

SKILLS INITIATIVES FOR THE QUEENSLAND WATER INDUSTRY



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SUMMARY

Career pathways and attraction and retention of staff are key issues for the Queensland water industry and the broader industry nationally. This situation is getting worse with technical skills shortages and attrition to the mining sector, retirement of long-tem workers in an industry dominated by ‘baby boomers’ and increasing community and regulatory standards. The Queensland Water Directorate (*qldwater*), a membership body for water service providers (WSPs) in Queensland and representing over 90% of local government WSPs, is building a number of projects to address these issues.

KEY WORDS

Training, skills development, qualifications, water industry worker, *qldwater*, TAFE.

DISCUSSION

The *qldwater* training program to increase access for urban water industry workers to accredited vocational training is progressing well. The industry-driven program has links to the national and state training activities of other organisations including the WIOA, IPWEA, WSAA, AWA, and LGAQ and seeks to promote coordinated and practical water industry training among Queensland water service providers.

The initial focus for the program has been on the nationally accredited Water Operations package and particularly the significant gap in recognising skills of civil construction staff. 22 participants graduated at Cert II level in December 2009, there are currently 88 participants from SEQ enrolled in Cert II and III. This year, 13 participants have commenced the Cert III pilot program in regional Queensland and approximately 20 supervisors are undertaking Cert IV in Training and Assessment to improve organisational capacity to deliver relevant skills development.

So far, four different Registered Training Organisations have been commissioned to provide training services. Providers are chosen based on the quality and value of the services they offer. *qldwater* continues to develop training materials, building on the GSA framework to be owned and used by industry while working with RTOs to make their offerings more relevant, and use delivery methods which suit industry and individuals. This brokering role also includes negotiation of more competitive pricing as well as improved subsidies for training, especially with the State Department of Education.

The *qldwater* e-Learning project sponsored by the National Flexible Learning Framwework, has completed its pilot e-learning tool and has so far received sponsorship commitments which should allow the development of materials to support one new unit of competency. Importantly, e-learning is now an available option for all students participating in the water industry worker program. Feedback from both this and tool user testing of the pilot tool has been positive, with the proviso that e-learning remains part of a blended, supported delivery program rather than trying to replace workplace training.

A Queensland Water Skills Formation Strategy project has commenced with initial meetings of both the steering committee and workforce planning sub-committee. Importantly, the Department of Environment and Resource Management have offered strong support for this initiative, which has been recognised at DG level. The steering committee represents a strong industry-wide commitment to these crucial issues; indeed it is the first time these organisations have been represented at primarily CEO level to discuss any issue. Current membership includes Unity Water, Queensland Urban Utilities, Allconnex Water, Sunwater, The Water Grid Manager, SEQWater, AWU, LGAQ, DET, DERM, Wide Bay Water, Cairns Water, Murweh Shire.

This presentation will be in a session that will include time for questions and feedback. In particular, direction is sought on issues such as:

- is training towards formal qualifications of interest to industry members?
- what are the major barriers to undertaking training?
- what format of training is most suitable for your workplace?
- how important are formalised career paths for water workers?
- what training options should be more readily available?