

YOUR GUIDE TO A TRADES CAREER

START



FOR SCHOOLS



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Competenz skills for life

Who is Competenz

Competenz is one of New Zealand's work-based learning organisations (WBL), dedicated to building skills, careers, and businesses across the country.

Each year, we collaborate with over 3,500 companies and 11,000 learners across 30+ industries nationwide. Most learning happens on-the-job, in partnership with employers, apprentices, schools, training providers and assessors.

We work with...

3,500+

Companies

11,000+

Learners

What is on-the-job training?

On-the-job-training allows you to learn skills while you're working and getting paid. First you learn the basic skills, then as you progress you learn more advanced skills to do your job even better. The more you learn, the more career opportunities will come your way, things like promotions, pay rises, and new learning or job opportunities.

On-the-job training means you:

- Earn while you learn – no student loan and you're getting paid from day one
- Finish your training with a job instead of needing to look for one
- Gain practical skills that employers really want
- Get a nationally and internationally recognised NZQA qualification that you can travel abroad with.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a formal arrangement between an employer, a learner (you), work-based learning organisation (WBL) such as Competenz.

An apprenticeship is a three to four year commitment, combining real work experience with structured learning.

It develops the full range of skills needed to perform a trade and results in a nationally recognised qualification.

How does on-the-job training work?

Once you've found employment in your chosen trade, Competenz supports you, your employer, and your assessor throughout your training journey. You'll learn skills every day from experienced tradespeople in your workplace.

Your on-the-job learning will be supported by online learning and assessments, and for some programmes, you'll also attend block courses at a polytechnic or training provider. You'll be assessed by your employer and industry experts, who will confirm that you've achieved the required standard in your work.



Our industries

We work with the following industries.

Mechanical engineering

- General engineering
- Machining
- Fitting and machining
- Maintenance
- Toolmaking
- Metal forming and casting
- Dairy systems
- Locksmithing

Fabrication

- Light fabrication
- Heavy fabrication
- Steel construction

HVAC-R

- Refrigeration and air conditioning
- Air conditioning installation
- Mechanical building services

Fire

- Fire protection

Manufacturing

- Furniture
- General manufacturing
- Plastics
- Wood manufacturing
- Wood panels

Print, packaging and signmaking

- Packaging
- Print
- Signmaking

Food and beverage

- Baking
- Food and beverage processing

Forestry

- Harvesting
- Silviculture

Transport

- Rail

Distribution

- Distribution



Getting your driver licence

Employers do ask that their staff hold their Full Driver Licence. This is so staff do not have to rely on public transport to get to work on time and you may be asked to use a company vehicle.

Learner Licence

You can get your Learner Licence when you turn 16. This allows you to drive an automatic or manual vehicle while you learn, supervised by someone who holds a Full Driver Licence.

