

2026 Investment Advice to TEC for the Support Services 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, ākongā (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 Support Services industry, as well as identified skills needs. We have used this information to determine how many places are needed for qualifications relevant to the Support Services industry.

Support Services Industry trends:

This is a complex collection of industries which play a critical role in conjunction with many of our other industry groups. Industry forecasts show continuing growth.

Support Services Workforce trends:

The workforce has been increasing over time but has high levels of seasonal variation (which affect how forecasts should be treated). The 'cross-sector production' workforce as a whole is forecast to slightly decrease by 2032 but shows substantial increases in higher skill role types (13%-20%) that will require increased levels of training (MPI forecast). Other forecasts covering other segments of the sector show workforce growth.

The workforce currently has low levels of formal qualifications and would need a substantially higher than requested level of investment to reach industry benchmark parity.

The workforce has low new entrant retention rates and very low levels of industry tenure which drive a need for training of replacements. The sector has very strong reliance on those on RSE, temporary & work visas making the industry vulnerable to changes in immigration trends and policy shifts.

Industry skill needs identified from engagement

Our industry engagement analysis and review of key industry documents has highlighted the following skill needs:

- Increased need for workers as pest populations increase (for example, mice rising relative to rats and rising populations as a result of recent natural disasters and changing environments and climate).
- New skills may also be necessary as pest control methods change to meet new threats (for example, increasing use of chemical controls).
- As farming systems have diversified and become more complex, external technical expertise to assist producers has become more important.
- Industries across both horticulture and agriculture have identified the need for skills to apply agrichemicals safely.

- The arboriculture industry has identified the need for leadership and self-management.
- The Landscape construction industry has a need for more autonomous and managerial skills.

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: Support Services related qualifications and credentials

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 Support Services 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.

The Arboriculture industry would like more classroom-based funding in the Auckland and Wellington regions specifically. We do not know what qualifications this applies to and welcome any further information to help us build this picture.

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: Support Services 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 Pest Operations (Level 3): Rural Pest Control, Rural Pest Monitoring, and Urban Pest Control [2443]	The New Zealand Certificate in Pest Operations (Level 3) is intended for individuals who have recently begun working in the pest operations industry or who wish to enter the pest operations industry.	10-15%		
New Zealand Certificate in Pest Management (Level 4): Pest Animal, and Pest Plant [2444]	The New Zealand Certificate in Pest Management (Level 4) is intended for people who have some experience as pest control operators who wish to develop their skills and knowledge in pest management.	15 learners		
New Zealand Certificate in Rural Servicing (Level 4) [3520]	The New Zealand Certificate in Rural Servicing (Level 4) provides graduates with the skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• analyse a client's production system(s) to determine business needs• investigate and apply technical knowledge of a range of rural products and services to provide a client with appropriate solutions• recommend technical solutions and monitor their implementation.• • analyse and evaluate the outcome of implemented technical solutions and make recommendations for improvement.	20 learners		
New Zealand Certificate in Agrichemical Application (Level 4) with strands in Aquatic, Broadacre, Tree and Vine Horticultural, Targeted	The New Zealand Certificate in Agrichemical Application (Level 4) meets the need of industries by providing people who have the technical skills and knowledge to apply agrichemicals and work unsupervised in the agrichemical application industry.	15-20%		

Weed Control, and Total Vegetation Control [3984]				
New Zealand Certificate in Artificial Insemination of Livestock (Level 4) [2467]	The New Zealand Certificate in Artificial Insemination of Livestock (Level 4) provides the agriculture industry with individuals who have the skills and knowledge to successfully artificially inseminate livestock.	10-15%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Arboriculture (Level 5): Supervisory Operations, and Technical Operations [2670]	The New Zealand Diploma in Arboriculture (Level 5) is for experienced workers to develop their technical skills and knowledge to be able to manage arboriculture operations.	20 learners		
New Zealand Diploma in Landscape (Level 5) with strands in Construction, and Design [2888]	The New Zealand Diploma in Landscape (Level 5) recognises the technical skills and knowledge to either produce high quality landscape drawings or project manage landscape construction, working autonomously within established parameters of a landscape business.	20%		
New Zealand Diploma in Horticulture Production (Level 6): Process Improvement, and Product Development [2667]	The New Zealand Diploma in Horticulture Production (Level 6) recognises the skills and knowledge of individuals who can apply in-depth technical horticulture production skills and knowledge to inform strategic business decisions. The qualification supports the skills needed by semi-autonomous and managerial workers.	30 learners		
New Zealand Diploma in Arboriculture (Level 6) [2669]	The New Zealand Diploma in Arboriculture (Level 6) is intended for experienced individuals who have advanced technical skills and knowledge in arboriculture operations to operate as a technical specialist at an advanced level with an emphasis on tree risk assessment and contract management. These skills contribute to the development of leadership, mentoring and role models.	20 learners		
New Zealand Certificate in Fencing (Level 4) [4356]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide the fencing industry with people who have the knowledge and practical skills to design and construct fences, and interpret a livestock yard design and construct yard to meet client requirements;			Medium Priority

