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With the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) forecasting that New Zealand requires an additional 56,000 construction workers by 2022, the industry needs to think creatively about where that resource comes from.

As evidenced throughout the Canterbury rebuild, attracting construction practitioners from offshore is an effective strategy. However, even allowing for a widening of the net to include non-traditional markets, this approach is unlikely to grow the construction labour pool sufficiently.

Two growth markets to consider are; women (50 per cent of the population and only 17 per cent of the construction workforce), and increasing our share of those leaving college. For the former, the Canterbury focused 2013 research undertaken by the Ministry of Women Affairs, found that there exists “an under-utilised and hidden female labour force”. Further tapping into the women market would be beneficial.

Marketing the construction industry to college-aged students, to increase our share of school leavers, is a priority for the New Zealand Institute of Building (NZIOB). Our ‘Industry Big Day Out Construction’ collaboration with Careers NZ, has been successful in opening the eyes of Careers Advisors to the wide variety of opportunities that exist within construction. The next step is for the NZIOB to realise its proposed Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) in Spades programme. This initiative will aim to provide a nationwide match-making service for college-aged students to explore professions within construction. That is a longer-term strategy, but one that will ultimately provide the industry with the fit-for-purpose workforce it requires.