



**A•S•U**  
**Australian Services Union**

## **ASU Response**

### **Draft Local Government Workforce Strategy October 2009**

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## Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Developing career paths.....	7
2. Apprenticeships .....	7
3. Retaining local government workers in the sector .....	10
4. Promoting women in local government.....	12
5. The social impact of contracting out .....	15
6. Social inclusion in local government.....	19
7. Training and development.....	21
8. Recruiting a diverse workforce .....	24
9. Job and work redesign.....	24
10. Planning for the future workforce needs of the sector .....	26
<i>Climate change.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Ageing population.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Rising community expectations.....</i>	<i>28</i>
11. Funding .....	29
Schedule 1: Climate change and Quality Public Services discussion paper.....	30

## Introduction

The Australian Services Union [ASU] is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 120,000 employees.

The ASU was created in 1993. It brought together three large unions – the Federated Clerks Union, the Municipal Officers Association and the Municipal Employees Union, as well as a number of smaller organisations representing social welfare workers, information technology workers and transport employees.

Today, ASU members work in a wide variety of industries and occupations and especially in the following industries and occupations:

- Local government (both blue and white collar employment)
- Social and community services
- Transport, including passenger air and rail transport, road, and air freight transport
- Clerical and administrative employees
- Call centres
- Information technology
- Electricity generation, transmission and distribution
- Water industry
- Higher education (Queensland and SA)

The ASU has 11 Branches and members in every state and territory of Australia, as well as in most regional centres. The Union has approximately equal numbers of males and females as members, although the proportions vary in particular industries.

Local government is the ASU's single biggest membership sector.

The ASU covers blue and white collar employees, including professional employees, in the local government sector.

In October 2009 the Federal Government released its Draft Local Government Workforce Strategy to stimulate discussion around the current and emerging workforce issues in local government and to embark on long term planning for the sector's 171,700 workers.

The draft strategy identified a number of key challenges for the sector. Those challenges include a skills crisis in a number of professions, the ageing workforce and problems recruiting and retaining workers, particularly women and Indigenous workers.

The ASU acknowledges these issues and in response has prepared eleven strategies for meeting these challenges and building a strong local government workforce for the future.

### **1. Developing career paths**

One of the strengths of local government is the diversity of occupations and skills classifications offered within each council. This diversity offers the potential for a capable person to move through the occupations or classifications from an entry level low skilled occupation through to senior management. The ASU recommends the development of career pathways supported by education pathways and training and development to translate this potential into a reality for the many capable workers in low skilled occupations.

### **2. Apprenticeships and traineeships**

More and more councils are opting to use group training companies instead of training their own apprentices. There needs to be a renewed focus on offering in house apprenticeships and traineeships. In addition to this we need to focus on the retention of these workers after their training has been completed. Targeted strategies are required to keep workers for at least five years.

### **3. Retention of local government workers in the sector**

One of the problems identified in the draft report is workers leaving local government for the private sector creating skills shortages and workforce instability. A national portable continuity of service scheme and internal vacancy website would go some way to addressing this issue.

### **4. Promotion of women in local government**

Local government doesn't have a problem recruiting women, the problem lies in the promotion of those women into more skilled roles and ultimately into management. In clerical and administrative areas, for example, there are plenty of women. Development of career paths for women, training opportunities and family friendly conditions are needed to encourage women to see management positions as attainable and feasible.

### **5. The social impact of contracting out**

Contracting out of services has resulted in extensive job loss, deterioration of wages and conditions and a loss of diversity in the workforce.

Where councils contemplate the contracting out of services an appropriate public interest test should assess the impact on local government employment, including investing and training for the future. The contracting out of work should not be associated with the diminution of training, investing in the future, rates of pay and working conditions.

The ASU strongly believes that where contracting out does not exist it should not be pursued; no safeguards or alterations to the tendering process can stop the loss of jobs and negative impacts on the workforce.

Where contracting out has already occurred the council should be required to undertake a social impact assessment of contracted services. Councils need to demonstrate they have considered the impact on jobs, skills, conditions and the impact on the local economy when they put a service to tender. *Local councils play a crucial role in supporting community employment.*

## **6. Social inclusion in local government**

Local government has an important role to play in social inclusion. By developing career paths for school leavers and disadvantaged groups within its municipality local government can make a real difference in addressing disadvantage in its community and contributing towards the achievement of the Federal Government's social inclusion priorities.

## **7. Training and development**

More training opportunities need to be supported by enforceable industrial mechanisms that allow workers to participate in study or training. Training needs to be local and there needs to be better planning and articulation of educational pathways between the VET and tertiary sector. We also need to continue to value experience in job and classifications descriptions. We don't want to see qualifications become a barrier for employment and promotion!

