

Taking charge of your apprenticeship

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Taking charge of your apprenticeship

It's a big deal to become an apprentice. You've decided you'd like to get trade qualified and your boss thinks you're worth the time and effort. That's why they signed you into a training agreement. While on the surface things might seem a little overwhelming, it's not out of control. In fact it's really under your control. So now is a good time for you to take charge of your apprenticeship because let's face it – it's your apprenticeship, your qualification and your career!

Being an apprentice involves more than just turning up to work and doing a job. Being an apprentice means constantly learning from those more experienced so that one day you will be able to do everything that they do (and hopefully more) to a standard considered to be that of a tradesperson.

Everything you have to learn to do is written in your manual. But how you work your way through that long list of skills and knowledge is the key. Your employer and co-workers will expect you to look, listen, fetch, carry, do as you're told, and work your butt off. But they'll also be impressed by you questioning "why?", sussing out the best way to do it, and showing initiative. This is the taking charge bit and it's what becoming a professional tradesperson is all about.

THERE'S A TEAM BEHIND YOU

While Training Advisors from the BCITO are the people who make the final assessment judgements about whether apprentices know their stuff and can do all the practical things they are required to, they don't just make the decisions by themselves. They are just one person in what we call the assessment team.

You – the apprentice

There are at least four people in every apprentice's assessment team. The first (and most important) person is you, the apprentice. You are the sole reason why everyone else is there.



Your trainer

The second person is your trainer who is usually the boss or some other person who has been deemed the one to pass on everything they know about the trade to the apprentice. It's not uncommon in larger businesses for an apprentice to have a number of trainers. That's cool – the more the merrier! All it means is that there are more people passing on the benefit of their experience and more people contributing to the assessment team.

Your training advisor

The third person in the team is the Training Advisor. Training Advisors have quite a bit to do because they sign you up in the first place, help the employer to help you learn, and help you become a tradesperson. Your Training Advisor:

- Keeps an overview of how your apprenticeship is going
 - explaining how an apprenticeship works to each of the parties involved and making sure that everyone is heading down the right track
 - talking with you to see how you're feeling about things
 - guiding you in what you can do, need to do next, or could do better
- Assesses your progress and help you towards your qualification
 - watching you performing on the tools and looking at work you've done
 - looking at things you've collected or recorded about jobs you have worked on
 - reviewing any material you have prepared to show what you have been learning
 - asking you questions to see what you know
 - discussing your progress with your trainer and getting their views on how well you are doing, and what you can and can't yet do

- making assessment decisions, writing reports that summarises their visits, acknowledging any assessments made and setting further goals for you. The report goes to everyone in the assessment team
- reporting your successful unit standard completions to NZQA so there is a record of what you have achieved

Your moderator

The fourth and final person in the assessment team is the moderator. For a lot of apprentices this person is invisible and may never come on site and participate in person with other members of the assessment team. But they're there all right in the background, taking a look at progress, reviewing the decisions that are being made, and making sure that the assessor isn't being too tough or too soft. When they do come on site, chances are they will contribute to the discussions between members of the assessment team and pass on their views because just like the trainer and assessor, they too have a bucket-load of experience they can offer.



What's in a qualification?

All BCITO qualifications are made up of a bunch of unit standards. Some are labelled as practical, some as theory, and some are a bit of both (practical and theory). Unit standards get registered on your record of achievement with NZQA once you know or can do whatever the unit standards say. However if you look at unit standards in isolation, they can make understanding your qualification an over-complicated process. We don't want you to think that unit standards are completely non user-friendly because they're not. However when people don't really understand how to use them, then yes, they may as well be written in Swahili! So we'll explain unit standards here:

PRACTICAL UNIT STANDARDS

Most of the time, practical unit standards are pretty straightforward. They lay down some specific requirements associated with the job. Looking at examples from a range of different trades, we can see how unit standards have clear requirements that are things you have to do:

