

Industry-based Training models in Tonga

The current state and potential for application

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Introduction

This brief is a summary of the national findings for Tonga 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 Tonga are summarised in four areas:

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

Tonga does not have active industry training; provider based TVET being the dominant formal method of skills formation in Tonga. We note, however, that the Tonga Institute of Science and Technology (TIST) is using dual training methods, combining workplace and institutional learning, for several of its programmes including construction (Australian Council for Educational Research and Scope Global, 2014). The status of these arrangements is unclear, but they are dependent on informal relationships with employers rather than structured national industry training arrangements. Some stakeholders in this research reported engaging with TIST to try and establish workplace learning opportunities but with no success. Future work is needed to understand how TIST designs and delivers these workplace learning experiences and how they could be involved in a national industry training system.

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.

Institution-based learning is the only method of formal construction skills training in Tonga, providing accredited and non-accredited programmes. The Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board (TNQAB), responsible for implementing a Tongan NQF and managing providers and qualifications in the system, had 29 registered providers and a further 16 non-registered training providers in the TVET sector in 2014 (Australian Council for Educational Research and Scope

Global, 2014). The largest by enrolment numbers in all TVET are the two government providers – Tonga Institute of Higher Education (TIHE) and TIST. TVET providers are loosely grouped into government, Free Wesleyan Church, Catholic Church, and private sector (see Figure 1). It should also be noted that the government is reviewing submissions on a bill to establish a national university in Tonga (Asia Pacific Report, 2021). This institution would likely merge the government providers, including TIHE and TIST, into a single national body that provides both academic and vocational courses.

Some education and training providers accommodate those in employment by offering part time learning, and flexible delivery hours. Some, including TIST, include workplace attachments as a part of their TVET programmes, however, these are based upon time spent in the workplace rather than being outcomes based. There are no providers in Tonga that offer programmes with integrated workplace learning outcomes.

Notably, with the lack of an industry-led skills formation system, there is no current agreed qualification for practicing professionals in the construction sector (Australian Council for Educational Research and Scope Global, 2014).

Some employers deliver non-formal and non-accredited formal learning activities to their employees. These can be from skilled staff members or skilled professionals brought in from overseas. Some will also send workers overseas for skills development opportunities.

System	Providers
Government system	Tonga Institute of Science and Technology (TIST) Tonga Institute of Higher Education (TIHE)
Free Wesleyan Church	Tupou Tertiary Institute (TTI) Pouono Trade Campus Tupou College Queen Salote College Hango Agricultural College
Catholic Church system	'Ahopanilolo Technical College St Joseph's Business College Montfort Technical Institute
Private providers	'Unuaki 'o Tonga Royal Institute
Regional providers	University of South Pacific

* Pouono Trade Campus, Tupou College and Queen Salote College provide training services under the auspice of TTI.

Figure 1: Largest Tonga TVET providers by type.

Source: Research into the Financing of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Pacific: Tonga Country Report, (Australian Council for Educational Research and Scope Global, 2014)

Management of TVET in Tonga is undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Training with quality assurance functions sitting with TNQAB. The Tongan skills development system is beginning to develop national competency-based qualifications named 'National Qualifications' following the establishment of the Tonga Qualifications Framework (TQF) (Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board, 2009). It has taken time to establish momentum, however, and at the time of writing the TQF now has 10 national qualifications listed (Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board, 2021). These are in hospitality and aged care. National qualifications are designed by Industry Training Advisory Committees (ISACs): industry-based temporary working groups with the mandate to design and develop national qualifications that are embraced by

industry and meet its needs (Tonga National Qualifications and Accrediation Board, 2019). The national qualifications are made up of modular competency standards. They include international best practice areas such as graduate profiles and learning pathways, and processes for recognising prior learning. Importantly, a construction sector ISAC was stated to be in operation in 2012, but no national qualifications have been registered on the TNQAB (Australian Government DFAT, 2012). TNQAB has robust guidance materials for the development of national qualifications and competency standards (Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditations Board, 2018). These include detailed guidance for mapping of industry sectors; demonstrating demand for qualifications; and developing competency standards and national qualifications. It is unclear why more national qualifications are not listed on the TNQAB, particularly in the field of construction as this was stated to be in progress in 2012. It is possible that targeted support in this area could have a large impact on the sector and the national qualifications system.

