

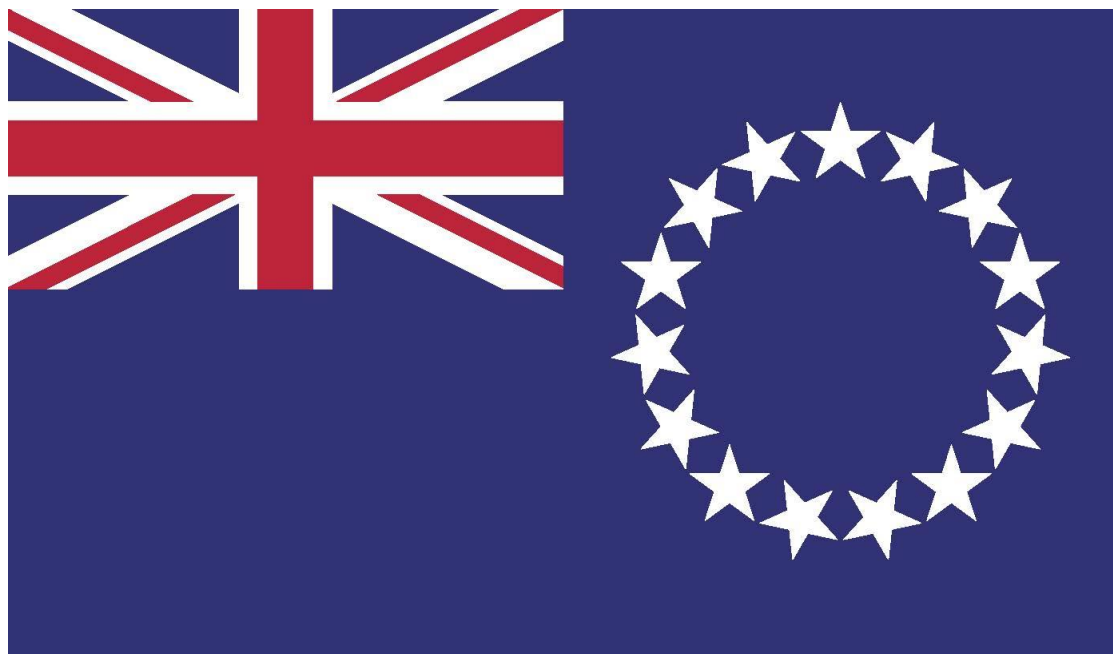
# Industry-based Training models in the Cook Islands

## The current state and potential for application

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## Introduction

This brief is a summary of the national findings for the Cook Islands from the *Construction Sector Industry-based Training in the Pacific* research commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and carried out by the Skills Consulting Group. The focus of the research was on the current state of industry training in 6 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and its likely impact on the implementation of industry training in the Pacific construction sector.

The findings for the Cook Islands are summarised in four areas:

- The models of industry training currently being delivered in the Cook Islands and its construction sector.
- The level and scope of skills demand in the Cook Islands which drives the need for Industry Training.
- The barriers to implementation of industry training in the Cook Islands.
- The development needs for the Cook Islands to enable successful industry training models.

The research was carried out between May and August 2021 using a combination of desk-based and field research. Field research involved semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of industry training in the selected PICs. These included government representatives; education and training providers; employers and industry representatives; and community and voluntary organisations where appropriate.

## Industry Training in The Cook Islands and its Construction Sector

The Cook Islands is currently testing industry training models through its government tertiary provider, the Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute (CITTI). CITTI is offering limited apprenticeships within the hospitality and tourism sector, though currently no robust evaluations of these have been performed. These are being designed and delivered in close contact with industry.

The government is looking to widen the scope of the apprenticeship system. *The Cook Islands Economic Development Strategy 2030* outlines a plan to develop an apprenticeship scheme in the Cook Islands (Action 3.14)

accessible to both Rarotonga and Pa Enea (Government of the Cook Islands, 2021). The indicative timeframe for this is 2022 with a pilot stated to commence this programme before being extended over a period of three years.

