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FEEDBACK:

Certificate of Competency Assessment Framework

To: The Secretary
Cadastral Surveyors Licensing Board
secretary@cslb.org.nz

This feedback is on behalf of the *Institute of Cadastral Surveying (ICS)*.

The Institute of Cadastral Surveying represents and advocates for the interests of Aotearoa New Zealand's cadastral surveyors, their clients and the cadastre.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed CSLB Certificate of Competency Assessment Framework

General

The ICS is pleased to see the CSLB creating a formal framework for assessing the competency of candidates seeking to become Licensed Cadastral Surveyors. The current process driven by the S+SNZ 'Annual Circular' is outdated, confusing for both candidates and their supervising surveyors and has the apparent conflicting purpose of admitting candidates to S+SNZ membership, the requirements of which don't necessarily align with the CSLB Standards for Licensing Cadastral Surveyors.

The feedback points below are structured in alignment with the consultation document. Where a section of the document is not addressed, ICS has no comment to make on that section.

B.3 The Need for Change

The ICS has taken a keen interest in the development of the new framework, including participating in the exploratory workshops on the competency assessment framework held in 2021, and we generally concur with the findings of Dr Grant set out in Paragraph B.3.

C.1 Goals for the Re-Design Process

- a) Ensure the framework provides a clear pathway for survey graduates seeking a certificate of competency for an initial cadastral survey licence.
- b) Ensure that the assessment of applicants is consistent from year to year and that the process clearly identifies those who have met the competencies and those who have not.
- c) Include more flexibility around the evidence of experience that is submitted to prove knowledge, ability and understanding more directly against the relevant competencies.

- d) Utilise modern examination formats to avoid disadvantaging those who do not perform well in certain testing scenarios, and to try and reflect a modern working environment.
- e) Create a framework for the Assessment Panel (whether internal to the Board or a third-party provider) so that the requirements of the Board and the levels of competence expected are clearly understood.
- f) Create a framework that is sustainable for the members of the Assessment Panel, with appropriate remuneration benchmarked against comparable professional models and subject to regular review.

We applaud and support the above goals.

- g) Ensure that the process of engaging with the framework is cost-efficient and that the direct costs are recovered from the applicants.

ICS is deeply concerned that the cost of obtaining a license does not become prohibitive to candidates, a concern which should be shared by the Board noting the risk identified in B.3(c) of creating a shortage of licensed surveyors. This should also be considered in light of the lack of diversity in the profession (which is regularly highlighted/lamented in the CSLB Annual Reports). It seems evident that placing a high cost-barrier to professional entry will not help to address the latter. At the same time ICS strongly agrees that members of the Assessment Panel need to be remunerated appropriately given that they are likely to be senior members of the profession and that this is occupational regulation for a statutorily regulated profession. It may be that the panel members also need to be indemnified for the decisions made in issuing a certificate of competency. It is unclear how this cost will be managed, particularly given that the number of candidates may vary greatly from year to year.

D Framework

D.2 Process

2. The intention of the Board is that once an applicant has completed enough post-graduate experience to potentially be proficient in the competencies and they have submitted their portfolio, they will be expected to proceed through the subsequent stages to obtain their certificate of competence in a timely manner.

No clarity is provided on what constitutes a 'timely manner'. ICS would expect that this was specified (perhaps 2-3 years), and that the process would specifically allow for candidates to apply for extensions especially due to changes of personal circumstances such as illness or having children.

D.3 Academic Qualification

3. Clause 10(2) of the Standards also provides the opportunity for an applicant who has an undergraduate degree which does not align with the above requirements, but has undertaken extra study required by the Board, to seek a licence.

It is hoped that the 'extra study' and the process for obtaining the Board's approval under this route will be more clearly spelled out by the Board at a future date.

D.4 Portfolio of Experience

2. The Board proposes that rather than requiring applicants to submit a series of pre-prescribed projects, they should present a portfolio of work that demonstrates they have achieved the appropriate level of proficiency in the competencies listed in Schedule 1 of the Standards.

The assessment criteria need to be clearly outlined or identified by the Board so that there is a level of consistency applied by the assessors from applicant to applicant and from year to year.

