

A Reason to Demand the Weld in Australia and Abroad

The Australian Welding industry has dealt with no situation quite as complex as the one we face today with the shortage of skilled welders.

There is absolutely no underestimating the importance of welding and the role it plays on our everyday society, from the welding of the cars we drive to the computer this case study is written upon. Welding is everywhere in one form or another, all of which demands a skilled operator.

At Australian welding solutions we are devoted to helping Australian and International industry achieve its goals by increasing welder performance, increasing welding skills, increasing welding knowledge in general welding terms and welding symbols, providing advice on how to comply with current Australian standards and International standards for both the pressure equipment standards and the structural standards.

As a Qualified welding inspector, working for Australian Welding Solutions visiting the workforce each and every day, the amount of people that are confused or unaware of how to comply with Australian and International standards is concerning. The confusion that exists on how to set up and qualify an approved

welding procedure, and the amount of people that don't understand the difference between a welding procedure and a welding procedure qualification record is astonishing. This to me raises alarms of where is the training coming from or more to the point where is the training going?

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Working in the industry the welding skills shortage and the declining amount of skilled operators is becoming very evident mostly in Australia. The amount of older welder's leaving the workforce who has gained skills from ship yards, large structural steel companies, the oil, gas and petrochemical industry and the mining sector is huge. To fill this void Australian industry is looking abroad with too few local students/candidates entering the field.

One of the other problems is the students that seem to be entering the welding workforce are not absorbing or grasping the knowledge and skill that is being passed on by the old school welder, nor is the old school welder given the time to coach and mentor an apprentice by having him/her in his back pocket all day.

The consequence is that Australia's manufacturing sector has an evaporating pool of skilled operators, educated thinkers and problem solvers to adapt to the driving demand of an evolving marketplace

The upside of this shortage is; the typical stereotyped image of the average welder which is the reason the occupation has struggled to attract young talent for years and the status of the blue collar wearing welder who generally does not require a tertiary education is slowly changing.



The technique involved in the full penetration welding of a ½ inch BSP threadolet fixed to a pressure component used in the oil and gas industry

The welder who wishes to push himself to achieve, to think outside the circle and to further study post trade qualifications will be offered better than average wages, be entitled to extra benefits and expand the chance of a career which involves a lot more than the factory floor.

Welding practitioners, welding supervisors, welding specialists, welding inspectors and welding engineers all are welding professions that requires minimal hands on welding at the best of times, but the best operator's in these fields are the students that have done the hard yards, done the hours under the helmet and have grasped the necessary knowledge and skills to expand their mind.

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A simple photo showing the skills adopted from some coaching and mentoring in the cleaning, set up, technique, weld sequence, transferring of identification marking and sequence of weld passes on a small pressure component for the oil and gas industry.

In other countries in the world master trades people are treated like royalty, they have an important status in the community, but not yet in Australia. For too long the tradespeople have been looked down upon and the importance of apprenticeships downplayed. The time has come for a system to elevate the status of the master welder, boilermaker and metal fabricator

The people who take advantage of today's situation can set themselves up for a very successful future both in Australia and overseas. With the current international qualifications on offer it is becoming easier for Australian talent to be recognised.

If this perception of the welder is ever going to change I think the time has to be now, the shortage of skilled operators and the publicity it is receiving is an ideal platform for the importance of welding to be highlighted.

I feel that if the situation is ever going to change it will be due to our local industry being given the responsibility to drive the demand, to slow the amount of off-shore welded components which are price driven and have some faith in our own grass roots, to try and upskill some of our workforce and submit reward for achievement.

The low perception of the average welder has had an enormous effect on the skills shortage we have today. This low perception has led to low pay conditions, average working environments, low safety standards, lack of recognition, lack of training and career opportunity. How many times have you heard the people express the term "I am only a welder" (a bucket head). Such comments are devaluing their own skills, lowering their self esteem and playing down their profession.

The lack of access to skilled operators constantly puts a strain on business to meet customer demands. The amount of operators that have gone to work in remote locations has left huge holes to fill in the Australian metropolitan areas. The amount of operators that could benefit from some post trade training could help slow down one of our country's more complex problems.

My theory is when these issues are resolved there will be a lot of very wealthy welders and/or welding technical people in Australia, with the skills, attitude and knowledge to accept opportunity to be the driving force to rule the weld.

Australian welding solutions can help provide some upskilling, coaching and/or mentoring within the welding sector to provide a good spread of welding knowledge into the future.



Damien Vickers from Australian Welding Solutions providing some Coaching on how to set a full penetration threadolet onto an end cap of a pressure component