Currently, beyond this limited instance, industry training does not exist within the Cook Islands. Other forms of formal work-based learning are largely performed by CITTI. CITTI is a formal TVET provider and subsidiary of the Cook Islands Ministry of Education. It has centres throughout the Cook Islands but is based primarily in Rarotonga (Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute, 2021).

### INDUSTRY TRAINING

*A mode of learning where learners develop competence mostly through the workplace, however, develop some complementary knowledge sets, skills, or competence outside of the workplace.*

CITTI provides both accredited and non-accredited training programmes; accrediting bodies include the CITTI academic board and Cook Islands registering authorities, City and Guilds, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). CITTI is funded through central government and aid organisations. CITTI also provides Pa Enea (Outer Islands) community training activities to reduce the geographical barriers to training.

The only other tertiary education and training provider is the University of the South Pacific (USP) with a campus on Rarotonga. CITTI is the only construction programme provider in the Cook Islands, however, some engineering-related programmes are offered through USP. Their construction programmes include short courses; basic trades training programmes that in some instances are integrated with secondary schools; and programmes, such as electrical, carpentry, and plumbing and gas fitting, which are accredited in New Zealand (Scott, 2015). Recent CITTI total completion rates are seen in Figure 1 below.

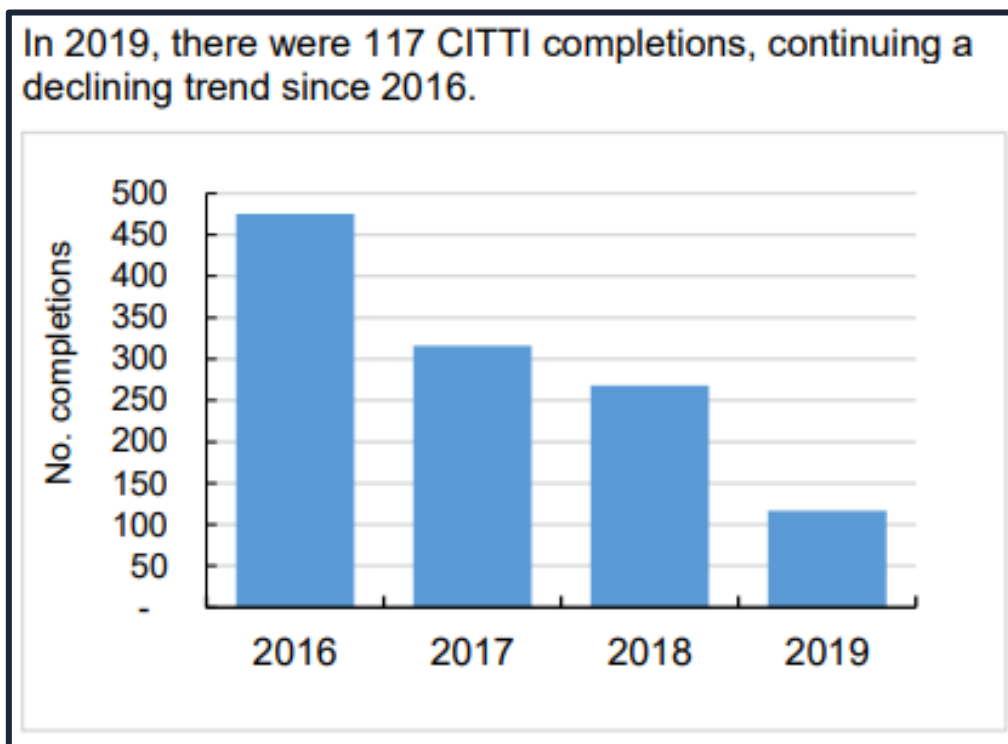


Figure 1: Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute Total Student Completions (2016-2019)  
Source: (Government of the Cook Islands, 2021)

Beyond formal industry training, participants in our research identified that industry employers were providing ad-hoc, non-formal training to their employees. This training is needed to supplement any construction skills acquired through CITTI. In some instances, employers are bringing in international experts to provide training; or providing training themselves. Some employers are also sending their staff overseas to be trained - returning to the Cook Islands to upskill other staff. Predominantly, this training is occurring in New Zealand.

