

Companies spend big to keep work brains fit

Training is giving an edge over business rivals, writes Amanda Horswill

IF knowledge is power, then Queensland is throttling up.

Local executive coaching and business skills training organisations are reporting booming business. This seems to fly in the face of logic: That in gloomy times, when redundancies are the norm and cutbacks expected, “luxuries” such as training and development should be slashed from the corporate balance sheet.

“In theory, in times of economic challenges, first the tea and biscuits are cut and then the training budget,” director of corporate education at the UQ Business School Jim Nyland says.

“But here at the UQ Business School, we have found that activity doubled last year and has doubled again this year, and we expect it to double again next year.

“That’s because, in times of economic challenges, the strong leaders in business put quite a lot of resources into training and development of staff.”

The lift in training business is coming from many quarters.

The desire to gain a competitive advantage over business rivals is stirring confidence in the training sector, driving up subscription to leadership and other “soft skill” courses for professionals.

At the other end of the market, recent Federal Government incentives that give employers cash to turn their lower-skilled workers into trainees is providing a windfall for vocational and education providers, in the public and private sectors.

And workers worried about losing their jobs, or the already redundant, are enrolling in courses designed to give them a new career path or increased chances of scoring another job in their chosen field.

In May last year, the latest figures available, the ABS tracked 19 per cent

of the nation’s population aged between 15-64 years as being enrolled in a course of study. About 38 per cent were in a higher education institution, such as university, 22 per cent were at TAFE and 12 per cent were at other institutions, such as private colleges.

The most common course they enrolled in was in management and commerce, and they were working towards a formal qualification.

Training organisations expect those official figures to rise sharply this year for every survey age group and working class.

Part of that rise will be attributed to government initiatives. Sarina Russo Job Access managing director Sarina Russo says the \$41.60-a-fortnight Training Supplement announced in last month’s Federal Budget will give those people without a Year 12 qualification receiving Newstart or Parenting Payment extra incentive to “upskill”.

The payment is in addition to the \$950 Training and Learning Bonus and the \$208 Education Entry Payment.

“Training develops people personally and the right training gives them the confidence to go out and get that job,” Russo says.

Tony Lander, GM of national training company Franklyn Scholar, says he’ll put about 6500 people into accredited training this year, with the most popular option being a formal traineeship. The Government is offering companies a \$4000 grant to put employees into traineeships. Lander says it’s not only the monetary incentive driving bosses to train in times of financial hardship.

“The companies that are innovative

want to ensure that their employees are skilled in multiple roles so they can step up and do other things than what they would otherwise traditionally be asked to do,” he says.

“They do see this as an opportunity to improve their workforce.

“Yes, there are still some old-fashioned managers out there, who cut the training budget before any other budget. That’s probably because they don’t understand the benefits.”

Individuals are also opting to train harder. Young people are signing up for courses offering a healthy return on time and monetary investment, says Mackintosh College MD Shane Mackintosh.

“This year the domestic (training) market overall has increased, and a lot more people are saying they are mindful of the skills they have — or don’t have — and how their long-term future might be affected by the economy,” Mackintosh says.

“And the kids coming out of school are more mindful that they need to have something under their belt, and uni is not an option or a desire for a lot of them. So they are going to vocational education — something that is easier and shorter and that will allow them to start a career sooner.”

He says hairdressing is increasingly popular, he suspects because of the media coverage of the skills shortages in that area. A new course the college launched recently in event management is also a common choice, he says, as the skills learnt can be applied in many industries.

Mackintosh says clever managers are investing in training as a way of keeping their staff.