CARPENTRY: constructing and standing up single and double storey standard, raking and braced wall frames with openings in them, making sure that they are straight, true, square and within tolerance

CEMENT & CONCRETE: making a pre-cast concrete panel with all the correct reinforcing and cast-in items placed inside it

FLOOR & WALL TILING: laying tiles in an orderly fashion to a prepared surface making sure that they have the same spacings between them and are bedded-in to the same depth to produce a flush surface

FIBROUS PLASTER MANUFACTURE: casting 23 standard 3 metre lengths of cornice in a day

SOLID PLASTERING: applying a plaster coating to a prepared surface so that it is even across the whole surface and finished to the requirements of the particular coat

On top of the actual job you have to do, practical unit standards will often also tell you to do things like:

- setting up your work area and get the tools and equipment you need to do the job
- confirming what you need to do from the documentation provided about the job
- gathering together the materials you need to do the job
- following any manufacturers' instructions
- wearing the appropriate PPE and working safely
- cleaning up when you've finished the job, putting things away and maintaining your tools and equipment

We know these are all important for any job, but we also understand that once you know how to do these kinds of things, it just becomes a discipline. So we're not going to single these things out each and every time they're mentioned in a unit standard – but we will check to see whether you are able to apply them in a variety of different situations.

There are also practical unit standards for things like using hand tools, power tools, or specific items of plant and equipment. Just because they might be in their own unit standards doesn't mean they have to be looked at on their own.

Let's face it, you use tools and equipment when you build, construct, manufacture, create or install something, not just for the sake of it. So it makes sense that your ability to use the different tools and equipment of the trade is considered at the same time you are demonstrating your ability in actual practical tasks.

THEORY UNIT STANDARDS

You can usually tell a theory unit standard when it starts with the words "demonstrate knowledge of". This means you have to be able to show that you know what it's all about and that you understand why things are done in a certain way.



Different people learn in different ways so don't let anyone tell you that you must do it a specific way. Some people love having their noses in books. They find that they can learn about things by reading about them, without necessarily having to see any practical demonstration or actually do it themselves. It's a real skill to be able to do this but not many people can do it with words alone, so it's best when the words are accompanied by photos, sketches, drawings or diagrams. But even with illustrations, sometimes reading can be a bit of a challenge – especially when the text is not as well-written as it could be or uses really long sentences and big, over-complicated words. This is where other ways of learning come into play. Books are certainly only one way to learn about stuff.

In fact, when it comes to trade apprenticeships, nothing can substitute for the learning you do on the job. Having someone more experienced than you physically showing you how to do something (provided they know how to do it right) is better than reading about it. But practical demonstrations are even better when you are actively involved. You will learn best in an apprenticeship when:

- it's not just a "show and tell" and you actually do some things too. You get to ask questions and seek clarification (not just about how to do something but why it's done that way)
- you get a chance to put what you are learning about into action – not once, but on different occasions and repeatedly
- you don't have to try to learn everything in the one hit but get chances to bite it off chunk-by-chunk
- your initial learning is followed up by a refresher or revision to see whether it has "sunk in"

How to use BCITO

learning resources

The BCITO provides apprentices with manuals and resources. They include a list of all the unit standards that require the apprentice to demonstrate their knowledge and skill. This means that everyone's clear what's in the apprentice's chosen qualification.

Sometimes the manuals are quite large which has a tendency to send some apprentices running for the hills! Never fear, that's one of the reasons that your Training Advisor is there: to run through the manuals and resources step-by-step and make sure you understand everything you need to know and do to gain your qualification.

BCITO-provided learning resources are like text books for the trade. They allow you to learn about everything you need to know, but if you try to read everything in them at the same time you won't get the best value from them. Learning resources are best used to supplement what you're learning on site at the time you are learning it. Use them to go back to and check what you've learnt on site against what it says in the books. Ultimately, learning resources become reference books once you're trade qualified, especially when you can't quite remember how or why to do something!

