

# Learner Perceptions of Industry Training

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## **Introduction**

The Industry Training Federation is exploring how learners make decisions about industry training, their experiences of it, and how participating in industry training impacts on their jobs and lives.

We aim to collect the views of a range of learners in order to improve understanding of the different experiences people have of industry training: what is distinctive about the industry training experience in comparison to other types of tertiary education, and what is common/distinctive across workplaces and industries.

As an initial step, this report brings together findings from a literature review and from three focus groups of building and engineering apprentices. This first stage of the project sets the scene for further work on learner perceptions. The findings provide an initial guide on how learners from the building and engineering industries talk about their experiences and expectations of industry training. Finding out what broader groups of learners think (particularly across different industries) will allow us to test and build on these initial results.

## **Executive summary**

This project explores what learners think and feel about industry training; how they get into it and what they get out of it. The first stage of this project has involved a literature review and focus groups in the building and engineering industries, which have helped us to develop a preliminary understanding of what some learners from the traditional trades think about industry training. We aim to help people involved in workplace training ensure that learners get the most out of their workplace learning experiences.

Research on New Zealand and overseas learners was examined through the literature review to see the type of findings that emerge from different research techniques. In the area of workplace learners' decision making, the review found that interest in the industry is a strong motivator, and that employers and family are influential. Most learners are satisfied with their learning experience, and find learning that is closely related to doing their job is most effective. Balancing work and study is the most oft-discussed barrier to learning, and motivation can drop when learners are not given opportunities to use their skills in the workplace. Increased confidence and job ability are most likely to be mentioned as outcomes of training, while learners are less likely to mention increased pay and promotion.

Many of these findings were paralleled in the focus groups. Interest in the industry is important for the majority of participants, and employers - followed by family - are most likely to influence their decision to enter industry training. While many learners find their training highly relevant to their jobs, a few are

dissatisfied with their apprenticeship experience. There is an implied preference for learning that is closely related to job tasks, and a clear role for employers and experienced co-workers in ensuring that learning leads to improved workplace performance. Members of the three focus groups expect that their pay will increase on completion of their qualification, and the majority also believe participating in training increases their ability to do their job, gives them skills they can use outside work, and provides opportunities for job progression as a result of training.

Most learners in the focus groups believe that Industry Training is working well: off-job and on-job learning are mutually reinforcing, learners see how training is directly and indirectly related to their jobs, and they want to continue learning after the completion of their qualification/apprenticeship. For a few of the participants, a perceived lack of support is making it hard to progress their learning. However, their commitment to working in the industry and the importance of completing their apprenticeship to progress their careers keeps them going. Some of the factors that made for a good learning experience were:

- an employer who supports and values learning and demonstrates this;
- formal processes to involve experienced workers in training;
- high quality on and off-job training delivered by committed professionals;
- a clear purpose for off-job learning, which is communicated to learners;
- maintaining the right balance between work and learning; and
- assessors, co-ordinators and training managers who provide learners with support, motivation and challenge.

## **Context**

### **What is Industry Training?**

Industry Training is a partnership between industry and government where both parties invest to develop systematic skills training that boosts industry productivity. Industry Training Organisations were established to increase the relevance and responsiveness of vocational education to industry needs, thereby improving skill level and usage by enterprises and employees. The 40 Industry Training Organisations are responsible for setting skill standards, arranging for the delivery of training and assessment against these standards, and providing skills leadership for their industries.

There are many different kinds of training arrangements made by ITOs. Training can take place in a workplace, a classroom, a home, or in a simulated environment. Training arrangements made by ITOs include:

- apprenticeships
- short courses that meet a particular workplace need (eg Health and Safety)
- workplace literacy and numeracy programmes
- benchmarking a company's in-house training to the National Qualifications Framework
- technical skill development, and
- higher level management skill training.

### **Who's involved?**

Over 30,000 businesses and employers are involved in industry training. Sectors of the economy with a tradition of workplace training, such as primary production, manufacturing and construction, are well represented in training. The business and services industries, where there has been less of a tradition of workplace training, are also increasingly becoming involved in industry training.

The numbers of employees participating in industry training has doubled since 2000, with over 160,000 taking part in 2005. Participants of all ages and career stages take part in industry training. The majority (56%) of industry trainees are aged 20-39, 10% are under 20, and 33% are 40 or older.<sup>1</sup>

Young people's participation in industry training has been boosted by the Modern Apprenticeship scheme introduced in 2000, which had 9,355 participants as at September 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding numbers may not add up to 100%

## Research questions

The following questions were developed to guide the literature review and the development of questions for the focus groups and survey. These questions were developed in collaboration with representatives from Business New Zealand, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) and Industry Training Organisations (ITOs).

### *Decision making*

- What influences learners' decisions to undertake industry training? How influential are employers, family, co-workers, secondary school and the work environment in the decision making process?
- What do learners expect training to lead to (career, promotion, self-employment)?
- What influences learners' decisions to enter the jobs they are in?

### *Experience of training*

- What are learners' personal experiences of training?
- What factors contribute to success, and what obstacles are there along the way?

### *Outcomes of training*

- What do learners believe they get out of training?
- What is the relationship between the achievement of qualifications through industry training and earnings?
- Has participating in training changed the way learners view learning, work and career, and future prospects?

## Methodology

The purpose of the literature review was to provide an overview of some representative research, rather than to undertake a comprehensive study. The review focuses on studies with information on learners' decision making, experience of training and outcomes. Methods and results of attempts to represent learners' views were also explored.

The focus groups were organised in collaboration with the NZCTU and ITOs. It was important to be flexible, as both the employers and their learners had to be willing to put aside time for learners to participate. The groups are therefore a convenience sample, rather than a representative sample. To elicit different points of view, we chose two different industries in different cities (building in Wellington, and engineering in Hamilton and Palmerston North). Unfortunately, no female learners were available to take part in this study.

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative information to augment information obtained from the literature review. In the focus groups, concepts and ideas about learners' experiences were explored in a free flowing way. While not representative of, or generalisable to, a large population group, there was an opportunity to explore experiences in more depth. Talking to people in a group created a dynamic which allowed for the development of consensus as well as the exploration of different points of view. However, it may also have constrained people from expressing an opinion which they thought others might not agree with.

The next stage of this research will involve a paper based survey, which will be informed by the qualitative information presented in this report.

### **Limitations of focus group findings**

The focus groups have provided us with some idea of what male apprentices from the building and engineering industries think about industry training. The experience of these groups is likely to differ from others involved in training both across and between industries. Learners from different backgrounds and in different industries (e.g. women in service industries) are likely to talk about their experiences differently than the groups discussed here.

The focus of this project is on *learner* perspectives, so the focus group findings only provide part of the picture. The employers, ITO liaisons and off-job training providers have not been formally interviewed. The suggestions for actions are not always in areas that ITOs have direct influence over. There are also likely to be suggestions for actions that some ITOs, employers and training providers are already taking. In this context, these suggestions should be read as an endorsement of current practice, with further enhancement possible.

This study provides some initial insights into learners' perceptions of industry training which the Industry Training Federation would like to build on through further research.

## Literature Review

This section focuses on studies with information on learner decision making, experience of training and outcomes. The methods and results of attempts to represent learners' views are also explored.

Official statistics offer us some information about the 160,000 people who participate in industry training yearly. For instance; women are underrepresented in training as a proportion of the working population, Maori participate at around twice the rate of their participation in the workforce, and over a quarter of industry trainees have no previous qualification.<sup>2</sup> What official data does not reveal are the reasons why particular groups of people chose industry training, and what they think about it.

