

# Passing on the professional baton

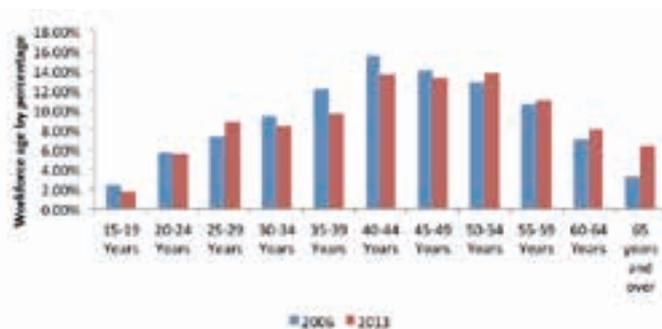
As statistics reveal an aging water industry workforce, Water New Zealand technical coordinator **Lesley Smith** outlines initiatives to attract younger people into the sector – and prepare the next generation of water professionals.

If you have recently attended a water industry gathering, you may have noticed a few grey hairs in the room. This should be no surprise as retirement age is less than a decade away for a quarter of water professionals in the 2013 census. With this age departs a rich history of experience and knowledge that benefits the industry and ultimately, society at large.

To ensure industry retains suitably experienced water professionals when the current cohort of baby boomers retires, it is essential knowledge is passed to the next generation. Young people bring new ideas, approaches and enthusiasm. This article explores existing initiatives to attract and retain young people into careers in the water sector.

## We have an aging sector

A census of water service personnel taken between 2006 and 2013 demonstrates the aging trend. The above-50 age group increased from a third [33 percent] of the workforce in 2006 to 39 percent in 2013. Representation in all other age groups under 50 declined, with the exception of professionals in the 25-29 year age bracket, which experienced only slight growth.



Changes in Water Supply and Sewerage Drainage Services Personnel in the 2006 and 2013 census.  
Data source: Census data was provided by Connexis and accessed using the Infometrics platform.

## CAREER PATHWAYS INTO THE SECTOR

Annie Yeates, Water Industry Manager at Industry Training Organisation, Connexis, thinks that some growth in the 25 to 29-year-old age bracket may be attributed to the development of apprenticeships in the water and wastewater sector.

“Providing structured career pathways helps raise the profile of the sector with young people considering their career options, and attracts them into the industry.”

Formal training programmes such as the New Zealand certificates and diplomas in drinking water, wastewater and drinking water assessment also give young people a clearly defined and nationally recognised route to enter the industry.

Graduate programmes are also in place to support university graduates entering engineering consultancies. Most of the country’s major engineering consultancies including Beca, Tonkin Taylor, Opus, Harrison Grierson, AECOM, and Aurecon offer graduate cadetships. A number of smaller consultancies also offer graduate programmes. Our Water New Zealand intern for example has just joined the BBO graduate team in Hamilton (congratulations BBO and all the best Zac!).

Other services providers also have structured on-the-job learning and facilitated development programmes. For example, Veolia provides support for a number of staff to undertake National Certificates in Water Reticulation, Water Treatment and Wastewater Treatment. The graduate connection website [www.gradconnection.co.nz](http://www.gradconnection.co.nz) (a common portal used by university students on the first job hunt) also includes a programme at Downer. However Auckland Council is the only council group with a programme on the website.

## Supporting young people

Water New Zealand coordinates a Young Water Professionals network based in each of our main centres. Each of the groups has a unique approach to supporting and attracting the best young minds on offer. Updates on initiatives their committees have underway are provided by our committee chairs. More information is available on the Young Water Professionals network and people can find out how to get involved via the group’s website: [www.waternz.org.nz/YoungWaterProfessionals](http://www.waternz.org.nz/YoungWaterProfessionals).

## More work is required

Despite efforts to date, data suggest we are not doing nearly enough if we want to attract and retain young people in the water sector. For those with an interest in exploring further professional development opportunities, come and join the conversations at the inaugural Young Professionals session at this year’s Water Conference.



### **FIONA MYLES, Wellington Committee Chair**

Fiona has a background in environmental engineering and is currently working at the Ministry for the Environment. Her current role, supporting the implementation of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, has demonstrated to her the importance of establishing effective networks across the spectrum of organisations involved in the management and use of fresh water.

The Wellington Chapter's inaugural event this year was a walking tour of water sensitive urban design (WSUD) features around the Wellington CBD. This was open to both young professionals and members of the regional stormwater SIG and was well attended by both. The WSUD topic attracted interest from a wide range of professions including engineers, planners, policymakers and landscape architects. This provided an opportunity for robust discussion about the benefits and challenges associated with the WSUD approach.



### **RICHARD GRAMSTRUP, Canterbury Committee Chair**

Richard is a Three Waters Engineer currently working for City Care. His specialisation is providing technical support and project management in the maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement of urban three waters networks.

The Canterbury Chapter has been active since forming in February 2014. The group has been working to develop a professional network



of like-minded young water professionals and university students to foster networking and technical conversations amongst the younger members of the water industry in Christchurch. The group has run a number of successful events. These have included technical presentations and networking evenings, as well as promoting Water New Zealand and the water industry to university students with guest lectures at the University of Canterbury and sponsorship of university club events.

### **MARIA UTTING, Auckland Committee Chair**

Maria is a Civil Engineer, currently working for Mott MacDonald. Maria is particularly involved in the modelling and design of stormwater and wastewater networks and working with clients to develop solutions that meet with the objectives for the wider catchment area.

The Auckland Chapter of The Young Water Professionals has been operating since 2013, with the aim of providing events and opportunities to encourage networking and engagement within the industry. The group runs an annual "Speed Networking" event, which provides a fantastic opportunity for young water industry professionals to gain career insights from senior industry professionals. Additional initiatives being developed include focusing on improving the attendance of young professionals at the Water New Zealand conference and providing CPD opportunities to support career development. **WNZ**

