

Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence and  
Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service

# THE TRAINER AND ASSESSOR LANDSCAPE: INSIGHTS IN FORESTRY AND WOOD PROCESSING

January 2024





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## **Disclaimer:**

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## Section 1

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# Introduction

## Context

Prior to this research, potential issues have been identified across the forestry and wood processing industries related to capacity, quality, and succession of an aging trainer and assessor workforce. Much of the evidence is anecdotal; for example, in Education and Training Opportunities reports that Te Uru Rākau - New Zealand Forest Service and the Forestry and Wood Processing Workforce Council published in early 2022<sup>1</sup>, an employer commented:

“ Our industry is so short of trainer-assessors. I used to be able to get someone so easily years ago, but I can’t do that now. That’s all on the individual employers. There aren’t enough trainers around to be able to support this. This is where I see our training system is failing us. The qualifications are appropriate, it’s the delivery of what is available that is the issue.”

Therefore, more robust data around the current state is needed before effective interventions can be designed. Te Uru Rākau - New Zealand Forest Service (TURNZFS) approached Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence (Food and Fibre CoVE) to establish a project involving major employers, sub-contractors and small businesses involved in forestry and wood processing, along with current trainers and assessors, to size the issue and investigate potential solutions to address it.

Research First has been enlisted to help Food and Fibre CoVE and TURNZFS better understand issues and perceptions surrounding the current model for training and assessment. This understanding needs to inform the future strategy of the industry.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/forest-industry-and-workforce/building-forestry-wood-processing-workforce/>

## Acknowledgements

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### NOTES:

When reading this report, “trainers and assessors” is often shortened to T&As for ease of reading as all participants worked across both roles and saw them as one.

Findings are the views of all groups (key informants, major employers, trainers and assessors, sub-contractors, small business), industries (forestry and wood processing), and regions unless specified otherwise.

Issues raised are sector wide unless indicated which industry the issue is specific to. It is important to note that although issues may be relevant across the sector the implications and solutions will differ between industries.

To clarify for understanding, Forestry and Wood Processing are industries that make up the Forestry and Wood Processing Sector.

Competenz<sup>2</sup> is mentioned throughout the report as they are a key player within the industry, specifically in relation to T&As. It is important to note that all T&As we spoke to in this report are registered with Competenz as Assessors, where Competenz is one of the NZQA approved education providers for both Forestry and Wood Processing. T&As are generally either self-employed or are employed by a company within the Forestry sector. All participants noted that Competenz play a leading role within the industry and therefore feel strongly about the influence Competenz has in the industry. Some Key informants also raised concerns relating to Competenz due to negative experiences they have observed with industry workers. T&As working for companies other than Competenz were represented in the research, these participants were invited to comment on these companies. No specific issues were linked to any other company.

Two government funding schemes are mentioned in the findings. Fees Free was introduced in January 2018 and then the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF) was introduced as a replacement during COVID. TTAF ended on 31 December 2022 and Fees Free became eligible again. There are key differences between the two funds and what and how they support the industry.

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of the research, Competenz was transitioning into the entity: Competenz Te Pūkenga therefore the report refers to the former, unless it is specific to current state. This is to reflect the time the research was conducted, and the name used by participants.

## Objectives

The primary objectives of this research project are to:

- Investigate future solutions, specifically the degree to which the generic model of work-based learning is suited to the forestry and wood processing sub-sectors.
- Provide evidence and insights into what could improve perceptions of training and assessment as a career move, and how these messages can be delivered. Highlight whether specific to forestry and/or wood processing or more general.
- Explore if issues arise relating to capacity, quality, and succession in the trainer and assessor workforce.

The enabling objectives are to test the hypotheses that:

- There are insufficient numbers of trainers and assessors across the forestry and wood processing industries.
- Training and assessment are not appealing career choices within forestry and/or wood processing.

## Research approach

### METHOD

#### ***Phase 1 – Qualitative***

In-depth interviews were held with key informants and major employers from the forestry and wood processing industries, along with current trainers and assessors (T&As). Throughout this report, when the research mentions a group size, this is referring to how often key themes or ideas were raised within each participant group. This is typical of qualitative research, which focuses on shared themes not numerical data.

A qualitative approach engages with fewer research participants in more detail than quantitative approaches. The value of qualitative is achieved in being able to build a conversation with the interviewee, rather than a simple Q&A approach. This approach allows different avenues to be explored and is better able to identify perceptions and needs. The format of discussion is relatively informal to build rapport and facilitate open discussion. However was led by a topic guide that has been reviewed by industry through a Technical Reference Group prior to interviews taking place.

All participants were recruited through a random sample of available contact details online. A handful of contacts were also supplied by Competenz. Some T&A participants were networked through other participants, although in most cases these contacts were already being recruited for the project.

#### ***Phase 2 - Quantitative***

In the second phase of the research, a quantitative method was used – an online survey with small businesses and sub-contractors. Here, the research provides exact numbers, as this type of research allows for numerical reporting.

Small businesses and sub-contractors that participated were recruited using a database built from publicly available sources, purchased from database companies, provided through previous research and randomly generated.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### ***Key informants and major employers***

Interviews were conducted with a total of 26 key informants and stakeholders (including Wood Processors and Manufacturers Association, New Zealand Timber Industry Federation, Forest Industry Contractors Association, Forest Owners Association and the Northland Wood Council<sup>3</sup>) and major employers from both the forestry and wood processing industries from across New Zealand. These interviews were conducted to gain an overview of the industry and a top-level perspective of the demand for trainers and assessors. Interviews were held either face-to-face, by using a video calling application, or over the phone.

### ***Trainers and assessors***

In the first phase of the research, 25 current trainers and assessors were interviewed to understand first-hand the challenges and rewards in the industry. These interviews were conducted with a split of 15 from forestry and 10 from wood processing industries. A range of in-house and contractor trainers and assessors were also included. The recruitment strategy was to include a mix of people from locations across New Zealand.

### ***Sub-contractors and small businesses***

For a comprehensive view of the industry, the research included sub-contractors and small businesses from across New Zealand, engaging with this group initially through a 12-minute phone survey. However, engagement from this group was limited as many declined to participate, citing insufficient interaction with trainers and assessors as the reason for their reticence. To boost participation, the survey was transitioned to an online format and dispersed to the email contacts within the sample. Together both methods obtained 56 completed surveys.

Although this is a smaller number than desired, it is still sufficient to provide a representative snapshot of the industry from this perspective. The data for small businesses and sub-contractors achieved a maximum margin of error of +/- 13 percent<sup>4</sup> at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if 50 percent of respondents stated that training and assessment was valued, then we can be 95 percent sure that between 37 percent and 63 percent of the entire customer base share this view.

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<sup>3</sup> All Wood Councils were contacted to participate, but only Northland Wood Council responded.

<sup>4</sup> This margin of error assumes an infinite population size, meaning it's designed to be a conservative estimate of the total number of sub-contractor and small businesses in the forestry and wood processing sector.



## **TIMEFRAME**

This research was conducted from October 2022 to May 2023. During this time period Cyclone Gabrielle caused great damage to regions within the North Island where a large group of potential participants for this research were living and working. This affected the research timeline as participants needed time to respond to the cyclone's effect.

## **FEEDBACK FROM INDUSTRY**

A management group was formed including members from TURNZFS, Food and Fibre CoVE, Muka Tangata (Workforce Development Council for the food and fibre sector) and Hanga-Aro-Rau (Workforce Development Council for the manufacturing, engineering and logistics industries) to oversee each stage of the research and be lead decision makers.

To include a wider group from the industry, a Technical Reference Group was established. This group included members from Forest Industry Contractors Association (FICA), Forest Owners Association (FOA), Competenz, The New Zealand Timber Industry Federation (NZTIF), Xlam and current T&As. The purpose of this group was to provide technical feedback on questionnaires and the report, drawing on their industry experience.

## Section 2

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# Key Findings

## Current state for trainers and assessors

Regarding the number of trainers and assessors (T&As), there is a disconnect between the perspectives of T&As when compared to key informants and employers. T&As believe there are enough people working in their field while key informants and employers do not. Issues were consistent regionally and across the forestry and wood processing sector, when issues are specific to industry or region it is noted as such.