5. The Guideline will also set the requirements for formatting the evidence provided in the Portfolio of Experience, along with the forms for the standard declarations required by the applicant and any supervising licensed cadastral surveyor (LCS).

It is important that the process allows for different supervising LCSs within a firm supervising different aspects of a candidate's work. It appears that this is envisaged. It also needs to be made clear to LCSs that they should only be signing this attestation if they did in fact supervise the work, and there needs to be consequences for making a false declaration in this regard.

7. Some provisions may also need to be established for those applicants who are unable to get project work to cover a particular competency. This would need to be discussed with the Board in advance and could only be for a small proportion of the Portfolio. Applicants could perhaps write an essay, critique a development, or undertake a mock project to convey their level of competency.

While it is important for the framework to accommodate the needs of candidates in these circumstances, it needs to be made clear what constitutes 'a small part'. It also needs to be clear to the assessment panel whether every single competence in the standards needs to be tested within the portfolio, and what leeway exists in this regard. Feedback from a former examiner suggests that under the current process this presents something of a challenge.

8. The Board is considering the option for applicants to progressively submit completed parts of their portfolio to the Assessment Panel to ensure they are meeting the competencies and have the right level of complexity so that they can adjust, if necessary, during the process.

This seems like an excellent option for the reasons outlined, as well as to potentially spread out the load on the assessment panel. We hope to see it in the final framework.

9. Provisions may also need to be made for suitable pre-graduate experience being included in the summary of work experience. This would need to be approved in advance by the Board (under Clause 10(3)(a) of the Standards), however it could be delegated to the Assessment Panel under certain conditions. Such conditions could include: the applicant holds a formal survey technician qualification; that the work was done under a supervising LCS; and that no more than 6 months experience is recognised. The Board can still approve pre-graduate experience in other circumstances.

ICS agrees that provision should be made for such experience – while pre-graduate experience may not be equivalent to post-graduate experience in terms of the nature of the work or the responsibilities held, in many cases the experience will vastly outweigh what a candidate who has gone to university straight from secondary school will be able to muster, and it is right that this be recognised.

D.5 Professional Challenge

3(e) The challenge is to be offered at least once a year and will follow reasonably soon after the deadline for the submission of the Portfolio of Experience for that year. The Board welcomes feedback on the frequency that the Professional Challenge is held.

More frequent running of the challenge will reduce the time-critical burden on the assessment panel in terms of marking (we understand the current Cadastral Law Exam has had up to 75 candidates some years), will help keep momentum up for candidates and will mean that candidates who fall short of the required standard won't have to put their professional progression on hold for an entire year. In the webinar Q & A the Board states that "...it is not envisaged that there will be many failures." This remains to be seen given that this promises to be an entirely new 'exam' with a much wider scope than the Cadastral Law Exam, which in its revised format still had only a 67% pass rate in 2023.

5. The Board does not envisage that the Professional Challenge will simply replace the current cadastral law exam, although it is expected that the challenge will involve the application of cadastral law and the cadastral surveying rules. There are other competency areas that can be readily tested during the Challenge.

ICS is pleased to see that the Cadastral Law Exam will not be replaced. To the extent necessary (and as we understand it with input from the CSLB) candidates should have gained sufficient knowledge of cadastral law and the cadastral surveying rules as part of their mandated tertiary qualification. Further rote learning of this material (which is after all ever-changing and freely available to any professional working in the field) has not necessarily proved to be a route to understanding or applying the laws and regulations in practice, and the Exam as it has existed prior to 2023 has deterred some otherwise potentially suitable candidates from progressing towards licensing. We can see a place for a challenge around competencies not easily demonstrated in a portfolio, such as application of the law and the cadastral survey rules as well as principles of good survey practice, communication, professional ethics

etc. We note that setting such a challenge in a way that meets the guiding attributes in Section 5.3 will be a difficult, time-consuming and recurring task for the assessment panel.

D.6 Professional Interview

2(c). The interview for each applicant would be conducted by three members of the Assessment Panel. The panel members would between them have significant expertise across all the relevant competencies.

