

Gateway to a Concrete Career

Rob Gaimster – Cement & Concrete Association of New Zealand (CCANZ)

Some months ago in this column I expressed concern over the fact that both the concrete industry, and the wider building and construction sector, is faced with a challenging shortage of skilled labour.

There are indications that productivity in the building and construction sector is falling behind the rest of the economy and the rest of the world, which reflects in part low training and skill levels.

Additionally, the downturn in the economy is affecting training levels. There are predictions that there will be a labour shortage when the sector picks up again, expected to be in 2010/2011. Declining levels of economic activity are also driving an exodus of skills from the sector.

As part of a set of measures to address this, I called for active promotion of existing training opportunities available through the building and construction sector, and the development of training pathways that are designed to attract young people.

To this end the Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation (BCITO) has liaised with the New Zealand concrete industry to develop a concrete package for its successful Gateway programme.

The BCITO Gateway programme is based on the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) Gateway model, which is designed to strengthen the pathways for senior students (year 11 – 13+) from school to further education, training or employment, by supporting their learning and assessment in the workplace.

The structured programme, with clear knowledge and skill objectives, aims to provide students with between 5 – 20 days of actual work placement, depending on the time required for students to complete their learning plan.

Students have their workplace learning assessed against unit and/or achievement standards on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and integrated with their current programme of study at school.

From the student's perspective the Gateway programme provides valuable concrete related learning and work opportunities. In particular, students can gain specific vocational skills that may lead to future employment, and can also benefit from making significant progress towards qualifications, such as the BCITO's cement and concrete National Certificates.

Within the concrete industry the vocational skills range across a diverse range of operations, including factory or plant-based and on-site construction businesses. Factory- or plant-based operations produce pre-cast concrete, tanks, pipes, masonry products and ready-mixed concrete. On-site construction operations

include large-scale commercial or civil concrete work, placing and finishing, and concrete sawing and drilling.

Employers within the concrete industry benefit from involvement with the Gateway programme through improved public relations and a proactive contribution to local community needs. In the longer term, employers have the opportunity for more efficient and effective recruitment, which can contribute to increased productivity and an enhanced company skill base. All state and integrated secondary schools are eligible to apply for inclusion in the Gateway programme. Schools are funded to coordinate activity and ensure the educational and subsequent employment needs of students are met.

The TEC administers the Gateway programme funding, and monitors the programme to ensure that schools meet contractual requirements. The TEC also provides information to schools about elements that enhance quality in the Gateway programme, and monitors enrolment, credit achievement and labour market outcomes relating to the programme. The BCITO provides information about suitable industry standards, assessment options and the availability of learner resources.

The BCITO's development of the Gateway programme's concrete package is also significant in that it directly aligns with the recent revitalisation of their cement and concrete National Certificates. Gateway students who demonstrate promise have a clearly defined route for further apprenticeship-based development within the concrete industry that provides an up-to-date combination of practical and theoretical learning.

Although by no means a silver bullet for the current skills shortage within the concrete industry, and the wider building and construction sector, the Gateway programme's concrete package is an indication of what can be achieved through a positive alignment of the various areas within the concrete industry (ready mix, precast and masonry), as well as close collaboration between business, government and the school system.

Those interested in the BCITO's Gateway programme should contact their school's Gateway coordinator or call the BCITO's Schools Coordinator on 0800 4 BCITO (0800 422 486).

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