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IN OTHER NEWS

Too Many Self Interests
(Opinion article)

It seems our industry is plagued by self interests. Everyone wants their self interests met first before others or before the needs of the industry.

Too much wheeling and dealing to find happy mediums instead of doing what is absolutely best for the industry.

One of the Federation's concerns is that our Industry Training Organisation (Skills) falls prey to the training providers (the polytechnics) and often put their needs ahead of the Industry needs.

This is a classic case of the tail wagging the dog. Industry have said time and again that we think a 12 week pretrade course is ample – young people simply don't need to be getting in unnecessary debt and doing year long pre trade courses (which is what the polytech's wanted) when it doesn't reduce the cost of the apprenticeship, nor does it reduce the time required to be served.

The polytechs didn't like this as pre trade is a money

Plumbing Gasfitting and Drainlaying Qualifications



In the last edition of the Fellow Practitioner we looked at apprenticeships and how they affect the industry, so this week we thought it appropriate to look at the qualifications we want our apprentices and registered practitioners to

aspire to.

Probably the first question is “Does the industry put up with the status quo or do we push for qualifications that assist and promote the industry?” The Federation believes change is needed.

There are numerous qualifications available to plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers but the most important are the qualifications required to register with the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board.

Currently the industry has the following classes of registration:

- Certifying Plumber, Tradesman Plumber, and Journeyman Plumber
- Certifying Gasfitter, Tradesman Gasfitter, and Journeyman Gasfitter
- Certifying Drainlayer, Tradesman Drainlayer, and Journeyman Drainlayer

The certifying classes are the pinnacle of the three branches of the industry and generally take 6-7 years to obtain.

Tradesman classes are generally obtained at the end of an apprenticeship, recognising the fact that an individual has passed the relevant exams and unit standards but is not deemed to be workplace competent. They are required to be under the supervision of a certifier until they obtain the status of Certifier. In a lot of cases this is never.

The Journeyman class recognises an individual has completed an apprenticeship in a relevant branch of the industry but has not passed all the unit standards or exams.

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

making scheme for them and so a compromise was reached on the number of weeks and Weltec did a template to be delivered by all polytechs so there was some consistency around pre trade.

Guess what – it appears some polytechs have gone “off the reservation” in terms of delivery and time frame – again a case of not delivering what industry want.

What is our choice here? It is to:

- Not recommend pre-trade to any potential apprentices
- Tell them to try and get an apprenticeship without the pretrade as it is not adding value
- To approach the TEC Minister and tell him Government is wasting money on a lengthened pre-trade – and that polytechs are not delivering what industry wants.

Skills don't appear to be ensuring the industry is getting value for money with regard to training as it is all about assessments and there does not appear to be any policing of the efficient use of time.

The industry has tried to work in and compromise but when we find out that after the fact Skills are aware polytechs are doing this and have done nothing – then perhaps we simply stop being co-operative about it.

Perhaps it's time to dig our heels in as at the moment the industry is simply the cash cow for everyone else. We don't appear to have a say in

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 setting the standards required for the licensing and registration of plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers. These standards in turn are the basis of the qualifications needed in the industry.

Most people are aware a review of qualifications has been underway for a couple of years. This was to have been a fresh clean slate start but turned out to be a rehash of the current qualifications where organisations and polytechnics pushed for what was best for them financially.

For the qualifications to be appropriate the standards and registration requirements set by the Board need to be what the industry and government needs.

In November 2013 the Federation wrote to the then Chairman of the Board, Mr Alan Bickers and asked for a review of the classes of registration. This request coincided with the review of qualifications that was under way by The Skills Organisation. The Federation believed it was a prime opportunity to move the industry into the future and away from the systems that don't provide what the industry needs. The response was that it was not on the Board's work programme at that time.

In 2015 the Board did a limited review of Registration and Licensing. Issue 4 of that Review asked the question “Should there be one or two classes of registration for qualified tradespeople. 108 submitters responded to Issue 4 where 51% supported one qualification and 49% supported 2 qualifications. The Federation and its membership supported one qualification. The Board opted not to progress consultation on changing Registration Classes to further consultation even though it was a narrow margin.

The Skills Organisation is basing the proposed NZQA Qualifications on a two tier system - effectively a re-packaging of the current failing system which follows a path of self interest and financial gain.

The 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 been ignored 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 registration classes and ensuing qualifications create problems in the areas of accountability, responsibility and supervision. This in turn affects the health and safety of the public.

The situation exists where the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industry is the only industry where, upon completion of an apprenticeship and passing of National Certificate and the Board's Registration exam, a newly registered tradesperson can't do ANY of their chosen trade unless supervised. This in turn creates problems

our own destiny.

Our industry is operating under a dictatorship because we choose to be in the Plumbing Gasfitting and Drainlaying Industry.

This is how it operates. We have the Government who want to regulate the industry.

They have created the legislation and the Board to implement the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006.