## Construction Skills Landscape

In the Cook Islands, demand was reported to be strong for both skilled and semi-skilled workers in all areas of the construction sector from all types of stakeholders. Strong demand for construction skills in the Pa Enea (outer islands) was also indicated. General construction activity, harbour development, civil projects, and power network expansion are driving demand.

More quantitative information is needed to accurately assess the scale and scope of construction sector demand. Undersupplied and oversupplied skills identified by stakeholders are presented in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Identified undersupplied and oversupplied construction skills in the Cook Islands.*

SKILLS UNDERSUPPLIED	SKILLS OVERSUPPLIED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders identified undersupply of skills in all areas of construction.</li> <li>Only about one-third of individuals working in trades and trade-related occupations have a qualification (Government of the Cook Islands, 2021).</li> <li>There is no quantitative assessment of skills gaps, however, skills shortages are generally considered to be an issue (Government of the Cook Islands, 2021).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No oversupplied skills identified.</li> </ul>

## Barriers to the Successful Implementation of Industry Training Models in The Cook Islands

There are three key barriers to the implementation of formal industry in the Cook Islands: limited resources and capacity; coordination and engagement; and relevant programmes.

### Limited Resources and Capacity

The theme of limited resources came through for government stakeholders, employers, and education providers.

#### Government Resources

The government doesn't provide the financial resources or have the capacity to lead and coordinate the sector effectively. Coordinating and managing an effective industry training system requires dedicated and sustained finance from stakeholders with government financing providing the anchor for the system. These costs are typically shared in a successful industry training system with employers providing wages and supervision/training time, and students and communities contributing in the form of fees. However, particularly in inception, costs will be high and will require increased levels of government funding to implement industry training.

Year	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
<b>Government Appropriation to Ministry of Education</b>	\$18,432,237	18,857,622	19,588,429	20,130,303	19,895,611
<b>Nominal GDP</b>	\$418,364,000	427,310,000	447,269,000	458,222,000	496,800,000
<b>%</b>	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.0

Figure 2: Cook Islands Government Education Budget as a Percentage of Nominal GDP.  
Source: 2020 Education Statistics Report, Government of the Cook Islands.

## Employer Resources

Employers do not have the resources to send employees away for formal training. The costs for formal construction training activities are prohibitive and are too much for employers to currently afford. Employers also identified the opportunity costs of training to be significant. Lost income-generating capacity through on-job training or releasing learners for off-job learning provided barriers to engagement with these models. Learners are equally unable to afford formal courses.

## Education Institution Resources

Institutional providers do not have sufficient resources to provide effective training. Work-based learning programmes typically have a high resource cost attached to them when practical training is provided through institutions. Currently, this is the case with institutional provision in the Cook Islands. Industry training modes are often more materials-efficient than provider driven modes as there is less redundancy in materials use: learners practice as they implement so there can be less wastage. Partnership opportunities emerged from the research when identifying more well-equipped employers who were not able to send employees away for training and under-resourced providers who needed materials and equipment to train with.

Student fees are likely to have increased this year with a boost in enrolment numbers described by participants because of the government fees free education scheme. This was one part of the Cook Islands COVID-19 economic response plan and comes following a steep drop in learner numbers in 2019 in all tertiary areas besides hospitality, as seen in Figure 3. This will offset the resource constraints for providers partially, but the high cost of provision remains.

## Capacity

Capacity has also been identified as a barrier to successful industry training in the Cook Islands. Participants reported that a shortage of skilled trainers and tutors exists within the Cook Islands. Education and training providers are finding it difficult to find new or replacement trainers and tutors for their vocational courses. Additionally, trainer and tutor rates were stated to be expensive, exaggerating the resource shortage issue. Current government immigration policies were also mentioned in the research as barriers to recruiting skilled trainers from overseas.

