



NATIONAL AQUATIC INDUSTRY WORKFORCE REPORT

Employee insights, professional
development and future needs analysis



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

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Australian Government





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Royal Life Saving is focused on reducing drowning and promoting healthy, active and skilled communities through innovative, reliable, evidence-based advocacy; strong and effective partnerships; quality programs, products and services; underpinned by a cohesive and sustainable national organisation.

Royal Life Saving is a public benevolent institution (PBI) dedicated to reducing drowning and turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. We achieve this through: advocacy, education, training, health promotion, aquatic risk management, community development, research, sport, leadership and participation, and international networks.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2019 Royal Life Saving published the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Profile.

While the Profile focused on providing demographic and general employment information based on data from the first half of the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey, this Report focuses on data from the second half of the Survey and provides information, commentary and analysis related to 6 key areas:

- Employment experience
- Qualifications and skills for the job
- Safety, injury and wellbeing
- Change
- Impact of work location
- Professional development (PD)

The data analysis contained in both publications, along with findings from a joint study by Griffith University, Brisbane, and Royal Life Saving Society – Australia, 'Investigating Job Demands, Resources and Occupational Stress in Pool Lifeguards in Australia' have been used to make a series of workforce development recommendations for the aquatic industry.

These recommendations (see page 25) will form the basis for consultation and discussion with key industry stakeholders. The outcomes of these discussions will inform the design of the Workforce Development Strategy.

'Aquatic industry' is defined as all workers who work for, or provides aquatic related services to, an organisation/body that is involved in the facilitation of water-based activities and programs in aquatic facilities. This also includes self-employed workers. The Survey and Profile focuses on paid workers only.

Overall, Royal Life Saving estimates that the aquatic industry workforce comprises approximately 67,000 workers. The process undertaken and the range of data sources used to estimate this figure is described in the Methods section of this document.

The National Aquatic Industry Workforce Development Project is being managed by Royal Life Saving on behalf of the National Aquatic Industry Safety Committee (NAISC).

The key objectives of the project are to:

- Achieve and share a greater insight and understanding of the aquatic industry workforce
- Build the capacity and capability of the aquatic industry workforce
- Support the development of a strong, sustainable and responsive aquatic industry

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- A positive and collegial work atmosphere was valued most highly by workers, slightly above improved pay and work conditions
- Almost three-quarters of workers have experienced a moderate degree of change in their role, with one-third of this group experiencing a large or very large degree of change
- 2 in every 3 workers believe that the greatest change has been in safety, compliance and legal requirements
- Most workers believe people leave the industry because of a lack of available work hours and poor remuneration
- The majority of PD activities across industry consists of face-to-face sessions
- Most workers value face-to-face PD sessions over online
- Most workers found that improved skills and performance resulted from day-to-day experience in the role and initial on-the-job training
- Most workers do 2 or less PD activities a year
- Not all employee PD activities are funded by employers.



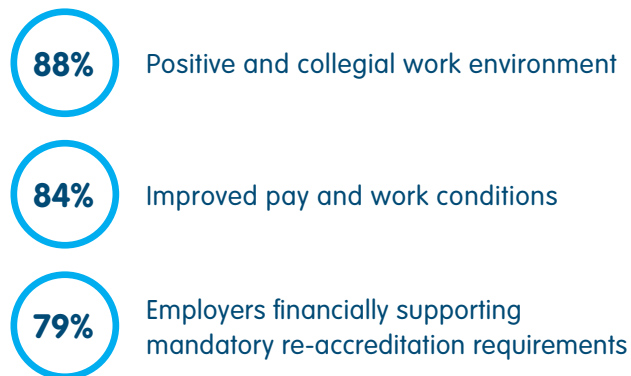
ALL WORKFORCE

Workers believe the most important methods of skill acquisition are:

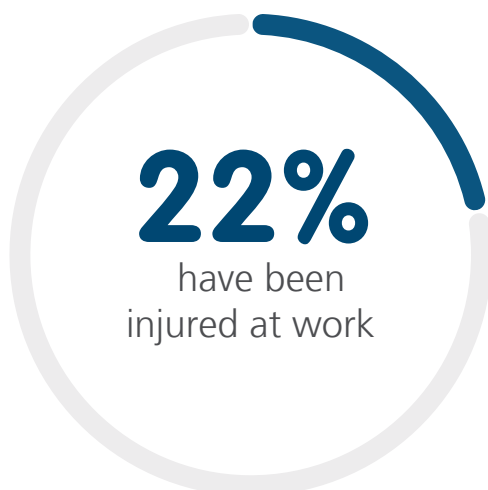


The above items were rated as **important** or **very important** by workers.

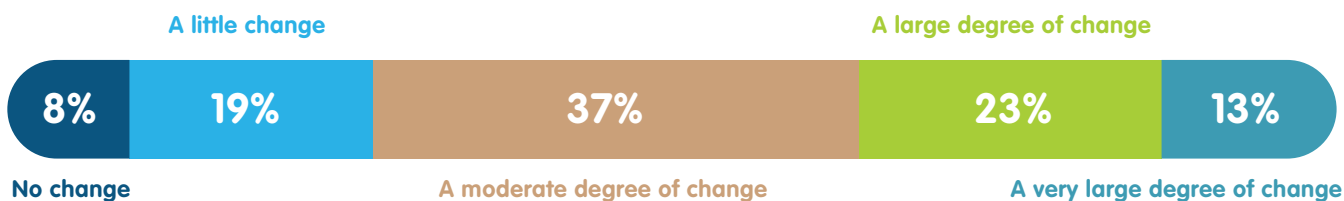
Workers most value strong social and financial support networks in their workplace.



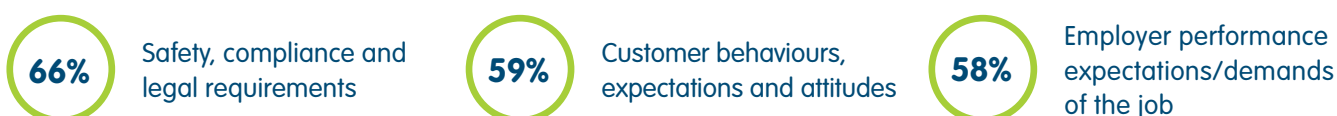
The above items were rated as **important** or **very important** by workers.



Most workers have experienced some change in their aquatic industry role.



The greatest changes experienced by workers have been in safety and compliance, and customer and employer expectations.



According to workers, the top reasons people leave the industry are:

- 01** Not enough work hours available
- 03** Seasonal nature of the work
- 05** Accreditation renewal
- 02** Poor remuneration/poor pay
- 04** Lack of career opportunity
- 06** Unsuitable shift times

Frequency of employers covering worker's PD costs



The top skills nominated by workers needed for success in the aquatic industry are:

- 01** Verbal communication
- 02** Customer service
- 03** Teamwork and collaboration

16% of workers have never undertaken PD.

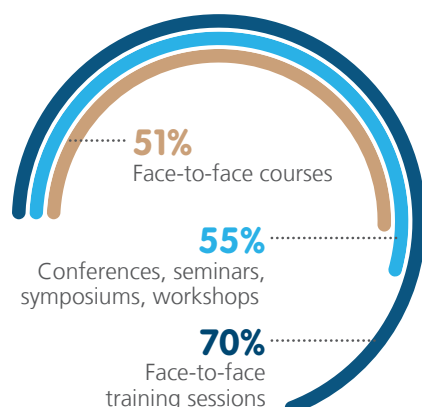
For those that have, the number of PD activities undertaken per year is relatively evenly spread.



