



WAIHANGA ARA RAU

**Construction and
Infrastructure**

Workforce Development Council

BCATS SUMMARY REPORT

NOVEMBER 2025

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1. PURPOSE

This report summarises the process to introduce of graded skill standards for BCATS (Building, Construction, and Allied Trades Skills). Waihanga Ara Rau undertook this collaborative journey with our stakeholders between 2023–2025.

The shift to a graded approach was a response to sector feedback and reflected a desire for clearer progression and recognition of learner achievement.

It also presents key insights from an assessment pilot project and offers guidance to support successful implementation and assessment practices for schools, tertiary providers and other users of BCATS.

2. INTRODUCTION

Waihanga Ara Rau (Construction and Infrastructure) Workforce Development Council completed a review of the **Building Construction and Allied Trade Skills (BCATS) qualifications**, to ensure they remained fit for purpose.

- ▶ New Zealand Certificate in Building, Construction, and Allied Trades Skills (Level 1) [Ref: 3843]
- ▶ New Zealand Certificate in Building, Construction, and Allied Trades Skills (Level 2) [Ref: 3844]
- ▶ New Zealand Certificate in Building, Construction, and Allied Trades Skills (Level 3) [Ref: 3845]

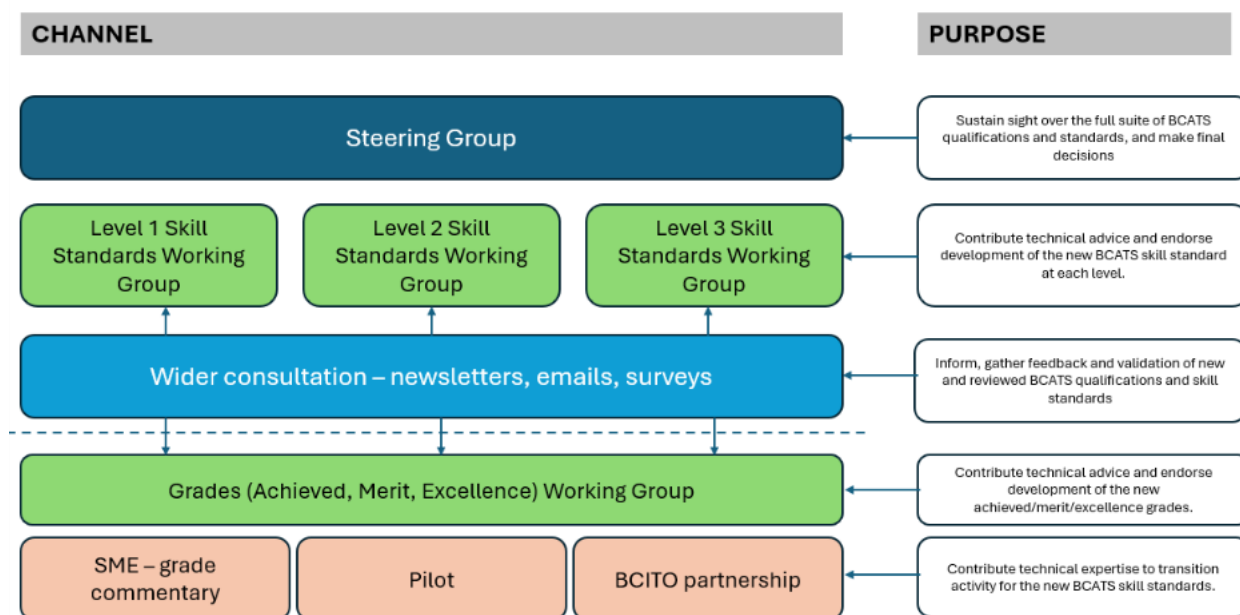
At the same time, we developed a [new suite of skill standards](#) better suited to the needs of ākonga (learners) and BCATS industries. All new skill standards include Achieved, Merit, and Excellence grades to differentiate a student's level of performance and achievement.

We heard it was important that the standards still focus on the practical projects ākonga undertake and the entry-level industry skills that they develop as a result. To maintain this focus, the step-ups between grades reflect how well the skill is demonstrated, showing progression in performance, rather than introducing new learning or skills.

The inclusion of Achieved, Merit and Excellence grades improves the attractiveness and parity of BCATS in comparison to other subject/career choices, particularly in upper secondary education. The standards contribute to certificate level and overall NCEA endorsement.¹ This has the potential to significantly impact future training and career prospects.

¹ As these skill standards are industry skill standards and not aligned to National Curriculum subjects, BCATS is not an approved subject course for University Entrance (UE).

3. DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



The development process was structured to include multiple channels and targeted consultation:

- Oversight was provided by a Steering Group which maintained visibility across the full suite of BCATS qualifications and standards and made final decisions.
- Technical input was provided by three dedicated Working Groups, each responsible for developing and refining skill standards at their respective level.
- Sector engagement occurred throughout the duration of the development process using newsletters, emails, and surveys to provide updates on progress, gather feedback and validate new and revised qualifications.

In December 2023, Waihanga Ara Rau decided to pursue the inclusion of grading. A specific Grades Working Group was established. This group provided technical advice and endorsed the development of grading criteria.

Between October and November 2024, draft skill standards were distributed for consultation through an online survey. This targeted key stakeholders including providers and industry representatives. The results confirmed strong support for the new graded criteria and identified concerns and potential risks raised by providers². All feedback was considered and addressed by the Steering Group prior to submission to NZQA.

² See *BCATS Skill Standards Wider Consultation Feedback Report*, August 2024.

4. SUPPORTING THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO GRADED BCATS SKILL STANDARDS

Several risks and concerns were identified during the development of graded BCATS skill standards.

To support successful implementation and equitable outcomes for learners, Waihangā Ara Rau partnered with BCITO to evaluate these risks and consider potential mitigations. Our key actions included:

- developing assessment commentary by subject matter experts
- partnering with BCITO who updated the resources and assessments to reflect the new skill standards
- piloting assessment of the new skill standards (details of the assessment pilot and recommendations can be found in section 5 below).

SUPPORTING CONSISTENCY

Consistency in awarding grades across schools and tertiary providers is critical. Waihangā Ara Rau has developed clear grade criteria and provided supporting commentary to ensure fairness and a shared understanding among assessors.

BCITO's update to resources and assessment includes project diaries to support evidence collection and teacher assessment resources that will work in conjunction with the Programme Guidance document.

SUPPORTING EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Achievement standards are sometimes perceived as being too academic. Clear messaging will reinforce that BCATS skill standards are distinct from achievement standards and are designed to reflect industry-valued skills. Grading progression relates to the complexity and quality of practical skills, not academic theory.

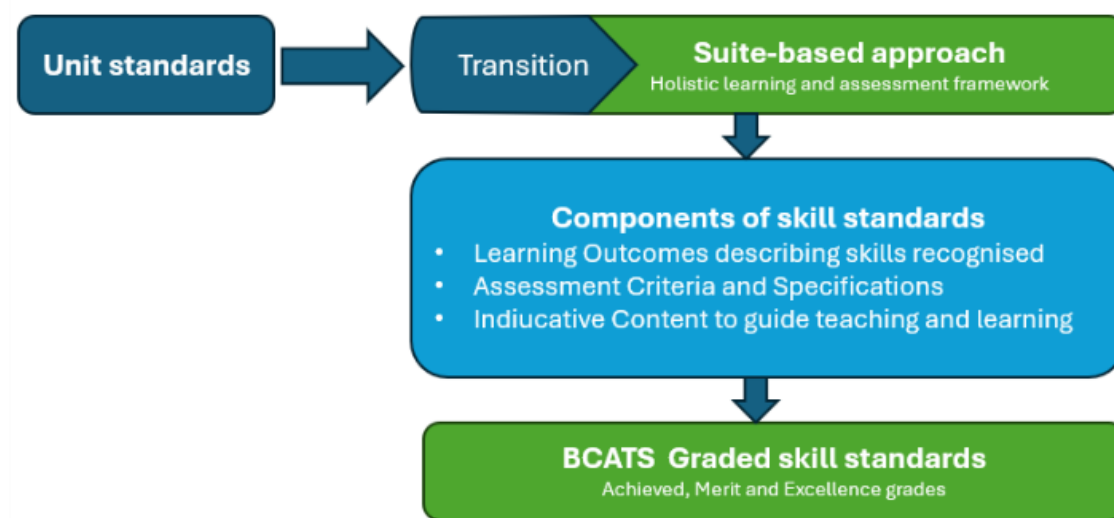
Concerns about the impact on learners with poor literacy and numeracy were also raised. Skill standards and the related assessments are designed to emphasise practical skill demonstration rather than written ability, except where literacy is linked to learning outcomes. Additional resources will support literacy and numeracy development without limiting access to merit and excellent grades.

BCITO's updated BCATS resources will be easily accessible to teachers, ākonga and home educators and will be publicly available through their platforms.

