



Quality Host Employers: a good practice review



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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
Etco	Electrical Training Company
GAN	Global Apprenticeship Network
GFF	Growing Future Farmers
GTA	Group Training Association
GTC	Group Training Company
GTO	Group Training Organisation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MERI	Motivate-Esteem-Reflect-Inform
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
PDCA	Plan-Do-Check-Act
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the characteristics and good practices of ‘host’ employers within a group employment model.

The quality of host employers is an essential component of group training and apprenticeship models. In general, these types of models involve a group employer that employ apprentices and place them with host employers.

This model offers several benefits, including flexibility for employers, as they can host apprentices without the long-term commitment of direct employment. The group employer is responsible for HR related tasks, recruitment, and training coordination. This approach helps apprentices gain the necessary skills and experiences for their particular industry, while enhancing their employability and addressing skill shortages.

A host employer in a group training model is an organisation that provides employment and on-the-job training to apprentices. The key aspects of a host employer's role may include:

- providing work and practical on-the-job training to the apprentice in accordance with their training plan.
- offering a suitable work environment and appropriate supervision for the apprentice.
- releasing the apprentice from work to attend off-the-job training arranged by the group employer.
- undertaking workplace assessments and providing feedback on the apprentice’s performance to the group employer.
- Contacting the group employer if there are any issues with the apprentice’s attendance or performance.

The host employer provides the day-to-day workplace and training environment for the apprentice, while the group employer is responsible for the overall management of the apprenticeship.

While the impact and characteristics of apprenticeships and group training are well understood, there has been less information and research done on the role of host employers within these models.

This report seeks to identify examples of what makes a good host employer, and then how to support less capable employers to reach a quality standard. The outcome of which is a rubric that allows employers to self-assess their capability against set criteria, this in turn may aid in the promotion of host employers and increase the quality of host employers within New Zealand.

Situational analysis: characteristics of quality host employers

The following explores different models of group training around the world and within in New Zealand. Each model examines the role of the host employer and what characteristics that host employer demonstrates.

It also includes a review of the International Labor Organisation's published recommendations for quality apprenticeships, and in particular looks at what criteria are relevant to host employers.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The ILO, as part of the United Nations, brings together governments, employers and workers drawn from its 187 members with the aim of ensuring decent jobs, social dialogue, social justice, and rights to work across the world for all peoples. It undertakes research, data collection and analysis, and looks to champion best practice and implementation of labour standards via ILO conventions and recommendations.

In 2023, the ILO published their recommendation for quality apprenticeships. This publication outlines a set of principles and a framework for identifying quality apprenticeships. It seeks to support improvements in apprenticeship systems and guide efforts towards establishing best practice.

The Framework recognises the rights of people to engage in apprenticeships that are - *“well regulated, sustainable, sufficiently funded, inclusive and free from discrimination, violence and harassment and exploitation to promote gender equality and diversity, to provide adequate remuneration or other financial compensation and social protection coverage, to lead to recognized qualifications and to enhance employment outcomes”*.¹ The result of which can lead to more job creation and better employment opportunities which in turn supports the business growth and economic sustainability.

Overall, the recommendation defines apprenticeships, setting them apart from other types of work-based learning programmes. It establishes a regulatory framework encompassing specific rights and entitlements aimed at safeguarding apprentices. Furthermore, it outlines the components of apprenticeship agreements and mandates measures to foster inclusivity and prevent discrimination within apprenticeship contexts. Lastly, it presents a series of initiatives designed to stimulate the growth and proliferation of apprenticeship opportunities.

The Framework sets out seven key recommendations for ILO members to adopt and measure themselves against when considering how best to implement quality apprenticeships. These seven recommendations are:

- I. Definition, scope and means of implementation

¹ June 2023, ILO International Labour Conference – 111th Session, Geneva, 2023. Outcome of the Standard-Setting Committee on Apprenticeships. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_885174.pdf

- II. Regulatory framework for quality apprenticeships
- III. Protection of apprentices
- IV. Apprenticeship agreement
- V. Equality and diversity in quality apprenticeships
- VI. Promotion of quality apprenticeships
- VII. International, regional, and national cooperation for quality apprenticeships

With regards to host employers the recommendations don't provide specific instructions or characteristics to determine quality. However, there are some recommendations within the Framework that are relevant to host employers or group training models. These are as follows.

Under the 'II. Regulatory framework for quality apprenticeships' recommendation the ILO advises that:

10. Members should, in consultation with representative employers' and workers' organisations, establish occupation-specific or general standards, as appropriate, for quality apprenticeships by taking measures that provide, among other things, for:

(d) the responsibilities of apprentices, employers, educational and training institutions, and intermediaries;

(e) the supervision of apprentices by qualified personnel and the nature of such supervision;

f) the appropriate balance between apprentices and workers in the workplace, with a view to ensuring successful apprenticeship programmes and adequate supervision, and while taking into account the need to avoid the replacement of workers and to promote apprenticeships in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises;

12. Members should prescribe the conditions under which:

(a) enterprises may offer apprenticeships;

(b) educational and training institutions may provide off-the-job and on-the-job training;

(c) intermediaries may coordinate, support or assist in the provision of apprenticeships.

13. Members should take measures to continuously:

(a) develop and strengthen the capacity of government agencies, employers' and workers' organisations, and educational and training institutions;

(b) strengthen the training capacity of host enterprises;

(c) increase the competencies of teachers, instructors, in-house trainers and other experts involved in apprenticeships.

