Registration as a Land Surveyor in NSW: Information for Candidate and Mentoring Surveyors

Michael Spiteri
NSW Public Works / Board of Surveying and Spatial Information
michael.spiteri@pwa.nsw.gov.au

ABSTRACT

In New South Wales, cadastral surveying is legislated under the Surveying and Spatial Information Act 2002 and requires cadastral surveys to be undertaken by a registered land surveyor or under the supervision of a registered land surveyor. The Act establishes the Board of Surveying and Spatial Information (BOSSI), which is tasked with the responsibility of setting the requirements for registration and to manage the registration process. Current requirements for registration include a surveyor must hold a recognised qualification, undertake the required practical experience and pass the Board's examinations. These requirements require candidate surveyors to gain expertise in rural and urban cadastral surveying, strata and community title schemes, town planning and engineering. A big part of a candidate surveyor's training is the mentoring they receive from their mentoring surveyor, with the task of the mentoring surveyor ensuring the candidate surveyor is ready to undertake the Board's examinations. The profession also provides many other resources and workshops to support candidates in their journey of gaining registration. This paper reviews the current requirements for registration, and the author provides his experience and observations as a previous BOSSI Registrar and examiner.

KEYWORDS: *Cadastral, registration, BOSSI, mentoring, examinations*.

1 INTRODUCTION

The object of registration of land surveyors in New South Wales (NSW) is to ensure the competency of surveyors who carry out cadastral surveys in NSW so as to ensure the integrity of the cadastre in NSW and to provide the general public with confidence in the cadastral surveying services they seek. Registration has a long history in NSW going back to the 1830s. It is currently administered by the Board of Surveying and Spatial Information (BOSSI) via its powers delegated by the Surveying and Spatial Information Act 2002.

This paper aims to provide candidates, mentoring surveyors and interested members of the profession an insight into the requirements of becoming registered, the resources available to candidates and mentoring surveyors, along with the reflections of a previous BOSSI Registrar and examiner.

2 HISTORY OF THE EXAMINING OF SURVEYORS IN NSW

It is possible that the first examination of surveyors in NSW occurred in 1837 with a notice placed in the NSW Government Gazette of 6 September 1837:

His Excellency the GOVERNOR is pleased to direct, that each Candidate for employment as an Assistant Surveyor in this Colony, shall, previously to appointment, appear before a Board consisting of The Commanding Royal Engineer, The King's Astronomer in New South Wales, The Surveyor or Deputy Surveyor General, to be examined as to his knowledge of the theory and practice of Land Surveying. If found duly qualified for employment, the Board will grant him a certificate accordingly, upon which he will obtain a provisional appointment from the Governor, to be confirmed in six months, if, after that probation, he be recommended by the Head of his Department.

It is assumed this examination was an interview where the candidate was examined in astronomy, surveying techniques and equipment, carrying out surveys of that time which would have been mainly Crown Land surveys, geology, botany and possibly valuation.

In the following years, this would become the basis for examination as a licensed surveyor for the carrying out of Crown Land surveys for not only surveyors employed by government but also surveyors who tendered for Crown Land surveys. On the introduction of the Real Property Act in 1900, the Land Titles Office introduced examinations for surveyors carrying out surveys for the purposes of the Real Property Act. In 1929, the Surveyors Act was enacted with a new Board of Surveyors created which took on the responsibility of the examination of land surveyors in NSW, and such surveyors who were successful were provided with a certificate of competency and were able to apply to be a registered land surveyor. This initial Board of Surveyors forms the foundation of our current registration system under the Surveying and Spatial Information Act 2002 and administered by BOSSI.

Examinations over the years have had many variations. Past examinations have included written exams, practical exams, projects and interviews, involving various topics particular to a land surveyor's work at the time. For instance, written exams may include questions on topics such as earthworks, trigonometrical surveys, various types of calculations, geology, biology and valuation. The calculation part of the exam would usually be based upon a boundary example where missing lines and areas were required to be calculated based upon the diagrams and limited information provided. Candidates would undertake these calculations by hand and using various trigonometry rules and aids such as logarithmic tables and early mechanical calculators.