### Learners in Industry Training

In 1996 the Education and Training Support Agency commissioned AGB McNair to undertake a survey of ITO learners' satisfaction with training. Based on a sample of learners from 6 ITOs, the survey found that:

- the majority of trainees felt they had learnt enough work skills through industry training, and three quarters said they could use their training in other jobs
- moving to a better position was the main reason trainees gave for gaining qualifications
- the majority were satisfied with both on-job and off-job training
- reasons for dissatisfaction with on-job training included no training or no time for training, and for off-job training, poor organisation

Individual ITOs also undertake a range of activities aimed at gathering a more complete understanding of their trainees in order to cater to their needs. This includes satisfaction surveys, case studies and focused research.

The Aviation Tourism and Travel Training Organisation surveyed employees, secondary students and tertiary students in June 2005 to explore the reasons behind high levels of turnover and the fact that some people who studied tourism/travel chose not to work in the industry. Graduates and employees both rated working conditions, career prospects and working hours as important for job satisfaction. The majority of employees were satisfied with their jobs, but those that weren't were most likely to be dissatisfied by remuneration, working hours and lack of career prospects.

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<sup>2</sup> Tertiary Education Commission (2006) *Industry Training 2005*

The Agriculture ITO conducted a needs-analysis of employers and employees in 2005, which explored views on agriculture training through interviews. They found that the majority of employees were committed to working in farming for the long term, and saw their skill levels growing in the next three years. Employers rated their employees' skills more highly than the employees themselves, with employees seeing the need to develop compliance, business and people skills. Employees enjoyed the social aspect of learning, and preferred workshops to online learning. The research identified three different groups of employees in terms of their attitudes to learning:

- an older, more experienced and confident group, who are less interested in training;
- a younger, more educated group who strongly believe in education and the need to close gaps in their knowledge; and
- a younger, less educated group with higher numbers of Maori and Pacific people who recognise their needs, but experience barriers to learning.

The Building and Construction ITO commissioned focus group research in 2005. The focus groups explored reasons why employers and trainees chose to enter the trades, and why they chose the building and construction industry. Findings that stood out from the report were the influence of the school subject woodwork on the decision to enter construction, and on-the-job training as the most prominent form of job-related training. Family were influential in decision making, but for many, entering construction was unplanned; it just happened by chance.

## **Learner decision making**

New Zealand research on learner decision making provides insight into some of the factors that influence school leavers and tertiary students. Karen Vaughan's longitudinal research on youth transitions, and Linda Leach and Nick Zepke's literature review on tertiary student decision making, find that the decision making process is complex and ongoing rather than a one off decision. Job and career prospects are only one part of the picture. Other factors that influence decision making include parents, socio-economic status, academic achievement, subject area interest and schools.<sup>3</sup>

Vaughan's youth transitions research hints at the different priorities of young people and adults in the importance they place on educational choices and job prospects. Leach and Zepke's study indicates that work and family commitments are more important considerations in the decision making process for adults.

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<sup>3</sup> K Vaughan (2003) *Changing Lanes: Young people making sense of pathways*, Paper presented at the NZCER Annual Conference, 'Educating for the 21st Century'

L Leach and N Zepke (2005) *Student decision making by prospective tertiary students: A review of existing New Zealand and overseas literature*

The UK Learning and Skills Council national learner satisfaction survey of workbased learners found that the most common factors influencing choice of programme/course include gaining qualifications, advancing skills/knowledge, and job relevance. The most common source of advice/guidance was their employer, followed by a family member.<sup>4</sup>

Also in the UK, a survey by the Construction Industry Training Board found that for the construction apprentices canvassed, studying a related subject at school influenced their decision: almost half completed a construction project at school. Construction was the first career choice for 87% of those surveyed, and the majority were in it for the long term. The main reason for entering construction was to do with the practical nature of the work (i.e. working with your hands). Forty-seven percent mentioned good pay. Family, friends and contact with the construction industry were more influential than school in career choice.<sup>5</sup>

### **Experience of learning**

Overseas studies that used a range of different methods to seek the views of employees on their training experiences were examined. Surveys of employees often find that the majority are satisfied with their experience of training, have a positive attitude to learning, and believe that learning contributes to self esteem.<sup>6</sup>

Research from Denmark and Singapore provides insight into the links between the nature of employees' work and their experience of learning.<sup>7</sup>

Singapore has recently experienced a decline in attendance at company-sponsored training. A survey of employees<sup>8</sup> found that one of the possible reasons for this decline is the focus on fixing areas of weakness among employees rather than building on strengths. While the majority of those surveyed felt training helped them do their jobs better, only one in five were in jobs that allowed them to use their training on a daily basis. Training is identified as only one factor in improving job performance and enhancing satisfaction.

A Danish study of workplace learning in the baking industry<sup>9</sup> found that repetitive work and a lack of autonomy were having a negative impact on employees' desire to learn. It also found that professional bakers had feelings of ambivalence

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<sup>4</sup> Learning and Skills Council (2005) *National Learner Satisfaction survey: Work Based Learning Report 2003/04*

<sup>5</sup> P Mann and S Golden (2003) *Construction Apprentices Survey 2002-2003: National Report*

<sup>6</sup> M Muhamad and K Idris (2005) 'Workplace learning in Malaysia: the learner's perspective';

<sup>7</sup> A Gopal (2005) 'The Limits of Employee Training', *Gallup Management Journal*

C Jorgensen, and N Warring (2003) *Learning in the workplace – the interplay between learning environments and biographical learning trajectories*, paper to International Reference Group Seminar January 27-29 2003

<sup>8</sup> A Gopal (2005)

<sup>9</sup> Jorgensen and Warring (2003)

towards their jobs. The mechanisation of bread-making had made their jobs less craft-based, but it also created opportunities for learning.

Australian research on TAFE employees' experience of learning<sup>10</sup> found that the most important learning often happens spontaneously, outside spaces and times designated for learning. The participants rarely sought help from people with official roles in promoting workplace learning.

The UK learner satisfaction survey found that employees see study for qualifications as preparation for employment. Qualifications are not a motivation for workplace learning.<sup>11</sup> Activities closely associated with the job: performing the job, observing others, and being shown techniques by colleagues are perceived by employees as more effective in improving performance than attending training courses or acquiring qualifications. Other findings on the experience of training included:

- teacher subject knowledge was rated highly, while making the subject interesting or enjoyable was rated lowest;
- the majority of learners found feedback motivating; and
- other commitments at work was the most frequently cited difficulty.

### **Outcomes of learning**

Official statistics such as the quarterly Household Labour Force Survey and the New Zealand Income Survey illustrate the link between training and labour market outcomes. Sholeh Maani's studies have found that the financial returns on post-school qualifications are positive and significant in New Zealand, and that this relationship has remained stable even as more people gain qualifications.<sup>12</sup> Also, people with tertiary qualifications are less likely to be unemployed, and increased education has a positive effect on health and social outcomes. Like New Zealand, countries such as the UK and Australia produce official statistics on the positive impact of qualifications on pay and likelihood of being in employment. An interesting finding from a UK workplace learning literature review was that learners who acquire qualifications through courses *provided* by their employer received higher returns than those acquiring qualifications that are not employer-provided.<sup>13</sup> The question is whether learners see this connection.

