

Degree-level apprenticeships enabling framework

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INTRODUCTION

This enabling framework is designed for key system stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships, including employers, industry and professional bodies, tertiary education providers, Industry Skills Boards (ISBs) and government.

It is intended to assist these key system players to align their roles, responsibilities, and investments to support high-quality, work-based¹ degree programmes that are accessible, sustainable, and fit for the future of learning and work in New Zealand.

This paper builds on and extends the systems gap analysis report commissioned by ConCOVE in 2023², drawing on experience from pilots of degree apprenticeships.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this enabling framework is to:

- Identify and articulate the key conditions and system settings required to support the sustainable delivery of degree apprenticeships in New Zealand.
- Provide a structured basis for policy development, regulatory adjustments, funding decisions, and sector readiness initiatives, informed by local and international experience.
- Support the design and implementation of pilots and demonstration models that test new approaches to co-delivery, assessment, learner support, and quality assurance.
- Facilitate collaboration and alignment between key actors, including tertiary education providers, employers, ISBs, government agencies, learners, and iwi/Māori partners.
- Lay the groundwork for a long-term systems shift, enabling degree apprenticeships to become a recognised, valued, and accessible pathway to higher education and skilled employment.
- This framework is intended to guide both short-term action and longer-term systems change. It builds on design discussions already held with stakeholders across the education and industry sectors and reflects principles of equity, flexibility, and partnership at its core.

WHAT IS AN ENABLING FRAMEWORK?

An enabling framework sets out the essential conditions, structures, and supports needed to make a new model like degree apprenticeships work in practice. It doesn't prescribe a single solution but identifies the policy, funding, regulatory, and operational enablers that must be in place for successful design, delivery, and scale.

¹ In this paper, we use the term work-based learning to describe structured educational experiences where learners develop skills and knowledge through direct participation in authentic work environments, typically as part of a formal qualification. Work-integrated learning is also used which encompasses a broader range of experiences, integrating academic learning with practical application, which may include work placements, internships, simulated projects, or workplace-relevant assignments, often coordinated by educational institutions in partnership with employers.

² Scanlan, P (2023). Degree-level apprenticeships – A systems gap analysis for transformative change in Aotearoa New Zealand vocational education and training sector pipeline. ConCOVE Tūhura. URL: [Degree apprenticeship \(DLA\) comparative pilot- ConCOVE Tūhura](#). Accessed: 26 August 2025.

³ EMA oral presentation to Education and Workforce Select Committee, 11 July 2025

⁴ Two out of five learners failed to complete their qualification successfully in 2024, a rate that has barely changed in almost a decade, and disparities between ethnic groups persist. TEC (2025) Ngā Kete. Tertiary Education Commission.

CONTEXT

New Zealand's tertiary education and training system is under pressure. Employers across sectors have raised concerns about the relevance and responsiveness of formal qualifications, with some increasingly investing in offshore, in-house, or informal training models³. At the same time, provider funding is constrained despite rising delivery costs, learner achievement remains uneven⁴, and the promise of lifelong learning is not yet a reality for many⁵.

Yet New Zealand also has strong foundations. Our universities are internationally respected, and we have a long history of delivering education in the workplace. Many employers are familiar with training processes and invest significantly in staff development. Workplace-based learning has demonstrated strong post-study employment outcomes⁶.

A substantial portion of degree education in New Zealand is vocational in nature, with up to 82% of degree programmes estimated to have an applied or work-oriented focus⁷. Work-integrated learning is already a key feature of many degrees, including internships, industry projects, and simulated workplace environments.

There have been several attempts to pilot degree apprenticeships, most notably in engineering⁸, initial teacher education⁹, and recently in the construction and infrastructure sectors¹⁰. However, the pace and scale of uptake in New Zealand contrasts sharply with the more coordinated and accelerated implementation observed in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the United States of America¹¹.

The tertiary system is once again changing, with the government signaling a stronger focus on work-based provision across polytechnics, wānanga, and private training establishments¹² and reforms to the university sector being considered¹³.

Taken together, these conditions suggest New Zealand is well-positioned for a step-change in the uptake of degree apprenticeships. This enabling framework outlines the current enablers already in place and identifies the policy, regulatory, and funding adjustments, both incremental and structural, that could accelerate the adoption of this model nationwide.

⁵ In 2024, 18.6% of people aged 20-24 years were undertaking degree study. The proportion of those aged 25-39 years was 2.2% and among those aged 40 years or older the rate was 0.4%. In practice this means that once you turn 25 years of age, the chance that you will undertake degree study drops by 88%. MoE (2025). Participation rates. Ministry of Education. URL: [02- Tertiary participation | Education Counts](#). Accessed: 26 August 2025.

⁶ People who train on the job are 10-15 percentage points more likely than other learners to be in employment five years after graduating when comparing tertiary education provider outcomes for BCITO graduates with degree graduates after five years. TEC (2025) Ngā Kete. Tertiary Education Commission.

⁷ UNZ (2019). Should NZ consider the degree-apprenticeship model? Universities New Zealand. URL: [Should NZ consider the degree-apprenticeship model? | Universities New Zealand- Te Pūkai Tara](#). Accessed: 26 August 2025.

⁸ The Engineering to Employment funded work to develop the Bachelor of Engineering Technology (Infrastructure Asset Management) as a degree apprenticeship.

⁹ The School Onsite Training Programme allows aspiring teachers to be hosted three days per week at a school while studying remotely towards their initial teacher education programme. MoE (2025). [School Onsite Training Programme](#). Ministry of Education. Wellington.

¹⁰ See <https://concove.ac.nz/concove-projects/degree-apprenticeship-dla-comparative-pilot/>

¹¹ For example, in France twenty per cent of all degree study is through apprenticeships, in Germany the comparable rate is five per cent, while the UK saw degree apprenticeships grow rapidly in the five years to 2024 and currently in the USA apprenticeship degrees for initial teacher education are offered in 40 states. Reference the Apprenticeship 2.0 podcast.

¹² Simmonds, P (2025). [Bill to reset vocational education passes first reading](#). New Zealand Government.

¹³ Collins, J (et al) (2024). Lifting economy through science, tertiary sectors. Ministerial Press Release 27 March 2024. URL: [Lifting economy through science, tertiary sectors | Beehive.govt.nz](#). Accessed: 26 August 2025.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

This enabling framework is organised around the six conditions of systems change¹⁴. The key advantage of this model is that it helps us tackle problems by changing the underlying conditions that keep them in place, especially those that create or reinforce inequity.

