



ConCOVE: Degree apprenticeships in construction and infrastructure

Innovation and Learning Practice

Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) Project

Submitted by ConCOVE, New Zealand

ConCOVE's degree apprenticeships in construction and infrastructure aim to bridge the gap between degree-level education and the construction sector. Through strategic partnerships with employers, it seeks to meet industry needs while expanding access to education.

Start date: November 2023

Type of implementing institution: Government organization or affiliation

Implementing partners: Tertiary education organizations, workforce development councils, industry associations, Tertiary Education Commission, New Zealand Qualification Authority

Target group: Industry employers, degree-level students, workers seeking upskilling, underserved groups



ConCOVE, New Zealand

ConCOVE is a vocational education centre for New Zealand's construction sector. This government-industry consortium connects industry, vocational education and learners to develop career pathways.

Description of activities

ConCOVE's initiative supports degree-level apprenticeships that integrate workplace learning with academic study in New Zealand's construction and infrastructure sector. It aims to fill skills gaps while making higher education more accessible and equitable. The initiative removes financial barriers through an earn-while-you-learn model and provides targeted support to priority groups including Māori and Pacific peoples, women and those wishing to change career or with limited access to campus-based learning.

Relevance

What issues is the degree-level apprenticeship initiative designed to address?

The initiative tackles key challenges in the construction and infrastructure sector:

- **High tertiary education costs:** Tuition fees and living expenses often lead to debt or deter potential learners.
- **Skills gap:** Recent surveys reveal a significant proportion of graduates lack essential work readiness skills with **83% of employers citing poor communication abilities and 73% noting insufficient initiative among job applicants**. This underscores the current need for structured on-the-job training post-graduation.
- **Limited career pathways:** The current system lacks opportunity for many to access new pathways into professional careers.
- **Inequality:** Priority groups remain underrepresented in the industry.

What strategies have been employed to address these challenges?

The initiative implements targeted solutions that bridge education and employment:

- **Industry-aligned learning:** Engagement with employers ensures learning outcomes meet workplace requirements.

- **Structured workplace learning:** Real-world experience provided through industry mentors.
- **Flexible learning formats:** A combination of online, face-to-face and workplace learning accommodates the needs of both learners and employers.
- **Reduced entry barriers:** Focuses on priority groups and enables learners to earn whilst they learn.
- **Comprehensive assessment:** Academic evaluation is blended with practical performance reviews and culminates in an independent, industry-led final assessment to confirm workplace readiness.

Is this part of a wider initiative or goal?

The initiative aligns with **New Zealand's Tertiary Education Strategy 2020-2025**, supporting national goals for industry-led training, access to education, and a skilled construction workforce. It also addresses several **UN Sustainable Development Goals** and looks to strengthen regional workforce development.

Added value

What is new about this initiative and how does it differ from similar programmes in New Zealand?

This innovative approach aims to reshape how qualifications are delivered and earned. The initiative draws on international best practices, particularly from the UK, while adapting to New Zealand's unique context. It is the first systematic implementation of degree-level apprenticeships in the country's construction sector, setting a precedent for industry-aligned education. New funding and delivery models ensure greater accessibility and sustainability, while an industry-led approach to the qualification puts employers at the heart of the process. The initiative elevates the traditional apprenticeship model by extending it to degree level and creating alternative pathways to professional careers.

What stage of implementation is the initiative at?

Four pilot schemes have been developed between industry partners and educational providers in architectural technology, building surveying, construction management and quantity surveying with delivery scheduled for mid-2026. The initiative builds on the successful BEngTech apprenticeship model, which has delivered improved outcomes for priority groups since 2020.

Transferability

To what extent is this initiative transferable?

Key elements can be replicated to strengthen technical and vocational education and training (TVET) across different sectors and locations: partnership frameworks between industry and education providers; integrated learning combining theory and practice; quality assurance for workplace learning; mentoring systems; and assessment frameworks. It is a blueprint for effective industry engagement, ensuring collaboration and responsiveness to evolving workforce demands.

What advice could be offered to those wishing to replicate this initiative?

Successfully integrating workplace and academic learning may require changes to regulatory frameworks, along with policy adjustments and stakeholder alignment. Educational institutions and professional registration bodies must also embrace cultural shifts that support work-integrated learning and industry partnerships.

Building strong industry collaboration takes time, while quality assurance requires robust and cost-effective frameworks and monitoring systems. Additionally, substantial resources are needed for programme development, and funding models need careful design to ensure sustainability, equitable access and programme quality.

Has the initiative been promoted in any national or international contexts?

The initiative has featured on national news ([RNZ](#)) and has been presented at national and international TVET conferences ([Podcast in Australia](#), [AVETRA conference programme](#)). It has also been shared through ConCOVE networks ([ConCOVE conference presentation](#)) and is part of wider vocational education reform discussions including a [reform submission](#) to the University Advisory Group.

ConCOVE's degree apprenticeships in construction and infrastructure is one of the BILT project's Innovation and Learning Practices that address systemic challenges within the five work streams of the project.

Specifically, the ConCOVE initiative addresses new qualifications and competencies in TVET.



New qualifications and competencies in TVET

- *Identifying new qualifications and competencies in a timely manner;*
- *Integrating them into appealing and flexible curricula and training regulations; and*
- *Implementing them in innovative training approaches.*

Additional Innovation and Learning Practices cover the following areas:



Digitalization



Entrepreneurship in TVET



Greening TVET



Migration and TVET

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More information about this practice

[ConCOVE project website](#)

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About the BILT Project

UNESCO-UNEVOC's Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) project is a reference point for innovation and learning in TVET. It fosters global policy dialogue and peer learning among TVET stakeholders while promoting innovation and inclusive excellence in TVET. BILT complements developments at the national level in supporting innovative, market-oriented and attractive modes of learning and cooperation in TVET.

The BILT project explores the process of identifying, integrating and implementing new qualifications and competencies in TVET. This is known as the 'three I's process'.

In addition to the broad focus on new qualifications and competencies, BILT addresses four complementary themes: Digitalization in TVET, Greening TVET, Entrepreneurship in TVET, and Migration and TVET.

For more information, please visit
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New qualifications and competencies in TVET

- **Identifying** new qualifications and competencies in a timely manner;
- **Integrating** them into appealing and flexible curricula and training regulations; and
- **Implementing** them in innovative training approaches.

Entrepreneurship in TVET

Unlocking the potential of innovative entrepreneurial activities and fostering entrepreneurial culture

Greening TVET

Responding to new development paradigms for sustainability and reduced environmental impact

Digitalization in TVET

Providing response to new skills demands, as technology has permeated the world of work and is changing the profile of jobs

Migration and TVET

Accelerating the integration of migrants into their host communities, and allowing them to become productive members of the workforce

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