Professional development helps motivate workers to stay in the aquatic industry

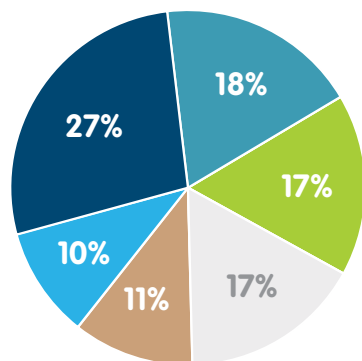


Face-to-face training sessions are the most common form of PD



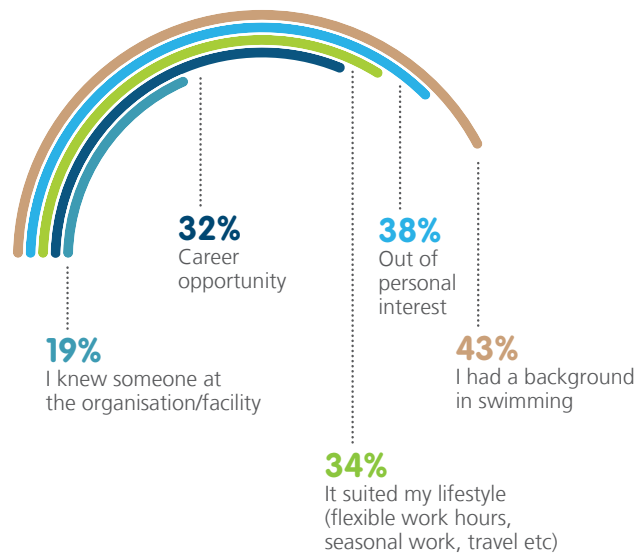
EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Where people learned about job opportunities



- Friends/family/word of mouth
- Attending aquatic facilities
- Participating in aquatic industry activities
- Other
- General job websites
- Industry specific websites

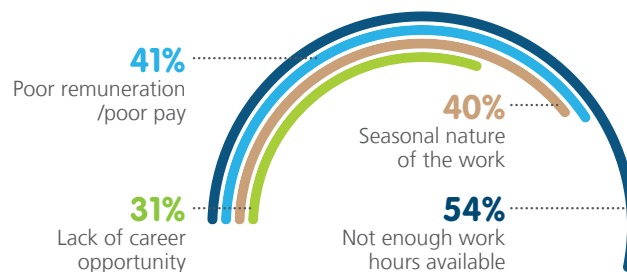
Why take up employment



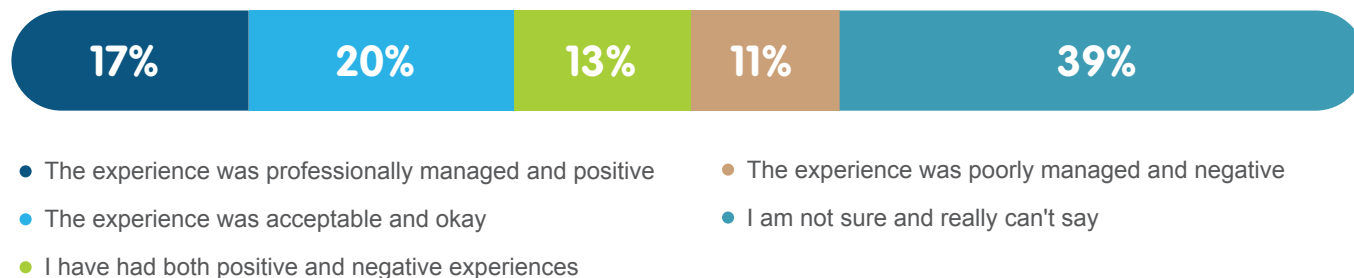
Most enjoyable part of your current role



4 main reasons people leave their role



Experience when leaving a job

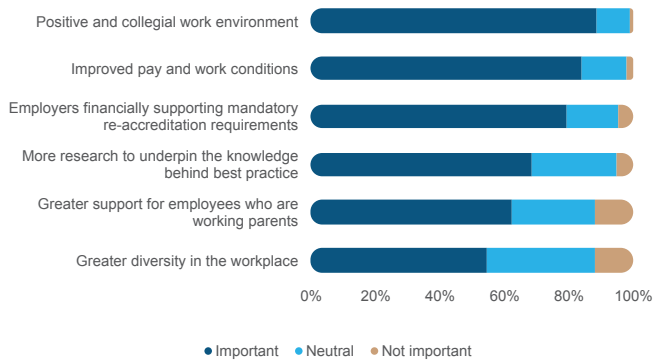


Experience with induction when commencing a job



Importance of matters

All workforce



Pool Lifeguards



Centre Manager



Lifeguard Duty Manager



Swimming and Water Safety Teacher



Swim School Manager or Coordinator



Aquatic Technical Operator

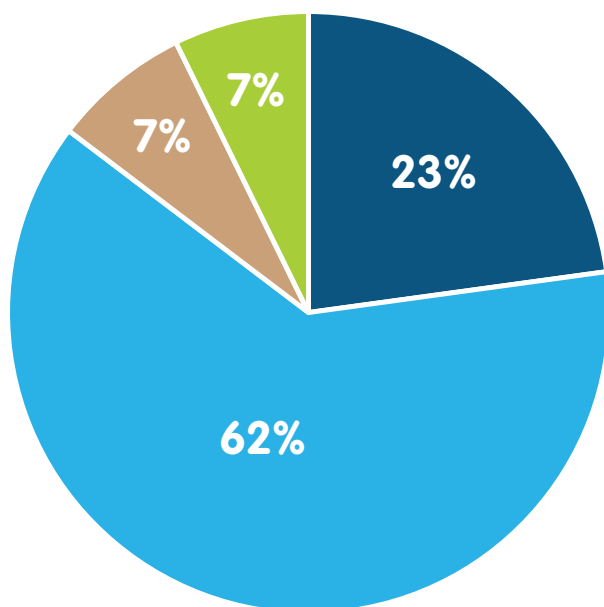


Office Worker



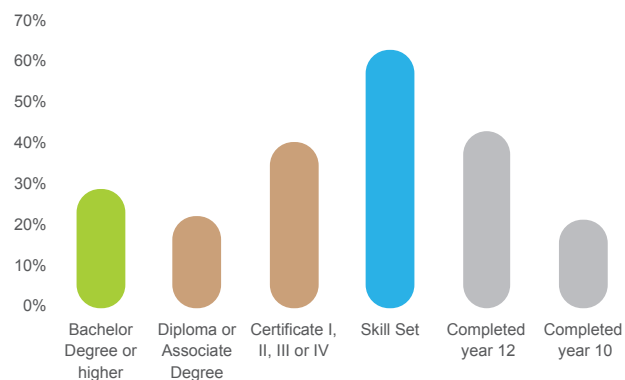
QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS FOR THE JOB