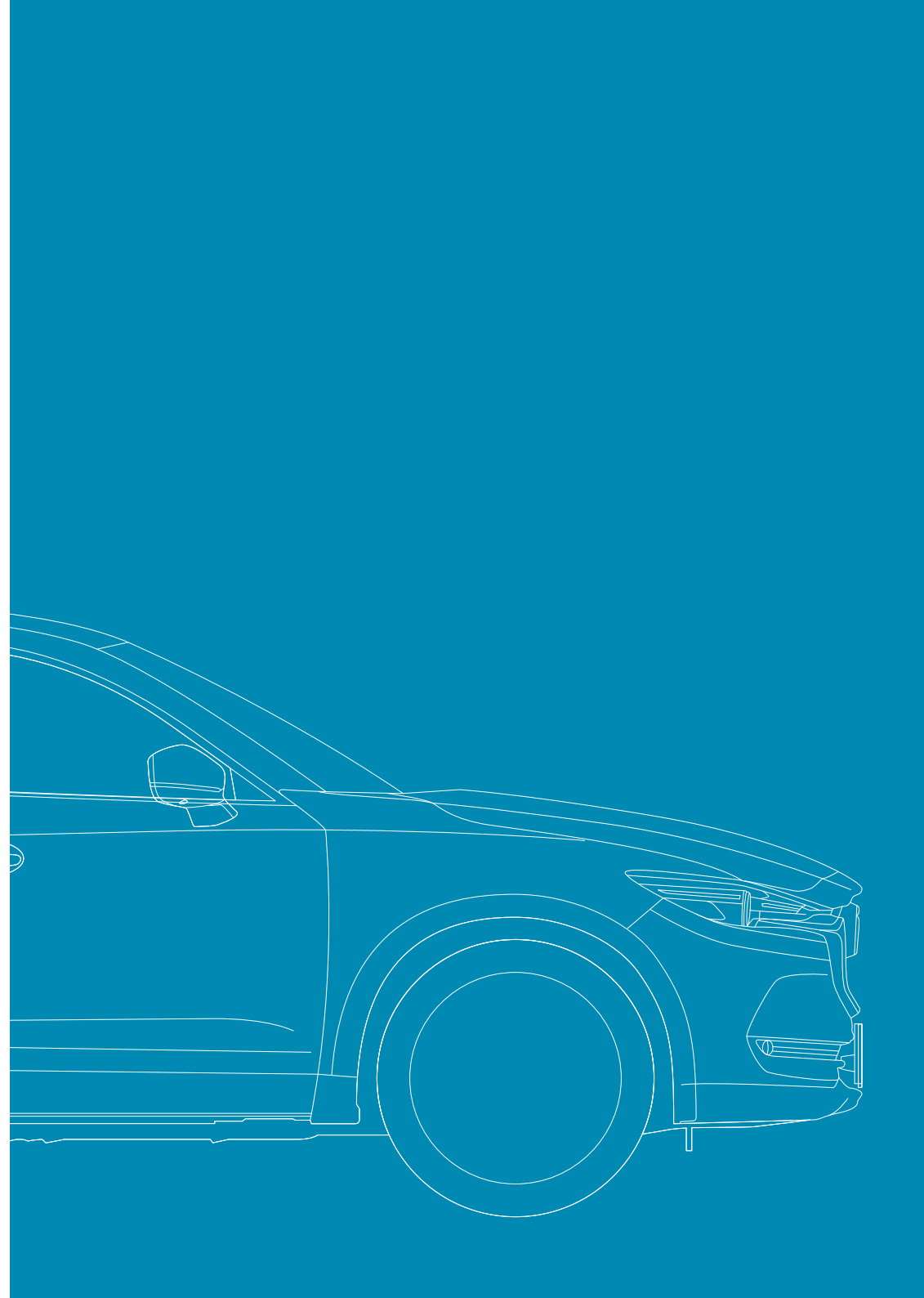
Restricted Licence

Once you have held your Learner Licence for six months, you can apply for your Restricted Licence. This means you can drive on your own between 5am and 10pm.

Full Licence

When you have held your Restricted Licence for at least 18 months, you can apply for your Full Licence. This allows you to drive an automatic or manual vehicle without supervision, with passengers, and at any time.

For more information about the process, visit www.nzta.govt.nz or scan the QR code below.



Writing your CV

Writing your CV and cover letter

Your CV and cover letter are your chance to show employers:

- **What you've done:** school projects, part-time jobs, volunteer work, or hobbies that show your skills
- **The skills you have:** both practical and transferable skills
- **Why you're the right person:** explain what makes you a great fit for the role.

Tips to get it right

- Think like an employer, what skills and qualities are they looking for?
- Highlight transferable skills, hobbies, or interests that show your strengths
- Have a portfolio of evidence ready if you've done any trade-related activities or projects at home or school
- If you speak more than one language, include it! Many workplaces are international or serve multilingual customers, this can be a real advantage
- Use clear, simple language and always check for spelling and grammar mistakes.

Job-specific

When you apply for a job, read the job description carefully — it tells you exactly what the employer wants. Be honest: if you don't have all the skills, that's okay. Employers value enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.

