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Management

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A FOCUS ON ASSET MANAGEMENT

Whether it's power outages, telecommunication breakdowns, or road congestion, people are most aware of asset management when faced by its shortcomings.

But it's an area in which New Zealand – like many other countries – suffers from a skills shortage that could have long-term implications for our economic development. That's according to Sara Dennis – national infrastructure strategy group manager for engineering consultancy GHD.

"A lot of the [economic] stimulus package is around building new infrastructure and both central governments and local authorities pour money into that year on year. But it's not just about building assets but maintaining them – and we see a gap there.

"A lot of these skills are disappearing with people retiring or heading overseas or becoming so specialised that there's a real lack of joined-up thinking about managing vital assets."

There is, for instance, the lack of co-ordination between asset classes (power, telecomms, gas etc) that sees the same bit of pavement or road being dug up over and over in the name of improving service.

"We talk about managing across the carriageway from boundary to boundary, which requires people who are not just good at what they do on the ground, but who understand there is a much bigger picture and all the financial/economic implications of that. I think New Zealand is doing better on that front, but

it is really a matter of opening people's eyes to managing everything as a whole rather than in separate silos."

To help meet that sort of need, GHD has developed a Vocational Graduate Certificate in Physical Asset Management with Chifley Business School in Melbourne. The course draws on some 30 years' experience of applying asset management across the world and is fully accredited under the Australian Quality Training Framework. Having proved its success across the Tasman, the course is being introduced in Canada next month and in New Zealand this September.

It targets a range of different disciplines – from engineering or planning graduates to financial managers as well as those who perhaps have no formal qualifications but have extensive on-the-ground experience, says Dennis.

"Vocational training of those sorts of people together encourages them to do that within their organisation so they get together and plan the future better."

The course syllabus includes: looking at the state of existing assets and answering questions around required level of service – which assets are critical to sustainable business performance? What are the minimum life-cycle costing, capital improvement plan and operations/maintenance strategies? What is the long-term asset expenditure profile?

It also looks at developing asset management plans and programmes, quality frameworks and data/knowledge management.



Sara Dennis: A joined-up approach.

Although there is a National Diploma in Infrastructure Management already offered in New Zealand (through the National Asset Management Steering Group), Dennis says the GHD will be more competency-based and also offers credits towards MBA courses. M

See www.ghd.com

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