

Award for apprenticeship training

A huge drop in the number of skilled people in amenity horticulture was the result of horticultural apprenticeships being effectively abandoned in 1991. In 2003 staff at Dunedin Botanic Garden successfully reintroduced apprenticeship training to help remedy this shortage of professionally trained horticulturists. The success of this apprenticeship training programme over the last 6 years has now been recognised by industry partners 4Trades Apprenticeship Training Trust, the Otago Chamber of Commerce and Community Trust of Otago with the presentation of a Certificate of Recognition to the Dunedin City Council Botanic Garden.

Like a forest with no seedlings, the lack of apprenticeship training during the 1990s resulted in a shortage of skilled workers with expertise to become industry leaders. It wasn't until 2001 that an opportunity arose for staff at Dunedin Botanic Garden to play a significant role in addressing this skills shortage. Over a two year period, negotiations with training providers lead to the current long term commitment with the 4Trades Apprenticeship Training Trust .

Apprentices range in age from school leavers to people in their forties. They train for 3 years, working a paid 40 hour week as well as studying through Otago Polytechnic towards the world recognised Level 4 Advanced Certificate in Horticulture. It's hard physical and intellectual work and a real challenge for apprentices. Barbara Wheeler, Botanic Garden Collections Supervisor, makes no apologies for the rigour of the programme, "I want to make it an apprenticeship that people will break their legs to get into. Dunedin Botanic Garden works to the highest possible horticultural standards so to train to anything less would be pointless."

Over time, the management team have introduced improvements. to the selection process. the quality and consistency of training and provided mentoring to apprentices to help guide and manage workloads.

The fruits of these labours are now demonstrated by graduates successfully integrating into the horticultural industry through direct employment or in one case a graduate who has established his own business. Barbara Wheeler says the apprenticeship training programme is successful because of the "very, very close partnership with 4Trades and the shared expectation of high standards". The Botanic Garden aspires to developing this programme to make it one of the highest calibre horticultural apprenticeship programmes available anywhere.



