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SURVEYORS PLAN TO BEAT

SKILLS SHORTAGE

South Australia is facing a critical shortage of surveyors which threatens to hold back the State's development, according to an industry leader.

Mr Ross Fyfe, a Director of major engineering and surveying firm Fyfe Pty Ltd, said that despite attracting salaries of more than \$100,000 a year, so few people had trained in surveying in recent years that there was now effectively a missing generation of practitioners.

"It's quite ironic that a State which owes so much to surveyor Colonel William Light is now facing such a shortage," he said.

"Surveys have shown that 80% of Australia's surveyors are over 45 years of age and by 2017 there will be a shortfall of some 500 jobs around Australia.

"South Australia has a number of major projects in the pipeline which are vital to the State's economy, including major mining developments such as BHP's Olympic Dam expansion, oil and gas programs and housing developments. All these projects have extensive infrastructure requirements.

"Once the economy begins its recovery, the shortage of surveyors could see these developments delayed, restricting the State's growth and recovery. It is a major concern."

Mr Fyfe said the Surveying and Spatial Science Institute (SSSI) had recognised the situation some years ago and had been working closely with the State Government on ways to address the problem.

One of the key outcomes had been the introduction of a new post-graduate degree in surveying at the University of South Australia which is expected to have its first intake of students in 2010.

The course is being significantly funded by the SSSI.

The Associate Head of Academic Programs for the University of South Australia's School of Natural and Built Environment, Associate Professor David Bruce, said the SSSI funding would enable the University to justify running the new course.

The new Master of Surveying degree will replace a Bachelor of Geoinformatics course that finishes this year.

Associate Professor Bruce said the new post graduate degree would take two years. The first year would be full time study, with the second year being project oriented with students provided with practical exposure within industry.

“We will be producing graduates who are technically competent and ready to move into industry,” he said.

“Within six months of completing the degree, we would anticipate that most graduates would be applying for a license as cadastral surveyors, although that would depend on the Board of Surveyors.”

Students looking to take part in the post graduate course would first be required to complete an appropriate undergraduate degree with some exposure to spatial science.

Mr Fyfe said the new post graduate degree and work by the SSSI to promote the industry would hopefully result in increasing numbers of people looking to take up surveying as a career.

“Fyfe is one of the largest private employers of surveyors in Australia and we are constantly looking for qualified people,” he said.

“However, surveying, like engineering, is not the most popular choice among secondary school students and getting enough people into the industry Australia-wide is a struggle.”

Mr Fyfe said the average graduate surveyor in the private sector could generally expect to start on a salary of around \$50,000, with experienced surveyors drawing salaries of between \$85,000 and \$120,000 a year.

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