

Using ConCOVE's evidence: Turning ConCOVE insights into action in industry

A practical implementation checklist for construction and infrastructure employers

PURPOSE This guide distils ConCOVE's employer-focused research (2021–2025) into eight actionable steps employers can take now, to build stronger workforce pipelines, lift productivity, and future-proof their organisations.

THE CORE PROBLEM Across ConCOVE's employer and workforce development projects, a clear systemic problem emerges:

New Zealand's construction and infrastructure workforce system is fragmented, inconsistent, and overly reliant on individual employers to solve structural issues.

More specifically:

- Workplaces are training institutions without the tools, capability, or support to deliver high-quality learning at scale.
- Apprenticeships and work-based learning vary widely in quality, structure, and support — leading to high dropout rates and inconsistent skill development.
- Funding and incentives do not align with the actual cost or effort of training (e.g., ~\$28k per apprentice per year in real employer cost).
- Employers struggle with business skills and future skills readiness, particularly in forecasting, planning, marketing, digital capability, sustainability requirements, and offsite manufacturing.
- Equity gaps remain entrenched — Māori, Pasifika, women, older learners, and neurodiverse workers face avoidable barriers to access, safety, belonging, and progression.
- Workforce development lacks a national, coordinated approach, leading to duplication, inefficiency, and disjointed learner experiences across the system.

In summary:

Employers want skilled people, apprentices want good training, and providers want to deliver — but the system connecting them is not yet designed for coherence, quality, or scale.

ConCOVE's research points to a need for a coordinated national apprenticeship strategy, stronger employer capability, and consistent frameworks to lift the quality and productivity of on-the-job learning.

Priority actions for industry associations / employers (12-36 months)

1. Co-design training and career pathways with providers

Providers are going to need to respond to industry needs faster to remain competitive in the future environment.

Implement:

- Form structured partnerships with ITPs, wānanga, PTEs, and Industry Skills Boards.
- Review ConCOVE's apprenticeship toolkits and degree-apprenticeship frameworks to map where your current training aligns — and where gaps exist.
- Utilise tools like ConstrucTrend to establish a “skills needs briefing” process annually with training providers.

Why:

Training becomes aligned with your real workplace needs; retention increases; onboarding becomes smoother.

2. Strengthen mentoring and on-the-job training capability

Implement:

- Use ConCOVE's Work-Based Trainer Good Practice insights to develop mentor training.
- Allocate structured time for coaching — not ad hoc support.
- Recognise and reward effective workplace mentors.
- Consider a sector-wide approach mirroring examples that already exist e.g. Australia's Apprenticeship Support Australia.

Why:

High-quality mentoring is the strongest predictor of apprenticeship success and reduces costly churn.

3. Make inclusion and pastoral care core business

Implement:

- Adopt ConCOVE frameworks on supporting women, Māori, Pasifika, rangatahi, neurodiverse workers, and under-represented groups.
- Implement Upstander/Bystander training and clear reporting pathways.
- Provide culturally safe induction and buddying systems.
- Use tools like ConCOVE's Worker Support Practice Toolkit to guide pastoral care, and the Apprenticeship Toolkit for employers to onboard and develop employees.

Why:

A safer, inclusive environment lifts retention, widens the talent pipeline, and improves team culture.

4. Build early talent pipelines through schools and communities

Don't wait for the Industry Skills Boards to develop vocational education for school children, invest in how your business or industry connects with schools.

Implement:

- Apply the Industry–School Engagement Toolkit, especially if you're an SME.
- Provide short workplace experiences, site visits, or taster days.
- Build relationships with local kura, schools, iwi providers, and community organisations.

Why:

This grows awareness of the trades, improves equity of access, and builds a sustainable entry pipeline with a local and regional focus.

5. Invest strategically in apprenticeships — treat it as workforce infrastructure

Implement:

- Budget for the real cost of an apprentice (≈\$28k/year in training time, supervision, and productivity).
- Work with providers to understand apprenticeship completion, dropout, and progression as KPIs.
- Use ConCOVE's Funding and Incentives research to understand how to optimise co-investment.

Why:

Reducing dropout and increasing productivity pays back the cost of investment many times over.

6. Prepare for the industry's future skills needs

Implement:

- Build (and push ISBs for) specific business training in forecasting, planning, marketing alongside digital, sustainability, and off-site manufacturing capability into training plans.
- Pilot new training approaches (e.g., AR/VR tools, micro-credentials, specialist construction business skills modules).
- Review ConstrucTrend survey annually for trends and advocate for better skills needs in the formal qualification system.

Why:

The industry is shifting rapidly; employers who act early will outperform on productivity and innovation.

7. Use data to drive workforce decisions

Implement:

- Request a simple regular workforce dashboard: retention, apprenticeship progression, diversity, safety, skills gaps from providers in the sector.
- Monitor this at least quarterly with the wider sector to ensure challenges are being addressed by providers and government.
- Partner with providers to share data on learner progress and outcomes.

Why:

Data provides visibility, allows earlier intervention, and helps quantify ROI on training.

8. Contribute to system-level collaboration

Implement:

- Join sector groups, alliances, and forums (local and national).
- Share insights and innovations openly with other employers.
- Advocate for consistent national apprenticeship and on-job training models.

Why:

Most challenges (productivity, workforce supply, inequity, quality of training) are systems problems — they require collective action.