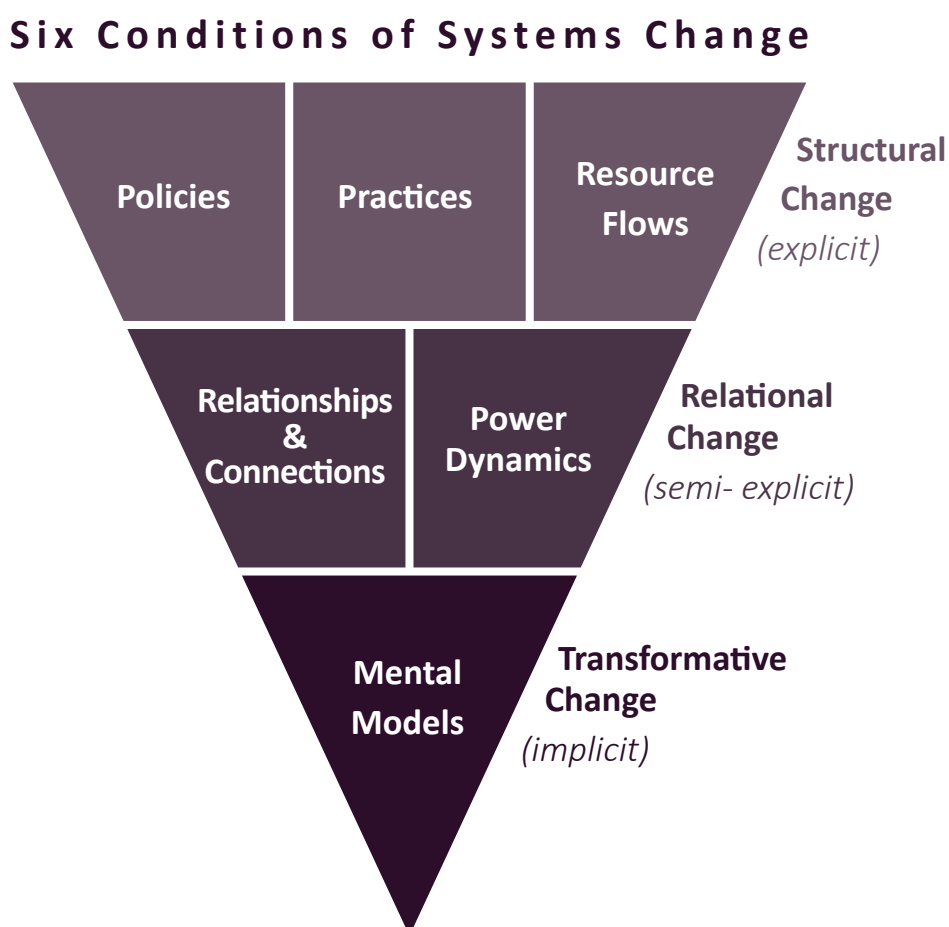
True systems change means being open to changing not just the system, but also how we think and act within it. For funders and policymakers, this means recognising that their own assumptions and behaviours may need to shift too.

The model also shows that lasting change happens at three levels:

- Structural change (like policies, practices, and how resources are distributed),
- Relational change (how people relate to one another and how power is shared), and
- Transformative change (shifting mindsets, beliefs, and assumptions).

These levels are shown in the reverse triangle below.

Table One: The Six Conditions of Systems Change.



¹⁴ Kramer, Mark R., John Kania, and Peter Senge. "The Water of Systems Change." Report, FSG, May 2018.

WHY SYSTEMS CHANGE MATTERS

Degree apprenticeships cannot succeed through piecemeal adjustments. They require coordinated change across six interdependent system conditions—and weakness in any one condition undermines the whole.

The current system actively works against degree apprenticeships. Policy frameworks signal that apprenticeships “stop” at level 4, rendering degree options invisible and illegitimate. Everyday practices in teaching, assessment and employer engagement remain anchored to campus-centred delivery, treating workplace learning as an add-on rather than the organising principle. Funding flows privilege provider-led models and offer no recognition of the dual-support costs, shared delivery, or employer investment that degree apprenticeships require. Relationships between providers, employers and professional bodies remain transactional rather than co-owned, leaving learners to bridge disconnected systems without coordinated support. Power sits almost entirely with government and providers, leaving employers as “placement hosts” rather than co-designers and co-deliverers. And mental models still code apprenticeships as lower-status trades training, degrees as academic and campus-based, and work and study as sequential rather than integrated.

These conditions reinforce each other. Policies that don’t recognise degree apprenticeships mean no dedicated funding, which discourages providers from developing new practices. This, keeps employer relationships advisory rather than partnership-based, which maintains the power imbalance, which in turn perpetuates the mental model that this isn’t “real” higher education. Breaking this cycle requires action on all six fronts—not simultaneously, but strategically, recognising that progress in one area creates leverage for change in others.

When all six conditions align, degree apprenticeships become viable, sustainable and valued. Policies signal legitimacy and channel resources. Practices embed co-design, workplace assessment and dual support as standard. Funding flows recognise shared costs and enable scale. Relationships shift to genuine partnership and shared accountability. Power is redistributed so employers, industry and iwi shape curriculum, assessment and learner selection. And mental models reframe degree apprenticeships as high-status, mainstream pathways to professional careers.

This framework maps the journey from current state to that aligned system—identifying both quick wins that can be achieved within existing settings and bolder structural shifts that embed degree apprenticeships as a permanent, valued feature of Aotearoa New Zealand’s tertiary landscape.

Summary of changes



POLICIES

Policies in this context relate to formal rules, priorities, and strategies set by the government and its agencies that shape how tertiary education is delivered and funded.

They influence which programmes are possible, which learners are prioritised, and how institutions and employers are incentivised to participate in new models.

Quick wins	• TEC Investment Guidance explicitly references degree or higher apprenticeships as a priority. • Tailored guidance from NZQA clarifying how degree apprenticeships can meet existing quality assurance requirements.
Bolder steps	• The Education and Training Act defines degree apprenticeships as a distinct category of work-based provision and makes research requirements for advanced programmes more flexible. • National policy framework that outlines principles, expectations, and minimum standards for degree apprenticeships. • ISBs (from 2026) incorporate degree apprenticeships into ‘industry-endorsed networks of provision’. • Student visa holders can work up to 37.5 hours per week when enrolled in a degree apprenticeship. • Professional regulatory bodies recognise degree apprenticeships as valid pathways to professional registration.

PRACTICES

Practices refer to the everyday actions, processes, and habits of organisations and individuals that shape how education and training are delivered. These include teaching and learning methods, industry engagement approaches, learner support systems, assessment design, and how programmes are developed and managed.

Practices influence whether degree apprenticeships are implemented with fidelity, quality, and learner success in mind.

Quick wins	• Practice guides, templates, and exemplars for degree apprenticeships programme design, co-assessment, and employer-educator collaboration. • Professional development for academic staff, training advisors, and employer mentors to support degree apprenticeships delivery. • Dual-admissions models that align employer recruitment processes with academic entry requirements. • Joint curriculum development workshops that bring tertiary education providers, industry, and professional bodies together to co-design degree apprenticeship pathways.
Bolder steps	• Programme approval and accreditation processes to explicitly recognise co-designed, co-delivered degree apprenticeship models. • National community of practice for degree apprenticeship implementation, to support peer learning and innovation in delivery practice. • Different performance measures are needed to better recognise the value of degree apprenticeships.

RESOURCE FLOWS

Resource flows refer to how funding, staffing, infrastructure, and information are allocated and distributed across the system. These flows determine which types of education are financially viable, which organisations are incentivised to participate, and whether learners and employers can access the support they need.

Without fit-for-purpose resource flows, degree apprenticeships will remain small-scale or unsustainable.

Quick wins	• Costing model for degree apprenticeships that reflects shared delivery, dual support roles, and flexible learning modes. • Default TEC funding approval for new degree apprenticeship programmes. • Employers who offer degree apprenticeships can access Apprenticeship Boost.
Bolder steps	• Dedicated tax credits, a levy-offset mechanism or training wages to support employer participation in degree apprenticeships. • Reprioritised and ring-fenced DQ 7+ funding to support the development of qualifications and programmes for degree apprenticeships. • Base funding for new degree apprenticeship programmes is fixed at a minimum of ten full-time enrolments for the first three years. • Use procurement levers (e.g. public infrastructure projects) to require or incentivise degree apprenticeships. • ISBs, professional organisations or iwi organisations are able to purchase degree apprenticeship programmes directly.

RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

Relationships and connections refer to the networks, trust, and collaborative behaviours between stakeholders in the system, including learners, employers, educators, iwi/Māori partners, professional bodies, and government agencies.

Strong relationships enable shared ownership, smooth transitions, and mutual accountability across the learner journey. Weak or siloed relationships are a major barrier to the successful implementation of degree apprenticeships.

Quick wins	• Partnership agreements (e.g. Memoranda of Understanding) between tertiary education providers and industry for degree apprenticeships pilots that outline shared roles and responsibilities. • Map existing networks and leverage established partnerships to seed degree apprenticeship opportunities. • Dual-support models where both an academic advisor and a workplace mentor work with each learner. • Group employer schemes expanded to include degree apprentices.
Bolder steps	• Co-governance requirements into degree apprenticeships design, delivery, and evaluation, including shared curriculum oversight and decision-making structures. • Regional or sectoral “degree apprenticeships Hubs” coordinate stakeholders, broker relationships, and share resources.

POWER DYNAMICS

Power dynamics refer to how decision-making authority, influence, and accountability are distributed across the system. In traditional tertiary education, power often rests with education providers and regulators.

For degree apprenticeships to succeed, power must be more equitably shared with employers, learners, community partners, and industry, particularly in the design, delivery, and governance of programmes.

Quick wins	• Shared decision-making structures for all degree apprenticeship programmes. • Extend the use of Māori-led frameworks for degree apprenticeships. • Redesign funding approval processes to require co-designed proposals with industry or professional groups
Bolder steps	• Establish governance mechanisms at the national level to steer the strategy and oversight of degree apprenticeships. • Provide targeted support to employers and other partners to lead or co-lead degree apprenticeships development in their sectors. • Enabling ISBs to develop vocational degree programmes.

MENTAL MODELS

Mental models are the deeply held beliefs, assumptions, and narratives that shape how people interpret the purpose and value of education.

These include perceptions of what a “real” degree looks like, who higher education is for, and how learning should be delivered.

Shifting mental models is essential to making degree apprenticeships a mainstream, valued option rather than a niche or second-best pathway.

Quick wins	• Promote real-life stories of successful degree apprenticeship learners, employers, and educators through media, events, and social campaigns. • Integrate degree apprenticeships into career guidance tools and school outreach activities as credible, aspirational pathways to high-value jobs. • Sector champions advocate for degree apprenticeships within their professional networks and institutions. • Run workshops and briefings for governance groups, academic boards, and regulators to build shared understanding of degree apprenticeships models.
Bolder steps	• Launch a national communications campaign to reframe perceptions of degree apprenticeships as high-status, high-value pathways equivalent to traditional degrees. • Embed work-based learning and apprenticeship principles into professional development for staff involved in degree programmes. • Incentivise academic and employer collaboration through recognition, awards, or performance funding tied to degree apprenticeships outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Degree apprenticeships offer a powerful opportunity to rethink how higher education is delivered, accessed, and valued in Aotearoa New Zealand. They bring together the strengths of our education and employment systems, combining academic knowledge with practical experience, and creating new pathways to success for learners, employers, and communities alike.

This enabling framework outlines the key system conditions, policy, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models that must be addressed to unlock the full potential of degree apprenticeships. It highlights that no single actor can deliver this change alone. Progress depends on shared commitment, coordinated action, and a willingness to test, learn, and adapt together.

By aligning funding, regulation, pedagogy, and partnerships around a shared vision of high-quality, equitable, and employer-integrated learning, we can build a more responsive, inclusive, and future-fit tertiary education system.

The framework is not a blueprint, but a starting point. It invites system leaders, educators, industry partners, and iwi to take bold steps now, while laying the foundations for long-term, systemic transformation.

Explaining the solutions



POLICIES

Current settings normalise sub-degree apprenticeships and render degree apprenticeships “non-normal”.

Where the gap shows up in legislation

In New Zealand, there is a long-standing view that apprenticeship training and programmes of advanced learning are fundamentally different. Indeed, a key element of the Education and Training Act is to distinguish between:

- Institutions.

The Education and Training Act differentiates by institutional type. The functions of polytechnics (section 315¹⁵) explicitly include responding to the needs of local communities and industries in their regions, while the characteristics of universities (section 281) emphasise advanced learning and research but do not explicitly include an industry-engagement duty analogous to that of polytechnics.

- Modes of education and training.

“Work-based training” is defined as systematic training and assessment in industry-valued skills provided by or for employers, and “vocational education and training” is tied to industry-developed skill standards and includes work-based training. These definitions orient the work-based mode toward industry-standardised sub-degree training.

This definition does not explicitly provide for industry more broadly to have a role in informing the education and training that universities and other degree providers might undertake, and that such training might occur in the workplace, even though this is a common feature of both the regulation of professions and teaching and learning in those institutions.

- Industry oversight.

Industry skills boards are charged with standard setting, programme endorsement and moderation and providing advice on behalf of industry (section 367), but it is only in relation to the advisory role that vocational education and training is cited as a constraint on the scope of these boards. The obvious implication is that the legislation could not conceive of a circumstance where industry might reasonably take a view on the network of provision as it relates to degree and higher-level study.

It is perhaps only natural then that there are different perceptions about the nature of the organisations that offer each option, the esteem with which each is held, the identity of the people involved, requirements that the majority of people involved in the teaching of advanced programmes must be engaged in research¹⁶, the restricted scope of government support such as apprenticeships boost, and so on.

The Tertiary Education Strategy (TES)¹⁷ includes priorities such as the importance of teaching and learning focusing and responding more closely to workplace needs, that people can upskill and retrain throughout their lives and gain skills relevant for employment, and education and training pathways are available for and deliver equitably for all learners¹⁸.

The current hard-wiring of the disconnect between ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ education sits uneasily with the TES, which does not explicitly assert that these priorities only apply to some of the people some of the time, or are limited to certain kinds of education and training.

But in practice, this is how the world works. Apprenticeships are seen as ‘stopping’ at level 4 on the NZQCF. Work-integrated learning is widely perceived to be essentially the domain of trades training, even though such learning is a feature of most education at the degree level (see [Degree apprenticeships in New Zealand: their place in the landscape](#)).

¹⁵ All references reflect the changes proposed in the Education and Training (Vocational Education and Training System) Amendment Bill as of 26 August 2025. The actual section references may differ if there are changes to the bill before it is enacted.

¹⁶ While this legislative requirement has been operationalised to require only 51% of staff teaching on a programme to be engaged in research, in practice tertiary education providers find that employing such staff almost exclusively gives them much more flexibility through practices such as cross-teaching.

¹⁷ The government’s official statement about the long-term direction for tertiary education, and which the Tertiary Education Commission is required to give effect to.

¹⁸ MoE (2025). Full NELP and TES statement. Ministry of Education. URL: <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/strategies-policies-and-programmes/tertiary-and-further-education/tertiary-education-strategy-tes>. Accessed: 22 August 2025.

Government funding guidelines for tertiary education providers also centre apprenticeship training on vocational education, with only one general reference in the current TEC plan guidance to the desirability of more work-integrated learning or employment-based learning for all higher education priorities¹⁹.

When flexibility is a bug, not a feature

The absence of a policy framework has some advantages, particularly the opportunity for actors to forge their own models and approaches in potentially innovative ways without needing to navigate bespoke regulatory and other requirements. Indeed, in the UK context, many universities express concern about the burdensome nature of the local policy and regulatory framework.

