



# ACCESS TRADES

*Advice to the Tertiary Education Commission  
for training investment in 2027*

Published November 2025

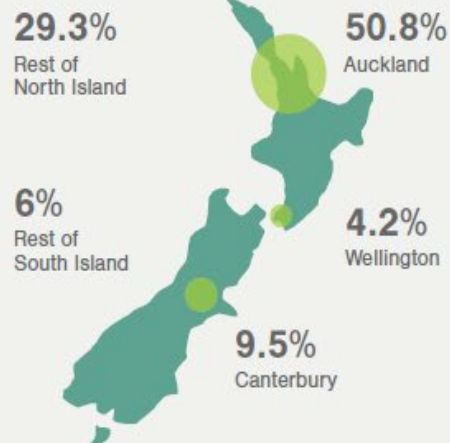


**WAIHANGA ARA RAU**  
Construction and  
Infrastructure  
Workforce Development Council

## ACCESS TRADES SECTOR

### EMPLOYMENT BY REGION<sup>1</sup>

2023



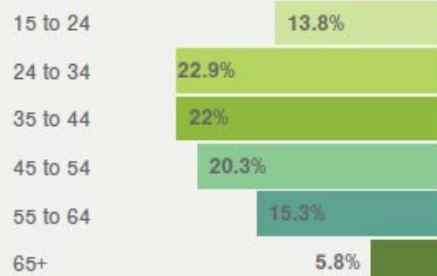
### GENDER<sup>2</sup>

2023

**82% Men**  
**18% Women**

### AGE<sup>3</sup>

2023



**591**

**TOTAL NUMBER OF BUSINESSES<sup>7</sup>**

2023



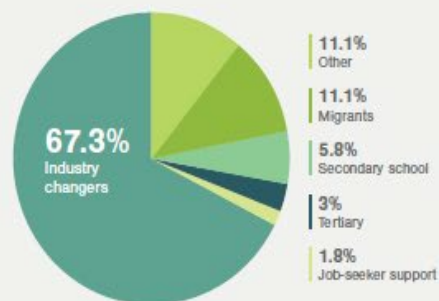
**58**

**TOTAL NUMBER OF SOLE TRADERS<sup>8</sup>**

2023

### NEWCOMERS BY ORIGIN<sup>4</sup>

2023



27.66% of employees have been in the industry for less than a year.<sup>6</sup>

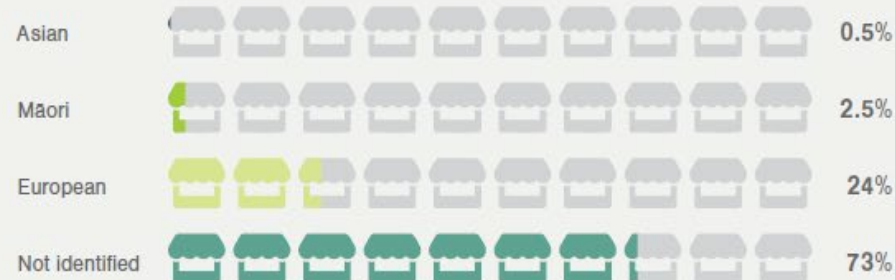
### ETHNICITY<sup>5</sup>

2023



### BUSINESS OWNERSHIP BY ETHNICITY<sup>9</sup>

2023



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# ACCESS TRADES NARRATIVE

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## Infrastructure alignment

As noted last year, Access Trades spans both the Construction and Infrastructure sectors. Because of this crossover, it was agreed that infrastructure assumptions and growth should apply, similar to Construction & Infrastructure Services.

## Pre-trade focus with a view to future training investment

The sector has highlighted the importance of strengthening pre-trade programmes at Levels 2 and 3 to help build a strong pipeline of learners and support economic recovery. The investment advice below outlines the minimum level of growth the sector would like to see in these programmes. However, if there is sufficient demand and provider capacity, TEC is encouraged to consider growth beyond these levels.

It is also important to anticipate a future increase in demand for Level 4 programmes as learners progress through the pipeline. This growth may align with a broader uplift in construction and infrastructure activity. While this demand is expected to emerge around 2028, there is a possibility it could begin as early as 2027. This serves as an early indicator of potential future need.

## Administrative data & scrapping of Census

As has been highlighted in previous advice rounds to TEC and other Government agencies, the sector has faced ongoing challenges with ANZSIC and ANZSCO classification codes. These do not accurately represent the sector and its industries. For example, the entire sector is assigned a single ANZSIC code. Consequently, administrative data fails to fully reflect the sector's workforce, businesses, and economic contributions - key information used to determine funding and investment.

