

## Quick facts

- An APTC employer survey found that over 90 per cent of the employers reported APTC graduates had undergone significant technical, personal and professional development since commencing training. Almost the same high percentage reported that APTC graduates improve the work standards of other employees or the organisation's productivity, contributing to overall business performance.
- Samoa's Electricity Power Corporation (EPC) is well aware that in order to achieve business success it must invest in developing the capability of its employees and have a succession planning strategy. Training employees to international standards is one strategy they are pursuing to reduce the significant costs involved in hiring overseas experts.
- EPC employs 20 APTC graduates and looks to recruit other APTC graduates.
- Currently EPC has five APTC graduates who have progressed to degree level studies overseas via the New Zealand Aid Programme.
- APTC has recently appointed a Learning Support Facilitator at each campus, except Solomon Islands to work with trainers and tutors to develop the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills of students to ensure that they are supported during their studies and develop all the related skills required in the workplace.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

CREATING SKILLS FOR LIFE

*IMPACT Case Study*

# Industry Capability Development



**APTC**  
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# Training for business success

*Investment in employee training and development is paying off for Samoa's Electricity Power Corporation.*

Established in 1972 as a corporation, Electricity Power Corporation (EPC) supplies electricity to over 96 per cent of the Samoan population.

EPC employs about 460 people and is well aware that in order to achieve business success, it must invest in developing the capability of its employees and have a succession planning strategy.

High staff turnover and a lack of succession planning can be much "tougher on small organisations", especially when departing workers possess specialised skills or knowledge sets.

For this reason, as a key part of its business strategy, EPC is investing in training and development to enable current and future generations of employees to gain qualifications and skills to an international standard.

To make this possible, EPC has supported 20 of its employees to participate in training at the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) since 2009, as well as continuing to recruit APTC graduates.

Douglas Tomane, EPC Training and Development Officer, says it is a business priority for EPC to invest in consistent, high level and continual training of employees, particularly so that they have the skills and capability to operate and maintain the equipment.

"Our new generation plant has up-to-date technology and we want our staff to be at that level," says Douglas. "If we want to improve our service, we have to start adapting to new technologies and for that we need to comply with international standards."

Investing in employees' training has direct financial benefits for EPC by enabling local employees to perform at a higher level, therefore reducing the reliance on overseas consultants for regular maintenance activity.

"For the future of EPC we want to lessen the cost of relying on experts coming from overseas. That is a high cost and we don't want that, we want our own staff to do that," says Douglas.

This also reduces investment in daily operations and maintenance, as well as increasing investment in the improvement of Samoa's power supply and services.

"I think there is a high value in investing in training staff," says Douglas.

The employees themselves also see the value in improving their skills and career potential, and are keen to take advantage of the opportunity to train with APTC.

EPC employee Peni Peni, who studied Certificate III in Electrical Technology at APTC in 2008-2010, says the studies really helped him.

"It helped me to learn more about my trade and it gave

me the chance to meet other electricians from the Pacific. I am more confident in my career," says Peni.

APTC provides training for EPC employees across a range of relevant industry sectors, including automotive, electrical, electronics, fitting and turning, metal fabrication and diesel engineering.

Some EPC employees receive APTC scholarships, making it more financially viable for everyone. However, the company does pay individual tuition fees for others and makes a significant investment to enable the training by, for example, resourcing staff absences from work while employees attend training.

For employers who only look at the costs or inconvenience of training, Douglas argues that they need to look further ahead, especially at how training can improve the quality and performance of individuals and the company. Trained EPC employees also ensure ongoing, on-the-job training of their co-workers.

These improvements, coupled with long-term cost savings, are justification to continue investing in training as a business priority.

Douglas also believes that the financial and other benefits of quality training far outweigh any costs. "I would advise others to invest in their staff. Sometimes you have to spend money to make money."

Fortunately many other employers are recognising the benefits of training, as detailed in the APTC Employer Survey conducted mid-2012 and involving over 70 employers of APTC graduates.

