

Misconceptions a recruitment challenge – MinEx

Bernie Napp - Thu, 15 Aug 2024



Many young New Zealanders are steering clear of careers in construction, engineering and infrastructure, viewing them as too physically or mentally challenging.

MinEx has drawn this conclusion from a Workforce Development Council for Infrastructure and Construction [report](#) completed earlier this year, in its August issue of Train Brain.

“These misconceptions are a growing problem for New Zealand; we urgently need more skilled professionals to build our new homes, hospitals, and other vital infrastructure,” MinEx chief executive Wayne Scott says.

“While the construction industry is experiencing a national slowdown, the long-term demand for skilled professionals remains critical.”

The negative perceptions are threatening even greater workforce shortages nationwide, Scott says.

Key statistics

The WDC is responsible for developing and maintaining qualifications, unit standards, and micro-credentials for the construction and infrastructure industries.

It commissioned the research from Ipsos, a global market research and public opinion specialist. The purpose was to better understand how to attract new entrants into target sectors.

Of 1000 New Zealanders surveyed across all demographics between 21 February and 12 March, more than half of young adults and 60 per cent of millennials viewed the idea of a career in engineering, construction and civil infrastructure negatively.

The research also showed that 44 per cent of millennials and 37 per cent of young adults – aged 18-25 – believe they lack the physical strength for construction jobs.

About 30 per cent of students surveyed feel they are not proficient enough in mathematics or sciences for infrastructure and construction careers.

What the report says

“People also place great stock on a positive work–life balance, and construction careers are seen as quite lacking in this regard – this remains a key image problem to address,” Ipsos says.

“Careers in sectors such as construction, engineering, and civil infrastructure still suffer from an image problem compared to more attractive options like business, law, IT, and government jobs.

“This poor image reflects a duo of stereotypes, in which construction, engineering, and infrastructure workers are seen as either highly physical ‘tradie’-types or highly intelligent STEM graduates.

“Hence the biggest barrier is people thinking they are not smart or physical enough to consider such sectors.”

Young people undervalue heavy equipment operation, outdoor work, cultural involvement, customer service, physically engaging work, practical problem-solving, and working with data and designs.

Proposed solutions

Ipsos concludes much work lies ahead to “shift misconceptions and promote much broader, more accurate awareness of the array of careers available in the construction, engineering, and civil infrastructure sectors”.

The industry will need to emphasise achievements in work–life balance and make a concerted effort to address misconceptions and attract new talent to the industry.

“Roles in construction, engineering, and infrastructure are varied, well-paid and offer job security in main centres and regions with a robust pipeline of future work,” Ipsos says.

[Similar concerns](#) and proposals for addressing worker shortages were raised at the QuarryNZ conference in Rotorua in July.

Issues included the need to build trust in the community, and for quarry companies to embrace technological advances, both to improve their own productivity, and to make the industry more attractive for new entrants.