



Fellow Practitioner Issue 384

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IN OTHER NEWS

APPRENTICES BECOME THE TEACHERS

We have covered what the Federation believes are changes needed to gain confidence and trust in the training and qualifications in the industry but what we haven't covered is the vital interaction between the apprentices and the qualified people in the industry.

The saying "you are never too old to learn" is true and the manner in which you learn can vary. One vital issue in our industry which needs a complete turnaround is the interaction between qualified practitioners and the apprentices.

The manner in which the training system in the plumbing gasfitting and drainlaying industry is set up is reliant on the certifying practitioners being completely up to speed with changes to legislation, materials, and new work methods but how do they get all that

THE FEDERATION VISION (continued)



Further to our last edition of the Fellow Practitioner - we are exploring our vision for the plumbing gasfitting and drainlaying industry. This week we are looking at training and qualifications

and the barriers in our industries way. We will also cover the barriers the Federation faces to get change.

The barriers facing the Federation restrict change and one of the biggest problems is the cartel formed by the Skills Organisation (Skills), the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board (the Board) and Master Plumbers (who last week claimed to represent 70% of the industry). Now this isn't so much these organisations and their claims, but it is more about who believes what they are saying and what actions are taken that affect the entire industry based on those claims.

The Government, their Ministries, their agencies and cronies accept everything the cartel claim as being gospel and best for the industry. The Federation believes this is where the problem is and that is probably why the members of the cartel are not trusted by a lot in the industry.

The current qualifications, registration and training, in our opinion, do not meet the needs of our industries and create more problems than they solve. Problems such as supervision, partially qualified practitioners, costs imposed on practitioners, costs imposed on non indentured trainees, advancement in the industry and the list goes on. You may even say there is a level of corruption as to who gains from the problems created.

This year we took a lot of the issues to the Regulation Review Committee (RRC) but they decided not to progress the complaints, which wasn't surprising as it was the RRC that made the decision regarding the legality of discipline and prosecution levies the Board had imposed on the industry and then went into the House at Parliament and voted against their own recommendations.

Getting fairness from the RRC is near impossible and the decision not to assist our industry is a black mark on their credibility. They have allowed barriers and unreasonable costs to be imposed on practitioners and the industry and this will continue for as long as

skills and knowledge?

We don't know how many times we have heard apprentices get told that they are apprentices and they are here to learn but we believe they are also here to teach.

If the right teaching methods and curriculum are in place at the polytechnics then apprentices attending courses (when we say courses we mean periods of instruction and assessment not just assessments that they currently endure) then apprentices can play a vital part in passing new information into the industry.

Not only do the qualified practitioners gain from getting new information but the apprentices also get a feeling of contribution and worth within the industry.

Imagine an apprentice coming back from a course and having the confidence to hand on new information to the qualified practitioners. This has to be good for everyone concerned and would certainly enhance the protection of the health and safety of the public.

A big role apprentices play in the industry is that if they are actually trained at the technical institutes in plumbing methods, up to date materials and changes to legislation then they have

the RRC keep making decisions that are politically based and not based on the facts.

Apprenticeship costs are not "value for money" as the majority of the training under the current apprenticeship scheme is performed by the qualified tradesperson. The apprenticeship scheme is a bureaucracy gone mad. We also need to remember that at the end of an apprenticeship the Registered tradesperson is not deemed workplace competent and must remain under supervision. The aim of an apprenticeship should be to produce workplace competent people who are skilled in their craft.

The current verification system for the five year apprenticeship is heaping additional costs on employers in terms of time required to provide evidence". We asked for more "training" and polytechs and the side effect of this was that more assessment needed to be done on job". Employers or supervisors are required to provide evidence that an apprentice can use the appropriate hand tools for instance. You would think that the employer watching or teaching their apprentice could be trusted to then sign off on it. But NO – they are required to have photographic or other evidence. For using a tape measure for instance? This is ridiculous and from a business point of view it would seem more cost effective then for this to be done back at the polytech. Apparently the verifiers need an assessor to check that they are correctly verifying.