In practice, it appears to be a default assumption of policymakers and regulators in New Zealand that tertiary education providers should simply take advantage of the lack of a defined policy framework to forge these innovative solutions.

We think that this view is misguided. One of the reasons that degree apprenticeships are uncommon in New Zealand is that they are not seen as a ‘normal’ option. Employers are not seen as ‘co-educators’ for advanced learning. Providers see a novel and risky option that lacks ‘official’ support, industry lacks levers to influence academic and funding decisions, and government control is so pervasive that it constrains the ‘ability of providers to innovate, drive homogeneity in provision, and limit the flexibility and responsiveness of the system as a whole²⁰.

The net effect of this restricted conception of apprenticeships is that degree apprenticeships remain marginal, unevenly applied or overly dependent on local champions ([see Degree apprenticeships in New Zealand: building for success](#)).

POLICIES – We can make some quick wins by prioritising degree apprenticeships for investment and clarifying how quality assurance requirements can be met.

Two low-friction moves would catalyse degree apprenticeships within the next planning cycle: (1) name degree and higher²¹ apprenticeships explicitly in TEC Plan Guidance for higher education priorities; and (2) add a degree apprenticeships schedule to NZQA’s degree guidelines with model documents and worked examples.

The TEC’s Plan Guidance is the primary mechanism that the government uses to signal its funding priorities for tertiary education. This document is generally issued annually and is used by tertiary education providers as an anchoring reference for their plans for future education and training, including their contribution to the network of provision and changes in terms of regions and qualifications.

The current plan guidance document highlights innovative modes of delivery (eg, work-integrated learning or employment-based learning) as a targeted priority for higher education.

A minor amendment to this statement, highlighted in italics as follows, would make explicit the focus on:

innovative modes of delivery (eg, work-integrated learning or employment-based learning including degree apprenticeships) that support good learner outcomes, increase workforce diversity, and recognise the financial pressures on learners

¹⁹ TEC. Plan Guidance For providers submitting [Investment Plans for funding from 1 January 2026](#), Tertiary Education Commission, URL: [Investment Plan guidance, templates and timeframes | Tertiary Education Commission](#), page 24.

²⁰ See New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2017). New models of tertiary education: Final Report. URL: <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2024-05/pc-inq-nmte-final-report-tertiary-education-v2.pdf>. Accessed: 28 August 2025.

²¹ Higher level apprenticeships are those that are delivered at postgraduate level.

Making clear that degree or higher apprenticeships are a priority for investment in tertiary education would underscore their potential contribution and provide a more explicit signal to tertiary education providers.

NZQA defines the requirements for approval of degrees and related qualifications through guidelines, mostly recently published in July 2025²². These guidelines make extensive reference to work-integrated learning, delivery in work-based settings and work-based components.

These guidelines provide a valuable foundation for the recognition of degree apprenticeships. It would be desirable, however, to make **specific references to degree apprenticeships in the guidelines for approval of degrees**, including highlighting practical examples of how tertiary education providers have gone about designing such programmes as part of supporting resources.

This approach would make clearer the range of options that are open to tertiary education providers interested in exploring such programmes, such as how different employer arrangements influence delivery and assessment choices.

POLICIES – We can take some bolder steps by providing for degree apprenticeships in legislation, establishing a national policy framework, extending the role of industry skills boards, expanding access to student visa holders and requiring professional regulatory bodies to recognise degree apprenticeships.

These bold policy steps move degree apprenticeships from edge case to commonplace options. Quick wins send immediate funding and QA signals, legislative recognition and ISB/regulator alignment create durable scaffolding, and a controlled visa setting unlocks scale without compromising quality or equity.

The Education and Training Act should be amended to make an explicit provision for degree apprenticeships.

This change involves a set of relatively minor amendments, including:

- Defining what a degree apprenticeship is
- Recognising that programmes leading to qualifications at levels 7 or higher on the NZQCF could be included in the definition of work-based training and the definition of apprenticeship training activities (sections 381 to 385)
- Broadening the definition of vocational education and training to include programmes of advanced learning that conform to the definition of degree apprenticeships.
- Broadening the characteristics of people who can teach programmes of advanced learning to include those with advanced professional expertise and experience (section 454).

These changes would give degree apprenticeships a clearer status within the broader tertiary education system, provide a clearer signal of legitimacy to all the actors in the system and make it much more straightforward to involve experienced industry professionals in teaching and learning.

A national framework that outlines principles, expectations, and minimum standards for degree apprenticeships would be beneficial.

It would be desirable for the government to develop a national framework to provide guidance (but not necessarily strict requirements) about the use of tripartite agreements, training plans, good assessment practices, admissions processes, engagement with Industry Skills Board and professional bodies and the role of off-job training.

Transition arrangements may be necessary, including providing for interim caps on enrolment numbers, setting minimum requirements in terms of employment agreements, exploring whether some form of employer accreditation is required²³, and establishing a fit-for-purpose monitoring and performance regime.

²² NZQA. (2025). Guidelines for listing, approving and maintaining degrees and related qualifications. New Zealand Qualifications Authority. URL: <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/tertiary/approval-accreditation-and-registration/degrees/guidelines-degrees-and-related-qualifications/>. Accessed: 28 August 2025.

The framework should draw on proven elements from higher/degree apprenticeship guidance in countries like Austria, Australia (as these are developed), France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, while aligning with NZQA's existing programme approval, accreditation and monitoring settings.

Throughout, it will be essential to protect the academic freedom of tertiary education providers and devise arrangements that support universities and other forms of tertiary education providers to maintain their distinctive characteristics.

TEC should request **advice from Industry Skills Boards about how degree apprenticeships can be best integrated in the network of provision** for their industries.

NZQA guidelines on the approval of degrees note that Workforce Development Councils may be a key stakeholder for programmes leading to degrees and postgraduate qualifications²⁴.

Building on this foundation by inviting Industry Skills Boards to take a view on priorities for the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships would better reflect how such programmes are necessarily deeply integrated with the needs of employers and industry.

Professional regulatory bodies should recognise degree apprenticeships as valid pathways to professional registration. This approach would build on emerging practice at professional bodies like the Teaching Council and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, which have already recognised apprenticeship-type programmes as valid pathways to registration.

Government policy should emphasise the potential for degree apprenticeships to increase the number and diversity of people obtaining professional registration. Government policy statements (like the government and national policy statement on health, land transport, housing and urban development, infrastructure, etc) and ministerial signalling and expectation setting in relation to professional bodies provide a vehicle for this to occur.

Some regulatory bodies may require additional support to recognise degree apprenticeships, particularly where their existing accreditation practices preclude learners from engaging in paid work as part of clinical placements, such as nursing.

Some of these shifts may arise as a natural consequence of the other changes we propose, notably as our research into the use of capstone projects indicated that many of the current practices of these bodies were driven by tertiary education provider-led changes in the range and types of education products available to learners.

Degree apprenticeships could make a material contribution to the goal of doubling international education's economic contribution if we **permit student visa holders to work up to 37.5 hours per week when enrolled in degree apprenticeships**, with safeguards (living-wage floor, protected learning time, employer accreditation, and outcome monitoring). This change would improve New Zealand's attractiveness, support scale for providers, and meet genuine skills demand while protecting learners and domestic labour standards.

