

RNZIH Horticulture Exams come back into fashion

David Puflett¹

Many horticulturists will remember the RNZIH Oral and Practical Exams held throughout the country in many sectors. They were industry based assessments that made up the National Certificates and Diploma in Horticulture qualifications. Since 1992, the New Zealand Horticulture Industry Training Organisation (NZ Hort ITO) has introduced a new format of horticulture training whereby apprentices and polytechnic students have to achieve NZQA Units of Learning in order to gain their national qualifications. These new qualifications require competency to be achieved and there are no grades or percentage marks. The horticulture industry for some time has preferred the old system of oral and practical exams which students sat at the end of each year of their apprenticeship. It has always been a good yardstick for the student to know whether he or she meets the industry standard of achievement as well as from an employer's point of view it provides a more accurate assessment of how well the student performs.

In May 2004 the NZ Hort ITO Board took a bold step and invited the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture

to take a more active role in horticulture training and horticulture qualifications once again.

This has resulted in the establishment of the RNZIH Education Trust followed by the full time appointment of David Puflett as National Training Manager for the Trust. The role of the Education Trust is to work independently from the NZ Hort ITO, but at the same time to carry out project work that gives a horticulture industry perspective. Funding for the Education Trust comes from the NZ Hort ITO. One of these projects has been to revamp the RNZIH Oral and Practical Exams which were last held in 1992.

Oral and Practical Exams

Many horticulturists will remember John Taylor of Christchurch as being the National Moderator for the old version of these exams, so it was only appropriate to ask him for advice on how he managed and coordinated the exam back in the 1970s and 1980s. He still had a lot of the old

exam papers and marking schedules so they became a useful resource to use when compiling the new oral and practical exams.

In order to establish a new qualification it is important to have a prescription and policies on how such a qualification can be achieved. The RNZIH Education Trust spent considerable time in formulating the rules to not only meet the trust requirements but also the NZ Hort ITO regulations.

The oral and practical exams are an attestation that candidates who successfully complete the exam are competent in a range of practical skills in a particular sector of the horticulture industry. The endorsements will be available in the following industry sectors:

- Amenity Horticulture
- Nursery Production
- Floristry
- Fruit Production
- Landscape
- Organic Horticulture
- Viticulture
- Arboriculture
- Vegetable Production



Candidates identifying plant specimens



Ian Dibley (Rotorua District Council) demonstrating machinery maintenance to examiner Alex Gardiner

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Exams will be held throughout the country during July-August each year. The one day exams will be achievement-based rather than competency-based so successful graduates will have a pass grade on their certificate.

The exam consists of 10 questions. Each question will take 30 minutes on average to answer. The questions are relevant to day to day activities that a 3rd year apprentice would be expected to accomplish in their area of horticultural work. The questions selected come from a question bank that has been compiled by horticulturists for each sector.

The pass grades for the exam are:

Merit	65%-84%
Distinction	85% +

Eligibility

Graduates who have completed one of the following are eligible to apply for the RNZIH Education Trust exam:

- National Certificate in Horticulture Level 4
- National Diploma in Horticulture Level 6
- Other qualifications recognised by the RNZIH Education Trust Committee

Venue

The number of candidates who wish to apply for the oral and practical exam will determine the venue. In general, it would be expected to have a minimum of 10 candidates at each venue.

Examiners

The examiners for each of the venues will be recognised horticulturists that are fully conversant with their nominated exam question. Each examiner will have a specific question to ask the candidate. This could be a:

- Practical exercise
- Short answers
- Oral question
- Demonstration
- Complete a skill or task

First Exam

On 12th August 2004 the first exam was held at the Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens in South Auckland for candidates that had completed their National Certificate in Horticulture Level 4 qualification in Amenity Horticulture. The one day event was successful with 11 candidates passing the RNZIH

Education Trust Oral and Practical Exam. The results were:

Ian Dibley	DISTINCTION
Ray Coe	MERIT
Andrea Wright	MERIT
Jenny Hopkins	MERIT
Nicola Taylor	DISTINCTION
Alice Gwilliam	MERIT
David Mauvan	MERIT
Annette Richards	MERIT
Richard Horne	MERIT
Lisa Pritchard	MERIT

In 2005 the following RNZIH Oral and Practical exams will be held:

Sector	Region	Date
Fruit Production	Hawke's Bay	6 July
Amenity Horticulture	Waikato	14 July
Nursery Production	Auckland	11 August

Any candidate who wishes to apply for the RNZIH Educational Trust Oral and Practical exam can obtain application forms from David Puflett.

David Puflett is the National Training Manager for the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture Education Trust.



Andrea Wright (Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens), Grace Gwilliam (Hamilton City Council), and Ian Dibley (with examiner Eddie Wellums) completing the bedding plant assessment