

***qldwater* SKILLS PROGRAM FOR WATER
OPERATIONS**



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Dr Rob Fearon, CEO, Queensland Water Directorate (*qldwater*)

The Queensland Water Directorate (*qldwater*) is the central advisory and advocacy body within Queensland’s urban water industry and represents members comprised of Local Governments and other Service Providers across the state. For the past three years, *qldwater* has been working with the industry to further develop workforce planning and to enhance and retain valuable skills unique to the industry. This work has taken a number of paths.

Improved access to training for Civil and Construction water industry workers.

qldwater has been working with industry members and with RTOs to increase opportunities to undertake Cert II or Cert III in Water Operations (Civil) from the National Water Industry Training Package (NWP07). To date we have trialled four RTOs with varying degrees of success. Wide Bay Institute of TAFE and Chisholm Institute of TAFE have continued to provide strong support and their courses have received positive reviews from most participants.

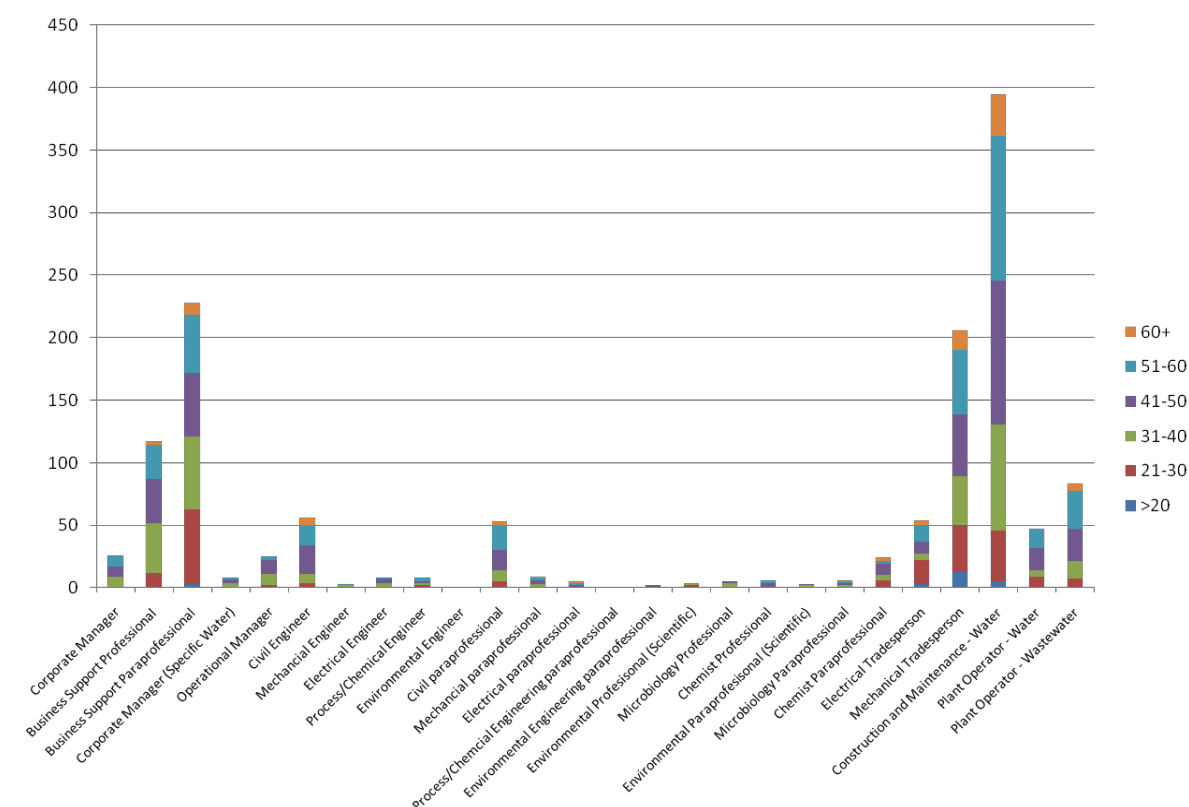


Figure 1: *Age profile by job role showing an ageing workforce dominated by Construction and maintenance, mechanical and business support workers.*

To date around 110 participants have completed Cert II or III through the program and another 65 have are enrolled in SEQ and regional Queensland. *qldwater* has also negotiated increased access for the industry to User Choice traineeships on behalf of the industry with the Department of Education and Training.

Progress with the regional training program has been mixed. While we have now seen 2 of 13 staff complete their qualifications, in some regions progress has been slowed by natural disasters. In addition, it’s clear that some trainees have not been getting strong support from their

employers to complete training. The program will be modified in future to attempt to address these issues.

