

NATIONAL FORUM ON SKILLS SHORTAGES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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**LGMA Perspectives
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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

This overview report is a response to the research, activities and programs being developed across the states, from an LGMA perspective. It is by no means exhaustive! The report is somewhat NSW focused given my familiarity with this state, but I would like to acknowledge the input from LGMA state CEOs for this report.

The national forum itself is a response to the impending problems confronting Local Government as a result of skills shortages, changing and challenging demographic and economic conditions, an ageing workforce and difficulties in recruiting and retaining significant professional groups, young people and women.

In 2005, the NSW Skills Taskforce (a multi industry LG group) conducted a market scope research of councils to ascertain the nature and extent of the problem.

The objectives of the NSW Taskforce scoping analysis are still relevant and ongoing". Our objectives are to:

- ❖ Better understand the nature of the training and professional development needs of those employed in Local Government
- ❖ Identify the "gaps" that currently exist in training and development for Local Government professionals and determine areas of priority
- ❖ Assess the causes and extent of current and projected skills shortages in Local Government
- ❖ Develop initiatives to assist in addressing existing skills gaps and workforce shortages in Local Government, based on the priorities identified by the Taskforce

- ❖ Advocate the need to increase resources and support for training in Local Government, including the need for workforce planning by councils
- ❖ Advocate Local Government as an “employer of choice”
- ❖ Provide a platform for the sharing of training and education information and for the development of ongoing relationships between stakeholders

There is a plethora of research in relation to this subject, and many of the speakers in the next two days will cover some of the emerging issues. The NSW findings although somewhat anecdotal, also confirm the work undertaken by the MAV, the LGAT, LGMA SA and the New Zealand research. For example, in 2004, the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) conducted substantial research which also confirmed that the national situation is replicated in Tasmania.

In reviewing the issues and strategies across the states and the considerations that have informed the strategies for the NSW Taskforce for the next few years, the research in general has identified:

- ❖ Workforce planning and practice issues, such as the lack of strategic and management focus; lack of long term data; flexible workpractise policies; innovative HR management soft skills development and so on
- ❖ Demographic considerations impacting on workforce recruitment, (e.g. casualisation of the workforce; retired workers) and workforce retention (e.g. xy generation)
- ❖ Economic considerations impacting on Local Government including rate base, cost shifting and infrastructure asset management
- ❖ Significant shortages in key professions, especially qualified town/urban planners, environmental health officers, engineers and building surveyors.
- ❖ Growing evidence of impending shortages in other areas of the Local Government workforce, including strategic and policy analysts, qualified finance officers, child care workers and traditional ‘blue collar’ jobs.
- ❖ Widespread concern that the increasing community demands and amount of legislation affecting Local Government is adversely impacting the workforce in terms of service delivery and standards, and workload stress
- ❖ Concern over the drain from some regional and remote areas, and areas of relative isolation

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

There are many initiatives being developed across Australia and in individual councils. As these will also be covered by other speakers, I have highlighted some of these initiatives, but the list is certainly not exhaustive!

MAJOR INITIATIVES

Local Government Industry Forums

NSW, TASMANIA and WA have industry based working parties, which is an important model, with the LGMA, LGSA, the Department of Local Government, and invited representatives from the Planning Institute of Australia; Australian Institute of Environmental Health; Institute of Public Works Engineers and Australian Institute of Building Surveyors.

These groups are seeking to address, through a range of strategies, some of the many human resource issues currently confronting Local Government. In particular focusing on ways to attract new people into the sector through school leaver and graduate recruitment programs, increased traineeship, cadetship and student work placement opportunities and regional skilled migration programs as well as addressing mature age workforce issues and pursuing various training strategies.

In addition to strategies designed to attract new people into Local Government, the working groups have identified a pressing need to ensure that the sector makes the best possible use of the human resources it currently has.

This is likely to require a greater focus on matters such as employee retention, paraprofessional training to support the dwindling cohort of professional officers and investigating the potential for resource sharing and the development of regional approaches.

The Tasmanian State Government, through the Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training (OPCET) hosted an industry forum on Local Government skills shortages and training issues in November 2005. It brought together over 60 people from State and Local Government, educational bodies, the professional associations and unions and canvassed a wide range of issues concerning skills shortages, education and training matters. The forum also sought to identify some specific longer and short-term strategies that might assist the sector in addressing some of its workforce problems and work towards developing an agenda for further action.

In speaking to Queensland it does not appear to have a similar initiative, although they are currently somewhat preoccupied with a reform program for LG in Queensland!

Development of Council Careers Information Kits

A comprehensive web-based information kit has been developed to highlight and promote Local Government career options throughout the community, by the LGAT/LGMA. The information kit was officially launched on 6 March 2006 and the full website will soon go live.