Job-specific skills employers often look for include:

- Customer service (in person, on the phone, and online)
- Ability to work well in a team
- Literacy and numeracy
- Using computers and technology
- Planning and organisational skills
- Initiative and a can-do attitude
- Problem-solving
- Good work habits and independence
- Reliability — showing up every day and on time.

Quick tips for writing a cover letter

- Introduce yourself and the job you're applying for
- Structure it clearly: opening, skills/experience, and closing
- Match your skills to what the employer is asking for
- Include both practical and employability skills
- Keep it clear, check spelling and grammar, and stay concise
- Thank the employer and show genuine enthusiasm for the role.

Building skills for success

Get ready for work

Employability skills are personal qualities or attitudes that make you ready for work. Below are the top skills New Zealand employers say are essential for the workplace.

Positive attitude

Having a positive attitude means showing up ready to give your best, staying motivated, and tackling challenges with energy and focus — even when things get tough or progress takes time. It's about being proactive, adaptable, and open to learning.

Communication

You have good communication skills if you can listen well, you don't swear at work or have a bad attitude, you can ask for what you want clearly, and you're not afraid to ask if you don't understand something.

Teamwork

Teamwork means collaborating with others to reach a shared goal. It's about doing your part, supporting your teammates,

communicating openly, and showing respect — for others and yourself.

Resilience

Resilience means keeping at it when things get tough or don't go as planned. It's about staying calm under pressure, asking for support when you need it, and using challenges as opportunities to learn, grow, and improve.

Self-management

Self-management means taking responsibility for your actions and how you present yourself. It's about showing up on time, prepared, and ready to get the job done. You stay organised, follow through on commitments, and make choices that show respect for yourself and the people around you.

Willingness to learn

Willingness to learn means being open to new ideas and eager to grow your skills. It's about taking feedback on board — staying calm, listening carefully, and using it to improve.

Thinking skills

Using thinking skills means using your initiative and solving problems independently. If you notice something that needs doing, try to find a solution rather than waiting for someone else. When making decisions, like choosing your first job or apprenticeship, think carefully about your options and ask for advice when you need it.



Interview tips

First impressions count!

- Dress tidy and professional – a fresh haircut and clean clothes go a long way
- Be positive, smile, and show genuine enthusiasm
- Use confident body language – sit up straight, make eye contact, and speak clearly
- Arrive a few minutes early to show you're reliable
- Put your phone on silent and keep it out of sight
- Check your social media – make sure what's online reflects the best version of you.

Sample interview questions

- **Can you tell us about yourself?**
Share a short summary of who you are and the skills that relate to the job
- **Why do you want to work for this organisation?**
Show you've done some research and explain why you'd be a good fit

- **What made you apply for this job?**

Talk about what interests you in the role and how it suits your goals

- **Have you done this kind of work before?**

Mention any experience, paid, volunteer or school-related, that's similar to the job you're applying for

- **How will we benefit from taking you on?**

Highlight your strengths and how you can contribute to the team

- **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**

Be honest. Focus on what you do well and how you're improving in other areas

- **Tell me about a time when you had to deal with conflict, resolve a problem, or achieve a goal.**

Use real examples and explain what you did and what you learned.

Before the interview

- Research the organisation by viewing their website
- Prepare questions about the role
- Practice your interview skills with friends and family
- Familiarise yourself with the role and job application
- Write down all your skills and be confident with your ability to do the job
- Plan your journey, allow for extra travel time, and know where you are going to park.

At the interview

- Smile and shake hands with your interviewer and maintain eye contact
- Take time to think about your answer to every question
- If you misunderstand a question, don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat it

- Always ask questions – this is your chance to ask the employer anything you want to know about their workplace and the job you are applying for
- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer for their time. You could ask the next steps in the recruitment process.