The difference for the most part is explained by key informants and major employers wanting their T&A requests to be followed up on quickly. The T&As are, however, often trying to schedule their work in some cases many weeks in advance, to ensure they make enough money if they're required to travel for the job or to work around other commitments. Or, in the case of in-house trainers, working around higher business priorities.

The T&A scheduling challenges are driven by economic factors. With a reduction in government funding, they have experienced a reduction in training work. This means with each site visit or trip away they need to work harder to deliver the same returns. Wait times for T&As rose during the period of government funding available for training as there was no mitigation to ensure the number of T&As in the industries could keep up with the expected increase of demand.

Key informants and major employers want the T&A work done with short notice because they're constantly juggling priorities and workforce shortages. Being productive is their main priority, so if the work schedule opens to allow for T&A time, it needs to be executed as soon as possible before conditions change.

Work-based learning has pros and cons, the benefits highlighted include hands-on development of skills that cannot be taught in a book due to the tactile nature of the work. Many workplaces have more modern machinery than training institutions – so at work, they learn more relevant skills. It also means people don't need to travel away from home or family for training, and employers do not need to spend as much or lose workers for periods of time to get their training and assessments done.

The negatives of work-based learning include limitations based on employer attitudes. Some can't, or don't want to invest in it. Employers often find making time for training and assessment difficult – it is the task that is always prioritised below others; profitability or more immediate efficiency gains come first.

## Perceptions of training and assessment as a career

The perceptions of T&A as a career are positive. It is seen as a specialist role requiring excellent people skills and deep industry knowledge. These characteristics bring mana to the role.

There is an element of moving sideways in one's career (rather than up or down) when taking on T&A responsibilities. The impetus to do so is often driven by a limitation of or desire to reduce physical effort. Given the physically demanding nature of most work in the wider sector, T&A is an avenue that provides some respite while capitalising on years of industry experience.

The challenge, assuming someone has the right characteristics for the role, is for the earning potential to be sustainable. The onsite T&As are salaried and can take on other responsibilities to bolster their contribution at their workplace, e.g., health and safety and/or time on the tools. However, the contracted T&As need to have excellent business acumen so that they can use their time profitably. This is often the skill that they lack; therefore, many leave the profession or work part-time, in many cases supplementing their income in other ways.

## Career appeal

More effort is required for succession planning by the industry. At present, most people describe either stumbling across training and assessing as a pathway or being shoulder tapped, to consider it as a possible career route.

Because the role isn't front of mind for many, it doesn't get wide consideration, and this limits the numbers exploring it as a potential pathway. The appeal of the job is seeing learners succeed by completing unit standards and giving back the knowledge they have learnt in the industry.

A limiting factor is earning potential. With all T&As expressing discontent with the remuneration structure from the company the contract was arranged with. Some T&As were also frustrated with the inconsistent frequency of payments as they are unable to plan for when payments would reach them. A person considering a T&A role could easily be put off by the prospect of limited earning potential.



## Improvements for career appeal

Training is the responsibility of the employer, variability of funding models therefore have a significant impact on T&As.

Consistency of work was a leading challenge for contractor trainers and assessors. This has worsened since the government funding under the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF)<sup>5</sup> (free trades training) was removed in 2022. Due to the actual cost and opportunity cost of training, i.e., workers not doing their main tasks, employers have de-prioritised training. Research participants felt that the inconsistency of the market doesn't allow for money to be spent on training. In-house T&As often supplement their workflow with additional tasks within their company, therefore aren't affected by the fluctuation of T&A work.

Highlighting the T&A career pathway is an essential step needed to ensure school leavers and workers in the industry understand the opportunity and role requirements. Research participants weren't aware of current opportunities to move into a career within forestry or wood processing – other than through family members currently working in the industry. Key informants want to see greater diversity of those within the role of a T&A and felt that advertising these job roles industry-wide would simulate greater interest amongst people within the industry to move into the role, rather than limiting the opportunities to only those who are being shoulder tapped.

The leading need communicated by T&As was for a support network to be established. All T&A contractors felt they were isolated and didn't have a support network to discuss ideas, share problems, or look to for improving areas of their role. Creating a forum to organise gatherings and enable ongoing connection was highly desirable by this group.

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<sup>5</sup> Training is the responsibility of the employer and as part of upskilling their staff, they ensure staff have the competencies to perform their expected duties in the workplace accurately and safely. Before the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF) was established this training was paid for directly to the Trainer by the employer at whatever rate was agreed. Since TTAF ended in 2022, training costs are once again the responsibility of the employer. Competenz Te Pūkenga contracts the assessment part of this process and pays a standardised rate plus any travel disbursements.

## Future solutions

Work-based training was deemed very valuable by research participants; the tactile connection ensures people learn “what” to do, correctly. Participants also recognised the importance of theoretical learning as it cements the hands-on and helps learners understand “the why”.

Involving T&As in the development of course materials were recognised to be an important change they want to see happen as the current material can be outdated, not specific to certain areas, and repetitive.

Having greater access to learners’ progress, which may be through online workbooks, was noted to be an important shift T&As want to see happen to keep track of learners’ progress. A strong frustration for T&As, also recognised by key informants and major employers, was learners not being ready for assessments that had been scheduled. Examples of learners not being ready for assessment are: having incomplete book work or not completing enough training to be ready for the practical assessment. The majority of the participants noted that the travel costs for the assessor were then at the T&A’s expense due to their pay being based on the number of credits they pass<sup>6</sup>. Finding ways to improve communication between employers, supervisors, crews, Competenz and T&As is important for smooth operations.

Some research participants suggested having alternative providers for training programs to improve the industry; the argument being that the variety would better meet the diverse needs of people across the country, especially for young Māori and those working across the wood processing industry. A small group of participants felt that they were better placed to manage training for their sector or cultural group, as it supported processes in a way that better met the needs of their learners.

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<sup>6</sup> Technical advisors of the report noted that if a learner is not competent to/capable of completing the assessment, it is then considered a not-yet-competent (NYC). These are paid for by Competenz and have been since at least 2012.

### Key areas identified across various elements of the research

<b>Forestry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to improve communication across industry for better resourcing of T&amp;As.</li> <li>• Course material needs to be updated.</li> <li>• Need more T&amp;As trained in mechanisation.</li> </ul>
<b>Wood Processing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to improve communication across industry for better resourcing of T&amp;As.</li> <li>• Need to update course material that is currently viewed as outdated.</li> <li>• Alternatively, allow companies running their own informal courses instead to ensure skills are specific and up to date.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low T&amp;A numbers in the South Island across all areas of both forestry and wood processing industries, resulting in a large amount of travel required.</li> <li>• Low number of T&amp;As in Central North Island within the forestry industry. T&amp;As regularly travelling from Napier to Gisborne and Hawke's Bay.</li> </ul>
<b>Māori participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure for transfer knowledge of culture practices and etiquette needed.</li> <li>• Want own course providers that are tailored to Māori to better understand and support their individual needs and ways of learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-Māori participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire for alternative course providers specific to each area of both forestry and wood processing industries.</li> </ul>
<b>In-house T&amp;As</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unaware of demand for T&amp;A roles outside of their company as they usually step into the role of T&amp;A when needed within their company.</li> </ul>
<b>Contractor T&amp;As</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle to find full-time work as a T&amp;A.</li> <li>• Low pay rate.</li> <li>• Payment model doesn't account for all hours spent with a crew and in some cases impacts the quality of the assessment.</li> <li>• Learners not being prepared for assessment.</li> <li>• Lack of communication with crew manager.</li> <li>• No support networks.</li> </ul>

## Section 3

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# Current state for trainers and assessors



## Connection between trainers and assessors

Although Trainers and Assessors (T&As) view the two roles as distinct tasks, all participants perform both roles. A trainer was also an assessor, and an assessor was also a trainer.

Only a minority of T&As indicate a stronger emphasis on one role over the other. It's essential to understand this as the report often refers to T&As as a single group, distinguishing between the roles only when insights pertain specifically to one role or the other.

## Are there enough trainers and assessors?

There's a discrepancy between key informants, major employers, sub-contractors, small businesses, and the T&As concerning the number of trainers and assessors needed.