Sometimes the learning resources are not complete in themselves. A really great example of this is in the Proprietary Plaster Claddings Systems qualification. In this case, the BCITO does provide some learning resources but the plaster systems that the qualification refers to are formulated and produced by certain manufacturers who expect them to be applied according to their specific instructions. So the manufacturer tends to be the one who provides comprehensive learning resources to ensure that their products are used in an appropriate fashion. If you're a Rockcote installer, you'll have a Rockcote manual to accompany your BCITO-

supplied resources. If something like this applies to you, don't stress about it because you'll have the information you need and you will be provided with direction from both your boss and your Training Advisor.

SHOWING WHAT YOU KNOW

BCITO-provided learning resources are usually accompanied by worksheets. They are one way for you to gauge how much you actually know. However worksheets are not the only way you can demonstrate your knowledge.

Another way of showing what you know is to provide specific examples from your workplace to explain the knowledge that underpins what has taken place. To show that you know all about setting up profiles and marking set-out points, you could get a copy of the site plan and draw where you placed the profiles and then mark where you placed the set-out points on the profile boards



In some cases it can be stated hand-on-heart “if you can do it, you must know it” For example, if you have been assessed as commercially competent in using the required selection of portable power tools then it can be reasonably assumed that you already hold all the underpinning knowledge needed to use them.

Sometimes all that’s needed is a discussion with your Training Advisor. Imagine looking at the practical work you have been doing installing exterior joinery and claddings. If you can answer questions about the different flashings you have installed the Training Advisor might conclude that you don’t need to provide any written answers to questions on this particular sub-topic.

Sourcing the appropriate information about materials/products/systems and showing how

they are to be used is another method. For example, you may have got the latest copy of the GIB Site Guide and be able to show how you referenced it to apply the appropriate fixing requirements for a specific bracing element.

So what should you do about showing you have the knowledge required?

- Talk to your Training Advisor and together work out the best way for you to show your knowledge. They might direct you towards answering certain questions or certain worksheets because they think it would be beneficial for you to complete them. They might also suggest some on-site discussions because explaining what you’ve done will illustrate that you have the knowledge. You and your Training Advisor will probably decide to use different approaches for different topics. There are no hard and fast rules about how it has to be done, just so long as it is done.
- Collect books, installation guides, product literature and anything else that helps you learn what you need to. Once you’ve read them, stash them away with your manuals so that you can show your Training Advisor when they next visit.
- Trawl the internet for useful websites and on-line reference material and save them as favourites. If you keep a record of the different websites, it will serve two purposes. 1 – you will be more likely to be able to find them again. 2 – your Training Advisor will be interested and is likely to take it into consideration when determining what you know.
- Keep good records of your practical work on site as there is a good chance that a lot of what you’ve done will help show that you have the knowledge too.



KEEPING A RECORD OF WHAT YOU'VE DONE: PRACTICAL EVIDENCE

Every apprentice gets given a manual in which they can record their practical experience. Usually this manual is called a Record of Work or Work Diary. What BCITO provides is just one way you can record your work. Many apprentices find their own way, or use the manual we provide as a starting point and add other information of their own.

You don't have to use what we provide you if you'd rather record your practical experience in other ways. What's really important is that you do record what you've done. And there's no need to use a single method, just so long as you keep it all somewhere easy to find.

Why do we insist on you keeping some record of your practical work? Well the answer is simple. Your Training Advisor does not stand next to

you day-in, day-out observing everything you do. They need to rely on what your boss says you can do, what you say you can do, and some physical evidence to back it up. And what better way to provide that physical evidence than to record your work and have it verified by the people who have worked alongside you?