After the interview

- If possible, email the interviewer and thank them for taking the time to see you. This shows you are interested in the role and are professional
- It may take several weeks before you hear back about your interview – if you haven't, you can politely call or email the company
- You may be asked to come back for a second or third interview. This is quite normal as recruiting can be a lengthy process.

Getting a job

The first step for on-the-job training is to get a job

Show you're interested

Employers want to know you're interested in their industry and their business. Take the time to learn about the company before you approach them. You can do this by visiting their website.

Be willing to learn

Show employers you've mastered new skills in the past – and you're keen to keep learning.

Show a great work ethic

Your employer wants to be able to rely on you. Turn up on time, follow instructions and work hard!

Be a team player

Employers are looking for people who fit in. Show them you're friendly, helpful and reliable.

Volunteer for work experience

It's a great way to show you're interested in an employer's business and motivated to get ahead. You may even get a job offer.

Make a plan

And stick with it! It can take a while to find the right job. Persevering will pay off!

Start your job search today!

Explore job opportunities


Find apprenticeship and trainee roles from employers across New Zealand – all in one place.



Want to be discovered?

Create your candidate profile and get your details in front of employers looking for new talent.



A background image showing two welders in protective gear, including helmets and gloves, working on a metal structure. The image is dark and moody, with a yellow and blue gradient overlay on the right side.

As learners, your background, journey, and reasons for choosing on-the-job training are all unique. Whether you want to choose the trades to do something you really enjoy, be able to earn while you learn or support your whānau, we can help find the right fit for you across our 30+ industries.

At Competenz our goal is not only to help you achieve qualifications; it's about providing you with the skills and knowledge to build a strong career.

Keep reading to discover the personal stories of our learners, each sharing how their journey in the trades has opened doors to both personal and professional growth.

TRADIE STORIES

From fictional muse to realworld apprentice

Patsy Gadsby's leap from diverse jobs to an fabrication engineering apprenticeship was sparked by Avatar: The Legend of Korra.

"I worked as a cleaner and in a bakery, I studied to be a make-up artist and spent three years as a postie, but it was during the six months I spent jobless watching Avatar that I finally worked out what I wanted to do," she says.

Patsy is now one of eight apprentices currently in training at BSM, and is the only female – but that's never held her back

"Doing a trade is fantastic—new skills, no massive student loans," she says. "It's about proving yourself, not your gender."

Patsy's attention to detail shines in her work, though she finds the bookwork challenging. With strong support from BSM and Competenz, she's thriving.

"I was nervous on my first day, but now I'm confident. Making a set of stairs was tough, but seeing it done was so rewarding. I'm thrilled Avatar inspired me to follow this path!"



"I'm thrilled Avatar inspired me to follow this path!"



Sulia Pepa | RAC engineering apprentice

Before she left school, young Pasifika woman Sulia Pepa decided she didn't want an office job.

Sulia spent two years in carpentry before changing tack to an apprenticeship in refrigeration and air conditioning with maintenance company City Care.

Now two years into a four-year apprenticeship, Pepa says she loves the challenge the job offers.

"It has taken me out of my comfort zone, but I like the work, problem solving and having to understand how machines work."

"I would definitely encourage other women and Pasifika people to go for it (a trades apprenticeship). All my friends thought it was awesome I chose this career and I often get men saying how proud they are to see a woman in the trades. It makes

me smile." She says she has no regrets and hopes more Māori and Pasifika people will, like her, be attracted to the trades.

Squarely in Sulia's corner is her Competenz Training Advisor, Bevan Paul: "He does an awesome job and is very encouraging. He comes (regularly) to check on how I'm going; I can also contact him if I get stuck with anything or have questions about my training." Sulia doesn't let the fact that she is the only woman in her team of five get in the way.

"I'm okay with it and don't feel out of place; they are all very supportive and, in many ways, treat me like a daughter or younger sister."

"Think about where you'd like to be in the future."

When Frank Uati saw his friends graduating from university with huge student debts and no guaranteed jobs, he knew he made the right choice to become an apprentice.

