

NOVEMBER 2025

Advancing pastoral care and needs-based support in the construction and infrastructure sector

Roadmap for industry

CONCO>E
TŪHURA



WAIHANGA ARA RAU
Construction and
Infrastructure
Workforce Development Council

Navigating 2025

The drivers and context for this roadmap

How this roadmap was developed

This roadmap builds on a synthesis of sector knowledge. It draws from research and insights commissioned and produced by Waihanga Ara Rau and ConCOVE Tūhura, alongside engagement with sector representatives across industry, training organisations, and government agencies.

A focused gap analysis was undertaken to identify capability gaps across the sector and system-level barriers to embedding change at scale.

About this roadmap

The construction and infrastructure sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is at a crossroads. We are facing persistent workforce challenges, including labour shortages, an aging workforce, low retention, and barriers to diversity and inclusion. While these issues are not new, the need for practical, collective action is becoming more important.

This roadmap was developed by Waihanga Ara Rau and ConCOVE Tūhura to help employers, industry groups, training organisations, and government agencies come together around a shared vision: building a stronger, more resilient sector through the provision of effective pastoral care and needs-based support.

The strategic focus areas and actions outlined in this document are grounded in research and what people across industry have told us about what works and where focused effort is required. We have listened to employers and training providers and drawn on research that captured worker perspectives to understand the realities on site and on the job.

The need for this roadmap in 2025

With ConCOVE Tūhura and Waihanga Ara Rau concluding their operations, the sector stands at a pivotal juncture. Sustaining momentum and building on recent progress will require clear leadership and effective coordination.

However, meaningful progress does not need to wait for a single lead agency. This roadmap is designed as a practical resource for collective action, but also as a guide for individual organisations to take initiative, build capability, address persistent system gaps, and implement new approaches that respond to workforce challenges.

This roadmap is intended for everyone invested in the future of the construction and infrastructure sector:

- ▶ Employers and business owners
- ▶ Industry associations, bodies, representative groups, and collectives
- ▶ Training organisations
- ▶ Government agencies and policy makers.

A blueprint for change

This roadmap outlines the pathway for collective leadership to drive meaningful sector-wide progress.

At the same time, it highlights tangible actions that organisations can take independently to contribute to this change. Whether working alone or in collaboration, the roadmap provides a clear blueprint for addressing workforce challenges at multiple levels, offering both immediate and long-term opportunities to strengthen the sector.

Our 2025 baseline and vision for the future

Vision statement

We envision a construction and infrastructure sector where all workers, regardless of background or need, have access to the support they need to succeed.

By embedding holistic pastoral care and needs-based support into industry systems, we will strengthen workforce quality, improve training completion and worker retention, and enable more people to build meaningful, long-term careers.

An intentional and inclusive approach to pastoral care and needs-based support will become part of the solution for addressing skills shortages, enhancing productivity, and developing a high-performing, resilient workforce for the future.

Where we are today

The construction and infrastructure sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is experiencing several persistent and systemic workforce challenges.

- ▶ **Labour shortages:** Even accounting for the sector's boom-bust cycles, modelling points to a projected shortfall of 157,490 workers (a 43% gap) by June 2027, relative to forecast demand.
- ▶ **Loss of experience:** The workforce is aging, and experienced workers are leaving faster than they are being replaced. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of workers aged over 55 dropped by nearly 15,000, and those aged 15 to 24 dropped by 3,700.
- ▶ **Retention and early attrition:** Retention rates are low, particularly among apprentices and early-career workers. Of the cohort who entered the sector in 2018, more than half left within the first three years. As of 2023, only 23% of the original cohort remained in the sector.
- ▶ **Diversity and inclusion:** We are struggling to retain our Māori and Pacific workforce. Women make up just 15% of the workforce (only 2.6% in trades roles). Our sector does not have enough initiatives to support diversity.
- ▶ **Productivity constraints:** The sector remains stuck in a cycle of low productivity, driven by skill shortages, outdated practices, and overreliance on long hours that ultimately reduce efficiency.

