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IN OTHER NEWS

The Decision makers make the rules

It seems many decisions are being based on the current situation where the Federation believes the decisions should be made based on where we want to be as an industry in the future.

Getting everyone to agree on the direction needed is a big problem and is out of the control of the practitioners - all we can do is vote with our feet but that only makes the situation worse.

Those that do stand up get called all types of names by those whom they disagree with, but yet those people, like the Federation, keep fighting because they care.

You hear people talk of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board as being an Industry Board but in reality they are a Regulatory and Licensing Board, however this current Board and Chief Executive are putting in the effort to help the industry come up with agreed solutions to help

Is the MESSAGE getting to the decision makers?



Being a logical thinker, with practical hands on skills and having common sense (like most tradespeople in the industry) is not a gift, it's a punishment because we have to deal with everyone who doesn't have the same skill set and at times we wonder if the messages are getting through to the decision makers.

The last few weeks have been heavy going talking about registration classes and qualifications, so we thought we would lighten it up a bit this week and what do you know - the Government helped us out when they stated this in their budget:

The stronger labour market, a rebuilt industry training system, and improvements in school achievement are resulting in greater demand for apprenticeships as young people rightly see them as a great way to get into, and stay in, a rewarding career.

Did someone write that as a joke or were they actually serious and believe it? We just don't understand that statement. Is that what the Government believes, is it what the Ministries have told them or is it what they want to achieve?

They claim **the labour market is strong**. Employment grew however, not enough to absorb all of the increase in the labour force. Those increases resulted from a higher participation rate (more people seeking work) and a record increase in working age population, with the largest growth in the 20-34 year old age groups. These increases meant that unemployment also rose. So is it good or bad?

They claim there are more jobs but are the skill sets available capable of filling the positions, or has the system left its run too late to train more people to a competent level where they can operate unsupervised? We know it's not the case in the Plumbing Gasfitting and Drainlaying Industries.

They talk of a **rebuilt industry training system** - we presume this was the review into the slow progress and low completion rates where fewer than A THIRD of trainees achieved a qualification

the industry progress.

A number of initiatives have been implemented already and a new one is in the planning stage.

We know the current Minister of Building and Housing, Dr Nick Smith, doesn't like bitching and moaning and wants people to step up with solutions.

A proposal has been made that a summit to discuss the issues regarding qualifications and registration classes be held where stakeholders get together and get agreement on the direction of the industry.

We know the Minister will get behind this, as at a previous meeting the impression was he wanted solutions to the problems not just more problems.

We are sure he would agree that it is better to base decisions on the advice of the people who have to live with the results rather than advice from people who don't have to deal with the results

What are your thoughts on a summit to discuss issues?

We know holding a summit sounds like something the UN would do but with the amount of conflict that goes on in our industry it's what is needed, and is a refreshing idea to get everyone in and discuss problems and solutions.

The Minister ultimately has the final say so let's

within five years of enrolling. Remember funds were being paid for trainees whether or not they achieved credits towards their qualifications in any given year. There was also a targeted review of vocational qualifications to reduce confusion caused by the duplication and proliferation of qualifications.

Funding rules were tightened to ensure only active trainees were funded. At the same time, apprenticeships were extended to all age groups, and now focus exclusively on level 4. As part of the government's reform programme, the number of ITOs was reduced to 12 through a programme of mergers.

Training is arranged by Industry Training Organisations who are supposed to be employer-led organisations, which agree investment plans with the Tertiary Education Commission, review the skills needs of their industries and devise occupational standards and qualifications in conjunction with the New Zealand Qualifications Agency.

All of that - and as an industry all we have seen is less off the job training at an increased cost to the industry. It really is a case of the message being watered down as and adapted with a less than satisfactory outcome for the end users.

They talk **of improvements in school achievement** that we can't comment on but we know there were a series of more radical reforms to the school curriculum, pathways to employment and work-based learning.

We still don't see much evidence of this working, as there is the perception that the senior secondary school system is designed to support access to academic and university education and still does not provide clear support and pathways for students who wished to pursue other options, such as trades.

We noticed these statements made by Mr Joyce, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment in the media earlier in the month.