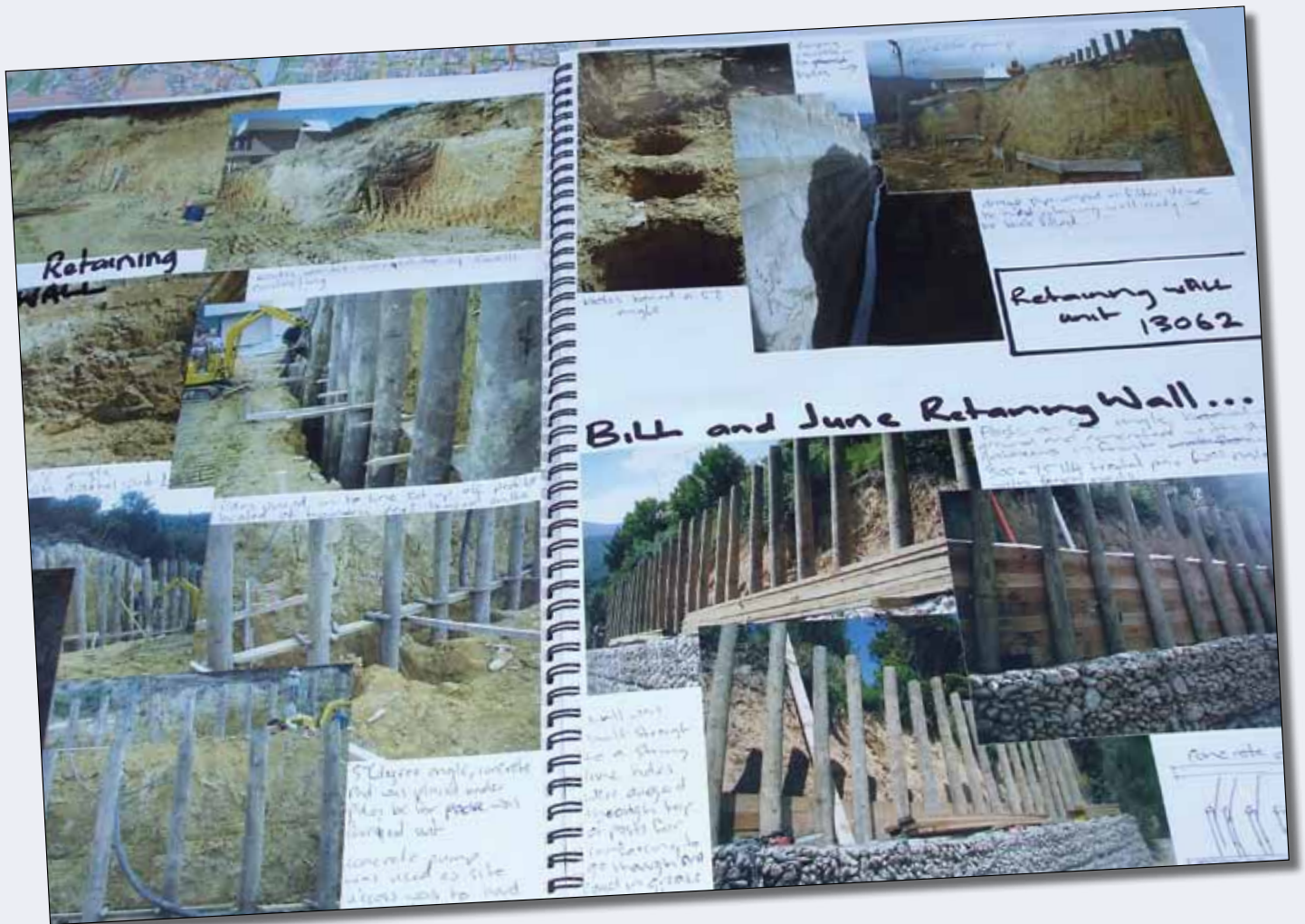
Even your timesheet can provide a great record of the work you are doing. A great example of this was a fibrous plaster apprentice who had to record the quantities and names of the different items he was casting every day. This simple record provided everyone with what was needed and saved recording everything all over again in the Record of Work!

We've seen some awesome stuff generated by apprentices so on the next few pages are examples of some of the great work they have done.



