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The Secretary
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Dear Phil

S+SNZ Professional Examinations April 2025 – Summary and Review

The latest round of Professional Examinations were held in Wellington over four days from Monday 7 April – Thursday 10 April 2025.

A total of 21 candidates applied for this round. This compares with 23 in October 2024, 16 in April 2024 and 12 in October 2023.

All 21 candidates were vetted and then invited to be interviewed. Of these, 11 candidates were considered to be a pass and have been awarded a certificate of competency. 9 candidates were issued with requisition letters requiring them to submit further evidence to the satisfaction of the relevant examiners before they could be considered to be a pass. The one remaining candidate failed and was advised to re-apply for a subsequent round of interviews.

Analysing the requisitions by each of the five disciplines, 1 candidate was requisitioned in cadastral, 2 candidates were requisitioned in planning, 2 candidates were requisitioned in geodetic and 6 were requisitioned in spatial measurement. No candidates received requisitions in engineering. Seven candidates received a requisition in one subject (being cadastral, planning and spatial) while two candidates received requisitions in two subjects. 43% of candidates received at least one requisition, higher than the average of 32% over the last 7 rounds of interviews since April 2022. Cadastral, Spatial and Geodetic remain the most consistently requisitioned disciplines over this time period.

Two prizes are available for the examinations panel to consider. The first is the Maurice Crompton-Smith Memorial Prize, which is awarded to the best overall candidate. The second is the Percy Dyett Award for the best engineering candidate.

These prizes are considered across two rounds of interviews starting in October and finishing in April. Winners were chosen for both awards at the conclusion of the April interviews and these are to be announced by S+SNZ in due course.

Overall the examinations panel were happy with the standard of the candidates presenting for assessment. There was a higher than average number of requisitions, particularly in the spatial discipline which is discussed further below. Requisitions could be readily resolved with the provision of further information by the candidates.

An important general item of note coming out of the April examinations was acknowledging use of external references when writing reports. Any material taken from external sources must be appropriately acknowledged and/or referenced. This is a critical part of demonstrating professional conduct as specified Schedule 1 Clause 8 of the Board standards. It is recognised that the use of AI is becoming increasingly common across all parts of our professional lives. The panel would like to remind potential candidates of their obligations if using AI as a tool while preparing their submissions. Any content written with the assistance of AI prompts must be thoroughly checked and edited so that it reflects the candidates personal views, thoughts and conclusions. Candidates found to be submitting reports containing material that is artificially generated without appropriate editing or references risk having their submissions declined.

In the cadastral interviews, the examiners found that there continued to be some deficiencies in water boundary survey knowledge. Licensed surveyors working in New Zealand are almost certainly going to encounter water boundaries on a fairly regular basis due to our extensive coastlines, rivers and lakes. A good working knowledge of this aspect of cadastral surveying is essential for candidates presenting themselves to the panel.

The cadastral examiners again noted that some candidates are not putting enough emphasis on effective quality assurance. Ineffective QA is an area that causes the majority of requisitions of cadastral datasets in NZ. Completed QA checklists and an understanding of the purpose of QA, both during the survey and prior to lodgement, are critical. It is important that candidates adequately demonstrate the level of competence and professionalism with respect to QA that is required to operate as a Licensed Cadastral Surveyor.

The spatial measurement examiners report that the candidates were again able to show good understanding of operating modern survey equipment in order to undertake survey measurements and present the results appropriately, whether that be on a topographical plan or documented calculations.

Most candidates were able to put forward projects that were able to fulfil the competencies of the CSLB, either within the project report or during the interview. Candidates were able to convey their knowledge of using suitable methodologies with drone aerial surveys and scanning are being used more in the submitted projects.

Generally, the candidates showed an understanding of QA and checking procedures of these methodologies both in the field and when processing deliverables, however good reporting and analysis along with auditing of the data is again lacking across the board through all reporting. The candidates' knowledge around what auditing is compared with quality assurance is lacking partly due to candidates often not being included in the auditing process of the senior surveyor.