	and the knowledge and skills to lead a team and manage client relationships.			
New Zealand Certificate in Fencing (Level 5) [2700]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide the fencing industry with people who have the knowledge and practical skills to design, cost, and construct fences and yards to meet client requirements; and the knowledge and skills to lead a team and manage client relationships.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Agrichemical Supply (Level 4) [2497]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide people who have the skills and knowledge to advise on and promote the safe and effective selection, storage, handling and use of agrichemicals to clients. Graduates will be able to supervise retail store staff in the safe handling, storage and recording of agrichemicals.			Medium Priority
Groundspread Nutrient Application for Primary Industry (Micro-credential) (Level 3) [4914]	The purpose of this micro-credential is to provide formal recognition and credentialisation of the skills and knowledge required to apply nutrients safely and effectively as a groundspread operator.	Recently developed		
Irrigation - Full pipe water measurement device installation and commission (Micro-credential) (Level 5) [5004]	The purpose of this micro-credential is to provide formal recognition and credentialisation of the skills and knowledge required to install and commission full pipe water measurement devices in an irrigation context, while operating safely and efficiently in Aotearoa New Zealand.	Recently developed		
Irrigation - Full pipe water measurement device verification (Micro-credential) (Level 5) [5002]	The purpose of this micro-credential is to provide formal recognition and credentialisation of the skills and knowledge required to verify full pipe water measurement devices in an irrigation context, while operating safely and efficiently in Aotearoa New Zealand.	Recently developed		
Irrigation - Water measurement telemetry system installation and commission (Micro-credential) (Level 5) [5003]	The purpose of this micro-credential is to provide formal recognition and credentialisation of the skills and knowledge required to install and commission water measurement telemetry systems in an irrigation context, while operating safely and efficiently in Aotearoa New Zealand.	Recently developed		

New Zealand Certificate in Irrigation System Performance Assessment (Level 4) [2555]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide the irrigation industry with individuals who have attained the skills and knowledge to carry out on-site evaluations of irrigation systems to determine their efficiency, leading to an effective, efficient and sustainable use of water.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Irrigation System Management (Level 4) [2556]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide a range of primary industry and amenity sectors with individuals who have attained the skills and knowledge to determine the need for, and manage sustainable irrigation for a commercial agriculture, horticulture property, sports turf, public grounds, or an irrigation scheme.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Irrigation System Design (Level 5) [2557]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide the irrigation industry with individuals who have attained the skills and knowledge to design efficient irrigation systems to enable improved production for commercial agriculture or horticulture operations or sports turf and public grounds.			
New Zealand Diploma in Field Hydrology (Level 5) [2344]	The purpose of this qualification is to recognise the skills and knowledge required to collect and manage hydrometric information from a range of field situations, and to interpret and make the data available to key stakeholders.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Tuberculosis (TB) Testing of Livestock (Level 3): Cattle [2369]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide the domestic cattle and deer industries with individuals who, under limited supervision, are able to prepare for and carry out the testing of domestic cattle and deer for bovine tuberculosis (TB) according to regulatory requirements and industry best practice.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Fencing (Level 3): Rural strand, and Industrial strand [2699]	The purpose of this qualification is to provide the fencing industry with people who have the knowledge and practical skills to repair, maintain, and construct rural electric and non-electric fences, or to construct and repair industrial fences.			Medium Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Land Based Sustainability Practices (Level 3) [2684]	The New Zealand Certificate in Land Based Sustainability Practices (Level 3) provides the skills and knowledge to actively contribute to the skills needed by industry to deal with	30-35%		

	<p>climate change impacts and changing land use practices. These include environmental, conservation and land-based management practices to enhance sustainability. The qualification also includes a component around applying knowledge of environmental factors and sustainable practices.</p>			
New Zealand Certificate in Sustainable Primary Production (Level 4) [2685]	<p>The New Zealand Certificate in Sustainable Primary Production (Level 4) builds on the level 3 Land Based Sustainability Practices to provide the land based primary industries with individuals who have attained the skills and knowledge to develop and manage sustainable practices to comply with a recognised production standard. Current enrolments reflect a high percentage of Māori learners.</p>	20-25%		High 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. 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</p>	15%		High Priority

	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.			
New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Operational Skills (Level 3): Optional strands in Specialist Equipment, and Infrastructure [2215]	<p>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 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>	20-25%		High Priority
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</p>	10-15%		High priority

	environmental sustainability requirements of a primary industry business.			
--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	--	--

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.			
Agricultural Qualification Development Project: including stackable MCs	We are planning to review all Agriculture qualifications, micro credentials, and standards to build flexible, sustainable, and enduring learning pathways for learners, employers, and agriculture industries.			