## **8. Recruiting a diverse workforce**

Many hundreds of Indigenous community members in the Northern Territory are engaged through Community Development Employment Projects to work in Local Government. This project presents a large skilled potential workforce who should be employed in a permanent capacity in local government. Federal Government funding is required to support these remote shires employ Indigenous workers in secure employment.

## **9. Job and work redesign**

One solution to the skills shortages facing particular skilled professions is to undertake job and work redesign. If we use the skills of professionals more efficiently and engage para-professionals to undertake the semi-skilled and administrative tasks of a professional's role, less professionals will be needed overall thereby alleviating the skills shortage.

## **10. Planning for the future workforce needs of the sector**

Climate change, the rising affluence of the community and the ageing population will all impact the local government workforce. We need to ensure in the next five years that workers are equipped to function in a low carbon economy. Workforce skills and training need to be tailored to the demands of an affluent community who are increasingly expecting a higher quality service. The ageing population presents significant challenges, we need workforce mapping which includes an age profile of workers to predict which services will be affected and in which occupations we are going to face the 'retirement tsunami'. These retiring workers should also be provided with the option (at the employees' will) to work part time.

## **11. Funding issues**

All these workforce issues stem from a serious issue of underfunding and cost – shifting from other tiers of government. Without adequate resourcing the sector cannot offer the much needed training opportunities to solve the skills crisis, and cannot provide adequate remuneration to retain people in the sector. The federal government needs to commit a fair share of funding for local government and

ensure that adequate funds are allocated to support particular projects where local government is involved.

## 1. Developing career paths

- a. The ASU believes the best approach to local government workforce planning is one that develops career paths and opportunities for workers throughout the sector in both blue and white collar professions.
- b. Such a career path structure should theoretically enable a person to enter the industry in a low skilled position and, given aptitude and merit, be provided with opportunities and training that enables them to be promoted through the ranks all the way up to senior management.
- c. Career path planning addresses recruitment issues as it aims to promote from within, targeting workers in occupations where they do not face recruitment issues. In many of the blue collar areas, for example, local government is recognised as an employer of choice as it offers decent wages and job security. It seems logical to promote capable people from these occupations who have a long term commitment to local government and are likely to stay in the sector.

## 2. Apprenticeships

- a. Local government needs more apprenticeships and it needs to train them in house. This is the most practical and urgently needed workforce strategy to meet the needs of the skills crisis and issues of recruitment and retention.
- b. There is a worrying trend in local government that councils are outsourcing their apprenticeships and training to group training companies.
- c. Rather than be employed as a trainee by the council, apprentices and trainees who undertake their training through a group training company are employed by the training company and are placed with a 'host employer' to undertake work. Local government is one of these host employers.

- d. Group training company GTES describe the employer advantages of using group training to train apprentices:
- i. *Two weeks notice (in writing) is all that is required should you wish to 'hand back' the apprentice or trainee, although during the probationary period this is not required. An apprentice or trainee may be handed back during this period with just a day's notice<sup>1</sup>;*
- e. There are a few problems with the use of group training companies in local government:
- i. The first is that local government is shirking its responsibility to provide long term training to apprentices. Local government has the capacity and the workload to sustain full time apprenticeships; they don't need the 'flexibility' that group training companies' offer.
  - ii. One symptom of the 'flexible' approach is apprentices are not staying in the council after they finish their training.
  - iii. This occurs because apprentices do not feel part of the council because on paper and in practice they are not. The apprentices are employed by the training company and may only have spent a portion of their time at the council. There is therefore no sense of loyalty or connection to the council that might encourage an apprentice to stay and use their training in a permanent role.
  - iv. Apprentices are also not staying within local government as they are not offered ongoing work after their training ends. It is cheaper for a council to maintain a constant cycle of trainees or apprentices paid at training rates instead of employing a permanent staff member. This short-term fix has long-term costs as the community produces many qualified trainees without employment prospects, and councils do not have a stable long-term workforce.
  - v. Another problem with local government's use of group training providers is that some of the group training companies pay below the local government award wages. This is one of the reasons these arrangements are so attractive to local government; they are cheap. Trainees are paid on all kinds of weird and wonderful awards that have little relevance to the local government sector. For example one group training company in NSW pays its local government trainees on the metal workers award.

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<sup>1</sup> GTES 'For Employers' (2010) < <http://gtes.com.au/gtes-benefits/employers>> at 1 March 2010



- f. There is no shortage of young people wanting to work in local government. In house apprenticeships are the best way to solve the issues of recruitment and retention in the sector. They provide a vehicle for young people to enter the sector in a variety of occupations. Our experience shows that once a person has been in local government for five years they stay for fifteen. If we concentrate our efforts on retaining apprentices after they finish their training for five years then we know they will stay for the long term.