The general theme amongst contractor T&As was that they did not see a need for more personnel in their role. They believe there has been a decrease in demand for training due to the removal of the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF), making it difficult for many to secure sufficient work. To mitigate this, many T&As undertake other roles, such as a health and safety officer, to support their workload. Other T&As don't require full time work as they are partially retired but continue with their T&A roles to maintain some income. In-house T&As were unaware of the scale of need for T&As outside of their workplace, as they do other work within their company and step into the role as a T&A with their crews as needed.

“ There isn't a need for more trainers and assessors. Look after the ones you've got.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Those who maintain a viable full-time income tend to have a broad range of training and assessment skills and operate their businesses efficiently by planning their workload to optimise the payment structure. However, the inconsistency of work remains a key challenge.

“ The biggest challenge is the inconsistency of work, therefore there isn't a need for more trainers and assessors.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Whereas key informants and major employers described experiencing wait times when in need for a T&A, therefore felt there was a need for more.

## LOCATIONS IN NEED OF T&AS

The majority of key informants and major employers interviewed highlighted a nationwide need for trainers and assessors across the sector, while a minority viewed the shortfall as localised to be in the South Island, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Gisborne, or sector specific mainly in harvesting, silviculture for forestry and saw doctoring for the wood processing industry. This group pinpointed a critical need in the wood processing industry in the South Island with only two T&As identified; this lack of resources has caused travel burdens and crew delays. In the North Island, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Gisborne were noted to have a lack of T&As across the forestry industry, requiring regular commutes from Napier.

## WAIT PERIODS

Sub-contractors and small businesses notably express a clear need for more T&As. Citing they often face challenges finding available T&As or encounter long waiting periods before one becomes available. Wait times described by participants ranged from a month up to a year, and were noted to have increased during the period when training was subsidised by the government as a part of the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund. During this time, T&As were stretched to meet the increased demand, although T&As were delighted by the increase in demand as it relieved them of the insecurity of inconsistent work.

“ We have two crews and every time I need a trainer there are not enough, and also a longer wait time.”

– SUB-CONTRACTOR OR SMALL BUSINESS FORESTRY

Trainers and assessors held a contrasting view, asserting that this perception often reflects the desired response time rather than an accurate gauge of available resources. They shared that employers frequently expected trainers and assessors to be immediately available. An employer might have scheduled activities or a lull in production, that enables time to be set aside for training and assessment in the short term. The government funding of training as a part of the Fees Free scheme and the availability of budget were recognised as factors that affect timing of companies scheduling assessment. However, this expectation does not always align with the trainers and assessors' availability or scheduling of other work in the area.

Most contract trainers and assessors noted that travelling for work, often requiring overnight stays, is a common requirement. Balancing this travel with other commitments and ensuring financial viability presents additional challenges to their availability. If the tasks requested by an employer are relatively minor, T&As often seek additional work near their travel destination to make the trip economically viable. This approach can delay their availability. A subset of T&As expressed unwillingness to travel between cities for work due to insufficient support, poor communication, and issues with job organisation between the arranging organisation and the crew.

## IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR TRAINING

Wait times were longer during government funding for the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund as more employers were motivated to pursue training due to the funding they received for credits. This meant waiting workers were performing tasks that they hadn't been assessed for. A key informant spoke to the danger of these longer wait times, mentioning there had been a death that occurred onsite amongst workers that were waiting and needed training. Whilst no causal link between the lack of training and assessment and the accidents can be attributed, the comments clearly show the level of emotion and seriousness the participant attached to the issue.

Outside of the period when the subsidy was available for training, T&As struggled to source full time work. Therefore, the spike in work available for T&As created wait times as mitigations had not been put in place to ensure the number of T&As could handle the increased workload.

“ Government paid training finished last year (2022)...since then no one is prepared to pay for the training.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## NETWORK OF T&AS

All participants had limited knowledge of the network of T&As working within each area of the sectors and their national spread. Therefore, they were uncertain about the exact scale of the demand for more T&As.

Saw doctoring and pulp and paper were the areas of the wood processing industry identified to have a need for more T&As, specifically in the South Island.

Harvesting, silviculture and mechanisation were noted by a large group of participants as areas of the forestry industry that lacked T&As.

The rapid adoption of mechanised processes has outpaced the availability of suitably skilled trainers and assessors, creating a significant gap in availability. The aging workforce of T&As was noted to affect numbers of T&As in mechanisation, as they felt it wasn't worth them investing time to earn credits to be able to train and assess in mechanisation as they will soon retire.

“ Course material isn't keeping up with the level of mechanisation of the industry. There isn't enough trainers and assessors skilled in this area to provide adequate training.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

The lack of nationwide networks and communication among T&As was apparent when trying to understand whether gaps existed for trainers and assessors. Participants generally had limited knowledge of others who taught and assessed the same skill areas as themselves, let alone other areas. They gave the general impression that those currently working as trainers and assessors managed the workload; but gaps arose when employers were playing catch-up on training and assessment.

## GOVERNING BODY

T&As across New Zealand are seeking a governing body to support them in allocating work, clearer systems and communication and assistance when travelling for work. Contractor T&A research participants who travelled for work felt they weren't being looked after due to minimal communication from the company they were contracting through, and the allowance for food and accommodation while away was not sufficient to make the trip viable. The governing body is the role of Competenz as the NZQA-approved education provider. Their responsibility is managing administration, systems, allocating work, wellbeing, quality, etc, of any registered T&As. This is how it was for all the other former ITOs (Industry Training Organisations).

“ There needs to be more structure to utilise trainers and assessors. It's not that there aren't enough, they aren't being utilised.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## VALUE OF TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

Training was recognised by all participants to be the duty of employers, and it is their responsibility to either train employees in-house or pay a trainer if they aren't able to commit to someone in time to train learners. Unfortunately, a large group of employers are seen to only offer the bare minimum of training and assessment to employees in areas where compliance was necessary, unless training and assessing is subsidised.

The elevated health and safety risk of this sector raises the importance of trainer availability: reducing wait times mitigates potential risk for crews waiting on training or assessment.



## Financial concerns for contract T&As

Most contract trainers and assessors participating in this research expressed they often have to travel to other parts of the country for work. The travel allowance provided by a company to its contractors to compensate for time, food and accommodation while away from home, was generally considered inadequate, making it more viable to wait for clusters of work in one area. There was a sentiment that unless they grouped jobs together, the travel allowance could result in a net loss.

“ I’m lucky I have a supportive wife who buys groceries and cooks my meals for the time I’m away, helping me stay within the \$60 daily budget for food. If I had to buy on the road, I’d spend more than this.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

“ You’d be lucky to find a half decent motel for \$160 a night these days – you have to book way in advance to get it, which adds more delays.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Many believed that the full extent of business administration, planning, and the actual cost of each activity is often misunderstood. This leads to T&As exiting the industry because they can’t make it economically viable. Therefore, assessing the payment model for T&As, especially while travelling, needs to be a priority to keep T&As in the industry.

## Industry experience and succession planning is required

The importance of industry experience and succession planning within the training and assessment field became evident in this research. Many trainers and assessors currently in the role are aged 50+ years, with the majority planning to retire soon or move on due to a lack of work. Despite this looming workforce shift, there are limited steps in place to prepare for the turnover of T&A staff.

About half of the current in-house trainers and assessors the researchers spoke to have identified a successor within the industry, yet little is done to prepare the successor for the role. This lack of preparation presents a significant challenge for the sector, given these T&A professionals are considered crucial sources of knowledge and wisdom. Their departure from the field may lead to a significant loss of expertise.

Key informants and major employers participating in this study also recognised the lack of a clear pathway for the recruitment of new T&As. They suggested workers should ideally have 5–10 years' experience in the industry before moving into a T&A role, as this experience is essential for the knowledge of practical skills. While there is a lack of preparation of younger workers to move into a T&A role, current T&As also feel it is a big step for the younger generation to take.

“ I’ve got someone in mind to be my successor. There’s no competition for the role cause it’s a prick of a job... if you don’t care about the guys, it’s going to be a trudge.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

“ As they all worked in the industry together for many years, as soon as one leaves to retire and go fishing and hunting, they all want to retire so they can enjoy their hobbies together.”

“ – Key informant

Participants emphasised the critical role T&As play as knowledge carriers, particularly in preserving culturally significant practices for those of Māori descent. Retiring elders taking unshared wisdom and industry insights with them is identified as a risk. Therefore, effort must be made to create time and space for knowledge transfer, especially of Māori traditions and practices, between generations.