As an industry we have no say how the Board operates or who is appointed to it.

The Board basically say what funding they need to operate and set the fees as they see fit.

The Government allows the Board to levy (tax) the industry to fund investigations and prosecute un-authorized people doing sanitary plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying. We are the only trade in New Zealand that incurs this tax.

In fact we are the only industry that 100% funds the regulation of its own industry on the Government's behalf.

As an industry all we can do is voice our opinions about levels of funding but have no real say.

The classes of registration are dictated to us so in turn the qualifications are dictated to us.

As an industry we have to take what is given to us from Skills. We have no say in the fees charged. We have no say in the delivery methods i.e.

for the Board policing supervision, and essentially costs all licensed people money in terms of discipline and prosecution costs.

The Board has recognised the difficulties and legal standing of supervision. The burden on supervisors is extremely high as a result of the poor level of skills being produced by the current training scheme. Anecdotally we also believe that many trainees, provisional licensees, journeymen practitioners and tradesman practitioners are in fact barely being supervised, and certainly not at the levels envisaged by the Board.

The ratio of supervisors to supervisees in the industry is very low with supervisors required to supervise tradesmen practitioners, journeymen practitioners, provisional licensees, trainees and exempt people (who are now in the thousands). Which leads us to another problem within the industry, one where exemptions are being used as qualifications. Over TWO THOUSAND exemption holders who are performing the tasks that fully qualified people should be performing! It is simply a way around getting the appropriate qualifications.

The system for training for the current qualifications means supervisors are responsible for the majority of the training provided to apprentices as well as the supervision of others. The Federation believes this training method is a total failure. It does not allow for consistency in training throughout New Zealand in that Certifiers may have different methods, likes and dislikes. There is the added problem of not every plumbing/gasfitting or drainlaying firm doing all work that is required for an apprentice to qualify. There is no quality control on what is taught and the training method is reliant on a theoretical pass.

Currently apprentices, employers and the tax payer are paying for the right of an employer to employ and train an apprentice. At the end of the apprenticeship the registered tradesman pays for the right to do plumbing gasfitting and drainlaying but is not allowed to unless supervised. They then have to pay for the right to gain experience in their chosen profession before they are deemed competent to work unsupervised.

The vision the Federation 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 to around 10,000 hours. It would also require the addition of formalised off site training. This can only strengthen the protection given to the public and raise the 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.

The Federation believes the current qualifications being developed are focused more on individual and organisational needs and wants, rather than what is best for the future of the apprentices and tradespeople in the industry. As the industry has no governing body it is heavily reliant on the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board to provide leadership within the bounds of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006.

assessments vs. training.

We are dictated to as to what we pay for apprentices and it is irritating to see that money spent on wages and flash equipment and buildings for Skills.

The Government doesn't communicate with the industry and if they do it is generally with those who they have control over or who will follow blindly.

Effectively as an industry we have to purchase the right to operate in the trades we are trained in so it is no wonder people leave the industry when the costs outweigh the benefits.

The industry is being pulled apart by self interest groups and organisations and by a Government who will side with whoever thinks the way they think.

The Federation is the only group that is not behold to anyone, that is prepared to say it the way it is, that is representative of all levels of people in the industry (apprentices, certifiers, tradespeople, business owners and employees), and that is not in it for the money.

The Federation simply wants a better industry which can be obtained by industry governance, fit for purpose registration classes, proper training and relevant qualifications.

The Tertiary Education Council (TEC) has stated "It is expected on completing New Zealand Apprenticeships, apprentices will be 'work competent' for the occupation in which they have been training, and their industries will determine the standard of competency to be met."

The Federation believes the current system does not meet the requirements of the TEC and the Board has deemed the apprentices are not 'work competent' upon registration, hence the requirement for supervision when they are deemed to be a tradesperson not an apprentice.

The Board has made an undertaking to review the classes of registration next year but by that time Skills will have completed its review of the qualifications based on the current system and yet again the industry ends up with qualifications that may not be appropriate and the entire cycle starts again with different versions of apprenticeships and more band aids on a gushing wound.

The Federation believes the qualifications should support one class of registration where a person is fully qualified. This class is then supported by the Journeyman class for those whom struggle to obtain the main qualification. Development plans should be put in place to assist these people to obtain the main qualification and progress within the industry.

A series of other qualifications should be developed for those who want to go over and above the registration qualification. Perhaps level five courses in design, solar, fire sprinkler, backflow prevention and other specialist qualifications that are aspects of the main industry but are not widely used by the bulk of the industry.

As for exemptions it is believed that these should stop being a qualification and be used for what they were designed to be used for and that was when the circumstances are such that specialist skills from outside the scope of the industry are needed but still need to be regulated by the Board for short periods of time. An example would be where the assistance of a Gas Engineer is required for a project and they are required to work in the bounds of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act.

If the industry does not act and get appropriate classes of registration backed by appropriate qualifications, backed by TRAINING then the industry will fade away.

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