#### *Recommendations*

- g. The ASU has a number of recommendations to keep young people in the local government sector after they have completed apprenticeships.
  - i. Require all apprenticeship and trainees who are undertaking their training in local government are paid at local government Award rates or the relevant enterprise agreement at the council at which they are working. This should be regardless of whether they are employed by a group training company or the council itself, if they are working in local government they should be paid at local government rates.
  - ii. Work with local government to develop career paths from apprenticeships to permanent roles at the end of their training.
  - iii. Create incentives for the retention of apprentices and trainees. Incentives could include making the retention of apprentices a management Key Performance Indicator (KPI). We suggest the appropriate measure should be the amount of apprentices and trainees that are retained in permanent employment at the council for five years after completion of their training. The Federal Government could then provide national awards and recognition for councils that achieve this KPI.

### 3. Retaining local government workers in the sector

- a. Retention of workers within the local government sector is of vital importance to maintaining a strong local government workforce. A local government worker leaving to the private sector creates a larger problem than just the immediate vacancy and skills shortage created; it also represents a wasted investment in training by councils.
- b. The longer the sector retains a worker the cheaper the training costs are as the costs of training are dispersed over a greater period of service. The higher the staff turnover the more often a council needs to outlay further training expenses for new workers. There are good financial reasons for giving attention to the issue of retention.

#### *Recommendations*

- c. The ASU recommends the following initiatives to retain workers in the sector:
  - d. A national portable continuity of service scheme.
    - i. Federal and state governments should implement a national portable continuity of service scheme to enable workers to move interstate to work at other councils without losing their accrued entitlements.
    - ii. Such a scheme has been implemented for the public service enabling workers to move between departments and across borders to other states or the federal public service without losing accrued entitlements. This scheme had to be implemented by co-dependent legislation in each state and territory.
    - iii. This is a good example of the kind of strategies that can be developed by national co-operation in areas that were traditionally the focus of independent states. We need to treat local government as a national industry with common issues rather than discrete state entities too diverse to compare or difficult to achieve co-operation between.
    - iv. The retention advantages of a continuity of service scheme is it removes some of the disincentives for people that are considering moving between councils. It encourages workers to take up new opportunities and develop their skills while staying within the local government sector.

- v. Such a scheme has particular importance to workers wanting to move from one council to another across state borders. Local government workers in border regions are more likely to move states for work rather than move to another council within their state. This is because if you work for the Campaspe Shire Council and live in Echuca, Victoria, the closest available work is probably at the Murray Shire Council in Moama, NSW, which is just across the Murray River. Our state borders create artificial barriers for workers who want to stay in the sector but will lose their entitlements because the closest council happens to be interstate.
  - vi. The ASU recommends the Federal Government develop a national portable continuity of service scheme for local government workers. This could be achieved by extending the existing public service scheme. The Victorian *Public Administration Act 2004 (Vic)* which establishes the Victorian part of the public service continuity of leave scheme already provides for local government workers to keep their accrued entitlements when moving from local government to the state public service within Victoria. This legislation could be extended to include other states, and within local government.
- e. An internal vacancy website.
- i. The Federal Government should establish a national local government vacancy website to advertise local government vacancies to workers within the sector. Local government employees should be treated as internal applicants through the website so that they have preference and are notified before vacancies are advertised externally. If we are serious about retention then we need to actively ensure there are jobs for workers to be retained in and they aware of them. The sector needs to provide every opportunity for workers currently in the sector to stay in the sector.

#### 4. Promoting women in local government

- a. The statistics on women's employment in the higher classifications of local government is startling. Ninety one percent of civil engineers are men, ninety percent of building surveyors are men, and ninety three percent of Chief Executive Officers are men!
- b. Women in local government are overwhelmingly concentrated at the bottom end of the pay scale, often in part time jobs and largely in the clerical and administrative areas. Many of these women are capable of promotion but for various reasons, both structural and social, are not offered or do not apply for promotional opportunities.
- c. If local government is to be truly representative and inclusive women need to be employed across all classifications, including in senior management and leadership.
- d. Apart from being an equity issue the lack of women in higher classifications and senior management reflects a failure by local government to invest in and utilise the potential of its workforce.
- e. With the right training, investment in skills, and career paths women in lower level classifications can be trained to become para-professionals and even skilled professionals to meet skills shortages in civil engineers and building surveyors and improve the representation of women in those non-traditional professions. With the right mix of family friendly conditions and training women can also be promoted to senior management and leadership positions.

