



**Media release from the Southern Wood Council
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Forestry awards its workers

You're never too old to learn, as forestry workers in Otago and Southland will testify.

From school leavers to a contractor pushing 60, the skills of Otago and Southland's forestry industry were celebrated at a recent Forestry Industry Training & Education Council (FITEC) graduation ceremony in Dunedin, which recognises the achievements of trainees within the wood industry.

The FITEC graduates gained national certificates in variety of forestry disciplines, from forestry skills including planting and thinning, to business skills that cover supervision and leadership qualifications.

FITEC regional training advisor Phil Williams says the number of people putting themselves out to make use of the modern apprentice system is testament to an underlying strength in the industry.

A total of 65 Otago/Southland modern apprentices and trainees were acknowledged at the ACC-sponsored graduation, including nine young workers gaining their first national certificates.

"The often physical nature of the industry means training is an essential health and safety issue. But it's more than that; a commitment to upskilling also it ensures we are retaining a skilled workforce in the Otago Southland area, and that in turn means a strong and viable forestry industry with an eye on the future."

Forestry workers in the scheme may start out gaining a certificate in ground-based harvesting, but many use training as a stepping stone to develop capabilities in something like silviculture, and others progress into management positions.

Southern Wood Council chairman Grant Dodson agrees that training and development is essential for the future of Otago and Southland's forestry industry.

"Continuing to foster and celebrate learning achievements is particularly important at this time, as investing in skills is investing in our future," Mr Dodson said. "The Southern Wood Council sees people as extremely important for our industry, as is their skill development, and these graduates should be proud of ensuring there is a continuing high level of qualifications and expertise throughout the workplace."



Mr Dodson told the graduates their achievements clearly demonstrate there are a lot of Otago and Southland people in the industry motivated enough to dedicate themselves to training in addition to their paid employment. "A ceremony supported by the wood industry of Otago and Southland, as well as the graduates' family and friends, is a good way of marking how that is being achieved."

The Otago/Southland ceremony is the eighth of nine regional graduations held throughout New Zealand. In total, over 1500 modern apprentices and trainees have completed around 2000 national certificates over the last year.

The Southern Wood Council Inc was set up in 2001 to promote, encourage and coordinate the sustainable economic development of the forest products industry in Otago and Southland. One of a few truly independent groups of its type in New Zealand, it includes all the major forest owners within the region (ownership or management of over 140,000 hectares of production forests with an annual harvest of over 1.2 million m³ of wood), the larger wood processing and manufacturing companies, the port authorities, and each of the three economic development agencies from local councils.

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