

## Report on the TIAG Industry Forum on skills, education and training for Local Government



### Introduction

The Tasmanian Learning & Skills Authority Industry Advisory Group (TIAG) convened an industry forum on local government to get agreed actions on skills shortages in local government occupations.

The forum was held on 29 November 2005.

This paper discusses the key issues and includes a summary of actions and outcomes agreed by the forum participants and the progress to-date on implementation.

### Background

Local Government as an industry sector in Tasmania employs approximately 4,300 people in 29 councils. This comprises 2.2% of the state workforce and local government activities contribute about 2.7% of the Gross State Product.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the responsibility and accountability for Tasmania's key infrastructure, planning and development approvals and public health devolves to Local Government.

For example, during 2002/03 Tasmanian Local Government spent over \$284 million (not including road funding) delivering a wide range of necessary services to the community. Examples of these functions and services include:

- Engineering (public works design, construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, footpaths, drainage, waste collection and management)
- Water and sewerage management
- Health (water and food safety, immunization, toilets, noise control, meat inspection and animal management and control).

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<sup>1</sup> Balmer, C. (2002, 18 March 2005). *Local government in the 1990s*. Retrieved 28 June, 2005, from <http://www.abs.gov.au>

- Building (inspection, licensing, certification and enforcement)
- Planning and development approval
- Public order and safety, including emergency and disaster management
- Administration of quarries, cemeteries, parking stations and street parking
- Land care and natural resource management
- Management of recreation facilities (golf courses, swimming pools, sports grounds and courts, recreation centres, halls, kiosks, camping grounds and caravan parks)
- Community services (child care, elderly care and accommodation, refuge facilities, meals on wheels, youth projects, affordable housing, counseling and welfare)
- Cultural/educational (art galleries and museums)<sup>2</sup>

## Skills Shortages in Local Government

The national trend for skills shortages in particular local government occupations is also having a major impact in the Tasmanian context.

Therefore, many consider the situation in Tasmania to be worse due to factors such as isolation from mainland Australia and the trend for young people to move interstate.

These and other factors have resulted in or contributed to critical skills shortages in local government occupations such as:

- Planners
- Environmental Health Officers
- Engineers and other Infrastructure, and
- Childcare workers<sup>3&4</sup>

Some of these other factors that are contributing to the skills shortages include:

- Aging workforce
- Difficulty in recruitment particularly in rural or remote areas
- Legislative requirements
- Competition with other industries for young people
- Lack of attraction of local government to young people as a good career pathway option

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<sup>2</sup> Standish, C. 2004. *Addressing Skills Shortages and Training Needs in Tasmanian Local Government Professions*. Local Government Association of Tasmania.

<sup>3</sup> OPCET, (2005) *Government Service Industry Training Demand Profile*, p.19

<sup>4</sup> Standish, C. 2005, *Skills Shortages and Training Needs in Local Government: Key Issues*, p. 1

- Relatively low salaries in local government, etc

## **Issues and Questions Prior to the Forum**

Prior to attending the forum all participants were provided with a discussion paper to promote thinking and ideas about skills shortage issues and solutions. Specifically, participants were asked to think about the following questions or statements:

- Why is there a problem with local government recruitment?
- Why has there been very little uptake of the qualifications for planning and environmental health in the nationally accredited Local Government Training Package?
- What are the implications of replacing the TAFE delivered Advanced Diploma of Environmental Health with a Bachelor of Science (Environmental Health)?
- Are there flexible articulation arrangements between the Vocational, Education & Training (VET) sector and Higher Education for:
  - Engineers?
  - Planners?
  - Environmental Health Officers?
- How can local government, institutions, education & training providers, universities and government departments collaborate to resolve current and future skills shortage issues?
- Is local government being strategic about skills shortage issues?
- Introduction of technical officers to perform the lower level tasks associated with engineering, planning, environmental health, etc.
- Promotion of local government occupations to young people as a career pathway with a future.
- Make better use of New Apprenticeships (called Australian Apprenticeships since 1 July 2006) and cadetships.

