

2026 Investment Advice to TEC for the Nursery, Turf and Gardening Industry

Muka Tangata is the Workforce Development Council (WDC) for the food and fibre sector. We work on ways to enhance vocational education and training (VET) to meet the needs of industry, iwi and hapū Māori, ākonga (learners), and kaimahi (workers), and support them to flourish.

Alongside our work on qualifications, standards, and quality assurance, we advise government, based on engagement with industry, on what qualifications they should support and fund. This takes the form of our annual Investment Advice to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). This focuses on the current set of qualifications (as TEC can only purchase programmes for existing qualifications).

This document sets out industry and workforce trends for the Nursery, Turf and Gardening industry, as well as identified skills needs. We have used this information to determine how many places are needed for qualifications relevant to the industry.

Nursery, Turf and Gardening Industry trends:

The industry was significantly impacted by Covid with steep reductions for exports – particularly for cut flowers and foliage though exports for seeds have recovered.

Nursery, Turf and Gardening Workforce trends:

The workforce has started to rebound from disruption posed by Covid though is still vulnerable to recent weather disruptions and some industry groups, like Sports Turf, have shown increases.

The horticulture sector workforce as a whole is forecast to increase by at least 16% by 2032, with increases being particularly concentrated in higher skill role types that will require increased levels of training, including managers and semi-autonomous workers (MPI forecast).

The workforce has low new entrant retention rates and low levels of industry tenure which drive a need for training of replacements. The workforce currently has low levels of formal qualifications.

Industry skill needs identified from engagement

There is a significant need for entry-level qualifications in the Nursery, Turf and Gardening industry, and our industry engagement analysis and review of key industry documents has highlighted the following skill needs across all qualification levels:

- basic 'work ready', generic team working and communication skills, as well as basic skills specific to the individual industries
- leadership, business and management skills
- skills related to carbon neutrality and climate change (specifically in terms of water use)

Furthermore, the industry has reported an occupation gap for:

- Botanists

Current qualifications and priorities

Below are three tables outlining qualifications and priorities. Where possible, each table outlines how these qualifications may fill skills needs, the scale of change we are seeking in our advice, the preferred mode of delivery, and the level of priority for this change.

Table 1: Nursery, Turf and Gardening related qualifications and credentials

- We have several qualifications with either low enrolment numbers or where any increase would be very small. We recognise the importance of these qualifications for the industry, but we are not in a position to give a specific increase. We welcome feedback here, especially if you have an indication of potential enrolment requirements.

Table 2: Pan-sector qualifications and credentials

- These qualifications provide skills that are relevant to a number of industries across our sector. We are unsure if Nursery, Turf and Gardening learners are enrolling in these qualifications and welcome any insights from industry.

Table 3: Related qualifications or credentials in development (or planned for)

- To be offered in 2026 or earlier.

Mode

We have not been specific about mode at a qualification level. However, in general, we recommend a preference for workplace training as part of the mix of the provision across all of our industries. This could include both work-based training and campus-based learning that include a strong component of practical 'on job' experience in a workplace setting.

What are we looking for?

For these three tables, we are seeking feedback on the following:

- Are industry using these qualifications?
- What is the preferred mode of delivery? (e.g. workplace-based, extramural, etc.)
- Do you agree with our prioritisation or have any recommendations for qualifications where we have not given a level of priority (low, medium, high)?
- What sort of level change do you anticipate? How many more trained people do you need?

Table 1: Nursery, Turf and Gardening related qualifications and credentials

Qualification or credential	What skills does this qualification provide	Scale of change you are seeking for 2026	Mode of delivery	Priority level (for this advice)
New Zealand Certificate in Horticulture (General) (Level 3) [2677]	We have checked our findings with Horticulture New Zealand, the key representative of the main industry using the Horticulture qualifications, and it has confirmed that their members are not using this qualification. Its preference is for the stranded level 3 New Zealand Certificate in Horticulture (2678).			
New Zealand Certificate in Horticulture (Level 3) [Stranded] [2678]	<p>The New Zealand Certificate in Horticulture (Level 3) is designed to provide the skills to work as an effective member of a team, including communication and interaction with team members and colleagues. It is a stranded qualification that enables learners to gain skills targeted to their chosen industry.</p> <p>It is the main entry point qualification and is also the qualification pathway for the two Level 4 Horticulture qualifications which provide the skills for more semi-autonomous and managerial roles (see below).</p>	10-15%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Horticulture Production (Level 4) [Stranded] [2676]	The New Zealand Diploma in Horticulture Production (Level 4) is intended for people who are experienced workers in the horticulture industry who want to develop their skills and knowledge to supervise day to day operations in horticulture production. It recognizes the specific skills and knowledge of individuals	15-20%		High priority