Supervision, if done properly, costs the industry a huge amount, reduces productivity in the industry and increases the cost to the consumer. To progress in the industry the registered tradesperson must fund further training, pay addition exam fees and then an additional registration fee. This is after they finish their apprenticeship. They also must be aware that they might not get registered as a certifier because they may not be a fit and proper person as deemed by the Board.

Some people may well argue that after finishing an apprenticeship the individual needs to gain experience and yet we have the cartel of Skills, Master Plumbers and the Board supporting a proposed accelerated apprenticeship scheme which reduces the amount of experience an individual obtains so we fail to see their logic! We also fail to see how they can call it an apprenticeship when it would seem the trainees are not required to be signed up with an employer at the commencement of the course.

On one hand they take away the experience gained by being an apprentice and then impose a period of time and expense at the end of an apprenticeship so the person can gain with the cartel claims to be vital experience. It really does appear the apprenticeship scheme has lost its focus and is now simply a stop gap for the likes of the cartel to make money and meet government expectations for numbers of bums on seats rather than be what it is meant to be where an individual learns craft skills and becomes a craftsman over an indentured period of time.

It's hard to find out exactly what the accelerated apprenticeship scheme would look like as the Board have withheld that information

the most current information available to take back to the working practitioners.

That information is exactly what the registered practitioners in the industry need to keep their skills up to date.

INDUSTRY REPRESENTATION

Isn't it ironic that the Federation doesn't make claims about membership and gets kicked out of the Stakeholder Liaison Group (SLG) by the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board (the Board) for not having members but the claims made by Master Plumbers are ignored.

The claim we are referring to is was made on 10 October 2019 in a submission to the Education (Vocational Education and Training Reform) Amendment Bill (the Bill). This is what they claimed in their submission:

Master Plumbers Gasfitters & Drainlayers NZ Inc (Master Plumbers) is a national Membership Organisation with a key focus on excellence in all areas of plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying. Master Plumbers is an Incorporated Society, which represents approximately 70 percent of the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industry. Established in 1901, Master Plumbers has both an extensive and supportive branch network of its Members. We have also been involved in the delivery of apprenticeships since

which is now the subject of a complaint to the Ombudsman. We can surmise that Skills gain from it in that they provide more training, Master Plumbers would be able to get apprentices for MasterLink saving the cost of a year's training and the Board may get an increase in industry numbers.

In the meantime the accelerated apprenticeship scheme would mean the trainee would have to pay for a year of their own training, and we say trainees, as they would not be apprentices, and take the risk that they may get an apprenticeship. This is where the managed apprenticeship people would step in and save themselves a year's cost of training.

This type of pre-trade training was rejected by most in the industry including the members of the cartel until the cartel sent representatives on a "fact finding" mission overseas and on their return rebranded a pre-trade and called it an accelerated apprenticeship.

The risk to the industry with the accelerated apprenticeship is the same as it was for the pre-trade courses in that trainees are given enough skills to be dangerous and if they don't get an apprenticeship can still apply those skills all be it illegally and without supervision.

There is possibly a move afoot that undermines the credibility of the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying qualifications and that is the creation of a qualification for people who are currently working under exemptions. The Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) have already run this idea past the Federation as part of their review of the Plumbing Gasfitting and Drainlaying Act 2006. The Federation rejected a blanket qualification and stated any qualification would need to be on an individual assessment basis. Perhaps this is another reason the Federation has being excluded from the Stakeholder Liaison Group and official information is being withheld by the Board.

There are barriers imposed on practitioners in the regulation of the industry and these include the manner in which the qualifications are managed and established. These seem to meet the needs of organisations such as those in the cartel mentioned above and appear to have little regards for the practitioners in the industry.

We believe the current system unnecessarily restricts the registration and licensing of persons as plumbers, gasfitters, or drainlayers; and matters impose undue costs on plumbers, gasfitters, or drainlayers, and on the public.

A lot of the regulation and qualifications restrict the rights of practitioners to apply their chosen trade, which they have been deemed competent in, by imposing unnecessary periods of supervision. This restricts their progression in the industry and business by imposing barriers to the unsupervised application of their trades.