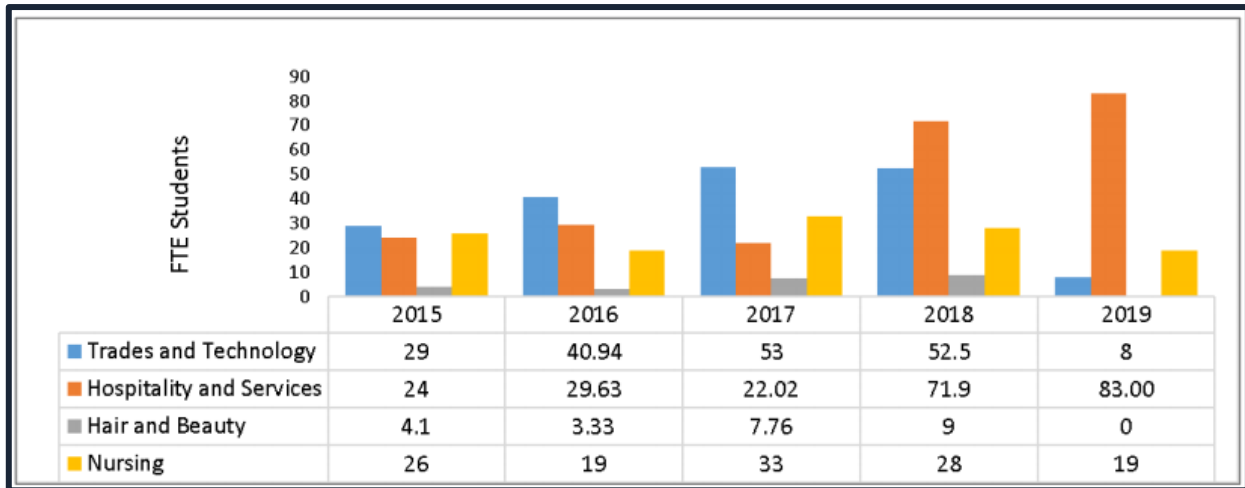


Figure 3: Cook Islands National Tertiary Enrolments - FTE Students. Years 2015-2019.  
Source: 2020 Education Statistics Report, Government of the Cook Islands.

## Limited Coordination and Engagement

Participants reported that government representatives did not have sufficient sector-specific knowledge and competence to lead the construction sector. Typically, university graduates with no practical knowledge of industry are tasked with engaging and leading the sector. This limited expertise in leading and championing the sector contributes to a lack of coordination and engagement with work-based learning and industry stakeholders within the Cook Islands.

There was also feedback that the government was not listening to stakeholders, that more engagement from government on workforce planning and the design/relevance of formal programmes is needed. In addition, participants reported an absence of trust in the training system as it is not generating effective outcomes. Industry feels that it is not meaningfully involved in skills development and wants deeper engagement with providers around the design and delivery of learning programmes.

The quality of learning pathways was also seen to be insufficient. Support was found for increased advocacy and integration of construction pathways in secondary schools that would promote the pathway.

## Limited Number of Relevant Programmes

Many formal learning programmes offered domestically were seen to have low relevance to industry. In addition, the Cook Islands sends a significant number of learners overseas to study and gain experience, often in New Zealand. Participants emphasised that while programmes are generally effective, some international programmes were irrelevant to the Cook Islands context. Ensuring the relevance of international and national programmes for the Cook Islands is important to supplying industry-ready graduates.

## The Development Needs for Industry Training Models in The Cook Islands

Based upon the availability of resources; the status and capacity of Industry Training; and the current approach to skills formation, The Cook Islands was classified in the research as a 'Provider-led Training System'. These types of systems were found to be dominated by institutional training models rather than industry training models; workplace learning takes place, but industry does not

lead the design of skills frameworks or the delivery of training. These systems lack the systems and capabilities for managing some features of industry training.

