



MUKA TANGATA
People, Food and Fibre
Workforce Development Council



A new approach to learner pathways

Recommendations paper

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Introduction

This paper presents a summary of the New Approach to Learner Pathways research project (March 2024) and recommendations arising from that report. The full report and accompanying collateral will be available in April 2024.

Context

This applied research project, co-funded by Muka Tangata and Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence (Food and Fibre CoVE), breathes life into the ideas and concepts proposed in *A New Approach to Learner Pathways*.¹ This Muka Tangata discussion document delivers a wero to the organisation (working closely with the food and fibre sector) to develop and embrace a radically simplified qualification structure, that will enable greater flexibility for ākonga and enhance transferability of skills across the sector.

Aim

To develop and test a food and fibre skills framework, which can be used to:

- Enable the simplification of qualifications
- Develop a common language to describe skills and knowledge, which will support flexible qualifications and transferable skills
- Help understand which skills are relevant across many food and fibre sectors and workplaces, and which are more specialised
- Help recognise skills that are gained outside of the formal qualification system
- Enable the future proofing of food and fibre sector skills and capabilities, addressing new and emerging skills as well as current skills.

A Skills First approach

The skills frameworks we reviewed highlighted the importance of skills as the currency for workforce development in the 21st century. In a fluid and rapidly changing employment landscape, job titles, occupational classifications or static qualifications are no longer fully reflective of what employers and industry seek in their workforce, or of what employees bring. Focusing on skills presents the opportunity for rapid updating and futureproofing as technology and ways of working change. The new products that Workforce Development Councils are working with; micro-credentials and skill standards, are ideally placed to support futureproofing, with generic, less prescriptive learning outcomes, balanced with indicative content and guidance for providers.

Along with the importance of a skills-first approach, we were guided by several other key concepts drawn from the literature scan. In terms of the **shape** of a food and fibre skills framework, these are:

- The appropriate recognition of te ao Māori in (or around) the framework
- The centrality of essential skills
- The need for a 'common language'
- Maturity / proficiency progression, which is enabling and learner-centred, rather than a more prescriptive 'levels' approach.

Vision for the Food and Fibre Skills Framework

The vision for the Food and Fibre Skills Framework is that it be:

¹ *A New Approach to Learner Pathways* (January 2023). Muka Tangata.

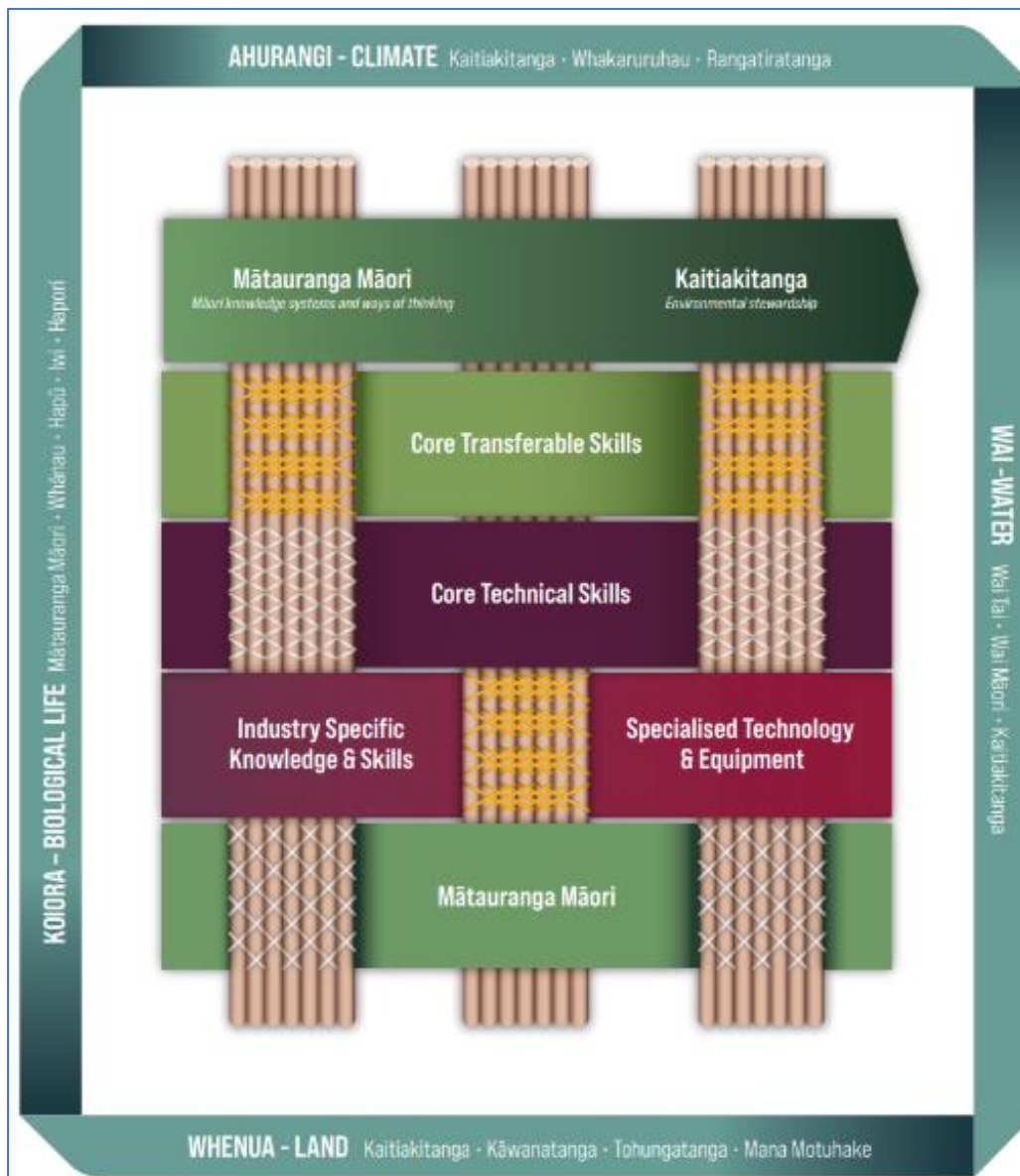
- A living skills framework, with accompanying resources, which are used (and contributed to) by all food and fibre sector vocational education stakeholders, to develop engaged, effective and empowered employees.
- A mechanism to support the skills-first approach across all sectors, enabled by aligned policy, funding and qualifications approval settings.

