

UNLIMITED OPTIONS WITH DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning is a popular choice, with close to 1,000 students currently enrolled with The Open Polytechnic in its three construction industry-related diplomas.

By Alan Muxlow, Programme Leader, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand



A glance at construction technician student details at The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand shows a wide range of career opportunities taken up by those focusing on gaining a qualification or just upskilling.

The construction technical skills offered are covered in three national diplomas that relate to architectural technology (draughting), construction management and quantity surveying. These are nationally offered qualifications, but The Open Polytechnic goes one step further in its internal assessment process. Students are required to present reports on site activities and practical work situations. This evidence has been used by students to demonstrate their skills to prospective employers and has often resulted in students getting jobs.

Who studies at the Open Poly and why?

Of the nearly 1,000 students currently studying for construction-related qualifications there are tradespersons, homemakers (male and female), project managers, architectural

designers, those recovering from an accident, career-change seekers and labourers. They are generally in the mature age group and are self-motivated.

Students are either self-employed or employed by builders, subcontractors, project managers, the armed services, quantity surveyors, developers, designers and investors. Students may live in main centres, rural New Zealand, or in Australia, Fiji, the United Kingdom, the USA and even Dubai.

The main reason for this variety is that Open Polytechnic educational requirements allow for students to:

- enrol at any time of the year
- study while working
- have a maximum 12-month study period
- set their own pace of study
- complete units as quickly as they want, due to internal assessment.

Tutors only a phone call away

Often new students are studying for the first time since leaving school or it is many years

since they have studied. To get back into a pattern of study, they are advised to start with a small unit or a subject in a familiar area. To ensure this happens, individual counselling is provided by programme specialists before enrolments are processed.

Studying alone and at a distance is not everybody's style and is certainly not the same as being supported in a classroom contact environment. Comprehensive course material has been designed for students to work through and make regular submissions. There is also substantial help via email, freephone with an after-hours message system, and feedback on pre-assessment work submissions.

How it works

Despite distance education being a proven teaching method, The Open Polytechnic is often asked how a drawing qualification (for example) can be taught this way. Very successfully, through comprehensive documentation, extensive examples of 'best practice' and progressive submission and work development. One specific teaching aid is the use of a DVD/video recording of a tutor marking and giving feedback on a particular student's work. The Open Polytechnic study process requires students to do research, use the library and generally become aware of where to find data and the need for continuous upgrading of knowledge.

With extensive practical experience, passes in construction-related subjects and comprehensive documented work evidence, students can apply through the APL (Assessment of Prior Learning) process to gain direct credits in the qualifications.

Over the years, course material has often been developed in areas where there are no New Zealand-specific publications. These resources are still used along with New Zealand developed documentation, such

as that produced by BRANZ, the Concrete and Cement Association and the Timber Research & Development Association.

In the ever-changing world of construction techniques and qualifications, The Open Polytechnic has always had a national focus. These three qualifications, previously New Zealand Certificates, have played a significant role over the last 30 years.

Other construction areas covered by The Open Polytechnic include electrical, plumbing, drainlaying and gas fitting, metal trades, interior designing and numerous business courses, computer skills and environmental qualifications.

For further details visit the Open Polytechnic website www.openpolytechnic.ac.nz, or freephone 0508 650 200.

BUILDING CAREERS WEEK

High school technology students across New Zealand have constructed specially designed rabbit hutches as part of the Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation's (BCITO) Building Careers Week.

Building Careers Week was held in September and involved events throughout the country aimed at raising awareness of career choices for young people in the building and construction industry.

The rabbit hutches have been constructed as part of the Build-Ability Challenge, which sees students involved in the BCITO's school-based Elementary Construction Skills programme forming teams to complete a building project which will benefit a local community group. The challenge this year was to build a rabbit hutch for a local SPCA shelter.

The competition attracted 18 entries from 16 secondary schools throughout New Zealand, from Rutherford College in Auckland to St Peter's College in Gore.

The rabbit hutches were judged by local BCITO training advisors, with the national winner announced in early September.

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