Under 'VI. Promotion of quality apprenticeships' the ILO recommends that:

25. Members should, in consultation with representative employers' and workers' organizations, take measures to create an enabling environment for promoting quality apprenticeships, including by:

- (c) establishing sectoral or occupational skills bodies to facilitate the implementation of quality apprenticeships;
- (h) facilitating effective public-private partnerships to support quality apprenticeships within a national regulatory framework;
- (i) supporting, where appropriate, intermediaries that coordinate, support or assist in the provision of apprenticeships;
- (j) undertaking awareness-raising activities and promotional campaigns at regular intervals to improve the image and attractiveness of quality apprenticeships by highlighting the benefits of apprenticeships to workers, young people, families, teachers, career counsellors, employers' and workers' organizations, and employers, particularly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises;
- (k) increasing awareness of apprentices' rights, entitlements and protections;
- (o) developing, supporting and encouraging the inclusion of mentorships in apprenticeship programmes.

Under 'VII. International, regional and national cooperation for quality apprenticeships', the ILO recommends that:

28. Members should take measures to:

- (c) build effective partnerships to promote quality apprenticeship programmes, including through tripartite national, sectoral or occupational skills bodies, global and regional alliances and apprenticeship networks;

Member countries are encouraged by the ILO to assess and evaluate their apprenticeship model against the Framework to ascertain alignment. To support this analysis, the ILO has evaluation tools² that can be used to assess a country's apprenticeship policies and systems against principles set out in Framework.

The tools are an ongoing resource that consists of guidelines and questionnaires, based on the Framework to support countries to analyse the characteristics and performance of their apprenticeship policy/models benchmarked against international good practices.

Given that these current recommendations are relatively new, there are few countries that have yet to fully undertake this alignment. However, these guidelines are a useful starting point for countries, including New Zealand, to review their status against the international benchmark.

² <https://www.ilo.org/topics/apprenticeships/publications-and-tools/digital-toolkit-quality-apprenticeships>

The Australian Model

In Australia, Group Training Organisations (GTOs) play a significant role in the employment and training of apprentices and trainees.

GTOs act as the legal employers, and are responsible for the recruitment, employment, and management of apprentices, including payment of wages, benefits, and workers' compensation. GTOs place individuals with suitable host employers for on-the-job training, matching them based on industry and training requirements. Apprentices may rotate between different hosts to gain diverse experience.

GTOs coordinate the off-the-job training component, alongside the provider and host employers. They monitor the progress of apprentices and trainees, ensuring quality and continuity in both on-the-job and off-the-job training.

Furthermore, GTOs provide ongoing support, mentorship, and pastoral care throughout the apprenticeship.

GTOs in Australia also manage administrative tasks and contractual obligations related to apprenticeships. They serve as a liaison between the apprentice, host employer, and training provider, addressing any issues or concerns. By assuming legal employment responsibilities, GTOs allow employers, particularly small or specialised businesses, to host apprentices without the administrative burdens or long-term commitments. By hosting an apprentice, host employers can contribute to the development of the skilled workers at a reduced risk to themselves.

The prevalence, regulation and use of GTOs varies across Australian States. While the core group training model is consistent across Australia, there are some differences from State to State in terms of the scale of utilisation, regulatory oversight, labour requirements, and government funding that influence how the model is implemented in practice.

Requirements for host employers in Australia

Despite some differences State to State, there are some similarities of best practice that all GTOs in Australia have in common. These include:

Workplace Health and Safety: Host employers have a duty to ensure the health and safety of apprentices in their workplace. Examples include conducting risk assessments and management, providing training and supervision. They should also consult, cooperate, and coordinate with group training organisations on health and safety matters.

Worker Suitability and Matching: Host employers must ensure the worker is suitable for the specific job requirements in terms of skills, and licenses. They should gather information from the main employer to determine the appropriate worker for the role.

Onboarding and Training Support: Host employers are responsible for providing adequate onboarding, induction, and training to workers when they commence work. This includes informing workers of all the health and safety protocols and ensuring they have the proper PPE and other work equipment.

Anti-Discrimination and National Employment Standards: Host organisations must not discriminate against workers and ensure they receive their minimum entitlements under the Fair Work Act.

The Australian Apprenticeship Support Network

To accompany the GTO model Australia has an Australian Apprenticeship Support Network. This Network provides a free service to both apprentices and employers and is funded by the Australian Government³.

The Network provides advice and support to apprentices and employers on how best to manage apprenticeships. This includes information about available financial support, support for priority cohorts, previous financial incentives, as well as the [National Code of Good Practice for Australian Apprentices](#).

Also included in these tools is an [Apprenticeship Preparation Checklist](#). This checklist is a self-assessment tool that employers can use to check that they fully understand all the components required to take on and support an apprentice. It provides links to further information for employers to read to support them when working with an apprentice.

The Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN) of Australia has also recently validated the Australian apprenticeship model against the ILOs Framework.

They have effectively utilised the ILOs Quality Apprenticeship Framework to enhance its apprenticeship programmes in Australia. GAN has aligned its initiatives with the ILO's standards, focusing on labour market demands, decent work principles, and inclusivity.

By engaging the sector, GAN has ensured that apprenticeship programmes are industry-relevant, financially sustainable, and provide mentorship from experienced professionals. It also enhances the reputation of accredited employers, assists with attracting better talent and allows them to showcase their commitment to quality apprenticeships through a Certificate of Accreditation and a quality apprenticeship seal.

By GAN aligning apprenticeship programmes to the ILO Framework, employers and apprentices can be assured that their programme has been benchmarked against international standards and will result in quality apprenticeship outcomes.

New Zealand could adopt a similar approach through our own GAN networks or by working with GAN Australia.

³ Australian Apprenticeship, Australian Government. <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.au/>

The United Kingdom and Europe

In the UK, Group Training Associations (GTAs) or Group Training Companies (GTCs) operate similarly to Australia's GTOs. They play an important role in the delivery of apprenticeships and workplace learning in the UK.

As in Australia, GTAs employ apprentices and place them with host employers across different sectors, coordinating and helping to deliver training and qualifications on behalf of a group of employers. With a focus across various industries, GTAs have been instrumental in cultivating skilled workforce pipelines while helping employers find suitable apprentices and vice versa.

