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IN OTHER NEWS

IS THE BOARD AND MINISTER LOOKING TO THE FUTURE?

Do you believe the Board and Minister are looking to the future? We don't think so.

They are always writing up a good story, but the reality is quite different. A prime example is the current recruitment for a new Board member.

The Board put the vacancy out in the 1 July 2021 Info Brief and applications for the position close on 9 July 2021.

We know a couple of parts of the announcement have not been followed in recent times such as:

This is not an avenue for agendas or membership organisation influence. It's a position where you have to be there with an open mind and have the ability to work constructively with other Board members. This is a governance role, not an operational role.

and

MBIE is committed to considering candidates from a diverse range of

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Board and the Government.

As well as this we have been preparing notes and information for our next challenge to the regulation of the industry. We don't like wasting time but there needs to be accountability hence the reason for preparing now.

We get told a lot that we need to work constructively with the Board, Government, and their ministries – and we think we have, with little to show for it in terms of benefit to our organisation and the industry at large. Our focus is all about accountability and we will challenge outcomes when we don't think they are right or in the best interests of our industry.

Why you may ask – well you don't have to look too far back in history to when the PGDB unlawfully took a couple of million dollars from the industry - they had the backing of Master Plumbers, the Minister and MBIE, but they were wrong, so wrong when they did this, and it took retrospective legislation for them to hold on to the money. That action alone cost the Board their reputation and showed the Government of the time to be untrustworthy. It was a dark day in our history, and we were treated appallingly.

You may or may not have noticed that Master Plumbers are the victims of working constructively and getting ignored as stated by their CEO/Registrar in the latest edition of NZ Plumber. Are they doing more harm than good by working “constructively” with these people? Does having selective membership organisations on board assist the PGDB in terms of government perception? Is this good for the industry at large?

Master Plumbers job is to get a good deal for their membership – but this excludes a large proportion of the industry such as apprentices, employees and the one-man bands that make up a huge proportion. WHO is their voice?

You may have noticed the Federation has been silent of late but that doesn't mean we haven't been keeping a watching brief on what's been happening in the industry and noting the actions of membership organisations, the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers

backgrounds, including age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location, to enable the Board to be high performing.

Those comments are laughable.

It would seem the Minister for Building and Construction is seeking candidates who have the following specific skills and experience:

- registered drainlayer and/or gasfitter and/or plumber
- ability to bring an employee perspective to the Board.
- strong sector knowledge.

We are greatly confident most in the industry will become aware of the vacancy too late to apply. It's as if someone has already been identified and now it's a matter of going through the process.

It certainly undermines the credibility of any new appointments whether justified or not. It is terribly like the last round of recruiting where gender and ethnicity discrimination reared its ugly head as did organisational bias.

We don't think any organisation can move forward into the future unless the past is addressed.

If the mistakes and wrongs from the past are left in operation, then nothing is happening except adding frustration and confusion.

Training and registration classes are two prime examples where huge mistakes have been made

Remembering all membership organisations simply represent their paid membership, you don't have to have some special qualification to belong, you simply have to pay the membership fee and meet the entry requirements. Master Plumbers and the Auckland Plumbers group are the same. The Federation has open membership and is free to join – so we do have amongst our supporters' employees, business owners and a lot of apprentices.

We have been astounded by the number of practitioners that we have spoken to that didn't know the Chief Executive/Registrar of the Board had resigned, or that there had been recent appointments to the Board. This does demonstrate some level of disconnection between the Board and industry. We did issue a warning that practitioners would turn their backs on the regulation of the industry, and it appears that is happening.

This is from the Board's press release:

PGDB Chair, Nick Fleckney, said Mr Sawyers has done an outstanding job as the PGDB's Chief Executive, overseeing the delivery of effective solutions that have transformed the PGDB into the high performing regulator that others look to today.

We have no doubt people are looking at the Board but not for the reasons they believe. How can it be a high performing Board when it is back to where it was a decade ago when the Auditor General issued its scathing report? When there is a large proportion of the industry being excluded from participation by the Board there can only be a one-sided view and that's the Board's. Then you end up with the situation where the Minister isn't going to question them because they are a specialist Board appointed by her.

When only 1.07% of the industry responded to the Board's consultation on their proposed changes to supervision you would hope the Board would sit up and take notice that the industry isn't participating. It will be remarkably interesting to see what happens with the fee's consultation because regarding the supervision consultation they had this to say:

While the Board acknowledged that the majority of people responding to the consultation did support the proposal, they noted that there was not a significant response to the consultation, and it could not be confident that there was widespread support for the proposal amongst the industry.

Here's hoping the same principal is applied to the fees consultation as we doubt there will be wide-spread support for the increases proposal amongst the industry especially when millions of dollars have been spent for the second time in a decade for a computer system that does less for practitioners and nothing to increase competency.

We have also been watching The Skills Organisation who have not kept abreast of the needs for a Covid resilient training system and seem to have opted out while they wait for ROVE to be implemented. In the meantime, we have apprentices waiting far too long for block courses, a lack of tutors who are able to deliver and

and all that happens now is that band aids are applied to gushing wounds.