So what do learners think they are getting out of training? Several studies involving ITO trainees, such as the AGB McNair 1996 survey, have found that learners believe training helps them do their jobs better, gives them skills that

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<sup>10</sup> Boud and Solomon *Uncovering learning at work*

<sup>11</sup> Learning and Skills Council (2005)

<sup>12</sup> Maani and Maloney (2004) *Returns to post school qualifications: New Evidence based on the HLFS Income Supplement (1997-2002)*

<sup>13</sup> K Ananiadou et al, (Vol 26, No. 2, July 2004) 'Basic skills and workplace learning: what do we actually know about their benefits?', *Studies in Continuing Education*

can be used in other jobs, and improves their confidence and motivation to learn. Overseas surveys produce similar findings, with learners reporting improved motivation, confidence, job satisfaction and ability to do the job as benefits of training. However, Amalia Santos and Mark Stuart in a study on *employee perceptions* found that learners were less likely to report higher pay and promotion/career progression as benefits of industry training.<sup>14</sup>

In examining the outcomes of training, it is important to consider how training works in combination with other factors. When looking specifically at the impact of learning on work practices, Santos and Stuart point out:

“...training is more likely to have a positive effect on employee attitudes (eg motivation and job satisfaction) where employers develop formal, structured approaches to training which link skill formation to job tenure, career progression, recognition and reward.”<sup>15</sup>

There are limitations to how much we can understand from learners' perceptions of training and its outcomes. In *The Role of Employee Reactions in Predicting Training Effectiveness*<sup>16</sup>, James A Tan et al explore the role of trainee evaluations in illustrating the impact of training programmes on employee performance. They found that “trainee intentions were strongly correlated with their post training behaviours”: i.e. learners who are highly motivated before training are more likely to put what they have learnt into practice. The authors also found that stated enjoyment of a programme did not necessarily translate to increased performance, and that “trainees who disliked the training programme showed higher levels of learning”. There was also a correlation between pre-training knowledge and a negative evaluation.

## Discussion

The desire to find out what makes a difference for learners has motivated organisations involved in education and training to use a range of techniques to elicit learners' points of view. Researching people's perceptions is challenging, regardless of the type of approach, and it is important to:

- have a clear idea of what you are trying to find out,
- be able to express questions unambiguously while being open to different interpretations and unexpected answers, and
- be aware that your research will not tell you everything.

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<sup>14</sup> A Santos and M Stuart (vol 13, no 1 2003) ‘Employee perceptions and their influence on training effectiveness’, *Human Resource Management Journal*

<sup>15</sup> A Santos and M Stuart (vol 13, no 1 2003) p30

<sup>16</sup> J A Tan, et al (vol 14, no 4, Winter 2003) ‘The Role of Employee Reactions in Predicting Training Effectiveness’, *Human Resource Development Quarterly*

The types of research examined here range from large-scale surveys and analyses of official data to more qualitative techniques such as focus groups, semi-structured interviews and observational case studies. The advantage of surveys is that they provide information that is generalisable to a population group. The disadvantage is that it is difficult to discover the underlying reasons behind broad trends. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and case studies give a more in-depth understanding of the reasons for particular viewpoints, but unless the number of cases or interviews is extensive and representative, it is not possible to apply the findings to the wider population.

The process of making a decision to undertake learning, and then deciding what kind of tertiary education to pursue, is informed not only by job and career prospects but by who you are, where you come from and what the people who are important to you think. In the case of building apprentices, both the UK and NZ studies found that interest in the kind of work done in the industry is important, and for many, this interest was prompted by doing a related subject at school. Work-based learners tend to differ from learners in other forms of tertiary education in that their employer is likely to be more influential in the decision making process, and career progression is more likely to be a motivator for them.

*Deciding on what kind of learning to pursue involves consideration of interests and abilities as well as what family, friends and employers think. Awareness of these influences may help to effectively target promotional activities.*

The main source of information on learners' experiences of learning is satisfaction surveys. These surveys tend to find that the majority of learners are satisfied with their learning experience. Finding time to fit learning around work is the most common difficulty experienced by work-based learners.

Interesting results emerge from research that explores the relationship between work, learning and qualifications. In a number of studies, attitudes towards learning are found to be affected by the way people feel about their jobs: for example, when employees' skills are not being fully utilised in their job, their motivation to learn is diminished. Learning that takes place on the job and that is closely related to immediate tasks, whether formalised through qualifications or not, is perceived by learners to be the most effective.

*The value that employees place on learning on the job illustrates the important contribution workplace learning makes to lifelong learning and improving business performance. The effectiveness of workplace learning may be increased by clearly linking learning to business practices, and by providing support for learners in balancing their work and study commitments.*

Research shows that there is a link between education/qualification level and aggregate income level. When it comes to learners' perceptions of the outcomes of a learning programme, they are more likely to note improved motivation and ability to do the job, rather than higher income or job promotion. This may have something to do with the timing of research (whether the survey/interview is done during, immediately after or some time after participation in learning), or it may be that learning is not always explicitly linked by employers to performance management policies.

*Many work-based learners find that participating in learning increases their effectiveness on the job, but this is not always seen to be rewarded by their employers. One way of addressing this could be to encourage employers to more explicitly link increased performance as a result of learning with pay increases, promotion and other rewards.*

## **Focus groups**

Three focus groups were held in 2005/2006 to develop an understanding of the way that Industry Training learners talk about their training experiences, to test some of the ideas that emerged from the literature review. Each focus group lasted around an hour, and traversed the topics of decision making, experience of learning, and current/expected outcomes.

The conversations were recorded and transcribed. A system of categorisation was developed to draw from and expand on the broad themes of the research questions, based on the apprentices' expressed areas of interest (see Appendix 1). This allowed the apprentices' stories to be loosely framed. Fragments from the transcripts were categorised by heading, and these were then used to order the discussions. We present the apprentices' experiences with as little editorial alteration as possible, and an analysis of the findings is provided later in the report.

## **Building apprentices**

The first focus group was held in November 2005 in Wellington and involved 10 employees in training at a large building company. It was organised with the help of the union and the company's training manager, and held in a temporary office on a building site. All of the participants were male, and the majority were young - only one participant was over 25.

### **Learner decision making**

Different factors motivated the focus group participants to enter the building industry. These included an intrinsic interest in the work (*I like to work outside, work with my hands, I enjoy it, I've wanted to do it since school*), the possibility of making good money, and the opportunities available through working in a growing trade. One participant was attracted to the building industry by the amount of variety in the job:

*There are so many different like, branches you've got with building to go into, so you can kinda, keep happy, and keep occupied and don't get too bored with it.*

The participants felt that the building industry could offer them job satisfaction.

For the majority of participants, training was seen as an integral part of the job, and entering training was by and large seen as their employer's decision (*got told to. It's just part of it*). One participant mentioned training as an opportunity, and another was doing it because he "wanted the bit of paper".

The participants were asked who influenced their decision to enter training/the industry. Family members were influential for a number of the participants, particularly those who had family in the industry. People on other worksites and mates were also mentioned. One participant was encouraged to enter an apprenticeship through pre-trade training.

