

A new forestry diploma for a new decade of industry growth

Waiariki School of Forestry, Wood Processing and Biotechnology

Waiariki Institute of Technology has taken on the challenge set by the forest industry training organisation, FITEC, to develop and deliver a new qualification in forestry: the National Diploma in Forestry (Operations Management). The new diploma will be paired with a revised Diploma in Forest Management, and is on track for first delivery in 2010. Director of the Waiariki School of Forestry, Wood Processing and Biotechnology, Jeremy Christmas, explains.



Jeremy Christmas

Background

A review of forestry qualifications has been undertaken by FITEC over the last two years aimed at: reviewing the effectiveness of existing forestry qualifications; establishing the forest industry's requirements for higher level training (above the Level 4 National Certificates); and developing a recommended structure to meet the industry's needs for Diploma level training.

The new Diploma structure had to ensure there was a clear linkage to industry skills requirements and future career pathways. Another objective was to ensure that, in addition to training and career progression, the new qualification staircased to degree qualifications, such as the Bachelor of Forestry Science at the University of Canterbury.

The review recognised some of the previous barriers to entry perceived with the current Diploma in Forestry (Forest Management), such as the overlap with the Forestry Science degree, long delivery times (2.5 years for completion) and lack of focus on "real world" assignments, which has resulted in reducing student numbers over recent years.

A series of Advisory Groups were established by FITEC from mid-2007, which included involvement of Waiariki tutors, to provide industry input and discussion on the course topics, skills and knowledge required, and guidelines on assessment.

FITEC developed the unit standards for the National Diploma in Forestry (Operations Management) and the changes included: a focus on forest operations management; provision of work placements for students to gain practical experience; reducing the qualification from level 6 to level 5; reducing the NZQA credits from 300 to 200 and reducing the study time to 18 months (3 semesters).

Diploma Development

The challenge was then put to Waiariki to develop the structure, course material and assessments for the new Diploma.

Waiariki has since embedded these new and revised unit standards into 12 courses for the National Diploma in Forestry (Operations Management) to be delivered from Semester 1 2010. These courses will be integrated into the semester-based delivery of all courses at the Institute, allowing students from other schools,

such as Business and Tourism or Maori Development and Humanities, to take additional forestry courses, something that previously wasn't possible with the "block" delivery of forestry unit standards.

Beyond the new National Diploma in Forestry (Operations Management), Waiariki has also developed a new Diploma in Forest Management for students who wish to deepen their knowledge in forestry business management. This level 6 diploma will be achieved through students studying a further 4 papers (60 credits) in one extra semester of study.

A formal Memorandum of Understanding is being developed with the University of Canterbury laying out the details of articulation between the Diploma in Forest Management and the Bachelor in Forestry Science. This is the process by which Waiariki Institute of Technology and the University of Canterbury match the course requirements of the Forestry Science degree with the course content completed in the Diploma in Forest Management.

So the future is bright for students of forestry, be they school leavers or people within the forest industry wishing to progress beyond National Certificate level qualifications.