"I had nothing to lose but everything to gain. No fees, no student loan, no secret clauses. You earn while you learn and gain a qualification that's internationally recognised. I'm 100% behind trades because I know they can provide a pathway to a great future."

"Printing is really challenging; it's so much more than standing in front of a machine and pushing buttons. I learn something new every day, and my workmates motivate me and push me along."

"Competenz has been with me every step of the way to make sure the apprenticeship isn't too

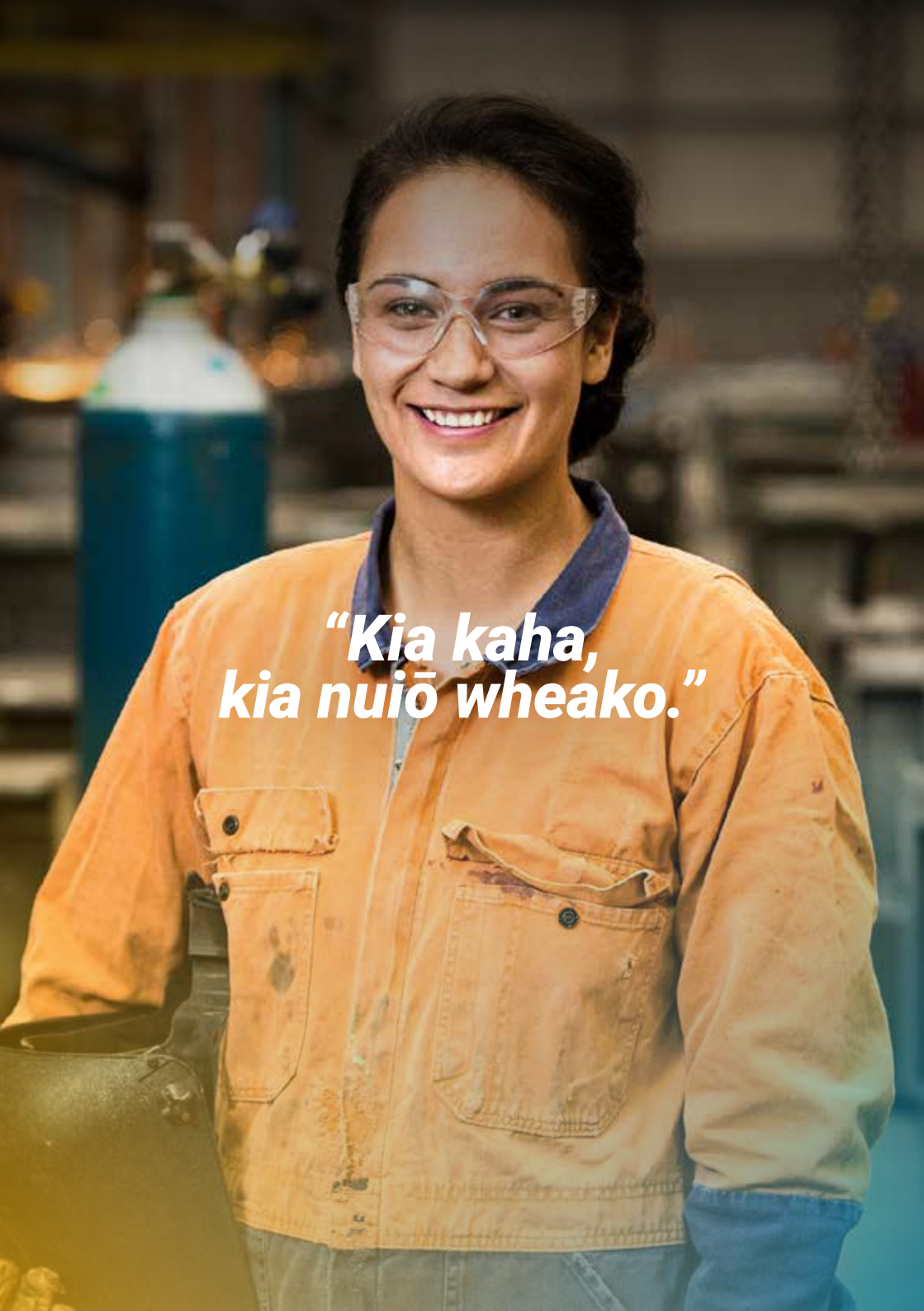
daunting. They want to see me succeed in my dream."