The inclusion of cadastral and other relevant survey information on the plans was an area that was lacking on a number of the topographical projects and candidates were

reminded of the importance of showing and noting encumbrances on their plans and conveying this to their clients. For this reason the candidates were encouraged to give consideration to the future uses of their datasets and the importance of good survey practice in ongoing land development projects and in their roles as a land development professional.

The geodetic examiners observed that many candidates are making the geodetic project somewhat harder than it needs to be. When planning a “geodetic survey,” many candidates think of the requirements of the 399 Camp at survey school and try to replicate that – an Order 4 Survey. Often, they do this without having access to, or having used, geodetic grade survey equipment since survey school.

While just a guideline, the Annual Circular’s minimum requirement is for an Order 6 Survey (including heights). This level of survey is obtainable using survey grade equipment and methods commonly employed for cadastral surveys.

Making the project more complex than it needs to be makes it challenging for the candidates to demonstrate competence, as they attempt (with varying success) to use equipment and methods they are unfamiliar with.

To draw a comparison with a driver’s license analogy: it’s like candidates who drive exclusively automatic vehicles turning up to the assessment with manual cars. The geodetic examiners encourage candidates to use technologies they are familiar with, which will help them to confidently demonstrate their understanding and competence.

The examiners would like to see a robust network geometry, to prove the internal integrity of the observations, but also to demonstrate the practical measures required to achieve the number of independent observations and occupations that are necessary for a robust adjustment. In the interviews, there is often a correlation between candidates that make the necessary effort to observe a network with good network geometry and well-placed independent vectors, and those who clearly understand and can discuss their methodology at the interview.

The geodetic examiners encourage all candidates to be comfortable in their understanding of underlying principles and terminology such as horizontal and vertical datums, projections, GNSS error sources and least squares principles. When candidates are requested to do more work after the interview, their subsequent submissions are typically of a high standard. It is therefore clear that the information is available to them and they are well able to understand it. It is much more efficient if they can demonstrate that knowledge at the interview.

The planning examiners report that most candidates interviewed well and were able to show a suitable knowledge of the planning process as it applies to their developing roles as surveyors. The planning projects submitted were generally of good quality but sometimes failed to effectively demonstrate the candidate’s planning knowledge and capability. Some projects were poorly aligned with the CSLB competencies, which hindered the candidates ability to demonstrate the application of key planning concepts.

Common issues identified included:

- Limited understanding of the broader context of how New Zealand’s land administration systems (survey, tenure, resource management) integrate and function together.
- Gaps in knowledge of planning instruments, such as the impact of national policy statements, environmental standards, and regional plans on land subdivision.

- An inability to articulate the broader considerations for subdivision, including the design of rights, restrictions, and responsibilities in response to legislative/regulatory requirements.
- Difficulty in explaining the pros and cons of subdivision options e.g. including ownership and management of common areas in medium-density developments or applying restrictions to achieve public-good outcomes, for example: natural hazard mitigation.

Overall, the planning examiners would like to see more evidence of candidates:

a) applying core planning and regulatory knowledge to practical problems they encounter in their professional practice;
b) demonstrating application of that knowledge within the planning projects submitted.

The engineering examiner was generally pleased with the level of knowledge and experience displayed by the candidates during their interviews. There were some outstanding candidates that have had strong support from their employers and were very confident and knowledgeable. These candidates presented good quality projects that generally required complex and diverse engineering solutions. Projects continue to be wide ranging in scope and size reflecting the diverse nature of land development around NZ. Two candidates who did not submit projects displayed unusually rudimentary engineering knowledge at their interviews which is of some concern.

The current S+SNZ examinations process has been a significant career milestone for surveyors in NZ for decades. The regime is about to undergo a significant and exciting change as the CSLB transitions into its new Competency Assessment Framework in 2026. The panel remains committed to setting a high bar for candidates to demonstrate their competency in terms of the CSLB Standards and believe that the industry demands this of its licensed professionals. We look forward to seeing a group of well prepared and enthusiastic candidates presenting applications to the panel for the final round of professional interviews being held under the current examinations regime in October.

Yours sincerely

Kris Gough
S+SNZ Examinations Panel Chair

Andrew Blackman
S+SNZ President