While it is easy to see this as being quite a daunting prospect for a young professional, we can see that it would have the benefit of being a more holistic and flowing conversation to tease out a candidate's strengths and weaknesses. We support the notion in 6.5 that a candidate could be accompanied by a support person.

2(d) The interviews would be conducted in person, unless there were extenuating circumstances.
We agree that this is a necessary provision.

2(e) Consideration should be given to conducting the interviews in more than one location to make it easier for applicants to attend them, for example one in the North Island and one in the South Island. The interviewers could be similarly geographically based to minimise travel costs.

In theory this sounds very sensible, but it does lean heavily upon the assessment panel being able to recruit willing and able assessors across the country, and also might bring into question the consistency of the process.

2(f) The interviewers would utilise the applicant's Portfolio of Experience and Professional Challenge results to help shape the discussion, exploring any areas of apparent deficiency identified in relation to the competencies.

Again this sounds very sensible but does mean that the interviewers will be asked to do a lot of 'homework' on each candidate.

E. Other Matters to Support the Competency Assessment Framework

E.2 Assessment Panel

2. Any third party that provides the Assessment Panel will enter into a formal arrangement with the Board to provide the level of service required under the Act and the assessment framework. It is anticipated that the Board would confirm the appointment of Assessment Panel members.

We regard it as appropriate that the Board confirm the appointment of panel members.

3. The third party provider would train and induct new Panel members, and ensure succession planning of high calibre members is implemented as other members retire from the Panel. They would also ensure that there is sufficient capacity to cover Panel member unavailability and to manage workloads.

Consideration should be given to mandating appointment terms, to ensure that a high calibre of assessors is maintained with gradual renewal over time.

E.3 Examinations Coordinator

The administration of the competency assessment framework will be best served by a dedicated Examinations Coordinator (the Coordinator). The Coordinator would need to have a good understanding of the assessment framework.

ICS strongly believes that this critical role should be independent of the Assessment Panel, and that the coordinator should be funded and appointed by the Board (possibly through licensing fees if necessary) so that they are directly answerable to the Board. The webinar Q&A appears to hedge on the above (Q13). The coordinator needs to represent the Board's and candidate's interests on a day-to-day basis and it is in the best interests of both that this be separated from the organisation responsible for convening the assessment panel.

E.4 Sponsoring Licensed Cadastral Surveyor

1. Paragraph D.4 above indicates a role for supervising LCS(s) to attest to the periods of time the applicant has worked under their direction on projects that align with the competencies listed in Schedule 1. The Sponsoring LCS, however, plays a different role. The Sponsoring LCS attests that in their professional opinion the applicant is proficient in the competencies and is ready to be issued with a licence to undertake cadastral surveys. The Sponsoring LCS could be a current or former supervising LCS of the applicant.

We are heartened to see in the Q&A the following “It is expected that the sponsoring LCS will be a New Zealander who knows the candidate well, is fully engaged with their work experience, and is very familiar with all the competency requirements.”

However, we are concerned at the immediately following statement “It is noted that the sponsoring LCS may not need be a current LCS, but a former LCS who has a senior role in mentoring candidates for example.” This conflicts with the further statement that “[t]he Board would consider [falsely attesting to the competency of a candidate] to be extremely unprofessional and would require a specific interview with the sponsoring LCS. Furthermore, it would be taken into consideration when that LCS applied for the annual renewal of their licence as it would be in conflict with the professional conduct competency.”

The Board cannot impose any meaningful discipline on a former LCS, and no requirement is made for the sponsoring LCS to belong to a professional body who might have some disciplinary regime (eg S+SNZ). The same applies for the attestations from supervising LCSs. ‘Poor training’ by an LCS isn’t professional misconduct, so there is not necessarily any consequence for an LCS that doesn’t adequately supervise a candidate or who pressures a candidate to submit to the assessment process before they are ready. At the very least the Board needs to produce some guidance for sponsors and supervisors, but realistically for these roles to have meaning there needs to be consequence for LCSs who put forth grossly unsuitable candidates, especially for ‘repeat offenders’.

We trust that the feedback outlined above will be taken into consideration in the final shape of the assessment framework. If further elucidation of any of the points outlined above is required, please don’t hesitate to make contact via the Secretary (secretary@ics.org.nz).

Signed:



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