

E-INSTITUTE is an initiative of the Institute of Plumbing Australia with the aim to provide a vehicle for all members to participate in the workings of the Institute from the comfort of their desk.

E-INSTITUTE is written in Plain Text so as not to clutter your mailbox with large files written in fancy formats. We will keep each issue reasonably short and restrict it to only one or perhaps two matters requiring input by members. We hope that you will reciprocate by considering the issues raised and providing your comments and/or suggestions so as to allow your Institute to publish a consensus view.

In our first issue we spoke of a need for national consistency, a need to promote the importance of safe, sound plumbing, a need to train in the underlying principles, retention of and utilisation of a four year apprenticeship, broad spectrum training, capstone examinations and the down side to profit driven training.

Our correspondents to Issue 1 were all generally supportive of the views expressed but please do not hesitate to disagree if that is your view, I am sure that we are more than able to catch brickbats as well as bouquets!

One of the driving forces behind the resurgence of the Institute into the national scene both as a professional institute and as a participant in the recently formed Plumbing Coalition (A discussion group for Australian Plumbing Industry Organisations) is the need for national consistency in all things plumbing. The current message coming across is that the only thing that is consistent is the failure of the current systems to adequately provide for plumbing into the future.

We know that many people within government departments, corporatised utilities and regulators around the nation are working on their view of a consistent approach to plumbing; its regulation, who will install it, who will maintain it and the amount of training those people will require, who will design it and certify it as correct and who will fix it if it is wrong. Unfortunately their view of consistency appears to stop at the border of their small patch in the big picture; the only claim to national consistency is a rather dubious starting point at an Australian Standard (not necessarily the same revision) or the new training streams/competencies but not necessarily the same amount of training hours or even the same streams. After that any item consistent with another jurisdiction appears to be purely coincidental.

Some 12 months ago the Plumbing Code of Australia (PCA) was resuscitated by Commissioner Michael Kefford (since retired) the Victorian Plumbing Industry Commission (PIC) and the National Plumbing Regulators Forum (NPRF), prior to this intervention the PCA had languished in no mans land and was close to being swallowed by the Building Code. In the March 2005 edition of the Plumbing Connection Magazine was an article titled "the simple life: one code one WaterMark" the sub-heading read "Our States and Territories have finally embraced a single national plumbing code and a single WaterMark, which will make life easier for everyone." National consistency at last you may say! But close to the 12 month anniversary of that article how many State Governments have passed enabling legislation to adopt the Plumbing Code of Australia? I do not know the answer but believe it to be not many if any; maybe readers can help with the news relating to their own state. Unfortunately we hear that some states contemplating the

uptake of the PCA are already planning their own local variants just when you thought that the Industry was getting somewhere.
If you still have the March 2005 Plumbing Connection it is worth a second read as the articles on regulation and training together with interviews with pollies and commissioners are still pertinent today and although they all talk of moves to national consistency nothing much has changed.

TRAINING:

What's happening in other parts of the world? Here is part of a report given by Mr Robert Burgon after a World Plumbing Council Meeting in North America, November 2005.

"Education and training is a subject included on every WPC meeting agenda. The importance of this subject was stressed during a visit to the St Louis Plumbers and Pipefitters Training Centre operated by the United Association Local 562. Like so many other UA Local facilities throughout North America, this centre is purpose-built and equipped to a high standard to meet the skill needs of both apprentices and journeymen.

While in some countries shortages of skilled plumbers have led to the creation of fast-track training solutions, the model followed in St Louis is sure to provide apprentices with a solid understanding of a wide range of skills. Apprentices attend the centre for one day every second week (and one evening a week) throughout their 5-year apprenticeship. New apprentices start with a focus on their mathematical skills (which the instructors believe is so important for plumbers). During their studies they will encompass a wide range of learning opportunities ranging from technical drawing through to sophisticated fault-finding. The minimum age for a new apprentice is 18 but there has been an increasing trend for older entrants to see plumbing as their career of choice and the average age of new recruits at the centre is now 26-27.

Although the UA model, with its well-funded arrangement through deductions from hourly wages, may not be suitable in all other countries and cultures, WPC delegates left the centre with a strong feeling that this was an arrangement which is of real benefit to the learners, their employers and ultimately to the clients of the businesses in which the apprentices worked."

>>> The above training regime is of course what we used to have in
Australia

It must be remembered that the reduction in apprenticeship time and training was introduced into Australia not to benefit the apprentice but to encourage employers to employ apprentices, maybe it is time we considered the apprentice.

The current scenario is that a young person leaves full time school and enters the work force as an apprentice (on probation for 3 months) then if deemed suitable a 4 year indenture is agreed. In the first 3 years the apprentice is subjected to being pulled from the work place for a number of two week stints of academia and expected to suddenly become a student again. At the completion of the first 3 years and if assessed as competent against the class average the 4th year is served without any off the job training and in many cases very little on the job training as by then they are employed as defacto tradespersons. At the end of the 4th year the apprentice is issued with a certificate of trade studies and becomes a tradesperson. Then the forgoing comes home to roost. As the 'plumbers license' is deemed to be the holy grail of plumbing the new tradesperson

enrols at their own expense for some fast track refresher courses and sits the plumbers license examinations and from all accounts the high failure rate at these exams proves our contention that the current method of training delivery is flawed. This is not to say that the quality of training is at fault but the adhoc delivery in short concentrated bursts do not allow any report between student and teacher or give the teacher the chance to mentor his students throughout their apprenticeship.

The question is how to best utilise the 4th year of the apprenticeship to best benefit the apprentice.

The current system of training delivery is back to front we seem to be training off the job what should be learned on the job and missing out on what should be trained off the job. If the current system can complete the practical training over 3 years maybe the 4th year can be used to impart the underlying knowledge that sets apart a skilled craftsman proud to be called a plumber from an installer of pipes.

QUESTIONS:

1. Should training continue throughout the full 4 years of a plumbing apprenticeship?
2. If so what should be taught in that 4th year?
3. Should there be a capstone exam at the end of the 4th year?

WHAT'S ON?

ISH China. The ISH organisation from Germany also run plumbing exhibitions around the world and the next one is in Beijing China 14 - 17 March 2006. The World Plumbing Council and ISH will run the first WPC/ISH China Academy, Plumbing Symposium 16 March 2006 in conjunction with this exhibition. www.ish.messefrankfurt.com

1st National Hydropolis Conference to be run by the Stormwater Industry Association (WA) Inc in Perth Western Australia 8-11 October 2006. see www.promaco.com.au/conference/2006/sia

TECHNICAL BOOKS:

Did you know that the NSW Chapter of your institute runs a mail order bookshop supplying all manner of technical books and Australian Standards. Email Manager Ken Adams kadams@acenet.com.au for more information.

>>>> Comments on matters raised in E-INSTITUTE or suggestions for future issues may be sent to the Editor at:

The Institute of Plumbing Australia Inc.
P O Box 2005
MARMION
Western Australia 6020
FAX: 08 9448 0420
EMAIL: secretary@plumbing.org.au