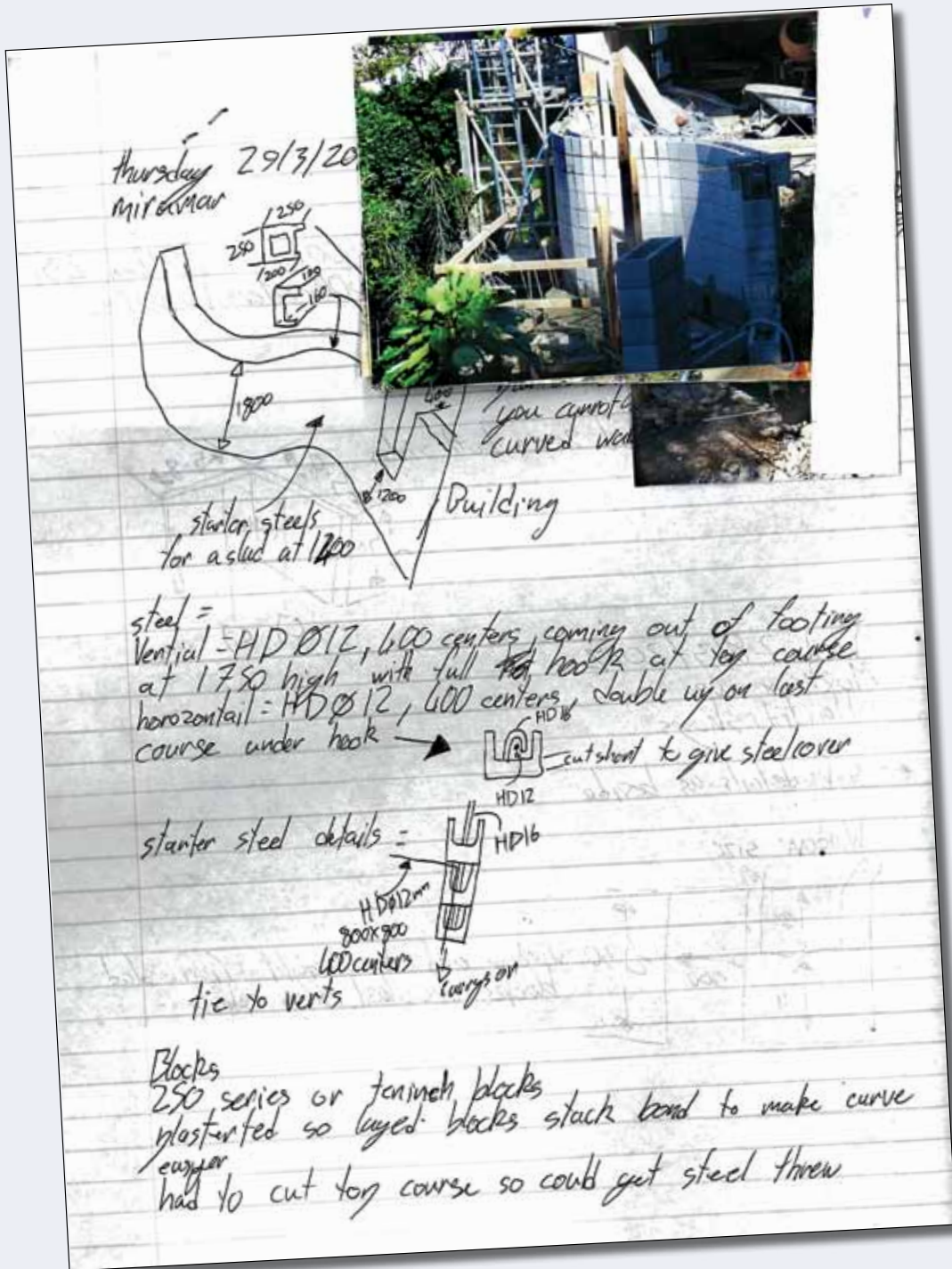
Samples

SAMPLE 1: PHOTOS OF JOBS WITH LABELS AND NOTES



Photos printed and placed in a photo album, scrapbook, or just stored in a folder, envelope or box, or electronically on a memory stick are a great way of keeping a permanent record and reminding you of the job when your Training Advisor calls to review your progress. It's very important to label them in some way so that there is a record of the date and the name of the job. You should also make sure that they show the work that you did, not the work that someone else did, unless you have included a note about what others contributed to the job.