The manner in which the Act has been implemented and interpreted

1948.

So the Federation doesn't make any claims about membership and get ostracised but the Board ignores the claim that Master Plumbers represent around 70% of the industry. We would challenge this percentage of representation and would say there is a difference between representing 70% of the industry and employing a large portion of the industry.

You can apply for Membership of Master Plumbers if you're:

- A Certifying Plumber, Gasfitter and/or Drainlayer and you've been running your own business for at least 6 months
- Running a business that employs Certifying Plumbers, Gasfitters and/or Drainlayers

We know that the above is not 70% of the industry. We also note that practitioners can become an associate member or an apprentice member of Master Plumbers.' We would challenge Master Plumbers to produce evidence of representing over 70% of industry. In fact we believe the majority of industry don't belong to any membership organisation, but simply operate as themselves. Apprentices certainly have no voice in the governance of our industry at any level.

We believe it is as we have stated before that because of its 118 year history the

with regard to qualifications is an abuse of the powers inferred on the Board and as a result industry practitioners suffer because of the barriers imposed by the Board supported by others.

Problems have and are being created by the Boards actions and inactions and it is obvious that change is badly needed.

The Federation's vision is for one qualification based on a 5 year apprenticeship. This would involve real training aimed at the craft skills of our industries. We see all apprentices trained in all things plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying for the first two years and then the following two years specialise in either plumbing, gasfitting or drainlaying or a combination of the three. The final year is the polish on their training and other issues they need to know to operate effectively in the industry and to be responsible for their own work.

The reason for the first two years training in all three trades in that the trades are so interrelated it provides the basic knowledge and skills and allows for those to be built on later should the apprentice wish to obtain more qualifications. It is basically a knowledge bank.

Under the current scheme, which is focussed on assessments not training, the onus is left on the employer to provide a huge proportion of the skills and knowledge required, but we all know not all plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers do all things, so the apprentice ends up with huge gaps in the skills and knowledge they require to be a well rounded tradesperson.

Under the current scheme apprentices tend to only learn what their employer concentrates on which may be new residential, high rise ventilation, maintenance etc so although they get their registration they haven't learnt all the skills they need going into the future, and therefore may not be deemed competent in those areas, so we fail to see how the current standards and qualifications protect the health and safety of the public.

We have mentioned the barriers imposed on the industry and practitioners and it does seem like a daunting task to get change but really the onus is on the Government and the Regulators to make the change. They choose who they want to believe and what they want to see as being the truth to meet their purposes.

We know that the systems that have been in place for the last 20 years haven't worked because if they had we would have well trained practitioners in the industry who are responsible for their own work and we would not have a skills shortage.

The sooner the Government pulls their head out of their backside and the cartels that are doing harm to the industry are dissolved the better. The new tertiary education scheme being imposed by the government is a prime opportunity for the industry to make the changes required, however that will require a shift in attitude by the Government and it will also require them to make change so the same mistakes made by the same types of people are not made in the future.

claims Master Plumbers make are accepted by the Government and its cronies based on history rather than fact.

The Federation feels the industry would be better served if there was one organisation that actually represented the views of the entire industry. We have asserted this view before – there does need to be a “governance body” that represents the views of ALL of industry – employers, employees, apprentices etc.

The Government believes what they want to believe and it doesn't matter if it is true or not.

We certainly hope the Boards expulsion of the Federation was a simple act of stupidity rather than a purposeful act to remove opposition to their cartel arrangement so they can get representation on new councils and committees to be formed under the tertiary education review.

The industry needs representation from the industry for the industry.

The Government goes on about diversity in the statutory boards to help effect change but we really don't see that. We don't see any industry representation to push the needs of the industry. We see a cartel that is influencing the direction of the regulation of the industry and the qualifications imposed and their line of thought isn't working.

We don't see anyone accepting liability for mistakes, simply more deceptive behaviour and cover-ups. As an industry we can make the changes required but it will require us to stay the course and hold people to account for their actions.

Remember it wasn't the industry and practitioners that created the problems but we do have the skills and knowledge to correct the issues. All we need is the legislative power and appointments to implement the changes needed.

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