This change would recognise the broader economic, social and cultural benefits to New Zealand from international students and build on the increase from 20 to 25 hours per week, which goes into effect from November 2025²⁵.

This change would make New Zealand a more appealing destination for international students, contribute to economies of scale for tertiary education providers and help meet demand for skilled workers.

²³ Employer accreditation as a possible requirement of participating in apprenticeship programmes was raised by the Minister for Vocational Education in August 2025. See Simmonds, P (2025). From the Beehive: Industry input needed for vocational education reset. Southland Times 23 August 2025. URL: <https://www.thepress.co.nz/nz-news/360797603/beehive-industry-input-needed-vocational-education-reset>. Accessed: 28 August 2025.

²⁴ Industry Skills Boards will presumably assume this role from 2026.

²⁵ ENZ (2025) International Education Going for Growth Plan. Education New Zealand. URL: <https://www.enz.govt.nz/news-and-research/ed-news/government-announces-international-education-going-for-growth-plan> Accessed: 28 August 2025.

PRACTICES

Current delivery norms make degree apprenticeships the exception rather than the design.

How this shows up in delivery.

Current delivery norms that marginalise degree apprenticeships:

- Campus-first design: lectures, tutorials, assessments drive the timetable; workplace activity fits around them.
- Work-integrated learning as a discrete component, not programme-long design.
- Employer engagement remains advisory and episodic, not co-design and co-delivery.
- Assessment privileges academic outputs over authentic workplace evidence.
- Role confusion for learners juggling employee/student expectations without explicit protections.
- Variable supervision standards and unclear escalation processes.

These patterns make degree apprenticeships look risky to start, hard to timetable and fragile without local champions. The implications for each stakeholder group are obvious:

- Learners experience role conflict as they juggle employee and student expectations without explicit protections for learning time or opportunities to use relevant workplace experiences to demonstrate their developing competencies.
- Employers see variable value when supervision and assessment aren't calibrated to the realities of work.
- Providers face uncertainty about quality assurance and moderation in workplace settings.

Put simply, current practices normalise provider-centred delivery and keep degree apprenticeships at the margins, even where there is an appetite to earn and learn.

PRACTICES – Quick wins like practice guides and exemplars can unlock degree apprenticeships.

What we can do now.

A small set of practice guides, templates, and exemplars for degree apprenticeships programme design, co-assessment, and employer-educator collaboration will make degree apprenticeships easier to start, simpler to run, and safer to assure without waiting for policy change.

Most of these quick wins are well within the capacity of tertiary education providers and employers to implement because they involve drawing on existing capabilities and partnerships and adapting current business practices and processes.

There is a range of resources developed through the degree apprenticeships pilots and work-based training system to support apprenticeships and traineeships, and as part of the work-integrated learning that takes place as part of degree study.

Most providers will be able to repurpose these materials to support more extensive degree apprenticeships. Some examples will be:

- tripartite agreements between tertiary education providers, employers and apprentices. These agreements spell out responsibilities, protected learning time, health and safety, information management expectations and dispute resolution processes.
- training plans that map out the relationship between the learning outcomes for the programme against the on-job and off-job training planned for the apprentice.
- guidelines for training advisors and assessors.

The more sophisticated approaches will be digital enabled. Providers that are new to degree apprenticeships might consider partnerships with others that have more experience of work-integrated learning, such as the work-based learning divisions of the industry skills boards.

Engaging with existing networks like WILNZ²⁶ can also help with insights and draw on implementation experience.

Providers and employers that are building new degree apprenticeship capability should invest in **professional development for academic staff, training advisors, and employer mentors to support the delivery of degree apprenticeships.**

Depending on the delivery model, tertiary providers and employers might need to consider how best to support academic supervisors and tutors, training advisors, employer supervisors and apprenticeship coaches, human resources and other professional staff in making changes to their business processes.

ConCOVE-developed resources, developed for work-based training, including the employer toolkit for engaging apprentices and toolkits for trainers, will provide insights into what to consider. They also include tertiary education providers and employer readiness checklists.

A dual-admissions model can align employer recruitment processes with academic entry requirements. In practice, that means one funnel with two gates: employers recruit for the job, and the tertiary education providers confirms academic readiness.

Making sure that there is a shared selection criterion, joint interviews where appropriate, and conditional offers that become unconditional only when both employer and tertiary education providers sign off, can all be put into place.

The ConCOVE admissions checklist provides guidance on how best to approach these processes.

Providers, employers, and, ideally, professional and industry associations should **work collaboratively to develop the programme and curriculum for degree apprenticeships.**

This co-design is vitally important because both employers and tertiary education providers need to be working collaboratively throughout each degree apprenticeship. Critically, each apprentice's experience is likely to be different, meaning it will be essential to build flexibility into the programme design.

What is essential is purposefully mapping priority workplace tasks to graduate outcomes, deciding on the mix of authentic evidence (observations, artefacts, logs, supervisor attestations), agreeing on a baseline for off-the-job learning, and sketching out the role that capstone assessments that integrate theory and practice might play.

PRACTICES – Bold changes in our practices can embed and scale degree apprenticeships.

The quick wins in terms of practices can make degree apprenticeships feasible, but bolder steps can make them dependable. The real gains come when we hard-wire co-design and workplace assessment into the way programmes are approved, taught, and improved so that degree apprenticeships become a recognised, repeatable mode of degree delivery rather than a set of bespoke pilots.

Programme approval and accreditation processes need to explicitly recognise co-designed, co-delivered degree apprenticeship models. We highlighted adjustments to the NZQA guidelines for the approval of degrees and related qualifications as a 'quick win' in the policy sphere. There is a case for reimagining how these approval processes work for degree apprenticeships.

²⁶ Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ) is a not-for-profit, incorporated society that brings together a network of people involved in Work-Integrated Learning. For more information visit the WILNZ website at <https://wilnz.nz/>.

The challenge we should take on is to shift away from a tertiary education provider-centric model of approval and accreditation to one that recognises the integrated role of employers and industry more explicitly (see also Power Dynamics).

These arrangements are necessary because we need to better design degree apprenticeships around work, rather than just accommodating them. Approval processes need to deeply interrogate how employers and providers share responsibility for delivery and assessment, rather than treating employers as an extension of the provider.

A national community of practice for degree apprenticeships implementation would support peer learning and innovation in delivery practice. The system needs such a community to reduce duplication and lift consistency. A small investment in coordination would pay off in faster diffusion of what works and a shared understanding of quality.

The community of practice would bring together providers, employers, professional bodies and government agencies to share good practice, maintain a library of resources, publish short practice notes, and provide stewardship to the 'degree apprenticeships system'.

This community of practice could be housed in an existing body, such as WILNZ or one of the Industry Skills Boards, to maintain connectedness to the broader system.

Different performance measures are needed because degree apprenticeships offer the opportunity for better matching education and training to specific jobs, and integrate the induction practices (or 'finishing') that mainly occur after a graduate completes and enters employment.

The primacy given to educational performance outcomes means that it is too easy to misjudge and undervalue these kinds of programmes by focusing on strictly academic outcomes.

A better approach would be to measure these programmes in terms of retention in relevant or related roles, the avoided opportunity costs of time out of the labour market and time-to-competence and professional registration, wage progression and productivity gains, employer satisfaction and supervision costs, and equity outcomes (participation, progression and completion for priority learners).

RESOURCE FLOWS

Current funding arrangements undervalue degree apprenticeships.

Degree apprenticeships - just another degree?

