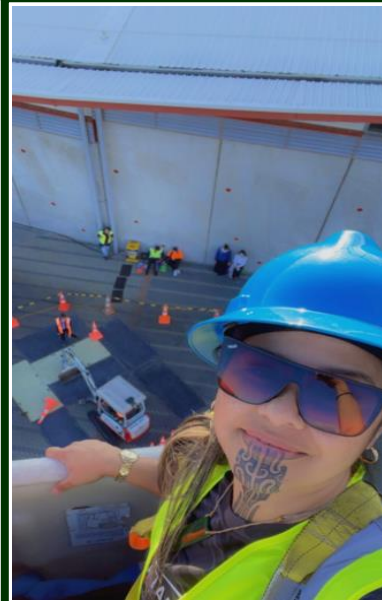


**TOP REGIONAL INSIGHTS**



**Taitokerau is experiencing low vocational, tertiary and skills outcomes.** Intergenerational poverty is persistent, and it has been exacerbated by the increasing cost of living, digital inequity, and the decreasing affordability of study.

**Taitamariki are having to trade-off between different wellbeing factors, due to the cost of living.** It is more attractive and pragmatic to work and earn an income, so taitamariki are choosing not to pursue the skills development that positions them for more sustainable employment with higher income and better career progression. Career changers face a similar challenge, particularly as it is more pragmatic to remain in their current employment than go back to study. As a result, there is low uptake of education and training opportunities which is reflected by these outcomes – [9% of the region’s population is receiving Jobseeker Support](#) (the highest in Aotearoa), the ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEET) rate for Taitokerau has reached 14.5% (compared to the national rate of 11.7% in the June 2023 quarter) and the percentage of ākongā enrolled in tertiary education one year after leaving school is lower than the rest of the country, [53.4%, compared to 59.3% nationally](#). The challenge then is how to upskill our people in a way that recognises these lived realities which is preventing access to training? RSLG suggests ‘Earn as you Learn’ (EAYL) is a way to address this challenge.

**RSLG identified EAYL is most likely to have impact in the Hauora/Health, Construction and Horticulture sectors.** Health and Construction are sectors where the workforce needs to grow at scale and pace to meet demand. In the Construction and Infrastructure sector, the \$10B infrastructure builds scheduled over the next eight years makes it imperative that the current skills gaps are addressed, as pressure on this workforce is going to grow exponentially. In Health, the cost of study exacerbates lower participation in this sector. Roles that require clinical placements provide insufficient or no compensation, so ākongā struggle to meet living costs. It is also common for students in Taitokerau who are pursuing a health qualification to have to undertake a bridging course (as a result of not taking science and maths in high school). This means it takes longer to become qualified, putting earning adequate income to support living costs further out of reach. In Horticulture, given the nature of the mahi, skills are best developed through work but due to the highly seasonal nature of the mahi there are challenges to ākongā accessing sustainable employment while they develop their skills. EAYL, would make qualifications more attractive and pragmatic for ākongā to pursue, and could help these sectors retain ākongā.

**TRENDS AT A GLANCE**



Waihangā Ara Rau estimated there was a shortfall of 8,400 workers in the construction sector in Taitokerau in 2022.  
 Source: Waihangā Ara Rau, [2022 Regional Construction Workforce Planning](#), p7.



Taitokerau’s Hauora sector will need an additional 2,000 health professionals by 2028. Nursing is a particular shortfall - Infometrics suggests the nursing workforce will need to increase by 3.7% (330 people trained) by 2028.  
 Source: Health care and social assistance Northland Region 2022, Detailed occupational employment forecasts by 6 digit occupation, 2022-2028, Infometrics 2023



Infometrics suggests there will be 400 job openings in Horticulture by 2028. Orchard managers is a core skill gap identified in the 2022 RWP.  
 Source: Infometrics Regional Skills Outlook Primary Industries Forecasts accessed Aug 2023.

**REGIONAL ACTIVITIES**

**Implementing EAYL as a regional solution will require a coordinated and collaborative approach.** A regional solution relies on intentional action from education and training providers, private sector, investment partners and government policy and operations. Through a ‘working group’, Te Purunga ki Te Raki Taitokerau RSLG begun exploring what implementing a regional solution will require. We brought together Te Pūkenga, NorthTec and the Tertiary Education Commission in August 2023 to have an initial kōrero. This highlighted what challenges industry and providers experience when supporting ākongā to reach their potential. Alongside these challenges, we have identified below how EAYL is an opportunity to address these challenges.

