly gruelling exercises such as the ladder pull, wāhine described routinely being "yelled at". If wāhine weren't successful with a task, trainers would be "nailing people to the wall"; recruits were "bollocked" in front of everyone. The emotional reactions described included feeling "humiliated", "intimidated", and the sense that "they wanted to break me". Some observed trainers targeting females and seemingly being particularly hard on them. There were also concerning – albeit second-hand – accounts of more than one wahine being aggressively manhandled by an instructor.

These types of experiences resulted in wāhine developing highly adverse associations with training, creating an extra barrier amongst those who wanted to progress:

> *… they don't need to be doing that type of things in front of people – – to intimidate people. So when all of us [wāhine] go back to NTC now there's a knot in our stomachs.*
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

> So it's kind of like I always say, I've got course PTSD. Like going courses makes me super nervous.
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Regular training within brigades could also throw up negative experiences. In an example from a few years ago, a career wāhine described how some brigade members would avoid doing training exercises with her and were generally unsupportive:

> *…that basic core everyday training, not many people would ever do it with me…. when you were training, often if you ever did anything wrong, you wouldn't really be helped as such or taught.*

Other wāhine responded to these kind of negative training experiences by becoming reluctant to engage in anything but essential training. This was mostly amongst volunteer wāhine, who unlike career firefighters are not paid to attend training courses:

> You don't bother, especially once you've done your recruits course, because once it's volunteer, you know it doesn't make any difference to your pay. We still get paid nothing, so why would you? If you've had a bad experience at your first course, why would you bother to keep upskilling?
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

The style of instruction at NTC was experienced as unsuitable for adult wāhine learners

Several wāhine felt the style of teaching at NTC did not suit wāhine. A firefighter with an educational background described it as "old school", where there was no "show and tell". Another wahine said she felt that "you are thrown in the deep end, and it is sink or swim". One volunteer wāhine described her experience of an advanced training course as being like an "ill-fitting coat":

> …they are square pegging us women …we are square pegs that they're trying to jam and scrunch, scrunch, scrunch us into round holes.

She also described how the focus seemed to revolve around "command and control" ideas, and that trainers seemed to want her to "think like a man". This emphasis on "taking control" did not, in her view, necessarily work within the modern firefighting role, with increasing responsibility for medical emergencies and traumatic incidents, where a predominantly empathetic response was appropriate:

> *You know people that are losing their home or, you know, been in a motor vehicle accident or witnessed one, you know those people, in the most vulnerable moment of their life. … You want to be walking in and meeting people with empathy …. Why are you coming at them with guns blazing? … It's like the charge of the bloody light brigade!*

Attending training courses could be stressful due to the isolation felt by wāhine at NTC

Wahine frequently felt isolated whilst attending training courses at NTC, as it was not uncommon for them to be the only female in attendance. Several wāhine described being in the female changing room and hearing their male colleagues next door "having fun, yahooing" and listening to music. Sometimes they were aware they were the topic of conversation amongst the men. More then one wahine described the situation where decisions affecting all participants seemingly got made in the male changing room, but not shared or communicated with the wāhine next door.

> … the guys would go to their changing room and I'd go to mine and it would be the end of lunch and I'd go out to the parade yard and no one is there. They're not in their changing room, and no one had told me that they'd been told by the trainers to go to a certain location before 1 o'clock, and the message hadn't come through to me sitting by myself in my changing rooms. So I'd be wandering around NTC going, "Where the hell is my recruits course and where am I supposed to be?

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

The absence of formal career planning was a significant barrier to the career progression and development of wāhine

None of the wāhine who participated in this study reported having received any formal performance reviews or professional development planning (PDP), although some volunteer Chiefs spoken to had instigated this in their brigades off their own back (based on accepted practice in their non-firefighting main place of work). As one career wahine described it, "nobody was having the conversation about where you want to be in 10 years' time" and "how are we going to get [you] there". In terms of career progression, this lack of focused discussion on the topic constitutes a barrier for both wāhine and tāne firefighters. As a result, unless they had happened to know someone personally who worked in a particular role, they will likely be unaware of developmental opportunities, or of available career paths:

> You have to work it out yourself, what you need to progress.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

Finally, a few wāhine reported that they had been simply overlooked when training opportunities arose:

> *I might get passed over for training that some of the guys did and I'm thinking, "Well, what about me? Why can't I do chainsaw operating?" Just because I might not have been at training, I wasn't told about it, so they'd just assume that I didn't want to do it. … Then of course there would be "Oh, we don't need any more. We've already got enough people who can do that".*

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Narrow scope to firefighting training

A few, more senior wāhine observed a lack of opportunities and/or preparation for firefighters (wāhine and tāne) to learn about leadership, or to develop skills useful for career paths away from the frontline. Those who had progressed to leadership roles felt that earlier opportunities to develop relevant skills might encourage more female firefighters to want to become leaders.

The deficiencies with current processes where the training for career firefighters contained very little that might be relevant or helpful to becoming a leader was described by one wahine:

> …over here in the career world, because you come out of training, you go on to a station, you have no responsibilities until you're probably a senior firefighter or higher level. Because you will do as you're told. So that might be for ten years. You don't actually get to think because someone is always telling you. … And I don't know how you can create rounded bosses or managers out of that way of doing things. They don't hold any portfolios, they might have a portfolio to fix the hose or equipment or whatever, … mostly everything they do is operational-minded. So we're not trying to produce good leaders, we're not giving them any extra skills on personnel.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

This may explain why a couple of wāhine who had successfully progressed into black watch / manager roles felt unprepared for their new roles. Instead they felt "thrown in the deep end" and, consequently, at least one was unsure if they wanted to progress further:

> "You're sort of just throwing in…. It's like, here you go. Here's what you do. … Off you go, figure it out. … And these roles, like when I got the manager position, I had no management experience whatsoever … I had to organize my own courses. So I went and did a management course and some leadership stuff, but I had to organise that myself. … My manager, sort of, he knew I could do the job. But the support wasn't there. He was happy for me to go and do the courses, of course, but there was nothing in there to say. "Hey, we know you haven't got this. Why don't you try doing this or do this and do this" … No, it's like you've got the manager's job. Off you go. I was like, oh, f**k. I have no idea what I'm doing.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

Lack of opportunities for volunteer firefighters

Career firefighters have a wider range of career paths open to them, such as black watch, regional management or NHQ roles. A significant barrier for volunteer wāhine progress is the comparative absence of career paths available to them, particularly for members of rural brigades:

> …the only barrier that I can really see is that there isn't much scope for advancing in our brigade because you go recruit firefighter, firefighter, crew leader, deputy controller, controller. I think our controller's probably going to be there for quite a few more years so there isn't really any positions after that.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Such 'slim pickings' were thus experienced as demotivating for those wāhine who wanted to progress, and for some may contributed to a decision to leave.

Volunteer firefighters also reported that their careers paths seemed restricted because their operational experience was not valued if applying for, say, a regional management position. Despite sometimes decades of operational experience though volunteer firefighting, and accompanied by relevant emergency or managerial experience from careers outside of Fire and Emergency (or black watch manager roles within), the message received seemed to be:

> If you don't come off the truck [i.e., career firefighter], we're going to block you.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

3.4.2 Enablers – 'sideways' developmental opportunities and female trainers

Some wāhine had found the training and development opportunities they had been exposed to as enabling. These included those who had been offered opportunities to develop different skills and networks within the organisation (described as sideways opportunities), where training experiences were positive (including exposure to female trainers) and involvement in specific professional development opportunities that somehow inspired them.

Taking up opportunities to develop different skills and people networks within the organisation, were seen as particularly valuable enablers to career progression

As noted earlier, opportunities to develop skills useful for other career paths remain very limited while firefighters remain "on the truck". One way around this, as identified by several wāhine, was by "putting your hand up" for "sideways opportunities". Example of these included taking on special project work (e.g., roll out of new infrastructure, recruitment initiatives), volunteering for local representative positions (e.g., Unions, Regional Women's Advisory Network (RWAN), and of particular value, opportunities for fixed-term secondments (e.g., NHQ positions, Volunteer Support Officer, casual trainers). Some wāhine noted instances where overseas training opportunities arose (e.g., wildfire courses). These "sideways opportunities" enabled wāhine to develop new skill sets and build confidence and networks. Having recently secured a permanent manager role, one wahine summed up the value of an earlier secondment:

> … the exposure it gave me across the organization, as well as the leadership skills and the relationship building … unbelievable, it was a huge opportunity.

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Other comments in this respect included:

> I like the fixed-term secondments. … because it's allowed guys and girls to come across from the trucks and have a little tutū, and go back. And they're guaranteed they've still got their permanent role, you know, and back they go. And I think there should be more of that. Instead of maybe creating a permanent position, have one that you can roll people through. Give people opportunities!

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> *… So I was kind of like asked to – – and agreed to be involved in different advocacy groups in the organisation and different projects and was exposed [to this] at a very early time. … So then I got to meet people, not just in my direct management line or immediate firefighting group as a lot of people. … I had really meaningful conversations with them, checking in with people like that over the years and still – – even though I don't see them very often, but just knowing I'm able to call them if I need to, is really helpful. But, I guess, I was lucky to do these different side projects in the organisation which meant I was exposed to more people than just my Chief, which is what a lot of people's experience would be.*

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Positive training experiences enhanced by the presence of female trainers, encouraged and facilitated wāhine to develop their skills

In contrast to the training experiences described above, some wāhine described positive training experiences, or at least positive in some aspects. These experiences appeared to depend in part on which individual trainer was on the roster; others suggested however that experiences at NTC generally were improving other time.

One volunteer wahine was appreciative of the lengths NTC staff went to her as a new mother, allowing her baby and partner to enter NTC facilities enabling her to continue to breast feed. Wāhine generally found attending courses at the NTC to be a more agreeable experience if there were other wahine present – "having other women on your journey helps", as one put it. Another career wāhine spoke of her appreciation of receiving a style of teaching that was less autocratic than she had previously been exposed to.

> …we were one of the first courses that they didn't yell and scream at you. … and so we all went in expecting that and then, in the first week, we had a meeting and they said, "How is everyone feeling?" We were all like – – actually we were all a little bit on edge because we're just waiting for this, the yelling and screaming, and they said, "No, we've changed our training style. You're adults, we'll treat you like adults. And yelling and screaming at you and negative comments don't get the best out of people".

She went on to explain how, in her view, this different approach achieved better results:

> I think it was good because we weren't afraid to make mistakes, whereas previous courses, you make a mistake, it was just the end of the world. Whereas we'd make a mistake, they'd, go like, "Do you know what you did wrong?" You'd go over it, and then next time you do it better, because you weren't as scared to get in there and try, whereas previous courses, people were a bit more timid and so I think that was a good thing.

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Female instructors

Another aspect identified as helpful by a few wāhine was the presence of female instructors. Seeing a wahine in this role was described as motivational:

> So you get that sort of little look in their eye like, "oh it's not just male dominated." You can see that they sort of feel a bit more comfortable with it and "Oh, there's a female. She can do it. And she's at that higher level as well.

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From a practical perspective, wāhine instructors were also able to demonstrate to wāhine recruits techniques in a way that made the technique more applicable to them.

> …so one of the trainers, he ran a hose out. You had to hold [the hose] branch a particular way. But with girls, our hands are smaller and we couldn't do that. We had a women trainer on our course, which was quite helpful, and so we were like – "How do you carry a branch? Like, we're struggling to do it, how they do it". And she goes, "It doesn't matter how you carry it. You get it there, run the hose out and you don't drop the branch, it doesn't matter how you carry it". And so some people are just so regimented and like, "This is how it's done", and she's like, "Doesn't matter". And so we found that really useful.

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Attending wāhine-focused professional development opportunities was an enabling experience for wāhine

Some wāhine spoke of being inspired to progress in their career through attending professional development events where other wāhine leaders spoke. These included the National Women's Advisory Committee meetings, and other industry-related conferences. One wahine had been sponsored by RWAN to attend a Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFA) conference, and described speaker there delivering a powerful and influential message:

> "
> She put this phrase up on the projector for everyone to see. It was, "Opportunities multiply as they are seized". That was a really big takeaway, and it was then I was like, "Right, I need to start grabbing these opportunities". And they have, they've just multiplied. But you've got to look for them. They don't fall in your lap very often.

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This idea is particularly important given that some wāhine spoke of being reluctant to put themselves forward due to the range of influences within the work environment. It also highlights the value of taking up "sideways opportunities" if and when they become available.

3.5 Work–family balance

The challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities is a well-documented barrier to both career progression and retention of wāhine irrespective of industry type, but particularly in male-dominated ones such as firefighting (Dyer et al., 2021). Research conducted in Australia that found female firefighters' career suffered more significantly by taking a career break to have children than was the case with their male counterparts (Parkinson et al., 2019). Without flexible work policies or other supportive practices, wāhine firefighters with caregiving responsibilities tend either decline opportunities for promotion, or decide to pursue an alternative career that better accommodates their needs. Another issue that emerges for wāhine who wish to start a family is that they feel pressured to either delay this or even decide against it.

Working arrangements for wāhine firefighters include a rotating rooster of shift-work (two day shifts, two night shifts, followed by four days off). The dynamic nature of this shift work, with its irregular hours, is a particular challenge for those with caregiving responsibilities. Generally no option exists to, for example, do day shifts only, to job share or to work part-time. Even senior executive officer leaders have on-call rooster duties, which mean they may include night-time call outs. Another challenge relates to training courses which typically require attendance at an off-site block course involving extended time away from home. The regional structure of Fire and Emergency means that wāhine in senior management roles must travel between their region and NHQ, putting further pressure on those with families. Managing childcare responsibilities at short notice can also be a significant issue for wāhine volunteer firefighters.

The importance of these challenges has been recognised by Fire and Emergency, with the initiative '*building a positive flexible workplace*' a core component of the organisation's strategic priorities. In relation to career firefighters there has also been progress with the development of the Pregnancy and Operational Firefighting Policy (2019). This policy allows alternative work roles to be offered during pregnancy, ensuring the protection of substantive roles while on leave, and setting out equitable return-to-work protocols. More recently new guidelines have been published on managing pregnancy and parental leave for operational personnel.[44] Beyond these advances, work to progress Fire and Emergency's Kia Toipoto Action Plan has also been announced, which promotes 'flexible-by-default' working arrangements across the organisation.