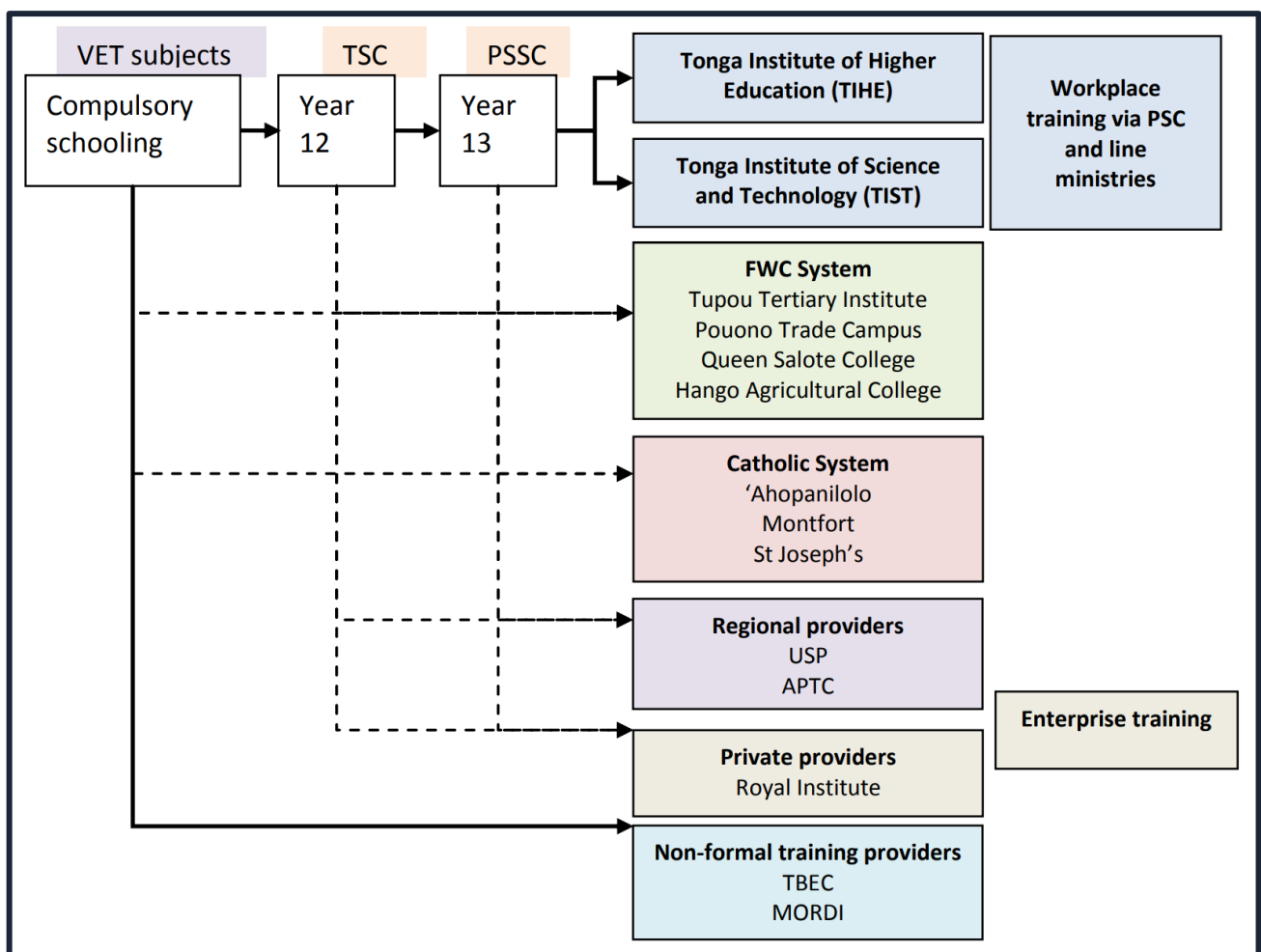


Figure 2: Work-based learning Providers and pathways within the Tongan Education System.
 Source: Research into the Financing of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Pacific: Tonga Country Report, (Australian Council for Educational Research and Scope Global, 2014)

Construction Skills Landscape

There is insufficient information to accurately assess the demand for semi-skilled workers in Tonga.