Council Careers were as developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including educators and industry bodies, and it provides detailed information on the structure of Local Government, job types and opportunities, career pathways, relevant qualifications and training opportunities. It is intended for school leavers (or those about to leave), graduates and those contemplating a change of career. It will also be useful for those already working in Local Government who might wish to upgrade their skills. Copies of the kit can be downloaded from www.councilcareers.tas.gov.au.

WA has a comprehensive career kit also developed in conjunction with the Department.

The NSW Taskforce has developed a careers pamphlet specifically for school aged 15-17 yrs, to be used by career councillors and councils. It is also hopeful a LG portal will be part of the Departments new website development.

University and School Leavers

The NSW Taskforce is participating in a national CAREER EXPO in June, with a "LG Village" theme, auspiced by the LGSA and participating councils. A number of young professionals from Councils will assist at the booth, keen to promote their occupations

The LGAT kit was recently used to promote Local Government professions at the University of Tasmanian Careers Fair and a Local Government booth has been booked at the National Careers Expo to be held in Hobart in July. The LGAT Association is working with various Schools within the University of Tasmania to facilitate student work placements with Local Government.

Individual Councils across Australia continue to make presentations at their local schools, greatly assisted by the materials that have been developed, or have been developed locally.

Cadetships

Councils are encouraged to offer, wherever possible, cadetships and apprenticeships in areas where there are skills shortages.

The NSW Taskforce wrote to all state government departments seeking support for a cadetship program, in particular in planning cadets and indigenous cadetships. The response was very disappointing and is now likely to be developed by the Department of Local Government.

Careers Advisory Industry Placement

The NSW Taskforce has also seconded a person from the Department of Education and Training to work with and assist the Taskforce on establishing more effective linkages with schools.

The Australian Government, through the Department of Education, Science and Training, has provided funding for LGAT to host a careers advisor industry placement. The scholarship recipient, a qualified careers educator currently working in a State high school, will work with the Association to promote Council Careers throughout the education system and to develop other relevant education material that can be used within Tasmanian schools to enhance students' understanding of Local Government and to raise awareness of the more than 200 types of career opportunities it offers school leavers. She will also deliver leading practice seminars on Local Government career opportunities to other career educators within the Tasmanian education system.

Mature Age Workforce

LG Association of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology have conducted a transitional employment survey, developed by Local Government. It is designed to gather qualitative data from Council employees contemplating retirement in the next 6 years that will provide an indication of what employees are prepared to consider in terms of 'transitional employment' after their official retirement date and assist Councils in determining appropriate workforce planning strategies

A number of strategies have been identified to address this problem include phased-in-retirement and succession planning including cadetships/apprenticeships; para-professional training to support the diminishing pool of qualified professionals; and regional skilled migration.

Mark Healy, the NSW Department representative on the NSW Taskforce presented a paper, *Local Government and the Ageing Workforce Paper* –at an ageing conference in 2006.

Workforce Diversity.

The NSW Department with LGSA and LGMA have started planning for a forum on workforce diversity. There is some debate whether this cuts across the work of the Taskforce and what constitutes “diversity” but will be part of the broader workforce planning progress.

It is also an important initiative, aimed at:

- Identifying success stories, on promoting positions of leadership in local government, including senior management and elected representative roles, for under-represented groups (Aboriginal people, older people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities, women and young people).
- Identifying barriers to participation in positions of leadership in local government, for under-represented groups eg. Organizational culture, recruitment practices.
- Seeking the views of attendees as to the potential role the Department, LGMA and LGSA can play in encouraging the development of appropriate initiatives and in overcoming the barriers, where appropriate
- Identifying links with other relevant projects. Eg. Skills Shortages project.

Para-professional Training

NSW Taskforce has developed a “Bridging” qualifications for Development Assessment, a Joint building and planning qualification, a model DA qualification, with the Centre for LG at UTS

The taskforce is also reviewing the roll-out to other TAFEs of the Diploma in Engineering (Leeton); examining e courses, liaising with TAFE/providers to encourage take-up of Map courses/ Diploma of Local Government (Planning) and exploring the broad based entry requirement need for Environmental Health Professionals.

LGAT is working with OPCET and TAFE to identify appropriate paraprofessional training opportunities and approaches, including promoting take-up of the recently updated Local Government Training Package to Councils.

Workforce Planning:

MAV work has led the way in this area, as outlined by the MAV presentation.

The issue of workforce planning was first identified by LGPRO with the Minister for LG almost 2 years ago with a view to encouraging a sector-wide response to the issues. The state government Department is convening a working party to address the issue and have supported LGPro involvement

The NSW Taskforce has also identified workforce planning as a key issue. LGMA and the LGMA HR group in NSW have run a number of network meetings around this theme. For example, dealing with mature age workers; and the XY Generation.

