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IN OTHER NEWS

Classes of Registration

This week the Federation sent a request to the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board for consultation with the industry on Classes of Registration.

Dear Mr Bickers

The development and future of the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industries is dependent on having classes of registration that are fit for purpose for the industry, and meet the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board's purpose of protecting the health and safety of members of the public by ensuring the competency of all people engaged in the provision of sanitary plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying services.

A key part of fulfilling the Board's health and safety function lies in administering the licensing system of plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers.

Our View



agendas and operate on a secret society basis.

The first subject we are looking at is the qualifications review. Is it meeting industry needs or is it a stop gap because time is running out? Where do we believe it is taking us?

In 2011 a qualifications review was started by NZQA. The purpose of the review was so ensure that qualifications exist to meet the needs of learners and the broader New Zealand society and economy. Qualifications needed to be reviewed to ensure they remain useful, relevant and fit for purpose.

The initial round of reviews of levels 1-6 qualifications was to focus on reducing the duplication and proliferation of qualifications. The aim was to ensure the system is easy to understand, particularly for learners and employers. The reviews were expected to take three to four years to complete and were to take place between 2011 and 2014.

The initial reviews looked at qualifications in groups to ensure they meet the overall needs of any particular sector. The reviews are also to ensure that all qualifications are aligned with the new rules for listing qualifications on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF).

Key points

- *Reviews aimed to reduce duplication and proliferation of qualifications.*
- *Reviews aimed to ensure that the range of qualifications, and associated further educational or employment opportunities, are easy to understand for learners and employers.*
- *NZQA will work with qualification developers and providers to ensure groups or clusters of qualifications being reviewed are appropriate, comprehensive and a good fit with overarching sector objectives.*

Last week we reported that over the next few weeks we would be giving you our view on issues affecting the industry. These views will be based on the current situation because as we know, a lot of people in positions of authority in this industry have their hidden

Relevant legislation is:

- *the Plumbers, Gasfitters, and Drainlayers Act 2006*

- *the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers (Plumbing Registration and Licensing) Notice 2010*

- *the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers (Gasfitting Registration and Licensing) Notice 2010*

- *the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers (Drainlaying Registration and Licensing) Notice 2010*

- *the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers (Fees) Notice 2010.*

The Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Federation believe problems are being created within the industry by the classes of registration currently in place particularly in the area of supervision. This has become quite evident during consultation by The Skills Organisation into NZQA qualifications for the industry.

Supervision in the industry is an issue that is getting a great deal of attention, as is the level and standard of training. The Federation believes the current system creates problems in the areas of accountability, responsibility and

- *NZQA's role is to maintain oversight of the review process and its outcomes. NZQA also provides support for qualification developers to understand and meet the new requirements for listing qualification at levels 1-6 on the NZQF.*

In mid 2012 a Targeted Review of Qualifications in our industry kicked into gear to ensure that our qualifications are useful and relevant to current and future learners, employers and other stakeholders.

This was a mandatory review on plumbing, gasfitting, drainlaying and roofing qualifications. We were put in to a group with Scaffolders who also had to have a review. Key stakeholders were invited to participate in advisory groups. The key role of the groups was to review and advise on the technical content of the qualifications, recommend the structure and content of new/reviewed qualifications for governance approval, represent wider stakeholders groups and provide a voice for industry, and be technical experts in the subject areas.

What NZQA wanted was industry participation to ensure industry needs were met. The Federation initially participated but believed the system was being railroaded in a particular direction which favoured the educationalists, not industry. There were very few practicing trades people in the groups which was very possibly due to costs having to be covered by those attending the meetings themselves.

Eventually the Federation suspended its participation in the process as it felt there was insufficient industry participation and options were not being looked at. It rejoined the process after NZQA noted our concerns and directed SKILLS to invite us to participate so the process could progress.

There have been numerous meetings and work groups (called SME's – short for Subject Matter Expert Groups), since then and there has been some progress with regard to qualifications content. Recently The Skills Organisation, who are our ITO, held consultation meetings throughout the country, which had very poor attendance rates from the industry. It is understood that some in the Lead Group have taken the low turnout to mean the industry was happy with the direction and content and therefore didn't feel the need to turn up and voice their opinions.