Pastoral care and needs-based support as part of the solution

A strong, skilled, and productive workforce requires more than technical training. It needs wraparound, needs-based support and pastoral care.

- ▶ **Happier, healthier workers:** Effective pastoral care removes barriers that affect workers' ability to succeed, leading to improved wellbeing and sustained engagement.
- ▶ **Positive team culture:** Supportive environments foster trust, inclusion, and collaboration, building stronger, more resilient teams.
- ▶ **Diversity drives innovation:** Supporting workers from different backgrounds expands talent pools, enriches workplace culture, and enhances innovation.
- ▶ **Pastoral care is essential for business success:** Pastoral care reduces turnover, boosts retention, and enhances productivity, supporting long-term business performance.

Capability gaps of the construction and infrastructure sector

The capability gaps outlined in this roadmap reflect the current challenges facing the construction and infrastructure sector. Our research points to recurring issues, including limited understanding of future workforce needs, and a lack of confidence among employers and supervisors to initiate difficult but necessary conversations. Similarly, power dynamics in the workplace can prevent workers from advocating for their own needs. These gaps directly affect the quality and consistency of pastoral care and needs-based support. Addressing them is essential to building a more resilient, skilled, and inclusive workforce.

Low awareness about the future face of the workforce, and what effective support is required

Many employers and industry leaders lack a clear understanding of their future workforce, and the skills and resources needed to support them. Needs-based supports often focus narrowly on gender and cultural awareness, overlooking neurodiversity, disability, and other types of diversity.

Limited understanding of and confidence to engage with Māori culture

Understanding bi-culturalism is a particular weakness. Many misunderstand equity for equality, which leads to resistance or inaction. There is a widespread lack of clarity and confidence about how to engage with Māori culture and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Assimilation into existing workplace cultures is often expected, rather than adapting workplaces.

Fear and reluctance to have discussions about diversity and wellbeing

Employers and supervisors can feel ill-equipped to lean into difficult conversations about mental health, wellbeing, or other diverse needs. This can lead to avoidance of difficult conversations and unresolved issues.

Difficulties finding and navigating supports

Employers are often overwhelmed by the number of available resources and lack clear guidance on where to start. Referral pathways are unclear, and many employers are unaware of what is available. Accessing timely mental health or specialist support is difficult and expensive.

Low worker capacity for self-advocacy

Workers can lack the tools, knowledge, or confidence to identify their needs, understand their rights, and advocate for support. There is a significant power imbalance between workers and employers, making it difficult for workers to voice personal or sensitive needs.

Limited formal or codified processes and practices

Few businesses have formalised needs-based support and pastoral care commitments into business cases, measurable objectives, or reporting mechanisms. Highly effective practices exist but are not always codified. The absence of clear strategies, policies, and procedures hinders sustained commitment and systematic improvement.

Ingrained cultural attitudes and mindsets

The sector is described as male-dominated and “macho” with behavioural expectations that can be unwelcoming for people from different backgrounds. Traditional or “old-school” mentalities can disregard pastoral care as an optional extra and be resistant to change.

Focus on technical over transferrable skills

Transferrable skills are not given the same emphasis or recognition as academic or technical skills. This can be problematic for workers who rely on these skills for navigating workplace dynamics. It can also minimise the important role leaders, mentors, or pastoral care navigators play in the workplace.

Reluctance to invest in worker support

Some employers avoid taking on apprentices or trainees due to concerns about attrition and “wasted investment.” There is an entrenched belief that “training someone who leaves is a wasted investment,” discouraging support for learner mobility, even though system-wide workforce mobility can benefit all businesses in the long run.

System gaps of the construction and infrastructure sector

The system gaps outlined in this roadmap highlight structural barriers that limit progress across the construction and infrastructure sector. While many organisations are committed to improving workforce outcomes, systemic challenges, such as fragmented support systems, inconsistent funding models, and siloed responsibilities, make it difficult to embed best practice at scale. Meaningful change requires coordinated effort beyond individual employers, with stronger alignment between government, industry, and training providers.