The participants were interested in discussing why they thought their employer invested in training for them, and came up with a number of perceptive answers. These included preparation for the future:

*I think they're just trying to spend money to invest in the future, they realise there's a job shortage worldwide, if they train, they must know they're going to need a certain number of people in the future.*

providing career pathways:

*They want people to move up the ladder in-house.*

and being able to influence the development of their employees:

*We can be trained in the way they want us, so they can mould us in a way.*

The focus group members got into the building industry and training through different routes. Several had been working for a family member before entering an apprenticeship, others had been working in other industries, and one had done a pre-trade course at polytechnic. Two participants noted that apprenticeships were becoming easier to access, with opportunities now available for school leavers to go straight to an apprenticeship:

*I tried to get an apprenticeship, but it wasn't as easy as it is now. Now you can get someone who hasn't done a pre-trade straight into an apprenticeship, now they take people straight out of school, and um, most people on my pre-trade course got offered an apprenticeship, or job.*

*Yeah I think, unfortunately, when I was at school they weren't offering apprenticeships.*

## **Experience of industry training**

The participants were quick to describe a wide range of activities offered by their employer to foster learning. There was also a general impression amongst the participants that their employer was interested in their development, and that they saw the link between providing adequate support and achievement.

*I think there's an attraction of staying with you, they open a few doors for you, they encourage training so at the end of your apprenticeship maybe they'll stream*

*you off somewhere else if you're interested in carrying on so you stop working with tools.*

One participant talked about the opportunities to learn different skills on site:

*They have field days for us, they also set up in-house training, so they'll send you out on the yard... to build trusses for a day, you know, roofs, so they sort of train, within the company.*

Other forms of support offered by the employer included a training manager to supervise training, time off for off-job training (e.g. half an hour off before night classes), and specialised short courses.

*they send you on courses that are relevant to the job you're doing... they send you off for first aid things and um other licenses...*

Participants also noted the advantages of training with a bigger company as compared to a small one, and the difference that their employer's commitment to training made - which in turn influenced employees' attitudes to training:

*I'd have thought twice about doing my apprenticeship with a small crew – if there wasn't enough work for a smaller company, they'd [the apprentices] have to go find work, and other people to sign them up. Least with [company x] you get um...they keep you on until you've finished.*

*Some of the organisations I've worked for...some thought training was the biggest drag ever...I imagine companies spend thousands of dollars on training, and then for an employer that's not really enthusiastic about it, it's money wasted. So I mean in this one we all seem pretty enthusiastic about training. From experience, some people aren't at all.*

Being paid to learn was mentioned several times, which was motivating in the sense that it made participants feel a responsibility to complete their training, and participants also described how their employer made it clear that training was a part of the job:

*Probably gives you a bit of respect for your company, knowing that they're paying for you. Maybe I should do some work!*

*We're expected to; we'd be sent down the road if, you know, we ignored you're going to polytech. It's sort of, part and parcel, they employ you they expect it of you.*

Support from peers had an important place in encouraging learning:

*you've got your peers to bounce off while you're at polytech*

*you've got support while you learn, so you're not by yourself really*

Learning from more experienced workers was an area of concern for one participant who felt the generation gap between young apprentices and older builders caused tension:

*I think um, it's quite a bit issue with regards to getting training off your peers, as in people who have already been trained. Um, there are a lot of "old school" builders, that are on our site, and a lot of them have trouble accepting that there are apprentices and younger people coming through.*

Others talked about the value of support from experienced builders - if relationships were strained the company would offer a solution in order to maintain a harmonious working environment:

*If you get put alongside someone you get along with, it just makes coming to work so much easier eh, but then yeah, that's the luxury of a big company...if you say I'm not happy working with this person, generally you get moved*

One participant described the process of on-job learning, which involves keeping a log, mentioning that regular work documentation can be difficult. He also described how performance is monitored:

*...we get assessed by [ITO], um, and they just keep an eye on us, and [training manager] drills us, and tells us what we're doing wrong. Yeah, it is good we get like, checked on by two people, two different groups, so ah, keeps us on our toes eh*

The impact of changing technology provides incentives for everyone to learn, even for more experienced builders.

*Yep, I'd say they'd probably be learning too, there are always new products, so you never stop learning*

While in general the apprentices felt they were learning a variety of skills needed for the building business, roofing was seen as a gap in training for commercial builders. A possible solution was offered by one participant:

*I guess one of the things which was good was the roofing which was a big problem for the commercial apprentices, and I think it would be a good idea for [company x] to consider, you know, a secondment, to, um, a small building company, ah, where we can, you know work on, you know, the only aspect that we are not really doing is commercial building. I don't know if they do that.*

Participants talked about off-site learning at a polytechnic, which they saw as a theory-based supplement to their on-job learning; “It’s basically the theory to what we do on-job”.

Off-job learning was generally valued by the participants, but they believe it provides an overview rather than in-depth coverage, and there is a lack of time to engage.

*Um, I think it’s effective, I think it’s got a very, limited amount of time that you’ve got to run through a unit*

*Yeah, I think you just touch on the fundamentals at polytech, just the scrapings of what’s involved*

One participant talked about the difficulty of matching what was learnt off-job with what was happening on-site:

*It’s ah, kinda hard to match it up, exactly because, um, work you’re doing on-site, is not always going to match up with the units you’re doing at tech, um, and you don’t always do, a lot of it until you’re more experienced, like roofing and what not. And like you’ve got to try and understand that at tech, and you’re a little bit in the culture where you don’t have that hands-on experience, to relate to them so it’s pretty near impossible to match that up.*

Some participants saw the way that on and off-site training worked together, and appreciated the need for both:

*Yeah, and you’re not, you get a bit of both worlds, you’re in the class, and then you’re outside, hands-on.*

*You learn more on the job, learn more from the experience probably after the paper work...*

*you just touch on the fundamentals at polytech...and then you sort of get practice at work, and then you probably get more encouragement from your work peers, like, on how to do things that you’ve learnt at polytech.*

Others thought that informal learning on the job was more effective:

*I’ve managed to learn more from trial and error than anything else*

While off-job learning may not have been seen as immediately relevant to the job, one participant explained how what is learnt at polytechnic can become useful later on.

*... like I say it's not only, till you get onto the site that you actually realise – it sort of comes together, so you're sometimes blindly doing the paperwork, and then it only sort of clicks when you're on the building site building, so like I say, there's a mismatch, you might do a unit months ago, and then you finally clutch on it and you finally think "Oh I get what they were talking about now," so yeah, in a way it is it sorta comes back to what you're doing at work.*

## **Training outcomes**

Many of the participants saw that learning was a necessary part of building up the competencies needed to do the job – they talked about building their knowledge (*More knowledge, of the products that you're using, Some of the technical names of things*) as well as skills for working efficiently:

*When you're on the site you can find like, easier ways to do things*

A number of the comments made by participants throughout the interview hinted that the company had an interest in providing a career pathway for their employees. A couple of the participants appeared interested in progressing their careers in the industry:

*Yeah I don't see myself being behind the tools for my whole career, its early days yet, but I'd like to think I can branch out into something else, yeah*

One participant talked about how training helped to give a sense of what a role with more responsibility would be like:

*Well it gives you an insight on actually how the work's done, so you can go to a job, and you go oh yeah, its going to take a guy a day to do, and you go yeah okay he's got a day to do it instead of going oh, it will take half a day give him half a day to do it*

*...you can sort of see problems that you'll come across, possibly come across and go oh yeah that might happen and allow for it type of thing.*

The participants were clear that participating in training effected how much they got paid, and that they would get a pay rise when they finished their qualification.