“ There is a cultural responsibility to ensure that the Māori traditions are being passed onto the younger generations, otherwise they are at risk of being lost.”

– MĀORI KEY INFORMANT

“ I think from our sector (industry), which is manufacturing, the skill level has been lost with the retired guys leaving lots more emphasis on training and not so much on learning the training.”

– SUB-CONTRACTORS AND SMALL BUSINESSES

All participants recognised that for a person to succeed in the role, they need to hold mana, be experienced, and respected. This presents a challenge for younger, less experienced trainers and assessors, who need to learn from more seasoned T&As. All participants expressed a need for greater support for new trainers and assessors. They felt this support should come from someone already working in the industry. Those entering the role from a tertiary pathway were described as offering textbook answers that lacked the practical, on-the-ground experience compared to those who have come from within the industry, could provide.

## Funding changes have had a considerable impact on training

### IMPACT OF COST ON EMPLOYER'S UPTAKE OF TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

The training funding introduced by the Labour government in 2021 as a part of the Fees Free<sup>7</sup> tertiary education policy, led to regular work for trainers and assessors. During this period, employers took advantage of the subsidy, creating training plans and ensuring their staff were equipped with necessary job skills. T&A participants noted that the industry was booming over this time with the ongoing training as it created motivation and a pathway for workers.

“ New Zealand was renowned for (high) level of workers due to all the training that was being done during the subsidy for training.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

However, T&As indicated that the removal of training funding in early 2022 has led to an unstable workflow for them, as cost is a key deterrent for employers. Even though the industry recognises the value of training, its high cost means there is limited uptake.

Apart from cost, other barriers compound the issue of training within the industry; cyclical nature of the sector, worker shortages, and a mismatch between task scheduling and training and assessment calendars are a few examples. These complications often result in training and assessment activities being irregular, even when budgeted for.

“ Companies don't want to pay money to have tickets done, they are often willing to run the risk of getting caught. As they have a period of time to complete tickets if they get caught, employers just do what they need and don't put effort into their employees.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

T&As highlighted the high comparative cost of offsite training. Estimates were given in relation to a PTE within the wood processing industry suggesting that sending a worker away to complete a block course (which may entail two or three separate trips to the training institution) could cost over \$30,000 per person per year. This figure comprises the cost of attendance, travel, food, accommodation, and productivity loss due to absence from the workplace or the cost of labour to cover their duties.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.feesfree.govt.nz/>

“ I’ve heard that it can cost about \$30,000 per person to send guys to the polytechnic and complete unit standards offsite.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Alongside cost, some participants expressed that there is a sentiment among employers that investing in worker training might encourage them to move to different crews for higher pay once they’ve gained new skills. The workforce shortage has opened job opportunities for skilled workers in the sector, especially those willing to relocate. The threat of workers relocating makes investment in training a potential cost-risk for employers.

## FLUCTUATION OF WORKLOAD

Since the discontinuation of the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund, T&As report going from rejecting work in 2022 to only having enough work for a few days every fortnight.

The unpredictable fluctuations in work for T&As has meant they have had to find other means of work. For some this is working in-house for a crew, and they just step out their day-to-day work and into the role of a T&A when needed. Participants working in-house haven’t noticed a decrease of work due to the loss of funding as they were often part of companies that agreed to train employees as per their employment agreement.

For contractors, a small group described having trained in health and safety to create another avenue of work they can do within the industry. A large group of participants recognised if the level of work remains low, they will most likely go and work in the mines or similar sectors where they can use their skills and can secure full-time employment.

The irregular work pattern and consequent necessity for alternative work is leading key knowledge holders to consider leaving the sector. This potential loss of high-level skills and knowledge continuity is a significant concern for the sector’s future.

This concern is echoed by key informants, major employers, and small businesses. They too recognise how the loss of funding has affected T&As and their likelihood to step away from their role, noting that losing T&As will take away an important source of knowledge which will affect the quality of the workforce. They suggested reinstating the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund as a means of providing consistency to trainers and assessors, thereby retaining their knowledge and experience within the industry. Participants (from all groups) were unsure who the governing body to provide subsidised training who would help mitigate other industry issues, should be. A large group of research participants often looked to the government, as they provide the current training subsidy through Fees Free. This confusion reiterates the need for T&As to have a union or governing body to provide direction and instil confidence that they have an advocate addressing their needs within the industry.



“ Being an in-house (T&A) it’s easier to organise training and assessment as I know where the boys are and can check up on them to keep them on track.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

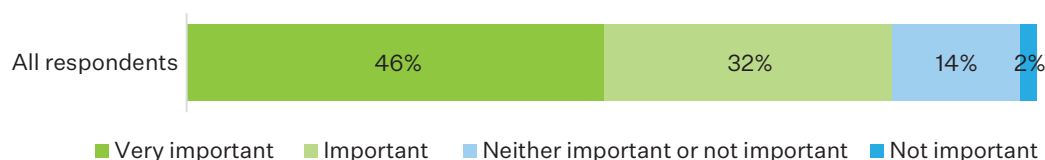
“ I did training to become a health and safety officer to supplement my hours to ensure I had a full week worth of work.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## Training is valued – in theory

All participants acknowledged the value of training and assessment: it improves safety, ensures better quality and more efficient work. Having trained and qualified employees also reduces the need for close supervision. This perspective was echoed by 78 percent of sub-contractors and small businesses who stated training and assessment was either very important or important to their businesses.

**Figure 1 Importance of training and assessment to small businesses and sub-contractors**



Base: All small business and sub-contractor respondents (n=56)

The benefits of having trained and assessed staff include improved health and safety as workers become more confident and knowledgeable (45 percent). Additionally, having better skills enables employees to produce higher quality work faster, which is advantageous for the business.

**Table 1 The benefits to small businesses and sub-contractors of having trained and assessed staff**

	Percentage	Responses
Safer/more confident	45%	25
Better skills/higher quality	32%	18
More professional/qualified	9%	5
No comment	7%	4
No difference if trained and assessed	4%	2
Other	4%	2
Number of respondents	100%	56

Base: All small business and sub-contractor respondents (n=56)

The data for the above table was collected from an open-ended question. Respondents were asked, “What is the benefit of having trained and assessed staff?”, their responses were then grouped into the above categories, based on their responses.

Despite this recognition, around half of the T&A participants noted some employers still do not prioritise training. T&As stated these employers often react only when a lack of training leads to problems, with the financial impact of such problems spurring them to seek training.

A small group of employers are known to provide regular training to employees, at times also incorporating it into their employment contracts. On the other hand, another small portion of employers do not provide training to their staff, showing little investment in training plans and minimal support for employee development.

The distinction between the two groups was described as values-driven. Some employers strive to improve and prioritise training, while others were content with the status quo.

“ It’s sad to see some employees have worked with a company for seven years and only have a few tickets. These workers need to be invested in, especially when they have stuck with a company for over a year.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## LEARNERS’ MOTIVATIONS

T&As often described younger crew members as more motivated to learn and improve their skills. In contrast, older members of the crew did not place the same value on training, some were described as unwilling to learn new methods and acted as though they already knew everything.

Celebrating crew members’ qualifications through awards and ceremonies was seen to have a positive impact on all learners. The forestry industry was noted to celebrate qualifications earned by crew members at cross-industry events – more so than in the wood processing industry. Being recognised for their achievements was noted to be of great value for learners, as often it was their first qualification due to many learners not achieving in high school. The awards signify their hard work and give their family and friends an opportunity to celebrate their success.

“ The younger guys want to make the most of the training as it is an opportunity to climb the ladder and progress their career. There is also the money incentive as earning qualifications does translate to a pay rise.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

T&As recognised the greater cost (that often isn't being accounted for by employers), if employees aren't trained and learning on the job. If employees haven't been trained and qualified to work on certain machines or jobs, then there is a higher risk of them injuring themselves and damaging the equipment. This leads to time off work or the slowdown of production as equipment is out of use until fixed. With an ever-increasing use of machinery in the forestry industry, training is becoming highly important. Research participants raised the issue of the high risk these machines pose if not used correctly.

## Payment and its process are frustrating

All participant groups highlighted the low pay rate and problematic payment system for T&As. Participants worked for a variety of companies, therefore the payment models were different. A need was identified for consistency between payment models to ensure there is a baseline for what T&As should be paid for.