SAMPLE 2: SKETCHES AND NOTES



Sketches or drawings in a scrapbook or exercise book that are labelled in some way really help you remember what you did and when. Written comments alongside the illustrations are a good way of helping to explain what you did. It doesn't have to be an essay (unless you like writing essays). It can simply be some critical dimensions, a bullet point list, your calculations or some key words that identify critical aspects of the job. The photo stapled to the page next to the sketch really helped the assessor know that the apprentice is not just a good artist with a fertile imagination!

SAMPLE 3: WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS OF JOBS

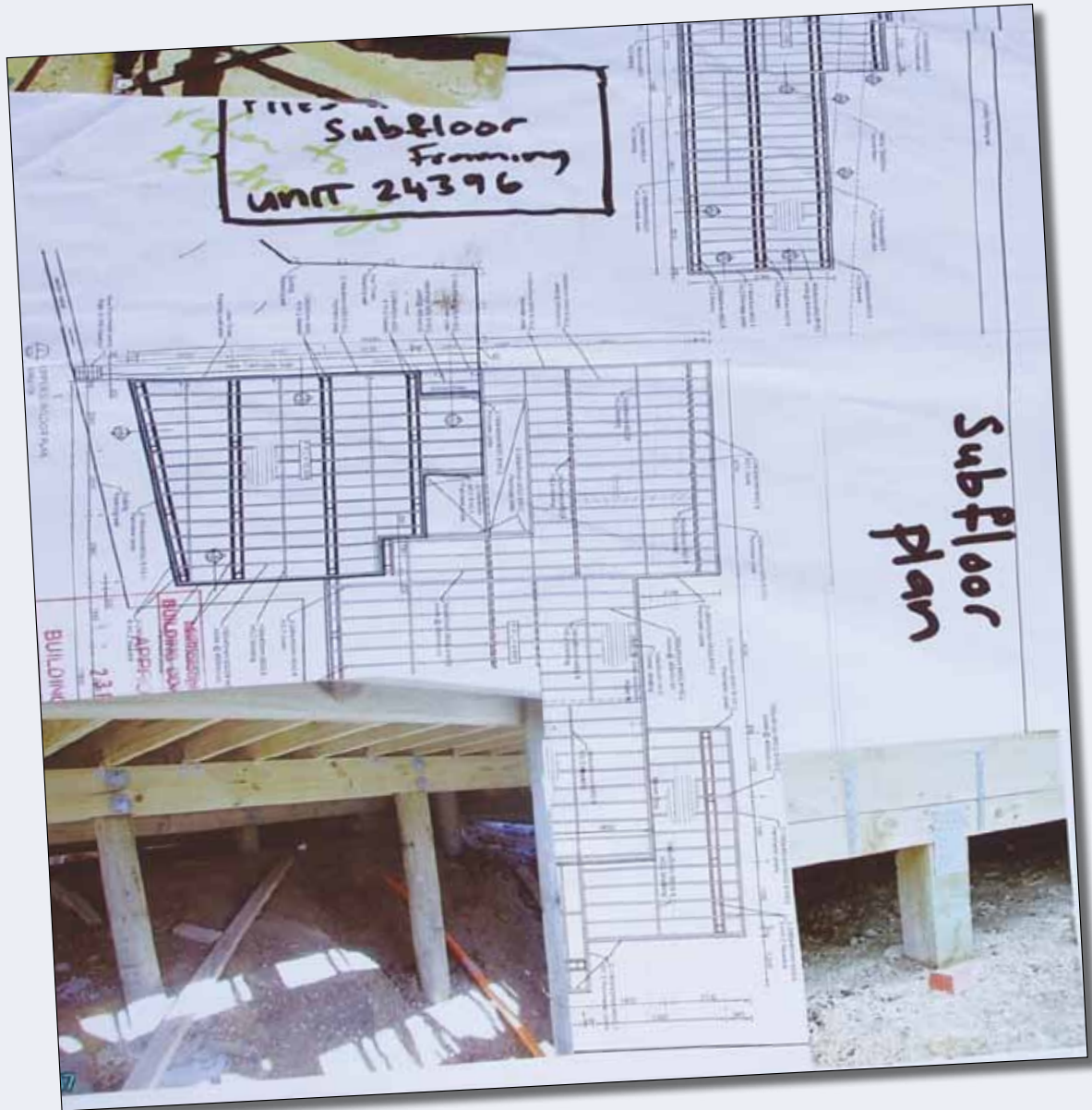
Supplementary Page

Unit Plan and carry out demolition work on site Job Number 2

This involved getting out a kitchen and toilet downstairs and 2 bedrooms upstairs. For a renovation and an extension to build 2 flats, one upstairs and one downstairs. Firstly we removed the windows downstairs by using a sabre saw from the inside. We cut the nails and removed the facings and sashers. Using a club hammer removed skirting inside kitchen. Being aware away from danger, watching my work does not injure coworkers. Upstairs I gutted the bedrooms, which involved removing skirting, scotrol skirting, carpet and cutting out every second sarking board on external walls for insulation later on. Once the old plaster board had been removed I used a skill saw down the sides of the wall, cutting every second one. Then using a hammer and doggy bar wedged the boards out. The front stop store had asbestos on the walls, so needed to get qualified persons to remove it for us.

And of course if you are one of those people who does like to write essays, you can just use your own words to describe the job, start to finish. The one shown here uses a supplementary page that is part of the standard BCITO Record of Work, but it could just as easily be a notebook or even a Word file. By the way, you'll notice that this apprentice's employer has initialled the bottom of the page. It's his way of confirming that this is a job that the apprentice did.

SAMPLE 4: PLANS OR SPECIFICATIONS WITH COMMENTS




