

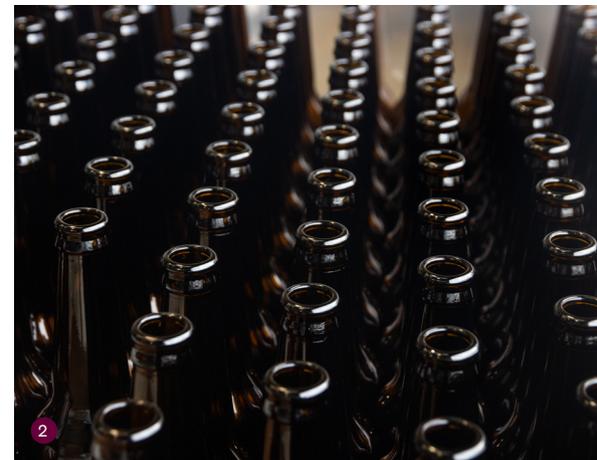
# Hopportunity knocks

At Otago Polytechnic's Brew School, the future of New Zealand beer-making is being developed one batch at a time.

STORY ALEXIA SANTAMARIA



1, 2. Beer sales at Otago Brew School help support the course. 3. Brewing lecturer Geoff Collie.



IF YOU HAPPENED to drop into the Stoaker Room in Cromwell this summer, you might have been served by Ricky Barbara. And if you asked him for a local beer recommendation, he might have proudly told you the Czech dark lager is pretty good. And rightly so, as he was personally involved in its creation. Not as a bartender, but as a student at Otago Brew School, in 2021. Barbara was a student in one of four yearly intakes of The New Zealand Certificate in Brewing (Level 4), the country's first brewing qualification. It's a course with an excellent by-product – beer that the public can purchase.

It's the ultimate in hands-on learning. Rather than scrambling around to find real-world experience for students, Otago Polytechnic built a brewery at their Cromwell campus. Students get to practise (under supervision) on a suite of recipes created by the tutors, and this beer is sold in selected pubs around New Zealand – and they are already gaining a keen following.

"We established the one-year course in 2019 here at the Cromwell campus, and it's attracted all kinds of students, at all stages of life," says Geoff Collie, brewing lecturer.

"It's so good to train people to go directly into the industry by teaching both the theory and the hands-on side of working in a brewery. We've had everyone from young people straight out of school, to a guy who had spent most of his life working in the sawmilling industry in Southland. The youngest has been 18 and the oldest was 64, and we've had a mix of men and women. This year it's close to 50/50."

Beer sales help support the course financially. They can brew 250L at a time, and there are two brewhouses that can do multiple brews a day depending on demand. The recipes for the standard range were developed by Collie and Ben Middlemiss (the original brewery manager), who like to joke that they have more than 70 years of experience between them.

There's always a pilsner, pale ale and Vienna lager – and in winter they brew a Scotch ale, oatmeal stout and dunkelweizen. Kolsch and hefeweizen make an appearance in summer and, if a student comes up with something particularly tasty in their small-scale experimental brews, it may become a limited-edition special release. The ultimate accolade.



The big breweries have been very supportive. "Lion has been getting the beer into pubs all over the country, and Asahi and DB have let students through their breweries," says Collie. "Small brewers have opened their doors as well, so the students have ended up with well-rounded experience on top of their everyday training. We've had students go to Asahi, Emmerson's, Waitoa and others. It's great to see them go straight into work after completing the course." [central.op.ac.nz](http://central.op.ac.nz)