Lack of definitional frameworks for pastoral care in workplace settings

Existing definitions of pastoral care are grounded in tertiary education, not in work-based learning or employment. The Education Code places responsibility on providers, but this model doesn't translate well to the realities of construction and infrastructure workplaces. Many workers outside of the tertiary system are not covered by current regulatory mechanisms, leaving a significant policy and practice gap.

Ambiguous roles and responsibilities

There is confusion about who is responsible for pastoral care – training providers, employers, external social services, or all. This lack of clarity leads to fragmented, informal support systems, increasing the risk that workers with complex needs fall through the cracks.

Limited industry coordination and SME engagement

The sector is highly decentralised, with most firms being small and operating independently. Subcontracting disperses responsibility, making coordinated solutions difficult. SMEs often lack the time, resources, or incentives to participate in sector-wide initiatives, limiting the reach of even well-intentioned programmes.

Disconnect between industry and education sectors

There is a persistent lack of coordination between education (particularly secondary and classroom-based settings) and industry, leading to mismatched expectations, fragmented programme design, and variable quality in vocational education and training. Young people are often not adequately prepared for workplace expectations and educators struggle to keep pace with industry change.

Limited strategic coordination

Fragmented investment and siloed agency mandates result in disjointed support for employers and workers. The absence of a national strategy that integrates pastoral care as a priority creates ambiguity about which agency is responsible, leading to gaps in continuity of care and support.

Funding gaps and inconsistencies

Successful models often rely on time-limited or project-based funding, making them unsustainable in the long term. The closure of key funds has left delivery partners without resources. There is limited government-funded support for workers outside of apprenticeship or jobseeker programmes. Local pilots or programmes often remain isolated due to funding dependencies, limiting the ability to embed improvements system-wide.

Incomplete evidence on data and outcomes

There is no integrated, system-wide dataset for workforce outcomes or intervention effectiveness. Some groups remain underrepresented in official statistics. Programme performance is often measured by completion rates alone, missing broader outcomes like job retention, post-study success, and alignment with industry needs.

Poorly aligned incentives and a lack of accountability

Incentive structures focus on participation, not quality or outcomes, and can be misused without adequate monitoring. Employer responsibilities for support are often implicit, with few mechanisms to ensure quality or consequences for poor practice. Incentives are not consistently tied to measurable indicators of quality, such as qualification attainment, job retention, or learner satisfaction.

Untapped levers for system change

There is scope to use institutional levers, training systems, funding, and procurement to embed pastoral care more deeply. There is a need for proportionate mechanisms that both enable employer participation and ensure learner support is not compromised.

Industry roadmap for change

We have identified six priority areas for supporting capability and system change

Positioning pastoral care and needs-based support as a strategic investment

The value proposition is clear: investing in people's wellbeing drives productivity and retention. Messaging focuses on long-term benefits rather than compliance or extra effort. Businesses understand and believe in the value of pastoral care and needs-based support and invest in the wellbeing of their workers.

1.

Acknowledging the workplace as a site of pastoral care

The employer's role in pastoral care is part of a shared responsibility alongside training providers and communities. Clear expectations and practical guidance identify key touchpoints where pastoral care and needs-based support can be embedded into daily practice, enabling organisations and clients to actively collaborate towards better outcomes for workers.

2.

Valuing people beyond the job they do

Guidance encourages employers to see employees as whole individuals with lives, identities, and aspirations beyond work. Sector leadership promotes empathy and relational leadership to foster stronger connections and culture, valuing diversity and the cross-pollination of ideas for innovation. Organisations embrace cultural responsiveness, enabling people to bring their whole selves to work.

3.

Normalising hard conversations

The fear and stigma surrounding difficult conversations is broken down by showing they are manageable and essential. Workers are empowered to self-advocate confidently. Employers and businesses benefit from a broader, accessible support network, ensuring no one falls through the gaps. The system remains responsive to the evolving needs of workers.

4.