The practical examinations typically involved checking the competency of a candidate to carry out levelling surveys and traversing using a steel band. The venue for the practical exams was typically Centennial Park or Queens Park in Sydney, with exams carried out over two days. Typically, candidates would use other candidates as their assistants during practical exams, particularly candidates who would be seeking to undertake the examinations at the next examination period.

The topics for the projects and interviews have mainly stayed consistent over the years with the main topics being urban and rural cadastral surveying, engineering and town planning. Calibration and use of survey equipment was at one stage an additional topic on its own and with the introduction of the Strata Titles Act, strata was initially included in the urban cadastral interview but became its own separate project in the early 2000s.

Practical experience has also been a common theme for surveyors undertaking examination. Candidate surveyors in the early 20th century were indentured or apprenticed to a registered land surveyor. The registered land surveyor would then provide training to their candidate surveyor to prepare them for registration. Typically, the indenture or apprenticeship was over

4 years. With the introduction of surveying courses being provided by technical colleges, candidates would support their training from their registered land surveyor by attending and completing these courses. The establishment of a bachelors surveying degree at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in the 1950s was the impetus of the introduction of the degree being a requirement for registration.

3 REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESSES

The pathway to registration generally follows the below path:
1. Gain a recognised degree in surveying.
2. Apply to be a candidate surveyor with BOSSI.
3. Undertake the required practical experience.
4. Prepare and complete projects for BOSSI exams.
5. Undertake the BOSSI exams.
6. Apply for registration.

Typically, the total time required to undertake the above pathway is around 7-8 years, including 4 years to gain a recognised degree, 2 years of practical experience and 1-2 years to prepare and complete projects and then undertake the BOSSI exams. Although the above path is shown linear, there are opportunities for some flexibility allowing candidate surveyors to undertake various parts of the path concurrently or cater for their particular career path.

The following sections detail the requirements for each part of the pathway shown above. For further information, candidate surveyors and mentoring surveyors should consult the BOSSI Examination Determination publication (BOSSI, 2025) which is available on the BOSSI website (https://www.bossi.nsw.gov.au/) and then, if in doubt, consult with BOSSI directly.

3.1 Recognised Degree

Currently, the recognised degree for registration as a land surveyor in NSW is a 4-year Australian/New Zealand bachelor's degree in surveying or equivalent. Details of current recognised surveying degrees available across Australia and New Zealand are listed on the BOSSI website.

BOSSI also has the facility for people holding overseas qualifications to have their qualification assessed for their equivalency to an Australian/New Zealand bachelor's degree in surveying. The process involves making an application with BOSSI and providing all supporting documentation which should include a copy of your current qualifications and a detailed description of the subjects studied towards this qualification. The assessment is then undertaken by the independent Bureau for the Assessment of Overseas Assessments. Based upon the advice received from the Bureau, BOSSI then decides if the overseas qualification is equivalent to an Australian/New Zealand bachelor's degree in surveying, and whether the applicant can then apply to be a candidate surveyor with BOSSI to commence their journey towards registration in NSW.

BOSSI does encourage people to enrol as candidate surveyors while they are undertaking their recognised degree. This gives the opportunity for the candidate surveyor to gain practical experience or even attempt BOSSI's exams while studying towards their recognised degree. Of course, this may not suit all candidates as each candidate may have a different pathway due to

their own particular preferences and constraints, but allowing candidates to gain practical experience and attempt exams while studying towards their degree does give some flexibility and may assist with keeping the registration timeframe to a minimum.

3.2 Practical Experience

To become registered as a land surveyor in NSW, a surveyor is required to gain a minimum of 2 years practical experience in surveying in NSW prior to making an application for registration. This practical experience is to mainly involve cadastral surveying as undertaken in NSW, but BOSSI does encourage candidate surveyors to gain a wide field of experience. It is noted that the BOSSI exams also have specific practical experience requirements: A candidate cannot attempt their engineering or town planning exam until 26 weeks of general practical experience is gained, and 52 weeks of cadastral practical experience must be gained before they can attempt their cadastral exams. As mentioned above, practical experience can be and is encouraged to be undertaken concurrently while studying towards a recognised degree and attempting the BOSSI exams, as this practical experience will greatly assist the candidate to successfully complete the BOSSI exams and gain their registration in NSW.