*With the apprenticeship you're working towards a qualified tradesman's rates, and once you finish you get onto that rate.*

*Yeah – while you're training it usually goes up as well*

Some participants had the impression that pay rises were linked to the amount of time in training:

*it goes up every 6 months I think, yeah, every 6 months.*

Others believed that learning achievement also had an impact on pay:

*the harder you work the quicker you can get a pay rise. The more you get signed off in a 6 month period, in theory you can get a bigger pay rise.*

One participant noted that linking skill gains with pay was commonplace, but another pointed out that other workplaces didn't have this system:

*I suppose it's just like any other job, the more experience you have, you're gonna be worth more to the company so they pay you more.*

*At the place I used to work we used to stay on the same rate unless you asked for a pay rise.*

A number of the participants saw that the building skills they had developed could be applied outside the workplace, through being able to fix things around the home, or earning extra money on the weekends:

*But it's good for, you know, amongst your family, family members have something to do you can go do love jobs for your family or something*

*I think that was one of the incentives for me, become a builder you can like, get your wage for working at work and then um, go and get a couple hundred bucks on the weekend as well, but you know, you can always earn more, earn as much as you want really.*

As well as specific building skills, the participants talked about a broader set of skills which will be useful for work and life, with a particular emphasis on interpersonal skills:

*The opportunity, so like, first aid and all that kinda stuff, like life skills, um yeah, helping each other out, better awareness of your surroundings and what not, working up high, yeah, learning to tolerate people, and things*

The participants also talked about how training prepared them for further learning, as well as enabling them to keep learning informally and sending signals to future employers about their ability to continue to learn.

*I've also been on projects, if I was ever to go on another course, outside of building, I'd know how to do it better now, like, they help you with assessment writing, and definitely with the genuine work, they sort of follow through, make sure that you complete, so if I was ever to do another course, I'd go about it a lot better. I'd know how it was, sort of, how it was structured.*

*I think it shows in terms of employers that you've got it, you can learn formally.*

The majority of apprentices mentioned that they planned to go overseas when they finished their apprenticeship. The one exception here was the older learner. Going overseas offers them opportunities to earn better money, progress their careers and see what the world is like.

*I think with going overseas there's opportunities to gain more experience and come back – you can further yourself overseas*

There was also a general agreement that they would come back once they'd been overseas and return to working in the building industry. Many members of the group gave the impression that they saw themselves in building for the long term, either staying as a tradesperson, moving up into office positions, or starting their own company.

Some had no plans to continue with formal learning once they had completed their apprenticeships, while others intended to continue with learning. The following statement sums up how one of the participants saw that working with his current company provided opportunities to learn and progress:

*the way I thought of it is that if any training comes up, well, I intend to take it with both hands, because its there available to you, for free, and you get paid for it you know, I mean its there you may as well get as much knowledge as you can while you're in this environment. And they effectively make you aware that... there's room for further progression type, through training, if you're keen to do it they'll make sure they encourage you to do it.*

## **Engineering apprentices**

Two focus groups were held with engineering apprentices, one in Hamilton, based at an off-job provider involving 3 learners, and one in Palmerston North, again at an off-job provider with 10 learners. While there were commonalities between the groups, in some areas they had quite distinct experiences. The responses of both groups are combined in the following discussion.

### **About the learners**

All the participants were male, and the majority were in their 20s (with one under 20 and two over 30). The engineering apprentices differed from the building apprentices in that the engineering apprentices came from several different workplaces. The majority had either a pre-trade qualification or 6<sup>th</sup> Form Certificate/NCEA level 2 prior to entering their apprenticeship. All but one were working towards a Level 4 National Certificate in Maintenance and Diagnostics, and most were in the second or third year of their apprenticeship.

## Learner decision making

Amongst the 13 apprentices talked to, there were a variety of pathways into the industry and into industry training. A few had come directly from school, with two working in the same businesses as their fathers. The majority had come from a pre-apprenticeship and/or a different trades-based industry (such as motor mechanics, electrical engineering or farming). Going into engineering was seen as a career change for several of the participants.

Two learners talked about how school had provided them with work-based experiences which encouraged them to engage in trades-based learning, one in New Zealand and one in Australia:

*we did engineering at school, and they sent us down there [the paper mill] for 6 months 1 day a week... it was real good, got to see what happens down there and get a feel for it, and I did my work experience out at the mill out there, so yeah, sort of pretty much got into doing it down there*

*I did um, an entering pathways programme through school that they have over in Australia... they have you, you know on lathes, and welding at school instead of metal work here, you know schools here, you make a camping shovel, that's about it.*

Several factors contributed to the decision to enter the industry, with the main ones relating to intrinsic interest and the kinds of conditions offered.

*Just interested in it, and pretty much everywhere you look there's engineering. So when you've got that sort of mindset...*

Being able to do a variety of work was an attraction (*just the variety I think, and you get to use your brain*), and the fact that the work could be challenging was also appealing for several of the apprentices (*it's always a challenge, something new comes along*).

Many of the apprentices gave the general impression that engineering suited their personalities, and for some, it gave them a great deal of satisfaction.

*It's just something you love to do you know... to be able to stand back and say, I built that, or I've just repaired that, and go oh well it's working, and that's satisfactory, being able to stand back and look at the job knowing that you did that*

In regard to conditions, better pay (relative to some other trades), and the ability to work with your hands and move around was mentioned:

*engineering is quite hands on, and I can't be stuffed being cooped up inside a class room, or an office doing trivial mundane paperwork, I'd rather be out moving, doing something. Engineering you can be doing a job in a workshop outside a workshop doing a job, it's a lot of indoor/outdoor moving around type of stuff*

The participants perceived an apprenticeship as a key requirement in securing a good position within the industry with corresponding pay, and this was why many were involved in training. Commitment to the industry was also seen as an important pre-requisite and motivator for undertaking an apprenticeship.

*...that's pretty much the only way to get a decent job in the trade is to do an apprenticeship*

*I was making cars 15 years before even doing the pre-apprenticeship, you know it's just like, the paper work is obviously going to get me more money*

*you've got to want that job before you start the apprenticeship, you know, that's what gave you the incentive to do the apprenticeship*

One participant talked about the relative position of an engineering employee who has achieved their qualification compared to one who hasn't:

*... I can't see the point in being an engineer, or any form of trade, working 5 years, and where you could still be on no more money at the end of 5 years, have no qualification, and the person next to you has done all the paper work, the hard work, he's on an extra 5 dollars an hour than you...you've been there for 10 years and you're basically a labourer, you know you can't get any further than that, you have to do the apprenticeship to get more money, to get more skill, start your own business and all that sort of stuff*

Participants also noted that completing an apprenticeship would provide them with an advantage in the job market:

*...the guy's going to look at it and go, well, this guy's got his trade, and it's a guarantee you know, and you say, well you should know that this guy knows his stuff because he's got a certificate saying he does, it's a guaranteed way of getting yourself a really good job*

For some, entering the job and doing the apprenticeship went hand in hand, and employers/managers were at times quite influential in the decision to undertake training:

*when I started working in engineering it was, you know I was working as an apprentice as well, it was an opportunity as well*

One apprentice was positively encouraged to take part, but others had to actively push to participate:

*Basically, there was a notice on the wall, and I was like, nah bugger that, too much work, but then basically the foreman was like nah just do, just do it, you'll be fine, and so I was like, oh, nah yep, go and do it.*

Learner 1: *I think it was offered to us wasn't it?*

Learner 2: *nah,*

Learner 1: *you suggested it?*

Learner 2: *I demanded it!*

Learner 1: *That's how we got it too*

Learner 2: *If they didn't provide an apprenticeship I was going to go somewhere else that was going to offer one.*

## **Experience of industry training**

Many of the learners felt well-supported by their employer, noting that the employer paid for some or all of their learning. Others had mixed views about the level of involvement their employers had in encouraging learning to take place. For some, their employer directly encouraged them to make progress:

*I find they like, they obviously want you to advance in a couple of areas, he'll like give you the opportunity to let you have a go you know, push you along by saying, 'I'll give you a raise'*

For a few of the others, the employer's focus on the bottom line and the pressures caused by skill shortages meant that they were not interested in supporting learning.