Copies of plans with bits highlighted and photos to accompany specific parts make great discussion-starters with your Training Advisor when you are ready for assessment. In this example the apprentice has identified the pile foundations practical unit standard (24396) as the main focus, but this page also provides opportunities to discuss the theory unit standard in foundations, the plans and specifications unit standard and even aspects of the legislation one, not to mention floor framing and flooring!

SAMPLE 5: YOUR DAY DIARY

14

MARCH
Wednesday



2012

week 11 : 74-292

Mandeville park. 7.30 - 4.30 6 1/2

JOB NO	Weather	a.m.	Fine	Wet	p.m.	Fine	Wet

To do: * internal boxing / 240mm.
 2 of us should take all day and maybe half 2hrs

* steel arrives. some point in day (will start thurs) Monday pm

* book inspection for foundation Friday pm

* order concrete (Monday am) Tue

	7920	6130	4980	7520	1000
Concrete.	9690	10300	5540	1290	10200
	1940	5540	4870	4290	1060
NOTES	850	5560	2400	7110	8130
	850	= 109200	109.2m ²	x .7 (average height)	x .24 (foundation width)
					= 18.3456m ³ + BACK

* ring Simon/plumber (Thursday) floor work
 maybe Friday
 Wednesday eve.

SITE HAZARD	CONTROLS
354 x .01	

January: 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30	31	1				
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

February: 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29				

March: 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

April: 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
30						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

May: 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

June: 12

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

A lot of us keep a standard diary. While this might not break things neatly down into skills or unit standards, a brief description of each day's activities is a great way of recording of the work you have done. Many apprentices find this easiest because they have to write their hours and other notes down every day anyway, and it makes sense to record what you have done while it's still fresh in your mind. The page we show here provides a great opportunity for the Training Advisor to discuss volume calculations and attendance on other trades with the apprentice, never mind the foundations work.