##### *Women in non- traditional professions*

- f. The reason that women compose only nine percent of all civil engineers and just ten percent of building surveyors are a range of social and cultural attitudes that go beyond local government. Until these attitudes change we will continue to see a disproportionate amount of men choosing to go into these fields as compared to women.
- g. That being said, by improving the recruitment of women in blue collar occupations and para-professional roles we can improve on those statistics. Once these women are in the sector and working in non-traditional fields, such as building surveying and engineering they can be offered training and development opportunities to encourage and equip them to take up the skilled professional roles within that field.

### *Women in senior management and leadership positions*

- h. There are a number of structural problems in the local government workforce that create disincentives and barriers for women to gain or choose promotion to management or leadership positions. These are as follows;
- i. Women do not receive the relevant incentives to take up management positions; women are paid less than their male counterparts<sup>2</sup> and more often than not have to give up flexible working arrangements to take up a promotion.
  - ii. Our experience is women with the ability and skill set to be promoted to a management position either do not apply or are not offered promotions because of their family responsibilities. It is rarely overt discrimination. More often than not women will not apply for promotion because they would lose the flexibility and family friendly conditions which are available at the lower end of the pay scale.
  - iii. One example of this is the nine day fortnight. This condition is a common benefit found in enterprise agreements and awards for blue collar and clerical and administrative workers. In return for working longer hours workers receive a rostered day off every fortnight. This condition is essential for working families as it can mean one less day of childcare, a day to run errands or perform the many hours of unpaid and unrecognised work in the home.
  - iv. This condition is usually not available to workers in management level classifications. A “promotion” therefore can actually mean a loss of conditions that is often perceived by women as more valuable than a pay increase.
  - v. These perceptions are reinforced by the experience of women in managerial positions who find it very difficult to access flexible conditions. Our experience with members working at managerial or higher classifications is that it is very difficult to transition to part time work or return to work part time. Our members report that the negotiations are very difficult, and they often have to accept reduced conditions or loss of entitlements in exchange for access to flexible or reduced hours.

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<sup>2</sup> Workforce Victoria, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development ‘Pay equity and productive workplaces in local government’ (2009) State of Victoria.

- vi. One example of the lost entitlements that sometimes occurs when women move to part time work is that they lose their car. This represents a very real financial detriment to taking up flexibility options and makes life harder for women juggling work and family. This in turn sends a message to other women in the workplace that they should not apply for managerial positions because the working conditions are not family friendly.

### *Recommendations*

- i. The real solution to this problem is a more equitable division of family responsibilities between men and women. Short of this social revolution occurring there are many initiatives local government can implement to better support women (and men) with family responsibilities to enable them to take up management and leadership opportunities. These are as follows:
  - i. Identify women in lower classifications with the capability to undertake training and skills development with the aim of promoting them through the classifications eventually to management level or skilled professional roles.
  - ii. Enforce the provision of flexibility conditions that exist in EBAs and awards and change the workplace culture around accessing those conditions. The problem is not that conditions are not 'available', technically they are but the culture of the workplace and attitude of human resources is such that women do not feel they can or are not allowed to access the conditions. Local government pays lip service to family friendly conditions but it is yet to translate into a reality for many women managers. The sector requires a genuine shift in attitude and enforcement of entitlements if it is to truly support its female managers and make the positions attractive for more women to apply.
  - iii. Focus on the recruitment of women in blue collar areas and para-professional roles.

## 5. The social impact of contracting out

- a. The trend towards contracting out essential local government services has had a devastating impact on the local government workforce and the ability to recruit and train staff, effectively plan for the future and meet the service demands of local communities.
- b. Over the past two decades local government sometimes voluntarily, often because of legislative requirement, has undergone a process of putting essential services previously provided in house up for tender. The impact of this has been the proliferation of private companies now operating traditional local government services. These companies do not have the same commitment to the industry *long-term* as council employed staff. The contractor does not invest in training staff, but rather is concerned on cost .
- c. We have seen local government not just contract out its services but also contract out its responsibilities and obligations to the community, for services now and in the future years. The services that are now operated by private providers are of poorer quality to those run previously by the council. There is now less ability for the public to keep service providers accountable though they are funded from public rates.
- d. The impact on the workforce has been extensive job losses, a deterioration of standards of training as well as wages and conditions and a loss of diversity in the workforce as women and culturally and linguistically diverse workers leave the sector or are unable to gain employment.
- e. There has been a movement away from training and preparing for the future. Investments in training and skills have been reduced by Councils in many areas, leaving skills shortages in critical areas.
- f. The problem with contracting out is it has involved competition judged solely on the bottom line. This means that, in some states, even where the in house tender has won the contract, job losses have followed as the competitive cost dynamic requires the department or service provider reduce their costs.
- g. The public expects more from local government than thrifty services employing workers at low wages. They want quality services, and they want local government to employ local kids and invest in their training and development.