GTAs select employers who are committed to providing high-quality training and development opportunities for apprentices, considering arrangements that benefit both the employer and the apprentice.

In general, best practice in the UK involves GTAs assessing an employer's capacity to provide structured training and mentoring. They look for businesses with experienced staff who are willing and capable of guiding apprentices through their apprenticeship. This includes evaluating mentors who can impart industry-specific knowledge and skills effectively.

GTAs also ensure the workplace environment is conducive to learning and adheres to health and safety regulations. A safe and supportive workplace is essential for the holistic development of apprentices, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings under supervision.

Additionally, GTAs prioritise employers who offer diverse learning opportunities. They seek companies that can expose apprentices to different facets of the industry, enabling them to gain a comprehensive understanding of their chosen field. This may involve rotations across departments or exposure to various projects, enriching the apprentice's skill set and fostering adaptability.

GTAs also assess an employer's commitment to ongoing professional development. Employers who invest in continuous learning and skill enhancement for their workforce demonstrate a dedication to nurturing talent and staying abreast of industry advancements. Such companies are more likely to provide apprentices with opportunities for further training and career progression beyond their apprenticeship.

To select the best employers for apprentices, GTAs may collaborate with industry stakeholders and utilise feedback mechanisms by consulting with trade associations, unions, and regulatory bodies to gather insights into the reputation and performance of potential employers. Moreover, GTAs may solicit feedback from past apprentices and monitor employer satisfaction metrics to ensure ongoing quality assurance.

GTAs in the UK serve as pivotal entities in fostering apprenticeships and vocational training. Through undertaking a deliberate employer selection process, GTAs look to match apprentices with reputable businesses committed to providing enriching learning

experiences. By promoting collaboration between employers and aspiring professionals, GTAs contribute significantly to the UK's workforce development and economic growth.

The German model

Germany's dual vocational training system often involves collaboration between vocational schools, host employers, and chambers of commerce. Host employers in Germany are typically companies within the industry relevant to the apprenticeship programme. They provide hands-on training for apprentices while also allowing them to attend vocational school. Many host employers in Germany have established apprenticeship programmes with structured curricula and mentorship.

Germany's group training model is structured to enable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to collaborate and jointly provide vocational training for apprentices. This model helps SMEs overcome challenges they may face in providing comprehensive training on their own due to increasing specialisation, technological changes, and high costs.

Under this model, host employers as part of the SME collective, sign a cooperation agreement and work together on an equal footing to take on apprentices. The key aspects of the group training model are:

the formation of training consortiums by SMEs to jointly train apprentices.

companies provide training in specific areas based on their expertise and resources.

apprentices rotate among the participating companies to receive well-rounded practical training across different aspects of their occupation.

companies share the costs and responsibilities of training the apprentices.

This collaborative approach enables employers to pool their resources and expertise, ensuring that apprentices receive comprehensive practical training that meets the regulatory standards, despite the limitations of individual workplaces. The group training model is an effective support measure that helps employers actively participate in Germany's renowned dual vocational education and training system.

Host employers play a crucial role in Germany's dual vocational education and training system.

Role of host employers

Host employers provide the on-the-job training component of the dual system, where apprentices spend 3-4 days per week at the company.

Host employers are expected to follow nationally standardised training curricula and regulations for recognised occupations to ensure consistent quality standards across Germany.

They are responsible for providing qualified instructors and trainers to guide and supervise the apprentices during the in-company training phases.

Host employers work closely with vocational schools to coordinate the practical training with the theoretical instruction the apprentices receive. They also cover the costs of the company-based training, including apprentice wages and instructor salaries.

Participating companies consider the dual system as the primary form of recruiting and training their future skilled workforce.

Host employers are pivotal in Germany's dual vocational training system, providing practical hands-on training and mentorship. They collaborate with vocational schools and other SMEs to offer comprehensive, industry-relevant training. This cooperative model ensures apprentices receive well-rounded education and on-the-job experience, meeting national standards and addressing the challenges faced by individual SMEs.

The ApprenticeshipQ Consortium: criteria for quality apprenticeships

The ApprenticeshipQ Consortium in part funded by The European Commission has developed a set of quality criteria for apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) programmes.

Researchers conducted interviews with educational institutions and placement providers to identify success factors, leading to the development of 30 quality criteria. These criteria were validated through a survey with over 480 participants from various stakeholder groups, including auditors, quality experts, education providers, placement providers, apprentices, and alumni.

The quality criteria cover various aspects of apprenticeships, such as:

- preparation and planning
- management of placements
- establishing agreements and matching apprentices
- monitoring and evaluation
- assessment and certification
- complaints and appeals

The report provides detailed descriptions and measurement indicators for each quality criterion, along with examples of how placement providers have implemented them.

It also includes templates and forms that can be adapted for documenting and implementing the quality criteria.

The report emphasises the importance of a quality management procedure, suggesting the use of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle and the MERI (Motivate-Esteem-Reflect-Inform) cycle to promote a quality culture and continuous improvement in apprenticeships.

With regard to host employers, the report defines them within the role as 'placement providers' which includes employing organisations and education providers and there are elements of cross-over between the three.

Placement providers play a crucial role in apprenticeships by providing the real-world work experience and training components that are essential for apprenticeship programmes.

