

Management Programme
for
Directors of Co-operative
Group Water Schemes

Introduction

This Management Programme for Directors of Co-operative Group Water Schemes has been developed in response to a need identified by the National Federation of Group Water Schemes following a review of the service requirements of its member schemes. The programme is timely, given the driving forces for change now impacting on group water schemes.

As the rural water sector develops, it is essential that group water schemes are managed in a professional and businesslike fashion. Consumer and statutory demands place the responsibility for delivering a quality product and service firmly on the shoulders of the boards of directors of group water schemes. Licensing is a requirement under the Water Services legislation and good management structures will be a factor in the awarding of such licences.

The underlying aim of the NFGWS Management Training Programme is to equip the boards of directors of group water schemes with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to meet these ever increasing obligations and responsibilities.

Background

In late 1997, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes (NFGWS) negotiated a special partnership arrangement and programme, known as the Rural Water Programme (RWP), with the then Minister for the Environment and Local Government and his officials. The Programme, officially launched by Minister Noel Dempsey, TD, on 20 February 1998, included a package of measures aimed at establishing a new framework for the upgrading and development of rural drinking water supplies. This programme was backed up by an increased capital provision to address the problem of deficient water quality, particularly on privately-sourced group water systems.

From its inception the RWP recognised the necessity for the provision of training for activists within the rural water sector. In a circular L4/98, outlining the detail of the RWP, the Department of the Environment & Local Government emphasised that ‘the training needs of the group scheme sector is an area that has been neglected and is in urgent need of review’.

The Water Services National Training Group (WSNTG) was established as part of the RWP and this organisation now provides comprehensive operational training programmes for local authorities and the group scheme sector at centres in Castlebar, Roscrea, Stranorlar and Ballincollig. The National Federation of Group Water Schemes is represented on the board of the WSNTG and is active in furthering the operational training programmes provided.

While appreciating the need for ongoing operational training, the Federation recognised that a separate training initiative was required to address the legislative and consumer demands being placed on the boards of management of group water schemes. In particular, there was an acceptance that the delivery of quality water and a quality customer service would require quality management. It was against this background that a training/development programme for the boards of management of group water schemes was developed.

Development of the Programme

Funding

Having identified the need for management training in the rural water sector, the NFGWS set about securing funding for the development of a suitable programme. An approach was made to the National Training Agency, FÁS, which generously agreed to fund the initiative.

Appointment of Consultants

A brief was prepared and tenders sought from qualified consultants for the development and pilot-testing of a training programme which would:

- Identify and communicate the key essentials for running a successful group water scheme
- Enhance customer services skills
- Assist groups to comply with their legal obligations
- Clarify and have participants understand the role of Boards, Officers, Management and Staff
- Familiarise participants with basic financial and business planning
- Review and improve participants understanding of the key business functions
- Make participants aware of their legal responsibilities, including recent legislative changes
- Identify issues in the business environment that will impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of group schemes
- Highlight the possibilities and mechanisms for joint action with other schemes
- Improve level of awareness of water quality
- Establish an understanding of Quality Assurance (QA) generally
- Develop the skills necessary for the implementation of the QA scheme and towards achieving certification

A total of three tenders were received and assessed and the contract was awarded to I.C.O.S. Services Ltd. in November 2001.

Steering Group

To oversee the development of the programme and to facilitate its smooth implementation, a steering group was established. This group, comprising representatives of the various interested parties – NFGWS, Local Authorities, FÁS, DoELG and ICOS Services Ltd. – met on a regular basis during the development stages of the programme. The final meeting was held in January 2003 when final approval was given to the programme content and layout.

Appointment of Training Manager

In July 2002 the NFGWS, once again with the generous assistance of funding from FÁS, secured the appointment of a Training Project Manager to facilitate the development and delivery of the Management Training Programme and future NFGWS training initiatives.

Training the Trainers

As part of the overall contract, in September 2002 ICOS services facilitated a two day ‘train the trainers’ course in Castlebar, County Mayo. This exercise and the related discussions aimed to provide the trainers with the skills required to deliver the training programme to individual GWS committees. This session also provided an opportunity for the trainers to become comfortable with the material in the programme. Feedback from the trainers – based on their experience with GWS people on the ground, on the relevance of the course material and the suitability of the presentations – was encouraged and these views were taken on board during the final drafting stage of the material. Representatives from FÁS also attended this element of the project development and provided valuable observations on training methods and techniques.