Elevating transferrable skills as core to industry success

The system recognises the importance of transferrable skills alongside technical to bolster culture and practice. Leaders can embed transferrable skills in real-time to ensure they are responsive to the needs of workers. Industry associations, leaders, businesses, and workers who demonstrate these skills are respected and rewarded.

5.

Building a culture of growth and learning

Businesses have clear documentation of goals, plans, and progress to keep workers and businesses aligned. There is a culture of regular self-review and implementing of lessons learned to enable continuous improvement at work and in the system.

6.



Positioning pastoral care and needs-based support as a strategic investment

The value proposition is clear: investing in people’s wellbeing drives productivity and retention. Messaging focuses on long-term benefits rather than compliance or extra effort. Businesses understand and believe in the value of pastoral care and needs-based support and invest in the wellbeing of their workers.

-  Industry
-  Training providers
-  Industry Skills Boards
-  Government agencies

Build capability

Promote employer awareness of the social and economic benefits of pastoral care and needs-based support via evidence-based case studies, data, and insights.

Build momentum

Embed pastoral care and needs-based support as a core pillar in workforce development strategies, sector plans, and industry standards.

- *This should also include individual organisational planning frameworks, strategic documents, or internal workforce policies.*

Work with industry associations and leaders to champion the value of pastoral care and needs-based support across their networks and membership, leveraging credible sector voices.

- *Individual organisations can engage actively with these groups and advocate for stronger sector-wide commitment.*

Invest in ongoing research and evaluation to demonstrate outcomes and enable greater investment in pastoral care and need-based support.

- *Individual organisations can also contribute by collecting their own data, evaluating support initiatives, and sharing insights to build the evidence base across the sector.*

Ownership assignment and assumptions

For each action in the roadmap, we have indicated whether ownership could sit with industry, training organisations, Industry Skills Boards (ISBs), or government agencies. These assignments are based on where meaningful levers or influence exist. For example, policy settings, organisational capacity, funding mechanisms, or established relationships. Ownership reflects an ability to lead, coordinate, or enable delivery, depending on the nature of the action.

The rationale for these ownership assignments, and the underlying levers that support them, is outlined in the companion research report, *Advancing pastoral care and needs-based support in the construction and infrastructure sector*.

Owners



Redefining the workplace as a site of pastoral care

The employer’s role in pastoral care is part of a shared responsibility alongside training providers and communities. Clear expectations and practical guidance identify key touchpoints where pastoral care and needs-based support can be embedded into daily practice, enabling organisations and clients to actively collaborate towards better outcomes for workers.

-  Industry
-  Training providers
-  Industry Skills Boards
-  Government agencies

Build capability

Promote practical examples and leadership modelling of good workplace pastoral care, including tailored support for those on vocational learning pathways.

- Organisations can lead by example, showcasing effective practices, mentoring others, and visibly prioritising care in workplace culture and leadership behaviours.

Build momentum

Leverage credible sector voices to share practical insights, clarify misconceptions, and build support for recognising the workplace as a key site of pastoral care.

- Individual organisations can contribute by participating in sector discussions to help spread these messages.

Develop a flexible, worker-centric framework for pastoral care tailored to workplace settings, outlining roles and responsibilities for workers, employers, and training providers.

- Organisations can adopt this framework within their own operations and ensure responsibilities are defined across supervisors, team leaders, and training advisors.

Develop formal coordination protocols between employers and training provider, supported by a responsive model where training advisors can adjust caseloads based on learner needs.

- Individual businesses can adopt responsive operating models with training advisors that clarify roles, expectations, and regular engagement points.

Develop, model, and normalise contracting practices that address the needs of the workforce, incorporating expectations for site amenities, targeted social outcomes, and onsite wellbeing services.

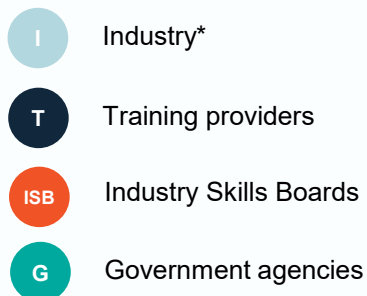
- Businesses can lead this change by integrating these requirements into their contracts and procurement processes, while actively educating and raising awareness among clients.
- Large clients have a significant opportunity to drive industry-wide progress by making these criteria a mandatory condition for doing business.