Their key responsibilities include:

Preparation for the apprenticeship

- developing model contracts defining work conditions
- having a financial plan and resource allocation for hosting apprentices (wages, benefits, infrastructure)
- providing information/guidance manuals for communication and learning structures
- ensuring necessary capacity to host apprentices (personnel, infrastructure, equipment)
- having recruitment procedures for apprentices

Identifying mentors

- selecting suitable mentors with required technical, pedagogical and mentorship competencies
- establishing communication structures between mentors, apprentices and educational institutions
- providing training and evaluation processes for mentors

Establishing agreements

- defining approval workflows for apprenticeship contracts/agreements
- formalizing agreements covering aspects like work hours, salary, learning outcomes, mentors, communication plans
- matching Apprentices with Placements
- collaborating with educational institutions to match apprentices based on profiles and requirements

Providing suitable conditions

- ensuring a safe working environment adhering to health and safety regulations
- providing necessary equipment, tools and resources for apprentices
- integrating the Apprentice
- assigning a mentor and facilitating the apprentice's integration into the workplace culture

Mentoring

- providing guidance, feedback and support to apprentices through assigned mentors

Maintaining records

- keeping records of apprentices' progress, achievements and assessments

Assessing learning

- participating in the assessment of apprentices' learning and skill development
- evaluating the process
- evaluating the overall apprenticeship process and providing feedback for improvement

By fulfilling these responsibilities, placement providers ensure that apprentices receive valuable practical training, mentorship, and exposure to real work environments, complementing the theoretical knowledge gained from educational institutions.

The ApprenticeshipQ project offers a comprehensive framework and practical guidance for ensuring the quality of apprenticeships and WBL programmes, benefiting all stakeholders.

New Zealand: Te Hiku Group Employment Programme

Te Hiku Iwi Development Trust alongside iwi, crown and employers developed a Group Employment Programme, known as Tupu Horticulture. The Tupu model designed an innovative "learn as you earn" programme to address skill shortages and provide supported training that leads to employment opportunities in the horticulture sector of New Zealand's Far North (Te Hiku) region. Launched in response to socioeconomic challenges, the programme aimed to create a pipeline of suitably trained staff while meeting seasonal workforce needs.

Tupu Horticulture applied a group training model, bringing together various stakeholders including government agencies, training providers, and host employers. The Tupu model offers a holistic approach to employment, focusing on workplace skills, employability, and cultural and social outcomes rather than solely on qualifications.

Key features of Tupu Horticulture included:

- paid work and training for participants (called Kaingaki Kāri)
- a curriculum designed around the seasonal horticultural calendar
- individualised learning plans and support
- building of cultural capability, numeracy, literacy, financial literacy, and digital skills
- to gain industry-relevant certifications and a formal primary industry qualification.

Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa (Te Rarawa) was the group employer for the Tupu Horticulture programme.

Te Rarawa was selected as they could offer cultural, social, and commercial strength as the group employer. Their responsibilities included:

- delivering the programme within a Te Ao Māori approach.
- providing a workforce to the host employers in accordance with the agreed annual calendar.
- ensuring host employers were satisfied with the provision of the service-level agreement.
- managing daily operations and industry-specific training components of the Tupu Horticulture programme.
- employing, maintaining, and providing wrap-around support for 20 kaimahi (Kaingaki Kāri) on one-year, full-time contracts.
- handling performance management and disciplinary matters.
- providing any required equipment e.g. laptops and general Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

- maintaining co-developed policies with host employers on health and safety, leave allocations etc.
- providing back-office support for the programme e.g. Management oversight, HR, Finance/Accounting, Communications, Legal, Administration, Te Ao Māori/cultural capability; and Infrastructure e.g. office, training space, digital connectivity, and transport.

Te Rarawa also employed key staff for the programme, including:

- a Kaihautū (Project Lead) responsible for oversight, day-to-day operational management, and stakeholder relationship management including liaising with training providers and host employers.
- two Kaiurungi (Navigators) to provide supervisory training, employment, and pastoral care support to the Kaingaki Kāri.

By combining practical work experience with targeted training and comprehensive support, the Tupu model seeks to create sustainable employment pathways for participants while addressing the specific needs of the local industry and the social, cultural, and economic needs of whānau, iwi and employers.

Host Employers for the Tupu programme

The Tupu programme engaged Bells Produce Ltd and Mapua Avocados Ltd as host employers. Sought for characteristics of host employers included:

- provision of a safe workplace environment: host employers are responsible for providing a safe workplace and on-job activities for the trainees.
- training and induction: provide induction, and health and safety requirements.
- commitment to work hours: responsible for providing the minimum work hours per person as per the agreed programme and Annual Calendar.
- financial viability: understand their role and the impact of delivering their commitment to work hours to support the programme's sustainability.
- provision of specialised equipment: provide specialised Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- collaboration: work with the group employer on matters such as shift cancellations and replacement workers.
- openness to learning: demonstrate a willingness to adapt their perceptions and practices based on the programme's outcomes, such as incorporating Māori values and mātauranga into processes.

Feedback from Tupu Horticulture host employers found that they viewed the programme as advantageous in that it provided potential employees trained specifically for their business needs. They also suggested that the Tupu model could be expanded into other areas for iwi, including replanting and restoration projects, and into other sectors, such as construction.

Since then, Te Hiku Iwi Development Trust have worked with partners and applied the Tupu model in the construction sector with Tupu Plumbing.

Te Rarawa ran three cohorts (2021-2023) as group employer of Tupu Horticulture. External market impacts (a crash in the Avocado export market), reduced commitment from host employers, and efficient and effective operational delivery are critical to the economic sustainability and successful delivery of the Tupu model. These factors and their impact on the programme supported the reasoning for closing the current iteration of the Tupu Horticulture programme. Te Hiku Iwi Development Trust continue to work with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Takoto to explore a pivot of the model into a more secure Horticulture environment where these challenges are mitigated.

Findings from New Zealand Group Employers

Interviews were undertaken with key organisations within New Zealand that run group training or similar models, to identify what key characteristics these organisations looked for when working with host employers.

Growing Future Farmers

Growing Future Farmers (GFF) is a farmer-led vocational workforce training programme in New Zealand, aimed at transforming the agricultural sector by nurturing quality people into the industry. The model works by providing a two-year intensive, highly practical on-the-farm programme for youth aged 16-20.