Much of this work stems from recognition of the need to support career progression and retention of wāhine. Such policies and practices can also benefit tāne firefighters with families, as well as those who have taken a break from operational work due to injury or illness.

Considering this level of awareness within the organisation, it was interesting that only a few of the wāhine interviewed identified the topic of working arrangements as a barrier without prompting. This was despite the majority (around 70%) of wāhine interviewed having been working mothers at some point in their career, a few of whom were currently sole parents. Some wāhine responded with "you just make it work", perhaps reflecting the typical firefighter response style of approaching problems with a solution-findings focus. The low level of concern about the topic could also relate to wāhine very much wanting not to be treated differently as women (see section 3.1.1).

However, just because it was not readily talked of, does not mean that the issue is not significant for career progression. It was clear from those who did speak more candidly, particularly around managing childcare responsibilities, that there were some stressful challenges. As one wahine with several children said:

> *… so like, there is no work-life balance. I've done away with that whole concept of trying to achieve it!*
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

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44 The guidelines contain information for all operational personnel who may be eligible to take parental leave, or who want to better understand the policies and support available to new parents (see www.fireandemergency.nz/assets/Documents/FENZ_Annual_Report_2022.pdf).

Another wahine in a black watch / manager role also described the challenges:

> [the] mental load is huge – It's been really, really tough with being out from lockdown now and the – – the kids being young, getting sick constantly. … It's easier for me to work from home than [for my partner] … so there's pressure that I feel from being at home and trying to manage sick kids and a workload. Everyone has needs and I'm being stretched all over the place.

It was also highlighted that some male colleagues (often older) showed little understanding of the issue:

> *Sometimes, there's a pause and a blank look of "What? What do you mean?" …so like I will keep my camera on when I'm at home in the morning. They can see the chaos of what the kids are doing in the background, that kind of thing!*

It was pretty much a 'given' for the wāhine interviewed that being a mother and managing childcare responsibilities was an obstacle to career progression. Those who did not have children noted "I can do it because I don't have kids", while those with described there being "some things you can't do as a young mum". In terms of identifying specific barrier and enablers, most discussion centred around the factors that made it more of a challenge (barriers), and/ or examples of what helped wāhine managed these challenges (enablers).

3.5.1 Barriers – cost of childcare and "mum guilt", and pressure on relationships

This section presents some of the issues that made being a firefighter and a mother difficult. There are also a few comments on how the firefighting role for wāhine could impact on intimate relationships.

Finding suitable childcare and managing work responsibilities presented a range of stressful challenges to wāhine and restricted access to developmental opportunities

Examples of challenges related to managing childcare raised by wāhine included:

- **Childcare being expensive and not suited to shift work** – for career wāhine finding a childcare provider that suited shift work was difficult. One wahine noted most childcare providers required a full five-day booking to secure a spot, based around a typical Monday to Friday working week. However, for firefighters this meant paying a premium for childcare:

> [you have to] pay for five days a week, although you may only need two days because of our shift system.

Another wahine spoke of the demands on her children of an 11-hour stint in childcare, as well as the expense of this.

> My kids would end up in day care for 11 hours a day because … by the time you travel, drop them off and do your 10-hour day shift and then, pick them up. And I mean, that's pretty hard on the kids themselves, …the government subsidy … you could only have 6 hours a day subsidized, so then you'd also have to fork out the extra hours.

- **Pressure to do overtime** – several wāhine explained that doing overtime was "not really a choice, more of a responsibility". Whilst the extra money was important, for wāhine who mentioned this, a more common pressure to accept overtime came from wanting to "not letting the team down", as not doing so might mean insufficient staff available to staff a truck. However, for wāhine with children, accepting overtime meant less time at home. One career wāhine described how a "massive mum guilt kicks in" when she agreed to do overtime or take on an extra shift.

- **Residential training courses** – most qualification or other development training require attendance at block courses away from home; this applies to both career and volunteers. Attending these is a requirement of career development and progression for wāhine and tāne. However having dependent children obviously created difficulties for wāhine. Being away on courses put pressure on other family members who had "pick up the load, when I'm away", or could be hugely expensive if paid childcare had to be used.

- **Travel requirements** – advancing into senior leadership/national manager positions often came with heightened requirements for regular travel. It is not uncommon, for example, for wāhine to be appointed to NHQ roles whilst residing and working in the regions. However, for those who took on these roles faced a requirement to travel to Wellington on a regular basis. The pressure this created on families was noted by a few wāhine, with one wahine explaining how "*if I mention Wellington my children have emotional triggering!*". She was now in a different role but had decided she would not take on another role that required regular travel because of the effects on her children.

- **Coming back after pregnancy** – returning to work after having a baby can involve returning to a changed workplace with little support and a loss of status (Parkinson, 2019). This, and the challenges already highlighted above, were suspected to be the reason why wāhine have a shorter length of service, with some finding the pressures too difficult to manage.

Volunteers who took time out to have children also faced obstacles to their return. One wahine described her frustration at having to start from scratch with her training and qualifications after she took time away to start a family.

> I had two kids, like quite close together. I was away for a little bit of time …so yeah I think that probably being a female that's a bit of a disadvantage just for if you're away for a period of time, then you start from scratch again. So yeah, which I understand like I get it, but yeah, probably for some people they just go, I can't be bothered doing recruit schools again, like it's a lot of effort.

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Managing a negative workplace environment could also put pressure on relationships

A few wāhine spoke of the cost of being a firefighter on relationships. Those who raised this, described tensions created by the wāhine choosing to persevere in the face of hostility and dismissiveness in the workplace (see 3.2.1). As noted earlier, many wāhine facing harassment and bullying from other brigade members persevered simply because they "didn't want to get beat". Some partners however found this situation difficult to accept:

> " It was actually really frustrating, and I'd get quite pissed off and then I'd go home in tears and my husband would go, "Just give up. Just leave it" and I'm thinking, "I don't want to because I really, really enjoy doing this.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

At least one volunteer wāhine felt this had contributed to the breakdown of a relationship: "it definitely played a part in that … because he hated it."

3.5.2 Enablers – supportive environment and career path options

In terms of enablers of career progression, wāhine identified a range of factors that served to ease or mitigate the barriers outlined above. These included levels of general support, ensuring family members were kept informed, availability of different career paths that suited personal circumstances, and – for volunteers especially – the adoption of innovative solutions. Enablers of these types allowed wāhine to avoid hard choices between family over career. Enablers described here are of course equally applicable to tāne with caregiving responsibilities.

Of note, none of the wāhine interviewed provided examples of how the Pregnancy and Operational Firefighting Policy (2019) had been an enabler for them, although, several talked positively about the policy, and the value of its provisions. It is possible however that the affected wāhine who participated had had their pregnancies prior to implementation of the policy.

Examples of factors wāhine identified that enabled them to manage the roles of being a firefighter and a mother are discussed below.

Supportive family/brigade/manager

Numerous examples were given by wāhine of having the right supports in place which enabled them progress their career whilst also managing family responsibilities. Having a supportive partner, friends or extended family were critical for wāhine with children, especially when work related travel was required.

> I've had a very supportive husband because he has probably put up with quite a lot, if I'm honest. To do all those training courses, you have to be away which means he has to pick up the load at home.

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> [My husband] he's quite proud of me. … even when we had our girls, it just carried on and he's been there in the background looking after them while I go to fires and stuff. So he's been amazingly supportive, I'm really lucky to have someone who doesn't go, "Oh, you know what? Actually, I don't think you should be doing this because you're away from the girls" and blah, blah, blah. No, he's the one who'd go, "Oh, that's really cool" and when I got deployed he was over the moon because I'd been waiting for so long it just seemed to be everyone else would go.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

As highlighted above, in addition to looking after children, a partner specifically supportive of her career progression was hugely appreciated. In the example below, the husband of a career wahine (with older children) also worked in an emergency service. She described her husband as her "greatest supporter":

> "
> …he knows what it means to be available or be flexible when you're at home because of the nature of the emergency services work. He always said to me, "Put your hand up for everything because an opportunity missed – – and opportunity that you missed you'll never get that back". Like in terms of overseas deployments and things like that. So, yeah, I have done a bit of that as well.

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As noted in the introduction to this section, flexible working arrangements are a primary enabler to wāhine managing work and family responsibilities. While this is not an option for operational firefighters working "on the truck", it was possible for those who had moved into black watch / manager type roles. A manager supportive of flexi-time was as significant enabler for wāhine, as illustrated in the quote below:

> I've got a really fabulous manager, who's very understanding, and we work with a flexible environment as much as possible and it's a case of as long as the work's being done or what's needed to be done is done. It may mean that I'm up at 5.00 am, checking to see what's happening for the day. Then it's home, managing the kids, breakfast, getting off to school, preschool drop-off, so forth. I have flexibility to pick up from preschool or school if I need to, but it means that I'm then online once the kids are in bed for an hour or two, just tidying up any loose ends or anything that may have cropped up that I haven't had a chance to get on top of. So – and it might mean instead of having a – we're a black watch, which is Monday to Friday. I may need – I often will work weekends just to stay on top of things.

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A few wāhine also described the value of having a "family orientated brigade", where family members were allowed to join them for dinner at the brigade ("for a small fee") or for special days like Christmas. Other examples included where brigade members worked together to fill gaps in childcare or, as in the example below, where the brigade culture is simply accommodating of any childcare issues that might arise (between call outs):[45]

> We've all got kids, if the kids are sick the boss will get cover within five minutes – – just go to him, "I need to get home". "Right". And we've done it for my boss as well, like something has happened at home, we'll get him a truck and we'll go straight away. And we'll sit outside for half-an-hour, we'll all sit in the truck and wait. Nobody rushes him. And the same, if I needed to go home they'd let me go home, and I've done it in the past, "… And we just do a quick drive by, I go in, make sure she's okay and things like that and then I go. Very family orientated.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Innovative/local solutions (volunteers)

Volunteers have the extra challenge of managing childcare responsibilities at short notice when call outs occur. This was particularly true for sole parents, who "can't just run out the house and leave the kids". A few examples arose where brigades had come up with their own innovative solutions to address this, for example where a volunteer "nanny" arrived at the station shortly after the call out, available to look after children that are brought in by a firefighter enroute to the job:

> *When the siren goes the granny goes to the stations, and they just grab all the children.*

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Occasionally a volunteer firefighter who turned up but was surplus to requirements might stay behind and look after any children. Other examples included neighbours who volunteered to look after children or, as in the quote below, the partner of another firefighter.

> *One wife … she said to me because their house was on the way to the fire station. She's like, do you know what, I'm always home after school. Just drop the kids on your way past. And so whenever the siren went, I just send her… Well, she was actually normally faster than me. She would just text and say "drop the kids". And so I dropped them on the way and then I could go to the fire station. … so yeah, our kids have grown up with the fire station kids and with partners, … they called it their fire whānau.*

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45 Note this practice would only happen between callouts, and if the appliance / crew was to get a callout while checking on family, they would respond as per normal.

Automatic Messaging System (AMS)

For families to be able to support volunteer wāhine (particularly those with children) fast and efficient forms of communication are essential. Supporters need to know, for example, that their family member has been called out, and the likely duration over which they will be away. Communication has improved through the electronic messaging system (AMS), something mentioned positively by several wāhine.

"

If a volunteer basically hits in in their messaging system. Yes, I'm going to attend this incident. Then it sends a message directly to their nominated partner or contact to basically say your partner has gone to this type of incident and that immediately just gives the partner an indication … those types of incidents normally last about 2 hours that now means I'm gonna need to go and pick up the kids from school or so. There are some small things like that that I think are really great.

Options for a career path that suits

Career firefighters typically have a wider range of career path options open to them, some of which are more conducive to different working arrangements. While there is the standard shift pattern for firefighters "on the truck", the standard 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday working week is there for black watch roles and other regional or national level positions. Interestingly wāhine had differing experiences of which worked best for them to maximise time with their children. Some mothers said that the shift work actually gave them more time at home, and for at least two career wāhine this was part of their reasoning in choosing to sign up as a firefighter. Whilst the need to do over-time intruded, on their days off they could, in the main, "switch off and concentrate on the kids and do family stuff".

> …I've been firefighting and doing shift work for the last 16 years. It's actually all I've known since I've had my children and shift work actually works very well for getting children to their various activities after school.

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However, other wāhine found the shifts hard to manage, as the weekly routine changed each week and had "no consistency". For example, one career wāhine had a mixture of family and friends helping her out with childcare when she was on night shifts or getting her children to school or sports activities. She described this as stressful:

> *The kids were going in all sort of directions, there was no routine for them.*

This was part of the reason she had now chosen to take on a black watch role, after which their weekly routine became much easier to manage. On the other hand some wāhine also talked of high workloads in black watch or manager type roles, and the on-going need to work some weekends.

3.6 Uniforms, equipment and infrastructure

As highlighted by Dyer et al (2021) "in addition to difficulties within the social environment, women fire fighters face difficulties with aspects in the physical environment, ill-fitting protective gear and inadequate fire station facilities" (Dyer et al, 2021, p32). These difficulties are primarily barriers to the retention of wāhine firefighters, as they can negatively impact job satisfaction, ability of wāhine to perform effectively in the role, and health and safety. It could be argued that they also work against wāhine being seen as valuable, effective and credible firefighters, and who are deserving of promotion.

In their review of literature, Dyer and colleagues cite overseas research that highlights barriers for wāhine associated with unsuitable gear, equipment and facilities. Key aspects include:

- firefighting tools, equipment, and techniques are designed by men to accommodate men's height, strengths, and techniques;

- ill-fitting protective gear, including gloves, pants, helmets and boots, are uncomfortable and constitute a significant constraint for wāhine to work safely and efficiently;

- personal protective clothing and heavy equipment designed for the typical male body configuration may cause stress on the female body, with the weight of personal protective equipment and breathing apparatus, and restrictive boots increasing the occurrence of musculoskeletal injuries; and

- the lack of provision of separate toilets, showers and changing rooms can lead to both privacy and health concerns for women creating daily stresses and anxiety.

These difficulties were each raised by the wāhine firefighters in this study. Many were also bothered by the subtle messaging created when wearing a uniform and protective gear that was ill-fitting, as if symbolising that, as females, they were a *poor fit* within the organisation.

This theme (uniforms, equipment and infrastructure) was the only one where wāhine responses were predominantly negative. While a few wāhine said they had "no problems" with their uniform – one wahine even said "I love the uniform" – most of the comments in relation to uniforms and protective gear involved negative experiences.