Owners



Valuing people beyond the job they do

Guidance encourages employers to see employees as whole individuals with lives, identities, and aspirations beyond work. Sector leadership (including industry associations) promotes empathy and relational leadership to foster stronger connections and culture, valuing diversity and the cross-pollination of ideas for innovation. Organisations embrace cultural responsiveness, enabling people to bring their whole selves to work.



*Including industry associations

Build capability

Partner with iwi, Pacific and migrant communities, and neurodiversity advocates to develop and promote awareness and training initiatives.

- *Individual businesses should proactively engage with these opportunities and embed the insights gained into their organisational culture.*

Develop “short burst” cultural competency and inclusion learning modules designed for easy integration into existing training programmes and site induction processes.

- *Organisations can embed these modules into their own onboarding and ongoing development frameworks to foster an inclusive workplace culture.*

Develop targeted interventions to support equitable performance management, goal setting, feedback, and progression pathways that reflect diverse workforce needs.

- *Employers should actively engage with these initiatives, embed best practices within their organisations, and proactively seek out opportunities to improve these processes.*

Showcase the achievements and leadership of individuals from diverse cultural, gender, neurodiverse, and social backgrounds to challenge and expand perceptions of belonging, leadership, and success within the sector.

Build momentum

Support, strengthen, and grow peer support groups within large firms and across SMEs through industry forums, industry associations, and representative groups.

- *Organisations can establish internal groups for their staff or provide flexibility and encouragement for workers to participate in external peer networks.*

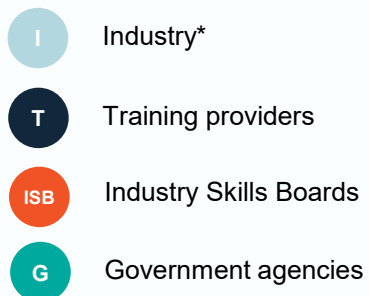
Establish initiatives to monitor and understand emerging workforce shifts, including age, cultural diversity, neurodiversity, and migration patterns, to ensure employer training, development, and support initiatives remain relevant, responsive, and future-fit.

Owners



Normalising hard conversations

The fear and stigma surrounding difficult conversations is broken down by showing they are manageable and essential. Workers are empowered to self-advocate confidently. Employers and businesses benefit from a broader, accessible support network, ensuring no one falls through the gaps. The system remains responsive to the evolving needs of workers.



*Including industry associations

Build capability

Build sector capability in wellbeing literacy, mental health first response, and resilience through the development and promotion of targeted initiatives, including modules within existing train-the-trainer programmes, dedicated training offerings, and micro-credentials.

- Organisations can adapt existing training content to include these focus areas, engage with industry-led initiatives, invest in external training, or partner with providers to build internal capability.

Create and promote a dynamic, region-specific directory of local health, wellbeing, and community support services to improve access and connect workers with relevant support in their area.

- Organisations can map their own networks of support services, ensuring these resources are visible to supervisors and workers, and that referral pathways are clear and accessible.

Build worker capability in understanding rights, wellbeing literacy and resilience, and effectively advocate for themselves through the development and promotion of targeted initiatives.

- This might include integrating key information into site induction processes, embedding content within qualification pathways, providing training opportunities, or developing worker toolkits and resources, and sharing resources through industry associations.

Build momentum

Engage with SMEs to identify barriers to participation in training and develop options for more flexible and fit-for-purpose delivery models, ensuring they cater to the needs of small businesses, and explore options to incentivise greater participation.

Explore navigator-type infrastructure to help employers connect with and coordinate wraparound support services, delivered either on-site or through local providers, to better support their workforce.

- This could be developed through partnerships between government, industry bodies, and community organisations, ensuring services are accessible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to workforce needs.

