



# All in a day's work for fire masters



The South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service's Mick Shepherd, Grant Lupton and Michael Morgan have combined practical experience with postgraduate study for the betterment of their organisation.

AN MBA IS most often associated with high-level executives and entrepreneurs, yet the qualification is fast gaining popularity within technical professions.

Prime examples are contained within the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service.

According to Chief Officer Grant Lupton, completing an MBA has become an expectation for fire officers making the step up from senior management to executive leadership.

"There are seven roles at the head of various departments, each contributing to a \$170 million organisation, so that degree of responsibility warrants having as much business acumen as possible," he said.

"Most people who get to the senior leadership rank in the MFS already have 25 years of operational experience, but when they move into senior roles they take on the same corporate responsibilities that other large government organisations would have."

From managing a team and a budget to supporting a specialised industry, the additional qualification gives workers a strong foundation of academic credibility to bolster their operational experience.

SAMFS Assistant Chief Michael Morgan said completing his MBA with the Australian Institute of Business provided key skills, including how to work with budgets and staff.

"There may be a perception that as Assistant Chief you have only been a firefighter, but you are required to have an understanding of what it takes to run a business as well," he said.

One of several firefighters who completed a business degree with AIB, Michael said the qualification provided

immediate applicability for him, as each subject allowed him to learn skills he would need to work at senior levels.

"The chief and the deputy have numerous qualifications and master's degrees in various occupations, so it just makes really good sense that, if you're running a business, that's how we would do it," he said.

"In going for promotion, I knew that there would be a lot of synergy between what I would do in the MBA and what I would be required to do as an Assistant Chief."

Through the work-applied learning model, Michael used his final project to the advantage of the business, creating a performance review system for firefighters and introducing it into the company.

"For me, the MBA showed me how I would implement the performance review system and do it correctly to give it a greater chance of succeeding. If I hadn't done the MBA we might have just fumbled through and perhaps done it, but it might not have worked," he said.

As technical professionals like Michael are promoted through the ranks, fitting postgraduate study around a busy career and family life comes with challenges.

This is also a focus for Chief Lupton, who has been using SAMFS's performance review system to help determine which candidates to take to the senior levels.

"We had to find a way to enable them to receive the business training and still be able to continue working," he said.

The outcome was to offer the opportunity to complete a Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma or

MBA through two main service providers, plus one further option, to ensure each candidate could find a suitable option.

"Through AIB's work-applied learning model we get each person completing the programme to use organisationally-based projects that will add value to what we do," Chief Lupton said.

"The setup is mutually beneficial as at the end of the 12 months of study they achieve a master's level qualification that allows them to use current and future business scenarios as projects to help the organisation."

Completing a postgraduate qualification has provided additional benefits than just a promotion, according to Mick Shepherd, a metropolitan commander within the SAFMS.

"We can tend to be a little insular in the emergency services – there's a lot of 'that's the way it's always been done, and that's the way it's going to be done', so it was good to work with students from other organisations at AIB," he said.

The study has also helped participants attain membership qualifications from the Institute of Fire Engineers, a peak industry body for fire engineering based in the UK but with 43 branches worldwide.

"We've actually achieved an associate membership to the Institute of Fire Engineers based not only on our practical experience over our careers, but also from the tertiary qualifications we have too," Mick said.