In 1976 the industry went from an era where apprentices qualified at the end of an apprenticeship to an era of protectionisms where the registration of Craftsman was gifted to thousands of practitioners based on time.

An era where those who had completed their apprenticeship had to endure additional supervision (two years) and had to fund future progression.

An era where an unlawful exam (The Business Exam for Certifiers) was imposed and later when proved it was illegal was replaced by a condition of registration that the practitioner had to attend a business course as selected by the Board and yes there was only one course, no choices at all.

We are now in an era of no road map, no timeline, no industry input, and no incentive. No-one knows who is going to control the industries destiny.

Imagine an industry where practitioners supported the Board and CEO/Registrar.

It makes no sense to resort to heavy handed regulation when those trained are best suited to protect the health and safety of the public as practitioners are the solution.

People are a funny breed that don't react well to forced compliance. They need to want to achieve the projected outcome.

some facilities around the country in dire need to updating. This effectively means apprenticeships are being extended – there has been no consultation and the list goes on. We simply ask the question “who is holding them accountable? It's the apprentices that are being affected here and, in the years, to come the skills shortage will be even greater.

The Continued Professional Development (CPD) has turned into a debacle, and it has become overly commercialised rather than its perceived purpose. The Federation always advocated a feedback loop system whereby issues raised at disciplinary cases were looked at and where it deemed necessary became part of the CPD along with new regulations or legislative changes. These are “matters necessary to...”.

The Minister for Building and Construction has approved the regulation that CPD is a term and condition of annual licensing, but has she signed off on a method or on the subject matter? As it stands the CPD subject matter is nearly 12 months old before it is presented to practitioners, and it is subject matter that practitioners have already qualified in.

While we are grateful for industry support to keep costs down – is it necessary to have CPD yearly? If there are not issues raised in the feedback loop, then have a year with no CPD. Does loading a trailer and a van really have any bearing on whether you can do your job as a plumber, gasfitter or drainlayer. It is a nice to know, but not a legal requirement for competency in our industry.

If you remember we had this issue with re-qualifying for courses where practitioners had already passed the unit standards and it was deemed by NZQA that practitioners could only be forced to re-qualify if there were changes to the unit standards. It appears the same is happening with CPD where practitioners are being forced to re-qualify by attending refresher training. Perhaps this is another unlawful activity we are being forced to abide by. Upskilling is great – but it needs to be just that upskilling not re-hashing something we are already qualified in.

The Board is very fond of telling us how well the past Chairs and CEO/Registrar's have done. We are concerned that the CEO/Registrar position is the tail wagging the dog with around 90% of the Board's functions delegated to the CEO/Registrar and when they make a decision the Board is forced into the position of admitting liability or supporting the CEO/Registrar.

Obviously, their insurance policies will not let them admit liability in case of legal action, so they support the decisions made by the CEO/Registrar even if it is, in our view, questionable.

It seems to be that everyone forgets that the Board is a perpetual Board, that is it doesn't stop when new people are appointed it continues and the Board and CEO/Registrar are responsible for decisions made by their predecessors. That means they must also accept liability.

Practitioners want to be unified, inspired, and useful.

Sometimes the behaviour doesn't conform to what you'd assume rational people would do but it doesn't mean that its entirely wrong.

What's needed is the design of systems for the reality of the way the world is, not design systems on the basis everyone will behave the same or comply the same.

DONATIONS

Right from its inception the Federation has relied on donations for its survival and the generosity of practitioners has been great.

We believe we have sufficient reserves to sustain the Federation's actions, so we ask practitioners to cease making donations. We thank all of those who have donated to enable the Federations to keep members informed.

We believe the Board needs more than just the faces to change, it needs a change in attitude and if attitudes don't change and if the wrongs of the past are not addressed then the Board might as well be disestablished.

This latest idea involving the recommendation for exemption holds to be given a qualification is just another coverup of a decision made by the CEO/Registrar and Board. As it stands, they have issued around 2500 exemptions knowing they had no way of regulating them hence the huge push on supervision requirements.

The number of exemption holders is 300% more than the actual membership of Master Plumbers. Now there is a push for the exemption holders to be given a qualification of plumbing/gasfitting or drainlaying assistants. How is this going to impact on apprenticeships and are we going to end up with thousands of partly trained assistants and no fully qualified practitioners, talk about dumbing down an industry! Needless to say, we do not support this one.

When looking back over the decades, and in particular the last decade, it is presumed the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006 was intended to be supported by the practitioners if regulates. The name portrays ownership by the practitioners but that hasn't evolved.

If it was named the Plumbing Gasfitting and Drainlaying Act 2006 and funded by the Government, then it would indicate it was to regulate all New Zealanders but as it stands because we choose to be in the industry, we get the burden of the costs and the risks of prosecution every day we walk out the door to earn a living to support our families. Where is the incentive?

You can't regulate the people if they oppose the regulation

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