Eligibility to work in industry

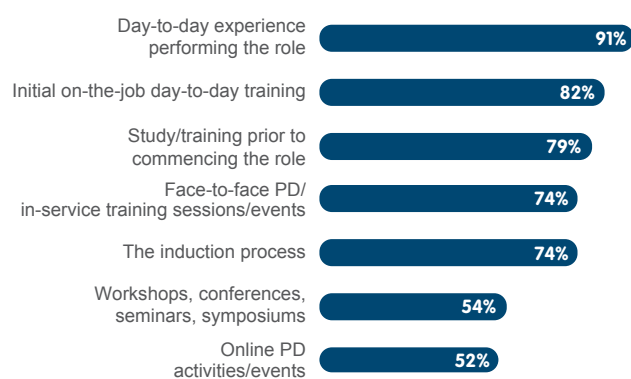


- Industry accredited course
- Vocational skill set
- Vocational qualification
- Bachelor degree or higher

Current qualifications



Importance in developing skills for the job



Skills for success in your role

All workforce

- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Customer service
- 03 Teamwork and collaboration
- 04 Rapport building and relationship management
- 05 Problem solving

Pool Lifeguards



- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Customer service
- 03 Teamwork and collaboration
- 04 Conflict resolution
- 05 Problem solving

Skills for success in your role

Centre Manager



- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Customer service
- 03 Teamwork and collaboration
- 04 Rapport building and relationship management
- 05 Conflict resolution

Lifeguard Duty Manager



- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Customer service
- 03 Teamwork and collaboration
- 04 Problem solving
- 05 Conflict resolution

Swimming and Water Safety Teacher



- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Customer service
- 03 Teamwork and collaboration
- 04 Learning and applying new information
- 05 Rapport building and relationship management

Swim School Manager or Coordinator



- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Customer service
- 03 Planning, coordinating & organising
- 04 Teamwork and collaboration
- 05 Rapport building and relationship management

Aquatic Technical Operator



- 01 Teamwork and collaboration
- 02 Verbal communication
- 03 Problem solving
- 04 Rapport building and relationship management
- 05 Customer service

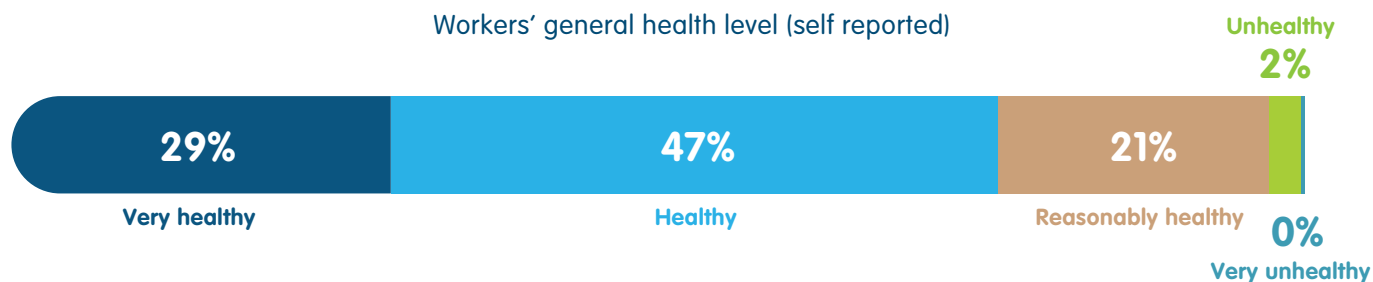
Office Worker



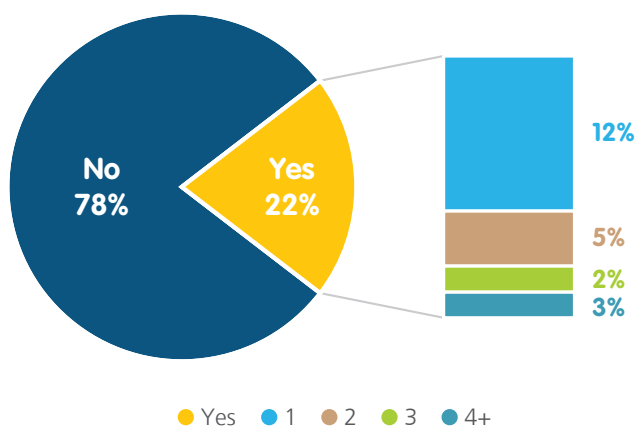
- 01 Verbal communication
- 02 Teamwork and collaboration
- 03 Rapport building and relationship management
- 04 Planning, coordinating and organising
- 05 Problem solving

SAFETY, INJURY AND WELLBEING

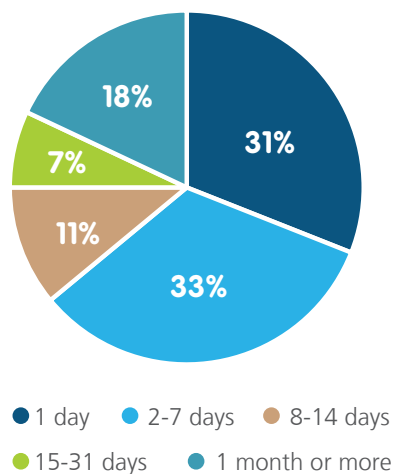
Workers' general health level (self reported)



Injury at work and if 'yes', how many injuries

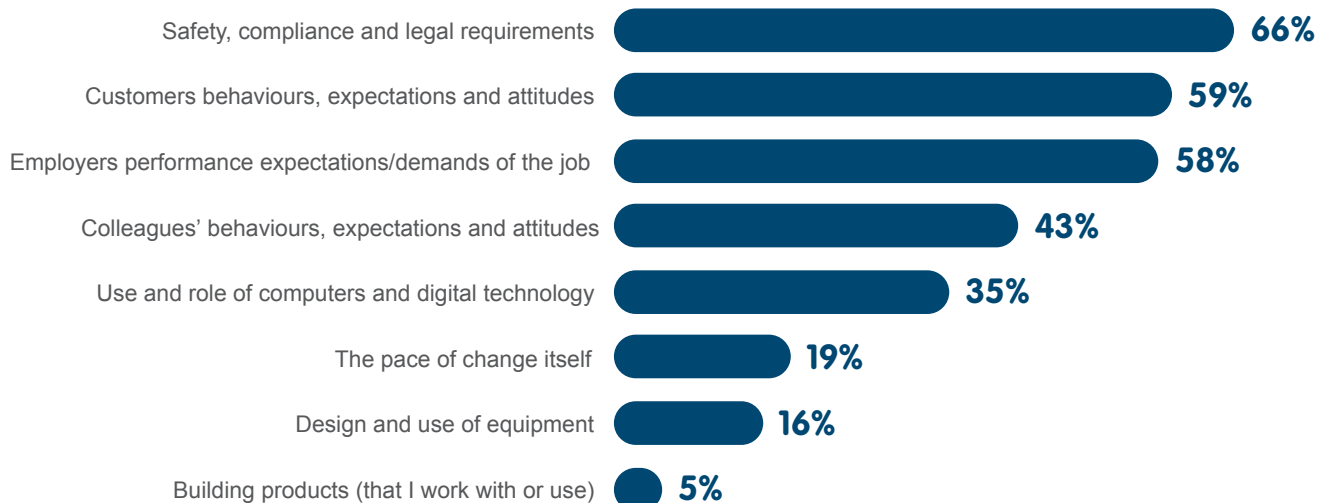


Longest period before able to return to full duties



CHANGE

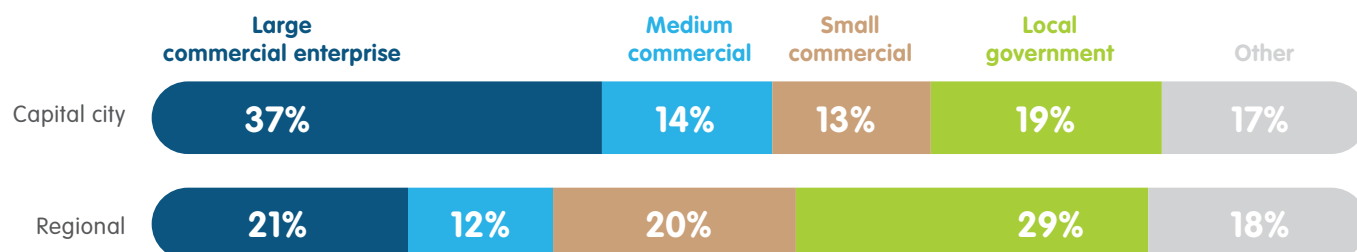
Main areas where change has occurred.