The Cook Islands government operates CITTI, the sole formal work-based learning provider in the Cook Islands. The size of the Cook Islands is likely too small to facilitate multiple work-based learning providers in the same industry. Consequently, CITTI acts as a gatekeeper to formal work-based learning. Government education and development policy and strategy for the Cook Islands indicate that CITTI will continue to play a central role in the development and management of work-based learning. The Cook Island education strategy refers to the development of an apprenticeship scheme, with apprenticeships currently being tested in the hospitality and tourism sector, however, industry engagement in the design and delivery of courses at CITTI is low.

The development priorities for these types of training systems are presented in Table 2 below.

*Table 2: Development Priorities for Provider-led Training Systems.*

<b>DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR 'PROVIDER-LED TRAINING SYSTEMS'</b>
<p><b>Policy and Coordination</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. These PICs understand dual training systems but need support in implementing and capacitating on-job learning and assessment.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Regulation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Capability building for regulatory bodies around dual learning systems and concepts.</li> <li>3. Implementation/ capacitation of effective monitoring and evaluation systems and capabilities.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Workforce Development</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Develop simple labour market information nationally and regionally.</li> <li>5. Engage employers more effectively in framework and qualification design.</li> <li>6. Draw on regional qualification and assessment networks to support and expand local provision.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Financing</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Support local families, groups and communities through targeted scholarships and grants.</li> <li>8. Implement investment planning funding systems for providers.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Delivery</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Link into regional dual training frameworks and systems.</li> <li>10. Potential to bring external providers in to deliver online and blended learning elements.</li> </ol>

CITTI has an opportunity to develop into a pillar of the local industry training system as the single main provider of work-based education in the country. CITTl could adapt its offering to provide effective off-job learning that supplements industry training models and could potentially develop into another much-needed role: coordination. Industry training requires the coordination and assessment of workplace activity as well as its quality assurance. Employers generally favour systems that require the least administration on their end that might take them away from income-generating activities. Education experts in CITTl could play a key role in reducing the burden to employers and learners by performing intermediary functions to these activities, like the intermediaries seen in New Zealand and Australian industry training systems. Establishing a clear



role for CITTI in the industry training system and building its capacity and capability could have significant benefits to the potential system.

As mentioned in the barriers section, there are currently limited resources and capacity in training providers, employers, and the government. Although industry training is a relatively cost-effective model of learning, scalable and efficient supporting processes and delivery mechanisms should be considered for sustainability, particularly as the current system was described as cost-prohibitive by many. Efficient delivery mechanisms may help to reduce costs of training, beyond the cost-sharing that industry training models incentivise.

Regional supports might be needed to perform functions where the local system does not have the capacity over the long term. The capacity and capability to perform key system functions will need to be scoped and put in place. Regional integration or support systems could be considered where necessary, particularly for oversight functions such as external quality assurance. Integration with New Zealand industry training systems or capability may be useful given its relationship to the Cook Islands, and that it is a common location for Cook Islands learners and workers. Regional supports that enable local empowerment over time will likely be favoured by local stakeholders as they reported a preference for a local system over implementing external systems.

Tutors and trainers will likely be needed to be sourced internationally in the short-term given the shortage in the Cook Islands, however, local tutors and trainers should be prioritised where possible.

Pa Enea (Outer Islands) should be considered in all reforms and equity and impact should be monitored between them. Stakeholders described differences in training and workforce needs between the islands. CITTI is implementing some activities to reduce barriers to training in these areas, however, methods to effectively involve these areas in industry training will be important to the local system.

Opportunities and demand for workplace learning will need to be assessed in the Pa Enea, as well as Rarotonga, to determine how industry training systems might be utilised in these areas. With moderate labour market size, local industry may be able to support workplace learning opportunities for learners. Equity and impacts of industry training should be monitored between the islands.

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