SAMPLE 6: BLOGGING

Fibrous Chick's Blog

Up to my armpits in gypsum plaster

Archive for the 'Flexible moulds' Category

[« Older Entries](#)

Monday, 15 November 2010
November 15, 2010

My first job this morning was to do the second coat of rubber on the new centre mould Tim and I had done the first coat on last Friday. Steve reckoned we'd only need about 1.5kg of rubber to finish the mould. I mixed 1.5kg of the silicone mix with 1.5% thixotropic additive and 2.5% catalyst. When you mix the thixo, you do that first before adding the catalyst.

I brushed it onto the high-spots and then left it to set.



Second coat of rubber with thixo additive - brushed over first coat to high-spots

Posted in [Flexible moulds](#) | [Edit](#) | [Leave a Comment](#) »

Friday, 12 November 2010
November 12, 2010

The second job Steve left us with was to stop a new ceiling centre to a base board, clay the outer ring in place, and put on the first coat of rubber for a rubber-skinned mould.

Tim and I both worked on this as a team as Tim had not done rubber before. After we were happy with the centre on the board, we mixed up about 2.4kg of rubber with 2.5% catalyst.



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- » Mouldmaking and Casting
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Categories

Flexible moulds ▾

Biggins Interior Solutions
Wellington Ltd



And if you are technologically savvy and love spending hours on the internet (after work of course) you could consider blogging your practical records. In this sample the apprentice has arranged the site around the unit standards to make it easy to find all posts about the same skill or topic.

You can also post short video clips or upload photos online or any one of many other things that can be done to showcase your work. If you choose to do this, it would pay to check out whether your Training Advisor is up to speed with the latest technologies – otherwise they might struggle to access your work! And if they're not, think of it as a brilliant way of teaching them something new.

Progressing towards your qualification

The BCITO tracks every apprentice's progress towards achieving their qualification. The first thing we can tell you is that no two apprentices are exactly the same. The next thing we can tell you is, if you're new to the trade, don't expect to see immediate progress in terms of unit standards registered against your name. It takes time to be able to demonstrate what the industry calls "commercial competence", which is being able to perform tasks:

- in a safe manner
- without supervision
- to the required minimum standard
- repeatedly and on-demand
- in a commercially viable timeframe
- so you can apply the skills demonstrated to other work

There are a couple of rules of thumb when thinking about progress towards completion:

- the more credits in the qualification, the longer it takes for the average apprentice to complete
- progress normally follows a banana-shaped curve like this:

The chart below is an example of a Carpentry apprenticeship.



HANG IN THERE

It's quite typical of an apprentice who has come into the apprenticeship with little previous experience and takes about four years to complete the qualification. After two years, they are only about 15% of the way through their qualification in terms of credits, and yet they are about 50% of the way through the time it will probably take them to complete. In other words, as time goes by, your rate of progress will speed up. So hang in there!

Your Training Advisor will be monitoring your personal progress very carefully together with you and your boss, and will set goals for you to aim towards in the time between visits. These goals (along with a record of their visit and any successful completions) will be recorded in a Training Plan. When you receive a Training Plan after a visit, make sure you review it and plan how you will work towards the goals that have been agreed. And don't just file it away and forget about it. Regularly have a look to see how you're progressing and definitely have a good look at it before your Training Advisor visits next!

TAKE CHARGE

We're pretty confident that by the time you get to read this last bit you'll be more than ready to take charge of your apprenticeship. Hopefully we've outlined some tools you can use to get there and explained all the different options you have to learn, record what you've done, and help plan your path towards completion.

And don't feel you have to do it alone. Your personal assessment team is going to be there with you the whole way. And if there's anything you need to have explained, your BCITO Training Advisor's the one – so make sure you have their number on speed dial.





**Nothing can
substitute for the
learning you do
on the job**





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