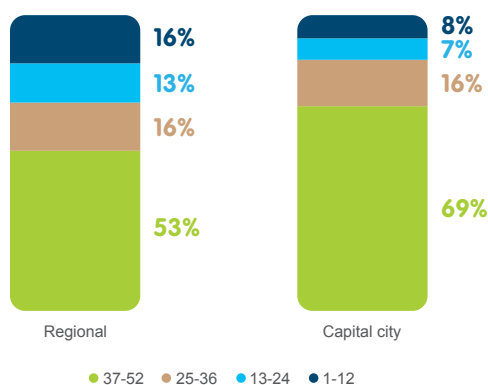
IMPACT OF WORK LOCATION

Q.12 asked respondents if they worked in a regional and/or remote setting or in one of the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra. The charts below compare responses based on work location.

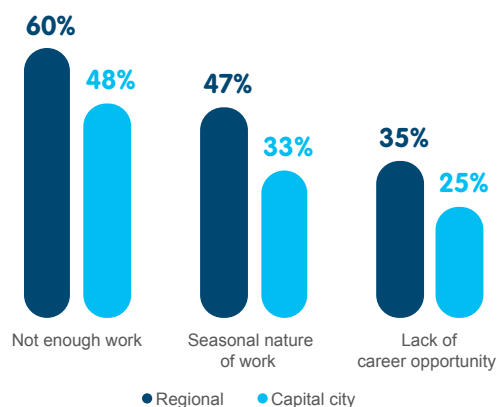
Type of employer organisation



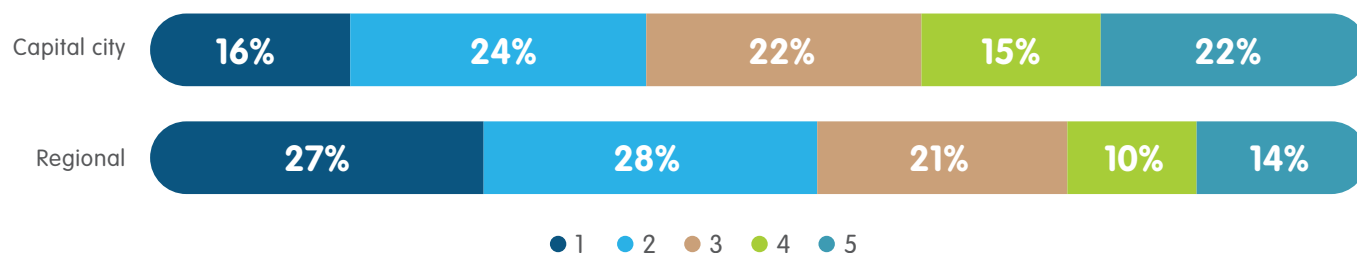
Weeks worked per year



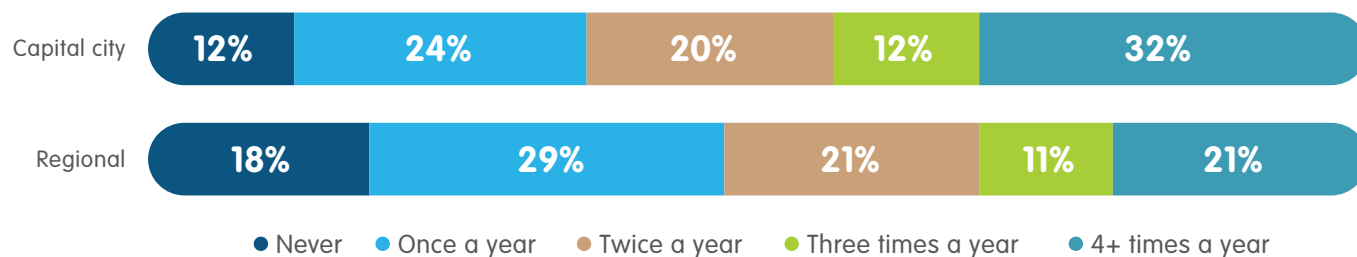
3 main reasons people leave their role



Number of PD sessions undertaken in any 12-month period (from the respondents that have undertaken PD)



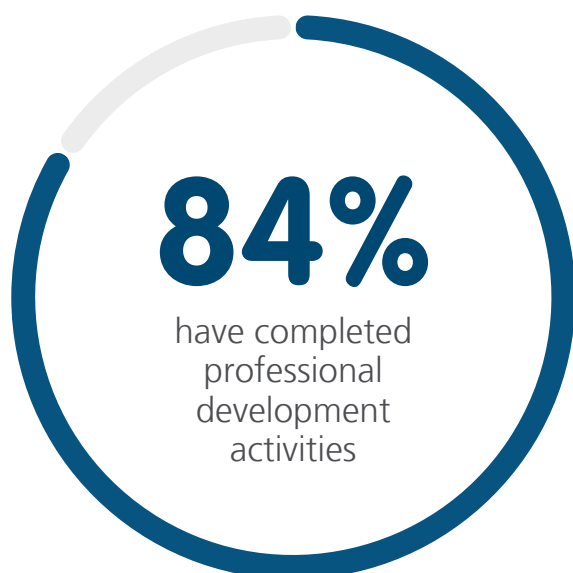
How often employer provides/organises opportunities for PD (from the respondents that have undertaken PD)



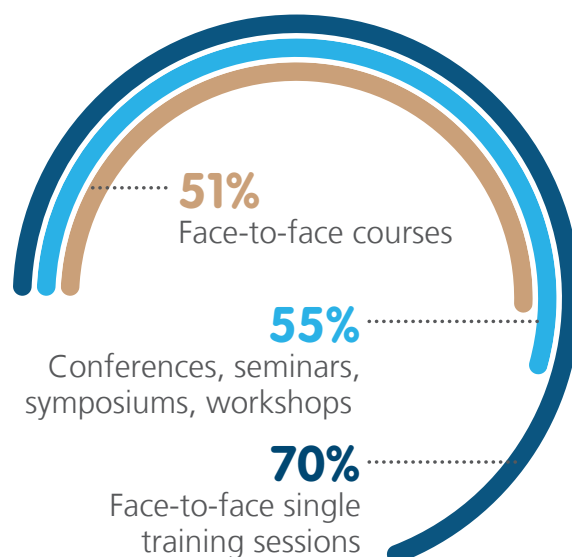
(Note: 15% of regional and remote workers and 17% of workers based in capital cities indicated they have never undertaken PD.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Workers that have undertaken PD during their time in the aquatic industry