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS

The need for professional development and moderation support for teachers was identified. Waihanga Ara Rau and BCITO developed an implementation plan that included piloting of the skill standards, professional development opportunities, documented guidance information (see section 5 below) and networking to ensure consistent implementation and confidence in the new standards.

UNDERSTANDING GRADED SKILL STANDARDS



Skill standards are designed to recognise practical skills through clear learning outcomes supported by assessment criteria and specifications.

Assessment criteria describe the expected measures for each outcome, providing assessors with clear guidance.

Assessment specifications outline conditions for assessment, including scope, definitions, and requirements for consistency. For example, “within a BCATS project context” ensures evidence is authentic and practical.

A new feature is **Indicative content**, which identifies key topics for teaching and learning. This ensures industry confidence that essential knowledge is covered, without over-assessment.

The BCATS suite of graded skill standards is intended for use as a cohesive package within structured environments, such as schools.

Graded skill standards typically have one learning outcome, with progression between grades reflecting increasing complexity and quality of skill application. The grades recognise practical ability and progression in skill demonstration, supporting parity with other subjects and career pathways. Merit and Excellence do not introduce new learning but require higher levels of

performance, often defined through terms like “effectively” or “efficiently,” supported by explanatory notes. This structure encourages all learners to aim for excellence while maintaining a strong focus on practical projects and entry-level industry skills. Credit allocations were also considered to align with school timetables and programme design.

For further guidance on skill standards, resources such as [ConCOVE good practice guides](#), [NZQA guidelines](#), and [Waihangā Ara Rau webinars](#) are available.

USE PROGRAMME GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Programme Guidance is a key resource in the kete supporting BCATS skill standards. It:

Contains key information, which may not be included in other NZQA products, on:

- Understanding and supporting the transition from unit standards,
- Equity considerations and te Tiriti o Waitangi requirements,
- The role of BCATS skill standards as building blocks leading to BCATS qualifications.

Works alongside the BCITO resources to provide supporting assessment commentary – essential to best practice assessment. For each grade (Not Achieved, Achieved, Merit, Excellence), the commentary includes:

- An overarching description of the grade,
- Indicative criteria for evidence,

Examples of the skills demonstrated at each grade in practice.

WHEN CAN YOU START USING THE BCATS SKILL STANDARDS?

The new graded BCATS skill standards are available now. However, providers, including schools, must use approved assessment materials when delivering and assessing these standards. BCITO is developing updated teaching, learning, and assessment resources to support implementation, ensuring these materials are accessible in time for planning for 2026. The assessment materials will be pre-moderated and approved for use.

TRANSITION & EXPIRY

The existing unit standards are now designated expiring. The last date for assessing the unit standards is 31 December 2027. This will allow for a managed transition during 2026 and 2027.

EXCLUSION LIST

While the standards can be used from 2026, there will be an overlap period where both skill standards and existing unit standards remain in use. An Exclusion List (developed to prevent the

use of credits from standards that recognise similar outcomes to be used together in the same programme or course of study) is included in the Programme Guidance.

CONSENT TO ASSESS

The BCATS skill standards listed in the **Building Construction and Allied Trades Skills domain** – meaning that they still exist in the Base Scope of Assessment for Schools.

If you are a provider and already have Consent to Assess for the BCATS domains, consent is being extended to the new suite of skill standards. The details are available here [Unit Standard Change report](#).

5. BCATS PILOT PROJECT

The BCATS Pilot Project for skill standard [40546](#), *Create joints for a BCATS project or related tasks* (Level 1) commenced in Term 2. The pilot trailed BCITO's new learning and assessment resource alongside the skill standard document and supporting assessment commentary across seven participants, including five secondary schools, one private training establishment (PTE), and one industry training provider (ITP).

The purpose of the pilot was *"For educational professionals to provide feedback that will inform the transition to Achieved, Merit and Excellence grading for BCATS skill standards."* The pilot aimed to explore and provide feedback on the Waihangā Ara Rau grade commentary and the new BCITO resource design, and how grading decisions aligned with the intended standards and grade criteria.

PARTICIPANT'S FEEDBACK

Responses from pilot participants reflected strong engagement and endorsed graded BCATS skill standards. Teacher/tutor participants told us:

- They have seen an increase in focus, effort, and quality of outcomes.
- Ākonga are enthusiastic about graded BCATS skill standards and enjoy the process.
- Grading acts as a motivator – ākonga:
 - take more pride in their work.
 - are prompted and inspired by the opportunity to achieve Merit and Excellence. Certainly, many were aiming for Merit and Excellence from the outset, thanks to clear criteria and early communication. Some have restarted projects to aim higher.
- Ākonga appreciated the clarity and transparency of the grading process, and alignment with other subjects and standards. They had a strong understanding of grade requirements, supported by familiarity with achievement standards, which helped them confidently navigate and meet expectations.
- As assessors, teachers/tutors found the supporting assessment commentary helpful for decision-making and provided suggestions for improvements.
- The new BCITO resources received widespread praise for their design, usability, and alignment with Universal Design for Learning principles, especially for diverse learning needs.

