

Insulating against skill shortages in Moree



HR Officer Kellie Reeves (right) with existing worker trainees Leanne Ivanov and Belinda Olsen.

Moree Plains Shire Council has seen real benefits from its traineeship program: more opportunities for promotion, increased staff confidence and engagement, and success in securing contracts, for example. Some staff have even won awards: several regional awards, and one state award.

The Council currently has around 40 people working to gain nationally recognised qualifications. Since 2002, over 100 staff have completed their traineeships — in around 16 different qualifications, including planning, water industry operations, business and civil construction. Three training organisations deliver the training and conduct assessment both in the workplace and off-site.

‘This investment in professional development has been a turning point for us,’ said Debbie Baxter-Tomkins, the Council’s Human Resource Manager. ‘This has meant that we have been able to largely insulate ourselves from the skills shortages, particularly in civil construction.’

Kellie Reeves, the HR Officer, said that when people start with Moree Council they see internal staff who have already succeeded. Jobs are vacated because someone with new and upgraded skills has moved into a more senior role. Job interview skills training also helps promotion become a reality for quality employees.

Training has increased the number of licenses that machine operators hold. Employees gain increased confidence and a real understanding of occupational health and safety principles, for example. A workforce more fully engaged in training means the Council has remained competitive and wins contracts over private suppliers. (Having a training regime embedded in the organisation is often a pre-requisite even to be invited to tender.)

Every 8 weeks Moree Council also runs a course on how external jobseekers can apply for jobs with them. Successful applicants start in casual roles; they then gain the experience to fill permanent traineeship positions when they become available.

Most applications for traineeships come from the over-thirties age group – including those who've decided to make a shift away from the city. 'They really believe that having a qualification is essential. They benefit, council benefits — and we have an obligation to do our bit for the community' Debbie said.

Although attracting young people to a rural area like Moree can be 'near impossible', according to Debbie, the Council aims to attract high school students to school-based traineeships and designated indigenous school-based positions.

The Council's local apprenticeships consultant, Pam Hill, has also helped the organisation claim the Commonwealth government incentives that help fund training programs. For further information about funding available under the Australian Apprenticeships program, contact Australian Business Limited Apprenticeships Centre on 1300 65 22 36.