



Workshop refit stage one of upgrade

By **SIMON EDWARDS**

WelTec has just spent \$750,000 re-fitting its plumbing and gasfitting workshop and says there is more upgrading of its trades training facilities in the pipeline.

Something of a "rabbit warren" of three teaching spaces and sundry offices has been transformed into a light-filled and open-plan space that can easily cater for 60 trainees/apprentices at a time, says the Petone-based institution's trade Executive Dean, Alan Peck.

Data cabling as "future proofing" has also been installed. While the plumbing and gasfitting apprentices who come for 16-week block courses are not yet regularly using computers as a diagnostic tool, given the increasing sophistication of water heaters and other gas appliances, it's not far off, School of Construction, Trades and Horticulture, Neil McDonald, believes. Besides, still to be built in the new workshop is a mezzanine floor where trainees will be able to do research, and jump on computers to call up industry

codes and standards.

Both men pay tribute to the level of donations of equipment and materials for the new workshop by the plumbing industry. Mr McDonald had estimated he'd need to spend \$60,000 each on both the gasfitting and plumbing sections of the facility, but thanks to support from companies from around the region, WelTec only had to find \$20,000.

Nevertheless, Mr Peck says the Opus Architects-designed workshop is a "major investment" for WelTec.

"The revenue we get from carrying out this sort of training doesn't cover the capital investment. If you like, we're taking a financial risk but we're determined to be there in the future to support plumbing industry training."

That future looks bright. Plumbers recently topped recruitment company Tradestaff's list of careers least likely to be affected by the recession. The survey showed that a registered plumber

earns up to \$65,000 per year, with many self-employed plumbers earning over \$100,000.

Trades course demand at WelTec is growing strongly. "Our enrolments have been higher this year than ever before. I can only put that down to the fact that young people are looking to up-skill."

"It's typical that in an economic downturn our full-time courses top up (but) this year that's happened to a bigger degree than ever."

The modernised workshop is stage 1 of a major redevelopment of N Block. WelTec wants to close its ageing automotive training workshops in Wakefield Street by the end of this year, but to do so needs to build a new facility on its current carpark off Cuba Street. It has begun the process of seeking resource consent, with the key issue likely to be how else the tight carparking situation around WelTec might be eased.



LIVE WIRES: Thanks to industry donations of fully wired and piped appliances, apprentices such as Chris Downey get to practice their diagnosis and repair skills in 'live' settings.



LOOKING UP: Alan Peck (left) and Neil McDonald survey the newly upgraded workshop that will handle the more than 600 plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying apprentices who come to WelTec for block courses each year.