The Food and Fibre Skills Framework

Framework visualisation:

Figure 1 is a high-level visualisation of the Food and Fibre Skills Framework, which shows the interwoven nature of the core components. Te Ao Māori has been integrated into The Framework by using a Māori icon in the form of Tukutuku Lattice panels which adorn the pakiwaitara (stories) on the walls of the whare Tipuna.²

Figure 1: Food and Fibre Skills Framework visualisation



² This visualisation was prepared for the project by [HTK Ltd](#).

Framework components:

Core transferable skills: These are ‘skills to build skills’: learning to learn (learner agency), learning for work, and learning for life. We have deliberately chosen the term ‘core transferable skills’ as these skill sets underpin the ability of ākongā to gain, value, extend and transfer any skills or knowledge to different contexts. These skills have a proficiency progression across mōhio (understanding), mātau (expertise) and mārama (enlightenment).

Core technical skills: These are the generic or underpinning technical or work-related skills that are common to all (or most) of the food and fibre sectors. By their nature, these skills are transferable across different contexts, and also have a proficiency progression across mōhio, mātau and mārama.

Industry specific skills: These are specialised technical skills; industry specific knowledge and skills, and specialised technology and equipment skills, which are unique to the relevant sector.

Bodies of knowledge: The concept of bodies of knowledge is to allow learners to explore and develop mastery of areas of knowledge that are significant to them as they progress through their careers. These include both content areas, like biodiversity or climate resilience, and specialised business or technical skills.

Food and Fibre Skills Framework: Research findings

The Food and Fibre Skills Framework: There was positive feedback about The Framework across all research participants. The focus on skills-first resonated with all, especially at the foundation level. There were several discussions about how the core transferable skills were the building blocks on which all other skills are built. The concept of progression for these skills was also valued. Concerns raised included how best to articulate the value to employers, the need for a common language, and the interdependence of the core skills.

Flexibility: The Framework supports a deeper understanding of core transferable and technical skills. This will enable the deliberate design of qualifications and their components to ensure portability within and between qualifications, roles, and sectors. This provides flexibility so that ākongā can move along a learning and employment pathway in the way that meets their needs and preferences, without significant barriers or consequences.

Transferability: The Framework explicitly identifies the dimensions and developmental progression of transferable skills. Transferable skills are “portable skills” that can be transferred across different social, cultural, or work settings. They include cognitive, social, and emotional skills, and they work alongside other skills such as those specific to a job. (NB: the underpinning knowledge involved in many of the core technical skills is also highly transferable). The ability to transfer skills between different contexts is a relatively complex cognitive process, which requires support and scaffolding from all involved in the training system.