Waihangā Ara Rau, alongside several industry bodies, submitted feedback to Stats NZ during the National Occupation List (NOL) consultation. That input led to the inclusion of many previously overlooked occupations, a win for the sector. But without a clear timeline or process for how and when the NOL will be implemented, it's hard to see the upside.

On top of that, the decision to scrap the Census is a setback. For a sector already grappling with patchy admin data, losing the Census means falling even further through the cracks. It was one of the few tools available to help fill critical data gaps.

While the sector recognises issues with current classifications, they've also played a key role in helping businesses access skilled workers through immigration. It's a double-edged sword.

## Workforce and training pressures

As highlighted throughout this advice, the Access Trades sector is one of those feeling the pinch of the current economic climate. Businesses are letting people go, and many workers are heading across the ditch to Australia.

Across the industry, there's a real sense of hesitation, trying to figure out the right moment to 'jump' back into training investment after a long downturn and ongoing uncertainty about the pipeline of work.

When activity picks up, businesses will likely face tough decisions: bring back skilled workers who left, retrain those with some experience, or start fresh with new entrants. But training won't necessarily happen straight away. The initial demand will require experienced hands, and many businesses may hold off until they've weathered that first wave.

The delay in training is compounded by the cost, which doesn't align with the current realities many businesses face, and by providers who are often constrained by existing vocational funding models.

It's further complicated by the ongoing reform across the VET and Education (NCEA) sector. After several years of change, and with more still to come, uncertainty remains a barrier to long-term planning and investment in workforce development.

This feeling isn't consistent across the sector. Some industries still lack adequate, or in some cases, any training options that meet their needs. There's a strong appetite and demand for training, especially from those who, due to the absence of formal qualifications, are often classified as unskilled labourers. That label couldn't be further from the truth.

The recognition of some of these occupations in the National Occupation List has been a step forward, but now the training needs to follow. This is something ISBs should be exploring more closely.

## Regulation changes

There are early and ongoing discussions around changes to the Working at Height regulations and associated Certificates of Competency. While the outcomes are still unclear, any decisions made will likely have a direct impact on training demand, especially if new requirements lead to upskilling or the need for different competencies.

This could be particularly relevant for industries like Temporary Edge Protection, where even small regulatory shifts can significantly affect how work is carried out and who is qualified to do it. It's an area that needs to be monitored closely, and one that ISBs may need to explore further to ensure training systems can respond quickly and effectively.

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# INVESTMENT ADVICE

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## Overarching narrative

This document should be read alongside the overarching narrative document which provides the introduction and overarching assumptions for Waihangā Ara Rau's 2025 investment advice to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), focused on training provision for 2027.

The sector versions outline our approach to qualifications relevant to each sector, regardless of whether they meet TEC's investment threshold. This ensures that all stakeholders, from policymakers to industry leaders, can engage with advice that aligns with their areas of interest.

## 2027 Investment advice baseline year

We're applying a similar approach as we did last year. **The baseline year is 2024**, which provides the most recent full year of training data. All active learners across the 2024 calendar year set the minimum level of provision we expect in 2027, with any recommended growth, reduction, or no change based on that starting point.

## Investment advice threshold (for 2027 delivery)

The threshold is intended to ensure our advice prioritises qualifications that could materially impact current TEC funding. Qualifications below the threshold generally fall within the margins of existing funding activity and therefore do not significantly affect funding availability. It is made explicit throughout that the overall growth percentage should be applied to all relevant qualifications, regardless of whether they meet the threshold. Publishing our approach for all qualifications under our coverage also enables providers to understand the provision landscape.