*we know how to do our job, if they switch us round, we won't be making money for them...I think a big issue too is a shortage of staff in the industry...that's why I've been, partly why I've been in the weld shop the whole time, because they can't find staff for the industry*

The role of the foreman in supporting learning was mentioned a couple of times, with one learner discussing how his foreman has taken an active interest in his development:

*not so much the boss, but the foreman helps me out quite a bit, trying to get me into different areas, because our factory has got several different divisions in it, ah, people from other divisions have started sort of getting me into different parts...*

The majority of learners also commented positively on the support offered by experienced tradespeople in their workplaces, who were a key source of learning throughout the apprenticeship:

*if you get a job that you haven't gotten before, the boss, the foreman that gives it to me will usually say to me oh, go and talk to such and such, they know how to do it, can show you how to do it*

Not all experienced tradespeople were helpful though, and one learner felt that experienced tradespeople could be used more formally in the apprenticeship:

***if you were to run apprenticeships differently, what kind of things would you do to make it work better?***

*I'd have gone straight through the tradesman, so the tradespeople at your work.*

Learners talked about some of the formal processes involved in learning on the job (documenting work and undertaking assessments), but also explained that trial and error was an important strategy.

*and you do the notes and do the requirement for the unit and maybe a little test after that, and that's it*

Some of the apprentices talked about the support that was available from assessors and co-ordinators, who provide them with structure, motivation and challenge. For several, the structured part of on-job learning was not found to be very helpful.

*all the assessors are pretty good, they're always checking up on you, you know...*

*they [the apprenticeship coordinators] send us like contracts you know, like monthly contracts to do bits and pieces...deadlines help*

*nah, it's just the workplace, that's where you learn everything, or the tradesmen, they're the ones that are teaching you, all the book-work, yeah, it's just sort of, you know, have to cross the 't's and dot the 'i's to get signed off*

The majority of learners found that what they were learning was relevant to their job and the unit standards were well-matched with what they did every day: *it's pretty much as you do it at work*. Some participants however, found the apprenticeship material needed to better reflect changes in technology.

For many of the engineering apprentices, off-job training was useful as it provided them with the opportunity to put some of their book-work into practice, reinforcing the concepts from on-job learning:

*it just sums up what you did on the notes before you come here too...you don't have a clue about it, then you come here and you actually like, do it*

*I found that last year I understood more, after I finished the course*

Off-job training also gave the learners new ways of performing tasks, both because the tutors came from industry backgrounds, and because they were learning with other apprentices from the same industry:

*the tutors here have been in totally different jobs than I have been in, so their experience in different areas is helpful, whereas, some of their experience, like my experience has superseded that in other areas...you just pick up the best from everyone*

*you know it's the old thing about twenty heads being better than one, you know, you might have one angle on a job, and you know, you think this is the way it should be done, and someone will come in and be like, oh well, you know, you just do it that way you know, try something a bit different, and it could pay off*

A couple of apprentices did have some negative experiences of off-job training, with the block-course provider not meeting their expectations. They expressed concerns about the quality of teaching, learning materials, equipment and assessment processes.

*when you're here on a block course it's like a holiday, the teacher is not there, or doesn't know anything, half the class is not listening.*

The communication and organisational skills of tutors were sometimes lacking, and it was felt by one participant that tutors should have a combination of teaching skills and industry experience:

*they should have some sort of teaching qualification...they've [tutors] got no communication skills for group communications, teachers are trained in that way, it's their job to talk to students, tradesmen are paid to be tradesmen*

Assessment was an area where two of the participants felt they were being let down. They felt that there was no rigour in the assessment of standards.

*...you'll read all these ways of testing steels and stuff like that but you don't actually do any of them, so you just get told about them, you write stuff down but you don't really know what it is, so you're still passing but you don't even know what it is, they just say "write it down here" and you pass*

Views were mixed on the effectiveness of combining off and on-job learning, and of unit standards-based learning. As mentioned above, some learners felt that on and off-job learning reinforced each other, providing an effective way to

ensure theory is reinforced by practice. Several participants felt that learning was too broken up, creating a situation where it was difficult to retain knowledge. This suggests that aspects of the older system (in particular the sitting of a final registration exam) might improve the quality of learning.

It was felt that completing an apprenticeship enables learners to develop knowledge and skills across a breadth of areas, rather than developing expertise in one particular area.

*there's a lot of different areas...if someone doesn't do welding every day, you can't expect them to turn around in two years time and do a perfect weld... you've got to have a basic general knowledge of all areas, I don't think you can really target one area*

Many of the apprentices had some experience of training including pre-apprenticeships, with a mixture of good and bad experiences. The following quote highlights how one participant found workplace learning better suited him:

*I wanted to get into civil engineering, and um, I went to uni but I hated it... You're just, one of the crowd... that's why I'm better at the workshop... actually doing it and stuff like that. Just sitting in a classroom listening to one lecture and there's like, 300 people in the same classroom is, just not me...*

As mentioned, employers pay some or all of the costs involved with training. While many of the apprentices agreed that having the employer pay for their learning was helpful, a few saw that paying for some of it themselves could be motivating:

*I'm putting in about half, and I think, you know, it's my money wasted, each time a year goes by I've gotta put a bit more money in it, so you know I try a bit harder*

The learners were also asked if they were given time at work to study. One learner was part of a group training scheme, and would go off-site to study. The majority, however, did their book-work outside of work (at home), and some found it difficult to fit learning with full time work. A couple of participants thought that it would be helpful to have time at work to complete training requirements:

*It's pretty hard some days, because like on the weekends you don't want to stay home, and at the end of the work day, you're too stuffed to do paperwork, so some weeks it just doesn't get done*

## Training outcomes

For the majority of engineering apprentices, there was a definite link between their training and their ability to do their job. The apprentices described how training enabled them to be more productive and efficient, and how it gave them the ability to ensure clients are confident that they can do a good job:

*higher quality, like, anyone can put a bit of weld on a bit of steel, but not everyone can do a good weld, that's the difference*

For a couple of the apprentices, achieving the qualification would help them to meet their career goals, but they felt they were not getting opportunities to build their skills and knowledge because of a lack of employer and tutor support.

The skills that participants developed through their apprenticeships could also be useful outside of their specific workplaces:

*it helps with your hobbies and stuff, I ride motorbikes, and just fixing things, making new stuff, you can do it, you've got the skills*

In addition to this, some participants talked about how an apprenticeship helped them to develop broader project management skills: "problem solving, costing, all of that".

When asked, learners confirmed that their pay was linked to training, and for some, this helped motivate them to complete. One participant noted that while systems were in place for linking the achievement of unit standards to pay rises, in reality this wasn't working because he was not making progress:

*in theory it's supposed to, but...you've got to get marked off to get your credits, to get the pay rise, and in our department it just doesn't happen.*

One participant saw a need to have additional indicators of performance as a basis for pay rises, as gaining qualifications does not necessarily guarantee quality work.

### *Career progression and future aspirations*

From the perspective of the learners, doing an apprenticeship was an essential part of establishing their careers in engineering.