## Forum

The Local Government forum was attended by approximately 70 people from a range of stakeholder groups including:

- Local Government Authorities
- Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT)
- Government departments
- TAFE Tasmania
- University of Tasmania
- Industry associations and institutes

Many important issues were discussed and suggestions for solutions, opportunities and actions were identified. A record of the forum details was compiled and circulated by email to all forum participants for further comment.

## Opportunities, Actions and Current Progress

Fourteen opportunities to assist with overcoming local government skills shortages were identified at the forum. A list of suggested actions, who could/should take responsibility for these and timelines for completion, was also compiled. Current progress is as follows:

**Opportunity 1:** Investigate more strategic use of available skills through arrangements for sharing expertise and resources between councils including through the establishment of regional centres specialising in particular services.

### Action:

Develop a variety of models for resource sharing to suit the variety of opportunities and situations and seek agreement on the concepts from Local Government prior to developing an implementation plan.

### Comment:

This forms part of the agenda for the LGAT sustainability project and a consultant is being engaged to commence the process. LGAT is also about to conduct a research exercise in relation to models for resource sharing in Australia and Tasmania.

**Opportunity 2:** A project to look at changes required by local government to meet emerging skills needs including recruitment,

workforce structure, professional development, use of para-professional positions.

**Action:**

Develop collaborative strategies for workforce structure and working as an industry through the LGAT sustainability agenda.

LGAT to convene a Local Government Human Resources (LGHR) working group of LG HR management people supported by OPCET, Economic Development, TAFE & Utas to consider the workforce structure, professional development, technical officer positions etc.

**Comment:**

This forms part of the agenda for the LGAT sustainability project and a consultant is being engaged to commence the process. LGAT is also about to conduct a research exercise in relation to models for resource sharing in Australia and Tasmania.

**Opportunity 3:** Better communication by PhD, honours and undergraduate coordinators to find opportunities for applied projects in Local Government.

**Action:**

Utas to liaise with Local Government Areas.

**Comment:**

LGAT is working with various schools within the University of Tasmania to facilitate student work placements with Local Government e.g. the School of Geography and Environmental Studies professional placement unit (a part of the Graduate Diploma and Masters Planning degrees) and the School of Government's public sector internship program.

Planning placements have been particularly successful.

**Opportunity 4:** Better information required for Local Government and prospective employees on pathways to qualifications and jobs, the education and training system and skilling existing workers.

**Action:**

OPCET will produce (in consultation with LGAT and UTAS) an information kit for local government covering training packages, university courses, articulation, relationships to jobs, trainees and apprentices, existing workers, cadetships, funding, skills, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), contacts and resources.

TAFE Tasmania to run pilots for qualifications from the Local Government Training Package – Certificate II to IV in 2006.

**Comment:**

A draft of the information kit has been completed as a web resource. Publication is pending.

TAFE Tasmania has added to its scope the following qualifications:

- LGA30204 Certificate III in Local Government (Health and Environment)
- LGA30404 Certificate II in Local Government (Regulatory Services)
- LGA40704 Certificate IV in Local Government (Planning)

TAFE will be piloting some of the qualifications with the Glamorgan Spring Bay Council later in November 2006 and will evaluate these on completion to identify any delivery and assessment issues prior to broadening to the state-wide market.

**Opportunity 5:** Obtain commitment from all councils to level of training effort.

**Action:**

OPCET will consolidate a range of data from training statistics, EHO studies and LGAT, to establish a baseline of what is known and provide information to the LGHR group.

**Comment:**

Data from OPCET training statistics has been collected. DHHS survey report will soon be available.

The OPCET Government Services Training Demand Profile has been reviewed and updated.

The OPCET Environmental Health Training Demand Profile is currently under review and being updated.

**Opportunity 6:** Explore potential for mature-age worker career change.

**Action:**

LGAT will adjust a new survey to get further information.

**Comment:**

The survey has been conducted and results disseminated to all councils.