It should be noted that the GFF model has some similarities to a host-employer/group employment models, but it is not a direct employment relationship in the same sense; participants are students not employees or apprentices.

The GFF model

The programme places students with an accredited farmer across 14 regions of New Zealand for practical workplace training and development.

Over 100 farms have volunteered to train students as part of their team. The students live and learn on the farm for the duration of the course, working four days a week and attending courses one day a week.

The programme is NZQA accredited, offering Level 2 and 3 qualifications, and is designed to enhance apprentices academic learning as well as their practical experience. It provides a pathway into the farming sector for young people recently graduated or for those students directly out of secondary school.

Support for Students

GFF provides comprehensive support to the students throughout the programme. This includes:

- pastoral care and liaison support from regional managers
- course fees, subsidised gear, equipment and a clothing pack
- a living allowance

The regional liaison managers work closely with the farmers and students, supporting the training process and attending quarterly progress meetings.

Collaboration with Farm Trainers

GFF operates through a collaborative model with farm trainers, who are responsible for providing practical skills training, on-the-job experience, and mentorship to the students.

This farmer-led approach ensures that the training is industry-relevant and aligned with the practical needs of the farming sector. It also provides a direct pathway for students to gain

employment upon graduation, as the programme is designed to meet the workforce needs of the industry.

The GFF model have been successful in addressing the workforce challenges faced by the agricultural sector in New Zealand. By involving farmers directly in the training process, it ensures that the apprentices receive practical, hands-on experience and develop the necessary skills to become successful in the industry.

The programme's emphasis on pastoral care, support, and industry-relevant qualifications contributes to the holistic development of the students, preparing them for long-term careers in agriculture. Additionally, the collaborative approach with employers increases the likelihood of employment opportunities for graduates, addressing the industry's workforce needs.

Overall, the GFF model provides an example of how vocational training, employer engagement, and comprehensive support can work together to nurture the next generation of skilled agricultural workers in New Zealand.

Characteristics of good farmer trainers

When asked about the characteristics they look for in good host Farm trainers, GGF identified the following attributes.

Ideally, a good trainer possesses a combination of personal qualities, professional capabilities, and the ability to create a positive workplace environment for young people under their care.

Personal qualities include humanity, self-awareness, professionalism, and a strong ethical foundation. These employers demonstrate fairness and respect towards students which helps create a positive workplace environment. They also demonstrate a commitment to health and safety and fostering a supportive atmosphere. They focus on sustainability in their farming practices and have a positive reputation within the farming sector.

Professional capabilities centre around strong mentorship skills and excellent communication abilities. Good trainers have extensive experience and industry knowledge, which they are able to effectively pass on to students.

GFF also provided insights into their selection criteria, their support mechanisms for employers, and the key challenges they have experienced when working with some trainers

Selection criteria for Farm Trainers

When selecting Farmer Trainers, GFF looks for individuals who demonstrate a genuine desire to educate and train students. Patience, empathy, and an encouraging nature are crucial

traits. GFF also values those who show a willingness to upskill themselves and improve their farming practices and standards.

A commitment to giving back to the industry is another important criterion. This reflects GFF's ethos of farmers supporting the next generation of farming professionals.

The also give practical considerations as part of their selection process. These include evaluations of the farm environment, health and safety practices, police checks, reference checks, and assessments of accommodation provided to students.

Support provided to Farm Trainers

GFF also talked about the importance of supporting Farm Trainers in their role. Currently, support is primarily in the form of basic checks and evaluations to ensure suitability.

Previously, the programme offered personal development and self-awareness workshops for host employers. However, these have been temporarily paused due to funding challenges.

In the future they would like to introduce more comprehensive support. This includes workshops on understanding teenage brains, training on how to coach and mentor adolescents, and guidance on providing inspirational leadership for young people.

Programme benefits and attractions

When asked about what draws Farm Trainers to the model, GFF reported several reasons. Firstly, the credibility stemming from its farmer-led design and implementation is a significant factor. Many farmers are attracted by the positive outcomes and well-rounded graduates the programme produces.

GFF have also found that participation in the programme often leads to improved farming standards through knowledge transfer from students to the wider team. It also enhances farm culture and provides opportunities for existing staff to develop their leadership skills.

Many trainers have expressed pride in contributing to industry growth and individual success and have seen tangible results as young people develop under their guidance.

Challenges and Observations

The programme has identified several challenges and made important observations about farm trainers. A key finding is that being a well-respected farmer does not automatically

translate to being a good mentor. The relationship between the farmer and student is critical for success, emphasising the importance of human connection and effective communication.

GFF noted that the way a potential Farm Trainer talks about students can be a strong indicator of their suitability for the role. The language and tone used often reveal whether they are participating for the right reasons.

In summary

The success of the GFF programme is in part due to the quality and commitment of its Farm Trainers. They play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of farming professionals, serving not just as employers but as mentors, and educators.

The ideal Farm Trainer as identified by GFF, possesses a blend of personal qualities and professional capabilities. They demonstrate humanity, self-awareness, and a strong ethical foundation, coupled with extensive industry knowledge, a commitment to maintain a safe support environment as well as excellent communication skills.

GFF's selection process for Farm Trainers, which includes evaluating their desire to educate, willingness to upskill, and commitment to giving back to the industry, ensures a high standard of training. Their success in attracting quality Farm Trainers, evidenced by improved farm standards and enhanced farming culture, speaks to the mutual benefits of this model.

Electrical Training Company (Etco) model

Etco's model is a group apprenticeship scheme that employs electrical apprentices and places them with host companies.

Under this scheme, Etco takes care of the employment, administration, and management of the apprentices, while the host companies provide the on-site training and work opportunities. Like other group models, this arrangement allows host companies to benefit from having apprentices without the administrative burden of direct employment.

