



Degree apprenticeships – an enabling framework

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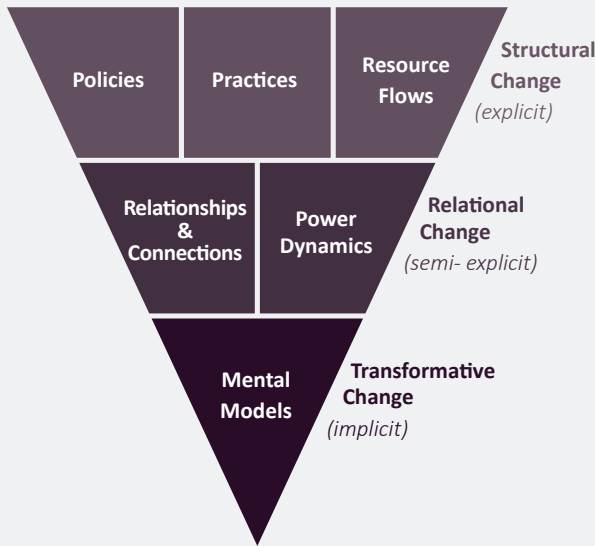


OVERVIEW OF THE ENABLING FRAMEWORK

An enabling framework sets out the essential conditions, structures, and supports needed to make a new model like degree apprenticeships work in practice.

It doesn’t prescribe a single solution but identifies the policy, funding, regulatory, and operational enablers that must be in place for successful design, delivery, and scale.

Six Conditions of Systems Change



Commentary

This enabling framework outlines the key system conditions, policy, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models that must be addressed to unlock the full potential of degree apprenticeships.

It highlights that no single actor can deliver this change alone. Progress depends on shared commitment, coordinated action, and a willingness to test, learn, and adapt together.

By aligning funding, regulation, pedagogy, and partnerships around a shared vision of high-quality, equitable, and employer-integrated learning, we can build a more responsive, inclusive, and future-fit tertiary education system.

The framework is not a blueprint, but a starting point. It invites system leaders, educators, industry partners, and iwi to take bold steps now, while laying the foundations for long-term, systemic transformation.

Current state	Quick wins	Bolder steps
POLICIES in this context relate to formal rules, priorities, and strategies set by the government and its agencies that shape how tertiary education is delivered and funded. They influence what programmes are possible, which learners are prioritised, and how institutions and employers are incentivised to participate in new models.		
No dedicated policy framework exists for degree apprenticeships. Work-based learning is primarily recognised as a sub-degree option. Degree apprenticeships are not formally recognised in legislation or TEC Investment Guidance. There is no systematic support or requirement to develop and implement degree apprenticeships. Research is the default focus of academic staff teaching on degree-level programmes.	TEC Investment Guidance explicitly references degree-level or higher apprenticeships as a priority. Tailored guidance from NZQA clarifying how degree apprenticeships can meet existing quality assurance requirements.	The Education and Training Act defines degree apprenticeships as a distinct category of work-based provision and makes research requirements for advanced programmes more flexible. National policy framework that outlines principles, expectations, and minimum standards for degree apprenticeships. ISBs (from 2026) incorporate degree apprenticeships into ‘industry-endorsed networks of provision’. Student visa holders can work up to 37.5 hours per week when enrolled in a degree apprenticeship. Professional regulatory bodies recognise degree apprenticeships as valid pathways to professional registration.
PRACTICES refer to the everyday actions, processes, and habits of organisations and individuals that shape how education and training are delivered. These include teaching and learning methods, industry engagement approaches, learner support systems, assessment design, and how programmes are developed and managed.		
Most degree programmes place the provider-led, campus-based model at the centre. Work-integrated learning is typically a component, not embedded throughout. Industry tends to be consulted, rather than co-designing and co-delivering learning. Assessment often privileges academic outputs over authentic, workplace-based evidence of competence. Limited guidance exists on how to blend academic and employment roles.	Practice guides, templates, and exemplars for degree apprenticeships programme design, co-assessment, and employer-educator collaboration. Professional development for academic staff, training advisors, and employer mentors to support degree apprenticeships delivery. Dual-admissions models that align employer recruitment processes with academic entry requirements. Joint curriculum development workshops that bring TEOs, industry, and professional bodies together to co-design degree apprenticeship pathways.	Programme approval and accreditation processes to explicitly recognise co-designed, co-delivered degree apprenticeship models. National community of practice for degree apprenticeships implementation, to support peer learning and innovation in delivery practice. Different performance measures.