Type of PD activity most often undertaken



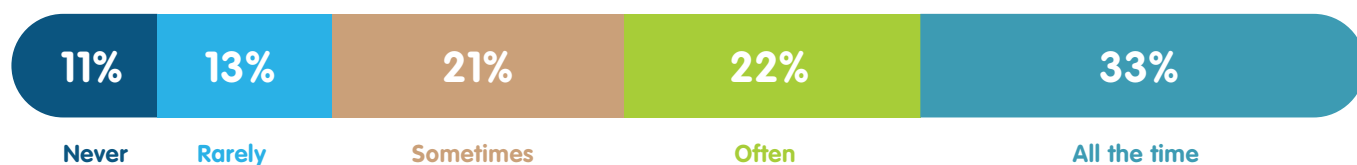
Number of PD activities undertaken in any 12-month period (from the 84% that have undertaken PD)



How often employer provides/organises opportunities for PD (from the 84% that have undertaken PD)



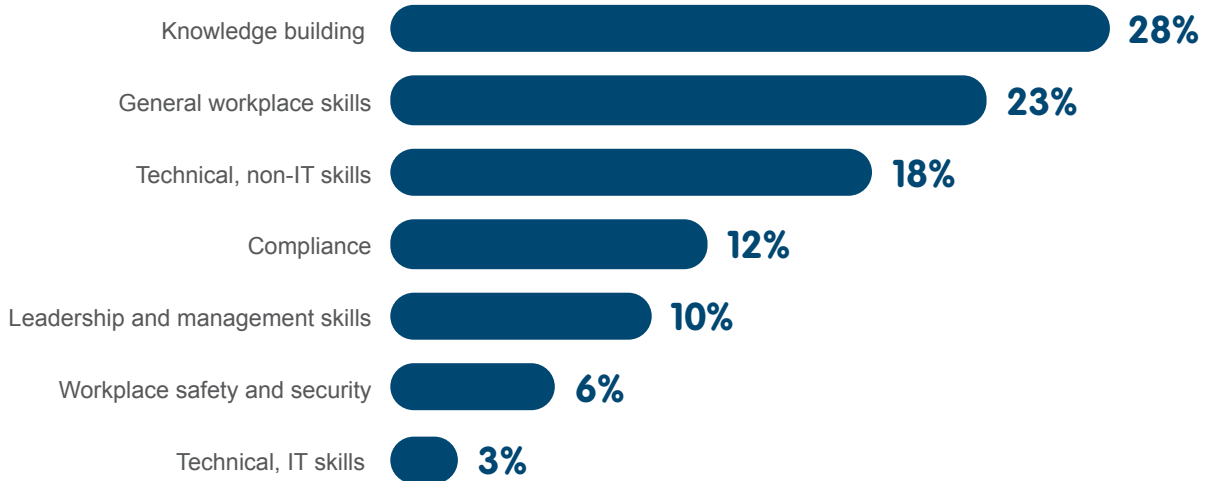
How often employer covers PD costs (from the 84% that have undertaken PD)



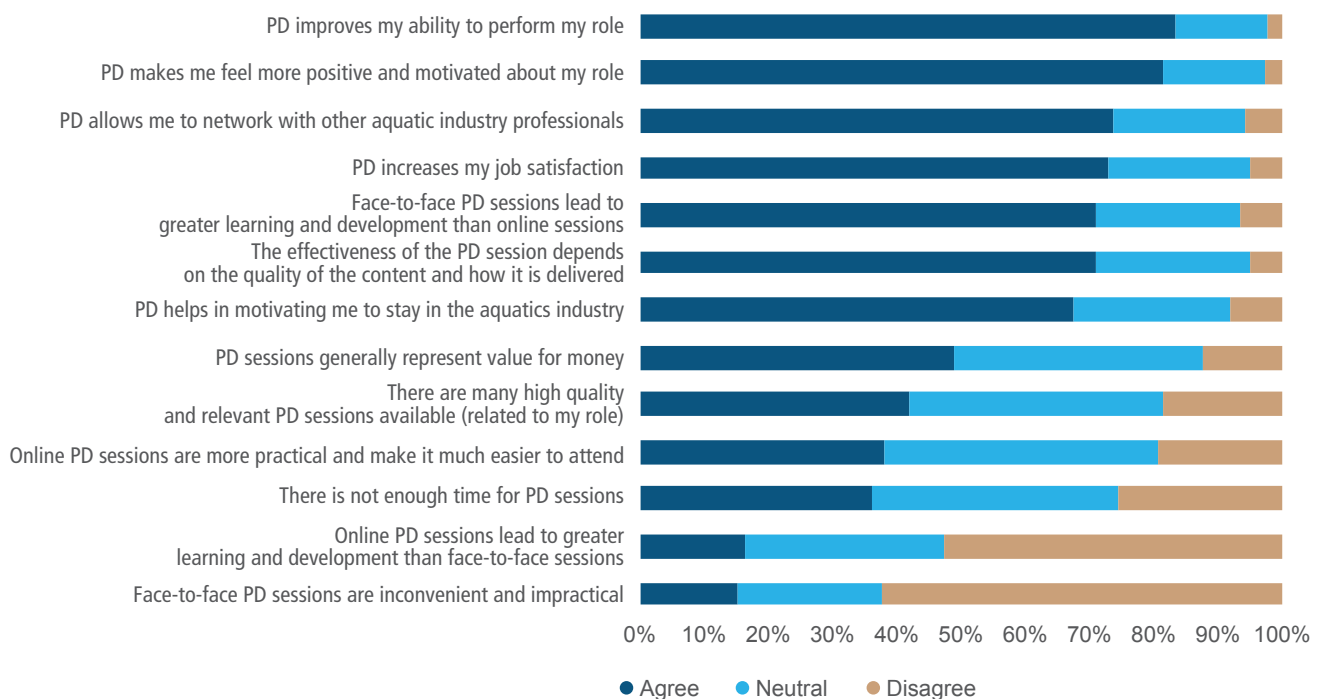


There needs to be a better focus on providing pathways for development for people who actually want to work in the aquatic industry, rather than people who use it as a summer job or students who come and go.”