	<p>who can, in a self-managed capacity, take responsibility for the daily operations in a horticulture production sector.</p> <p>The qualification also includes a component around applying knowledge of environmental factors and sustainable practices.</p>			
Assess and manage risks to freshwater from horticultural production (Micro-credential) (Level 4) [5055]	This micro-credential has been developed to upskill horticulture ākonga/learners' awareness of freshwater values and uses and the potential risks posed by horticultural production systems on values and uses. It is aimed at growers, horticulture advisors, auditors, and horticulture ākonga/learners.	Recently developed		
New Zealand Diploma in Horticulture Production (Level 5) [Stranded] [2666]	<p>The New Zealand Diploma in Horticulture Production (Level 5) provides a set of planning and management skills, stranded to meet the needs of the different horticulture industries and sub-industries, including post-harvest quality standards and seasonal outdoor crop production tasks.</p> <p>It also enables graduates to apply knowledge of leadership and relationship management to engage with team members and clients using a range of effective interpersonal skills relevant to a horticulture sector.</p>	30-35%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Organic Primary Production (Level 5) [2682]	The New Zealand Certificate in Organic Primary Production (Level 5) provides a set of planning and management skills to meet the planning and organic standards compliance requirements of an organic primary production operation.			Medium Priority

New Zealand Certificate in Sports Turf (Level 5) [2675]	The New Zealand Certificate in Sports Turf (Level 5) is intended for people who have significant operational experience in the sports turf industry, or who are capable of transferring their prior skills and knowledge to the sports turf industry.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Sports Turf (Level 6) [2683]	The New Zealand Certificate in Sports Turf (Level 6) is intended for experienced individuals who have advanced technical skills and knowledge in sports turf operations to operate as a technical specialist in sports turf surface development.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Diploma in Amenity Horticulture (Level 5) [4284]	The New Zealand Diploma in Amenity Horticulture (Level 5) is intended for people who have significant operational experience in the amenity horticulture industry, or who are capable of transferring their prior skills and knowledge to the amenity horticulture industry.			Medium Priority

Table 2: Pan-sector qualifications and credentials

Qualification or credential	What skills does this qualification provide	Scale of change you are seeking for 2026	Mode of delivery	Priority level (for this advice)
New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Skills (Level 2): Optional strand in Self-Management and Employability Skills [2218]	<p>The New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Skills is designed to meet the needs of industries by enabling workers to carry out practical tasks associated with an entry level role in a primary industry context; including using safe work practices and self-management skills. It is targeted at new or potential entrants into the primary sector including seasonal workers, career changers and those not yet engaged in education, employment or training.</p> <p>A repeated concern from across nearly all of our industries has been the need for a strong set of basic skills for workers in the food and fibre sector, especially for those who are not familiar with those work settings.</p> <p>From our engagement with the food and fibre sector, industries have particularly identified health and safety, self-management and 'employability' skills as key gaps in their workforces (in fact these form the most often cited skills gaps by industries), especially for new entrants.</p>	15%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Operational Skills (Level 3): Optional strands in	The New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Operational Skills is one of the sector's central cross-sector qualifications designed to provide primary industry workplaces with individuals who can safely and effectively carry out operational	20-25%		High Priority

Specialist Equipment, and Infrastructure [2215]	<p>activities which involve vehicles, machinery and specialist equipment, and infrastructure.</p> <p>Industries from across our sector have identified the need to strengthen a core set of capabilities for workers, both those entering the industry and the existing workforce. In particular, industries want people who can (safely) operate vehicles, machinery, and other specialist equipment; and maintain infrastructure.</p>			
Emerging Leadership in People, Food and Fibre Industries (Micro-credential) (Level 4) [5044]	<p>The purpose of this micro-credential is to provide a formal credential to recognise the skills and knowledge attained by learners/ākonga as they enter leadership roles across a range of People, Food and Fibre industries in Aotearoa New Zealand. The micro-credential provides a training scaffold to support and upskill potential, new, or existing leaders, including seasonal workers and career changers, and workers in supporting industries, into leadership roles.</p>	Recently developed		
New Zealand Diploma in Primary Industry Business Management (Level 5) [2221]	<p>The New Zealand Diploma in Primary Industry Management is a pan-sector qualification that builds financial management, business planning and general business decision-making skills. It also contains skills around leadership, including for staff employment and work allocation, and applying interpersonal and leadership skills to monitor staff performance, health, safety, and well-being requirements in a primary industry business. It enables a graduate to plan, implement and review the environmental sustainability requirements of a primary industry business.</p> <p>MPI workforce forecasting indicates the need for more skilled workers, with both technical and</p>	10-15%		High priority

	business/managerial skills needs rising. Most of our industries have also highlighted leadership as a pressing skills gap, alongside a need for business planning and financial management. Environmental sustainability - and the skills required to respond to a changing environment - is an emerging issue for the sector.			
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Table 3: Related qualifications or credentials in development (or planned for)				
Qualification or credential	What skills does this qualification provide	Scale of change you are seeking for 2026	Mode of delivery	Priority level (for this advice)
Entry Level Qualification Development Project: including stackable micro-credentials	We are planning to build flexible, sustainable, and enduring learning pathways for learners as they enter the primary industry sector.			