Etco's programme combines on-the-job training at the host companies with off-the-job training provided by Etco. Apprentices attend classes, block courses, and receive extensive instruction, supervision, and support from Etco throughout their training. This includes assignments, assessments, and examinations to ensure they develop the necessary skills and knowledge.

Etco provides apprentices with a comprehensive professional trade-quality tools, ensuring they have the proper equipment including basic PPE to perform their duties effectively, any specialized equipment may be provided by the employer. The group apprenticeship scheme exposes apprentices to various pathways within the electrical sector, including domestic, commercial, and industrial work.

By employing apprentices through this group scheme, Etco aims to ensure consistent training standards, provide dedicated mentorship, and looks to offer a diverse range of work experiences across different host companies.

We interviewed Etco's Regional Manager for the Central North Island, to explore what makes a quality host employer from Etco's point of view.

Host Companies

Etco currently engages with approximately 300 host companies across the country. Some of these employers retain apprentices for the full duration of their apprenticeship and beyond, offering permanent employment opportunities, while others seek short-term labour.

When considering what makes a quality host employer, Etco discussed the importance of having genuine employer buy-in and investment in the apprentice's learning and development, the importance of having the right cultural fit, an employer's own willingness to undertake professional development, diversification in the workplace and being open to collaboration with Etco to support the apprentice with pastoral care.

Training and development

Etco works closely with employers to ensure they understand the value of apprenticeships and their role in fostering a positive learning environment. Collaboration between Etco and employers is a key aspect of the programme. Quality host employers will work with Etco to support the apprentice throughout their tenure and provide opportunities for the apprentice to learn on the job and across a range of different skills. They understand the need to provide appropriate training and support to apprentices.

Furthermore, good host employers are ones that are engaged and have a genuine interest in the apprentice, their learning, and lives. For example, they want to know how their apprentice is going with their block courses.

Etco also places a strong emphasis on ongoing training and support for both apprentices and employers. To ensure employers are also supported in their roles as not just employers but mentors to apprentices, Etco will provide additional training for them as well. Participating in this training shows an employer's commitment to learning and development and a willingness to improve their own practice and knowledge.

Cultural fit and inclusivity

As part of their decision making when placing an apprentice with an employer, Etco carefully considers each employer's profile to ensure there is a good cultural fit between the apprentice and employer. Etco have found that one of the indicators of a successful placement is ensuring the host employer's organisation and employment style is suitable to the apprentice.

Apprentices come from diverse backgrounds with varying skill sets. Negative experiences have occurred in the past, where employers have discriminated against apprentices based on factors such as sexual orientation or ethnicity. To address this, Etco profiles employers to ensure a good cultural fit and places apprentices, accordingly, prioritising their well-being and success.

A good host employer will be accepting of any apprentice regardless of background and personal circumstances and will work with the apprentice and Etco to positively address any issues that may arise.

There are many employers that also recognise the importance of diversity and inclusion within their workplace. Currently, 10-11% of apprentices at Etco are female, and good host employers will enact processes and policies to meet their specific needs, for example providing separate facilities and appropriate workwear for their female workers.

Etco also aims to break down outdated mentalities and promote a more inclusive workplace culture. For gender-diverse apprentices, Etco carefully matches them with suitable employers to ensure a supportive and inclusive environment. Similarly, for neurodiverse apprentices, Etco collaborates with employers to provide appropriate support and accommodations, such as alternative learning methods or communication strategies.

Some employers have also indicated a preference for more experienced apprentices. The programme has seen an increasing acceptance of mature apprentices (40-50 years old) with transferable skills from previous careers or life experiences.

Pastoral care and ongoing Support

Etco recognises that apprentices and employers may face various challenges throughout the apprenticeship programme. Issues such as licenses, drug use, and family or cultural matters are handled on a case-by-case basis, with Etco providing appropriate support and guidance for both the apprentice and employer.

The organisation also helps employers as needed, recognising the complexity of group schemes and the importance of maintaining strong relationships with all stakeholders.

Good host employers will work with Etco to learn and respond appropriately to support apprentices in their workplaces. They will work with the Etco field team to provide pastoral care for apprentices, address social and mental health issues that may arise during their apprenticeship. Account managers also support employers with apprentices that may display social anxiety, help them learn how to operate in a team, and to learn other interpersonal skills.

Some employers even go above and beyond to support apprentices supplementing apprentice wages or provide vehicles to support their commute.

An example of where Etco has worked with employers to upskill them in regard to pastoral care is during mandatory refresher courses. ETCO uses these as an opportunity to provide additional training on topics such as suicide prevention, substance abuse, and mental health for employers.

Etco's group apprenticeship model offers an approach to apprenticeships, benefiting both apprentices and host companies. Quality host employers are crucial to the success of this model. They demonstrate genuine investment in apprentices' development, provide diverse work experiences, and collaborate closely with Etco.

These employers prioritise cultural fit, inclusivity, and ongoing professional development. They create supportive learning environments, embrace diversity, and adapt to meet individual apprentice needs. By fostering a positive workplace culture and actively participating in the apprenticeship process, these host companies play a vital role in developing the industry's workforce of skilled electricians.

Te Kawa a Tāne: Enhancing the Mana of Māori forestry workers

Te Kawa a Tāne is an innovative initiative dedicated to enhancing safety, health, and well-being for forestry workers in New Zealand's Te Tairāwhiti (East Coast) region. This initiative places forestry workers (kaimahi) at the heart of health and safety practices, empowering them to take an active role in decision-making processes.

Te Kawa a Tāne is established as the Tairāwhiti Forestry Alliance and is led by Māori iwi and Regional Forestry Leaders. Te Kawa a Tāne is a collaborative effort involving key stakeholders such as Te Runanganui o Ngāti Porou, Te Runanga o Turanganui a Kiwa, WorkSafe, Eastland Wood Council, Safetree, and various other government agencies.