### *The history of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in Victoria*

The problems with the contracting out of services are best illustrated by the Victorian experience from 1994 – 1999.

- h. Local government pre 1994 had been a source of employment for local school leavers, providing a good first job, opportunities for training and apprenticeships, good career paths and job security.
- i. Kennett's CCT legislation introduced in 1994 required councils put 50% of their operating costs to tender, which meant many essential council activities were outsourced to private companies. These companies, unconstrained by a sense of community and public responsibility, employed people at lower wages, and costly inputs such as training were sacrificed as the bottom line became the most important factor in gaining and retaining the tender. An estimated 11,000 jobs were cut over this period.
- j. Rural and regional voters watched this happen and felt the impact as their kids and communities lost scarce local employment opportunities. In 1999 the Kennett Government lost power in large part due to rural and regional communities expressing their dissatisfaction with Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT).
- k. Almost immediately the newly elected Bracks Government abolished the CCT legislation and replaced it with the Best Value Principles Act, which allowed councils to assess more than the bottom line when services were put to tender and sought to rebuild communities and local employment opportunities. However, in most cases the damage was done and outsourced services could not be regained.
- l. The Kennett example of contracting out is the extreme example but the consequences are the same no matter where competitive tendering is initiated.
- m. Cost shifting to local government has meant councils are under constant pressure to contract out more services to reduce their costs. We are increasingly seeing private contractors replace in house service provision as the preferred method of local government service delivery. It is unsurprising within this context of instability and cost pressures that the development of the workforce of the workforce has been neglected and we are now facing a skills crisis and problems retaining a diverse workforce.

### *Keeping waste services in local government campaign*

- n. The most recent high profile push for widespread contracting out occurred in 2006 when the Federal Government commissioned a



Productivity Commission report into the viability of contracting out waste services from local government.

- o. In response to an ASU campaign and community opposition, the Government rejected the Productivity Commission's recommendations that contracting out should be undertaken in waste services. In doing so the Federal Government recognised that local government was the best placed body to respond to local circumstances and that the private sector is not always the best manager in all circumstances.
- p. This is a good example of an area which must remain in public hands and with service delivery undertaken by local government for their local communities. The merit of this argument was recognised by the then Liberal Government and remains true today.

*Recommendations:*

- q. Where contracting out does not exist it should not be pursued.
  - i. The problems outlined above exist in all examples of contracting out, the perceived benefits of reduced costs can not compensate for the inevitable job losses and detrimental impact on local communities and quality service provision.
- r. Where services are already contracted out we need to reframe what constitutes the best value for money and look beyond a bottom line analysis.
  - i. When choosing between suppliers in a tendering process council must consider the social impact of choosing one supplier over another and the impact of contracting out instead of retaining the service in house. This consideration should assess the impact on jobs, skills, conditions and the impact on the local economy.
  - ii. This social impact assessment should be a requirement for councils. Requiring that services meet quality standards and be responsive, accountable and accessible to the community. It also ensure councils to take into account factors such as affordability, community expectations and values, opportunities for local employment growth and retention, and environmental advantages when choosing a tender. It is only with this sort of holistic assessment that a council can truly assess whether one supplier is better than another.

- s. Where councils contemplate the contracting out of services -
  - i. An appropriate public interest test should assess the impact on local government employment, including investing and training for the future.
  - ii. The contracting out of work should not be associated with the diminution of training, investing in the future, or rates of pay and working conditions.

## 6. Social inclusion in local government

- a. Local government is central to the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda. As a large provider of community services and a large employer local government possesses many opportunities for addressing social inclusion. This is particularly the case in rural, regional and remote communities where it is most often the largest employer and central access point for services. As a public entity local government has an obligation to make use of those opportunities to address disadvantage in its municipality.
- b. The Government has identified six social inclusion priority areas, some of which offer opportunities and impose obligations on local government. All six social inclusion objectives impact local government as a service provider, but these three directly relate to the local government workforce.
  - Targeting the number of jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity;
  - Closing the gap for Indigenous Australians; and
  - Breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities.

### *Recommendations*

- c. Local government through its employment practices and training programs possesses the ability to make a real difference in these three social inclusion priorities.
- d. Career paths for school leavers
  - i. By employing young school leavers in apprenticeships, traineeships and employment in entry level occupations local government can make a real contribution to closing the gap and breaking the cycle of disadvantage. By intervening at that point when young people are vulnerable to continuing a cycle of disadvantage and providing them with employment and training councils can make a real difference in a young person's life
  - ii. Easy to say, not easy to do. Often these people find employment difficult, and training them is very resource intensive. It is easy for a council to engage a group training company to employ the apprentice which gives them the ability to ship the worker off to another workplace if things

become too difficult. As was discussed in the [Apprenticeship](#) section of this paper, this attitude is failing our young people and the councils that engage in this practice are failing in their obligations to the community.

