

7. Workforce Planning - Trainees and Cadets

Workforce and succession planning is a key aspect of Council's objective to maintain a sustainable and well skilled workforce to meet our statutory and customer requirements. This report recommends the appointment of a number of trainee and cadetship positions across Council.

General Manager

BACKGROUND

10 In 2002 Council agreed to start appointing trainees in the Works section due to the impending loss of skilled and experienced retirement aged employees. These trainees were employed through SERTEC on the basis that the traineeship would be of two years duration with the requirement to complete Certificates 2 & 3 (Local Government Civil Operations). The performance of the trainees has been regularly assessed over the two year period. Since 2002, seventeen trainees have worked with Council, with seven appointed to fulltime positions and six currently still completing their traineeship. All trainees have integrated well with existing staff and are helping to change the culture in a positive way.

20 Council has taken a leading role in appointing females to non-traditional roles and the results have been outstanding. They have shown exceptional skills in many areas especially in the operation of plant and machinery. Other traineeships have been established in the library and child care areas.

Council also implemented a targeted and successful Aboriginal trainee program and continues to manage this program with several staff now in full time permanent positions with Council. Aboriginal trainees will continue to be a target group for the Council.

30 It is also pleasing to note that the trainees were recognised through regional SERTEC Awards for Youth Employment Initiative which continues to result in very favourable media coverage to Council's proactive approach. It should also be noted that existing staff have responded very positively to this initiative and are achieving a sense of satisfaction with the opportunity given to pass on their knowledge and skills.

Council acts as a host employer under an arrangement where SERTEC meets most of the recruitment costs and carries the workers compensation risk for 2 years.

40 The continuing program of employing trainees has enabled Council to reduce its casual employment costs to almost nil. Similarly, while overtime costs have been managed closely, it is considered the resources provided by trainee positions has assisted the reduction in overtime.

The skills shortage issue has been well publicised and Council has developed a number of initiatives to address this ongoing problem. The most cost effective method is a program where Council develops its own professional and technical staff in those areas identified as skills shortage positions such as engineering, town planning, environmental health and building surveying right through to plant operators and noxious weed/environmental officers.

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This report recommends the appointment of 4 cadets (professional positions) and 4 trainees (technical or operational positions) to provide for succession planning across a number of disciplines as shown in the following table.

Area/Section	Position	No. of Positions	Estimated Cost including study expenses	Funding Source
Water & Sewer	Cadet Engineer	1	\$35,000	Water & Sewer fund
IT	Trainee IT Systems Officer	1	\$35,000	General fund (trainee positions have been funded for the past 5 years through savings in leasing costs)
HR	Cadet HR Officer	1	\$35,000	General fund through performance incentive payments received for OHS and Public Risk (approx 80K per annum)
Planning	Cadet Planner	1	\$35,000	Already funded by town planning vacancy
Works	Trainee Civil Works	2	\$58,000	General fund through savings in casual employment and planned retirements

Area/Section	Position	No. of Positions	Estimated Cost including study expenses	Funding Source
Environmental	Cadet Environmental Officer	1	\$35,000	Already funded by town planning vacancy
Environmental	Trainee Weeds Officer	1	\$29,000	Funding available for the 2008 /09 budget and the traineeship costs for 2009 /10 will be funded through the retirement of existing weed staff

PROPOSAL

Water and Sewer Cadet Engineer

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Professional engineering positions have proven to be extremely difficult to fill with most vacancies being advertised two to three times or more with limited success. The water and sewer area has a detailed works program that is capable of providing excellent training for a cadet engineer while at the same time providing a resource for existing professionals. The section expects to experience some turnover within the next four years by which time a cadet would be well advanced through their university studies.

Trainee IT Systems Officer

Council has had two previous trainees in IT over the past 4 years and they have been funded by savings in lease costs as a result of performing computer “builds” in house. The trainees have been performing this function amongst a variety of other systems support tasks including the help desk. It is proposed to extend the traineeship position for a further two years and to review at that time the prospects of transferring to a cadetship arrangement.

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Cadet HR Officer

The need has been identified for the human resources area to take a more strategic approach to ensure that Council can continue to meet its statutory requirements in service delivery. A cadet will provide support across all aspects of HR including training and OHS while studying for university level qualifications to strengthen Council's

human resource management. It is expected that there will be turnover in this area over the next few years.

Cadet Town Planner

80 Multiple advertising over a period of time has failed to attract interest from qualified planners and this is an industry wide trend nationally and internationally. A cadet planner could provide significant support to professional staff while studying and gaining experience to be a long term asset to Council.