*you do an apprenticeship you can go away and pretty much do anything, you can do anything you want*

Many of the participants were looking at staying in the industry for the long term, but also saw that participating in Maintenance and Diagnostics training provided them with skills they could use in a wide range of areas, including mechanics,

fabrication and building. One learner saw an apprenticeship as a way of financing his goal to become a pilot:

*being a tradesman where I am, it's pretty good money and it pays for all my flying lessons*

A couple of apprentices planned to own their own engineering business at some stage, and training was seen as helpful in gaining the experience needed to prepare for that.

As the apprentices (particularly the older ones) tended to see themselves as workers rather than students, they felt that any further training they did would have to be closely related to their jobs. A few mentioned that they might go on to the Level 5 Maintenance and Diagnostics qualification, which includes supervisory skills.

Gaining a qualification was also seen as helpful for several of the apprentices who planned on going overseas at some stage:

*...locally, people sort of know your experience, but a job interview in America or something, you've got the bit of paper... it's a guaranteed way of getting yourself a really good job*

## ***Discussion of focus group findings***

A comparison of responses to the themes discussed in the focus groups is provided in the table below.

	<b>Building apprentices</b>	<b>Engineering apprentices</b>
<b>Decision making</b>		
<i>Reasons for entering industry</i>	Intrinsic interest Security through a trade Variety of work	Intrinsic interest Variety and challenge Security through a trade Conditions and pay Career change
<i>Reasons for doing industry training</i>	Integral to job Opportunity to develop skills Piece of paper	Integral to job Advantage in the labour market/ability to move into different jobs Career progression/pay
<i>Influencers</i>	Employer Family (especially family in the industry) Pre-trade	Employer Family in industry Pre-trade (school and tertiary education)
<b>Experience of industry training</b>		
<i>Employer support</i>	Supportive, interest in development of staff Provide opportunities for progression Variety of formal and informal learning opportunities In-house training manager Time off for study	Some employers were seen as supportive – e.g. paying for learning; others were more focused on the bottom line Active encouragement and variety of work (though some stuck in one place)
<i>Peer support</i>	Learn and get support from being in a group Experienced peers important in providing support, but potential tension (generation gap)	Respect for experienced trades people – through some are more helpful than others Experienced trades people could be used more effectively as part of the apprenticeship
<i>On-job learning</i>	Support and challenge provided by training manager and ITO Hard to maintain balance between work and learning Repetition and variety provided in workplace Learning helps to do the job	Support and challenge from co-ordinator and assessors for most (not there for a few) Hard to maintain balance between work and learning Book-work and unit standards relevant for most, others found need to update for new technology Variety of tasks in workplace support learning
<i>Off-job learning</i>	Effective, provides theory and overview Limited time to complete Doesn't always immediately match up with job (but may be useful later)	Group learning provides opportunities to learn new approaches Variable quality between providers Tutors could benefit from teacher training alongside trade experience
<i>Interaction of on and off-job learning</i>	Complementary – learn more on the job after doing the paperwork (putting theory into practice)	When working well, reinforces learning on-job Formal exams suggested by a few as a way to better integrate and retain knowledge

<b>Training outcomes</b>		
<i>Ability to do the job</i>	Formal knowledge (product and technical) Better processes (how to be more efficient and effective)	Higher quality work, improved productivity and efficiency
<i>Career progression</i>	Training helps to show how the business works, opportunities to move up the company	Mixture of training and experience prepares learners for higher positions along formal career path/owning own business (though some saw it as just a piece of paper needed to get ahead)
<i>Qualifications and pay</i>	Formal system of linking training to pay increases (when finished apprenticeship, go onto tradesperson rates)	Formal system linking training to pay (motivating for some, though others saw need to also link performance to pay)
<i>Skills outside of job</i>	Building skills useful around the home, work on the weekends Life skills, working in groups, health & safety, learning to learn (confidence about the learning process)	Useful for other jobs/hobbies Client services and project management to a limited extent
<i>Future aspirations</i>	In building for the long term Going overseas Further training	In engineering for the long term Going overseas Further training has to be closely related to job (e.g. Level 5 supervisor qualification or Bachelor of Engineering)

The table above shows that the building and engineering apprentices who participated in the focus groups had very similar reasons for entering their chosen industry and Industry Training. Interest in the work was a primary motivator and training was seen as integral to the job. They also had similar influencers; primarily their employer, or family involved in the industry, but for others it was just something they wanted to do. None of the participants had received advice or encouragement to enter industry training/an apprenticeship from school. Their aspirations for the future were comparable, with the majority committed to staying in the industry for the long term and many (particularly the younger ones) anticipating working in the same industry overseas in the near future. In both the building and the engineering groups there were several apprentices who planned on moving into management/owning their own business.

While there were many similarities, there were also areas of divergence between the learning experiences of the three different focus groups. The building apprentices were positive about learning, outlining the impact of formal aspects of learning as well as providing a picture of a strong learning culture within their workplace. For them, learning provided opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills, and to explore their potential within the building industry. They expressed loyalty to their company, which they could see was actively investing in them.

For many engineering apprentices, learning through the apprenticeship provided skills and experience that related to their jobs, and could be useful across a range of trades. The on-job component of learning was relevant and well-structured, with good support from assessors and co-ordinators. They generally felt supported by their employers, who paid for training and provided opportunities to work in a variety of areas, but some felt more time to do book-work would be helpful. Off-job learning was a chance to learn off others and try new things, and was seen to reinforce the on-job training component.

A few of the engineering apprentices did not feel as well-supported, and they described how a lack of opportunities to learn at work was a barrier to progress. While they valued the knowledge of more experienced workers, their expectations of learning had not been met. They expressed concerns about the quality of off-job tutors, equipment, assessment methods and the need for learning to reflect changes in technology.

Employers' different attitudes to learning were interestingly portrayed when skill shortages were mentioned by participants of different groups. One apprentice believed that skill shortages provided an incentive for his employer to invest in training in order to retain and progress staff. Another apprentice felt that skill shortages made it difficult for his employer to maintain production levels. He believed he was stuck in one place because the employer saw learning as a cost, because it temporarily lowered productivity and compromised profitability.

As a result of the different experiences of training, the expected outcomes were also different. The building apprentices talked about tangible outcomes from learning, in particular being able to do their job more effectively, and of being better prepared for further learning and progression in the industry. The majority of engineering apprentices also talked about producing higher quality work and being more productive as a result of training. The engineering apprentices did not, however, identify themselves as learners to the same extent that the building apprentices did; the apprenticeship was seen more as a means to meeting their career goals. Any further learning would have to be closely related to their jobs. The engineering apprentices were from different workplaces, and tended to have more work experience than the building apprentices, which may in part explain why they identified themselves more as workers than learners.

All three groups had employers who directly linked qualification achievement to pay. This worked well for the building apprentices, who saw it as an incentive to learn. The engineering apprentices had mixed views; most found it motivating, but some felt job performance also needed to be taken into account with regard to remuneration. A few did not find the link helpful because they felt they were not making progress in their apprenticeship.

## Implications for Industry Training

The focus groups provide some interesting lessons for Industry Training, highlighting what is working well and illustrating areas for possible improvement. The majority of the apprentices were committed to being in the industry based on interest in, and enjoyment of, what they do. They had high expectations of learning, and in the main these expectations were being met. Even the apprentices who were not going so well saw their future in the industry, and intended to see the apprenticeship through. For employers, ITOs and training providers, reiterating at key times how training will help the individual to meet their career goals in the industry may be a good way to keep learners motivated.

The apprentices picked up on whether their employer was committed to training or not, and this impacted on their motivation. Employers who demonstrate a belief in training and provide support for learning help learners to commit themselves to training and to the job. Demonstrating a commitment to learning does not have to be expensive and/or formal, but can involve activities such as providing opportunities for learners to experience a variety of different activities within the workplace and showing an interest in learners' career development.

