




Degree apprenticeships in Aotearoa
New Zealand
Key informants

A background image of a collection of wrenches. The top half is a dark purple triangle, and the bottom half is an orange triangle. The wrenches are arranged in rows, with some in the foreground and others in the background, creating a sense of depth.

Brenden Mischewski | April 2024



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the many helpful comments and detailed feedback from numerous construction industry partners, government agencies, tertiary and vocational education experts, academics and researchers. These insights have contributed greatly to the rigour and coverage of this document. Particular thanks are due for the valuable input of the key informants.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document summarizes key themes from interviews with 23 stakeholders in New Zealand's tertiary and vocational education system and government. The discussions were held as part of preparing a business case for piloting degree-level apprenticeships.

Key themes include the importance of employers in program success, the need for suitable Tertiary Education Organization (TEO) partners, and potential of engagement with iwi.

Employers are crucial for setting standards, curriculum development, and providing practical training. Informants also highlighted the need for supportive systems involving Workforce Development Councils and other organizations.

Challenges identified include regulatory complexity, cultural perceptions of apprenticeships, and the high proportion of SMEs which may lack the infrastructure to support such programs. However, the success of the Bachelor of Engineering Technology in New Zealand demonstrates the potential of degree-level apprenticeships.

Informants emphasized the need for strategic communications to raise the profile of these apprenticeships and suggested leveraging existing networks. Equity considerations were also discussed, with calls for a broader definition of underserved learners, including older employees and those from diverse backgrounds.

Overall, the informants supported the pilot program, noting the importance of tailored approaches to suit New Zealand's unique context and the potential benefits in terms of addressing skill gaps and enhancing employability.

PURPOSE

This document summarises the key themes from discussions with key informants interviewed as part of preparing a business case for the Construction and Infrastructure Centre of Vocational Excellence (ConCOVE) to support the piloting of degree-level apprenticeships in New Zealand.

METHODOLOGY

We interviewed twenty-three people from across the tertiary and vocational education system and government. The interviews were semi-structured and generally organized around a set of common topics, although many explored areas relating to the informant's expertise or areas of interest. We reviewed interview notes to identify key themes, which are summarised in this report.

A list of key informants is presented in Annex A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our gratitude to all the individuals who generously shared their time, insights, and expertise through the interviews. Your willingness to contribute despite your busy schedules is deeply appreciated and speaks volumes about your commitment to developing the construction and infrastructure workforce.

LIMITATIONS

Employers and industry representatives were not interviewed as part of the business case's development. ConCOVE staff advised that preliminary engagement had already occurred, and more targeted engagement would normally take place once a decision to proceed with the business case was made.

This report forms part of a fuller business case that includes the results of a literature scan, quantitative analysis, and an operating model that describes the key characteristics of degree-level apprenticeships.

KEY THEMES

The key informant interviews provided a wide range of insights into the general context within which degree-level apprenticeships operate and important considerations for their development and delivery. Some common themes through the interviews were:

Apprentices: Key informants noted that these programmes addressed an employability gap that some graduates may otherwise experience, offered them access to support from employers and TEOs, and involved education and training tailored to individuals' circumstances. Care would need to be taken to provide support for learners that was easy to engage with.

The role of employers: Employers were seen as central to the success of these programmes, and the expected contributions should not be underestimated. Many key informants referred to the need for employers to be involved in admission decisions, set apprenticeship standards, partner on curriculum development, create inclusive environments, deliver work-integrated learning, free up time for off-job training and play a key role in capstone assessments.

Potential TEO partners: Many key informants identified suitable TEO partners and staff of several TEOs saw value in participating in pilots of degree-level apprenticeships. They also noted opportunities to better serve the needs of their communities, strengthen relationships with employers and develop new markets. Naturally, the staff of TEOs we spoke to noted that they would need to do their own

Iwi partnerships: Iwi were considered well-placed to engage with these programmes, and the opportunity was potentially appealing to iwi-owned businesses. However, more extensive engagement with iwi would be necessary to develop the concept.



Wider partnerships: The support systems for degree-level apprentices and employers were potentially extensive, with key informants seeing potential roles for Workforce Development Councils, the Te Pūkenga Work-based learning subsidiaries, Māori and Pasifika Trades Training consortia and programmes that support workplace placements for Pacific people such as Tupu Toa and Tupu Tai.

Policy, quality assurance, and funding settings: There was considerable interest in understanding how policy, quality assurance, and funding settings could be adapted to support these programmes when compelling evidence of the need for these changes was provided.

