

## **SKILL SHORTAGES IN NSW**

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## Response to Inquiry into Skill Shortages in NSW

### Identifying gaps and areas of need in particular industries, professions and communities Response from the City of Sydney

#### Background

The City of Sydney's workforce is large and diverse, with a range of occupations represented. Employees work in front line, operational and strategic services located at several depots, libraries, parks, community centres, Town Hall House and other offices.

As at May 2013, the City employs 1,831 staff and an additional 141 casual staff (full time equivalent). Women represent 40 percent of the workforce compared to 60 percent men. Permanent employees represent 74 percent of the workforce. The major occupational group is clerical administrative workers at 28 percent. Professionals make up 24.5 percent of the workforce. The majority of the workforce is aged between 30-49 years. Employees aged less than 30 represent 9 percent of the workforce. Employees aged over 50 represent 35 percent of the workforce. The City's workforce has a relatively stable separation rate of 7.7 percent.

The City shares an industry wide trend in *specific skills shortages* that impact on its' business operations, in particular the occupations of *planning, surveying, strategic planning, sustainable design and development, health and building compliance, property and assets management and child care and some areas of information communications technology (ICT)*.

As part of the Workforce Strategy 2011-14, the City is committed to developing entry-level positions in areas of skills shortages and where there is a high concentration of mature-aged employees.

The strategies to address skills shortages at the City are designed to produce a *multiplier effect* on the workforce that takes into account the vertical integration potential of pipeline programs such as cadetships, internships, traineeships and outreach to schools. Also by meeting skills shortages through strategies that amplify workforce diversity and by consolidating education and training partnerships, and to embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation within the City's workforce.

#### Current Skills Shortages

Identified Skills Shortages at the City (as at May 2013) include:

- IT, including Governance, Spatial, Security and Web Design specialists
- Civil & Construction Engineers
- Childcare Workers
- Building Inspectors
- Planners
- Environmental Health Officers
- Project Managers
- Trades

## **Identifying strategies for government to assist in addressing skills shortage - Response from City of Sydney**

The experience of occupational skills shortages for planners (town planning, sustainable design and development, strategic planners, environmental and building surveyors and planners) is uniform across the Local Government sector in NSW. The skills shortages profile for the City is reflective of most Local Governments in metropolitan areas. There are however, complexities that current strategies outlined in the City's Workforce Strategy 2011-2014, including entry-level pipelines, will redress to different degrees.

Entry-level pipelines fulfil an organisational diversity strategy by attracting young people from a variety of backgrounds entering the workforce for the first time and providing opportunities to undertake work placements where they gain skills and experience for their future careers.

Internships are the ideal pipeline for temporary labour supply and a positive strategy for creating future graduates and longer-term employees. Internships raise the profile of the City and build its capacity to renew and augment its workforce with energetic and bright young people and, it is an essential factor in generating a 'learning organisation' that is future focussed.

The City is also building partnerships with universities by targeting specific schools such as the University of NSW's (UNSW's) Faculty of The Built Environment, to attract high performing students and provide a pool of high quality individuals for cadetships and the Graduate Program in areas of skill shortage.

By collaborating with the University of Technology (UTS), the City has developed a unique pilot program which has resulted in two paid internships for UTS undergraduate international students to work with the Economic Development area within the City. The results from this project will provide the City with a better understanding of the economic impact of international students and assist the City to improve its response to international students.

The City continues its strong commitment to diversity and equity by increasing its intake of Aboriginal School Based Trainees to 11 in 2013 in specific areas of skill shortage such as childcare, trades and libraries.

The following areas have developed individual strategies to counter skills shortages:

### **Planning**

The City has developed several entry-level roles to attract planners for the City. There are six 12-month Student Planner positions at the City. These Student Planners can also apply to have one hundred per cent of their higher education qualification reimbursed by the City while working here. Also a graduate position has been targeted in the planning area to increase the number of entry level planning roles.

### **Health and Building**

In Local Government across NSW there is a shortage of Environmental Health Officers and Building Surveyors. The City has implemented a successful strategy to sponsor Health and Building Compliance Officers on 457 Employer Sponsored Skilled visas from the United Kingdom, in addition to retraining some of their experienced Rangers to perform compliance assessments thus reducing the Health and Building Compliance Officers workload.

In addition, as part of the pipeline strategy, a trainee Environmental Health Officer and a trainee Building Surveyor position have also been established. The trainees are paired with an experienced employee and mentored so that they quickly develop skills.

## **Property**

Property is also an area of recognised skills shortage as it is competing directly with the private sector that pays bonuses and commissions. To counter this skills shortage, units within the City relating to sustainability and infrastructure take on additional labour as internships, volunteers or cadets to boost their output capacity and also to provide an entry level pipeline.

## **Engineering**

Engineering is a critical shortage area for the Local Government sector from civil engineers to traffic, environmental, structural, floodplain management and specialist areas such as bridges and seawalls. Engineering as a vocational choice has been out of favour for at least a decade as it has been superseded by ICT and other technology focussed occupations such as sound engineering or biotechnology.

Some of the skills shortage occupations the City would normally experience difficulties recruiting for, such as civil and construction engineering, are outsourced as part of the contract arrangements to complete infrastructure and building projects. Consequently the City runs internal training in project management and procurement as an ongoing program of workforce learning and development. The downside to this system means that the demand for teaching and learning and the resources needed to support that in a range of specialised areas is declining.

To increase entry-level positions in the City, several 12-month engineering cadetships have been established. The City has also recently sponsored two Co-op scholars in Engineering and Construction Management as part of the UNSW Co-op Scholarship program. This program allows for regular work placements throughout their degree, and the Co-op scholars are supported by City staff who mentor and develop their skills.

## **Childcare**

Childcare has recently undergone a nationally mandated accreditation and increased skills requirements for childcare workers to be better qualified, and the ratio of children to carer has decreased meaning the need for more qualified and more numbers of childcare workers.

To address this area of skills shortage the City has tried to model itself as an employer of choice to attract childcare workers by providing quality learning centres, varied work, career paths and flexible work practices. In addition, under the City's Higher Education policy, childcare trainees will be able to apply to have one hundred per cent of their higher education qualification reimbursed by the City.

## **Apprentices**

Many trades have lost the patina of 'a job to fall back on' as the economic growth continues. The Dawkins Reform of the late eighties and nineties that created a platform of second tier universities in outer metropolitan and regional areas and; the growth of the aspirational lower middle classes to positions of better economic status, has meant parents discourage children from going into trades. Also the level of wages for first and second year apprentices is so low (approx. \$27,000 pa. for a first year apprentice) it has become a disincentive especially as many trades apprentices need their own transport.

Also, the City has difficulty attracting women to study and work as apprentices and subsequently trade positions, particularly in horticulture and as mechanics. To redress this, the City has applied for funding through the NSW Government *Investing in Women Program* for a project officer to work with the City to identify barriers for female apprentices at the City and develop strategies to attract a pool of women to vacancies in areas of skill shortage.