Over 90 per cent of the employers in the survey reported APTC graduates had undergone significant technical, personal and professional development since commencing training. Almost the same high percentage reported that APTC graduates improve the work standards of other employees or the organisation's productivity, contributing to overall business performance.

EPC also encourages its APTC-certified employees to seek further education overseas "in order to keep up with the world and technology".

Currently EPC has five APTC graduates who have progressed to degree level studies overseas via the New Zealand Aid Programme.

Similarly APTC trained employees are encouraged to seek broad workplace experience. If they leave the company for another role, explains Douglas, it is not a wasted investment as they will continue to contribute to the development of Samoa. Interestingly, many of these people eventually return to EPC and subsequently bring with them wide-ranging experience.

"[These graduates] are moving forward to a level where they can come back and work at EPC at a very high level standard," says Douglas.

"I hope this cycle continues for the development of our staff - it will help tremendously for the development of EPC."



APTC students in a trade classroom



APTC graduates from EPC, 2010. Far left Peni Peni. Far right Douglas Tomane

## Training the trainers – Certificate IV in TAE

After years of encouraging other Electric Power Company (EPC) employees to train at Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC), Douglas Tomane has decided to go back to the classroom himself.

As EPC Training and Development Officer, Douglas thought he knew it all when it came to training, but once he started at APTC he realised that he still had "a long way to go".

Douglas' manager recommended that he enrol in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) at the APTC Centre for Professional Development.

"My training at APTC has opened my eyes," he says. "It changed my way of thinking, to learn there is no end to our learning."

Participating in the course has also inspired him to look into doing more training.

"I still have my certificate beside my desk - it has made me so proud," he says.

## Respect all round for APTC graduates

Electric Power Company (EPC) employee, Peni Peni, says that his Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) studies have helped him in more ways than just at work.

"My family and friends respect me so much more, and believe more in my career," Peni says.

EPC Training and Development Officer, Douglas Tomane, believes that employees who graduate from APTC improve their level of performance, responsibility and confidence at work. He also regularly receives feedback from workplace supervisors that this improved behaviour is being replicated at home.

"There are many positive implications of APTC training on the graduates' lives and the lives of their families, not just as work, but at home as well," says Douglas.

The other family members of APTC graduates also express their pride in the "big achievement" of earning a qualification that is internationally recognised.

Douglas recognises a positive change in all APTC graduates, as well as a willingness to be more proactive and responsible.

"Sometimes their supervisor tells them: 'This is how you do it', and they say: 'No, no, no! This is how we learned it at APTC'. So they work together to get a better solution to the problem."

If training helps improve the performance of EPC as well as the employees themselves, then Douglas is keen to ensure that the company continues its long-term investment in employee development.

## Bridging the learning gap

Although many vocational students have the practical work expertise required for training at Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC), many of them lack the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills required. This is often the result of Pacific Islander students leaving school in their early teens to work or help their families.

The challenge is to bridge the learning gap for those students who have a high level of practical skills, but who are then inhibited with the theory and book work because of low LLN skills.

To support these students, APTC has appointed a Learning Support Facilitator at each campus. These facilitators work with trainers and tutors to develop the LLN skills of students to ensure that they are supported during their studies and develop the skills required in the workplace.

For Samoa's Electricity Power Corporation (EPC), this support greatly assists its employees who attend APTC training. Douglas Tomane, EPC Training and Development Officer, describes how many of the employees finish school at around 15 years and then start work with only basic schooling.

"Some of our staff are very passionate for learning, but their capacity and competency is limited. It is difficult for them," says Douglas.

With the help of a Learning Support Facilitator, students who have low LLN skills are able to continue their studies at APTC.

*<sup>1</sup>Estimated staff turnover-related costs represent more than 12 per cent of pre-tax income for the average company. Retaining Talent - A Guide to Analyzing and Managing Employee turnover, by David G. Allen, Ph.D., SPH. Published by SHRM Foundation, an affiliate of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM®), United States of America.*