3.6.1 Barriers – gear is ill–fitting, unsafe, ineffective, and "it feels like you don't belong"

This particular theme provoked frequent and animated responses; in fact, poor fitting uniforms and protective gear were the most common topic raised by wāhine in this study. Of course, the issue is not new, having been identified in research here over 20 years ago (e.g., Brough & Smith, 2002; UMR Research, 2003); this may partly explain the frustration among some wāhine, as they were aware that so little progress had been made in addressing it.

Poorly fitting gear created health and safety concerns for wahine

The strongest area of concern related to health and safety issues caused by ill-fitting protective gear. As noted by one senior wahine "it really upsets the women".

> Yeah, safety and wellbeing as well. Like making sure that people can feel safe going to work and being able to move and do their job in the uniform that they're wearing, that's definitely an important aspect of it. …It's frustrating knowing that you've got these issues and trying to do something about it, is like hitting your head against a brick wall. We've done the research, we know all these issues contribute to the bigger problem, but it's like it's not being heard. We always get, "Oh, but money. Oh, but this", and it's like, "No, this goes above that". So, yeah, definitely frustrating.

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As several noted, this was not just an issue for wāhine:

> " … there are probably men out there that have either the same small narrow feet or quite long wide feet, that have problems with the boots too. As I've had it explained to me, the "outliers" of the organisation … they're not catered for, so it's how we go about that we need to change. It's not right, and it's definitely picked up on the ground floor.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

There was acknowledgement that some improvement had occurred with respect to uniforms now available for wāhine and tāne. There were a large range of sizes to choose from for some gear, for example the different-sized face masks were appreciated. However, as comments below suggest, more action is needed in order for all wāhine to feel safe, respected and credible while on the job.

Wāhine were aware of the potentially lethal consequences and pointed to the tragic death of a UK female firefighter (Fleur Lombard) who died in 1996 as the result of a flashover. The cause of death was determined as a failed breathing apparatus, but the design of her Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) gear was also found to have been inadequate for her body type, "the temperature underneath her clothing had been 400 – 600 degrees Celsius at one point."[46]

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46 www.ctif.org/news/tragic-death-fleur-lombard-spurred-major-changes-design-womens-firefighter-clothing

As highlighted in the quote below, wāhine felt basic health and safety needs were not being met:

My specialty and passion is uniform, so our PPE is really important for us to do our job safely, and FENZ likes to follow a model of a one size fits all for 14,000 people, and it doesn't work. And this isn't probably just relatable to females but to everyone, that we don't just have a 5' 11 medium-build person. So I think that's a massive part of it, is people being able to come into the organisation and know that the uniform that they're going to wear fits them and they're going to be able to do their job safely, that's a really important aspect.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Examples of health and safety concerns raised during interviews included:

- **poorly fitting L2 boots** – wāhine described having to cut the back of the boot in order for it to fit their calves, otherwise "they're so tight on your calves you can hardly walk"; being too wide with the example of a boot falling off when they were in "live fire", and making climbing up ladders difficult; when too big, socks can fall down, resulting in blisters.

> **"**
> I had the worst blisters I've ever had in my life from walking in them [L2 boots] for 20 minutes, which is just ridiculous. Like, it shouldn't happen.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

> But it's like, we've got one [L2] boot, and that one boot doesn't fit all. They're about that wide and so for most women, this is not practical. … so when you walk, your feet are moving up and down. You walk upstairs and your feet come out. You're up ladders and your feet are coming out, which isn't good. It is a huge health and safety risk.

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- **inadequate ergonomic design of footwear causing injuries** – wāhine commented that footwear (e.g., structural firefighting boots) had insufficient support to enable them to carry out their work without injury. Examples included, "foot problems, calf, Achilles issues". One wahine described having plantar fascia surgery due to insufficient support in the boots, and that on her first day back it re-ruptured because of the footwear.
- **helmet too big and heavy** – current helmet design requires some wāhine to wear a layer of padding underneath so it didn't fall off; concerns exists regarding the weight of the helmet, causing neck strains and sore shoulders.

> Helmets are an issue for all, not just women… Like, the amount of times you've got a sore neck after, if you've been at a big job. You know, it's not great, but people just get on with it because that's what you've got … But really, should we have to?

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

- **chemical suit too big** – one smaller-framed wahine described the poor fit of the chemical suit:

If I was to wear the chemical suit, then the crutch is like at my knees and things like that like. And you just made it work, but it was never … nothing was ever gonna fit properly, you know, I'm a women's size small.

- **gloves not fitting and not fit for purpose** – gloves that are too big made handling of equipment difficult, and risked exposing skin to burning.

Gear and equipment that were not ergonomically suited to wāhine impeded their ability to work efficiently

In addition to health and safety concerns, as noted in some of the quotes above, ill-fitting gear and equipment also means greater difficulties for wāhine in carrying out their duties.

> Look, it's just about them being able to do the job, to do it safely, and to do it well because these are all, yeah, hinders, …you know, having clothes that fit women is important.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

This applied also to how equipment is stored on appliances, which could make it difficult for shorter individuals "to reach, and get gear out safely and efficiently". Another example specific to the rural space was the handles on shovels and grubbers, the lengths of which one wahine described as solely "designed for strong men". It was noted lighter gear can be equally effective but able to be used efficiently by more people. The solution for this for one wahine was to supplying her own:

> …*she ended up taking her own grubber with her because it was fit for purpose for her.*
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

An ill-fitting uniform made wāhine feel like they didn't belong

Many wāhine spoke of ill-fitting uniforms in terms of making them feel like they didn't belong:

> "
> ## Nothing is a bigger daily reminder that you don't belong here than uniforms.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Other wāhine talked of feeling "ashamed" and robbing them of any pride in being a wahine firefighter:

> …*they haven't thought about the female uniform, like it's not very flattering if you want to wear your uniform with pride when it comes to going to conferences or going to meetings or going to formal functions, … it is quite demoralising at times because you don't feel that pride of putting that uniform on.*
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Another wahine described "feeling ashamed":

> *So I went to the UFBA conference last week and I had to wear, what I call the fire service uniform. And I almost resent it. … Because I'm actually really ashamed to be wearing this… I have to wear a light blue shirt with a tie. I have to wear shoes that look like men's, that are men's shoes, pair of trousers that look revolting. And I had to wear the tunic.*
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

A career wahine spoke of the impact of ill-fitting gear on personal perceptions:

> …*having clothes that fit women is important. It is important for our perception of ourselves and important for our confidence, and we should be able to have clothes that fit us, that are designed for our body shape. You know, I'm wearing men's trousers, I've been wearing men's trousers for 20 years!*
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Equally, ill-fitting gear was resented as creating negative perceptions by others:

> I turn up as an incident controller and I'm turning up in gear that doesn't fit … this thing comes down to my knees – And I'm like, oh, I'm supposed to look credible?! ….So yeah why should Police take me seriously when clearly my organisation doesn't … no wonder the police turn their back on me – look at me!

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

The adequacy of facilities for wāhine at stations or on trucks was less of an issue for wāhine interviewed, most of whom accepted and "made do" with what was provided; however, a few issues were raised

On call-outs

A few gender-specific challenges arose for wāhine whilst on longer call outs, particularly in rural locations.

> …one of the issues that we sometimes have when you're on the fire ground for an extended length of time is finding somewhere to pee.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

This was made particularly difficult if wāhine were wearing 'one-piece overalls' rather than separate pants and jacket, which required you to "strip off to be able to have a pee". Two-piece gear was available in most brigades, but it appeared some smaller rural stations still only had access to one-piece overalls, with the extra cost of issuing two-pieces having been raised as a barrier. Wāhine in one brigade had asked if it was possible to have "sheewees" issued (a portable urination device that allows wāhine to pee discreetly and hygienically while standing) as an alternative solution.

The other gender-specific issue related to call-outs was access to sanitary items. Tampons stored on the truck were mentioned as helpful for cases where a wahine having a period got 'caught out'. A response to this issue has been the fairly recent introduction of "personal hygiene packs" to be stored on trucks (and at the station). Interestingly these packs generated mixed views. Some wāhine thought they were a good idea:

> … You never wanna be caught out. … It's easier just to grab something out of the truck and go quickly and sort yourself out then having to say, hey, look, can we go to the supermarket, you know, the pharmacy? Yeah, I think it it's a good idea and it should just be normalized and you know,… you might [also] be in a situation when somebody in the public asks for something like that and you could help them out.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

One Chief noted they had worked well, and that she had had to re-place products in the packs, "so obviously they're getting used."

However, some career wāhine had quite strongly opposing views on the idea, highlighting the need to consider differences among the wāhine when implementing support actions:

…last year they came around with putting tampons – – like a little period bag on station, and us girls were very anti it because they were going to put it on the truck; and it's like, "Well, hang on, nobody has asked us and we're all big girls, we can all look after ourselves". … Because straightaway the boys are like, "Well, what do we get?" and they're like, "Well, nobody is buying us razors and nobody is doing this and yet we've got to shave every day, so why are you girls different?" And that's the thing we didn't want, to be treated differently.

…they want menstrual packs on the truck. And I'm like, I'm an adult who's had her period for about 30 years. I don't need a pack on the truck. I have a bag on the truck with a spare T-shirt and bra and stuff like that if I need to change. I've got tampons in that. I don't need the truck to supply them. I just think women just ask for too much sometimes, and it's like- – I think that's a ridiculous thing to want on the truck, because we can deal with it ourselves.

Station facilities

Facilities at stations varied depending on size and age of the building, with smaller rural facilities having the most basic. Larger, newer stations had better facilities that might include separate facilities for wāhine to change, toilet and shower and the availability of sanitary bins. Where changes of this type had been made, these were appreciated:

> "
> [back then] there was no women's – it was either mixed or it was men's … you'd be going to have a shower and … some bloke would be taking a dump beside you. It was just, you know, not very nice. But you know, things like that, they've different now, they've separated them out, which is good.
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

However, in the main wāhine were quite accepting of what was provided.

> *Yeah, I just get changed. You just drop your pants. … Yeah, we'll all be standing around talking to each other while we drop our shorts and that's quite fine. … We have a toilet and shower and if anybody was shy they could do that, they could pop up there. It would just, take half a minute longer to do that. No, I think people tend to just fit into the culture of it's fine, you just get changed. Nobody's got time to look at what you've got on underneath anyway.*
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Some wāhine whilst not complaining, would appreciate improvements to the facilities:

> *… we don't have girls' toilets on the station. I've got to share toilets with the other boys and sometimes – – I always make sure I wear my boots and so I'm not stamping – – like, if at lunchtime and I've kicked my boots off and I'm on the La-Z-Boy watching TV and I need to go, I always put my boots on because I'm not walking into the toilets in my socks, because they're boys and they're gross. I'm not going to complain about it, it's just life.*
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

However, some were conscious that younger wāhine may feel less comfortable "taking off their clothes and getting changed in front of a 40-year-old man". In response some stations had incorporated a dedicated area within the station for females.

> … we kind of killed two birds with one stone basically, we put in a shower and a toilet and a disabled one, so it's quite a large area with a little stall and stuff and hooks, so the girls can go – – and it's at the back of our engine bay so, yeah, it's just made known, "If you want to go in there and get changed, go for it, that's your space, you can go in there and get changed".
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

3.7 Organisational factors

Fire and Emergency as an organisation, including its array of policies and processes, is the final theme to be considered in trying to better understand barriers and enablers to wāhine career progression and development. Of course, 'organisation' as a frame potentially subsumes within it all of the other themes dealt with under the theme headings above. However, it is worthy of specific investigation as unique and important aspects of a wider organisation culture can have significant impacts.

Helpful here is the 'glass ceiling' metaphor referred to in the review by Dyer and colleagues (2021). They refer to this well-recognised metaphor when describing how wāhine rarely achieve senior managerial positions in male-dominated organisations. They extend the metaphor further by unpacking the following dynamics:

- 'glass door' (difficulties in entering)
- 'glass walls' (difficulties in moving within)
- 'glass ceilings' (preventing moving up)
- 'revolving doors' (incentives to early exit)
- 'glass cliffs' (premature promotions to unsuitable senior roles).

These glass and door metaphors capture well a range of experiences described by wāhine firefighters. Many mentioned aspects of brigade culture communicating that wāhine are not suitable for a firefighter role; being held to a higher standard, having to work harder; lack of access to role models or mentors; fewer training and development opportunities and career support; a hostile working environment; and challenges of managing family and work responsibilities leading to early exits.

Across all interviews, wāhine in this study had little to say about Fire and Emergency as an organisation *per se*. This likely reflects the separation and disconnect that exists between the operational "truck world" and the wider management domain. This disconnect is highlighted in a quote from a career firefighter who had recently shifted into a black watch role.

> I've had a very steep learning curve over here because there's this whole other world. I lived in a bubble of naivety. As a firefighter, everything was sort of handed to me on a plate. If I had a training course, I just had to turn up. Suddenly, now I'm involved in the organising, I realise – – when we ask for something, it's not necessarily an easy task. It takes many people and there are many balls in the air just to achieve one task that I thought would have been so easy.

This disconnect also expressed itself in lack of awareness (or interest) in the organisation's declared priorities and values,[47] although a fairly common sentiment amongst those on the frontline (both career and volunteers) was that those on "the shop floor" were not valued by those at the top.

Whereas many aspects of organisational structure and processes can impact on firefighter development, career progression and retention, this section presents just those additional organisation-related aspects identified by the wāhine that emerged as distinct from earlier topics. These include views on the efficiencies of the organisational processes and the perceived commitment of Fire and Emergency to progressing issues for wāhine. Some factors had a direct bearing on the likelihood of wāhine continuing to advance their careers (e.g., appointment processes). Other experiences had broader influence on role satisfaction and therefore retention.

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47 The main exception to this being the points of tensions under dispute between the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) and Fire and Emergency as part of the industrial action that was occurring during the period of the fieldwork.

3.7.1 Barriers – lengthy processes, lack of transparency and ineffective resolution of complaints

Wāhine were not always specific in their concerns about the wider Fire and Emergency organisation, but it was interesting that, when asked to rate on a one to five scale their level of satisfaction in their role, several responded independently by suggesting it was necessary to divide ratings between "doing the job" and "being part of the organisation". Inevitably, "the organisation" received the lower rating:

> *It depends on the way I look at it. If I look at it coming to work and doing my job, with the crew that I work with − − five [out of five]. If I look at it from an organisational, dysfunctional side of it, probably like a two [out of five].*

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

This section reviews four re-occurring criticisms wāhine made of the wider organisation.

