



ABOVE UNITEC'S TRADES TRAINING FACILITY, MATAAHO; JIA JIA CHEN, TRADES STUDENT.

# Building careers

*Unitec's world-class training facility overturns any old-school ideas about what it means to be a tradie.*

**T**rades is a vital industry attracting switched-on, capable people from all walks of life — people who can create, construct and get things done.

At Unitec's purpose-built trades training facility, Mataaaho, students are receiving world-class training in building and carpentry, electrical engineering, plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying, fabrication and welding, and automotive engineering.

The 7000m<sup>2</sup> open-plan learning environment at Mataaaho is the largest in New Zealand and is home to some of the best technology available. Students have access to \$8 million worth of equipment and simulators, from everyday tools to world-leading, specialised equipment.

For Jia Jia Chen, taking on a Unitec trades certificate at age 37 was a complete career change — from nursing. "I'd been thinking about doing this for many years," she says. "I love to create things and use my hands."

Chen challenges one of trades' strongest stereotypes. She's taking a male-dominated programme and, when she graduates, the multi-skilled building certificate she has earned will be in a male-dominated industry — likely one of the reasons New Zealand is experiencing a shortage of skilled trades workers.

"Females don't really see themselves as part of the industry, so that's half your labour pool gone," says Chen.

The open-plan 'classrooms' and simulators at Mataaaho give students the chance to learn more about what other tradespeople do, helping them prepare for the workplace — and the cross-disciplinary nature of their chosen field.

And choosing trades as a career path is often as lucrative and financially secure as pursuing a degree can be — sometimes more so. In 2017, BERL, an Industry Training Federation think tank, found that young apprentices at the start of their career were earning significantly more than graduates with bachelor degrees. At age 40, when they had reached the middle of their career, the apprentices were actually more financially secure.

Apprenticeship training at Unitec

*“Successful trades people should not only be skilled but technically confident. Trades training at Unitec means access to great facilities, world-class teaching and some of the best tech in the country.”*

MARK MCNEILL, DEAN OF CONSTRUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENGINEERING, UNITEC

offers plenty of guidance and support. For many students it's the ideal career path that allows them to earn while they learn, or minimise their student loans as they can often get financial support from their employer.

David Simpson, 48, is a mid-life career changer studying building and carpentry. He says the country is short on skilled tradespeople because it's in catch up mode after phasing out the trades apprenticeship system of the past. "We're now paying the price for that," says Simpson. His decision to retrain was in response to the country's need for more housing. "I saw this growing housing shortage in New Zealand and thought, if there's something I can do about it, I'll do it," he says.

With New Zealand's construction sector in need of skilled workers, alongside the Government's promise to build 100,000 high-quality, affordable homes, it looks like the country's next generation of tradies will be kept busy.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT A CAREER IN TRADES, VISIT [UNITEC.AC.NZ](http://UNITEC.AC.NZ)