Most contractor assessors reported receiving payment per completed credit sign-off. Many participants (across all groups) felt this payment method could lead to assessors prematurely signing off learners on credits to ensure they receive payment.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023, Competenz Te Pūkenga provided clarity on their payment model for contractor T&As working for them. Their current payment system for T&As is that the company receiving the training or assessment pays \$15 per credit signed-off to Competenz. All other costs including travel and accommodation is picked up by Competenz at a set rate to the contractor T&A. Contractor T&As that work directly with companies also noted they were paid per credit they signed-off. T&A research participants expressed dissatisfaction with this payment model due to the amount of unpaid time they spend on administrative tasks, such as organising work for upcoming weeks, creating training plans for learners, and conducting data entry post-assessment. They believe their remuneration does not adequately reflect this time investment.

The payment system imposes a significant burden on a large group of T&As, who reported feeling pressured to pass learners for credits despite concerns over their skill levels. This is due to the need to make their efforts financially worthwhile. This payment system for Assessors potentially increases the risk of an under-skilled workforce; a serious concern in such a high-risk industry.

Research participants see administration as a large part of their role with many explaining if they had a full week's worth of work, they would be in the forest four days and need one full day to complete paperwork and administration. As a crucial part of their role, they feel it is important this time is built into the payment structure.

A small group of participating contractor T&As mentioned Competenz still pays them for attending an assessment even if they don't pass the learners. This situation underlines the need for better communication and clarity from Competenz and employers of contractor T&As regarding how the pay system operates.

Current T&As across the sector also expressed that the system Competenz uses to manage their pay, causes significant issues. Participants noted a range of experiences, including delays in receiving pay for completed jobs, minimal pay rises, and lack of support. T&As agreed the payment structure doesn't adequately support them or make the role attractive.

All T&A participants highlighted the biggest pain point for them is the low payrate. Given their influential role within the industry which ensures worker safety, they believe it's important they are appropriately compensated for their essential work.

“ A lot of new Assessors come in and then realise there is no money in this – so go back to working on the crews.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Adapting the current payment model or move to a completely new payment model is desired to recognise the work T&A do and paying them a respectable wage. A new model that reduces pressure for T&As to sign off learners prematurely (to ensure they are paid for their time), is vital to the skill quality of the industry. A new payment model needs to include payment for the administration hours associated with assessing learners. The move to Te Pūkenga being the course provider for credits across the forestry and wood processing sector, provides an opportunity for the payment model and contract of service for contractor T&As to be modified. With the integration of Competenz with Te Pūkenga, it is important to reinvestigate how they can work together for the benefit of T&As (the 'how' was largely an unknown). Whilst participants didn't have a solution, they highlighted a need for a better payment model and communication.

“ I haven't had a pay rise in the over 20 years I've been working as a Trainer and Assessor. When it gets raised with Competenz they say they will look into it and then nothing gets done<sup>8</sup>.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

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<sup>8</sup> Competenz Te Pūkenga advised on the 13th of December 2023 that the pay rate for Competenz Te Pūkenga Assessors was last increased in November 2019. To reflect the recent increases in the cost of living, another pay increase will be implemented in 2024. Whilst not accurate, this quote warranted inclusion as it demonstrates the frustration observed.

## Summary

Given that current trainers and assessors view their roles as interrelated, and often performed by the same individual, it might be beneficial in the future to consider these positions as a combined entity for training and certification purposes.

Industry participants expressed a desire for faster responses when requesting T&A assistance, suggesting that a national network connecting all T&As could clarify availability. They emphasised the importance of caring for those already in these roles before focusing on workforce expansion.

The loss of for the TTAF training has reportedly led to a significant decrease in work for contract T&As. Although employers appear to value training highly, they often do not prioritise it. Participants described the unpredictability of the market as a challenge for budgeting. This issue, along with a busy workforce, resulting in learners sometimes feeling constrained to their job and unable to attend training or assessment, are identified as reasons for the decreased priority of training.

The ageing T&A workforce is a high concern for participants, as there are no established processes to support new recruits transitioning into these roles. With the majority of the current workforce being aged 50+ years, it is essential to create a succession plan that prepares people to move into these roles and gain the knowledge and experience from seasoned industry professionals.

The increasing shift towards mechanisation has created a need for T&As in this area. Most participants recognised this area as a priority for T&As, but due to the ageing workforce, many T&As are not interested in upskilling at this late stage of their careers. This situation reinforces the need for robust succession planning.

The payment structure for contract T&As is a leading concern. There seems to be a lack of awareness of the payment model for contactors. In some cases, the 'pay by credit passed' model creates pressure for T&As to pass learners to ensure they are paid. Reforming the payment structure to ensure all time spent, including administration, is compensated regardless of pass or fail rates, could improve the appeal of this career, and help T&As feel they are both valued and supported.



## Section 4

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# Training and assessment as a career

## It's about being the right person for the job

Trainers and assessors view their profession as a calling, with the right personality fit being critical. They equate this fit with possessing excellent people skills. Participants expressed that their role allows them to share their knowledge and give back to the industry. To be effective, they need to establish a strong connection with those around them. They experience joy and a strong sense of achievement when their teaching is understood by learners, leading to professional and personal growth.

“ You become a trainer and assessor because you are passionate about the industry and want to give your knowledge back.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

The advancement of learners, especially those who left high school early, is a significant motivator for the trainers and assessors we interviewed. Witnessing learners develop skills and earn credits that could contribute to a successful career and a better future for their whānau and communities, was described as rewarding. Key informants and major employers also resonate with these motivations.

It was noted that a large proportion of learners who enter the industry may have limited numeracy and literacy skills. This calls for patience and adaptability on the part of the trainer or assessor. They acknowledged that adjusting their teaching style to meet the learner's needs is crucial for effective teaching. The ability to adapt to different learning requirements is a skill that trainers and assessors cultivate over time. Participants emphasised that each learner is unique and requires a personalised approach to achieve success.

“ You can't just give the guys the booklet and leave them to it.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

“ It's like a calling you know, you're going to be good at it or not. Doesn't matter what you have written on paper, what matters is how you deal with people, it's a real people thing.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

“ The best [trainer and] assessor, assesses the room. Versus one that is straight down the line and doesn't actually take the people in the room into account.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

In contrast, a less experienced T&A shared his experience of being asked to take up the role, despite believing he lacked the necessary skills and patience to support learners. Frustrated with learners' lack of preparation and effort, he realised he wasn't the right fit for the job. He soon left the position, stepping back into his previous role.

“ The attitude of learners isn't good, it's just a tick box for them so they aren't reciprocating the effort I am putting in which frustrates me. I struggle to be patient and help them when they haven't done their book work. You need to be the right person for this role which isn't me so I'm not going to pursue it.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR.

This underscores the importance of ensuring the right person fills the role and of improving the readiness of those new to the profession.

## A career move, sideways

Trainers and assessors often choose this role so they could continue working in the industry without enduring the physical strain of their previous jobs. For most participants, becoming a trainer and assessor was a lateral move that allowed them to share their knowledge and give back to the industry. Most did not see it as a retirement option, instead it is a role within the same industry that utilised their knowledge, but wasn't so hard on the body.

“ Moving into the role as a trainer and assessor definitely isn't a retirement plan as I'm doing more work than I did in my previous role. It is a good change of career within the industry to utilise and share my skills without being so tough on my body.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

A small group of trainers and assessors view this career move as a progression. For these individuals, obtaining additional training and qualifications to become a trainer and assessor represents a significant achievement, especially for those who left high school without any qualifications. These individuals highly regard trainers and assessors, associating the role with respect, authority, and extensive industry knowledge and experience.

A few key informants felt that the majority of trainers and assessors they knew, were in the role as a backup career option.

Sub-contractors and small businesses were asked what factors would influence them to move into the career of a T&A; respondents were able to select multiple options.