Organisational processes experienced as inefficient, such as the appointments process, could be de-motivating for wāhine

When describing the organisation, the term "dysfunctional" came up several times. Usually this related to the frustration of wāhine feeling they were not listened to, "sort of forgotten about" and how it was "like hitting your head against a brick wall" if and when they tried to get things done (for example, getting changes to uniforms and other gear; see section 3.6.1).

There were also examples of general inefficiencies that wāhine felt unnecessarily increased their workload. This arose mostly amongst those in black watch / manager roles:

> Paperwork office work that was probably more than what I expected, and a lot of systems and things aren't really in place. And a lot of that I don't know enough about and don't feel confident doing it … when you don't feel like you're doing them that well and they're not that efficient or anything like that yet, that can be a bit hard and frustrating. − − And there is a bit of a disconnect between all the people rolling this out throughout the country and me and everyone are sort of trying to do the same thing, but we're all doing it individually. When if they, you know, put us together in a room and every now and again and we got to share our ideas and talk about stuff and do things like that, it would I think it would make a big difference.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

Appointment processes

The organisation's appointment processes were described by some wāhine as inefficient and "a barrier". Complaints included processes that were unnecessarily drawn out, low in transparency and, in cases where applications were unsuccessful, devoid of constructive feedback or support on how best to move forward. The combined effect was felt to be de-motivating of participation in the process. While such concerns were aired by both career and volunteer wāhine, they likely apply equally for tāne.

Several wāhine described direct impacts of these appointment process inefficiencies and their desire to pursue further career progression. A career wāhine pointed to the de-motivational impact on her (and others like her), after her own negative experience of applying for a developmental opportunity:

> "Everything is such a process in this organisation, and I think because everything is such a process people miss out, and perhaps even the organisation misses out. Like someone who would be really, really good at something just goes, "Oh, God, I've got to go through all this crap". It's not easy to get into the roles that you want to get into, so I think the organisation really misses out.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

The quote below also relates specifically to an overly lengthy nature of appointment processes acting as a barrier:

Okay, so you put in an application and then people review the application and then there are interviews and so you go through the interview process, and then they go, "Okay, well, you're the tenth person in line to be [black watch role]. So you just need to sit here and wait until a spot comes up on a course and a need comes up for you within the organisation." So it could be a 12-month process to get to where you want to get to, or sometimes even longer because there might not be a demand for that role. So I think people get a bit frustrated in that process. I think you've got to be mentally prepared going into it to know it's going to be a slog to get to where you want to go.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

For at least one wahine, support to help her cope with "knock backs" would have been helpful; the lack of any such support meant she was now ambivalent over trying to progress:

> I think the knocks that you get just really contribute to whether you go on within the organisation – – that's pretty much killed the [next rank up] thing for me because I'm just like, "I don't know whether I can be bothered going through all that bullshit again". Being told, "Oh, you're not good enough, or you're not arduous enough". You do all this work for someone to turn around and say something stupid – – and I don't know if I want to go through that again.

A lack of feedback fostered a sense that the process was not transparent, generating suspicions around fairness, whether the best person for the position had in fact been appointed.

> "I think we want to be really transparent about how we recruit to people that we're recruiting; that you – – regardless of who you are, there is – – this is the job, this is what is expected of you to be able to do and being really clear with that. Otherwise, I think we set people up for failure.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

A lack of support with "knock backs" was further described as a "missed opportunity" for managers to help wāhine understand areas they should work on in order to increase their future chances:

> … *So the knock-back from not getting to where you want to go sometimes hits people really hard. So instead of saying, "oh, no, you didn't make the top five " or whatever, saying, "Yeah, you didn't make the top five but here's this option we want you to take up on and do this for six months. … or "Hey, how about we offer you this course, or you do this?" … it's going to be better for your personal development, and "we want you to re-apply for the next round", instead of just being like, "No, you're shit, you're not getting in."*
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

Finally, at least three wāhine identified a lack of clarity around role requirements for some vacancies. Insufficient job descriptions details had led them to conclude they lacked the relevant experience to apply. In each case they were encouraged to apply, and were successful; but without this encouragement they each would have missed the opportunity to progress.

Wāhine were frustrated at the organisation's inability to deliver positive change for them

Several wāhine were frustrated by the slow progress in improving working conditions for wāhine firefighters. As noted in the Clarke (2022) review, "actions don't equate to outcomes" and whilst important guidelines, codes and policies had been developed, systems to support implementation of guidelines were not always there. For example, the small Women's Development Team developed the Pregnancy and Operational Firefighting Policy of 2019, but the programme of work required input from groups across the organisation, as it involved various systems. As one wahine explained, expecting a small stand-alone team to effectively develop and implement this type of work was unrealistic.

> *[so they say] …women's development can solve that. And this is like organizational problems, right … [it involves] payroll, HR, health and safety.*

It was suggested that the organisation's management continually underestimate the scale of problems. A more integrated way of working across the entire organisation was felt to be needed, in order to achieve meaningful change for wāhine:

> "
>
> I think in this organization, we kind of go, "we've got the [Women's Development Team]. So the women's network will solve that." It's like, they expect them to do it. …. So for start they [the organisation] don't understand the scale of the challenges that women face and the history of discrimination. … People [across the organisation] don't understand that they are part of the problem? and so they need to step up and be part of the change.
>
> **BLACK WATCH / MANAGER**

Other examples of slow progress in achieving change included incomplete amalgamation of rural and urban brigades (evidenced by, for example, rural brigades still having a separate training process and leaders still referred to as 'rural controllers' rather than chiefs); the slow delivery of the organisational re-structure and associated appointment processes; and, perhaps of most relevance to the current study, the slow progress in achieving positive culture change:

"
Just get the old boys out. It's exhausting. It's exhausting. I know change takes time, but I've been here for 13 years and it's still dealing with some of the same comments and the same attitudes. …[progress] it's a bit glacial at the moment.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Whilst not an overly strong theme, several wāhine also talked of the ineffectiveness of the organisation's rollout of many initiatives (e.g., Code of Behaviour). Some wāhine referred to the tendency for the organisation to resort to "quick fixes" and "soft roll-outs" that, in their view, were largely ineffective. For example, in relation to the roll out of the Code of Behaviour, a volunteer firefighter estimated only 20% of the "shop floor" had even heard of it. This was supported by an observation made by a career firefighter:

> There was no real structure around how it [Code of Behaviour] would be rolled out. So they're made up some lovely videos and some lovely material. And then they're just pushed it out to the regions and said "here you go, you do with it what you will" and many teams and many brigades and in many areas it would have just been put on a shelf. There are volunteers, especially, in the organization that have never heard of it, never heard of the values, you know, and all the other stuff that was wrapped around it.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

The current options for resolving serious complaints were perceived (and experienced) as ineffective and wāhine were unlikely to use them

An effective complaints resolution process is a key component of achieving positive culture change in an organisation. In order for discrimination, bullying and harassment to be eliminated, there must be a safe, fair and effective process where those who are experiencing problematic behaviour can take their complaints, and for those responsible to be held to account. The effectiveness of such processes within Fire and Emergency has been the focus of two recent independent reviews into bullying and harassment within Fire and Emergency (Clark, 2022; Shaw, 2019).

The findings in this study largely mirrored those found by Shaw (2019) and Clark (2022), and so comments below are limited to some high-level points.

In terms of options available to wāhine, collectively they described a continuum of options they had variously used for resolving complaints about inappropriate behaviour from colleagues:

- deal with it themselves
- take concerns to their "boss" , who if needed could escalate the concern to regional management to address and if this was unsuccessful assistance from HR would be required
- seek confidential guidance and support from Women's Development
- make an informal or formal complaint to the Behavioural Conduct Office (BCO).

In terms of initiating a formal complaints process, variations exist around the country in the degree of confidence wāhine had in this being able to achieve an effective resolution. As touched on in section 3.1.1, there are a number of factors at play including differences in practices across regions and brigades, but also in the degree to which the team-based culture among firefighters supported or inhibited speaking out against a colleague or boss. In many cases it appeared that being labelled as "troublemaker" could be the death knell to one's career. As described in the quote below, making a complaint was not likely to be "career enhancing":

> ❝ Yeah, because if you stand up against behaviour like that you're seen as the person that puts your "head above the parapet" type thing, and that's always detrimental to career progression. Like if you're the one that puts your head up and calls people out, or calls managers out, or doesn't go with the grain, then it will definitely have a detrimental effect on your career.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Behaviour Conduct Office (BCO)

Wāhine who made positive comments about the BCO tended to focus on the way that having such an office conveyed that the organisation does not tolerate abusive behaviour. However, when questioned, most wāhine thought it unlikely that they would take a complaint to the BCO. This appeared mainly due to the potential negative impacts personally of making a complaint, but for others, also a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of BCO processes.

> I don't think I could recommend the BCO because of the way they treated me.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Whatever the nature of the reservation, the effect was that formal complaints were unlikely to be laid by wāhine. As one volunteer firefighter who was struggling with the culture of her brigade stated:

> …there was no good gonna come of me complaining. Like, if I complained, I always had the feeling – and I still have the feeling – if I made a complaint that I could not go back to my brigade. I might as well write the complaint and my resignation at the same time because there's no way you could be back in that brigade.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

At least three wāhine in the study had had direct involvement with the BCO, while a few others were aware of related experiences of wāhine colleagues. All reported very negative experiences and no satisfactory resolution; in fact, some felt the situation had been made worse. The issues raised by wāhine were concerning, but are not detailed here, partly due to privacy concerns, but also because the core issues have been covered in detail by Clark (2022).

A few wāhine talked of appreciating the WFENZ and/ or Women's Development as a source of confidential guidance and support. In contrast to the BCO, these groups were described as "trusted" and "safe place" to go to:

> *[Women's Development] have been really good sounding board and they've been really good conduits to some support systems that aren't necessarily in place here [local brigade]. …So I was having the issues with [a member of the brigade leadership]. I just didn't really know who I could turn to and who I could have a safe conversation with. Someone in our RWAN kind of steered me in the right direction to where I needed to go to have that conversation. … It's just nice being around likeminded people and you know 100 per cent that it's a safe place.*

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Other options for resolution

Wāhine reported that the most likely responses they would make to experiences of inappropriate behaviour would be to try and resolve the matter themselves by confronting the individual and, if that was unsuccessful, to talk to their immediate boss . Most career wāhine (although not all) spoke with confidence that their boss and/or managers would be able to deal with such issues effectively. There was a sense that, broadly speaking, professional standards and expectations within Fire and Emergency were improving, that unacceptable behaviour was increasingly being recognised as such. Consequently, there was a growing consensus that unprofessional behaviour between brigade members shouldn't be tolerated.

However, experiences for volunteers were more variable, perhaps because of weaker organisational oversight, and greater reliance of the brigade Chief for complaint resolution. Some wāhine were confident in the processes of their local brigades and the ability of the Chiefs and other seniors to respond effectively if issues were raised. However, as highlighted in section 3.3.1, idiosyncratic responses by some Chiefs were liable to make matters worse (for example where "a quiet word" with a Chief resulted in the wahine being instructed to apologise to the person who was harassing her).

In the following example, inaction by the Chief resulted in the inappropriate behaviour persist:

> " But there are definitely characters down there that should not be in the brigade, but no matter how much you say "This is inappropriate" or " This is not right" or. "This shouldn't carry on" or " This person isn't allowed to behave like this" – nothing gets done about it. And then the new people coming through encounter the same problems and they can't get help either. … And so one of the bosses that's higher-ranking than him sort of just allows him to sort of tick away and do his thing and, I guess, dictate. Whereas one of the other bosses isn't very happy about him, doesn't like him, but [still] won't do anything about him. … it's a prime example of how on the volunteer side – – how it can just brew and just become something more negative. I don't know what the answer is to it, like I've thought about it so many times.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

3.7.2 Enablers – organisational commitment to change

While a majority of wāhine expressed dissatisfaction with the rate of progress within Fire and Emergency, many also spoke of how working conditions had improved for wāhine compared to 5, 10 or 20 years ago. Wāhine recognised the efforts of the organisation in pursuing continuous improvements for wāhine.

Examples of generalising comment from wāhine that acknowledged progress within the organisation to improve the working environment for wāhine included:

> I think it has changed a fair bit – but there's definitely still plenty of room to move.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

> They've still got a hell of a long way to go … but it's definitely better, and I think the older boys' club wouldn't cope [now].

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Several wāhine attributed the positive changes observed to the increased professionalism brought about as a result of the amalgamation of firefighting services within Fire and Emergency; relatedly, some had observed that changes for the better seemed to come about because older members of the workforce felt it was time to "move on".

> [back then] …I was told to my face, "You're a woman, you don't know what you're talking about". I mean, a lot of these men have now gone which is probably a blessing, and the reason why they've gone is purely because of the transition [to] Fire and Emergency … There would be no way that they would be able to cope with what is a united front now so, I suppose, it is progressing.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

> But I think for us now, we've gotten rid of the older guys that have retired, that believe woman don't belong in the job, … they're not capable, we should be at home with kids and in the kitchen.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Most comments noting positive change for wāhine centred on an improved workplace culture, but some references were to specific improvements, many of which have been described in earlier sections of this report, but listed again here in summary form. This list reflects things specifically mentioned by wāhine; there may of course be additional factors which have influenced positive change.

Improvements appreciated by wāhine included: the accommodation of breast-feeding mothers with at NTC; the development and implementation of the Pregnancy and Operational Firefighter Policy; improved facilities (e.g., separate female showers and toilets, supply sanitary bins in stations and sanitary items); improved professional standards within brigades; the establishment of the BCO and the message this conveyed; and improvements in some equipment (e.g., smaller lighter pumps).