The funding system treats degree apprenticeships as identical to campus-based degrees. Government subsidies vary by qualification level and subject area; learners pay fees (often loan-funded). Employer contributions beyond taxation are incidental. All employer costs (direct, indirect, opportunity) are borne at the point they arise. Learners bear clinical/placement costs²⁷ (travel, parking, forgone work), with these costs often cited as a key barrier²⁸. No mechanism exists to track degree apprenticeship enrolments or outcomes (see [Degree apprenticeships – a work in progress](#)).

Quick wins –recognising the costs of degree apprenticeships

There is scope within existing resourcing arrangements to take quick steps that would aid the uptake of degree apprenticeships.

The first opportunity is to provide a **higher subsidy rate for degree apprenticeships**.

The general principle that costs of delivery should be reflected in funding rates is reflected in the current subsidy regime. In the case of degree apprenticeships, these higher costs arise because of their complexity.

Costing model work completed as part of the ConCOVE pilots indicates that tertiary providers incur higher costs because of the need to build new business to business marketing functions, the practicalities of catering to numerous ‘cohorts of one’, the need to offer flexible transitions between work-based and other modes as learner circumstances change, the importance of developing the capability of employers and tertiary education provider staff to work in new ways, the upfront costs of developing new systems and processes and the implications of a co-design process for qualification and programme development.

The second opportunity relates to the perceptions of risk relating to TEC’s funding decisions. Officials generally hew to the principle that approvals by NZQA and TEC are separate processes. For providers, this means that they need to assume the risk that the TEC will not fund a programme even after they have incurred potentially significant development costs.

We argue that there is a case for TEC to move **to an ‘in principle’ approval model for degree apprenticeships**. This model would mean that TEC defines a set of transparent criteria that would give providers near certainty that if they develop degree apprenticeship programmes, they would receive funding approval.

The case for this special treatment seems strong given the clear alignment between the TES priorities and degree apprenticeships, and the evident benefits of offering programmes of this sort.

The third opportunity relates to extending eligibility for Apprenticeship Boost to degree apprenticeships. Apprenticeship Boost is a temporary subsidy paid to employers who employ apprentices. This subsidy is currently limited to New Zealand Apprenticeships at level 4 on the NZQCF employed in a subset of industries for the first 12 months of their apprenticeship.

The basic policy rationale for the initiative is directly applicable to degree apprenticeships. For example, the original Cabinet paper cites factors like apprentices often starting out in their chosen industry, that these programmes create highly trained practitioners that train the next generation of skilled people and that apprentices are costly for firms to support, particularly in the early years of their training²⁹.

²⁷ Some limited exceptions apply such as the payments made to AUT learners undertaking health placements student who study outside of Auckland (or Northland for midwifery). See AUT (2025) \$150K in clinical placement support. Auckland University of Technology. URL: [\\$150K in clinical placement support- AUT News- AUT](#). Accessed: 23 August 2025.

²⁸ Howells, Bex (2024). ‘We pay to do free labour.’ How unpaid placements affect New Zealand’s healthcare students: a proposal for sustainable workforce development. Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington. Thesis. <https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.26951671>

Extending the coverage of the Apprenticeship Boost scheme to include degree apprenticeships would ensure that the cost of employing these apprentices is not a barrier to their uptake by employers.

The government could consider capping the number of apprenticeship places covered by this subsidy and/or time-limiting the support. This approach would help to manage the cost of the initiative, while creating incentives for tertiary providers to offer degree apprenticeships, and by stimulating demand, help to solve the challenges with scale that degree apprenticeship programmes face.

Bolder steps – addressing the resourcing challenges

We can also take some bolder steps to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships. These include exploring tax credits or levy arrangements, funding qualification and programme development, breaking the link to volume-based funding and using procurement levers.

Tax credits or levies are two different approaches to incentivising degree apprenticeships, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Introducing a tax credit for degree apprenticeship fees would recognise that the costs for degree study are high compared to other forms of apprenticeship training, and for some learners, they may be a disincentive to participate. Experience with the broader apprenticeship system indicates that employers will often seek to pay the fees of degree apprentices, and a business tax credit would both normalise that behaviour and reduce the impact on business cashflow of providing this support.

An alternative is a broader based levy³⁰ that would be paid (in the case of the building and construction industry) indirectly by consumers through the building levy, government and private funders of infrastructure projects through an infrastructure levy and employers who recruit staff from overseas through a migrant visa levy.

The revenue from these levies would then be used to help defray the costs of offering degree apprenticeships by subsidising programme development costs, employer capability development and direct, indirect and opportunity costs.

Another option is to extend eligibility for the minimum training wage to degree apprentices. Being able to pay these apprentices a lower hourly rate when they are new to the workplace or industry helps to recognise that these employees are yet to be fully productive.

It would also be possible for the government to ring-fence a modest portion of the \$3.8 billion invested in tertiary education each year to provide **funding to support the development of degree apprenticeship qualifications and programmes**.

Tertiary providers and professional and industry associations would be eligible for grants of up to \$250,000 each to offset these development costs. A time-limited investment of \$5 million over two years to support the development of 20 degree apprenticeship programmes would help to create the critical mass necessary to stimulate interest and growth of the model.

The TEC could also be empowered to commit to a base level of tuition subsidy for degree apprenticeships, irrespective of the number of enrolments. We propose that **for the first three years of any new degree apprenticeship, funding be set at 10 EFTS, regardless of the actual number of enrolments**.

This approach would naturally carry some risk (in the absence of enrolments, the government could provide funding for no output) and opportunity cost (this funding could be used to subsidise other learning).

²⁹ Hipkins, C (2020). Cabinet paper: Apprenticeship Support Programme – design and implementation of the Mana in Mahi expansion and the Apprenticeship Boost initiative. Ministry of Education. URL: [35.Minute-and-paper-CAB-20-MIN-0280-Apprenticeship-Support-Programme.pdf](#). Accessed: 29 August 2025.

³⁰ For a broader discussion of the merits of a levy see Mischewski and Smyth (2025). Funding of vocational education for the construction and infrastructure sector. Discussion paper for ConCOVE. URL: [Discussion Paper -Funding of Vocational Education May2025.pdf](#). Accessed: 23 August 2025.

However, these risks can be mitigated by working with higher-performing tertiary providers that have a track record of delivering good outcomes and a recognition that they will have a strong incentive to create a pipeline of enrolments to sustain the programmes beyond the third year.

Procurement levers offer an opportunity to stimulate demand. There have been long-standing calls for the government to mandate training requirements as part of public procurement.

Degree apprenticeships provide an opportunity to trial this approach for infrastructure projects. Large-scale infrastructure projects require a skilled workforce with a wide range of professional skills. **Requiring suppliers who are bidding to deliver large-scale infrastructure projects to commit to employing a modest number of degree apprentices** would stimulate demand and supply for these options.

A more innovative approach would be to **enable ISBs, professional organisations or iwi organisations to directly fund degree apprenticeships.**

The government would empower the TEC Board to set aside a portion of DQ7+ funding for this purpose. These organisations would be able to directly purchase this training from tertiary providers (in consultation with the TEC), helping to ensure that any initiatives reflect the needs of industry, professions and Māori.

An example of how this might work is the Water Training Centre being explored by Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira. This concept integrates degree apprenticeships into the proposed portfolio of training offered by the centre.

By giving iwi the option through the centre to subsidise certain kinds of provision would enable key stakeholders a strong voice in determining the types of training that are available.

RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

The tertiary education system doesn't consistently support purposeful relationships.