**Table 2 Factors influencing career move to T&A for small businesses and sub-contractors**

	Percentage	Responses
Passion for teaching/training	52%	29
Higher pay potential	41%	23
Career growth opportunities	38%	21
I wouldn't consider it	21%	12
Other	34%	19
Number of respondents	100%	56

*Base: All small businesses and sub-contractor respondents (n=56)*

Interestingly, a passion for teaching and training was the most significant factor for 52 percent of respondents, followed by potential for higher pay (41 percent), and opportunities for career growth (38 percent). This echoes the insights gleaned from in-depth interviews, which identified a love for teaching as a key motivator. However, there seems to be a disconnect surrounding the pay scale and process for trainers and assessors, as the pay rate is a contentious issue and a point of frustration among current trainers and assessors.

## Quality of trainers and assessors is generally high

The quality of T&As is generally perceived to be high. Key informants and major employers regard training and assessing roles in the industry as highly credible. However, it was acknowledged the quality of T&As can vary. This view was echoed by respondents who are sub-contractors and small businesses, most of whom regard T&As to be of good quality. A small group of respondents, however, perceived the quality of T&As to be poor, arguing that trainers need to maintain higher standards and expressing a preference for in-house training.

Key informants and T&As raised a concern that may extend beyond the scope of this research but is important to note to facilitate further discussion and consideration. Specifically, there's a concern a minority of T&As, possibly driven by the payment system, might pass assessment of learners who haven't yet reached full competency. This could potentially undermine the credibility of the assessment process. Such worries were shared by those who appreciate the importance of maintaining the high standards of assessments and the credibility of their profession.

On the other hand, some employers expressed a desire for their learners to pass assessments, citing they did not have the time or resources to provide additional training or allow for reassessment. This dynamic could lead to perceptions of compromised assessment processes, with some T&As noting at times they felt pressure to pass learners who may not be fully competent.

However, it was broadly understood that better compliance, improved quality, and higher work rates can be achieved if the workforce is properly trained and qualified. This, in turn, can lead to increased productivity and profitability, which is the industry's overarching goal. From a health and safety perspective, measurable improvements were reported once individuals were trained and qualified. This not only enhances productivity, but also ensures a better quality of life for the workers, as they are less likely to sustain injuries.

## Summary

The role of a trainer and assessor is multifaceted, demanding not only comprehensive industry knowledge but also exceptional interpersonal skills. Identifying and investing in individuals within the industry who embody these qualities is crucial for success. Highlighting the opportunities and career pathways within the T&A role will be instrumental in attracting interest from those new to the industry.

Most participants view the transition to T&A roles as a lateral career move rather than an upward progression, providing an alternative way to apply their skills while alleviating physical strain. Given the significant administrative workload, full-time roles are not typically seen as a retirement plan. The small group who saw it as a career progression, did so as it required additional training to move into the role, and because T&As hold mana and are highly respected in the industry. Overall, this insight underlines a prevalent industry perception that may influence the appeal of these roles to new talent. The industry may need to reconsider how these roles are portrayed and find ways to articulate their value to the industry, emphasising the personal and professional gratification derived from nurturing the development of others.

Most respondents believe T&As deliver work of high quality, acknowledging these roles demand in-depth industry knowledge. However, concerns were raised about the current pay-per-credit payment model, with some participants fearing T&As may be incentivised to pass underqualified learners to ensure payment. Addressing the payment structure could help to mitigate these concerns.

Overall, the findings suggest a high level of commitment among trainers and assessors to maintain quality standards, and there was consensus on the high quality of T&As; this is a testament to the dedication and expertise of those currently in the role. Nevertheless, concerns persist about potential compromises due to the current payment model. This raises important questions for the industry in terms of ensuring a fair and motivational payment structure that doesn't inadvertently encourage poor practice. It also points to the necessity for ongoing industry oversight, regular quality assurance measures, and that a review of this payment model may be a critical next step for industry stakeholders.



## Section 5

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# Career appeal

Generally, the trainer and assessor role is not well known or considered as a career path by many in the day-to-day operations of wood processing and silviculture.

T&As describe the conversations they initiate with learners as a main instigator for people to explore it as a pathway. These conversations are with selected learners, who the T&A feels have the right fit to become a T&A. The role also depends on the characteristics of the individual. Success in the role requires a passion for sharing knowledge, a knack for understanding and supporting others, and a good dose of patience. People ill-suited for the role often get frustrated and leave according to the majority of participants.

There are structural barriers that limit the role's appeal. As discussed previously, these include low remuneration, inconsistent work, and heavy administrative duties. Participants felt that learners saw these frustrations and that turned them away from the role.

## Highlighting the trainer and assessor career path

Participants suggested several improvements for highlighting the T&A career path.

Mentoring was widely recognised as a way to support young workers into the role of a T&A. This approach could reduce the gap created when trainers and assessors leave, ensuring better preparedness for the role. The on-site T&A is well-positioned to incorporate this into their workplace. However, contract T&As also expressed a desire for more networking and greater connectedness within their profession; mentoring could serve as a gateway for this.

Full-time contract T&As strongly suggested that individuals in similar positions need more business coaching to succeed in the role. Mentoring can address the business administration required for training programs, assessments, and work organisation. For example, calculating the true costs and necessary daily earnings when travelling for work is an important skill when working as a contractor. This approach can help establish strong foundations and support long-term success in the role.

Both T&As and key informants proposed that bringing workers in through apprenticeships is another effective way to attract workers and lead them in the role of a T&A. Apprentices can be trained in a variety of skills and can demonstrate the range of qualities needed to be a T&A. This method offers another avenue to identify individuals that possess the qualities to be a T&A and was seen as an effective way to support more candidates in the role.

Most participants, across various industry areas and locations, noted a low interest from youth in entering the industry. One suggestion to help increase interest was to provide more work experience opportunities outside of the classroom. Being informed about all the career opportunities, including becoming a T&A at an early stage, could increase knowledge of career pathways within the Forestry and Wood Processing industries.

“Introducing youth to the career pathways available within forestry through work experience will bridge the gap between school leavers and their move into the industry.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Māori participants noted that Māori are currently entering the forestry and wood processing industries through whānau currently in the industry. Participants recognised that Māori need to be supported and educated about other roles within the industries such as being a T&A to help make them aware of pathways available to them, in addition to the roles their whānau members are in.

## Job opportunities currently not seen by many

“Shoulder tapping” was noted as the leading way workers moved into the role of a T&A. Participants shared that occasionally learners would express interest in their role, but no plans or pathways were in place to support a transition into the role. Current T&As explained if a learner showed interest in their role, they would let it sit for a few months to see if the learner initiated the conversation again, verifying their interest as genuine. Trainers and assessors often, along with employers, look within crews to identify workers who are best suited for the role.

While this method can be effective in certain circumstances, key informants voiced concerns that it significantly limits the visibility and accessibility of these roles, thereby restricting opportunities for others to step into the role. It was further noted this approach runs the risk of introducing bias into the selection process, as choices could potentially be influenced by unconscious bias towards candidates who resemble existing T&As.

Moreover, key informants pointed out this “shoulder tapping” practice has implications for diversity within the T&A roles. They specifically identified a clear under-representation of women and Māori in these positions, which they believed to be a direct consequence of the prevalent “shoulder tapping” within the sector. This observation identifies the need for a shift in approach.

“ The level of shoulder tapping within the industry is affecting the diversity of people in these roles. They (retiring T&A) are just passing the job on to someone that looks exactly like them rather than opening the opportunity up to everyone.”

– KEY INFORMANT

To address this, the industry could benefit from a broader advertisement and recruitment strategy that focuses on reaching a diverse audience, ensuring the opportunity to become a T&A is open to all potential candidates. This would require strategic planning and execution, but the ultimate goal should be to shift away from “shoulder tapping” and move towards a more equitable recruitment strategy that promotes diversity and inclusivity within the T&A roles.

## Creating a support network is desirable

Creating a support network is highly desirable for trainers and assessors. Many participants identified a trainers and assessors’ union as an effective way to improve support for individuals in their role. Contractors specifically highlighted the isolating nature of their job and expressed the need for a support network of like-minded professionals to share ideas and discuss common issues. Participants expressed the desire for regular opportunities to connect with others in their field, enabling them to establish a professional network and seek advice when needed.

T&As were aware they only knew what they had been taught and experienced. They recognised the tangible value in sharing their experiences with others, as it would provide them with a wider pool of knowledge and expertise to draw upon. This sharing of experiences and professional development opportunities could encompass various areas, including support with different learning styles, technicalities of operations, and business skills.