Longer serving wāhine were buoyed especially by the overall increase in the number of wāhine firefighters:

> *So we've come a long way from – – in that sense from, I think, when I graduated. There were 20 female career firefighters to now we have 28 [just] in Auckland in the Te Hiku region. So – – and I think we're upward of 90-odd plus part-time.*
>
> **CAREER FIREFIGHTER**

> … I mean, obviously 30 years ago when I joined it was just me, and now a third of our brigade is female …
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

The gains over the years contributing to the ultimate goal of acceptance among their peers:

> … when I go to my leaders' meetings, I'm very much accepted – – I'm not afraid to speak up and share things about my brigade with other brigades … It's very accepting now. They've still got a hell of a long way to go but it's definitely better, and I think the older boys' club wouldn't cope with that because [back then] basically a woman was told what to do, or that's how it felt. You were told what to do, you take that instruction and that's as far as it will go.
>
> **VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER**

Whilst overall progress was frustratingly slow, several wāhine spoke optimistically that, as an organisation, Fire and Emergency appeared genuinely committed to developing a diverse and inclusive workforce. This would likely be an important consideration for those wāhine intending a long career:

"

I think they've really tried to make a lot of positive changes since that Coral Shaw report came out … they talked about the values and the code of behaviour which they rolled out. At a national and regional level, I think everybody in management knows them, understands them, tries to embed their and their normal BU like.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

Several wāhine recognised that achieving change was going to take time but, while it might require patience, were confident it could happen:

> The culture has changed a whole lot, and I think it is moving in a good direction. I mean, even where I am at the moment, there's the grumpy old officers that are just bastards! … but you know the culture in general is changing as the new people come through. … I've always said you sort of gotta look at our organization as a big giant bloody cruise liner and you just have to turn the wheel and turn the wheel … and eventually it [the cruise liner will] get turning and because … a lot of the guys … they don't like change … so you just take those slow little little steps and get things moving in a different direction and they don't even realize that things have changed even though they're have!

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

" But I mean the reason I stay in the job is I am confident the organisation is trying to improve their culture, I really am.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Supporting career development and progression

This final section outlines wāhine firefighter's views on what they would like to see, or to see more of, to support women's career development and progression. This addresses the question framed by one of the interviewed stakeholders: "*what could have got you over the roadblocks, what would have made a difference?*".

As is by now very obvious, the experiences of wāhine firefighters varies hugely, highlighted by the extent to which various factors were experienced by some as barriers, but as enablers for others. Naturally, this variability of experience influenced what or how wāhine would like to see things change. As such, suggested actions should be viewed as a range of possible responses that would need to be delivered in a flexible manner to meet individual needs.

Included in this section are: (1) the types of support that would facilitate the career development and progression of wāhine (e.g., formal career planning); and at the end of the section (2) the views of wāhine on how best to implement these support activities (i.e., the overall approach to delivery). Wāhine interviewed repeatedly expressed a preference for not being treated differently, and that any new initiatives and supports should to be integrated as organisation-wide approaches, as opposed to initiatives focused on wāhine alone. Such initiatives should also emphasise inclusion and respect of all. It is noted that, in many cases, suggestions from wāhine match work that is either already planned or in progress by Fire and Emergency.

The previous sections have presented in detail the barriers and enablers to career development and progression experienced by wāhine. This section moves beyond what was experienced to wāhine views on how things could be improved. The content of this section largely mirrors the material already covered (i.e., actions needed either to reduce barriers or enhance enablers). To avoid becoming overly repetitive, this section employs fewer quotes from wāhine to illustrate points made.

4.1 Types of support

In discussing actions that would support career progression, wāhine often referred to actions that would also improve retention. As noted under project focus and research aims (section 1.2), while the focus of this study is to better understand how to support wāhine firefighter's career development and progression, factors that influence the retention of wāhine firefighters are integral considerations.

In response to this overlap between objectives (career progression and retention) the types of support actions identified have been organised using the following framework: (i) those aimed primarily at career development and progression (e.g., making training more attractive); (ii) those aimed primarily at retention (e.g., uniforms and resolutions of complaints); and (iii) those impacting both equally (e.g., a supportive inclusive culture). These are presented below in table 4.1 as an introduction to the various support options identified by wāhine.

The order in which support actions are outlined in this section follows the list in figure 4.1, with those more directly related to career development and progression presented first, while those important to wāhine but relating more to retention appearing later. This ordering is not intended as a prioritisation of support actions.

Table 4.1. Suggested support activities and their primary focus

Support action	Primary focus	Relative timeframes to implement	Importance to wāhine
Structured career planning advice	Career progression	Short	Medium/High
Programmes to develop future leaders	Career progression	Medium	Medium/High
Accessing developmental opportunities	Career progression	Short	Medium/High
Making learning more attractive	Career progression	Short	High
Supportive and inclusive workplace environments	Career progression & retention	Long term	High
Develop effective leaders	Career progression & retention	Long term	High
Ensure access to wāhine networks and mentors	Career progression & retention	Medium	Medium
More flexible working and support with childcare	Career progression & retention	Medium	Medium
Address unconscious bias and structural barriers	Retention	Long term	Medium/High
Effective resolution of complaints	Retention	Medium	Medium/High
Ergonomically suitable clothing and gear	Retention	Short/Medium	High

4.1.1 Structured career planning advice

The current *ad hoc* approach to career development and progression could be enhanced significantly through the establishment of a formal programme of career planning or professional development planning (e.g., use of annual performance reviews and professional development planning). As described variously by wāhine some of the key features, and merits, of this approach are:

> …if you've got the career plan, like… "What do you wanna do? Where do you want to go?" I think that will help identify the people that want to do what, … and what's the process that they need to do to get there. So what's the course progression that they need? And then also outside of courses, what other skills do people need to do a job?

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A more formalised approach would address a number of shortfalls in career planning support identified by wāhine, including facilitating:

- wāhine to identify career goals and understand the areas of development they should focus on to achieve their goals
- wāhine to better understand the steps and processes they should take to develop these areas
- wāhine to better understand the developmental opportunities including other career paths that are available to them
- wāhine to get support with "knock backs" and what they need to do to improve their changes with their next application
- managers to understand the aspirations of wāhine, and ensure they are not overlooked when vacancies arise
- the opportunity for leaders and managers to enhance confidence of wāhine, encouraging and supporting wāhine to put themselves forward for opportunities.

A career wāhine offered this view: better processes whereby everyone had the same opportunities to progress meant that "*no one gets left behind*".

4.1.2 Leadership programmes, talent management and succession planning

Closely associated with career planning was a more systematic approach to leadership development and talent management, where the organisation identifies and nurtures talented firefighters, and ensures that anticipated gaps in roles can be filled by appropriately skilled individuals. This includes the identification of potential leaders, understanding their aspirations, and ensuring they have access to the right developmental opportunities to achieve their career goals (and those of the organisation).

> …we can pretty much help people develop themselves, but in terms of saying, "Have you thought of this?" or "You'd be really suited to that", we don't really have that.

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A few longer serving career wāhine talked positively about a (apparently, discontinued) programme called the "Career Board", with at least two wāhine having been participants. Details were sketchy, but it was described as a "leadership programme", "career development" and a "progression system". It appeared career firefighters could put themselves forward to be considered for the programme. Their skills and attitudes and aspirations were then assessed before being selected for a special two-year tailored development process. This included being directed to relevant courses, attending special training courses, learning about the organisation, and the option of being assigned a mentor.

The value of formal mentoring programmes and/or a sponsorship system were seen as key components of such a broader programme, or a programme in their own right, and were commonly suggested by wāhine:

> " ... mentors, having someone in a position that you want to go for and or get some understanding on, and having someone mentoring you into it, or sits down and has that career pathway conversation on, "This is what I did to get where I am and this is what you are missing and what you might wanna do or how you wanna educate yourself?

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Key aspects of a formal mentoring/sponsorship programme were the identification and matching of the aspirations of wāhine with the developmental opportunities they needed to progress. This could include filling roles when people are on leave, or shadowing people in different roles. For example:

> …it would be good to see. …I guess something like a sponsor system. … we [find out] what's [this person's] view of life. Where do you want to be in 10 years' time? or What do you wanna be? I don't know, maybe its Deputy Chief Executive or something. So oh well, how are we getting [this person] to Deputy Chief Executive, they'll have a sponsor. …Like someone that sits in at the ELT table that [checks] when can [this person] not be here, but [otherwise] sitting side by side with someone at the meeting because….she wants to be a Deputy Chief Executive, but how do you learn to be a Deputy Chief Executive? It's not without sort of having a taste.

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These processes or programmes would ensure wāhine have access to the right developmental opportunities, but also enable managers to have in mind all potential candidates to support succession planning.

> *I think if the Regional Managers are aware of, you know what's the list of people that are aspiring to be in these roles. …there needs to be that voice at the table that says. Oh, hang on, I'll just pull this list out of my back pocket, and I've got these people… can we not put them in these roles to shadow or step in if someone's going on two weeks leave.*

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Support was generally lacking for a dedicated leadership programmes for wāhine

Wāhine were generally against the idea of receiving special treatment (see section 4.2) such as a dedicated leadership programme for wāhine. The concern was that an overtly gender-based approach would result in accusations of "tokenism" and stigmatising that was then difficult to shift i.e., "you only got that job because you are woman".

However, it is also important to recognise that, while aspects of the workplace culture remain unsupportive of wāhine, even under improved conditions some wāhine might be reluctant to "put their hand up" for opportunities, and so miss out. This means leaders and managers may need to apply more subtle, but proactive levels of support to ensure wāhine can participate equally, as the following quote recommends:

> *…I think the problem with that, is that woman quite often won't go on courses till they're super-duper ready to go. You know, like if you're a woman, you go "I won't do that course. Cause I don't wanna fail, but I wanna do really well. So I'll make sure that I'm really ready before I go and get the confidence and then go and do it." Whereas really, sometimes they need a bit of a shove or someone saying "I'm putting you on this course. It's gonna be outside your comfort zone". So you know, like sort of forcing the conversation. So I think, yeah, I think in our organization there's a lack of support for woman and support for growing our people.*

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4.1.3 Access to developmental opportunities

This section briefly lists some of the developmental opportunities wāhine indicated they would like greater access to. These included:

- having access to "sideways" developmental opportunities (see 3.4.2); secondments into other roles, deployment opportunities, project work, local representative roles

- funding and support to pursue development outside what is offered through Fire and Emergency (e.g., formal educational qualifications for trainers – one wahine funding this herself and completed it in her own time)

- access to courses to develop "soft skills" in addition to well catered "technical skills"; suggestions included courses on how to do peer support; to develop instruction/teaching skills; leadership development from early in their career; and conflict resolution and communications skills

- greater opportunity for wāhine rural volunteer firefighters to develop leadership skills. One wahine suggested this could be achieved by increasing the current limit on 5 crew leader positions in any brigade; she explained there were few developmental opportunities in rural volunteer brigades, and wāhine (and other members of the brigade), would have more opportunities to develop their skills if there were more positions of responsibility available.

4.1.4 Making learning and development opportunities more attractive

Adapting developmental opportunities so as to be more appealing to wāhine would encourage more wāhine to progress. This applies to the training and qualifications courses offered at NTC, but also on-going training within brigades. A more appealing training experience would enable more positive associations with training to develop, in contrast to the adverse associations described by several wāhine (e.g., intimidation, humiliation, isolation, the fear of making mistakes, giving them "a knot in their stomachs" and "course PTSD").

Wāhine had a number of suggestions on how training at NTC could be made more appealing including:

- ensuring wāhine had the option of attending courses with at least one other wāhine

- more female trainers to act as role models, but also to demonstrate different ways of applying techniques that are applicable to wāhine; more female instructors in leadership courses too (e.g., Volunteer Executive Officer course)

- more flexibility in styles of instruction to suit wāhine (and adult learners in general). This included less "screaming and yelling" and more explaining why things need doing in a certain manner, and suitable feedback on correcting mistakes. One wahine suggested the style of instruction should be adapted to be appropriate for different settings:

…it's getting that balance … It's not "Get up, shut that door" in the classroom. It's "Hey, could you close that door, please?" But it is "Hey, get that hydrant set" [with a sense of urgency] on the incident ground, as that is the way it has to be … with the expectation that if we need something done smartly, then it should be done.

- greater use of distance learning where possible to reduce the amount of time away from home; as one wahine put it "On-line learning? Universities do it easily enough. Why can't we?"; relatedly, more options and support for childcare whilst attending.

Other suggestions to encourage on-going skill development and progression centred around creating a generally more supportive environment. This was applicable to all training opportunities including brigade-based training. As one career wāhine described, what was needed was:

" Being able to "play in a safe spot" … more opportunity for females to play and not be judged right? So I feel like everybody's always been watching me, still does on the fire ground.

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Suggestions on how to achieve a more supportive environment are covered in the next section, but specifically in terms of training, a couple of ideas were:

• training opportunities tailored to wāhine identified areas of need, that provided a supportive environment to practice skills and build confidence without feeling embarrassed. Particularly practical training sessions (e.g., courses or modules on using pumps, driving). There were mixed views whether these should be wāhine only or open to all

• brigade leaders to foster a more supportive and "patient" culture towards training within brigades, allowing wāhine to feel comfortable to speak out, encouragement to ask for training sessions to develop specific skills. Some wāhine felt leaders or other brigade members would just "take over" if they were struggling to complete a task, and several explained they found it difficult to ask for additional training:

" We would be cutting people out of the car [during a training session]. He would take the tools off me and go. No, that's not how you do it. And then start doing it himself and. And so that also kind of hampers my development in that practical sense, because I really would have needed someone a lot more patient, somebody who was prepared to show me how to do it and then let me kind of do it myself and practice.

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• trainers should focus on providing constructive feedback, positive and well as negative, and to celebrating successes.

4.1.5 Supportive and inclusive workplace environment at all levels, in all places

Providing a supportive and inclusive workplace is essential to maximise the retention of wāhine firefighters but also to enable them to take up opportunities, to develop the skills and confidence needed to progress into leadership roles.

> …you have to be able to step up into a place of safety, otherwise you don't survive.

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The importance of this is clearly recognised in Fire and Emergency's dedicated programme of work known as Positive Workplace Culture. Findings from the current study strongly reinforce the need for this initiative (see 3.2.1). It is beyond the scope of this project to delve deeply into how to achieve a more supportive and inclusive culture, but below are some high-level areas of focus that emerged specifically from interviews with wāhine:

- **leadership** – improving the quality of leadership, ensuring those in these positions have good people management skills, including conflict resolution, not just operational experience (see next section 4.1.6)

- **address more directly the problem of poorly performing Chiefs** – where volunteer Chiefs are performing poorly, performance management should be instituted, and subsequent response properly monitored; further, with those who fail to respond they should be held to account

- **recruit for inclusivity** – for volunteers, consider strategies for recruiting the right people into the brigade (e.g., use probation periods, make up of recruitment panels to include outside voices); a suggestion from wāhine was use of "no confidence votes" as a strategy to ensure unsuitable members can be weeded out (granted such a mechanism carries risks of misuse)

- **reinforce the modern firefighting role** – where call-outs to medical emergencies, and engaging with diverse communities around risk reduction, has become a more a substantial part of role. In this way the value is underlined for brigades of having a diverse team (that includes wāhine) , one where a wider range of skills and attributes are available in its responses

- **building a critical mass** – continue to increase number of wāhine firefighters recruited into brigades, as well as into leadership roles, in order to build the critical mass that supports continuing culture change. The value of having wāhine in a crew was observed by a career wahine:

The way in which the conversations would go around the station when I was there and I was on the trucks … I could steer stuff and the way I could get people thinking outside the box and just ensuring that we were all together and people would say stupid stuff and I'll be like, "no … no". But do it in a fun way.