We believe the low turnout is caused by something quite different – we believe industry is weary of consultation because they believe it doesn't make any real difference. We believe industry thinks it is a "going through the motions" process, where there is back room deals done by those with hidden agendas. The only way to change this is for industry to turn up and insist that they are heard. To do this Skills needs to ensure that the environment is one of mutual respect and openness. Does that environment exist within Skills? Well the jury is still out on that one.

A broad overview for our industry is that there will be a pre-trade at level 3, apprenticeship and licensing qualifications at level 4 and certifying qualification at level 5. At the beginning of the process all those participating were told the qualifications need to concentrate

supervision.

With the review of qualifications under way the Federation believes it is a prime opportunity to move the industry into the future and away from the systems that don't provide what the industry needs.

A change in classes of licence may aid the public, who are often ignorant of the difference between a Licensed person and a Certifying person, to better understand regulation of the industry.

The Federation request the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board consider consulting on Classes of Registration as soon as possible to ensure the classes meet the industries needs.

The vision we have is of a registration system and qualifications matrix that sees registered people being able to perform all duties, without supervision. We realise that this would require a longer training period and see apprenticeships lengthened, however with the proposed Level 3 and 4 – almost by default this is happening – a one year pre-trade with a four year apprenticeship will be five years. The additional formalised training can only strengthen the protection given to the public and raise the

on “what the individual can be and do” at each stage when they qualify. This is where the Federation has a problem.

Let's start with the Pre-trade, which is likely to be a 120 credit full year course. Trainees are taught very basic skills and knowledge in the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industry. Graduates will be capable of assisting with, plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying work UNDER SUPERVISION and will be ready to enter an apprenticeship.

For the industry this will allow for a pool of potential apprentices but will need to be tightly controlled as it does allow training institutions to “sell” a qualification where the graduates may not end up getting apprenticeships. This leaves a pool of people who may enter the black market using their limited skills which would place the public at risk as there will be no supervision. This pre-trade qualification is an “EXIT” point where graduates can opt out of the system with a qualification or may not be wanted by the industry and still has a qualification, i.e. L3 plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying. What can they be and do? Nothing without direct supervision as defined under the Act.

Next there is level 4 which is the apprenticeship, which prepares trainees for sitting their registration exams for a Licensing Qualification. This is the guts of the training. This qualification is to provide the sector with people who are suitably skilled as plumbing, gasfitting or drainlaying tradespeople and are ready to apply for registration.

This is another EXIT point where graduates can decide to opt out of the industry or stay at this level under SUPERVISION. We see this as another situation where a pool of people can leave the industry and enter the black market as they don't have sufficient qualifications to be responsible for their own work. What can these people be and do? Without supervision – nothing legally.

On qualification at the next level, Level 5, you are deemed to be at the top of the trade and are capable of taking responsibility for your own work and RESPONSIBILITY for the work of level 3 and 4 trainees and those with the Licensing Qualification. You are responsible for SUPERVISION and are totally responsible for others actions.

We believe the consultation at the initial stages was insufficient and followed one track to the detriment of exploring other options. Skills perhaps put the wrong people in charge of the process – to the point where we suspected there was a pre-determined outcome.

Now don't get us wrong, there has been some good work on content of the qualifications but the content isn't going to stand for much if the qualifications themselves cause problems in the industry - such as the potential growth of the black market, accountability and supervision issues.

The Federation believes that graduates qualifying at the completion of an apprenticeship should be “fully qualified” to a standard where they are responsible for their work and accountable, without the supervision requirements currently in place. This means lengthening the apprenticeship and providing more depth within it. It would see a system much like the 1st, 2nd and 3rd quals of the past. A system which produced some excellent tradespeople with a good solid

standards in the industry.

We feel the industry needs a system that is transparent and understood by industry and can be easily explained to the public.

We are happy to meet to provide more information or assist in the consultation process if required.

The Federation knows change is needed in the industry and will keep pushing for it. If you agree with what we have said then you might like to write to Mr Bickers as well supporting our request.

You know what they say – the more the merrier!

knowledge base.

Time is running out and the Federation has been told that if it doesn't support the proposed scheme the industry may end up without a NZQA recognised qualification.

We will be monitoring this carefully as we do need qualifications, but we don't want a "stop gap" qualification, as we have just gone through a decade of that.

We believe the industry needs to return to core "training" on courses not just assessments, and that even trainees need to be responsible for their own learning through night classes or correspondence. To be fair this is a view held fairly widely by other interest groups in the sector and by most practitioners.

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