

QUALITY – NO QUESTION!

With the introduction of its Quality Assurance (QA) programme, this has been a defining year for Master Plumbers. *Plumbers' Journal* takes a look at the new programme and its benefits to members and their customers.

In a major survey conducted by Master Plumbers in 2010, quality and consistency were the two stand-out themes. Consumers wanted to know that Master Plumbers was a brand they could trust and that members would go the extra mile in delivering quality service and workmanship.

Members already follow a code of conduct and code of practice, commit to ongoing upskilling and provide their customers with the back-up of the Master Plumbers Guarantee. The launch of the QA programme in August adds a further level of reassurance that Master Plumbers throughout the country strive for excellence in all they do.

New member companies now undergo a review to determine whether their business practices meet the standards required by Master Plumbers before being accepted for full membership. The programme is also being rolled out among existing members and those reviews are expected to be complete by the end of 2012.

What's it about?

The QA programme was first piloted among a group of Master Plumbers' members in Southland, with independent assessors from the Electrical Contractors Association of NZ (ECANZ) carrying out the reviews, which take around an hour to complete at the business's workplace.

“ IT REALLY MAKES
A DIFFERENCE ”

QA review criteria have been developed to assess a number of areas, including knowledge of relevant legislation, health and safety processes, and the serviceability of technical and safety equipment. The review also looks at best business practice, such as employment contracts, internal complaints processes, insurance cover and terms and conditions of trade.

Eight members in Southland have completed the review and received their certificates to put on display for customers to see.



“Many of our customers have commented on the certificate and it is pleasing to see that it really makes a difference,” says national president Ray Galt, whose Invercargill business Baxter & Neilson Plumbers was one of the first to complete.

“We now need to get the message out to our other clients, as I think this will assist our business greatly going forward. Consumers today are looking for more and more reassurance – particularly those potential clients we haven't yet built a relationship with.”

The Waikato and Wellington Associations also showed their support for the programme from the start by contributing funds towards the reviews of their members. Those are now underway, with seven member businesses in Waikato and 21 in Wellington having successfully completed their reviews at the time of writing.

On a roll

In June, Master Plumbers appointed Chris James to oversee the programme in the new role of quality and standards manager. It has been Chris's job to ensure that firm foundations are laid for its future success and to establish a network of independent reviewers nationwide, with five fully trained to date. Since joining, Chris has met with members around the country to outline the benefits of the programme and assist with the reviews.

“It's important for people to realise that this is not a compliance exercise with a pass/fail mark attached,” says Chris. “The focus is on seeing how we as an organisation can help members strengthen their businesses, and provide support for them to make improvements where necessary. As a business benefit, it has immense value.”

Chris points to the fact that Master Plumbers offers members a wide range of practical business resources, including draft employment contracts, terms and conditions of trade, health and safety manuals and interactive online business tools – all designed to make it easier for them to run efficient, compliant businesses.

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Michael Foote of Plumbing & Gas Works in Hamilton was one of the first in the country to be presented with a Master Plumbers QA certificate at the Waikato Master Plumbers Association annual general meeting.

“VERY STRONG REASSURANCE FOR OUR CUSTOMERS”

Wellington-based Master Plumbers member Mander Plumbing Ltd underwent the QA review in October and company director Gavin Chambers says it was a very worthwhile process. “Having the Master Plumbers Quality Assurance certification enhances Mander Plumbing’s own customer assurances and guarantees and provides very strong assurance for our customers.”

Before the review, Gavin was sent an email with the objectives so he could be prepared with any necessary documentation. “We were also sent worksheets to go through, including a request for a list of staff, their qualifications and licence numbers.”

At the meeting, the reviewer sighted the company’s health and safety manuals and websites used to access compliance documents and relevant legislation, explains Gavin. “I also showed him the minutes from our team meetings and talked about toolbox meetings we had held. We want our team to be safe and enjoy their work, so their attitude becomes one of questioning any safety issues rather than rushing to finish and taking unnecessary risks.”

Gavin also commented that the reviewer seemed to be looking for areas where improvements to processes and safety procedures relating to documenting and reporting would benefit the company.

The whole review was of real value, he says. “Some customers require regular confirmation that our business meets their required standards, and they were impressed when I sent through a copy of the Quality Assurance objectives we had met. It means they don’t have to go any further with checks.”

If you are interested in having a Quality Assurance review, please contact Chris James at chris@masterplumbers.org.nz or 0800 502 102. ■



Mander Plumbing’s Gavin Chambers with office manager Sheryl Riley.

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