Broad topic/focus of last PD session undertaken



Agree or disagree with the following statement regarding PD



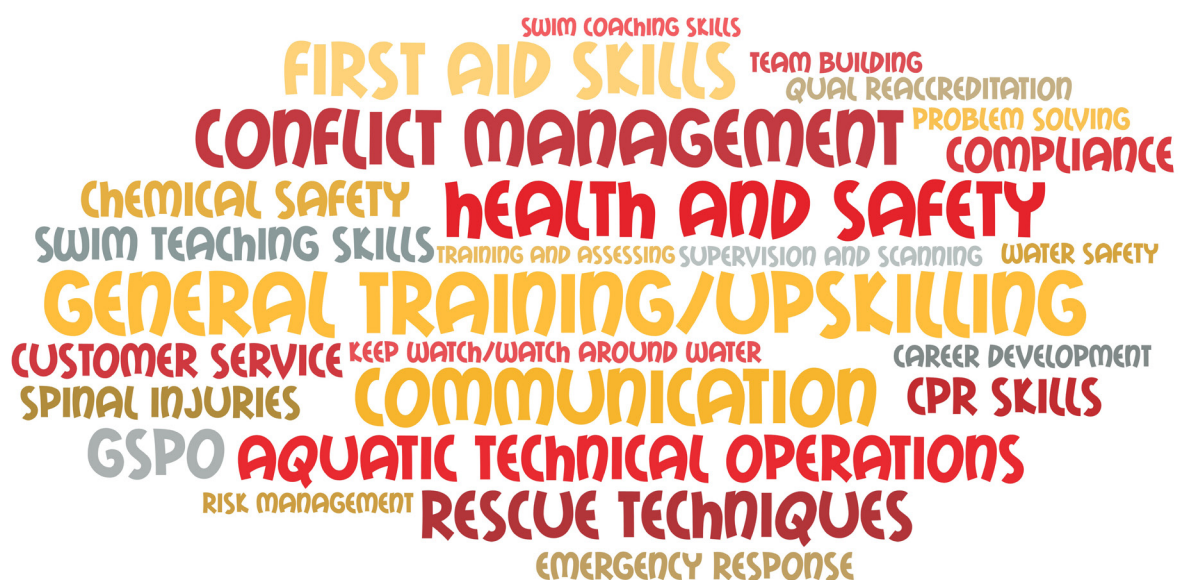
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – PREFERRED PD TOPICS

Q.57 asked respondents to list up to 5 of their preferred PD topics. A thematic analysis was done to collate similar responses and produce the word clouds below. 'Swim Teaching Skills' is a merged category that captures the range of swim teaching related PD topics nominated by respondents. This category has been expanded in the 'Swimming and Water Safety Teacher' and 'Swim School Manager or Coordinator' word clouds on page 18.

Preferred PD Topics All Workforce



Preferred PD Topics Pool Lifeguards



“

Sometimes it is not just the topic, it can be the quality of the presenter and their ability to engage.”

Preferred PD Topics
Centre Manager



Preferred PD Topics
Lifeguard Duty Manager



Preferred PD Topics
Swimming and Water Safety Teacher



Preferred PD Topics
Swim School Manager or Coordinator



Preferred PD Topics
Aquatic Technical Operator



LIWA CONFERENCE
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MARKETING
PROJECT MANAGEMENT CUSTOMER SERVICE HEALTH AND SAFETY QUAL REACCREDITATION
COMMUNICATION IT SOFTWARE/SYSTEMS CULTURAL DIVERSITY
AQUATIC TECHNICAL OPERATIONS
TRAINING AND ASSESSING GENERAL TRAINING/UPSKILLING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
FIRST AID SKILLS TECHNOLOGY
CHANGE MANAGEMENT
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Preferred PD Topics
Office Worker



MARKETING
SWIM TEACHING SKILLS
HEALTH AND SAFETY MENTORING
HR SKILLS PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
CULTURAL DIVERSITY BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT
PROJECT MANAGEMENT
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
COMPLIANCE
SUPERVISION AND SCANNING
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
TEAM BUILDING CUSTOMER SERVICE
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT LIFEGUARDING IT SOFTWARE/SYSTEMS COMMUNICATION
LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT
FITNESS TRAINING AND ASSESSING QUAL REACCREDITATION
WATER SAFETY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROBLEM SOLVING
RISK MANAGEMENT
CAREER DEVELOPMENT
AQUATIC TECHNICAL OPERATIONS

(Includes: Executives, General Management, Finance, HR, IT, Business Development/
Marketing, Customer Service, General Administration, etc)

DISCUSSION AND POINTS TO CONSIDER

Employment Experience

- Workers typically join the industry through 'community-based' channels such as 'being involved in swimming', 'attending a local facility' and 'through word of mouth' or 'discussion with friends and family'. Workers derive satisfaction from interacting with patrons and colleagues, and helping people and the community. In the main, it is a people-driven and community-driven profession. Fostering strong and positive connections between work teams and between workers and their local community will strengthen the organisation and the industry.
- Over 60% of workers had a good experience in the induction process but it would be good to see an improvement in the less positive ratings (4% very poor, 7% poor, 26% okay). Especially given induction was rated as 'important' by 36% or 'very important' by 39% of workers in developing the skills needed for the job.
- The main reasons people leave the industry, 'not enough work hours', 'poor pay' and 'lack of career opportunity' all point to the need to diversify roles. It is also worth noting that 'requirements around renewing qualifications' came in 5th at 22%.
- One way to 'improve pay and work conditions' is to diversify roles and provide a broad range of horizontal opportunities, thereby shifting the focus from vertical opportunity, which is often quite limited. Horizontal opportunity enables workers to explore a variety of stimulating, challenging and career-building experiences beyond the scope of their primary role. This allows them to develop a diverse range of skills and fosters flexibility and adaptability for the individual and the organisation. It also makes individuals more valuable to the organisation, which can help to move workers out of tenuous casual roles and onto permanent contracts.
- A significant challenge for the aquatic industry is the highly casualised workforce. While it is understandable that there is a high percentage of casual workers in the first year of employment, the fact that for those employed between 1-5 years the casual rate is still double that of permanent is a concern (see Table below).
- Casual workers generally have less connection – less buy-in – with the organisation and equally the organisation is less inclined to invest in and develop a casual worker. While there are shared positives to casual work arrangements, the aquatic industry often loses workers that want to work, learn and offer more but end up leaving because of 'lack of work hours', 'poor pay' and 'lack of opportunity'. Identifying, supporting and developing such workers through mentoring programs, diversifying roles (i.e. multiple-role positions) and offering permanent contracts is likely to benefit the organisation as well as the industry and the communities they work in.
- Along with greater diversity in the workplace – sourced from the local community – staff that work regular shifts and remain with the facility for extended periods are generally better able to establish relationships and build rapport with patrons and colleagues – further enhancing stronger connections between the facility and the local community.
- A key challenge for the industry is to rethink roles and job design and reshape them in a manner that better meets workers' needs and motivations and that facilitates the creation of more permanent full-time and part-time roles.

Qualifications and Skills

- 62% of workers gained a qualification to work by obtaining a nationally recognised skill set. Skill sets are providing an effective entry mechanism into industry, in particular for swimming and water safety teachers, pool lifeguards and aquatic technical operators. However, there is potentially a lack of aquatic industry specific qualification options (e.g. Certificate IV and Diploma) beyond these skill sets.
- 'Study prior to commencing the role' was rated almost as important as 'initial on-the-job training' in facilitating skill development. As expected, 'day-to-day experience performing the role' is most important in giving workers the skills to perform the job. Nonetheless, the quality of the course that enables entry into a role is important.
- Workers rated 'Verbal Communication', 'Customer Service' and 'Teamwork and Collaboration' as most important for success. This aligns with the fact that the aquatic industry is ultimately a people-driven, community-driven and service-based industry. Successful organisations will be those that recognise and prioritise the importance of these skills in their workers. The benefits will be more effective work teams and more satisfied workers and customers.

Years actively employed in the aquatic industry	% Casual	% Permanent (FT & PT)
<1	75	19
1-5	63	30
6-10	46	45
11-20	29	56
21+	27	52

Safety, Injury and Wellbeing

- More than three-quarters of respondents have never sustained an injury at work. However, this percentage varies according to profession. Aquatic technical operators had the highest injury rate and this was followed by those in management positions. It is likely this correlates to the length of time in the role, i.e. more time equals a greater chance of injury, and the variety of tasks, often ad hoc, that management roles are required to undertake.