All practical experience is undertaken under a supervising NSW registered land surveyor, who signs off the candidate's practical experience forms submitted to BOSSI for assessment. It is important at this stage that the candidate surveyor has a supervising and mentoring surveyor that gives the candidate surveyor a wide variety of projects to be involved in which exposes the candidate to various types of land surveying in NSW. This includes the field and office processes to successfully complete surveying projects in NSW, exposure to carrying out land surveys in various areas of NSW, exposure to dealing and consulting with clients, and generally providing the candidate with a strong foundation of understanding of how land surveys are carried out in NSW.

The role of a supervising and mentoring surveyor is a very important role in the training of candidate surveyors towards registration. It is the supervising surveyor's responsibility to ensure the survey work carried out by the candidate is in compliance with the Surveying and Spatial Information Regulation and to sign off on their work. A mentoring surveyor, on the other hand, is a NSW registered land surveyor who is responsible for the training and development of the candidate and ensures the candidate is ready for the BOSSI exams. It should be noted that the supervising and mentoring surveyor for a candidate could be the same registered land surveyor.

3.3 Examinations

The BOSSI exams consist of five exams on the following topics:

- Urban Cadastral
- Rural Cadastral
- Strata and Community Titles
- Engineering
- Town Planning

All five exams comprise of the candidate carrying out a project and then presenting their project to two BOSSI examiners at a viva voce interview.

The projects are either real-life projects or hypothetical (but preferably real-life). The projects are presented to the examiners as if the examiners are clients and/or statutory officers. They must meet all legislative requirements and be in a form which would be suitable for lodgement at NSW Land Registry Services (LRS) or Council depending upon the exam being sat. Included with the project, the candidate is also expected to submit not only the final plan for their project but also all search results, field notes, calculations, checklists, documentation usually required for that project, photos and any other documentation that might be applicable to that project.

Each project must also meet the requirements as set in BOSSI's Examination Determination (BOSSI, 2025), particularly the minimum size and content of the project. This may include the zoning, site area, number of lots, size of project, age of search, and certain specific requirements for each examination. Further details can be found in BOSSI's Examination Determination, which candidate and mentoring surveyors are encouraged to continuously review while candidates are preparing their projects.

The viva voce interview involves the candidate showing that they are competent in the topic via presenting their project as well as answering questions from the examiners. Each exam has set competencies which the candidate will be examined on. These competencies are listed in BOSSI's Examination Determination and include legislation applicable to that topic, surveying techniques and instrumentation, boundary determination and land titling, ethics and professionalism, and consulting with clients and government. Most of the questions will be based on the candidate's project but as it is unlikely that the candidate's project will touch upon all competencies required for the examination, the examiners will also pose hypothetical questions. As such, it is up to the candidate and mentoring surveyor to ensure they are prepared to answer questions in all competencies for that exam.

4 RESOURCES AND WORKSHOPS

There are many resources available, including workshops held by the profession to assist candidate and mentoring surveyors in the registration process, online resources and websites, publications, guidelines and references. This section provides a summary but not a comprehensive list of all the resources and workshops available to candidate and mentoring surveyors.

4.1 BOSSI

A good place to start for any candidate or mentoring surveyor is the BOSSI website. It not only contains information about the registration process but also a list of the Board's determinations and policies (most importantly, the Examination Determination), as well as a section of historical documents. In particular, candidates and mentoring surveyors should access the publications "Notes on Survey Investigation" by R.W. Willis (Willis, 1982), "Marking the Landscape" by I.H. Marshall (Marshall, 2002) and other documents which will give the candidate a good understanding of boundary and control surveying in NSW.

In addition to these resources available on the BOSSI website, BOSSI organises an annual workshop held in Kurri Kurri in May which provides details of the examination process to candidate and mentoring surveyors. This workshop also gives the opportunity for candidate and mentoring surveyors to review past project submissions as well as have discussions with BOSSI examiners. It is encouraged that candidates should attend this workshop at least once in their

registration journey, particularly close to the beginning to get a greater understanding of the registration process. Mentoring surveyors are encouraged to attend this workshop every few years to keep up to date with the current registration requirements.