- iii. From a workforce planning perspective these workers offer a good investment return. With strong mentors and good training programs these people can become loyal life-long workers in local government. From a social inclusion perspective we can give kids from disadvantaged backgrounds training and an employment future in their local community.
  - iv. If this strategy is going to be truly successful councils need to develop career paths as was discussed in the section on [Career paths](#). A job is a great start to changing the lives of these young people, but from there they need opportunities to further develop their skills and move up the classifications.
- e. Career paths for other disadvantaged groups
- i. The same strategy that applies to school leavers needs to be applied for mature age, jobless families and Indigenous workers. With well planned career paths these people should be able to enter the local government workforce at an entry level occupation and be given opportunities for promotion.
  - ii. Again we acknowledge this is not easy as training is often required to get these people job ready. However we believe that local government has the right mix of local training and employment capacity that with appropriate funding, they could be (and in many cases are) leading this effort to engage disadvantaged groups in long-term employment.
- f. Building capacity in rural and regional communities
- i. Local government can play an important part in attracting business and other employers to rural and regional communities by building the workforce capacity of the communities. One of the biggest barriers to business moving their operations to rural and regional communities is the perceived lack of a skilled workforce. These communities offer many other benefits for business, as land prices and cost of living are also generally much lower than city areas. However these benefits are irrelevant for a business if there isn't also the workforce capacity to undertake the business operations.

- ii. This is very much a chicken and egg dilemma. Until business establishes in the local community there are no job opportunities and so training workers seems redundant. Yet business is unlikely to move to a community unless that capacity already exists.
- iii. Someone needs to take the initiative and invest in these workers and the business opportunities will follow. Local government, which is already involved in training and apprenticeships for its own workforce is the logical place to initiate this cycle.

## 7. Training and development

- a. Much of the work around the training and development needs of the local government sector is being undertaken by Government Skills Australia (GSA) and other relevant Skills Councils. GSA covers approximately 40% of the local government workforce and co-ordinates the training packages for indoor workers in local government. The ASU is represented on the GSA Board and Local Government Industry Advisory Committee by Greg McLean, Assistant National Secretary.
- b. The training and development needs are ably identified in the various environmental scans by Industry Skills Council. The ASU has repeated several of these to reinforce their importance and provided a number of further recommendations.
- c. There is a need across the sector for more ongoing training and skill development for existing local government workers. There is firstly the enduring issue that not enough funds are allocated to local government to deliver the training it needs. However even when this is resolved there is a need for flexible conditions to enable workers to actually take up those opportunities when they are funded.
- d. Enforceable industrial mechanisms
  - i. More support in the form of enforceable industrial mechanisms that enable workers to engage in training or study. Conditions such as paid time to complete study and training tasks, and backfilling of positions while participating in the training are kinds of support that workers need if they are to participate in training.

- e. Better planning and articulation of education paths
  - i. One of the problems that prevent the further skills development of workers is the lack of articulation of pathways between the VET and tertiary systems. There needs to be a clear pathway through Certificate to Diploma level training in the VET sector to Bachelor and higher degrees in the tertiary sector.
  - ii. The lack of communication and planning between these sectors means that the education pathways to becoming a skilled professional are disjointed. The tertiary sector often doesn't acknowledge prior VET qualifications in the same field.
  - iii. This is a disincentive and creates obstacles for people with VET qualifications pursuing higher education to upgrade their skills for para-professional and professional roles. It equally makes it difficult for university graduates wanting to update or top up their university training with a workplace specific VET course.
  - iv. This issue was acknowledged in the 2009 Environmental Scan undertaken by Government Skills Australia.<sup>3</sup>
  - v. Indigenous workers in the Northern Territory have particular educational pathway needs. There needs to be clear training pathways and Recognition of Prior Learning strategy to transition workers from Community Development Employment Projects to more permanent work.
  
- f. Local training
  - i. Training opportunities for rural and remote local government workers needs to be offered locally. This is particularly relevant for workers in the Northern Territory for whom travelling to Darwin for training can take a travelling time of days and for whom web based learning is not always accessible for a number of reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> Government and Community Safety Industry Skills Council, Government Skills Australia 'Environment Scan 2009' (2009), p5

- ii. This issue was acknowledged in the 2009 Environmental Scan undertaken by Government Skills Australia;

*A GSA survey of the local Government industry strongly indicated concern with rural and remote communities access to VET and additionally having to often pay an increased cost for staff to access metropolitan based training. The lack of access to training is compounded in Indigenous communities, which also report issues with the language, literacy and cultural appropriateness of training processes and material. <sup>4</sup>*

- g. Practical skills recognition

- i. While workers need to be offered every chance to gain qualifications not having that piece of paper should not be a barrier to employment or promotion within local government. Many local government workers have worked in the sector for decades and bring experiences and knowledge to their job that exceeds anything that can be learned in a short training course or degree. The value of experience needs to continue to be acknowledged in job and classification descriptions.