Role	% Sustained an injury at work	% Haven't sustained an injury at work
All Workforce	22	78
Pool Lifeguard	16	84
Centre Manager	31	69
Lifeguard Duty Manager	30	70
Swimming and Water Safety Teacher	18	82
Swim School Manager or Coordinator	26	74
Aquatic Technical Operator	43	57
Office Worker	21	79

- Just under a third of workers (31%) (that sustained an injury) were able to return to full duties after 1 day and 33% were able to return within 2-7 days. The percentages for those positions with the highest injury rate align with the broader workforce for minor injuries:
 - Aquatic technical operators: 32% returned after 1 day and 26% within 2-7 days
 - Management positions (centre manager, lifeguard duty manager, swim school manager or coordinator): 30% returned after 1 day and 37% within 2-7 days.
- With regard to more significant injuries, 25% of workers required at least 15 days before being able to return to work and 8% required 4 months or more. Similarly, 27% of aquatic technical operators required at least 15 days before being able to return to work; however, none required 4 months or more. 23% of management positions required at least 15 days before being able to return to work, with 9% requiring 4 months or more.
- It is worth looking into why almost 10% of those in management positions sustained an injury that required 4 months or more recovery time.

- The PD word clouds on pages 16-19 indicate that health and safety was commonly rated as a preferred PD topic by aquatic technical operators and those in management positions. It is also worth noting that 'safety, compliance and legal requirements' was rated as the main area in which change has occurred.

Change

- Almost three-quarters of workers experienced at least a 'moderate degree of change' and over one-third of this group indicated they experienced a 'large or very large degree of change'. When this is reviewed in relation to the areas where workers indicate change has occurred, see Chart on page 13, the likelihood of their being a steady flow of change-related challenges – many with potentially significant consequences for the organisation (e.g. around health and safety, and customer and employee experience) – becomes clear.
- Change generates uncertainty and ambiguity. It requires being able to understand and apply new ways of working, which can lead to confusion and errors. In a changing work environment calling on skills and attributes around communication, teamwork, problem solving, conflict management, adaptation and resilience becomes the norm and a worker's ability to effectively apply these skills and attributes becomes increasingly important.
- Leaders that have all of the above skills and attributes, as well as experience in change management, will therefore potentially be of greater value to an organisation and the aquatic industry in general.

“

I would like to see a greater focus on research within the industry particularly around the safety and longevity of employees.”

Professional Development

- The fact that 16% of workers have never undertaken PD during their time in the aquatic industry is a concern. The Table below demonstrates how this percentage changes in relation to time in the industry.

Years actively employed in aquatic industry	% Undertaken PD	% Never Undertaken PD
<1	44	56
1-5	73	27
6-10	92	8
11-20	97	3
21+	98	2

- Given the need for new workers to establish a meaningful connection to their industry and that new workers have a strong need to develop their industry-related skills and networks, the fact that 56% have never undertaken a PD activity needs to be addressed. Likewise, the fact that over a quarter of workers (27%) that have been in the industry 1-5 years have never undertaken a PD activity needs to be reviewed and addressed.
- Almost one quarter (24%) of workers that undertake PD 'rarely' or 'never' have the cost covered by their employer. When combined with the 16% that have never undertaken PD this is a significant proportion of the workforce that are not undertaking PD or that are unsupported by their employer when they do PD.
- Price, scheduling, investment of time, relevance of content and skills of the presenter are all commonly identified issues associated with PD. The first 3 of these issues present particularly acute challenges for casual staff and those in regional and remote areas who generally incur greater travel costs and time to attend PD.
- There is a strong sentiment that casual and permanent part-time workers, which represent approximately 62% of the workforce, do not earn enough in relation to the price of attending PD combined with the additional costs associated with meeting reaccreditation requirements.
- While face-to-face PD sessions are generally preferred and considered most effective (see Chart on page 15), other forms of PD still have an important role to play. Across all forms of PD, there needs to be an especially strong focus on ensuring it is of high quality and that it engages and meets the needs of participants' thereby representing value for money and time.

- Access to PD is an ongoing challenge for workers in regional and remote areas. This is reflected in the fact that 55% of regional and remote workers undertake 1-2 PD sessions per year compared to 40% of workers based in major capital cities. (Note that the above figures are drawn from the percentage of workers that indicated they have undertaken PD at some point in their aquatic industry career. 15% of regional and remote workers and 17% of workers based in major capital cities indicated they have never undertaken PD while working in the aquatic industry.)

Impact of Work Location

Responses indicated that 'not enough work hours' and the 'seasonal nature of the work' are more of an issue for workers in regional and remote areas than for those based in major capital cities, see Charts on page 13. This aligns with the fact that 29% of workers in regional and remote areas work between 1-24 weeks per year, compared to 15% of workers based in major capital cities.

Alongside limited work hours and challenges accessing PD, survey responses indicated that there are a range of areas where owners, management and staff at regional and remote facilities face heightened operational challenges. These include:

- Small community populations resulting in smaller networks of potential customers/patrons, staff and volunteers
- Finding, recruiting, training, rostering and retaining appropriately skilled staff in order to be able to offer a range of products and services
- Facility and equipment operation, maintenance and repair, including meeting energy costs and access to technicians, parts and products
- Haphazard patron attendance
- Extreme weather and weather events
- Maintaining a positive relationship with community members when needs and expectations don't align (e.g. around facility rules and safety requirements).



Rural areas are poorly paid but it is difficult as customers have limited means too. Yet the cost of running an indoor pool is the same regardless of where it is located in a city or regional area. Our electricity prices are the biggest overhead. We need cheaper power."





RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information collected from the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Development Survey and the Preliminary Research Report by Griffith University on Job Demands, Resources and Occupational Stress for Pool Lifeguards the following recommendations for the development of the aquatic industry workforce and thereby strengthening of the aquatic industry have been proposed for further discussion.

Recognition

- Promote and clarify the use of the appropriate industrial employment award to determine minimum worker remuneration and conditions
- Review current recognition awards programs with the goal of achieving a nationally consistent approach that results in improved awareness and recognition of excellence in the full range of industry roles.

Professional Development

- Benchmark, promote and support best practice in PD resources, program design and provision
- Develop an industry-driven PD quality assurance system
- Establish firm links between PD and mentoring programs, opportunity and reaccreditation (see below)

Mentoring

- Establish, promote and support an industry mentoring program linked to PD requirements and reaccreditation and linked to developing and formalising multiple-role capacity

Opportunity

- Establish multiple-role positions and clear career pathways and support organisations to facilitate worker uptake of these roles, chiefly through mentoring programs and qualification pathways (see below).
- Investigate the development of clear qualification pathways within the industry and drive development of new qualifications where necessary
- Link mentoring programs to PD and reaccreditation requirements

Regional and Remote Support

- The NAISC form a working group tasked with:
 - Better understanding and articulating the unique challenges faced by regional and remote facilities and their workers
 - Developing short, medium and long term strategies to support better outcomes in response to these challenges
- Establish immediate mechanisms to connect and support facilities in regional and remote settings
- Enable greater access to PD for regional workers

Community and Diversity

- Further promote and reinforce the message that aquatic facilities are a vital part of local communities
- Develop and communicate innovative and sustainable strategies and programs for facilities to deeply and broadly engage with their local communities
- Foster a workforce that is representative of the local community and actively seeks workers from a wide range of backgrounds, skills and experiences within that community or beyond