Emerging Leaders

LGPro, LGMA - NSW, Qulin, WA and SA all have Emerging or Aspiring Leaders programs aimed at

- Building management capacity
- Improving skills development
- Addressing the transitional age gap
- Encouraging networking and support

Women in LG

LGMA National commissioned a report in 2003 on Women in Local Government. LG pro and LGMA NSW have run professional forums for Women in Local Government.

However it would be fair to say the profile of women particularly at senior level is not satisfactory.

It is estimated in Australia that Women represent only 10% of Executive Management positions and that 42% of employers have no women executive managers in their ranks.

Australia is behind the world on these figures. The US has nearly 16 % of women executives, Canada 14% and Australia is behind South Africa with nearly 15%.

So we have some work to do in this area of workforce planning!

Graduate Recruitment Program

I would like to outline the Local Government Graduate Development Program in NSW as a possible model for some other states. I am aware Victoria also has a program run through the MAV. I believe graduate recruitment is a key strategic issue and requires more consideration and development.

The LGMA Local Government Graduate Development Program is a two year program designed to develop skills, competencies and understanding of Local Government that will prepare graduates for senior professional leadership positions.

The Program is a joint initiative and partnership between the LGMA NSW, Chandler Macleod and member councils.

LGMA NSW manages the program and provides administrative support to the Program and manages marketing activities related to Council membership.

Chandler Macleod provides recruitment support and manages marketing activities to attract graduates to the Program.

The Program has a number of benefits for member councils:

- Recognizes the need to address the changing Local Government workforce age and experience demographics;
- Provides opportunity to supplement the top down approach to staff development with greater concentration on a continuing bottom up refreshment through an active graduate program;
- Utilizes a structured graduate development program to develop expertise, capability, leadership and performance in Local Government;
- Provides an opportunity to work in partnership to enhance the image of Local Government as a preferred employer and as a provider of professional career opportunities for graduates;
- Allows a council to benefit from critical mass, competitive edge and economies of scale as well as the sophistication and quality of recruitment and development processes that are difficult to achieve as individual councils.

Graduates are provided with

- An induction program by council
- Council mentoring and coaching
- A structured leadership and management skills training program with LGMA
- Networking opportunities.
- Each participant will undertake a project on an issue of strategic importance to LGMA and or the employing council.

EMERGING THEMES

In outlining the research and the activities in relation to skills shortages and workforce planning, I would like to reflect on some of the emerging themes that may inform future strategic development. There is a need to :

- Promote and undertake long term WORKFORCE PLANNING – critical at a strategic, management and HR professional level
- Identify the problem, in order to create the solutions.
- Identify good practises and practical things that will start to make a difference; Showcasing council initiatives
- Coordinate. There is currently a lack of coordination and perhaps even competition for research, resources, training development and so on, and therefore a need for a Local Government sector wide approach at a national and at a state level
- Coordinate at Secondary and Tertiary levels. The work to develop materials or processes for educating about or promoting LG as a sector/employer, to careers advisers in the secondary and tertiary education sectors and to create an approach which will encourage sector advertising and sector or “group” employment is piece meal and uncoordinated
- Engage. Intergovernmental/public private sector engagement is important, particularly given the lack of resources identified for example for research, resourcing Taskforce initiatives, cadetships, traineeship, HECs subsidies, professional development and so on!
- Market effectively. There is a lot of talk about branding Local Government, as an employer of choice and associated marketing programs, but perhaps these need to be “ unpackaged” in terms of purpose and outcomes.
- Harness material and data, with a national clearing house
- Develop “group employment” arrangements, and other Human Capital strategic alliances
- Work with superannuation providers. There may be ways to encourage mature workers to continue on part-time work, without being disadvantaged

- Engage recruitment agencies. There is some evidence that recruitment agencies do not understand the nature, purpose or value of Local Government as an Employer of Choice.
- Provide suitable Training and Development programs. Guidance and support is critical, to help senior managers develop creative responses to skills shortages, and cope with the additional stress and workloads they and their managers are bearing as a result of the challenges outlined in my report!

SUMMARY

In summary a focus for LGMA at a State and National level could be to consider:

Promoting Local Government as an Employer of Choice

- ✚ Perception and image
- ✚ awareness and
- ✚ culture

Pathways for Professionals and Paraprofessionals

- ✚ Planning, Building and Engineering links with tertiary institutions
- ✚ Current and future skills requirements

Human Resource Management

- ✚ Workforce planning
- ✚ Workforce practice
- ✚ Work choices
- ✚ Skill set gaps – performance skills/ “soft skills

Advice and support for councils

- ✚ Capacity building initiatives
- ✚ Good practice
- ✚ Manager exchanges
- ✚ Identify and monitor other resources/information

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