However, stakeholders generally agreed that demand for skilled workers was high; evidence of the demand for semi-skilled workers shows only moderate demand. One stakeholder noted that there may be an oversupply of semi-skilled construction workers.

More information is needed regarding the demand for construction skills in Tonga, particularly quantitative information. Undersupplied and oversupplied skills identified by participants are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Identified undersupplied and oversupplied construction skills in Tonga.

SKILLS UNDERSUPPLIED	SKILLS OVERSUPPLIED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plumbers. • Finishers and Joiners. • Tilers. • Quantity surveyors. • Site foreman. • Team leaders. • Painters. • Steel Fabricators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slight tendency to have a greater number of carpenters that other trades was reported. Though, this is often seen locally as a starting point from where workers may transition into other trades. • Block layers. • Plasterers. • Unskilled workers. • Some limited evidence from stakeholders to suggest an oversupply of semi-skilled workers.

Barriers to the Successful Implementation of Industry Training Models in Tonga

The key barriers to establishing a successful industry training sector in Tonga are limited regulation and standards; resources and capacity; and coordination.

Regulation and Quality Standards

In Tonga, a building code exists, but enforcement is a challenge. Participants identified that better enforcement of building codes may be a way to lift competency standards in the sector and positively influence workers attitudes to quality. Policies for the operationalising of building standards would support this.

Informal and non-formal training within employers was also identified to be of variable quality. Proper standards and evaluations would help to lift these and make them more consistent in an industry training system, however, the skill levels of trainers in the industry needs to be assessed too.

Limited Resources and Capacity

Insufficient resources for training are a challenge. Industry does not have the resources to support workplace learning. For providers the limitations include, limited space, facilities, modern tools, trainers, and funding. TVET training is having some success, however, providers as well as industry indicated that without sufficient funding, educational performance has been limited. This was reinforced by a similar finding in a 2014 DFAT study TVET (Australian Council for Educational Research and Scope Global, 2014). It should be noted that the annual government grant for providers is essential to their survival as few providers have the financial sustainability to function without grants. Finally, there are differences in financial resilience between providers, for example: church schools consistently have poorer financial positions than non-church providers. Funding was identified as a critical barrier to industry training implementation.

TIST's capacity is also a challenge. Stakeholders state that TIST is offering quality formal training overall but has a highly limited number of students that it may enrol. Any future research should have as one of its focuses the capacitation of TIST to meet learner and employer demand.

Opportunities for skills development were also identified as varied. Participants identified that some employers take on workers for relatively short durations over the course of project activities but do not have the ability to sustain their employment over longer periods. Work-based learning, therefore, maybe fragmented or split between multiple employers.

Another barrier is employer participation with industry training. Attitudes from employers in the research were mixed regarding their role in an industry training system. Some put forward the view that it was their duty to train in their sector and that they experienced benefit from this. Others, albeit a minority, put forward the view that they required competent workers from the very first day and that training them was not their role. These attitudes may intersect with other attitudes from stakeholders stating that many employers in the sector are profit-driven and do not have extra capacity to either train in the workplace or release their employees for training during work hours. These attitudes will need to be managed in any industry training implementation.

Coordination

Participants identified that there is limited coordination and engagement of employers in construction sector skills-based learning. This is defined principally by a lack of government initiation, support, or incentives for workplace learning; their focus is on formal training. There are also no bodies such as contractors' associations to champion this. Participants also noted government processes and bureaucracy to be barriers to implementation.