- h. Funding

- i. The issue of funding for the training of local government workers is an ongoing one. The 2009 Environmental Scan highlighted this issue and the ASU shares the concern.<sup>5</sup> Local Government is not receiving its fair share of public funding for training opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid p6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p5

## 8. Recruiting a diverse workforce

- a. In the remote communities which make up the local government shires in the Northern Territory hundreds of Indigenous community members are engaged through the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) programme to work in local government. In many of these communities the shire simply could not function without these Indigenous workers.
- b. The skills, knowledge and experience these workers have gained in the CDEP program presents an excellent opportunity for local government to recruit Indigenous workers. By employing them on a more appropriate and secure basis we can ensure they continue to develop these skills and knowledge as well as ensure a stable, skilled, representative and culturally relevant workforce in remote Indigenous communities. Indigenous workers in remote communities in the Northern Territory provide essential services to shires. The skills, knowledge and experience of these workers need to be retained in the sector.
- c. Funding constraints for the shires must be addressed by Federal and State Governments to ensure that sustainable employment can be created for Indigenous workers.

## 9. Job and work redesign

- a. One strategy for alleviating the impact of skill shortages for qualified professionals is to undertake job and work redesign and utilise para-professionals and skilled clerical staff.
- b. There are two advantages to this strategy. It is a practical solution to the problem of skills shortages because fewer professionals are required for the same amount of work. It also provides career path and opportunities within local government for clerical staff and unskilled workers in other areas of local government.
- c. Job and work redesign involves up skilling existing clerical staff or employing staff with relevant Certificate III or IV level qualifications to undertake those administrative and para-professional aspects of a professional's role. This frees up time for a professional to undertake more of the specialised work in their particular area of training. Less professional staff are required as the workload is spread more effectively across a few professional staff and many para-professional and skilled clerical staff.



- d. Job and work redesign provides a relatively quick solution to the skills shortage as para-professional workers take less time and resources to train as compared to a professional. Town planners are a good example of this;
  - i. The Bachelor of Urban and Regional planning (and alike courses) takes at least four years to complete. It therefore takes at least four years plus work experience to produce a qualified town planner to fill a vacancy. This is a significant time lag and investment to meet an immediate skills shortage.
  - ii. In contrast a person can undertake a Certificate IV in local government (planning) through a TAFE in 6 months. This course provides a graduate with the skills to assess minor applications for use or development; identify and refer planning issues and problems; analyse the natural built environment; and provide building and planning information and advice.<sup>6</sup> Essentially they are qualified to undertake substantial parts of a professional planning workload.

*Recommendation*

- e. The ASU recommends the use of para-professional be rolled out nationally to alleviate the impact of skills shortages in key professions.

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<sup>6</sup> tafeSA 'Certificate IV in Local Government (Planning)' (2010) tafeSA  
<[http://www.courses.tafesa.edu.au/xml/course/aw/aw\\_NBL.aspx](http://www.courses.tafesa.edu.au/xml/course/aw/aw_NBL.aspx)> at 1 March 2010

## 10. Planning for the future workforce needs of the sector

- a. Climate change, rising community affluence and the ageing population all present significant challenges for the local government workforce.

### *Climate change*

- b. In 2008 the ASU commissioned a discussion paper that considered the impact of climate change on the provision of quality public services. The paper identified a wide range of carbon abatement opportunities in local government and predicted the consequences for the workforce of the realisation of those opportunities. The paper can be found in [Schedule 1](#).
- c. The carbon abatement opportunities identified in the ASU paper will soon become necessary reforms as Australia seeks to reduce its carbon emissions. The Australian Government has committed to reduce emissions by between 5 to 15 per cent below 2000 levels by 2020. An Emissions Trading Scheme remains on the political horizon and state governments continue to regulate tougher environmental protections in particular industries.
- d. The role of local government in reducing Australia's carbon emissions was recognised by the Rudd Labor Government at its 2009 National Conference. The ALP National Party Policy reads:
  - i. *Labor notes that the whole community should play a role in climate change actions. This includes the role played by those in our community that deliver quality public services, like local government, water supply, electricity and public transport. These industries take actions every day in a range of services from recycling, water harvesting, demand management and much more. This is a significant role in making our community environmentally sustainable and fighting climate change. Labor recognises the role played by the broad community and asks the Government to continue to implement a broad range of climate change actions.*
- e. The ASU anticipates that public pressure for local action on climate change will only increase as the reality of climate change impacts people's daily lives. Drought, extreme weather events and temperature variations brings home to the public the need for urgent action.
- f. As a significant service provider in water, electricity and waste management, local government will be a focal point for this community pressure for action. Further, as the tier of government

with regulatory responsibility for town planning, provision of public spaces and more, it will naturally become (and arguably has already become) a focus of 'green' politics. Councillors and the electorate will demand local government functions are delivered in ways that are efficient and sustainable.