Current state – a work in progress

Existing models of tertiary education delivery assume a degree of engagement between tertiary providers, employers and professional organisations. Some of these relationships are strong, robust and long-standing. Others may be more nascent, which is more likely to be the case where partners are looking to forge new degree apprenticeship pathways.

It is also more likely that tertiary providers will tend to position industry and employers in an advisory role. This approach makes sense given their respective roles in most education and training programmes, but degree apprenticeships work best when power is shared, and co-design principles are in-built.

These relationship patterns mean that learners often need to be the bridge between disconnected systems, without coordinated support from both employer and provider. In traditional trades and apprenticeships training, this gap is frequently met by training advisors who maintain regular contact with employers and learners.

While many tertiary providers employ placement coordinators, they are unlikely to be as intensive or extensive as would be required to support the necessary business-to-business marketing and navigation services that are needed for degree apprenticeships.

For other groups, particularly iwi, Māori industry leaders and regional stakeholders, engagement with even the advisory function can be uneven at the degree level. These groups can perceive the need to work around existing relationships to design solutions that meet needs that the system can fail to deliver³⁰.

Quick wins – building on existing practice

There is scope within existing resourcing arrangements to build on existing practice to accelerate the uptake of degree apprenticeships.

The first step is to **put memoranda of understanding in place between tertiary providers and industry bodies** to support the exploration of degree apprenticeships. These memoranda would define the roles and responsibilities during the early stages of any degree apprenticeship.

Having a common understanding of what these programmes are intended to deliver and how each partner can work together is an essential foundation for a successful programme. It is crucial for emerging programmes like degree apprenticeships, where each partner is working in an unfamiliar space.

The second step is to **map existing networks and leverage established partnerships to seed degree apprenticeship opportunities**.

Initial analysis of enrolment data for the ConCOVE pilots suggested several candidates for degree apprenticeships in the construction and infrastructure sector and gave partners confidence to engage with those opportunities.

Repeating this analysis for other sectors and industries could stimulate interest and would benefit from augmentation by entities with a role in strategic workforce priority setting, such as industry skills boards, professional bodies, major employers and government agencies.

These bodies each have a range of relationships and partnerships that they can use to activate these opportunities.

³¹ Such as a proposed Regional Water Training Facility. See Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira (2025). Proposed wastewater environmental performance standards. Submission of See Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira. URL: <https://www.ngatitooa.iwi.nz/s/Te-Rnanga-o-Toa-Rangatira-Wastewater-Enviro-Performance-Standards-final-sub-23-April-2025.pdf> Accessed: 25 August 2025.

The third step is to **purposefully enable dual-support models where both an academic advisor and a workplace mentor work with each learner.**

These approaches recognise that an apprentice will have [multiple people in their working and academic lives who have an interest in their success](#). Depending on the size and complexity of a business, an apprentice may have relationships with their employer, supervisor, internal training advisor and human resources staff, and in the academic context with the programme coordinator, academic and tutorial staff and learner support staff.

These multiple, sometimes overlapping, relationships mean that tertiary providers and employers need to work collaboratively to curate the relationships between these support people. This support needs to be well coordinated to ensure that apprentices get consistent information and gaps in support do not arise.

Finally, there is **scope for group employer schemes to offer to host degree apprentices.**

These schemes are powerful tools helping employers manage the risk of employing apprentices, ensuring consistent support and creating opportunities for apprentices to move between employers, particularly if they would benefit from exposure to different work contexts (such as commercial and residential design work, or private and public sector employment).

Bolder steps – actively facilitating collaboration.

We can also take some bolder steps to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships by hard-wiring requirements for co-governance into programme oversight and management and establishing regional or sectoral degree apprenticeships hubs.

Requiring that industry and tertiary providers collaborate in the design, delivery, and evaluation of degree apprenticeships is a way to address perceptions that education and training are misaligned with the needs of employers.

Co-governance arrangements that shift the conversation from industry as advisors to industry as decision-makers are in line with government expectations that leadership and involvement by industry is enhanced³².

This change would require tertiary providers to relinquish some control over the design and delivery of educational programmes and may require a more expansive view of the legitimacy of stakeholder voice, given the interplay with academic freedom concerns.

Backstopping this strengthening of the relationship would be explicit expectations from quality assurance bodies that industry partners have a much greater role in programme oversight and monitoring.

Sectoral or regional degree apprenticeships hubs could be established to work with multiple industry and provider groups to share good practice and strengthen the capability of employers and tertiary providers involved in degree apprenticeships.

These hubs could be organised around the industry skills boards, as an extension of existing communities of practice like WILNZ or, in the case of regional hubs, centred on regional polytechnics, universities or regional bodies, like chambers of commerce .

Funding for these hubs could come from the lower overall cost to government of degree apprentices relative to on-campus students (through avoided student loan write offs and lower uptake of student allowances and accommodation boost payment), or through industry levies administered by the industry skills boards.

³² Simmonds (2025). From the Beehive: Industry input needed for vocational education reset. The Press 25 August 2025. URL: <https://www.thepress.co.nz/nz-news/360797603/beehive-industry-input-needed-vocational-education-reset>. Accessed: 25 August 2025.

³³ In line with models in the US and Germany. For examples see Reach University (2025). How Chambers Are Expanding Apprenticeship Opportunities with ACCE – Part One. Apprenticeships 2.0 podcast. 10 June 2025. URL: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/how-chambers-are-expanding-apprenticeship-opportunities/id1712099041?i=1000712092475>. Accessed: 28 August 2025.

POWER DYNAMICS

The tertiary education system doesn't enable power to be distributed in the right ways to make degree apprenticeships work

Current state – a work in progress

The government holds considerable power in tertiary education in New Zealand, with decisions about the objectives of tertiary education, funding, including public subsidies, fees charged to learners, and learner support, regulation about what education products and services are available, and where funding is directed.

Learner choice and the willingness of employers to allow their workplaces to be used for training are important triggers for funding and supply of education and training, but **employers have limited influence over curriculum design, assessment standards, or learner selection in most degree qualifications.**

This dynamic plays out in a myriad of ways. For example, employers can influence the admission and selection criteria for degree qualifications, but in practice, the primary consideration is whether a learner has university entrance or equivalent.

The first opportunity that employers get in practice to choose who has access to a given profession is after a learner has graduated, which can often be five years after a learner has commenced their journey.

Similarly, employers and industry may be consulted on the design of a given qualification or have an accreditation role, but lack levers to mandate requirements – their power to do so being often mediated through government agencies, which necessarily have different drivers and incentives.

Further, there are, outside of the wānanga sector, **few avenues for iwi Māori to exercise tino rangatiratanga over degree education.** Iwi are mainly dependent on their own efforts to engage and shift the tertiary education system, or the willingness of a sector, with variable capability and capacity to do so, to engage with them. Similar dynamics can be observed for Pacific peoples and disabled peoples.

Quick wins – taking modest steps

There is scope within existing power dynamics to take quick steps that would aid the uptake of degree apprenticeships.

The first opportunity is to embed a philosophy of **shared decision-making for all degree apprenticeship programmes.**

We have identified a keen interest among academic and industry leaders to collaborate to support degree apprenticeships. Some of this effort takes time, and not all parties have the right skills and resources to engage. Academic staff may lack ready-made networks to engage employers and industry, and employers have many competing priorities, not least the need to maintain a profit-making enterprise.