Stakeholders reported a gap between the skills and competences acquired through education institutions and the skills and competences industry needs. Coordination with industry is needed to ensure programme learning outcomes are consistent with labour market requirements. In addition, a key component of workforce development planning – accurate labour market statistics is missing. This means that skills development policies cannot be accurately aligned with industry need.

Another identified challenge was the trend of skilled workers leaving Tonga. This does provide significant benefit to Tonga in the form of remittances, but also denies Tonga these skills and the mentoring in the workplace which is a feature of successful industry training schemes. Participants argued, to mediate this, the procurement system for construction contracts should be redesigned to increase worker access to local opportunities. This would make it easier to connect the workforce to employment and provide opportunities for skilled workers who would seek employment overseas.

Other barriers included limited pathways for learners in the sector, both within and between countries; access of remote learners being low; and there was limited specialised construction

training provision in Tonga. Learners need some elements of specialised trade skills to be developed off-job and there are few relevant opportunities and trainers who can do this.

The Development Needs for Industry Training Models in Tonga

Based upon the availability of resources; the status and capacity of Industry Training; and the current approach to skills formation, Tonga was classified in the research as an ‘Emerging Industry Training System’. These types of systems were found to have some aspects of integrated and effective industry training systems but were lacking the coordinated policy and regulation to allow them to thrive.

Tonga’s skills delivery system is predominantly driven by institutional providers, though, a leading provider, TIST, is incorporating some elements of dual training and the TNQAB is beginning to create national competency-based standards and qualifications. These factors suggest that Tonga is integrating work-based learning into its education system and creating the systems for industry to define their expected graduate outcomes. However, few national standards and qualifications have been established. Tonga has the beginnings of a national qualifications system that would support industry training programmes; however, reformers need to think about how to build on this foundation, including how to improve the integration of employers and other stakeholders into well-structured and supported industry training systems, potentially including apprenticeships and work-based learning with significant workplace learning and assessment components.

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

Table 2: Development priorities for Emerging Industry Training Systems.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR ‘EMERGING INDUSTRY TRAINING SYSTEMS’
<p>Policy and Coordination</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of industry training policy built around dual training models. 2. Engagement with key stakeholders to agree policy and implementation priorities. 3. Clearer and better resourced governance arrangements.
<p>Regulation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Capability building for regulatory bodies around dual learning systems and concepts. 5. Implementation of effective monitoring and evaluation systems and capabilities. 6. Extension of regulatory support and oversight into informal learning systems.
<p>Workforce Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Support for industry training qualifications built around dual training concepts. 8. Effective skills monitoring systems. 9. Employer involvement in qualification design.
<p>Financing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Extension of student loan schemes to industry training. 11. Investment planning for providers.
<p>Delivery</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Enabling of industry training systems – on-job learning and assessment.

Tonga has a strong foundation to build from and is in the early stages of creating an integrated industry training system. The TNQAB and the systems necessary to regulate and define standards for national industry training programmes has been established. The next steps will be to review the progress of implementation policy and plans and engage stakeholders to create construction sector industry standards. These processes may need to be supported due to implementing agencies having limited capacity for change.

This process will need to include analyses of industry training opportunities; these were identified to be limited and often fragmented across time or multiple employers. A learner-centred approach that tracks achievement across multiple employers or learning opportunities may be needed to equitably recognise learning achievements.

Planning for the implementation of national qualifications may also be a challenge given the diverse providers and programmes available in the construction sector. There is no recognised and industry-backed set of qualifications or professional standards in the construction sector. After industry qualifications are created, industry will need to advocate for programmes based on the national qualifications to be established that see them widely implemented and become professional standards.

The systems and processes for managing learning against these national qualifications and associated programmes will need to be established and coordinated too. These will need to be simple to navigate and meet the needs of all stakeholders to training including the learner, the workplace/employer, the off-job provider, and the overseers such as regulators. Systems and processes to assess and quality assure workplace learning; methods and policies to coordinate the relationships between learners, employers, and off-job providers; and continual improvement and systematic evaluation processes will need to be established.

Industry training activities would also benefit from increased visibility in national policy and strategy to shift the education's focus away from general education.

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