Skills Formation Strategy

Funding was successfully sourced from the Department of Education and Training (DET) to undertake a 'Skills Formation Strategy' or SFS which is a standard program administered by the Department. Under this project, an Industry Leaders' Group with representatives from SEQ and regional Queensland water entities was created and has met several times over the past two years. Importantly, the governing group for this work also includes the State-owned bulk water providers, perhaps the first time such a diverse range of organisations across the industry has agreed to collaborate.

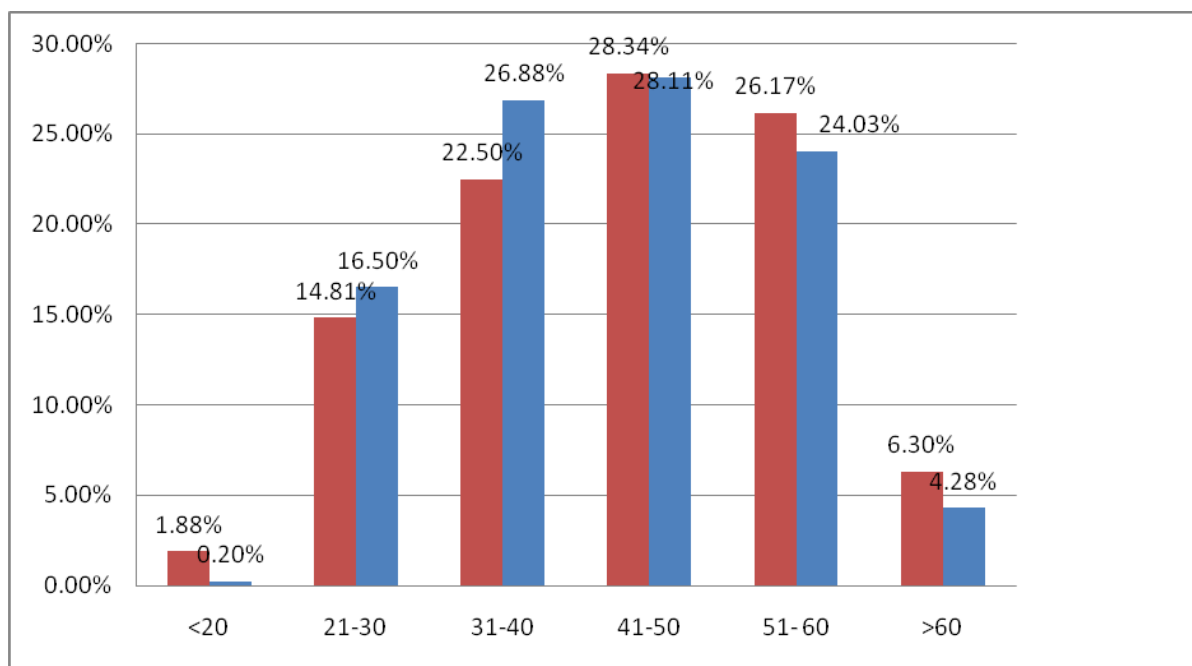


Figure 2: *Age profile (n=1381) of Queensland Water Industry (l) in comparison to SEQ Water Grid Members (r) showing an ageing workforce across the State, one of the key reasons for industry cooperation on skills development.*

Key achievements over the last few months include:

- An agreement with AWA to promote H2Oz to the Queensland industry, with a reciprocal opportunity to influence the future direction of this promotional program.
- A further response to the AWA-led National Skills Business Plan identifying key areas of interest to Queensland Water Service Providers.
- Production of the industry snapshot report, showing workforce profiles and trends from the study undertaken in mid 2010.
- Initiation of a more detailed workforce study using Queensland case studies.
- An expression of interest for the national Critical Skills Investment Fund has been lodged to try to stimulate a paraprofessional (Cert IV) program for civil construction and maintenance staff.
- Discussions with the National Water Commission and the Queensland Government about the new project scoping a national certification scheme for water operators.
- More direct involvement in national initiatives aimed at addressing skilling needs

E-Learning

A project with funding from the Commonwealth Government has been undertaken over the past two years to promote the use of e-Learning across the water industry nationally. While much of the industry is conservatively wary about the use of e-learning including online training, there is a growing recognition that this style of delivery will form an increasing component of water industry training in the future. This project is drawing to a close in May 2011. Significant milestones include the production of two wastewater learning objects which are in the process of being distributed. A potential future pathway for the work has been identified, with AWA keen to keep the national reference group going (jointly chaired with *qldwater*) but with a focus on broader technological learning solutions.