4.2 Government Resources

There are many government websites which contain resources pertaining to the undertaking of surveys for these government organisations and may be helpful to the candidate surveyor in their registration journey. The main government websites which should be referred to on a regular basis are the Surveyor-General's Directions (DCS Spatial Services, 2026), the Registrar General's Guidelines (NSW Land Registry Services, 2026) and the NSW Legislation (2026) website.

The Surveyor-General's Directions consist of a series of directions providing detailed information about the requirements for boundary and control surveying in NSW. In particular, candidates should have a good understanding of Direction No. 7 (Surveying and Spatial Information Regulation 2024 – Applications) and Direction No. 9 (GNSS for Cadastral Surveys).

The Registrar General's Guidelines provide detailed information regarding the requirements for lodging plans and documentation for registration. The section on Deposited Plans, Strata Schemes and Community Schemes is a must for candidate surveyors to study.

The NSW Legislation website is the source of truth for all legislation in NSW and is a resource providing access to current and repealed acts and regulations as well as planning instruments such as State Environmental Planning Policies and Local Environmental Plans. It also includes access to government gazettes from 2001 to the present.

4.3 Institution of Surveyors NSW

The Institution of Surveyors NSW (ISNSW) provides several publications, guidelines, notes and other resources as part of their member services. ISNSW's main publication is Hallmann's "Legal Aspects of Boundary Surveying as Apply in NSW" which was originally written by F. Hallmann and has been continuously updated by ISNSW as changes in legislation or case law occur (Hallmann, 2007). This publication has become an unofficial bible for boundary surveying in NSW and is an important publication for candidates to study while undertaking the registration process. Other publications provided by ISNSW include "Definition of Railway Boundaries in NSW" by J.T. Webber (Webber, 1983), "Institution Guidelines on the Preparation of Identification Reports" (ISNSW, 2002) and W.A. Searl's "Rural Boundary Surveys" (Searl, 2004), which may be helpful to candidates in understanding these specialised aspects of cadastral surveying.

In the last few years, ISNSW has also increased the number of workshops it provides for the training of candidate surveyors. The main workshop offered by ISNSW is the Cadastral Workshop, which is held twice a year over 5 days. The first 3 days involve instructional presentations on various boundary and land titling topics based upon the competencies for BOSSI's cadastral examinations. The fourth day is focused upon digital plans and LandXML, and the fifth day provides candidates the opportunity to have their cadastral projects reviewed by experienced surveyors who provide advice and commentary upon the project and the candidate's readiness for the cadastral exams.

More recent workshops offered by ISNSW include the Rural and Urban Cadastral Bootcamps and the Searching Workshop. These workshops were developed as it was obvious that candidates had difficulties to gain the full all-round experience and knowledge required to pass the exams. As such, these workshops were developed to cater to candidates who lack experience or knowledge in that particular area. The bootcamps involve taking candidates into a rural or urban environment where experienced surveyors guide the candidates into how surveys are carried out in that environment, clues to look out for to establish boundaries in such an environment, and how to manage themselves in such an environment. The Searching Workshop focuses upon the various methods used to find public records such as plans, titles and dealings to assist with the establishment of boundaries, using real-life examples and exercises.

In addition to these workshops, ISNSW has also developed a Mentoring Surveyors Workshop in the last year. This workshop was developed for mentoring surveyors to give them up to date information about the registration process as well as providing guides and tips on mentoring of candidates.

4.4 Consulting Surveyors NSW

Consulting Surveyors NSW (CSNSW) also holds workshops for candidates twice a year in Engineering, Town Planning, and Strata and Community Titles. These workshops are split into two parts, where the first part is for instruction and learning from experienced surveyors. This is where the candidates learn the theory and the processes to undertake their project and examination. Then there is a break between part 1 and 2 to give candidates time to work on their projects and prepare themselves to be reviewed. If a candidate does not have a project of their own, CSNSW can provide a project from their pool of projects for the candidate to use for their BOSSI exam.