- **targeted interventions to confront and deal with inappropriate behaviour of poorly performing brigades** – often it was just a few members of a brigade creating persistent problems for wāhine firefighters. These brigades and the disruptive individuals were often known to regional management. It appears more effective targeted strategies are needed to hold these individuals to account, thereby enabling other members of these brigades to establish a more inclusive culture

- **provide a range of effective options to resolve issues** – ensure there is a continuum of effective options for wāhine to select from for the occasions where they need to resolve issues that arise (see also 4.1.10)

- **eliminate unconscious bias and remove structural barriers** – for example ensure the use of 'firefighter' not 'fireman' (see also 4.1.9)

- **recognise culture change takes time** – progress will likely be slow and may require small steps to be taken with changes integrated slowly, rather than attempting to achieve big changes quickly. In the interim, this will require wāhine to be better supported
- **brigade culture is complex** – understand the complexity of a brigade culture, and that "gender issues" may be more a symptom of other underlying issues that need to be addressed:

Quite often it's not a gender thing. It's more around just brigade politics and personalities and how people are dealing with things.

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Achieving a more inclusive culture requires the leadership and the shopfloor to work together and present a unified front

A goal of this study was to highlight experiences and voices of wāhine, and below is an insight from one career wahine on how to achieve a more inclusive culture, through "attacking [it] at all levels":

…so [culture change] can come from your peers on the floor, the ones beside you, but then also it can come from above as well … if you've got all this [support] on the ground, then you're likely to bring everybody with you. Whereas if it's just coming from the top, you've still got this culture going on around you. ….But it has to be safe because even your peers on the floor. If they're not in the safe environment, then they call it out, and then they're the ones that end up getting vindicated as well. Whereas if it comes initially from the top as well as the ground beside you, then it's probably got more impact.

This wāhine, based on her experience, felt that the bulk of brigade members were supportive of wāhine, but nevertheless found it difficult to speak out against discriminatory treatment of wāhine due to the backlash they might face from what was typically "a few disruptors". It was important for the leaders to support the "shop floor" in order for them to enact change through being "upstanders".

4.1.6 Develop and recruit effective and inclusive leaders

Well skilled, inclusive leaders play a key role in facilitating culture change, enabling and supporting wāhine in their brigades to develop and progress into the roles they valued. This was a strong theme to emerge from the interviews. The importance of effective leadership has been well recognised for many years within fire and emergency services; and developing positive and effective leaders at all levels of the organisation, is another dedicated programme of work underway within Fire and Emergency (the Leadership Development Framework).

Largely in support of this programme of work, views raised by wāhine during interviews were often on how to develop and apply effective leadership:

- **earlier and on-going opportunities to develop leadership skills** – leadership learning experiences should occur throughout firefighters' careers, which is likely to be more effective than when introduced only later (there is research support for this idea; see for example McComas, 2020). Firefighters typically spend 10 years "on the truck" before stepping into leadership roles, and over that extended period they are "taught is the opposite of what we want them to be as leaders" (i.e., following instructions vs thinking for themselves, how to manage and support members of their brigade):

So we're not trying to produce good leaders, we're not giving them any extra skills on personnel. You come over here [to management], or you go into a manager's role, it's all personnel … [on the trucks] it's all operational. So then those poor bastards get over here [management] and they're still operational.

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- **tāne taking the lead** – wāhine talked positively about the two male champions that sit on the National Women's Advisory Committee (NWAC) and wanted to see more tāne leaders being proactive in supporting wāhine:

> Like for example if there's a group of people around and somebody says "fireman", none of them correct it. They wait for me to correct it because I'm the female. It's like I actually need you guys to correct that stuff, you know, like, why is it always left up to the female to correct it instead of the males?

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Wāhine felt tāne leaders advocating or modelling inclusive behaviour could get more "buy in" from the tāne workforce than wāhine leaders. A recent positive example of this occurring related to the launch in November 2022 of the hygiene packs for trucks. These include sanitary items for wāhine, as well as some items applicable for tāne. These have been a little contentious (see section 3.6.1), and it was viewed positive that the launch was led by two members of the Executive Leadership Team, with a DCE tāne leading the launch

- **recognising management skills developed in non-firefighting roles** – particularly in relation to volunteer leaders, some wāhine argued for greater recognition of skills wāhine developed in their previous/alterative employment. One Chief felt strongly that while her operational skills developed as a volunteer firefighter were important, it was her experience as a manager in her "day job" that helped her the most in being a competent Chief.

4.1.7 Access to wāhine networks and mentors

Research has consistently highlighted the importance of networking and mentoring as enablers of career progression for wāhine in male-dominated occupations (see Dyer et al, 2021). These structures can help wāhine to navigate challenging environments, and be a source of advice, guidance and support. In relation to networks specifically, they can provide a platform to advance issues important to wāhine, provide developmental opportunities, and support wāhine feeling isolated (see 3.2.2). Wāhine views and experiences of WFENZ were complex, with participation sometimes discouraged (see section 3.2.2). It appeared what was most needed was ways to support better access to WFENZ, with the following suggestions raised:

- provide more support to allow wāhine to engage with and contribute to the activities of the network. Currently, those who are regional representatives for the network (RWAN) are required to volunteer their time.[48] Fulfilling the expectations and demands of this role was felt to be difficult for some wāhine, with the suggestion that this important work should be better supported by Fire and Emergency (e.g., career wāhine not required to complete work out of hours, and for volunteers to have their time renumerated)

- more visibility, updates and awareness of WFENZ and the work of Women's Development team at NHQ

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48 Note WFENZ is a voluntary network that is supported by the Women's Development Team. The Women's Development Team consists of a team of three paid/seconded positions.

"…like you're constantly seeing emails – – if you look at the portal – – there's constant updates from [CE] Kerry Gregory and [DCE] Russell Wood, constant almost on the daily. But I don't see anything like that for WFENZ. Why aren't they giving out national notices daily? … Why is it that we're not seeing that same degree of visibility across the organization from our women's development team, I think we should be.

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- understand and address negative views about participating in WFENZ – several wāhine spoke of WFENZ repeatedly being "dissed" usually by tāne in some areas, which created a significant barrier to wāhine participation (as above, "you're going to your witches conference again"). While it is unclear how this might be achieved, efforts in that direction are likely part of efforts towards the 'positive workplace culture' goal.

4.1.8 Flexible working and support with childcare

Continuing to progress efforts towards supporting wāhine with childcare responsibilities would benefit both retention and career progression for wāhine with children. Flexible working arrangements currently available for wāhine in black watch / manager roles are highly valued, as are efforts to support childcare of wāhine attending training courses. Areas for further progress identified by wāhine included:

- explore options for job and shift sharing to enable wāhine (and other parents) to work day-shifts only. This arrangement apparently occurs in some overseas jurisdictions, albeit ones with larger workforces

- consider ways in which childcare arrangements for career wāhine on shift work can be made more suitable or affordable. One suggestion was for Fire and Emergency to partner with other emergency services with similar shift work challenges to create a "hub for childcare". This hub could tailor arrangements to suit shift work (e.g., accommodate longer hours but with fewer days, that changed each week)

- more family friendly training courses – consider ways training courses could be designed to reduce time away from home (e.g., more online learning, shorter courses, locally run courses)

- support innovative local childcare solutions in use by e.g., volunteer brigade creche/nannies), which may be able to be expanded.

4.1.9 Address unconscious bias and structural barriers

An area of focus wāhine indicated could improve their workplace experience and increase opportunities for career progression, was to work towards overcoming unconscious gender bias, and removing structural barriers. Wilson and Scanlen (2016) refer to these as 'non-visible' elements of organisation culture, which they suggest are the root causes of many barriers to increasing diversity within a workforce.

There are likely many relevant opportunities within Fire and Emergency where improvements could be made (see for example Dyer et al., 2021; MacDonald, 2019; Wilson & Scanlen, 2016), however, the two re-occurring themes identified by wāhine in this study were as follows:

- **confronting gender bias in everyday discourse** – the use of male pronouns to describe firefighters is common, with the prime example being the use of the term "fireman/firemen" instead of "firefighter/ firefighters". The widespread acceptance of the term "fireman" was illustrated in an example provided by a black watch wāhine. She described a "favourite moment" of hers that occurred during a school visit. As she walked into the classroom:

> …these two gorgeous little girls were like 'look it's a fireman lady!'

Another bugbear was the predominant use of male pronouns rather than gender neutral ones, in relation to senior leadership positions. For example when a group are talking generically about an *incident controller* they would refer to the actions *he* should take, rather than what *they* should take). Use of male pronouns occurred at times even when the specific leader being referred to was female.

Some wāhine were more frustrated by this problem than others, although most accepted that its occurrence was mostly unintentional. For this reason, it was suggested that what was needed was more educational and awareness training, and also the importance of the correct modelling of this "from the top".

- **removal of barriers in the recruitment and appointment processes** – the recruitment process, was frequently raised as an example of a structural barrier working against wāhine. Wāhine were adamant they wanted to be assessed using the same criteria as the tāne "as we're doing the same job", but felt that the assessment process didn't always reflect the actual skill set required to carry out the role. More than one (now successful senior wāhine firefighter) explained how they had nearly been "tipped out" as a result of irrelevant assessments, the most frequent example being the testing of upper body strength through the lifting of a wooden ladder. Given that ladders are now much lighter, being made of aluminium, this particular test was obsolete, but potentially disadvantageous. Wāhine in this study wanted a review of assessment processes to ensure they accurately reflected the skillset required for a modern firefighter, regardless of their gender.

The other structural barrier raised by some wāhine related to the appointment process, with the key concern being around predominantly tāne leaders appearing to prefer recruitment of firefighters who "looked like them", i.e., tāne with similar skills and attributes. It was suggested greater transparency should be built into appointment processes to reduce this tendency, and also to require inclusion of wāhine in interview panels. This extra transparency would also work against alleged tokenism faced by wāhine, i.e.,, that "she only got it because she's a woman".

4.1.10 Effective resolution of complaints

The effective resolution of complaints is a particularly important area of work to support culture change. This is another large area of work for Fire and Emergency that is currently under review following recommendations from the recent Public Services Commission Review into workplace culture and the handling of complaints of bullying and harassment (Clark, 2022). This study largely supports the findings and recommendations of the review, in particular the need for an independent complaints resolutions process that wāhine can trust, and one that is able to resolve complaints in a timely and fair manner.[49]

While this work progresses, there are perhaps just two additional points of relevance to emerge from wāhine:

- **the valuable role of WFENZ and the Women's Development Team** – these groups were viewed by wāhine as a safe place to go for confidential advice and support, and also to be able to connect with other wāhine who were struggling with similar issues

- **variable response options led by wāhine** – ensuring wāhine have access to a range of complaint resolution processes is important. The 'complex landscape' outlined in section 3.1 means the most appropriate responses for each wahine is likely to vary. An important principle common across all complaint resolution systems is that the individual feels supported, is made aware of the options available to them, and giving assurance that they will have control over decisions that impact them and what happens to information they have disclosed.[50] For example, they may just want advice and support, or to make a confidential informal report with no further action taken, or make a formal complaint to the appropriate body for full investigation and resolution.

4.1.11 Ergonomically suitable clothing and equipment

Wāhine needed clothing and equipment that fits them to be able to do carry out their work safely and effectively, and to feel a valued part of the organisation. Wāhine were frustrated over the lack of progress on this important issue, which carries risks for long-term retention. What wāhine wanted was:

- **for equipment and safety gear to be ergonomically designed for wāhine** – and not be based on a 'one-shape-fits-all' design, with the only choice being what size to select. Relatedly, it was felt important that wāhine were involved in the decision-making around equipment procurement:

> …they're trying to get more women onto those committees, like, the uniform ones. And so there's a new uniform procurement about to go out, just for station wear and so they're trying to make sure that there's some women in there to represent [us]. Because … apparently they've bought out some thermals or something, unisex thermals, and one of the girls said, like, "Do they realise most of the guys don't have boobs, so how do unisex tops fit both of us?" You know, it will be quite baggy on the chest for the boys or too tight for girls.

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- **increase awareness and access to solutions** – some wāhine were aware of options currently available to remedy poorly fitting gear including funding to get items individually tailored; ordering specially fitted boots; sourcing jacket and pants (rather than overalls). However, knowledge of (and access to) these options need to be addressed.

> … like normally when you go clothes shopping you go "that doesn't fit me. I'll try a different designer, a different style." There's not that option but there is option for our females to get things tailored if they need to, so there is that facility, but I don't think that is well known. I think people just suck it up.

BLACK WATCH / MANAGER

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49 One of the recommendations being that 'The investigation and determination of conduct complaints against FENZ personnel should be moved to a new body, external to FENZ for a period of at least five years.'

50 For example, a wahine might just want advice and support to cope with the situation, or to be able to make a confidential informal report in order to increase awareness of problems arising, or make a formal complaint to the appropriate body for full investigation and resolution.

4.2 Overall approach to delivery of support actions – inclusion and respect

Commonly promoted strategies to increase the representation of wāhine within a male-dominated workforces including those in leadership positions, are the use of gender-based targets (e.g., wāhine should make up X% of all firefighters and/or hold X% of leadership positions) and/or quotas (X% of recruits or job candidates must be wāhine). The use of lateral promotion is another strategy aimed at increasing the rate of progress in achieving gender-balance in leadership roles. The current practice in Fire and Emergency is for regional management appointments to be limited to internal candidates who have spent the requisite duration (around 10 years) progressing through the ranks (who at the moment are predominantly tāne). Lateral promotion would enable individuals (including wāhine) to be recruited into these management positions based on external relevant career experience.

