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City West Water Melbourne Region



City West Water, a Victorian Government-owned organisation, supplies services to more than 307 000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in metropolitan Melbourne and launched an industry leading training program in early 2009.

The first 13 cadets commenced City West Water's Technical Officer Development Program in February. The program is an accelerated cadetship completed over five years. It includes on-the-job rotations, internal training, Certificate III Business qualifications through an Australian Apprenticeship and a Diploma in Engineering Technology through Victoria University and the option to complete the Advanced Diploma in later years.

For Anthony Allen, Manager, People Strategy and Development, training is an important part of workforce planning.

'Until this program there had been no accredited technical officer training in the water industry since the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works was disbanded in 1991,' Anthony says.

'So we decided to develop this program ourselves. It's about City West Water at the moment, but we're also putting it out there as an industry program, anticipating that other water companies, especially urban companies, will take this on.'

City West Water identified this area lacked structured succession planning and development pathways. Technical officers also constitute the longest serving section of the workforce, with many in the pre-retirement phase.

Organisational Development Manager Sophie Sigalas worked in partnership with Victoria University to develop the education component of this program which targets school leavers.

'The program has been a long time coming,' Sophie says.

'In 2008 we participated in a skills recognition program with Victoria University to map the qualifications and experience of existing technical officers to units of competency. That was the first step for us,' she says.

'We looked at about 20 technical officers—some with old qualifications that don't exist anymore. We were able to see the areas they were competent in, and their levels of experience. Then we were able to see how this skill set mapped to existing units of competency and used this information as the basis for developing the program.'

Anthony says one of the advantages of developing a new program was being able to tailor it to City West Water.

'With the advanced diploma, we'll have to develop some units of competency that don't exist. They don't even exist under the water training package,' he says.

Sophie says internal training and on-the-job rotations at City West Water tie what the cadet learns back to the workplace.

‘For example, one of their subjects was 2D AutoCAD. When they come into the office they are supported by an internal mentor to apply these skills to real jobs.’

Cadets are supported by a full-time training coordinator and mentored by engineers and senior technical officers at City West Water.

Anthony says bringing in the Technical Officer Development Program has had a real flow on effect, with program mentors undertaking the Certificate IV Training and Assessment and increasing their qualifications across the board.

‘It is about succession planning as well as knowledge management,’ he says. ‘There’s a lot of value in this program.’

