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IN OTHER NEWS

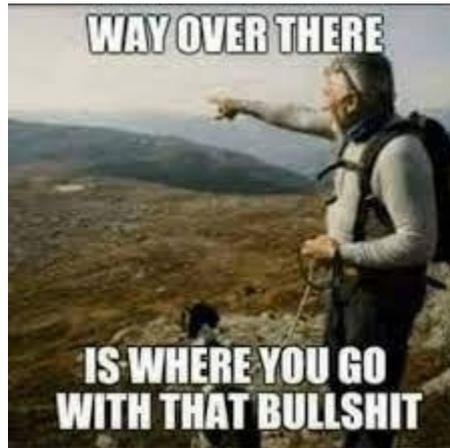
RISK AND AFFORDABILITY CONTINUED

This has resulted in a situation where hundreds if not thousands of practitioners are operating businesses within the industry with partial qualifications.

There is no benefit to other practitioners reporting them or members of the public because all this does is give the Board reason to increase annual discipline and prosecution fees.

The Board creates the competence problem and then hits practitioners with a double whammy of costs, prosecution, and defence. Practitioners then must make a

WAS IT AN APRILS FOOLS PRANK?



Are the claims of Industry feedback real or are most practitioners accepting what organisations are feeding them?

The term “misinformation” has been the topic of a lot of media attention in recent times and to put it simply, misinformation is a polite term for what most of us refer to as “bullshit”. By calling something “misinformation” we are being polite so as to not offend some, but in doing so we effectively water down the real feelings of most people.

Recently a lot of practitioners received an email claiming Skills, the industry training organisation (ITO/TITO, had been working with the plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying industry to make improvements to the Level 4 apprenticeship programmes.

It got us thinking about who they are working with because we haven’t seen any consultation to the industry from Skills for some years. Perhaps there should be some open disclosure about who are their stakeholders and even their shareholders within the industry.

The Skills email claimed that over 2021, they had been working with the PGD industry to make improvements to the Level 4 apprenticeship programmes. Apparently, this was driven by the need to future-proof the programmes

decision regarding defending any allegations whether it is worth it.

We had a look at the Board's Info brief and the five reported disciplinary cases. Looking at the costs the total contribution ordered for the five cases were \$26,440.00. This is an average of \$5,288.00 contributed by the alleged offenders. Practitioners pay the rest via annual licensing funding of the Board through the disciplinary fee/levy.

Costs imposed via the district court are generally about \$130.00 which for the five cases listed for discipline would be \$650.00 compared to the Board charges of \$26,440.00.

So, the risk and cost of being in this so called regulated industry are great for very little benefit.

We supply Practitioners, we do plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying to protect the public, we provide for the nation at our cost and we keep silent and pay the price.

A decade ago, the Federation questioned the need for the Plumbers Gasfitters and

and address a number of issues impacting providers' ability to offer sufficient block courses. They made changes that applied to new apprentices only that the industry needs to know about.

They claim that because of ongoing lockdowns and a tutor shortage it has been difficult to schedule block courses.

One issue the Federation has is that the system for apprentice training was garbage long before Covid reared its ugly head. It appears that Covid is being used as an excuse to implement what Skills and some selected groups have been advocating for several years where the training responsibility is solely the responsibility of employers and there is very limited training on courses.

Skills stated this in their email:

A revision of the programme has been developed with and endorsed by the industry. A National Working Group has also been involved and continues to provide Subject Matter Expertise (SME) to the development of course materials.

Here is a summary of the changes:

- 1. Each trainee will now get all their year-one resources at the time they enrol.** *This includes a handbook, study guides and on-job assessments.*
- 2. We've shortened the block courses.** *This means trainees can spend more time on the job getting practical experience.*
 - *Most block courses last for two to four days and now contain only practical assessments.*
 - *Gas block courses contain learning and practical assessments and will still take five days each to complete.*
- 3. Trainees will get access to a self-directed online learning programme.** *They can work their way through six modules over the year.*
 - *Modules associated with a practical course must be completed before trainees can be allocated to the block course.*

Drainlayers Board. There was some online debate about this issue and there were even those who openly stated if there wasn't a Board they would lose their influence.

The name of the Board implies ownership by plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers but this is far from the truth. Sure there are plumbers gasfitters and drainlayers on the Board but they are selected by MBIE and appointed by the Minister. This is a requirement for the disciplinary process.