"As an apprentice, I've gained a lot of skills but the one that stands out above the rest is being independent. I've become more confident in the work I do and the decisions I make, and it's helped me grow as an individual – and made me an awesome printer. I've been able to hone my craft and trust myself."

"Doing an apprenticeship has changed my life and my family's. Trades are a great career option for everyone. With the skills that I have gained I know that the world is my oyster."



"I had nothing to lose but everything to gain."



***“Kia kaha,
kia nuiō wheako.”***

Marlane Harmer | Mechanical engineering apprentice

A chance meeting was the beginning of a career pathway for the mother of one.

“I was a barmaid at a local pub when I ended up having a chat with Rob Miller (Maintenance Manager at Ravensdown),” Harmer says.

“I was handing out CVs everywhere in town but not having much luck. Rob said he’d put in a good word for me. I had one printed CV left when I applied for the apprenticeship. I guess it was lucky last for me.”

Marlane believes practice makes perfect. Rob says Marlane is passionate about engineering, and this shows in her attitude and commitment to her work.

“From my 30-plus years of working in the trades, Marlane is the best apprentice I’ve ever come across,” Rob says. “She’s outstanding. All our management team clapped

for her when she came into the canteen the other day. We’re all behind her 100%.”

“I love my job as a mechanical engineering apprentice. Nothing is boring; there’s always something new to learn, even on the dirty jobs. I love to get right into what needs to be done.”

Marlane is proud that as a mother, she is a good role model for her daughter and that she can provide for her. Marlane’s advice to others thinking of doing an engineering apprenticeship?

“Give it a go. And when you do decide to do an apprenticeship, give it all you’ve got. Learn as much as you can. Gain as much experience as possible.”

Paul Taurima has a huge variety of jobs and responsibilities as a mechanical engineering apprentice.

“My job has progressed from not knowing how to use a grinder properly, to being 40 metres in the air in a man cage with another tradie cutting seized bolts off two seven-metre pipes. I learnt on the job as it’s the only way. You can’t be told you might need to hold the angle grinder on this angle to cut there, for example, you need to be doing it.”

Paul says he is well supported by his workmates.

“Everyone knows I’m an apprentice and if they see I need help, they step in. Having a young manager and foreman in the workshop is good because they still know what it’s like to be an apprentice.”

One of the main reasons Paul chose to do an apprenticeship was so he could earn money while learning. When he’s not at work, Paul is a family man, spending time with his nieces and nephews. After a hard day’s work he enjoys fishing, plays rugby, does waka ama and coaches basketball.

So what does the future hold for Paul?

“I want to build a home out of shipping containers one day so I need some skills. Every day is a challenge and that’s why I love it.”



“He rā hou, he wero hou!”



“It’s a no-brainer.”

Bex Savage | Craft baking apprentice

The tattooed baker.

Bex is unmissable – her body is a tattooed canvas dedicated to baking.

One of her arm sleeves features cupcakes and doughnuts; her hands boast ‘cake’ and ‘bake’ in flourishing calligraphy. She loves her trade!

Bex says the places you can go after completing a baking apprenticeship are “endless”.

“I have worked in a small craft bakery, a supermarket bakery, a large factory bakery and a small café. A bakery apprenticeship is great because it teaches you so much more than just baking; you learn about the food industry, you make lifelong friends and it sets you up for other paths you can take like presenting a baking show or writing a cookbook. You just have to be a go-getter.”



We help Kiwi industry grow skills, careers and businesses.

For more information
competenz.org.nz/contact-us