Cadet Environmental Officer

90 The Environmental Services team has been under considerable pressure since the departure of the Natural Resources Officer in 2007 with many grant funded projects delayed. There has been an increased emphasis on the environmental management of Council's own assets, as well as the environmental assessment associated with development proposals. This lack of resource is compounding delays in DA assessment. The appointment of a cadet would also facilitate the redirection of resources towards the statutory environmental auditing of Council's operations.

Trainee Weeds Officer

100 The Weeds Section is likely to experience retirements in the next 18 month period. Recruitment of staff with experience and qualifications in weed management is difficult owing to high demand and a severe shortage of suitably experienced and qualified people. It is proposed to seek one trainee (year 12 minimum) through this program to work and study with the weed management team. In this way succession planning within the Weeds Section can be managed. It needs to be noted that the current average age of our four weeds staff is the highest of any section of Council. As well as tertiary study being available there is also significant scientific, vegetation management and legal training for weed management staff available at low cost through the Department of Primary Industries. Alternatives in weed management incorporating a remote sensing, partnerships and desktop assessment technologies will also be explored.

Trainee Civil Works (2)

110 Over the next eighteen months it is anticipated that up to 4 employees within the Works Section will retire. It is planned to continue Works recruitment of two trainees per year over the next two years to replace some of these employees. It is expected that there may be some loss of the trainees over this period as has happened previously. Vacancies occurring in the Works area are held open pending the completion of the trainees studies and review of their overall progress.

GENERAL

There are significant benefits associated with this traineeship and cadetship strategy:–

- 120 • Provision of local youth employment opportunities which addresses some of the concerns raised by the community.
- The opportunity to instil a culture more consistent with the principles of learning and career development.
- Employment through a Group Training company provides strong mentoring and motivational elements for trainees.
- The traineeship period provides Council with the opportunity to identify strengths of the trainees and to place them where their aptitudes can be most effective within the team.
- 130 • Distance education opportunities in the professional disciplines have markedly improved in recent years and makes cadetships a most viable and practical means of addressing the skills shortage.
- Cadetships will involve degree level qualifications and the associated costs have been factored into the cost of employment.
- Cadetships will be under a bond arrangement with incentives provided to encourage a long term employment relationship.
- Accommodation for 3 of the cadet positions will be planned as part of the Civic Centre re-development.
- Employees completing traineeships will be encouraged to pursue further studies towards diploma or degree level qualifications.
- 140 • Cadets can perform many of the para-professional duties and free the qualified staff to concentrate on the more intensive aspects of their positions. In return professional staff can also develop as a result of the mentoring roles that they will need to assume with the cadets.
- Council will receive a formal workforce plan during the next few months which details skills shortages, retirement and succession arrangements and the cadet and traineeships are critical initiatives in the overall plan.

ISSUES

Legal

150 Council has many statutory obligations across the areas that seek to appoint trainees and cadets. Succession planning forms a critical link in our long term capacity to deliver on those obligations.

Social / Cultural

The development of a successful traineeship program has a positive impact on the community as it provides employment for local young people in our community. Introducing trainees into Council's work teams has also had a positive impact on the culture of the organisation as it brings with it energy and often fresh approaches to work and function concepts. It also provides opportunity for passing on the collective knowledge of current team members, many who have worked for Council for many years.

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Economic

The initiative provides the opportunity to enhance the local economy significantly by the retention of 8 young people within the community and with ongoing professional careers.

OPERATIONAL PLAN

Funding for the positions can be met for the current financial year (approx 3 months) and ongoing funding has been identified in accordance with the above table. Education costs are incorporated in Council's training budget.

CONCLUSION

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The costs of employing cadets and trainees are moderate with the benefits of having them available to succeed retiring workers evident since the first intake and the recommendations are strongly supported. The financial implications are detailed in the table above. Cadets are bonded for a period of time beyond the term of the study – ie. six years for a four year degree. There is a pro rata recovery of education costs should cadets resign within that period. All cadets and trainees progress is subject to successful completion of their studies and satisfactory performance.

RECOMMENDATION

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- i) That the positions detailed in the table be approved as part of organisation structure and Council's workforce planning strategy.
- ii) That the cadetship and trainee program be reviewed and reported following 2009/2010.
- iii) That the General Manager be authorised to execute bonding documents with cadets.
- iv) That media releases be prepared to promote the initiative throughout the community.