The second part of the workshop is where candidates bring in their completed or near-completed project to be reviewed by experienced surveyors. Similarly to what is offered by ISNSW, candidates are given feedback on their project and knowledge in preparation for their exams.

4.5 Council Publications

Another great resource, particularly for the engineering and town planning projects and exams, are Council design and planning guidelines. These guidelines provide details on Council requirements for engineering designs and planning submissions. Candidates should consult the Council in which their engineering or town planning project is located. Typically, these guidelines will be on the Council's website – if not, Council's engineering and planning departments should be contacted. As part of their submission for the engineering and town planning projects, candidates will be asked to bring these guidelines along with them to the exam.

4.6 Networking

A great resource in preparation for the exams is networking. Candidates and mentoring surveyors are encouraged to make contact and work with other candidates and mentoring surveyors. For example, it is suggested that if a mentoring surveyor does not have the experience in a particular topic of the exams, then an experienced practitioner in that field could be found within the candidate's or mentoring surveyor's network to assist the candidate to gain the skills to complete the project and prepare themselves for the exam. In this instance, however,

it is still up to the candidate's mentoring surveyor to ensure the candidate is ready for the exam in consultation with the experienced practitioner. Using networking may also assist in a candidate finding an appropriate project for their exam. A great place for a candidate to commence or grow their network is the ISNSW Emerging Surveyors Group. This group provides opportunity for emerging surveyors to socialise and attend events that focus on the topics relating to surveyors in the beginning of their career.

5 REFLECTIONS

This section provides some reflections of the mentoring of candidates and the examination process via the author's experience as a prior BOSSI examiner. It should be noted the examination process is continually changing and as such it is recommended that candidates and mentoring surveyors always consult the current Examination Determination on the BOSSI website when reviewing these reflections.

5.1 Time

Time is the biggest enemy for candidates in undertaking their projects and exams. Typically, candidates have finished their degree and are working full time while preparing their projects and studying for their exams. Some candidates may be studying, working full-time and also trying to undertake the registration process. Combining this with the usual outside distractions does make candidates quite time poor. It may feel that the BOSSI examination process is quite long, burdensome and tiresome, but candidates should remember that the time sacrificed towards registration is actually quite small in comparison to their whole career life and will provide further opportunity to advance their career. Candidates should also realise that sometimes the projects they are working on in their employment may not be suitable for the BOSSI exam and as such they may need to undertake external projects within their own time.

With these points in mind, candidates should be prepared to become good time managers. One tip is to note that exams are held by BOSSI roughly 6 months apart, typically in March and October each year. As such, candidates should timetable approximately 6 months to complete their project, study and get ready for each exam. Candidates should also remember to give themselves plenty of time to study as well as to complete their projects. Some of the projects, particularly engineering, involve a lot of drafting and preparation, so candidates should allocate the appropriate time to complete these projects. From observations, the most intensive project is the engineering project, and it is estimated that this project may take the full 6 months on a part-time basis to complete. Other tips are to break projects up into bite-sized chunks and try to complete these chunks within a planned timeline. This is where an experienced practitioner in that field may be helpful to assist the candidate in developing their timeline and give them an indication of the time required.

5.2 Attitude

Attitude can go a long way in helping to make the registration process easier. Candidates should remember that it is a privilege to be a registered land surveyor. Some sacrifice will be required on their part, but the profession is happy to support if the candidate is willing to put the effort into preparing their project and undertaking their study. Many within the profession are willing to provide guidance and instruction, spend time to review projects or carry out mock exams, but in the end it is the candidate who needs to do the work. Some of the projects and exams

may feel superficial during preparation, but candidates might be surprised about how much foundational knowledge they gain which will be of assistance in their future career.

5.3 Mentoring

Mentoring is one of the most important aspects in the training of candidate surveyors towards registration. It is the mentoring surveyor's role to ensure the candidate gains the required experience and exposure to a variety of projects, to assist the candidate with their projects and study, and to provide the foundational practical knowledge for their surveying career. As an examiner, the amount and quality of mentoring provided to a candidate can be seen in the candidate's performance.

The amount of mentoring required will depend upon each candidate's confidence, ability and their dedication to the process. Some candidates may only need support with gaining a project and some support to complete their project, others may need more time to be able to discuss concepts and topics.