A philosophy of shared decision-making means in practice that tertiary providers need to create meaningful opportunities for employers, in particular to share in key decisions about who is admitted and how teaching, learning and assessment are organised.

Extending on the **Māori-led framework for degree apprenticeships** developed by the Food and Fibre CoVE would be an essential step in supporting iwi Māori to express their tino rangatiratanga over degree education.

Encouraging the use of the kaupapa Māori framework for degree apprenticeships would be a useful way to strengthen the relevance of these programmes.

Changing how funding approval decisions are made could play a role in shifting the power dynamics in the systems

as well. One option would be to **require co-designed proposals with industry or professional groups.**

Funders should expect that investment plans from tertiary providers include jointly developed sections relating to degree apprenticeships. This approach reflects the need for deep integration between the worlds of education and industry in delivering these types of programmes.

Bolder steps – purposefully creating new arrangements.

We can also take some bolder steps to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships by recognising the costs incurred by industry and professional associations, creating governance mechanisms to oversee the roll-out of degree apprenticeships and extending the statutory obligations for ISBs and tertiary providers to share power with industry.

There needs to be **governance mechanisms at the national level to steer the strategy and oversight of degree apprenticeships.** This role could be assumed by the Tertiary Education Commission either directly or as part of an advisory group that would advise Labour Market Ministers on the implementation of the degree apprenticeships, including policy, regulatory and funding settings.

This governance mechanism would support relevant government agencies, tertiary providers and industry and professional organisations to make deliberate choices about priorities for development and how to optimise the design of the system of supports.

Representatives from all these groups would be represented on the advisory group with formal mechanisms to advise ministers and other stakeholders.

The design of the tertiary education system anticipates that tertiary providers hold the main accountability for degree programmes, and so power and resourcing are directed to them. We can shift this dynamic by **providing targeted support to employers and other partners to lead or co-lead the development of degree apprenticeships in their sectors.**

This approach would involve funding industry and professional organisations so they can collaborate effectively with tertiary providers, either working in partnership or leading work with tertiary providers in developing common approaches or degree programmes for use across the tertiary education system.

We should also consider extending the role of industry by **extending the standard setting role of ISBs to include degree apprenticeship programmes.** This change would allow ISBs to then exercise their power to ‘develop and maintain national curricula’ for these qualifications.

This approach aligns with the approach being taken in Australia where the Jobs and Skills Councils are leading development of vocational degrees and offers a way for industry to exercise more influence over the tertiary education system. It also has the advantage of avoiding the need for each provider to develop their own bespoke programmes.

MENTAL MODELS

We need to see degree apprenticeships as a mainstream, valued option rather than a niche or second-best pathway.

Current state – a work in progress

Across New Zealand's tertiary system, **the dominant picture of a “proper” degree remains academic, campus-centred, and lecture-led.** Workplace learning at degree level is tolerated as an adjunct (placements, projects) rather than recognised as an equivalent, let alone primary, mode of delivery. **Apprenticeships are still coded as lower-status “trades training”,** so the term itself signals “sub-degree” to many students, parents, teachers, and even some policy makers.

Work and study are commonly viewed as sequential. Study precedes work. So integrated earn-and-learn pathways are misread as diluting academic depth instead of deepening applied competence. This bias is reinforced by institutional incentives (e.g., prestige tied to research outputs and lecture contact), which normalise lecture-led delivery and cast extensive workplace learning as exceptional, risky, or challenging to quality-assure.

Professional bodies and some university faculties often frame real-world exposure as “placements” that sit under academic control rather than as co-owned learning with employers. Gatekeeping typically occurs after graduation rather than through co-selection and co-assessment during the programme, which cements the mental model that competence is proven in classrooms and only later tested at work.

Public narratives of “success” still celebrate scholarship offers, campus life, and traditional degree completions.

Degree apprenticeships are largely invisible in school careers advice, university marketing, or media coverage, so most families have no lived example of degree earn-and-learn to reference. Where degree apprenticeships are noticed, they are often positioned as niche pilots, sector one-offs, or equity initiatives, not as a high-status mainstream route into professional roles.

Quick wins – taking modest steps

There is scope within existing mental models to take modest, rapid steps that make degree apprenticeships visible, credible, and easy to understand without waiting for policy change.

The first step is to **promote real-life stories of successful degree apprenticeship learners, employers, and educators** through existing media, events, and social channels. These should be concise, locally grounded vignettes that show the job role, pay progression, workplace tasks mapped to learning outcomes, how assessment works, and what support is provided. Where possible, elevate iwi, Pacific, disabled learners, SMEs, and regional employers to ensure relevance across communities.

Degree apprenticeships should then be integrated into career guidance tools and school outreach as credible, aspirational pathways to high-value jobs. This means adding degree apprenticeships entries to provider websites and careers platforms using the same taxonomy as other degrees, and supplying schools with a short pack (slides, a two-minute explainer, and a simple “earnings vs. debt” one-pager) that explains dual admissions, protected learning time, and co-assessment in plain language.

Sector champions can carry this message through trusted networks. Identifying respected employers, professional leaders, and academics—and equipping them with a brief, three slides, and a short FAQ—allows degree apprenticeships to be endorsed in CPD sessions, association newsletters, conferences, and boardrooms where perceptions are formed.

Finally, short, **well-structured workshops and briefings for governance groups, academic boards, and regulators** can build shared understanding of how degree apprenticeships work in practice. These sessions should use local examples to illustrate workplace approval, co-assessment and moderation, data-sharing, and equity supports, and conclude with a simple checklist of decisions or next steps.

Bolder steps – purposefully shaping perceptions.

There is scope to take bolder steps that reset status signals and align incentives, so degree apprenticeships are treated as a mainstream, high-value route.

The first opportunity is a coordinated national communications campaign that reframes public perceptions of a degree apprenticeship **as a high-status, high-value pathway equivalent to traditional degrees.**

A national campaign should use a single, consistent lexicon across government, tertiary education providers, professional bodies, and industry, feature measurable proof points (registration outcomes, retention in relevant roles, earnings growth), and deploy multiple channels—school careers platforms, provider sites, social and earned media, and sector events.

Ambassadors (apprentices, supervisors, academics) and employer case stories should be produced to broadcast quality, parity of esteem, and productivity benefits, with regional tailoring to ensure relevance.

In parallel, **embed work-based learning and apprenticeship principles into professional development for staff** involved in degree programmes, including academic leaders, programme managers, lecturers, questions and answers and student-support teams.

Short, stackable PD modules (or a micro-credential) should cover co-design with employers, workplace approval, protected learning time, co-assessment and moderation, data-sharing, and equity supports. Release time and recognition in promotion criteria signal that this capability is core academic work, not outreach on the side.

We also need to **incentivise academic and employer collaboration through recognition, awards, or performance funding tied to degree apprenticeship outcomes.** Introducing recognition and awards for exemplary employer–tertiary education provider partnerships and creating performance-funding components tied to degree apprenticeships outcomes, such as competence milestone attainment, retention in relevant roles, equity gap closure, and employer satisfaction, will help to direct provider and industry effort to what matters in an earn-and-learn model.

Finally, we need to **partner with iwi, Pacific communities, and regional employers to co-create narratives** that reflect diverse aspirations and cultural values. We should spotlight meaningful outcomes such as whānau prosperity, community contribution, and regional development.

Taken together, these steps elevate degree apprenticeships in the public imagination, hard-wire the necessary staff capabilities, and align money and recognition with the behaviours that make workplace-led degrees succeed at scale.