Advocate to local and central government agencies, health authorities, and regional workforce planners to improve access to specialist support services where there are persistent gaps.

Owners



Elevating transferrable skills as core to industry success

The system recognises the importance of transferrable skills alongside technical to bolster culture and practice. Leaders can embed transferrable skills in real-time to ensure they are responsive to the needs of workers. Industry associations, leaders, businesses, and workers who demonstrate these skills are respected and rewarded.

-  Industry*
-  Training providers
-  Industry Skills Boards
-  Government agencies

*Including industry associations

Build capability

Promote the value of transferable skills by showcasing success stories that demonstrate how these capabilities enable career progression, mobility across roles, and effective leadership in the sector.

Develop and promote recruitment screening tools for employers, along with guidance materials for supervisors and mentors, to support fair and effective hiring practices that prioritise industry-relevant transferable skills.

- *Individual organisations can engage with available resources and review their job descriptions and recruitment processes to ensure that communication, leadership, and other key skills are integral to their hiring criteria.*

Build momentum

Incorporate the development and prioritisation of transferable skills into workforce strategies and career frameworks to support employee development, mobility, and long-term sector sustainability.

Publicly recognise transferable skills through role rebranding, quality marks, and awards to uphold and celebrate the mana of industry leaders who demonstrate excellence in organisational values, pastoral care, and relational leadership.

- *This could include quality marks and recognition mechanisms that specifically honour leaders excelling in pastoral care and learner support.*
- *Training organisations can redefine the roles of training advisors as learning navigators, affirming their critical contribution to learner success.*
- *Businesses can also implement peer nominations and awards to promote and normalise the value of pastoral care within the sector.*

Owners



Building a culture of growth

Businesses have clear documentation of goals, plans, and progress to keep workers and businesses aligned. There is a culture of regular self-review and implementing of lessons learned to enable continuous improvement at work and in the system.

-  Industry
-  Training providers
-  Industry Skills Boards
-  Government agencies

Build capability

Develop and promote guidance and tools to support self-review and the documentation of pastoral care processes.

- Organisations can contribute by codifying best practices, using self-assessment tools to track practices, identify areas for improvement, and implement necessary changes effectively. They can demonstrate leadership by actively sharing knowledge and insights with industry peers.

Build momentum

Develop and implement a communication strategy that promotes investment in people as a long-term industry gain.

- This strategy should focus on shifting mindsets within the sector by highlighting the benefits of workforce development, addressing misconceptions about workforce turnover, and encouraging ongoing sector-wide commitment to nurturing talent.

Set minimum industry expectations and provide standardised documentation templates for pastoral care processes, diversity and inclusion policies, and related organisational practices, tailored to support SMEs implement these frameworks effectively.

Facilitate the sharing of research and impact evaluations to identify and scale effective pastoral care models, reinforcing pastoral care as a strategic investment across the industry.

- Ensure these insights are communicated in accessible, time-efficient formats to support engagement by SMEs.

Develop and implement an outcomes framework to systematically monitor, evaluate, and improve pastoral care and workforce wellbeing across the sector.

- This framework should include related outcomes such as workforce retention, productivity, wellbeing, and other indicators beyond apprenticeship completion.

Owners



Capturing the current state of pastoral care and supports in the Construction and Infrastructure sector – with a view for the future

This roadmap is part of a wider set of artefacts building on a synthesis of sector knowledge. Three documents have been produced to capture the research, insights, and impacts at different levels across the sector, including considerations for what comes next.

1 INSIGHTS REPORT

Advancing pastoral care and needs-based support: embedding effective practices in the construction and infrastructure sector

Explores current capability gaps and system-level barriers to providing effective worker support at scale as well as introducing the *six priority areas* for change.

2 INDUSTRY ROADMAP

Advancing pastoral care and needs-based support in the construction and infrastructure sector: Roadmap for industry

3 EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

Construction and Infrastructure sector: Worker support practice toolkit

Guidelines to support employers to identify at what points workers might need stronger support and some practical, proven ideas that can be used to start, change or increase employer practice.