There are mixed views in the literature on the impact of quotas and gender-based targets. Dyer et al. (2021) cites research that found fire services with the highest rates of representation of wāhine firefighters had used quotas and targets. However, other researchers (MacDonald, 2019; Parkinson et al., 2019) raise concerns over their potential for negative consequences (e.g., scepticism over capability of wāhine appointed). The aim of this study did not include addressing this debate but does include presenting the views on this topic among wāhine firefighters. Overall, the majority (if not all) of wāhine interviewed were strongly against the use of gender-based quotas and targets. There was some support for the idea of lateral promotion however, based largely on the need to speed up progress and recognising the level of personnel skills needed to carry out the role (see sections 3.4.2 and 4.1.2).

One of the more consistent messages from wāhine in this study was that they did not want special treatment, or to be singled out in any way because they were wāhine.

> I don't want to set myself apart because, number one, I'm a firefighter and, number two, I'm a woman. I don't want to say, number one, I'm a woman firefighter because that sort of seems a bit defeating …

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

They felt strongly that recruitment and appointments should be based on assessments of skill and merit and not gender, with appointment going to the "best person for the job". This was because they themselves wanted the most capable individuals to be part of their crew or to be their leaders. They also anticipated negative repercussions from a targeted approach:

> *Quotas are fraught… you've got that job because you are a woman…you get tarred with a brush that you can't get rid of.*

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

> " I know the Police have made things easier for women and stuff like that, but I think we've all got to do the same jobs and we've all got to be able to pass the same test and they shouldn't make it any easier, because I don't want to go into a fire with someone who's had an easier test than me and maybe hasn't got the strength to get somebody out of a building. I think we all need to – – it doesn't matter if – – your size or sex, you need to be able to do the same job, so I don't think they should make it easier.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

Some wāhine were also concerned that targets could make things worse:

> *This whole target of having 50% male, 50% woman, I don't think it's achievable and I don't actually think it's reasonable….unless you've actually got the best person for the job, you're not doing anybody any favours, so you potentially could put a female into a job who's not really quite up to it. You do her more harm potentially, and more harm for the crew by having somebody in there who's not the best person for the job.*

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

However, another important rationale against "special treatment" was because wāhine wanted to "feel good" about their career progression, to know that any advancement was in recognition of their true abilities.

> " …it doesn't feel good being overlooked, but it doesn't feel good catching the updraft.

CAREER FIREFIGHTER

This last quote reflects the dominant position of wāhine in this study, that while they did not want special treatment, they were supportive of equitable practices where they were not disadvantaged because of their gender. Wāhine wanted to see the identification and removal of gender bias, structural barriers and assessments not reflective of the modern firefighting role (as highlighted in section 4.1.9); they also wanted gender-based responsiveness such as instruction techniques at training courses (see 4.1.4) and uniforms, protective gear and equipment that was designed for wāhine (see 4.1.11).

Wāhine supported a focus on inclusion and respect

The views of the wāhine in this study align with that found in other researcher (Utumapu & Utumapu, 2016; Young et al., 2018) which points to a strategy where an effectively functioning diverse workforce is supported by inclusion and respect.

For wāhine to advance their careers, they need to be able to "step up to a place of safety". This requires a workplace environment that is inclusive and respectful of all individuals. The sentiments at play are captured well in a quote by Young et al., (2018) in their study on building effective diversity and inclusion in emergency management organisations. They suggest:

Doing diversity without inclusion is like jumping out of [the] plane without a parachute.

YOUNG ET AL., 2018, P.3

Prioritising diversity was found to be polarising, generating confusion, fear and resistance, and to be unstainable without the inclusive culture that might support it. They conclude that achieving effective diversity should be viewed as a long-term proposition that rests on the creation first of an inclusive culture, one built on shared understandings of desired outcomes and mutual benefits.

Key aspects of an overarching inclusive approach endorsed by wāhine in this study that would support their retention and career progression, included:

- **initiatives that achieve targeted goals for wāhine but delivered as organisation-wide projects** – wāhine receive benefits they need, but in a manner that does not "set them apart". Most, if not all, of the support activities identified by wāhine could benefit both wāhine and tāne firefighters, and so could be delivered as an organisation-wide project without prioritising one gender. For example a structured career planning programme could be vital to support and develop more wāhine leaders but would be beneficial for all firefighters

- **expert advice from wāhine needs to be integrated throughout the organisation** – for Fire and Emergency to deliver initiatives that are equitable and responsive to wāhine, it is essential there is greater input from wāhine firefighters.

> ## If women are not part of the decision-making, you'll end up with more 'one-size-fits all'.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

The scale of the work to be carried out, requires expert advice from wāhine (e.g., from Women's Development and/or WFENZ) to be integrated across all organisation processes and work programmes. The extent and importance of this role needs to be recognised and resourced appropriately, it will be difficult for a stand-alone team to achieve the changes needed

- **emphasise the building of high-performing teams** – leverage off the strong team-based culture within Fire and Emergency and highlight the value of teams that draw on a range of skills and attributes. Key messaging is that a firefighting team is more effective if it includes individuals small enough to fit into tight spaces, fit enough to run up the hill with a hose, can engage across communities around risk reduction, and has individuals who can respond empathetically at serious motor vehicle crashes where someone may have lost a loved one. This approach aligns with that advocated by Australasian Champions of Change Fire and Emergency Group in their 2020 report "*Gender-balance in fire and emergency: Going beyond it's the right thing to do*". The report presents a range of empirical evidence to demonstrate how fire and emergency organisations are missing out on potential performance gains that come with achieving gender equality and workforce diversity. MacDonald (2019) suggests that focusing on the value of a diverse team that reflects the modern firefighting role, is more useful than the commonly used argument of 'needing a team that reflects the community'.

Conclusion

This study is a 'first' for Fire and Emergency in gathering and analysing the experiences of wāhine firefighters in relation to their career progression and development. Up to this point, those with an interest in this important domain have had to rely on overseas studies for insights into the realities faced by wāhine 'on the frontline', but with considerable uncertainty as to the relevance of such findings to Aotearoa New Zealand. It is hoped that the current report will fill this gap in knowledge and enable the wāhine voice to be part of the organisation's evidence-based decision-making in their development of effective and appropriate responses.

It reflects well on Fire and Emergency as an organisation that there is a commitment to listening to its wāhine members, and a willingness to take these perspectives into consideration, in terms of influencing the reformulation of policy, procedures and overall strategy.

Much of what the wāhine have said will likely come as no surprise to the audience for this report. On the other hand some of the experiences described may dismay, or even shock the more hardened reader, while others may be surprisingly encouraging. As noted repeatedly through the report, it is a highly variable landscape.

In writing a conclusion to the report, it seems fitting to offer some personal reflections based on the experience of the writer. Foremost amongst these is the huge impression made through encountering so many strong, capable, tough, committed, hardworking and inspiring wāhine – all of whom appear to love their firefighting job, to revel in its challenges and excitement, enjoy the camaraderie of the team, and gain true reward from serving their communities.

These wāhine bring to the organisation huge skill, compassion, dedication and competence, which is a massive asset to the organisation, as well as to the wider public whom they are dedicated to helping. Fire and Emergency is a much stronger and more effective organisation because these wāhine are an integral part of it.

Yet many of the wāhine face daily challenges which serve to compromise, weaken or even undo their joy in the role, and their commitment to it. These range from the annoying – being referred to as a 'fireman' – through to the intolerable – tāne refusing to take orders from a more senior ranking wāhine. Happily, the challenges are not pervasive throughout the organisation: in some locations, and teams, wāhine are welcomed, accepted, encouraged, and find solidarity with fellow firefighters serving alongside them. However, there are locations, and teams, where bad behaviour, particularly from tāne colleagues, leaders, bosses and managers, is a regular source of frustration and discouragement. Further, entrenched organisational processes seem to reliably produce outcomes that are experienced by wāhine as disadvantaging, stigmatising, unjust and unfair.

Fire and Emergency has done well to recruit and retain the remarkable and talented wāhine who have sought to carve out a career for themselves within its ranks (both volunteer and career). But the evidence suggests it is seriously letting down a few, not helping a great many, and in some ways generally failing all.

This study was not designed to quantify the spread and extent of alternative experiences but, regardless of how common, behaviour encountered by some wāhine is clearly unacceptable. Negative experiences of the type described in this report not only impair career progression – and retention – of wāhine but, more concerningly, can have serious adverse consequences for the well-being of affected individuals.

There appear to be isolated locations within the organisation where inappropriate behaviour repeatedly occurs and is not being meaningfully addressed. It seems likely that the overall landscape for wāhine will not improve unless these pockets of dysfunction are confronted and put right.

The variability in experiences has also made it clear that wāhine may not need (or want) the same level or types of support; blanket approaches to delivering change are unlikely to be effective.

Data provided for the study are a reminder of the fact that wāhine remain significantly under-represented throughout Fire and Emergency, especially in leadership positions. Wāhine are largely absent from the most senior decision-making roles within the organisation. As was observed by more than one interviewee for this study, '**you can't be what you can't see**'. The low levels of representation across the agency, and lack of visibility in leadership roles, act as significant barriers to attracting more wāhine and then inspiring them to pursue advancement.

To date, relatively slow progress has occurred in shifting the numbers, status and career experience of wāhine firefighters. Four decades has elapsed between the first wāhine career firefighter being appointed, to a wahine taking up an Executive Officer role. Currently wāhine hold just four of the 71 Group Manager positions and none of the District Manager roles.

Further, there are issues which have been repeatedly raised by wāhine over the years – poorly fitting uniforms and protective gear being the most frustrating – which have largely been ignored. This further contributes to wāhine feeling frustrated and concluding that the organisation is not listening.

Slow progress undoubtedly (in part) reflects the complex landscape that underpins the work required. There are multiple, inter-related areas where change is needed. This complexity confirms that no 'silver bullet' can be utilised to achieve rapid progress in the career experiences of wāhine firefighter. Rather it will require integrated working across a broad range of areas.

It is hoped that the research exercise reported on here has been sufficiently thorough as to lift up into clear focus the important issues of concern, and which stand in the way of Fire and Emergency delivering meaningful outcomes for wāhine, and becoming the fully inclusive, supportive and diverse organisation that it aspires to be.

In formulating a strategy for change, a consistent message from wāhine in this study was that they did not want "special treatment" as wāhine. They were almost unanimous in opposing gender-based quotas, or special targets. They foresaw that introduction of measures of this type would backfire on them, resulting in accusations of "tokenism" and perceptions that any promotion was undeserved. In short, they feared that gender-based initiatives would make things harder, not better. The wāhine instead favoured initiatives being framed as organisation-wide and addressing the needs of all staff – but which would support wāhine in achieving their career goals. Examples could include more structured personal development planning framework, and a more transparent recruitment and appointment process. These are equally applicable to the tāne, but in light of prevailing conditions would almost certainly assist wāhine significantly.

Clearly, the time is right for action, for meaningful work to accelerate, enabling more wāhine firefighters to be recruited, retained and elevated into the full range of roles that they may wish to pursue.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Research Approach

The research employed a mixed methods approach to address the above research questions, incorporating use of qualitative and quantitative methods and analytical techniques. Primarily, the research endeavoured to highlight the voice and experiences of wāhine firefighters; as listed below, there were five components to the project, but the principal source of data was interviews with wāhine firefighters (see A.5 below).

A.1 Brief scan of the literature and key documents

The project started with a brief scan of key literature to ascertain the current state of knowledge regarding barriers and enablers to career progression of wāhine firefighters (see section 1.2). A review of key documents also assisted in appropriately positioning the project within Fire and Emergency's strategic context and related work programmes (see section 1.1.2).[51]

A.2 Interviews with key informants

As part of a scoping phase, interviews were carried out with nine key informants. These were all Fire and Emergency internal stakeholders and included representatives from:

- Women's Development Team (Project sponsor)
- Office of the Chief Executive
- Service Delivery
- People's branch including those involved with: volunteer sustainability; leadership development; workplace culture and change; and people and workforce capability.

These interviews assisted the development of the research design and provided insights into the current context within Fire and Emergency and existing programmes of work as relevant to development and progression of wāhine firefighters.

A.3 Content analysis of exit survey data

A secondary objective of the project was to understand factors potentially influencing the retention of wāhine firefighters. The intention was to conduct a content analysis of the organisation's exit survey data; unfortunately, due to the relatively short period of time during which exit surveys had been in use (introduced in 2017 but later suspended for an extended period for revision), insufficient data was available for use within the current analysis.

A.4 Analysis of relevant Fire and Emergency administrative data

Fire and Emergency administrative data was analysed in order to paint a picture of the current career paths of wāhine firefighters (see research question 1 in section 1.2). The goal was to profile wāhine firefighters within the organisation at the current time, while showing how that profile has changed over time; also, to compare the wāhine profile to that of the tāne within the organisation. The exercise also provided opportunity to compile potentially useful benchmark indicators for future monitoring.

There were a few challenges in retrieving this data, with different teams across Fire and Emergency all holding data of relevance (e.g., HR team, Kia Toipoto team (gender pay gap), recruitment, training and development) and differences emerged in how different parts of the organisation interpret and used the data.

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51 This task has been assisted by the initial supply of 33 documents and studies by the Fire and Emergency NZ research team (Te Ao Mārama) and the recently completed literature review by Dyer et al. (2021).

Data retrieved were broken down by gender to enable comparisons and analysed separately for volunteer and career firefighters. Key data retrieved included:

- Organisation-wide data
  - » representation of wāhine in different roles across the organisation-wide workforce (i.e., in operational firefighter roles and other non-operational roles)
- Data on volunteer vs career firefighters[52] and broken down by gender, including:
  - » demographics (age and ethnicity)
  - » length of service
  - » career progression (e.g., rank achieved and/or management roles)
  - » trend analysis of recruitments and exits.

Other data supplied included results from the recent gender pay gap analysis supplied by the Kia Toipoto Team, and the last four years data from the organisation's Peoples Survey (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Where possible this data was broken down by gender and role within the organisation. This provided insights into the views and experiences of around 2000 volunteers and over 1000 employees on topics such as organisational culture, leadership, performance development and their experiences of respect and inclusion.

This data was presented in detail in an interim report (dated 20 February 2023); key findings are reproduced in Section 2.0 of this report.

