
What to Look for in a Consultant

Introduction

In many ways engaging an OHS consultant is no different to selecting a plumber or an electrician, the key issues being qualifications, professional accreditation, experience, reputation, cost and availability.

However you should remember that you have a legal responsibility to ensure that your workplace is safe for your employees, visitors and member of the general public. Whilst a consultant does have responsibility for his own work, ultimately you will be responsible for engaging the consultant and implementing his recommendations.

Critical outcomes are that you get a professional report that has valid findings and that the interaction of the contractor with your staff and your facility maintains operational and OHS standards.

Qualifications

You should expect your consultant to have at least graduate qualifications in engineering, science or occupational health and safety. Post Graduate certificates and diplomas in occupational health and safety, occupational hygiene or ergonomics indicates that your consultant has applied knowledge in that field. Masters and Doctoral level qualifications demonstrate an ability to conduct applied research.

Accreditation

Membership of a professional body is your guarantee that the consultant has met specified criteria and has been assessed by his peers as being competent. Professional bodies such as the Safety Institute of Australia and the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists offer membership at a number of levels, subject to qualifications and experience:

Safety Institute of Australia Membership Criteria

Member A person who can demonstrate a satisfactory standard of general education and who has an interest in the delivery of safety and or health programs.

Chartered Professional Member (CPMSIA) shall meet one of the following conditions: Have been awarded an approved diploma in a safety-discipline and have completed five (5) years full time experience, (or equivalent) in safety and health. Have been awarded an approved degree or post-graduate diploma or above in a safety discipline area (or have completed the SIA Challenge Examination) and have completed three (3) years full time experience (or equivalent) in safety and health. Have been awarded a degree or post graduate diploma or above in a safety-related area such as fire technology, risk management, ergonomics hygiene, occupational medicine, occupational nursing or other related qualification that has a significant component of safety and health, plus has completed 5 years fulltime experience (or equivalent) in safety and health may be admitted as Chartered Professional Member. Applicants for Chartered Professional Member via this clause shall provide evidence of the safety and health components of their course. To maintain their grading all Chartered Professional Members are required to achieve 30 Continuing Professional Development (CDP) points over a 5 year period with no more than 10 points in any one year.

Fellow (FSIA) A person who meets the above criteria for grading as a 'Chartered Professional Member' of the Institute. In addition, the person shall meet the following requirements: Completed ten (10) years full time experience (or equivalent) in safety and health, Made technical contributions toward the aims and objectives of the Institute equivalent to 50 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points, Is considered exceptional in their ability in planning, developing, researching and/or educating others in the safety and health areas. To maintain their grading all Fellows are required to achieve 40 Continuing Professional Development (CDP) points over a 5 year period with no more than 12 points in any one year.

Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists Membership Criteria

Associate Membership (Membership for students is complimentary) A candidate for admission as an Associate Member of the Institute shall be required at the time of application: To be working in or have a professional interest in one or more of the following fields: occupational hygiene, occupational medicine, occupational health and safety, environmental health or in a closely allied field acceptable to Council; or To have, or to be studying for, a post-secondary educational qualification, as defined in By-law 6, in occupational hygiene, a relevant discipline or an equivalent qualification acceptable to the Council. An application for student status under Associate Membership must be accompanied by proof of a relevant full or part-time course of study by the applicant as defined in By-law 6 and proof of work that is not full-time in occupational hygiene.

Provisional Membership An applicant may be considered for the grading of 'Provisional' where they meet the following conditions: To have a first degree or diploma in Science or Engineering acceptable to Council. At the time application of membership is made to be working in the field of occupational hygiene or one of its specialist branches. To have worked for at least one year in a professional capacity in the field of occupational hygiene or one of its specialist branches. To demonstrate to the Council that an acceptable level of understanding of the basic principles of occupational hygiene has been achieved

Full Membership An applicant may be considered for the grading of 'Full' where they meet the following conditions: To have a first degree or diploma in Science or Engineering acceptable to the Council, or an equivalent qualification acceptable to the Council. At the time application for membership is made to be working in the field of occupational hygiene or one of its specialist branches. To have worked for more than five years in a professional capacity in the field of occupational hygiene or one of its specialist branches. To demonstrate to the Council that he possesses a satisfactory level of professional competence

Certified Member has demonstrated professional knowledge by way of the successful completion of a written and oral examination and through the continued maintenance of this knowledge via education and active participation in the field of occupational hygiene. Certification is voluntary and is designed to clearly show competence and a high level of knowledge and skill in the field of occupational hygiene. Certification is the process by which government and industry can easily recognise a competent occupational hygiene professional, whether it be for the purposes of engaging them to undertake work, for employment or for regulatory purposes.

Fellow Membership An applicant may be considered for the grading of 'Fellow' where they meet the following conditions: To have been a Full Member of the Institute for at least five years. To have worked for more than fifteen years in a professional capacity in the field of occupational hygiene or one of its specialist branches. To have made a distinguished contribution to the advancement of the profession of occupational hygiene. To be nominated by a Full or Fellow member of the Institute and to be seconded by a Full or Fellow member of the Institute

Your consultant should freely provide you with details of his qualifications and accreditations.

Experience

Your consultant should be able to provide you with a list of clients (i.e. a CV) and an example of his reports.

In assessing the client list you should assess the range of industries and the focus of the assessments. Ensure that the consultant has had experience in dealing with production staff, union representatives, OHS representatives and executives. Consider your own requirements.

The Report

Reports should be structured and specify the reason why the assessment was undertaken, the methodology, exposure limits, results, and provide clear recommendations for control. References should be made to legislation, methodology such as that contained within Australian Standards, and exposure limits such as the WorkSafe Australia National Exposure Standards.

For your own assessment you should expect to be provided with two hard copies (one for filing and one for staff), plus an electronic copy for long term storage. (see - What to look for in a Report)

Equipment

Your consultant should have access to appropriate auditing equipment and be able to refer to a recognised monitoring protocol (such as an Australian Standard).

Testing

In testing samples a NATA accredited laboratory should be used. This provides validity to the assessments and may be of critical importance at a later stage.

You should identify your sampling and auditing requirements and discuss these with your consultant.

Reputation

A competent consultant will freely provide you with a number of referees who will vouch for his skills. Some consultants list these on their CVs, others provide them on request.

Cost

The old adage is "Pay peanuts and you'll get monkeys". The costs involved in running a consulting business are considerable involving aspects such as office costs, equipment, transport, professional accreditation, insurance, advertising, sick leave, superannuation and training.

Generally you'll get what you pay for however consultants may provide some form of discount for large projects or where they are involved in long term contract work. Most consultants will provide you with an obligation free quote.

Insurance

Your consultant should have professional indemnity and public liability insurance. Coverage of \$2 and \$10 million is a standard level. A WorkCover insurance policy is mandatory.

It is recommended that policies be sighted where you are likely to employ your consultant over a long term.

OHS

Your consultant should have developed an OHS policy and be aware of his requirements at your site. He should be able to provide all of his personal protective equipment and have adequate training for workplace hazards (i.e. confined space entry, heights, dangerous goods/hazardous substances etc) as appropriate.

Availability

Expect to pay a premium if your work requirements involve some form of urgency or the work period extends over weekends or holidays. It pays to be prepared and schedule the work carefully.

Personality

Finally if you have assessed the above issues and are contemplating a large project invite the consultant to discuss the work with you at the worksite. Most consultants are pleased to assess the workplace and this helps them to identify specific requirements.

During the meeting ensure that the consultant will be able to work productively with your staff, and maintain the safety and operational standards of your facility. A face to face meeting can be revealing.