Moreover, this increased sense of community would also assist in identifying areas within the industry and specific locations that are most in need of additional or different T&As. This identification would help alleviate the impact of regional demand booms and reduced T&A labour supply, as more T&As would be aware of whom to collaborate with and seek support from.

It is worth noting that those working through Competenz felt they were not adequately supported. However, due to the lack of communication with other T&As, they were unaware of alternative options or avenues for addressing the issues they faced. Establishing effective communication channels and fostering collaboration among T&As is vital for discussing concerns, exploring future opportunities, driving positive change, and ensuring continuous improvement in the industry. The majority of participants felt creating a network or union for T&As should be directed and facilitated by industry.

“ Companies are not treating contractor trainers and assessors well and this is affecting the attractiveness of the job. There needs to be more communication of when learners aren't showing up or aren't ready for the contractor on the scheduled day.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

“ Support current trainers and assessors to improve the appeal for new ones to see attraction to come into the role.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## Business skills as a contractor

Contract T&As need to run a profitable business to survive, which involves a significant level of organisation and business skills. The majority of participating contract T&As indicated they struggled in this area.

Conversations with trainers and assessors revealed that those who remained highly active in the industry (despite the decline in work due to funding cuts), were the ones who had acquired the necessary business skills to find alternative work and leverage their connections. They were also skilled at effectively managing their time and calculating day rates to ensure they earned the required income, making their business financially viable.

Building a pipeline of work relied on industry connections and previous experience. Having support from an institution or organisation that could assist with workload organisation and provide training in business skills for contractors would greatly support their success. Some T&As had sought access to such support through their own personal networks and felt it was beneficial.

Sub-contractors and small businesses recognised the need for trainers and assessors with strong business skills. A small group of respondents noted that networking and taking initiative to find work were essential for T&As. They understood T&As needed to actively seek opportunities, as their lack of business skills could hinder their ability to secure work if it is not readily available to them.

“ Just need more people, more proactive people coming forward and offering training.”

– SUB-CONTRACTORS OR SMALL BUSINESSES

## Consistency of work

Trainers and assessors offered various suggestions to ensure more consistent work. One proposal was to reintroduce the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund. Given the high-risk nature of the industry, there is a significant need for training. The subsidy would effectively support employers in providing their workers with the necessary skills to work safely and productively.

Another suggestion, put forth by a small group of participants, is to establish fixed market prices to create greater stability in the industry. According to participants, the industry experiences constant booms and busts due to fluctuating market prices, which affects employers' engagement in training and assessment for workers. Uncertainty in the market often leads to delays in training and assessment. It was suggested to establish stable market prices so employers would be able to forecast their sales and feel more confident in investing in training and assessment.

Additionally, there is a call to create more T&A roles within Te Pūkenga and private training establishments. These roles would be salaried and retained, allowing individuals to provide on-site training and teaching directly from the learning institution itself.

## Summary

The pathway to become a T&A could be highlighted to more people already in the industry when discussing training plans and career options; this may encourage new people to consider the role. Advertising job opportunities is important to support diversity and increase awareness of what the job entails. It is important to note that while shoulder tapping can assist in identifying individuals who possess certain qualities, relying solely on this method limits diversity and opportunity for everyone in the industry to consider the T&A role.

Māori often come into the industries by following the pathway of whānau. Participants recognised those entering the industry through whānau need to be made aware of the alternative pathways available to them in addition to the roles their whānau hold.

Creating a network for T&As was described as an important way to improve career appeal as workers can see the role as somewhat isolated, which detracts from its appeal. By establishing a robust network, T&As can connect with others in the field, fostering a sense of support and camaraderie. This, in turn, improves the overall appeal of the role.

Contractor T&As expressed challenges in maintaining a consistent workload. To enhance the career appeal of the role, measures should be taken to ensure a stable workload. This can be achieved through subsidising training, establishing a more stable market, or implementing stricter requirements for employers to have their workers trained and assessed for specific job tasks. These actions will contribute to a more appealing and sustainable career path for T&As.



## Section 6

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# Future solutions

## Value of work-based learning

Hands-on learning is seen as vital, but still needs to be supported by other means of learning. Work-based learning was highly valued amongst all participants to fully appreciate the tactile elements of their job, it provides hands-on experience with tasks. This covers the “what” people do.

Trainers and assessors who participated discussed the crucial role of work-based learning in machinery operation. Simulators have become a teaching tool, but these T&As expressed that a simulator cannot replace the experience of operating an actual machine on-site. They voiced concerns about learners becoming accustomed to the reset option when making mistakes in the simulator. According to the participating T&As, the experience of using a machine and feeling its power is an important part of learning.

“ Simulators never gives the same feeling and learners can feel a false sense of security as it doesn’t have the same kick or affect when in the real machine.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Participants’ preference for practical learning was reflected in their favour towards individuals with industry experience to become a T&A, over those from a tertiary education pathway. Key informants and T&As felt that individuals straight out of university or polytechnic lacked the necessary skills to be a T&A. Working in the industry not only provides important experience, but also aids in earning the respect of learners when workers transition into trainer and assessor roles.

“ There can sometimes be too much emphasis on theory rather than practical. Spend more time training and the skill side can be taught while doing the job.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Theoretical learning (whether locally provided or block course) is still seen to have a very important place as it facilitates deeper understanding, explaining WHY they do WHAT they do. Most T&As believe this theory cements the learning process, improving quality and compliance while aiding in the transference of skills.

Travelling for block courses also has strong appeal within the wood processing industry. In many sectors of the wood processing industry, the training facilities are described as impressive, boasting vast collections of tools and machinery (though not always the absolute latest technology, as mentioned previously). Another benefit for learners is the opportunity to build networks by connecting with fellow industry workers from different parts of the country.

## Programme delivery

Given the wide variety of courses offered (often referred to as units), feedback on delivery and course material varied depending on the area of focus. To qualify in a course, learners are trained in - and are subsequently assessed on - a pre-defined collection of related unit standards, each of which relate to the correct use of a certain piece of machinery and/or correct undertaking of a certain task.

Some participants were generally content with the coursework and materials, understanding they are in a constant state of improvement and adaptation. However, others offered suggestions for further enhancement.

In saw doctoring, pulp and paper in the wood processing industry, and mechanisation in the forestry industry, organisations running courses aren't progressing at the same pace as the industry is changing. Consequently, teaching materials and machinery can become outdated, leaving learners without relevant experience and knowledge. One example highlighted was the sophistication of dry mill machinery. Some facilities use highly sophisticated computer-driven machines, which are not found in polytechnics or other training yards.

A small group of participants noted that workbook answers are occasionally incorrect, which can confuse learners. These T&A participants found themselves spending additional time to provide up-to-date information.

“ They keep changing the models on us, they redo what we did years ago, so what they have currently is not relevant these days, it is like they change the words, also it is more cost to just repeat what has already been done especially for the older ones that have already done that.”

– SUB-CONTRACTOR OR SMALL BUSINESS

T&As across the sector felt that more of them should have more input into updating and creating course material as they possess first-hand knowledge and are the in-field teachers. Their understanding of how learners interpret and effectively engage with material could improve content. An example shared involved the repetition of questions or asking the same thing in different ways. This was perceived as disrespectful to the learners as it often confused them.

“ Asking the same thing different ways makes the guys wonder if they think we're stupid or trying to trick us.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

“ They feel talked down to, they're asked 'what happens if you wear dirty socks - Really? Do you think these men don't know how to look after themselves?'”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

Participants from the wood processing industry also highlighted that assessments don't account for the time it takes to complete them. As an example, learners need to reassemble a band saw as part of the assessment. To ensure the group being assessed keeps on schedule, the assessor has adapted the approach. He moves in a circle, with each learner adding a piece in the assembly process, meaning the students don't reassemble the band saw individually; instead they reassemble the band saw together. The assessor acknowledges the assessment isn't being conducted correctly, but it ensures all learners can participate and stay on time.

All participants wanted to see learners succeed. They felt the wording of course material needs modification to match learners' literacy levels. The majority of T&As noted that a large portion of their learners possess low literacy and numeracy skills, but they stressed this doesn't indicate a lack of intelligence. Participants recognised the importance of maintaining a standard of literacy and numeracy in the courses but felt there could be wording changes to support learner comprehension. This could relieve T&As from needing to spend so much one-on-one time explaining questions to ensure understanding.