Work-integrated learning: The concept of work-integrated learning means that employers need to create space and opportunities for developing staff and resources for the teaching and learning aspects that occur on the job. At the same time, TEOs will need to work through the changes required to their delivery models, as learning in employment is not necessarily linear, and simply transferring existing pedagogy into this new context is unlikely to be fully effective.

Existing models: We benefit from the example of the Bachelor of Engineering Technology (Infrastructure Asset Management) that has been a trailblazer in New Zealand, demonstrating the effectiveness of degree-level apprenticeships in the local context. We also have many complementary models, such as a long history of apprenticeship training, work-integrated learning options, a wide range of professional practice postgraduate programmes and many other programmes that target people in employment.

Potential industries: There was general agreement that the candidate industries for degree-level apprenticeships likely included architecture, construction management and surveying, but there was a need to understand the nature and size of the opportunity and that there may be other opportunities.

Funding: These programmes involve contributions from many parties, but understanding the costs of programme development and delivery will be important, particularly given the potential for a high degree of tailoring of programmes to the context of individual employees. The development of a costing model was seen as important for an informed conversation about where the balance of contributions between the apprentice, employer and government lies. Informants noted that apprenticeship levies likely played an important role in the success of the initiative in the United Kingdom.

Market structure: The high proportion of SMEs in the New Zealand economy was seen as a barrier to uptake in part because of the internal infrastructure they may need to develop to sustain these programmes. However, key informants noted that there is a very large number of career changers in the construction and infrastructure industry (some 65-70 per cent of the workforce), several large construction infrastructure projects being delivered across the country that could provide points of focus, considerable experience and expertise in New Zealand relating to SME engagement and the uptake among smaller companies in England indicated a large potential market.

Research: The Education and Training Act requires programmes of advanced learning to be taught mainly by people engaged in research. Key informants had a range of views about this requirement, including noting that current knowledge of industry practice was incredibly valuable. Representatives of both NZQA and CUAP indicated an openness to discussing potential delivery models early to work through the implications for the relevant quality assurance regimes.

Engagement: Key informants were generally supportive of the need for strategic communications to raise the profile of degree-level apprenticeships and noted the importance of communicating the key concepts in a simple and accessible way. It was considered likely that labour market Ministers in particular would be interested in the concept and that it would be possible to leverage existing channels of TEOs, Careers New Zealand and other regional networks.

Barriers: The reasons why degree-level apprenticeships had not developed organically in New Zealand were thought to relate to employer incentives, the complexity of the regulatory environment, and cultural norms about apprenticeships' status in society.

Underserved learners: Key informants argued that equity needs to be built into the design of the programmes. We also heard calls for a broader definition of underserved learners that encompassed Māori, Pacific and disabled learners, but also older employees whose life circumstances may have precluded them from pursuing advanced tertiary education when they were younger and whose current work and life obligations can present barriers to accessing off-job study options.

Culture: We were counselled not to underestimate the complexity of weaving together different cultural norms about the relative value of different types of education and training, distinct parts of the tertiary education and workforce development system that do not necessarily 'talk to each other' and types of education and training that might serve different purposes and functions.

International examples: We were cautioned that aspects of the experiences in England, where degree-level apprenticeships are most mature, were not necessarily directly transferable to New Zealand. While measured post-study outcomes were very high and completion rates strong for these programmes, key informants were aware that the evidence base was still developing, and we should reflect critically on our assumptions so that the models we pursue in New Zealand are suitable for our context.

ANNEX ONE: KEY INFORMANTS

Organisation	Key informant
Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau	Wendy Lawson
BCITO He Hunga Hanga Mātou	Andrew Donohue
Hanga-Aro-Rau Workforce Development Council	Sam McNaughton
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Hīkina Whakatutuki	Leilani Tamu, Shaun Twaddle
Ministry of Education Te Māhuhu o te Mātauranga	Nyk Huntington, Phil Wise
New Zealand Qualifications Authority Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa	Merrin Neilson, Nuzhat Sohail and Graeme Cahalane
Tertiary Education Commission Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua	Bridget Burmeister, Jane Duncan, Joseph Randall, Sam Sefuiva*
Te Pūkenga	Brian Dillon Andrew McCulloch (Open Polytechnic) James MacKay (Otago Polytechnic)
University of Auckland Waipapa Taumata Rau	Garry Miller
University of Otago Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo	Stuart Brock
University of Waikato Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato	Karsten Zegwaard
Universities New Zealand Te Pōkai Tara	Rochelle Gribble, Wendy Robinson
Waihanga Ara Rau Workforce Development Council	Robbie Paul, Catriona Petrie

* Samuelu (Sam) Sefuiva is a member of the TEC Board of Commissioners and also has several governance and management roles with non-governmental organisations.