A.5 Fieldwork interviews with wāhine firefighters

The primary source of information for this project was collected through a series of interviews with 29 wāhine firefighters. This qualitative component of the study sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of wāhine firefighters, how they view their career, the factors that impact on their decisions to continue and, where applicable, progress their careers as firefighters.

Sampling framework

In agreement with the Fire and Emergency project team, the following wāhine firefighters' characteristics were targeted for selection.

- Those with **varied career paths,** including wāhine who were:
  - » volunteer and career firefighters holding leadership positions (Station Officer or equivalent and higher)
  - » wāhine firefighters on black watch[53] or those who have progressed to other non-operational roles (e.g., National Headquarters managerial positions)
  - » operational wāhine who have decided to not to progress into leadership roles (career and volunteer)
  - » recently exited firefighters.
- In addition, interviewees were to be from all five regions, and include those located in both urban and rural brigades.[54]

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52 In most cases data was presented specifically for operational firefighters and excluded other operational frontline roles or operational support roles.
53 Black watch roles are non-firefighter roles or 'off-the truck' roles but ones that require an operational firefighter background to be appointed (e.g., fire investigators, community risk management, trainers).
54 Wāhine Māori and their career experiences are a particularly important group to consider. However, they were not specifically targeted as the views and experiences of these wāhine were to be addressed in a concurrent research project commissioned by Fire and Emergency. This is one that has been designed specifically to understand the career experiences of Māori firefighters (both male and female) and is being conducted by Māori researchers using a kaupapa Māori approach.

Recruitment

Regional Leadership Teams and Regional Women's Advisory Networks (RWAN) in each of the five regions were asked to nominate wāhine from their area that met one or more of the above criteria. In total 79 nominations were provided, of which 62 matched the selection criteria (see sampling framework above). All who met the criteria were approached by the Women's Development team, who explained the intended purpose of the research and gauged interest. Of the 62, 40 agreed to participate and consented to their contact details being passed to the independent researcher (65% response rate). The final sample for inclusion was selected by the independent researcher based on achieving a good balance of the groups represented in the sampling frame (i.e., a suitable mix of roles, leadership experience, lengths of service, and experience working in natural and built environments). Of the 40 possible participants, 29 were interviewed.[55]

Recruitment of those who had exited required a different approach. Fire and Emergency identified a total of nine wāhine career firefighters who had left the organisation in the preceding three years. These wāhine were contacted through WFENZ networks to explore whether they would be willing to participate in the research. Unfortunately, this process produced just a single willing participant. It was deemed inappropriate to proceed with this individual, as doing so would likely allow identification of the person (a minimum sample of five was judged necessary, both to protect privacy and produce meaningful information).[56]

Note on industrial action

Fieldwork was planned to commence mid-July 2022 but this was disrupted by industrial action announced by the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU), starting 13 June that year. Participation in research fell within the scope of career firefighters' activities proscribed by the union. However, industrial action was paused in September for mediated negotiations, which enabled fieldwork with career firefighters to commence. Industrial action then re-commenced on the 14thOctober and continued through to the end of the scheduled fieldwork, which meant completion of fieldwork after this time was limited to non-NZPFU members only.

Approaches to conducting fieldwork

Procedures for conducting interviews adhered to standard ethical principles including confidentiality of information, informing participants of the nature and purpose of the research, and obtaining consent to participate. With participants' permission all interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The semi-structured interview schedule combined chronological 'story telling' questions (i.e., reasons for joining, experiences at training and later, on the station, and current intentions and experiences) with questions that sought to elicit women's personal experiences. Care was taken to avoid phrasing questions in ways that embedded assumptions about individual views or experiences.

Key areas of enquiry included views and experiences of:

- career and/or development aspirations
- access to and experience of training and other development opportunities
- station culture
- facilities and equipment
- managing work/life balance
- choosing different career paths
- barriers and enablers to career progression
- enjoyable aspects of being a firefighter and what could make it better.

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55 There were a few wāhine who were unavailable for interview, but the majority (n=7) were career firefighters who were unable to participate due to industrial action.
56 This individual was contacted and offered an 'informal interview' where information shared would not be included in the report, but where her views could help inform analysis.

A combination of face-to-face, video-call and phone interviews were completed, based on participant preference but also what was practically possible due to scheduling fieldwork during the industrial action. Interviews typically ranged in duration from 60-90 minutes.

Sample characteristics

Of the 29 wāhine interviewed, a good representation was achieved of differing career paths:[57]

- **just over half had a career firefighter background** – these included wāhine who had completed professional firefighting training and were operational firefighters or had since progressed into Executive Officer, Black Watch, and NHQ roles:
  - » around 30% of the sample were current career operational leaders (i.e., Senior Firefighter and above including those in Executive Officer roles)
  - » around 10% were current career firefighters but who also volunteered as firefighters in their spare time
- **just under half were current volunteer leaders** (i.e., Station Officer/Crew leader and above)
  - » around 20% of the sample were volunteer firefighters but also paid employees of Fire and Emergency, mostly in black watch roles.

The sample included wāhine from all five regions,[58] with a mix of those located in rural and urban locations. The length of service of those interviewed ranged from 4-32 years. Their age ranged from 25 to 61 years. The majority identified as New Zealand European/European/Pākehā, with one in five identifying as Māori or Māori and another ethnicity.

In terms of family characteristics, around 70% were mothers with children ranging in age from ten months through to those whose were now independent adults. The number of children ranged from one to four. A few were currently functioning as sole parents.

A.6 Data analysis

A general inductive approach was utilised to analyse the raw data produced from the interviews. Analysis was informed by findings from recent literature, but also shaped by research objectives. N-VIVO (a software programme that supports the analysis of qualitative material in a systematic and transparent way) was used to assist with the analysis.

Data were primarily analysed on the firefighters as a group but, where applicable, differences were highlighted that appeared related to particular characteristics (e.g., volunteer vs career, urban/rural location, career path).

Note on presentation of quotes

Quotes to illustrate key points are presented verbatim, but with minor editing to improve readability (e.g., 'umm's, 'yeah', 'you know', or repeated phrases were removed where they offered no added meaning). In light of the low number of wāhine leaders in Fire and Emergency, extra care has been taken to protect the identity of the individual quoted. For this reason unique identifiers (such as pseudonym or numeric code) are not utilised across the different sections of the report. However, in order to convey how views and experiences vary according to differing career paths, three broad descriptors have been assigned to quotes:

- **career firefighter** – wāhine who have completed the professional firefighters' training course
- **volunteer firefighter** – wāhine who hold volunteer firefighting operational roles
- **black watch / manager** – wāhine in either black watch or manager roles (regional or NHQ); note these two groups were combined as number of managers who participated is low and were at greater risk of being identified.

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57 Note: more exact numbers have not been provided to reduce likelihood of participants being identified.
58 There was a greater representation of North Island regions with these regions targeted first whilst industrial action was paused. Proportions in each region included 38% Te Hiku, 21% Nga Tai te Puku, 24% Te Ūpoko, 10% Te Ihu and 7% Te Kei.

Some wāhine belong to more than one of these groups (e.g., volunteer and black watch) or may have progressed into different roles but are talking about earlier experiences (e.g., career firefighters now in manager roles). In these cases the descriptor used for an individual may change, with the one selected of most relevance to the content of the quote. For example, a volunteer firefighter who also held a black watch role, when talking about experiences in their brigade would be described as 'volunteer firefighter'; a current manager talking about their experiences during their career firefighting training course would be denoted as 'career firefighter'.

A.7 Limitations

From a methodological perspective, two key limitations of the study are acknowledged:

- **Missing voices** – reflecting the aims of the research, interviews focused on wāhine who had progressed into senior positions, many now holding leadership ranks or senior managerial positions. The voice of these wāhine may not represent the voice of all wāhine across the organisation. As noted above, despite research efforts to include them, missing was those wāhine who, for whatever reasons, had exited the organisation. Also missing was the voice of tāne and their views and observations around wāhine firefighters and their career progression.

- **Quality of administrative data** – a number of issues were identified as to the quality and completeness of administrative data. In particular, data related to volunteers tends to be less reliable than for paid staff/career firefighters. Data for volunteers are compiled by local brigades and vary both in terms of accuracy, completeness and timeliness of delivery to NHQ. Accuracy of record keeping has reportedly improved, but caution is appropriate when interpreting historical trends and length of service data. Further, methods of data collection have changed over time, particularly with the establishment of Fire and Emergency in 2017.

Appendix B – Additional gender equality indicators

There are a number of gender equity indicators of relevance to the career progression and development of wāhine firefighters that are useful for monitoring progress. These include a collation of gender equity indicators regularly collected through the Champions of Change Fire and Emergency initiative, and gender pay gap data recently produced by Fire and Emergency.

Champions of Change Fire and Emergency indicators

Champions of Change Fire and Emergency Group was established in April 2017 with support from the Australian and New Zealand National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (AFAC). The Fire and Emergency Group consists of 29 member agencies responsible for fire, emergency and land management across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, within which Fire and Emergency represents Aotearoa New Zealand. This group is part of a wider Champions of Change Coalition within which over 225 organisations participate, with the aim of promoting action to achieve gender equality, advance more wāhine in leadership, and building respectful and inclusive workplaces.[59]

Fire and Emergency contributes data to the Champions of Change reporting process, data which is presented in annual progress reports (the first one being 2017/18). These reports describe progress on actions and a range of impact indicators including:

- gender balance in leadership, recruitment, retention, promotions and pay equity
- flexible and inclusive employment experiences.[60]

Many of the indicators reported are organisation wide statistics including all employees and volunteers in all roles (operational and non-operational).[61] Tables A.1 and A.2 present indicators published in 20/21 from the more recently published 2021 progress report.[62]

Table B.1. Gender balance in recruitment, retention, promotions and exits – organisation wide statistics (20/21)

	Fire and Emergency New Zealand	Champions of Change Group Average
Overall representation of women (as of 30 June 2021)	19.9%	21.6%
Women graduates (i.e., firefighters)	25.5%	27.5%
Women hires (organisation-wide)	24.0%	37.2%
Women exits (organisation-wide)	28.8%	28.9%
Women promotions (organisation-wide)	22.5%	23.2%

Source: Champions of Change Fire and Emergency 20/21 progress report. Note, the group average of other Champions of Change member organisations is based on those agencies that submitted comparable data.[63]

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59 championsofchangecoalition.org/groups/champions-of-change-fire-and-emergency/

60 In 20/21 Fire and Emergency did not report on gender pay equity or access to flexible working arrangements but a comprehensive programme of work is currently underway in relation to gender pay equity.

61 The only indicators that are broken down by different groups within the organisation are gender balance in leadership roles. These statistics are reported separately for (i) organisation wide; (ii) 'frontline service delivery' (e.g., firefighters) and (iii) 'frontline service delivery enabler' (e.g., operational support roles).

62 championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FE_2021-Progress-Report.pdf

63 championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FE_2021-Progress-Report.pdf

Table B.2. Champion of change flexible and inclusive employment experiences (20/21)

	Fire and Emergency Aotearoa New Zealand			Champions of Change Adjusted Group Average		
	Women	Men	All	Women	Men	All
Inclusive employment experiences						
% of exits during or at the end of parental leave	17%	0%	14%	3.4%	0%	2.3%
% reporting inclusive employment experience	78%	75%	74%	71%	73%	73%
Sexual harassment – perceptions of organisation response						
% who believe their organisation has zero tolerance to sexual harassment	58%	50%	51%	–	–	69%
% who believe it is safe to raise issues of sexual harassment without fear of victimisation or negative career implications	72%	73%	72%	–	–	44%

Source: Champions of Change Fire and Emergency 20/21 progress report.

Fire and Emergency gender pay gap data

Male-dominated industries are prone to more significant gender pay gaps than other types of organisations. A key driver of gender pay gaps are the under-representation of wāhine in more senior/leadership roles. Therefore, the degree to which gender pay equity has been achieved is an important indicator of relevance when monitoring the career progression and development of wāhine firefighters. Fire and Emergency's Kia Toipoto gender and ethnic pay gap data for 2022 shows that overall the gender salary pay gap for career firefighters is 7.2% in favour of tāne (data supplied by Kia Toipoto team, see Table A.3). Table A.3. below presents the gender pay gap data by operational firefighter role.

As a crown entity Fire and Emergency has a responsibility to be a good employer and implement equal employment opportunity policies and procedures. This includes implementation of the 'Kia Toipoto Public Service Action Plan 2021-24' that aims to close gender, Māori, Pacific and ethnic pay gaps. In 2022, Fire and Emergency began developing their inaugural Kia Toipoto closing gender, Māori, Pacific and ethnic pay gaps action plan which involved drawing down and analysing their latest gender and ethnic pay gap data due to be published by 31 December. Fire and Emergency and other Crown Entities are due to publish Kia Toipoto closing gender, Māori, Pacific and ethnic pay gaps action plans by 28 April 2023.

Table B.3. Gender representation and gaps in operational firefighters and specific roles

Job title	Male	Female	Median gender pay gap
Overall – all firefighters	94.3%	5.7%	Men paid 7.2% more
Trainee Firefighter	86%	14%	No gap
Firefighter	87%	13%	Women paid 3.3% more
Qualified firefighter	87%	13%	Men paid 5.3% more

Table supplied by Kia Toipoto team 20 December 2022 based on data calculated as of 30 March 2022, and to published on 31 December 2022. Operational firefighters include Trainee Firefighter, Firefighter, Qualified Firefighter, Senior Firefighter, Station Officer, Senior Station Officer. Some individual roles (Senor Firefighter, Station Officer and Senior Station Office) have been excluded to protect privacy, as wāhine account for less than 10% of employees in each respective role.

Gender pay gaps in steps of operational pay grades

The data on the percentage of tāne and wāhine career firefighters in lower, middle and top steps of each pay grade is presented in Figure 6.2 below. Similar analysis completed in 2018/19 had identified evidence of a gender pay gap with wāhine found not to be progressing through their qualification steps within the grades and being over-represented in the lower levels of their grade. Data in Figure 6.2 based on data as of 31 March 2022 suggests this trend remains unchanged.

Wāhine have lowest representation at in the top steps (14%) and highest representation at the bottom (62%), whereas tāne are more evenly distributed across the grades. This suggests the nearly-two thirds of wāhine firefighters that are in the lower steps are not taking up the opportunity for training at the same rate as tāne fighters and therefore relatively fewer are able to move up the next step in their respective roles. This appears an important analysis to continue to monitor as a factor contributing or pointing to, inequity in career progression of wāhine firefighters.