**Opportunity 7:** Retention, phased in retirement options.

**Action:**

Refer this opportunity to the LGHR working group.

Reinvigorate discussions between LGAT, Department of Economic Development, ASU, and link to other elements of succession planning, knowledge transfer – URGENT!

**Comment:**

Discussions are ongoing with the Department of Economic Development – the aim is to provide some good practice models for implementing phased-in-retirement to councils and hold some information workshops.

LGAT is conducting its own research through a public policy student intern placement.

**Opportunity 8:** Use of technical and para-professional positions and re-skilling existing workers.

**Action:**

LGAT will develop guidelines for technical and para professional roles covering all the technical and legal issues.

Guideline development will involve government agencies, UTAS and TAFE and will take into account legislative and operational issues and relate to a professional development strategy.

**Comment:**

Some progress has occurred in relation to scoping a paraprofessional role for environment health technicians.

DHHS have obtained national funding from the former National Public Health Partnership (NPHP) and the Department of Health & Aging (DOHA) and has commissioned a national project through the enHealth Council to examine the use of technicians working with, and under the supervision of, Environmental Health Officers (EHOs).

**Opportunity 9:** Partnerships with industry e.g. building surveying.

**Action:**

Develop a pilot collaborative model including the institute and private sector.

**Comment:**

None identified.

**Opportunity 10:** Regulatory reform to reduce unproductive use of skilled staff.

**Action:**

Refer problems to Government agencies.

Department of Premier & Cabinet (DPAC) to convene a meeting to examine opportunities for reform.

**Comment:**

DPAC advise it would be more appropriate for specific issues related to regulatory reform be raised with the State Government by LGAT through established processes.

**Opportunity 11:** Promoting careers in Local Government.

**Action:**

Use of the LGAT Careers Kit.

Professional development for Local Government staff to increase awareness and skills to optimize possibilities for recruiting and retaining young people.

General promotion of LG as a career of choice.

**Comment:**

Careers Kit and website launched.

LGAT, councils attendance at Uni, schools and other careers events.

Development of promotional material (e.g. posters, brochures, fact sheets, show bags and giveaways, etc).

Lots of interest, press coverage and requests to adapt the Careers Kit from other Australian States.

Careers Advisor industry placement with LGAT has helped build on these resources.

**Opportunity 12:** Industry graduate program.

**Action:**

Investigate the possibility of an industry graduate program with a general induction program and the opportunity for young people to move around the industry in the early stages of their career.

**Comment:**

This is not something LGAT intends to pursue. The economies of scale don't justify the resources required. Other states have implemented

these programs (notably Vic and NSW) and their experience indicates this is very resource intensive for little return. LGAT prefers option to pursue internships and student work placements.

LGAT offers through its LGAT Assistance fund 3 bursaries each year for students studying at University.

**Opportunity 13:** Promote issues nationally and use ideas from other states.

**Action:**

LGAT and others to use national forums to discuss and pursue new arrangements for recruiting and employing staff.

Include cadetships and the possibility of group employment type arrangements or a regional local government structure forming a brokerage arrangement.

**Comment:**

Skill shortages have now been taken up at national level through the Local Government Managers Association (LGMA) and Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). LGAT is feeding into this national process.

This is an issue identified by the Local Government Sustainability Project and could be addressed by this project.

**Opportunity 14:** Develop a course suitable for Plumbing Surveyors.

**Action:**

None identified.

**Comment:**

Following the forum TAFE Tasmania representatives met with representatives of the Tasmanian Plumbing Surveyors Association (TPSA) to discuss their need for a qualification for plumbing surveyors. A number of options were canvassed including the proposed Certificate IV Mechanical Services stream. In addition, TAFE Tasmania prepared a draft qualification for a Certificate IV Plumbing Surveyor. The

association was to evaluate these options. The most recent discussion between TAFE Tasmania and the President of TPSA was that these options would be discussed the Committee (TPSA) and TAFE Tasmania will be advised about the preferred option.