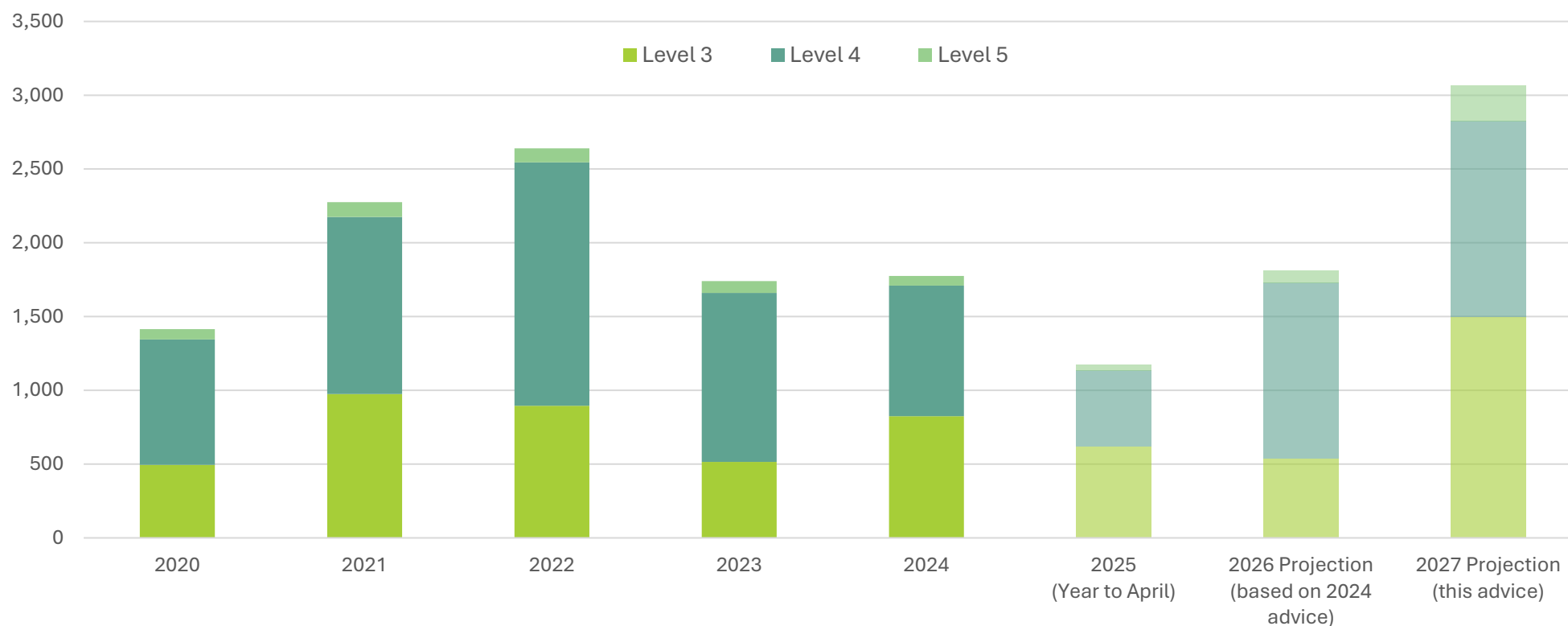
For qualifications within our scope, only those meeting the threshold are included in our formal submission to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). The 2027 threshold includes:

- Growth or reduction of more than 20 learners compared to the 2024 baseline.
- Not registered or not TEC-funded learners in 2024, but expected activity in 2027.
- Fewer than 20 learners in 2024, with projected growth that more than doubles by 2027.
- Qualifications where specific context and narrative are important to articulate are treated with particular attention.

This advice covers 16 qualifications and credentials within Waihangā Ara Rau's Access Trades sector. Together, these show a projected growth of 1,289 learners based on the 2024 baseline. Of these, 11 qualifications meet the TEC advice threshold and are included in the formal advice document submitted to TEC. These account for 1,255 of the total projected learner growth.

## Learner trends and projections (2020-27)

Like many parts of the C&I sector, Access Trades saw a significant increase in learner numbers during 2021–22, largely driven by Government interventions such as Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund, First Year Fees Free, and Apprenticeship Boost. With the conclusion of most of these initiatives, aside from Fees Free shifting to final years, learner volumes have returned to more ‘normal’ levels.



### Notes:

- Learner data is sourced from TEC’s Ngā Kete as of April 2025. It includes all active TEC-funded learners within a calendar year and excludes non-TEC funded training.
- **2025** data reflects learner numbers as of April. Based on sector conversations, end-of-year figures are expected to be similar to 2024 levels or slightly lower.
- **2026** figures are based on advice provided in 2024, which projected 4% growth on 2023 learner numbers.
- **2027** figures represent projected provision based on this year’s advice.

## Context: Investment advice table

As signalled in last year's advice, the Access Trades sector, and subsequently its workforce, align closely with the infrastructure sector, even though it's grouped under Construction by Waihangara Ara Rau. Given this, the sector has aligned its **growth to the 23.8%** infrastructure growth rate. The qualifications that meet the threshold are shown below, with additional context given to qualifications that sit outside the overall sector growth percentage:

- **2356 and 2357:** There's been no activity in 2024 (or 2023), and the provision aligns with the exact same advice we gave last year. These qualifications were reviewed in 2025, and this is expected to support their uptake, driven by increased access to local training options and clearer career progression pathways. A large number of Level 3 learners, both current and historical, are expected to transition through to the higher levels.
- **2358, 2359, 2360:** The industry is undergoing a review of its qualifications, which may lead to their transition to micro-credentials. These are noted in products in development section. Our holding advice remains the same as last year, but we are signalling that changes are likely.
- **3708:** This qualification is currently being reviewed and will likely result in a newly assigned NZQF Code.
- **3730 & 3731:** The fees for the funded Cranes programme inherited from Skills Group are very high, which has the effect of pushing people towards the casual credit process, which is entirely unfunded by TEC. Through this process, learners accumulate individual unit standards over an unregulated period and then seek recognition for the qualification at the end. These qualifications were reviewed during 2024/2025, and this advice is built on the assumption that this will be an opportunity to adjust fees. If adjusted, engagement in these TEC-funded programmes will increase.
- **3732:** The group of crane qualifications has been undergoing a review. The focus has been on the Level 3 and 4 qualifications, but once this is complete, it's expected to lead to a pathway into Level 5 by 2027. Up to 10 learners are likely to undertake the programme.
- **5310:** 50 learners is our current holding advice based on industry consultation.
- **Certificate in Construction Pre-Trade (High Work) (Level 3):** This programme was previously offered as a training scheme and is expected to be redeveloped under the current NZQA micro-credential listing rules. It is unlikely to include the scaffolding unit standards from the original version. While there is still some demand for this training, it is expected to remain steady. As a result, no growth is recommended beyond 2024 enrolment levels.
- The development of the **New Zealand Certificate in Exterior Cleaning (Level 3)** is largely based on an online certification course delivered by the Exterior Cleaning Industry Association, which has been running since 2024. It is expected that many local councils and other organisations will require this qualification as a condition for undertaking work. Since its inception, the course has **seen 596 workers participate, and the industry anticipates that this level of training will continue once the qualification is approved and programmes begin delivery, potentially as early as 2026.**

## Investment advice table

Code	NZQA Qualification Title	2027 Total Provision	Growth on 2024 base	Meets threshold
2355	New Zealand Certificate in Rigging (Level 3)	7	2	No
2356	New Zealand Certificate in Rigging (Level 4) with optional strands in Construction Rigging, and Telecommunications Rigging	150	150	No
2357	New Zealand Certificate in Rigging (Level 5)	100	100	Yes
2358	New Zealand Certificate in Industrial Rope Access (Level 3)	56	11	No
2359	New Zealand Certificate in Industrial Rope Access (Level 4)	13	3	Yes
2360	New Zealand Certificate in Industrial Rope Access (Level 5)	50	50	No
2363	New Zealand Certificate in Scaffolding (Level 5)	81	16	Yes
3708	New Zealand Certificate in Scaffolding (General) (Level 3)	106	21	Yes
3709	New Zealand Certificate in Scaffolding (Proprietary Suspended) (Level 3)	7	2	Yes
3710	New Zealand Certificate in Scaffolding (Trade) (Level 4)	1,078	208	Yes
3730	New Zealand Certificate in Cranes (Level 3) with strands in Cab-Controlled Overhead Crane, Dogman, Load Lifting Rigging Production, Pendant-Controlled Overhead Crane, Self-Erecting Tower Crane, and Truck Loader Crane	95	40	Yes
3731	New Zealand Certificate in Cranes (Level 4) with strands in Advanced Dogman, Crawler Crane, Mini Crane, Mobile Crane, Non-Slewing Articulated Crane, and Tower Crane	35	30	Yes
3732	New Zealand Certificate in Cranes (Advanced Crane Operation) (Level 5)	10	10	Yes
5310	Temporary Edge Protection (Micro-credential)	50	50	No
5550	New Zealand Certificate in Exterior Cleaning (Level 3)	596	596	Yes
-	Certificate in Construction Pre-Trade (High Work) (Level 3)	630	0	Yes
	Total	3,064	1,289	

## Products in development

Reference	Title	Type	Status	Likely Year
TBC	Cranes Gantry MC	Micro-credential	In Development	2026/27
TBC	Access Systems - IRA Level 3 MC 1 - BASIC Industrial Rope Access(Replacing 2358)	Micro-credential	Developing Idea	2026/27
TBC	Access Systems - IRA Level 4 MC 2 - INTERMEDIATE Industrial Rope Access (Replacing 2359)	Micro-credential	Developing Idea	2026/27
TBC	Access Systems - IRA Level 5 MC 3 - ADVANCED Industrial Rope Access (Replacing 2360)	Micro-credential	Developing Idea	2026/27
TBC	Introduction to Crane Operations (Micro-credential)	Micro-credential	In Development	2026/27

## 2026 Training delivery advice

This section has been included to provide additional advice on the **New Zealand Certificate in Exterior Cleaning (Level 3)**. This qualification was flagged in our 2024 investment advice as under development. The development process is now complete, and the qualification is registered with NZQA. We anticipate training activity in the **2026 delivery year, which aligns with the advice given above, totalling up to 596 learners.**