Pilot Testing

The pilot testing of the training with a ‘live’ GWS audience began on 23 September 2002 in Butlersbridge, County Cavan, with Annagh Group Water Scheme (an amalgamation of two smaller GWS). The committee of this co-operative consists of 22 members and through-

out the delivery of the programme an average of 13 members attended. On each evening one module was presented. The presentations were given by ICOS services and by some of the NFGWS trainers. The feedback from the Annagh Group Scheme was comprehensive and encouraging and their observations were noted and taken into consideration in the final drafting of the course to improve future presentations of the training programme.

Further pilot testing commenced on 14 October 2002 in the Regional Training Centre, Castlebar, County Mayo. Eight group schemes participated (with an average of three committee members per scheme). Once again the training took place over a four-week period, with two sessions per week.

Launch of Programme

With the pilot testing of the programme completed and final agreement on the material content and layout in place, the programme was formally launched by Environment Minister, Martin Cullen, TD, on 17 February 2003 in Strokestown Park Hotel, County Roscommon.



Environment Minister, Martin Cullen, TD, launched the training programme for the boards of management of group water schemes at Strokestown House, County Roscommon, on 17 February 2003.

Delivery of the Programme

The *Management Programme for Directors of Co-operative Group Water Schemes* was rolled out in February 2003 and is now available to boards of directors. A number of group schemes have already completed the programme, which is being delivered in a modular format. It is intended that, where possible, the training will be delivered separately to each affiliated GWS (board/committee) in its own locality – i.e. the normal committee meeting location. The entire programme consists of eight three-hour modules, details of which are attached.

While the funding granted by FÁS enabled the development and pilot testing of this programme, it is necessary to charge individual group schemes for the delivery of the training. It has been agreed with the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government that the cost of this training is fully recoverable under the terms and conditions of the subsidy scheme. The charge per group scheme for the delivery of the entire programme has been fixed by the NFGWS board, at €1,500.00.

The National Federation of Group Water Schemes urges the boards of directors of all group water schemes to participate in the programme. Group schemes wishing to take part are requested to complete the attached application form and to return same to: **Training Manager, National Federation of Group Water Schemes, 13/14 Market St., Monaghan.**

Management Programme Contents

Module 1: Applying Best Co-operative Practice to the GWS

- Unit 1 Principles, Practices and Legal Aspects of Co-operatives
- Unit 2 Incorporating the Group Water Scheme as a Co-operative
- Unit 3 Understanding the Nature of Co-operatives

Module 2: The Group Water Scheme Board

- Unit 1 The Member as the Source of Board Authority
- Unit 2 The Supervisory Role and Responsibility of Directors
- Unit 3 Board Structure, Organisation and Operations

Module 3: The Strategic Plan

- Unit 1 The Basic Elements of Planning
- Unit 2 Establishing Objectives and Goals
- Unit 3 Implementing and Evaluating Strategy

Module 4: Understanding Basic Accounting and Financial Information

- Unit 1 Understanding the Basics of Accounting Practice
- Unit 2 The Audited Accounts
- Unit 3 Interpreting and Understanding Accounts
- Unit 4 Performance Indicators
- Unit 5 Cash Flow

Module 5: The Board's Responsibility as an Employer

- Unit 1 Employer - Employee Relationships
- Unit 2 Health and Safety
- Unit 3 Insurance and the GWS

Module 6: Leadership and Communications

- Unit 1 Leadership
- Unit 2 The Role of Officers and Management
- Unit 3 Communications and the Role of Outside Bodies

Module 7: Reorganising and Restructuring of Group Water schemes

- Unit 1 The Traditional Approach to Structuring
- Unit 2 Planning for Structural change
- Unit 3 The Role of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes

Module 8: Training in Quality Assurance

- Unit 1 Current and Pending Legislation
- Unit 2 Rural Water Supplies
- Unit 3 Drinking Water Contaminants and Public Health
- Unit 4 Quality Assurance Scheme
- Unit 5 Water as a High Risk Product

National Federation of Group Water Schemes

Management Training Programme

Application Form

Name of Group Scheme:.....

Address:

County:

Number of Domestic Connections:.....

Structure of Organisation: (please tick the relevant)

Co-operative Society Limited

Company Limited by Guarantee

Other (please specify)

Number on Board of Directors (committee):

Number that will attend training:

(It is recommended that all board/committee members attend)

Contact Person: (To assist with arranging venue etc.)

Name:

Role in Organisation:

Address:.....

Phone: Mobile:

I wish to apply on behalf the Board of Directors of Group Water Scheme to participate in the Management Training Programme. I enclose a cheque for €1,500.00.

Signed: Date:.....

(Secretary)

(Return application to NFGWS 13/14 Market St., Monaghan)