**TOP LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES**

**Transplanting training programmes designed elsewhere is not meeting local industry or worker needs.** EAYL could help address this challenge by better integrating training with local industry needs. For example, local employers are reporting differences in technical ‘language’ which makes it harder for ākongā to gain employment locally. Restructuring training programmes so they are designed and delivered locally through mahi, will help our ākongā enter the workforce with the right technical language, positioning them to succeed.

**Current verification of learning achieved through work is not pragmatic, given industry constraints.** Photo evidence is a common method used by training providers to verify EAYL standards, however this might not be suitable for health and safety requirements in certain occupations such as arborists or for employers which have secure facilities.

**Employers’ ability to provide manaaki to ākongā is sporadic.** Smaller businesses find it harder to deliver the same wraparound support as larger organisations with dedicated staff. Smaller businesses might not be able to employ assessors, impacting their ability to provide skill development. Effective manaaki and EAYL models will be different for different sectors.

**There is inconsistent support transitioning ākongā from employment to education.** More consistent support and collaboration between education and employers is required. The ability to transition into permanent mahi right after qualifying is important to ākongā confidence and key to retaining talent within Taitokerau, however many smaller providers are not resourced to provide the level of support required. For many ākongā, viewing it as a ‘transition’ might not adequately reflect their lived experiences as most have to work while they study. EAYL better recognises this lived experience, by providing the opportunity to earn income while providing a clear line of sight to employment directly related to the qualification.

**TOP LABOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES**

**RSLG is incorporating the working group’s insights into its investment advice to TEC in November.** Given the benefits EAYL could have for ākongā in the Hauora, Construction and Infrastructure, and Horticulture sectors, RSLG will recommend that TEC increase availability of the following qualifications, but specifically via work-based delivery to encourage EAYL:

- **Horticulture:** Certificate in Horticulture (Level 3), Certificate in Horticulture Production (Level 4) and Certificate in Horticulture Services (Level 4).
- **Construction:** Diploma in Construction (Level 6) with strands in Construction Management, and Quantity Surveying, Certificate in Carpentry (Level 4). RSLG will also recommend there is investment in the higher level education required to increase the supply of quantity surveyors, geotechnical analysis roles and engineers. Other key occupation gaps highlighted include project managers, skilled labourers and electrical roles.
- **Hauora / Health:** RSLG will highlight the need for nurses and kāiawhina (caregivers) and emphasise the role EAYL plays in encouraging ākongā into these occupations. Te Whatu Ora and Toitū te Waioira are already leading work to develop EAYL as part of the qualifications needed for these occupations (this is being undertaken as part of their Qualification Review starting November 2023). RSLG will support this mahi to be developed locally by promoting regionally tailored implementation and helping the national Toitū te Waioira team foster relationships on the ground, particularly with mana whenua.

**The RSLG will promote good practice examples from training providers who offer on the job learning.** For example, Smart Trade Solutions work with both the employer and their apprentice to identify potential barriers and challenges, then encourage them to establish study habits that help mitigate any issues before they start. RSLG also closely connects with Te Hiku Iwi Development Trust Tupu Programme – a locally designed and delivered programme that supported 20 young workers to gain qualification in Horticulture, while transitioning them to full time mahi in the sector. Te Purunga ki Te Raki will continue to support efforts to connect small businesses, and encourage them to collaborate to provide pastoral care through a shared employer network model.

**REGIONAL WORKFORCE PLAN ACTIONS**

**The RSLG toolkit:** we identify where insights might be needed, where there are ways to improve coordination, and what support is required at a national level to empower us to lead this change. Below is our view on how focusing on EAYL will further particular RWP actions (detailed in our [RWP Reflections](#)) in the three identified sectors:

**Our Hauora/Health actions target growing the workforce by encouraging participation and completion of health qualifications** – our RWP signals the pastoral care our Haoura ākongā need to thrive. We believe EAYL could assist with this.

**Growing the Construction and Infrastructure sector requires investment in human capital as well as capital infrastructure** –having consulted workers, employers and education/training providers, we have heard qualitative insights which emphasize how important the role of pastoral care is in apprenticeships. We know programmes such as the [Apprenticeship Boost](#), makes it easier for employers to take on and keep ākongā, allowing ākongā to keep earning while they gain qualifications. Employers tell us that it helps them increase the diversity of their workforce. This signals that a coordinated regional approach to EAYL could help attract our bright taitamariki and whānau looking for a career change into the trades and construction sector.

**Horticulture sector is to ensure a sustainable and productive workforce with access to decent jobs with wrap-around pastoral care to awahi workers** – we need to explore opportunities to connect growers/employers and education providers to understand an earn learn approach that builds a learner’s capabilities and confidence to thrive in this industry and enrich both industry and worker success.