The best mentoring a mentoring surveyor can provide is to ensure the candidate is prepared before they attend their exam. This may be via reviewing the candidate's project and documentation and then carrying out a mock exam with the candidate. Clues on likely questions can be determined from the competencies for that particular exam, as listed in the BOSSI Examination Determination, and then considering what a regular registered surveyor should know and understand in regard to those particular competencies. If the mentoring surveyor does not feel they have the experience in a particular field or in carrying out a mock exam, then assistance could be sought from within their network of peers or via the workshops offered by CSNSW and ISNSW.

5.4 Projects

Candidates should ensure that their project meets the requirements as set in the Examination Determination. Bringing a project that does not meet these requirements may mean you will be refused examination before the exam even starts. If a candidate is unsure, they should check with their mentoring surveyor first and then, if still in doubt, approach their peers or professional associations for assistance. BOSSI may consider some exemptions but on only a minor basis.

When choosing projects, candidates and mentoring surveyors should consider the size and complexity of the project. From experience, a large, complex project does not provide any advantage to the candidate in their exam and may even be a disadvantage as most of their time will be spent upon preparing their project and their study time may then suffer.

At times, suitable projects may be difficult to find. Solutions to finding projects include using projects available from CSNSW, approaching your peers in your network, asking friends and relatives about surveying their property, or even approaching local businesses. Other sources are to create projects over public land such as reserves, State Forests or National Parks. Engineering and town planning projects can be based upon hypothetical projects using freely available data such as ELVIS elevation data, service information and planning maps. Land on the outskirts of already developed areas, which is earmarked for future development, is usually a good place to start.

It is also suggested not to wait for the goldilocks project which touches upon all the competencies for that particular exam. A better solution, particularly for the cadastral exams, is to present a portfolio of projects that individually only involve a couple of competencies but as a whole cover all or most of the competencies. This may mean the candidate needs to include further documentation in their submissions but may assist to prove competency in an easier way to the examiners as well as allowing the candidate to proceed through the registration process without waiting for the perfect project.

When presenting projects, candidates should ensure they have all documentation, and it is organised in an orderly fashion. It is very likely that the candidate will be asked by the examiners to present a particular document within their project, so having the project in an orderly and organised fashion will assist not only the ability of the candidate to find the document but also helps to ease the candidate's nerves.

5.5 Study

It is very important that the candidate undertakes study for all the competencies as listed in the Examination Determination for the exam they are sitting. Examiners are required to address each competency during the exam to ensure the candidate's competency. Candidates should be prepared to answer hypothetical questions if their project does not touch upon a particular competency. Also be prepared for examiners bringing their own examples to the exam.

5.6 Examiners

It should be noted that the examiners are not scary people and are not there to try to trick the candidate. Examiners do want to see candidates get through the process but of course have the difficult task of ensuring the candidate is competent and to keep the standard at the required level within the profession.

It is encouraged that candidates be confident as best as possible and listen to questions intently. Typically, a succinct answer is best as usually the examiner is looking to hear certain keywords. Candidates should use their intuition as this is usually a good guide to ascertain whether a small or big response is required. Examiners are also happy to rephrase or break down questions if the candidate does not understand the initial question. If the candidate does not know the answer to the question, they should advise the examiners and not dwell on that particular question. The examiners may decide to ask additional questions to replace that particular question or, if time permits, just come back to it later. Showing knowledge of resources where facts and answers could be checked can also assist in showing competency to the examiners.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Registration as a land surveyor in NSW is a thorough process to ensure candidates are competent to become registered. It is based upon a long history of examination of surveyors in NSW and based upon three pillars: a recognised degree, practical experience and examinations.

This paper has provided candidates, mentoring surveyors and interested members of the profession an insight into the requirements of becoming registered and presented many resources available to candidates and mentoring surveyors. It is recognised that the registration process can be difficult and may at times feel burdensome, complex and long. Hopefully, the

reflections outlined in this paper and the available support of the profession will help making it a rewarding experience for current and future candidates once the candidate surveyor receives their certificate of competency and then their certificate of registration. The motto to always remember is "short-term pain for long-term gain".

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