Current state	Quick wins	Bolder steps
RESOURCE FLOWS refer to how funding, staffing, infrastructure, and information are allocated and distributed across the system. These flows determine which types of education are financially viable, which organisations are incentivised to participate, and whether learners and employers can access the support they need. Without fit-for-purpose resource flows, degree apprenticeships will remain small-scale or unsustainable.		
The funding system does not support or differentiate degree apprenticeships from other degree provision. There are no formal mechanisms for co-investment between TEOs and employers. TEC funding privileges provider-led delivery and campus-based models. Employers bear almost all the costs of their participation in degree training. Learners bear the costs of clinical and professional placements. There is no distinct tracking of degree apprenticeships.	Costing model for degree apprenticeships that reflects shared delivery, dual support roles, and flexible learning modes. Default TEC funding approval for new degree apprenticeship programmes. Employers who offer degree apprenticeships can access Apprenticeship Boost.	Reprioritised and ring-fenced DQ 7+ funding to support the development of qualifications and programmes for degree apprenticeships. Dedicated tax credits or a levy-offset mechanism to support employer participation in degree apprenticeships. Base funding for new degree apprenticeship programmes is fixed at a minimum of ten full-time enrolments for the first three years. Use procurement levers (e.g. public infrastructure projects) to require or incentivise degree apprenticeships. ISBs, professional organisations or iwi organisations are able to purchase degree apprenticeship programmes directly
RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS refer to the networks, trust, and collaborative behaviours between stakeholders in the system, including learners, employers, educators, iwi/Māori partners, professional bodies, and government agencies. Strong relationships enable shared ownership, smooth transitions, and mutual accountability across the learner journey. Weak or siloed relationships are a major barrier to the successful implementation of degree apprenticeships.		
Relationships between TEOs, employers, and professional organisations vary significantly by sector and region, with some being strong and long-standing, while others are transactional or non-existent. Co-design of programmes and shared governance is not a common practice in most degree education. Learners often act as the bridge between disconnected systems, without coordinated support from both employer and provider. Engagement with iwi, Māori industry leaders, and regional stakeholders is uneven and often not embedded in governance structures.	Partnership agreements (e.g. Memoranda of Understanding) between TEOs and industry for degree apprenticeships pilots that outline shared roles and responsibilities. Map existing networks and leverage established partnerships to seed degree apprenticeship opportunities. Dual-support models where both an academic advisor and a workplace mentor work with each learner. Group employer schemes expanded to include degree apprentices.	Joint governance between employers and tertiary education providers for degree apprenticeships design, delivery, and evaluation, including shared curriculum oversight and decision-making structures. Regional or sectoral “degree apprenticeships hubs” coordinate stakeholders, broker relationships, and share resources.
POWER DYNAMICS refer to how decision-making authority, influence, and accountability are distributed across the system. In traditional tertiary education, power often rests with education providers and regulators. For degree apprenticeships to succeed, power must be more equitably shared with employers, learners, community partners, and industry, particularly in the design, delivery, and governance of programmes.		
Government controls funding, regulation, and policy settings, with little devolution. Employers have limited influence over curriculum design, assessment standards, or learner selection in most degree qualifications. Māori lack tino rangatiratanga over most degree education.	Shared decision-making structures for all degree apprenticeship programmes. Extend the use of Māori-led frameworks for degree apprenticeships. Redesign funding approval processes to require co-designed proposals with industry or professional groups.	Establish governance mechanisms at the national level to steer the strategy and oversight of degree apprenticeships. Provide targeted support to employers and other partners to lead or co-lead degree apprenticeships development in their sectors.
MENTAL MODELS are the deeply held beliefs, assumptions, and narratives that shape how people interpret the purpose and value of education. These include perceptions of what a “real” degree looks like, who higher education is for, and how learning should be delivered. Shifting mental models is essential to making degree apprenticeships a mainstream, valued option rather than a niche or second-best pathway.		
Degrees are still widely viewed as academic, classroom-based qualifications, with limited recognition of workplace learning as legitimate or equivalent. Apprenticeships are often associated with lower-status trades training, not with professional careers. Many learners, parents, and educators see work and study at the degree level as separate or sequential, not as integrated or mutually reinforcing. Cultural bias persists against applied learning models, particularly within some parts of the university sector and professional bodies. Degree apprenticeships are not widely understood or visible in the public narrative about tertiary education and career success.	Promote real-life stories of successful degree apprenticeship learners, employers, and educators through media, events, and social campaigns. Integrate degree apprenticeships into career guidance tools and school outreach activities as credible, aspirational pathways to high-value jobs. Sector champions advocate for degree apprenticeships within their professional networks and institutions. Run workshops and briefings for governance groups, academic boards, and regulators to build shared understanding of degree apprenticeships models.	Launch a national communications campaign to reframe perceptions of degree apprenticeships as high-status, high-value pathways equivalent to traditional degrees. Embed work-based learning and apprenticeship principles into professional development for staff involved in degree programmes. Incentivise academic and employer collaboration through recognition, awards, or performance funding tied to degree apprenticeships outcomes. Partner with iwi, Pacific communities, and regional employers to co-create new narratives about learning and earning that reflect diverse aspirations and cultural values.