Four rōpū have been established under Te Kawa a Tāne including Mauri Tu (kaimahi-whānau), Mauri Ake (contractors), Mauri Ora (regional leadership) and Mauri Mahi (facilitation, coordination and communication) to ensure a holistic approach is undertaken to achieve safe work, healthy work and equitable outcomes.

To help achieve this, the initiative integrates Māori models of wellbeing, including Te Whare Tapa Whā, with SafeTree principles like whanaungatanga, kaitiakitanga, and tikanga. By focusing on culturally aligned practices, Te Kawa a Tāne aims to significantly reduce injury and death rates among forestry workers, particularly Māori.

Te Kawa a Tāne key goals are aimed at improving the health, safety and wellbeing culture within the forestry industry in Te Tairāwhiti region. The initiative aims to achieve this through the following actions.

Empowering workers in decision-making: Te Kawa a Tāne aims to put forestry workers at the centre of health and safety practices, giving them a voice in operational and leadership decisions.

Forestry is as one of the most hazardous workplace sectors, particularly for young Māori men. The industry is characterised by:

- volatile and unstable work conditions
- heavy reliance on a single market (China)
- long working hours
- lack of paid travel time
- physically demanding work

By empowering those employed in the industry to actively participate in decision-making and health and safety discussions, the initiative provides a valuable opportunity for workers to:

- propose and implement beneficial changes to forestry operations.
- address specific concerns unique to their work experiences.
- contribute to the development of more effective safety and wellbeing protocols.

The forestry sector doesn't have regulated practices beyond basic health and safety standards. A broader regulated approach could encompass fairer labour practices, sustainable forestry methods, cultural inclusivity in the workplace and professional development opportunities.

Some Māori forestry workers also bring with them natural leadership attributes, often rooted in Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview), which offer significant value to the forestry industry. However, in some instances, these cultural expressions have been discouraged or misinterpreted rather than recognised for their inherent worth and embraced and integrated into forestry operations.

This approach to work and leadership, when properly understood and utilised, can become a significant advantage to businesses. Having Māori leaders within a crew can enhance team dynamics, improve communication, and foster a more inclusive work environment.

It is crucial for employers and industry stakeholders to recognise, reward, and give voice to these natural leaders. By providing them with opportunities to engage and express their ideas and contribute to decision-making processes, companies can tap into a wealth of cultural knowledge and alternative perspectives.

Te Kawa a Tāne includes this approach within its model and allows for the unique insights of Māori workers to not only be listened to, but to have their ideas and views responded to and acted upon. Embracing this culturally inclusive leadership style can lead to more effective decision-making, problem-solving, improved safety practices, and a more engaged workforce. It aligns with the principles of cultural intelligence and demonstrates a commitment to valuing diversity in the workplace and empowering employees by giving these leaders a place at the table.

Ultimately, by acknowledging and leveraging the natural attributes of Māori leaders, the forestry industry can create a resilient, innovative, and culturally responsive workplace.

Integrating Māori cultural values: The initiative incorporates te ao Māori principles and values into its approach, aligning with Māori models of wellbeing.

With a high percentage of Māori forestry workers in the region, the initiative incorporates a Te Ao Māori framework into training and operating systems. This cultural integration aims to improve outcomes for Māori kaimahi and create a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

For many young Māori, a key driver is kaitiakitanga (guardianship) connected to their whakapapa (genealogy). A quality employer should have a good understanding and appreciation of Te Ao Māori and recognise what motivates their Māori employees to come to work.

While much of the work in forestry is highly technical, the Māori worldview adds an important dimension for people raised in Māori communities, distinct from the industry perspective or mainstream system view. Many Māori workers possess a different perception that stems from their Te Ao Māori worldview. Employers need to understand this unique perspective but also value, enhance, and acknowledge it.

Successful whānau days run as part of the programme brings whanau to worksites to help them understand what their family members do at work every day. These events were reported to be uplifting experiences that fostered a deeper connection between workers and their whānau, enhancing family support for the workers and helping to install a sense of pride and mana in the work they do.

Collective action and collaboration: The initiative also facilitates collective action and collaboration among various stakeholders, including forestry contractors, kaimahi and their whanau, industry and community organisations, and government agencies. This collective effort enables a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex issues faced by forestry workers while ensuring that whānau prosper, the natural environment thrives, and the economy remains stable.

Capacity building: lastly, the initiative is in the process of promoting better training opportunities for kaimahi, encourages more women into the industry, and fosters stronger relationships between workers, contractors, and forest management. These efforts contribute to capacity building and the overall development of the forestry workforce enhancing community cohesion and shared responsibility for worker safety.

By addressing these key areas, Te Kawa a Tāne alliance strives to create a positive culture shift in the forestry industry, prioritising the safety, well-being, and empowerment of forestry workers in the Te Tairāwhiti region.

Benefits to Group Training Models

The Te Kawa a Tāne initiative offers valuable insights for group training and in creating quality host employers engaged in apprenticeship programmes. It demonstrates the importance of recognising diverse forms of leadership among workers, including those that may not align with mainstream notions of leadership. In an apprenticeship context, good host employers should actively identify and nurture inherent leadership qualities in apprentices.

Furthermore, the initiative highlights the benefits of implementing bottom-up feedback models. Host employers should create safe channels for apprentices to share their experiences and suggestions, fostering a more inclusive and responsive experience for apprentices and employees in general.

This approach empowers apprentices and contributes to continuous improvement of apprenticeship programmes.

Te Kawa a Tāne underscores the significance of cultural integration in the workplace. Quality host employers should strive to create culturally responsive environments that value diverse backgrounds and perspectives. This approach would lead to better job satisfaction, efficiency, and loyalty, fostering an environment where employees feel appreciated, respected, and valued.

This initiative could also serve as a model of good practice for vocational training under "a good employer and leadership" framework, demonstrating how culturally aligned practices can bring together all stakeholders and enhance safety and wellbeing in high-risk industries while also supporting leadership development.

