

Introduction

There is a Government strategy to increase local authority capacity and skills to help deliver their new role in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Flood Risk Regulations 2009 and other actions recommended in the Pitt Review.

Initial Surveys and Studies

Initial surveys and studies were undertaken to understand the existing skills and resource levels.

Three key themes were identified to provide a structure for the development of the strategy, these are;

- ⊕ Developing knowledge and skills for existing staff
- ⊕ Building capacity through provision of educational courses for new staff
- ⊕ Providing information and tools primarily to support local authorities and other stakeholders to develop skills

Foundation Degree in River and Coastal Engineering

Defra has been working closely with the EA and in June 2009 it was announced that places would be available for local authorities to take on trainees. Successful candidates were matched with local authorities and 19 trainees are completing the two year foundation degree.

They study alongside Environment Agency trainees, in a class of 39. They have progressed into their second and final year of the Foundation Degree and have been studying the two Local Flood Risk Management modules.

Distance Learning Component

The programme is taught in a form of blended learning with six block week's attendance during the year combined with electronic distance learning topics studied back in the office and at home.

Defra contributes 50% of the funding to support local authorities taking up a trainee. The course is run by the University of the West of England and combines effectively with ongoing work experience/mentoring, provided by the local authorities.



One of the major strengths of the Foundation Degree is that it combines academic study with practical experience to provide qualified staff that are already geared to working within a local authority environment and understand their role.

UWE has worked tirelessly to adapt the second year of the course to meet the specific requirements of the new legislation. In particular this relates to surface water management for which local authorities have lead responsibility.

UWE was also tasked with ensuring that the trainees receive appropriate transferable skills for immediate implementation in the workplace.

UWE automatically thought of Micro Drainage as an ideal partner to help deliver this key aspect, utilising their industry standard technology and extensive training program.

The training course was integrated into the Local Flood Risk Management Project Module, designed by Dr. Hazem Gouda specifically for the local authority students.

Objectives Met?

Micro Drainage training is covered in the company's quality assurance scheme.

Up to 650 engineers, hydrologists, development control and flood risk managers are being trained annually. Continual improvement is a main driver within the company culture with feedback encouraged and welcomed throughout the process.

So how did the trainees feel about the training? Here are some of the comments received during the course;

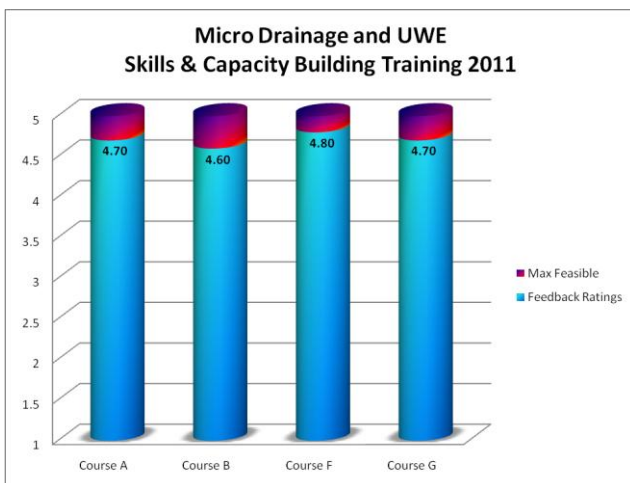
'Thank you very much for all your hard work and information – Invaluable.'

'Absolutely Brilliant - incredibly well taught.'

'Well structured, clearly presented, good booklets for future reference. Thank you.'

The anecdotal feedback is very useful, but the company also encourages the delegate to rate each section of the training course with 1 = poor through to 5 = excellent.

The following table illustrates the highly valued and objective feedback received for the four days of training provided.



Summary

In summary, the range of feedback for each of the courses started at 4.6 and reached 4.8 out of a possible 5.

The investment in these trainees will 'appreciate' as they apply their new skill sets in the workplace. As budgets become ever tighter how do you get 'more for less'?

Investing time and effort in people will help improve competence, confidence and enhance productivity. This is particularly the case when working with the latest industry standard technology.



The Foundation Degreed graduates can "top-up" to a BSc(Hons) which alongside the Grad Dip in River and Coastal Engineering are both accredited by ICE and CIWEM and recognised by the Engineering Council as satisfying the educational base for Incorporated Engineer. This is important in ensuring that in building capacity we are potentially enhancing the base of qualified engineers in this industry.

Conclusion

It is rewarding for the industry to see the recommendations of the Pitt Review being so well administered in practice.

It has been a long time coming and fits neatly in the context of the 'Localism Bill'.

Congratulations to Defra, the Environment Agency, UWE and the first stream of future graduates.

UWE and Micro Drainage would also like to acknowledge the contribution being made by the sponsoring local authorities.

Contact Details

For further information about WinDes, training and workshops, visit www.microdrainage.co.uk, email info@microdrainage.co.uk or call +44 (0)1635 582555.

To share your views, keep abreast of legislation and research visit Piped Up! The Micro Drainage blog at <http://pipedup.wordpress.com>