- g. The consequence of this regulatory, legislative and public pressure for reform will be increased pressure on local government resources and increased demand for staff skilled in sustainability practices across the sector.
- h. As evidenced in the ASU discussion paper carbon abatement opportunities can be found in every function of local government and will impact on almost every job. From gardeners employed to tend public spaces and parks, to people working in waste management facilities, each local government job is going to require some awareness of sustainability principles and in most cases will mean a change to the way their job is performed.
- i. Some of this training is already occurring to meet the current sustainability demands on local government.<sup>7</sup> For example training packages exist to train local government workers in sustainable waste management practices and compliance with various environmental regulations. More work and funding is needed to predict the future sustainability training needs of the workforce.

#### *Ageing population*

- j. The ageing population has two consequences for local government. The first is that local government employees a proportionally older workforce, and so will be hit particularly hard by the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation.
- k. The other effect is that as proportionally more of the age population enters retirement age local government services such as health and aged care will experience an increase in usage requiring more workers. There will presumably also be a proportional decrease in demand for childcare and maternal health services.

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<sup>7</sup> Industry Skills Councils 'Environmental Sustainability: An Industry Response', Available at: <[http://www.serviceskills.com.au/dmddocuments/Publications/fa\\_isc\\_sustainability\\_report\\_single\\_lr.pdf](http://www.serviceskills.com.au/dmddocuments/Publications/fa_isc_sustainability_report_single_lr.pdf)>

### *Recommendation*

- l. Workforce mapping is required to predict which services are likely to experience a demand increase and which occupations the retirement of workers are going to be impacted most. Once identified further training places can be created to cope with these future pressures.
- m. Workers nearing retirement age should also be offered the option of working part time or undertaking other flexible arrangements. This option needs to be in the form of an enforceable industrial mechanism that allows workers to opt to enter into flexibility arrangements from a certain age. This enables workers to continue to participate in the workforce where they would otherwise retire sparking a further skills crisis in certain occupations.

### *Rising community expectations*

- n. Community expectations and state regulations are increasingly requiring that the local government sector professionalise. Rising community affluence has changed expectations of how we live, one aspect of which is the quality of the services provided by our local councils. From pool side safety at the council run community pool to ensuring compliance with building regulations, council operations are now more than ever subject to regulation and a high level of community interest and expectation. The impact of this on the workforce is that it requires more trained professional and skilled staff. The ASU expects this trend will continue in the future.

## 11. Funding

- a. One of the enduring problems for the local government workforce is the underfunding of the sector and cost-shifting from other tiers of government. This funding context means resources are always stretched, limiting the training opportunities than can be provided, creating areas of understaffing and meaning local government that cannot offer competitive wages to keep and attract workers back to the sector from the private sector.
- b. The 2003 Parliamentary Inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration found that cost shifting was a serious problem for local government. The report identified a number of ways in which cost shifting occurs<sup>8</sup>:
  - *the withdrawal or reduction of financial support once a program is established, therefore leaving local government with the choice of continuing a program or suffering the political odium of cancelling the service;*
  - *the transfer of assets without appropriate funding support;*
  - *the requirement to provide concessions and rebates without compensation payments;*
  - *increased regulatory and compliance requirements; and*
  - *failure to provide for indexation of fees and charges for services prescribed under state legislation or regulation.*
- c. In response the Committee made a number of recommendations to address the problem. These included that other tiers of government should 'allocate revenue to local government from the relevant level of government if responsibilities are devolved' and 'address State restrictions on local government revenue raising such as rate capping, levies and charges and nonrateable land'.<sup>9</sup>
- d. Seven years on we are yet to see the impact of these recommendations on the ground and the problems of underfunding and cost shifting persist. Until this is rectified the local government workforce will continue to be under resourced resulting in skills shortages and retention and recruitment issues.

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<sup>8</sup> House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration 'Rates and Taxes: A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government' (October 2003), Australian Government, section 3.20

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p87

**Schedule 1: Climate change and quality public services  
discussion paper**