In Conclusion

The findings from the situational analysis and discussions with organisations undertaking group training models in New Zealand highlights several key characteristics of effective host employers.

In general, good host employers demonstrate a combination of personal qualities, such as humanity, self-awareness, professionalism, and a strong ethical foundation. They are committed to creating a positive and supportive workplace environment, prioritising health and safety, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and development.

Professional capabilities are also crucial, with strong mentorship skills and excellent communication abilities being essential. Host employers should have extensive industry knowledge and a genuine desire to educate and train apprentices.

They must be willing to upskill themselves and improve their practices, reflecting a commitment to giving back to the industry.

Furthermore, successful host employers are inclusive and culturally sensitive, ensuring a good fit between apprentices and the workplace. They support diversity and provide appropriate a workplace environment for apprentices from various backgrounds.

The ability to provide comprehensive practical training, often through collaborative models, and to engage in ongoing professional development, is also highlighted as a significant factor in the success of group training models.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of selecting host employers who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also dedicated to nurturing and supporting the next generation of professionals.

Lastly, to further enhance the quality and reputation of apprenticeships in New Zealand, it is also recommended that the Food and Fibre CoVE consider using the ILO framework to align apprenticeship programme against its benchmarks. This could be done in partnership with GAN New Zealand or Australia and would help further cement and promote quality of apprenticeship here in New Zealand.

Rubric for evaluating potential host employers

This rubric is designed to evaluate potential host employers based on their personal qualities, professional capabilities, workplace environment, training and development, etc. It ensures that potential host employers can provide a supportive, safe, and enriching environment for apprentices, contributing to their professional growth and the overall successful completion of their apprenticeship.

Attribute	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
<p>Personal Qualities Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanity and self-awareness • Strong ethical foundation • Professionalism • Commitment to health and safety • Fairness and respect towards apprentices 	<p>Demonstrates basic respect and fairness towards apprentices. Shows a willingness to develop as an educator</p>	<p>Exhibits professionalism and a strong ethical foundation. Creates a supportive atmosphere. Respects and is trusted by apprentices.</p>	<p>Demonstrates humanity and self-awareness. Fosters an inclusive and positive work environment. Shows a passion for teaching and mentoring.</p>
<p>Professional Capabilities Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive industry knowledge and experience • Strong mentorship skills • Excellent communication abilities • Willingness to upskill and improve practices 	<p>Has competent industry knowledge. Intends to participate in pedagogy and professional development training.</p>	<p>Has professional training in adult teaching methods. Culturally responsive with a commitment to multiculturalism. Has relevant industry connections.</p>	<p>Possesses respected industry knowledge. Highly proficient in foundational teaching principles and adult teaching methods. Has strong connections with both industry and education networks.</p>

<p>Workplace Environment Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a supportive and positive atmosphere • Focus on sustainability in industry practices • Commitment to maintaining a safe work environment 	<p>Conducts basic risk assessments and provides necessary PPE. Follows minimum health and safety standards.</p>	<p>Ensures comprehensive health and safety training and supervision. Collaborates with group employer on safety matters.</p>	<p>Implements thorough health and safety protocols. Actively promotes a safety-first culture. Regularly reviews and improves safety practices.</p>
<p>Training and Development Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genuine desire to educate and train apprentices • Provision of adequate onboarding, induction, and ongoing training • Engagement with apprentices' learning progress 	<p>Uses an informal training plan that considers learners' needs and industry requirements.</p>	<p>Develops a formal training plan informed by policy guidance and regulatory frameworks. Provides ongoing professional development opportunities.</p>	<p>Has a formal, culturally responsive training plan. Offers comprehensive, tailored training programmes. Actively supports apprentices' career progression.</p>
<p>Cultural diversity and inclusivity Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of apprentices from diverse backgrounds • Promotion of an inclusive workplace culture • Avoidance of discrimination based on 	<p>Avoids discrimination and meets minimum employment standards.</p>	<p>Promotes gender equality and diversity. Ensures a culturally responsive workplace.</p>	<p>Actively supports diversity and inclusion. Provides tailored support for apprentices from various backgrounds. Integrates cultural responsiveness in all aspects of training.</p>

<p>factors like sexual orientation or ethnicity</p>			
<p>Collaboration and Engagement Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to work closely with group training employer • Active participation in employer training programs • Engagement with apprentices' overall development, including off-site training 	<p>Shows willingness to work with training organisations and group employer. Provides basic support to apprentices.</p>	<p>Actively engages with apprentices and supports their development. Works closely with training organisations and group employer.</p>	<p>Fully committed to apprentice success. Collaborates extensively with group employer, providers, industry bodies, and other stakeholders. Participates in industry-wide initiatives.</p>
<p>Leadership and Empowerment Employers demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and nurturing of leadership qualities in apprentices • Support for bottom-up feedback models • Empowerment of apprentices to share experiences and suggestions 	<p>Assigns mentors to apprentices. Provides basic guidance and feedback.</p>	<p>Selects suitable mentors with required technical and pedagogical competencies. Establishes clear communication structures.</p>	<p>Develops comprehensive mentorship programmes. Empowers apprentices to share experiences and suggestions. Nurtures leadership qualities in apprentices.</p>
<p>Compliance and Standards Employers demonstrate:</p>	<p>Adheres to basic national employment standards and</p>	<p>Follows industry best practices. Participates in regular</p>	<p>Exceeds industry standards. Implements robust quality</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adherence to national employment standards and regulations • Commitment to workplace health and safety protocols • Proper risk assessment and management 	<p>regulations and health and safety requirements.</p>	<p>evaluations of the apprenticeship process. Ensures comprehensive health and safety training and supervision.</p>	<p>assurance and risk measures. Contributes to the development of industry benchmarks.</p>
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