“Simplify assessments to help trainees pass. Listen to the people that are active in the industry when making changes.”

– WOOD PROCESSING TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

A large group of participants (across both T&As and key informant and major employers) supported a shift towards online learning. They felt that it was the way of the future, and provided it wasn't overused, it was an effective way to engage learners. However, the approach needs to be easy to use as T&As noted learners struggle to navigate online resources.

T&As felt that online learning could allow them to stay up to date with learners' progress without having to make a site visit. By having visibility of what the learner had completed, the T&A could decide if their site visit would be worthwhile, or if the learner needs to spend more time on their book work. This approach could make their job more financially viable and improve the quality of learning.

## Learners not ready to be assessed

A major pain point for contract trainers and assessors was the inadequate readiness of learners when it came to on-site assessments or training, specifically in the forestry industry. This lack of effort, whether due to a lack of time or motivation, was a major source of frustration for trainers and assessors. They believed that crew managers could do more to monitor workbooks and prepare learners for assessment.

Assessment was the majority of work participants were being contracted for; although, it was a common theme for inadequate training to have been provided to the learner. In these instances, the learners' company had provided the training, and the contractor was brought in to complete the assessment. Participants noted that companies weren't spending enough time teaching learners the skills required for assessment and therefore learners were not prepared when the assessor came to assess them. This creates frustration for T&As, since they have often travelled a long distance to meet the crew on-site and then spend time training the learner to help them pass. T&As are not being paid for this time spent training the learner, although due to their passion for the industry, the majority of T&As spend time with the learner to teach them the skills needed to pass.

The communication gap when learners were sick, on leave, or dismissed, between crew leaders and T&As, led to wasted time and resources. T&As found themselves travelling and preparing, only to find out that the job scope had changed or the job itself was no longer available. In this scenario, T&As had no party to invoice for their time, resulting in underpayment. Contractor T&As often didn't have one direct point of communication; in the majority of cases, they were assigned the job by Competenz and therefore didn't have direct contact with the crew leaders.

Another hurdle for training and assessment, previously mentioned, was workforce shortages. Occasionally, learners couldn't step off the job for scheduled training or assessment due to the absence of a suitable replacement.

Improving communication amongst all parties could help rectify the above issues, reducing potential time and money lost for T&As.

The loss of readily available access to learners' information created disruptions for T&As. This change was made due to privacy reasons. Without this access, T&As lack the flexibility to adapt plans for who to assist in a crew if the learner they were scheduled to meet with was away or not ready for assessment. The need for approval of records was a recent change that learners and trainers found frustrating. T&As noted that when they were on-site, crew members often approached them asking about their credit status and the next steps in their career pathway. Because of the need for approval to access this information, the process of keeping learners on track has slowed down.

The transition to Te Pūkenga was a source of confusion and concern for a large group of T&As across the sector. This group sought clarity about future developments, what they could expect from Te Pūkenga, and how things would change for them. Participants wanted more communication from the organisation to better prepare and alleviate anxiety about the change. Those who had worked as T&As for over 20 years showed little interest in the move to Te Pūkenga, having experienced multiple provider shifts in the past. They didn't see the point of changing providers as it hadn't brought any benefits previously. Clear communication about the benefits of the provider change is crucial for T&As to understand for themselves, and also to pass on to learners.

“ I want more communication about the change to Te Pūkenga so I can learn what might change for me and those I'm training and assessing.”

– FORESTRY TRAINER AND ASSESSOR

## Provision of learning

A small group of key informants and major employers expressed that due to the lack of support they have received from course providers, they are now looking to run their own training programs and manage themselves internally. One participant, working in a specific area of the wood processing industry, felt it was easiest to manage training internally, due to lack of companies working in their area in New Zealand. Due to their specialisation, they already had T&As within the company and found it is easier to cut out the middleman, creating their own training program to ensure materials are up-to-date and specific to their area.

Another participant noted a motivation for creating independent training programs to better support Māori in the industry. The participant explained that cultural differences can lead to employers struggling to foster successful relationships with young Māori. It was expressed that current provider options did not adequately support the needs of Māori when establishing a career pathway, but alternative training allowed for trainers to adjust their strategies to better accommodate the needs of Māori learners. The participant reflected on learners that found the transition into the workforce difficult. There is a need for a Māori provider, specifically in the forestry industry, to highlight a pathway and career opportunities within the industry for young Māori, to help proactively address systemic barriers, thereby opening supportive pathways to careers that might previously have seemed out of reach. This support can foster transformative change, setting the stage for a more sustainable career and future.

This participant noted that providing a mentoring program and tailoring training to the learner, while establishing a strong relationship where the learner feels valued and are able to ask questions regularly, would be effective.

“ Te Pūkenga know bugger all about industry. People want a choice of provider. Māori want to provide their own training.”

- KEY INFORMANT

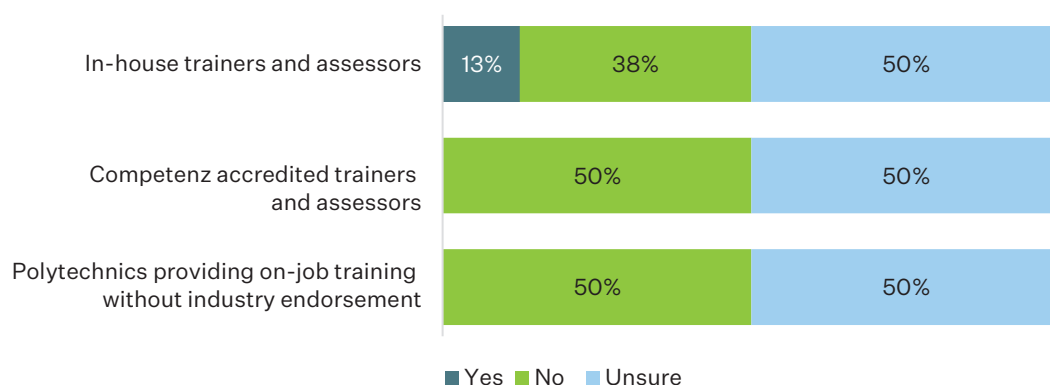
T&As that participated from within the wood processing industry noted that they follow their own training programmes as the course material can be outdated and not relevant to their specific area of industry. As a result, organisations within the wood processing industry have created their own training and assessment to ensure their workers have the skills needed for their specific job. These participants were generally in-house T&As. The specifications for training within the wood processing industries indicate a need for an alternative training and assessment model; this is to ensure learners are receiving industry-recognised training and qualifications – that are also relevant to their roles.



The T&As who participated also noted the need for alternative providers to ensure there is competition to maintain a high standard of training and operations. Having alternative providers will support courses to be tailored to specific areas of the industry and support different demographics, specifically Māori. Participants communicated that current course providers have limited knowledge about the industry and therefore aren't providing effective and relevant training. This group believes using providers from within the industry ensures that high standards and relevance are maintained.

Sub-contractors and small businesses that don't currently provide formal or non-formal training were more likely to provide in-house training (13 percent) than any other option. The high percentage of respondents indicating either "no" or "unsure" indicates that the current training options aren't appealing to this group.

**Figure 2 Training options small businesses and sub-contractors are most likely to consider**



Base: All respondents (n=56)

## Summary

Practical learning holds high importance in the industry, particularly given the rise of mechanisation. Participants noted that simulators might offer a false sense of confidence, reinforcing the necessity for practical, hands-on learning. Participants highlighted the need to update coursework regularly to stay relevant with industry shifts. Collaboration with T&As to revise courses was widely suggested, given their first-hand knowledge of the industry, learning needs, and effective teaching strategies.

Better visibility of learner progress was favoured to mitigate wasted time and frustration for T&As who arrive for sessions only to find learners unprepared. The transition to online learning was envisaged as the most probable shift in the coming 5–10 years, and the utilisation of an online tool for communication and visibility is anticipated to improve processes.

The inclusion of diverse course providers in the industry was recognised by some as a means to cater to a broader array of needs. Specifically, providers with expertise in certain areas and/or an understanding of various cultural practices, were acknowledged as potential avenues for improvement of course provision and learner experience.



**This report is available on the  
Food and Fibre Centre of  
Vocational Excellence website:  
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[projects@foodandfibrecove.nz](mailto:projects@foodandfibrecove.nz)