Overall, the pilot demonstrated that the new graded skill standards foster motivation, deeper thinking, and improved learning experiences compared to traditional unit standards.

SUPPORTING GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Skill standards do not introduce new forms of assessment. However, they are more encouraging of good practice assessment. This is reassuring, as post-assessment moderation from the pilot showed that assessments grades were not always fully aligned with the evidence presented.

The primary theme emerging from the pilot reinforced the risk of inconsistency identified during the development of graded BCATS skill standards. The following section explores this theme in detail and provides recommendations to strengthen assessment practice.

CLUSTER MODERATION WORKSHOPS SUPPORT GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Community of Practice forums play a role in facilitating good practice assessment against graded skill standards is the second clear theme to emerge from the BCATS pilot. Cluster moderation workshops, where assessment evidence and ensuing judgements are peer reviewed, are invaluable. Discussion, evaluation, and problem solving build a shared and consistent understanding that enables application of those good practice assessment principles, and the consistent improvement we all strive for.

Enquiry-based workshops are needed to ensure consistent measurement of ākonga performance against grade criteria, within and across education organisations and assessors.

During the pilot it became evident ākonga may have attained the skill, but it was unclear if their grade was deserved and able to be supported. Enquiry-based or cluster workshops provides a platform for educators to wānanga and discuss ākonga assessments in a supportive environment.

BCITO's 'Refreshing BCATS for the Future' workshops run throughout November 2025 were positive examples of valuable forums open to educators involved in BCATS.

Key discussion topics for any workshops in the short and/or medium term include:

- Expectations for the quantity of written and/or portfolio evidence from ākonga *versus* observed capability and judgement justifications from teachers.
- Whether teachers' justifications and observations match photographic evidence. Is it really an 'Excellence' when we see a photograph of the joint itself?
- Any remedial work undertaken and whether this should preclude ākonga from a higher grade.

PERSONALISED, SPECIFIC, AND FREQUENT ASSESSOR COMMENTS ARE EARLY INDICATORS OF GOOD PRACTICE ASSESSMENT

Waihangā Ara Rau Assurance have emphasised the importance of comments through articles in recent newsletters. This conversation must continue through various channels such as newsletters and as a key topic for external post-assessment moderation workshops. This will see comments become the norm, nationally. It will also ensure that space for comments is consistently used in the assessment resource. Teachers' final justification must robustly support the grade awarded. Blank spaces will not do.

Comments should be specific and accurate across all ākonga no matter who writes them. Particularly, how focused on skill criteria, and any one individual's skill level, do comments have to be? External moderation and assurance have a key role to play here. It starts with reminders that Programme Guidance assessment commentary acts as a guide, rather than citable criteria. Brevity and conciseness remain key. BCITO's Teacher Resources will provide further guidance on the depth and specificity required in teacher commentary.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUPPORTS HIGHER PERFORMANCE

BCITO have used plain language in assessments. Quick, easy, and completely understood prompting for what 'Excellence' means will scaffold all ākonga to a higher grade even more effectively. There is sound evidence from the pilot of scaffolding already. A notable number of samples showed ākonga emphasising the accuracy and finish of their joints through annotated photographs. Resource improvements will see more of this. So too will ongoing familiarisation with the resources where ākonga increasingly 'get the hang of' looking for and responding to plain language cues.

ARE ĀKONGA GIVEN THE OPTION TO ANSWER QUESTIONS VERBALLY?

Verbal explanations, descriptions, and/or identifications remain an option for all ākonga, especially those with lower language, literacy and numeracy abilities.

A GOOD PHOTOGRAPH IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

The BCITO assessment resources will reinforce the value of a carefully considered photograph as assessment evidence. Icons, including one for photographs, now appear throughout assessments, signalling the type of evidence needed. Instructions are also more explicit, making things even clearer in terms of what the image(s) should show. This also helps to clarify expectations regarding the number of photos needed. Less can sometimes be more – for example, two good close-ups of a joint (before and after assembly) are better than many photos of the project, from a distance, where the joints themselves cannot be seen.