Bridging to non-formal and informal learning: The prevalence and importance of non-formal and informal learning across the food and fibre sector highlights the importance of flexibility and transferability for the sector. Employers and learners value the relevance, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and flexibility that non-formal learning opportunities offer. Learners bring skills gained in different settings to the workplace or classroom and continue to build skills in a wide variety of ways that are not necessarily from, or recognised by, the formal qualification system. A food and fibre skills framework may provide a common language to facilitate discussion and recognition of

these skills, enabling the development of bridging mechanisms between formal and non-formal / informal learning.

A New Zealand Certificate in Food and Fibre: The Framework supports a clearer understanding of core transferable and technical skills that could form the basis of a family of generic NZ Certificates in Food and Fibre. These would be based on common core topics, with electives chosen from specialist areas to build a qualification to suit individual learners' requirements. Feedback was generally positive – simplification was seen as a key benefit. The major concern was for there to be sufficient information for future employers to understand what a graduate had achieved, and what they knew and could do.

Recommendations

Food and Fibre CoVE and Muka Tangata

- Complete an initial build out of The Framework
 - For each skill on the Core Transferable Skill matrix, develop a sentence to describe skill at the appropriate level.
- Develop guidance for each skill set to encourage the consistent application of the skills language and terminology, and approach to teaching

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- Formalise the implementation of the Skills Framework in the qualification review process:
 - Encourage the discussion of the core transferable skills as part of the input to reviews,
 - Encourage review teams to amend/update The Framework as part of the process
 - Develop examples to assist qualification team to focus on skills first (not task) in the development of products.
 - Develop a template for the Core Transferable Skills which can be included as guidance notes in qualification and skill standard documentation (appropriate to the level and topic).
 - Develop a process to assess the qualification reviews across the whole product landscape to ensure consistent application and terminology for the core skills. This process would refine the framework and vice versa.
 - Entry Level and Agriculture reviews - take note of the feedback about the NZ Certificate in Food and Fibre in their development of future qualifications.
- The Qualification and Standards (Q&S) team continue to encourage transferability of skills through the skills first approach, incorporating The Framework as guidance, and developing generic qualifications which are consistent across many sectors.
- Include The Framework concept in the Māori Workforce Development plan workstream.
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) team – support a consistent approach to evaluation of delivery of core transferable skills as well as technical skills.
- Engagement and Partnership (E&P) team – use The Framework approach to skill sets in discussions with employers and industry groups.

- Workforce Development Plans (Skills Leadership and Advice (SLA) team) – in the review of these plans, use a skills-first approach and apply The Framework to gain a consistent approach across the plans.
- Skill Forecasting (SLA) – assess any application of The Framework to aid the consistency of terminology and skills-first approach.

Food and Fibre CoVE

- Explore and commission further research, including:
 - Providers – research best practice examples (case studies) of teaching core transferable skills for each skill set and level - on campus, online and work-based settings.
 - Learner voice – research flexibility and transferability of skills - what are their priorities, would a passport system for core transferable skills be appealing, test value of self-assessment approach.
 - Employer usage research - what tools would assist employers to "teach" core transferable skills in their workplace.
 - Explore the value of further work around the Bodies of Knowledge component of the framework. (e.g. discussions with a couple of Professional Bodies).
 - Outline possible infrastructure requirements to do a pilot for a sub-sector (i.e. could involve passport, digital credentials etc.).
 - Explore the approach to the consistent assessment of tacit knowledge and skills to determine their equivalence against a qualification. Perhaps including the potential alignment of a qualification assessment with an employer's need to assess those same attributes against a job.
- Explore synergies across the multiple research projects (e.g. non-formal and informal learning, attraction and retention, DLA, and this project) to:
 - outline possible infrastructure requirements to do pilot for a sub-sector (i.e. could involve passport, digital credentials, etc.)
 - Identify projects which could be enhanced by, or test, the use of The Framework (e.g. Rural Leaders research, Ngā Pou a Tāne (NPAT)).

Wider vocational education eco-system / long term

- Recommend discussion about wider uptake of the Skills Framework across Ohu Ahumahi.
- Bring awareness of The Framework to leadership within Ministry of Primary Industries and Associate Minister Hogard.
- Workshop with TEC and NZQA (and others) to understand wider application of the skills-first approach and its importance for building equitable outcomes for all learners. The two key enablers from WEF framework are adopting skills-first culture, policies, and mindset, and adopting a common skills language.
- Continue to develop the vocational education ecosystem with flexibility of delivery as a core tenet to remove barriers for all learners.
- Communicate importance of skill-first approach for building equitable outcomes: Māori, Pasifika, women, neuro-divergent learners.

- Discuss with secondary schools / career guidance – explore building The Framework connectivity from NZ Curriculum aligning through to food and fibre vocational education.