Some apprentices found it difficult to balance work and training. Having more experienced workers or a training manager involved in learning, and putting aside time for completing workbooks/assignments helps to keep learners motivated and on top of their training.

Experienced workers are an important part of learning, but they do have the potential to undermine training if they do not see its value. A good way that some Industry Training Organisations utilise the expertise of experienced workers is by using them as workplace assessors. While this might not work in every situation, involving experienced workers in the training process is likely to foster a more supportive learning environment.

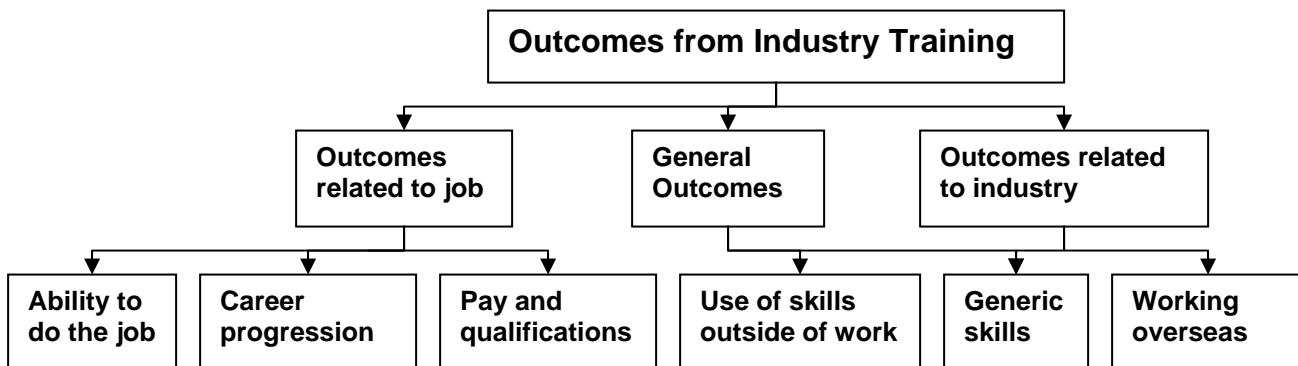
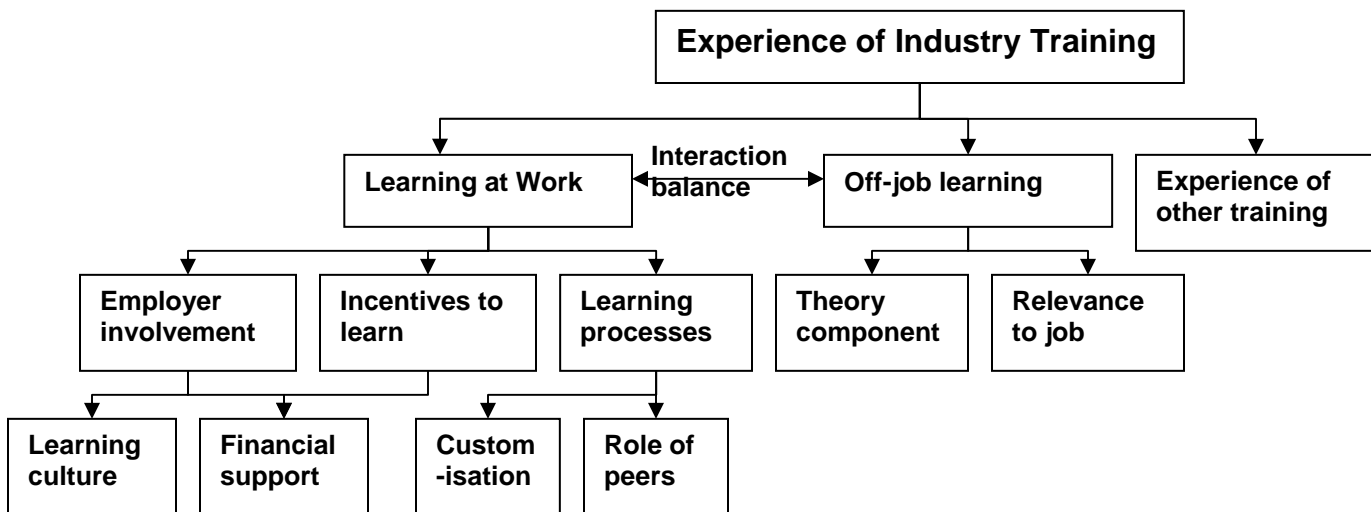
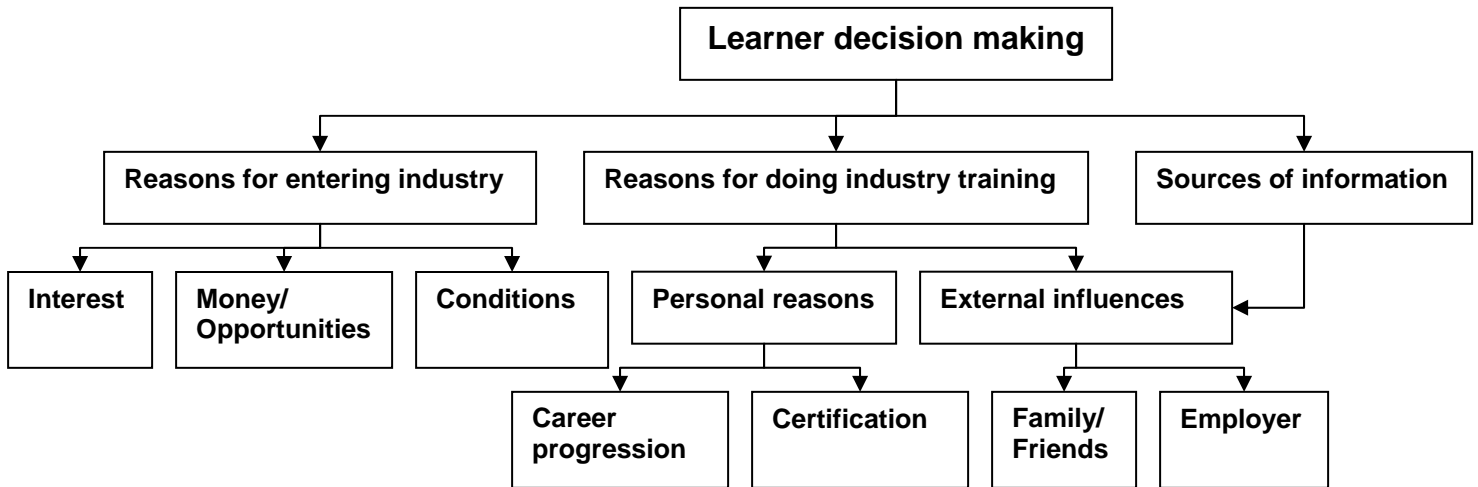
Learners are full of ideas for improving learning, with the following examples put forward in the focus groups:

- providing teacher training for off-job tutors;
- secondments to different companies to learn new skills; and
- more formal use of experienced tradespeople.

This kind of information can be used to improve training, and can be gathered through existing mechanisms such as training satisfaction surveys or more informal contact and discussions with learners.

Linking qualifications and pay can be motivating for learners, but on its own is not enough to ensure learning happens. It has to be coupled with employer commitment to training, high quality learning experiences and measures of job performance.

# Appendix 1: Learner perceptions of industry training



## Appendix 2: Literature review references

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