"In 2013/14 the Government carried out major industry training reforms. Since then, both apprenticeship numbers and, more importantly, completion rates have increased."

The numbers may be up, but are we getting people that are competent to do the job unsupervised or are the apprenticeships being dumbed down to reach the targeted numbers?

We know in our industry that the fees we pay for apprenticeships have increased by over 100% in 5 years. We now pay \$50.87 per week for 4 years, that's \$10,580.96, plus we pay wages, tool allowance, sick leave, holiday pay, and are expected to provide all the hands on training as they only go on ITO facilitated assessments every 17 weeks.

"In 2014 the number of those in apprenticeship training was up by 11.5 per cent on the previous year and completion rates for

give him the information that he needs to provide the leadership and solutions needed for us all to progress in this industry, as our only other option is to walk away in disgust.

Send us your thoughts on the holding of a summit and what outcomes you would like to see.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

I read the letter from the Forum last week about the Gas Certification system and would like to disagree with the writer. His reason for not wanting to give the Certification system back to the PGDB was the Paul Gee debacle. Let's not forget the PGDB found Paul NOT GUILTY on 42 counts, and that the things they did find him guilty of (which has nothing to do with the Fish and Chip shop explosion), were fairly minor and involved one job where in fact the unit had been installed too close to an opening window.

The issue with the Paul Gee case is that it cost the man his house and livelihood to prove his innocence, it showed up very poor investigatory skills on the Board's behalf, and the Board also cocked up administratively by sending out letters implying Mr Gee was involved in the selling of gas certificates which was happening at the other end of the country.

It then took the Board 6 months to apologise to Paul – which is in itself

apprentices were 88 per cent, compared with 72 per cent in 2009"

Completion rates don't mean shit if the trainees can't get jobs or don't stay in the industry. Completion is very different to being competent. We have people opting out or stopping training at licensing level where they have to remain supervised forever and a day.

"We're keen to stay on this roll and help people not just into employment, but into a lifelong career," he says.

Look at all the turmoil in our industry over the last two decades with Board's being fired, all the issues reported by the Office of the Auditor General, every Government reporting issues and, don't forget about this Government using a sledge hammer to crack a walnut by hitting the industry with retrospective legislation to make all the unlawful activities of the Board at the time legal.

Remember we are the ONLY practitioners who are levied and pay to prosecute members of the public for doing plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying. What incentive is there to progress in the industry or to encourage other to enter the industry when the Government shows nothing but contempt for the people in the industry that have the experience?

"The construction sector is growing strongly throughout the country. Increased apprenticeship numbers will help fill skill gaps and provide the new people needed to maintain that growth,"

What is need are experienced people who are willing to train the new generations and training to be provided on off job courses. The Government can have as many apprentices as it likes, but if it doesn't have the experienced people to train them, to supervise them and to mentor them to get fully competent and qualified then the industries will continue on the downward spiral. Where is the incentive for the industry?

Another announcement in the budget was:

\$36.9 million over four years to increase tuition subsidies for sub-degree provision at Level 3 and above by 2 per cent

This will align most sub-degree subsidies with degree-level subsidy rates and improve the quality and sustainability of sub-degree tertiary education. It will also support more people aged 25-34 into advanced trade qualifications, diplomas and degrees.

Who really knows what this means? Really, can someone explain it to us in plain English? We can only presume that the Government is throwing more money at the subsidies it gives to the ITO's to support their activities. Seems like more money on bureaucracy.

This entire scenario reminds us of a bit of history where Hitler's obsession with "super weapons" led to him pouring resources into developing weapons that were basically useless and ignoring production of needed materials such as trucks. His much-vaunted

disgusting. These are the things that we need to ensure never happen again – the gas cert system in itself seemed far better than what we have currently.

ED:

Hopefully one day we can get an appropriate gas certification system and Paul Gee can get closure. Here's hoping we don't have to wait too long.

Tiger Tank, a formidable weapon indeed, was expensive and unreliable. He could have manufactured many less expensive tanks for the same money, five or ten times as many. Is the same thing happening with our apprenticeships and training?

See the side column for more discussion

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