
WHY DO WE NEED A PROFESSIONALISATION SCHEME?

Professions do two important things.

They **accredit** their members and require high standards of personal conduct. They require specified standards of education and training and experience, all of which combine to enable a person to be certified as a professional in their field. It is also possible for a person to lose their accreditation should they demonstrate unprofessional behaviour or fail to maintain their skills.

They **validate** their members. Professionals are able to point to their status as proof of their skill and experience. Professional qualifications are portable between employers. They are also an assurance for the general public: the public can **have trust** that the professional is independently recognised as having skills and experience in their field and has been assessed against benchmarks.

Across Australasia there is no nationally accepted fire and emergency service worker profession, however, some specialist areas are covered, for example fire engineering (IFE), fire protection (FPAA) and forestry (IFA). In many cases, fire and emergency service workers with proven skills and many years experience have to start over if they want to move interstate.

Emergency management is a perennial feature of the Australasian social and governmental landscape. Emergency management agencies and government departments have now, and will continue to have into the future, a need to be able to identify suitable candidates for leadership positions. There is no professional framework that allows them consistently to do so. Nor, for the candidate ambitious to progress in the industry, is there any nationally recognised way for them to identify and gain qualifications that will make them attractive to employers across the country. A professionalisation scheme for fire and emergency service work will address these issues by:

- It would allow portability of qualifications between states and between the part time and full time branches of the sector
- It would allow endorsement of experts
- It would provide a benchmark for employers to recognise the candidates they want to attract to positions critical to public safety; and it would permit aspiring candidates to know, seek out and undertake the training and practical experience they require to fit them for given roles.

From doctors and lawyers in former times, through accountants in the last century, to nurses, allied health and human services workers in this, other occupations across Australia and beyond have seen the benefits of professionalisation, and self regulation. We propose that it might be time for the fire and emergency services sector to do so, too.

Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

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