The Board operates with impunity without any representation from the industry and in our view they have simply become a government tick in the box organisation.

The same situation exists with the ITO now called a TITO as they are a transition ITO, where they do what they want with selected input.

MBIE are just a waste of space, and the industry receives no support from the responsible Minister – in fact alongside the Police we think we could call her the Missing In Action Minister.

Practitioners fund the public's protection, provide the

- *The online learning programme will include self-directed online assessments, which are marked by the trainee's provider.*

- *All online theory, assessments and on-jobs within a year must be completed before a trainee can be allocated to the next year.*

- *Providers will be delivering online night classes later this year to support the trainees with their theory learning.*

4. Trainees who'd like to extend themselves can speed up their progress through the programme. However, this is dependent on whether there's appropriate work-based experience and time, plus space within the block course allocations available.

They claim to be very excited to bring the changes to support the trainees. They invite employers with questions, to contact their Account Manager. That will be very interesting.

There is one major problem with training apprentices and that is that not all businesses do all things plumbing and this new scheme does nothing to address the training required to address that problem of competency. We also need to remember that apprentices are completing their apprenticeships, passing their Tradesman Registration exams, and are still not deemed to be workplace competent.

We note also that some so called training provided by Polytechnics is already falling in line with the delivery mode but for existing apprentices. For example, one course scheduled in Wellington in the next month will see apprentices doing online theory full time at home for two days and then go to the Polytechnic for workshop activities for three days.

A second course at a different level has apprentices doing online theory full time at home for three days and then go to the Polytechnic for workshop activities for two days. It does question what employers are actually paying for.

Courses now seem to have changed to practical assessments so where do the gaps in the practical training that is able to be provided by some employers get filled?

It also seems that employers are now paying for apprentices to do theoretical training at home during

protection, and take all the risks resulting from the bureaucrats tick the box regulation.

Without the practitioners there is no industry. They are the backbone and are being short changed.

To put it in perspective the PGD Board is a registered charity and practitioners are mandated to licence with the Board or we are not permitted to operate legally in our chosen industry.

Because of our choice to be a plumber, gasfitter or drainlayer we pay for the perceived privilege and take the risks.

Competence in the industry is dropping, more partially qualified people are operating in the industry, there are less fully qualified practitioners per head of population, costs imposed on practitioners are increasing and practitioner input is either not asked for or ignored.

Why is the burden and cost of the protection of the public being placed solely on practitioners?

It's the PGD Board's purpose "*To protect*

normal work hours. More responsibility and costs are being placed on employers so is this going to see a reduction in the number of apprentices as what is the real benefit to employers in taking on an apprentice? Self-directed learning is just that and should be completed by apprentices in their own time, not during block course allocated time.

It seems that employers are expected to take on apprentices as a "good will" issue to the industry, as payback for being part of a regulated industry but yet we ask what the benefit is of being in this so called regulated industry.

Where are the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board to ensure competence?

As a registered charity their charitable purpose is "*To protect public health and safety and property in New Zealand by ensuring that people involved in the provision of plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying services are competent.*" Their Registered Charity Rules are recorded as the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006.

It seems this purpose has simply moved to enforcement, and they are not getting involved in the preparation of practitioners for the competence they are going to be held accountable for.

The Federation believes there are better ways of ensuring competence than enforcement. Things like industry buy in to the regulation of the industry, industry representation regarding apprenticeships, industry representation on the PGD Board, industry representation with regard to training and the list goes on.

The Federation have put forward recommendations over the last decade but have largely been ignored and excluded. This has been to the industry detriment and has contributed to the skills shortage and skills quality that now exists.

As it stands practitioners are being dictated to and those that have the appropriate training and qualifications are at an age where they are retiring and walking away from the industry due to costs and the risk of supporting others in the industry.

Practitioners are looking at risk and affordability.

public health and safety and property in New Zealand by ensuring that people involved in the provision of plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying services are competent.” They should be supported by the Minister, MBIE and the ITO/TITO. What a joke!

We feel sorry for those wanting to get into the industry as apprentices and we'll be giving you our thoughts on that soon.

RISK AND AFFORDABILITY

When looking at the PGD Board enforcement action over the last few years, a lot revolves around supervision which is a problem they have created with the two-tier registration of Certifier and Tradesman.

Having practitioners partially qualify, not deemed workplace competent and placing them in a position to be able to work legally in the industry reliant on a Certifier's supervision is a failure of the PGD Board to ensure competence.

Continued in the side column

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