Health and Safety

- Strengthen training around skills, knowledge and requirements for ensuring staff safety in an aquatic facility context
- Establish, promote and support the implementation of industry benchmarks in managing health and safety for workers in 4 key areas:
 - Balancing job demands with available resources
 - Working with or in environments that contain chemicals, including being in the swimming pool
 - Ongoing wellbeing of workers after traumatic events such as rescues or other emergencies
 - Ongoing wellbeing of workers dealing with conflict or other workplace situations that can negatively affect wellbeing and performance
- Investigate research needs and opportunities in the area of worker health and safety in the aquatic industry

Reaccreditation

- Investigate an alternative model for lifeguard ongoing reaccreditation requirements. For example, annual reaccreditation online with face-to-face every 3 years.
- Reinforce requirements for 4 PD sessions per year and maintenance of PD log books

Leadership & Management

- Establish greater emphasis on aquatic industry and aquatic facility knowledge and know-how in qualification training
- Develop a vocational qualification or series of qualifications with a primary focus on knowledge and skills required for aquatic facility management in a range of contexts
- Establish, promote and support the implementation of industry benchmarks in quality leadership and management

Further Research

- Review and evaluate status of the challenges raised in these Recommendations every 3 years
- Review and evaluate projects that are undertaken as part of the Workforce Development Strategy every 3 years.

NOTES AND RESPONDENT COMMENTS

Other Roles

Royal Life Saving acknowledges that there are a variety of roles that have not been highlighted in the Workforce Profile and Workforce Report publications and that these roles are equally important in their contribution to the aquatic industry. These roles were not included due to smaller response numbers.

Other roles included in Q15 of the survey were: group fitness instructor, swim coach, pool lifesaving coach, auditor/risk assessor, instructor/examiner, vocational trainer and assessor. This question also provided a free text box titled 'other'. The list below broadly captures respondents' entries:

- Owner, teacher, cleaner, customer service, manager – the lot!
- Access and inclusion teacher/coordinator
- I am risk assessor, on deck supervisor, lifeguard, coach, instructor, trainer and assessor
- My job is more than 1 role: customer service officer, swim and water safety teacher, swim school coordinator/supervisor
- Aqua fitness instructor and swim teacher
- Instructor, swim school operator and teacher of swimming and water safety, group fitness
- Swim school owner
- Swim instructor and pool manager
- Special needs teacher
- Instructor, curriculum creator, marketing etc
- Owner/operator
- Teaching and coaching 50/50 split
- Manager/swim instructor/aqua instructor/swim coach/lifeguard
- Business owner and head coach
- Centre manager/lifeguard/swim instructor/aquatic trainer/VET
- Recreation and community facilities coordinator
- Quality and compliance manager

Volunteers

It is important to highlight the significant contribution that the volunteer workforce makes to the aquatic industry. Without their dedication, aquatic sport and recreation, and many of the organisations, clubs and communities that rely on their time and efforts, would not be able to function. As the aquatic industry, like many others, looks to bounce back from COVID-19, the knowledge, skills, positivity and resilience of the paid and unpaid workforce will be more important than ever.

COVID-19

The Aquatic Industry Workforce Development Project was conceived of and commenced in a pre-COVID 19 world. This report was under development when the economic effects of COVID-19 took hold. Royal Life Saving estimates the impacts of COVID-19 on the aquatic industry include:

- The closure of more than 1,077 aquatic facilities, the majority of which are owned by local councils, and more than 1,176 swim schools, including many small businesses, across Australia – many of which have not yet re-opened at the time of publication.
- Loss of employment or significant reduction in work hours for many of the 67,000 frontline workers, of which almost half are casual employees, three-quarters are female and 40% are between the ages of 18 to 24 years.
- Particular distress and disadvantage for those aquatic industry workers that were unable to access JobKeeper.
- A loss of approximately \$900 million in lost revenue, and \$430 million in lost wages as a result of a six-month closure.

It is also worth noting the positive mental and physical health impacts that come with swimming and exercising and that few sports have the critical lifesaving elements that come with swimming and water safety.

With these broad impacts in mind – along with the flow-on effects at state/territory, regional, community and individual levels – Royal Life Saving and the National Aquatic Industry Safety Committee (NAISC) believes the wider goals of the project, and the information, commentary and recommendations contained within this Report will continue to be highly relevant as the industry strives to return to a stronger new normal. It is also worth referring to the Royal Life Saving communication issued on 30 April 2020 titled, 'COVID-19 Pandemic and the Case for Re-Opening Aquatic Centres and Swim Schools' for more information on specific COVID-19 recovery strategies for aquatic centres and swim schools.

Respondent Comments

The final question of the survey asked respondents to provide other thoughts and comments on any topics covered in the survey or the aquatics industry in general. A representative collection of respondents' comments are highlighted below.

Would be good to see stronger recommendations around safety and professional development.

Rural areas are poorly paid but it is difficult as customers have limited means too. Yet the cost of running an indoor pool is the same regardless of where it is located in a city or regional area. Our electricity prices are the biggest overhead. We need cheaper power. Perhaps you can lobby for that.

I cannot stress enough the need for employers to financially support mandatory reaccreditation requirements. Also I feel as though lifeguards voices are not listened to at all in the industry, maybe due to us being at the bottom of the ladder, when higher up managements make decisions and changes to our physical area or the process of our job. We should be the first people to come and talk to for ideas of how to make things better for staff and patrons.

Given the amount of training a swim teacher "should" be undertaking the wages need to be looked at as the cost of PD's are generally quite high and not always available in regional areas.

Sometimes it is not just the topic, it can be the quality of the presenter and their ability to engage.

There seems to be a push for online content, we need to discourage online and push for more PD sessions because these encourage/enhance and nurture team effectiveness and culture.

I would like to see a greater focus on research within the industry particularly around the safety and longevity of employees.

I make a huge point in my life of promoting the Aquatics industry as a positive place of employment. There are many life skills that can be gained and the reward of working closely with your local community is of great benefit on an interpersonal level.

I find my job as a swimming instructor rewarding and enjoyable, teaching a range of age groups from infants to adults and I am forever learning. We are reasonably paid for the hours we work but we are not guaranteed constant and reliable hours and have difficulty recruiting younger staff. I have seen a number of changes at the facility where I work and a number of restructures, not all of them successful. I have also seen a number of respected and reliable staff seek other employment. It has always been explained to me that it is the nature of the beast in the recreation/aquatic industry. I personally believe it has been because of how the facility has been managed.

Minimum hours for work needs review, other awards have a minimum of 2 hours. Rate of pay is poor for the responsibility and the required on going licencing and qualification costs. Penalty rates for weekend and public holidays are not competitive with other industries.

There needs to be a better focus on providing pathways for development for people who actually want to work in the aquatic industry, rather than people who use it as a summer job or students who come and go.

I think the cost of PD is the greatest issue for many teachers, we are not high income earners.

I get very frustrated with the low hourly pay rate combined with no minimum hours. I can't afford to work more than I do because it isn't worth me driving 40 mins one way for 1.5 hrs of work. I'm fortunate in that I can afford to do this for fun for a couple of hours whilst my kids swim but I couldn't justify it as a career choice. Plus we pay for registration, CPR, and then for access to PD (which is not always useful). Finding really good effective swimming teachers is hard because most teachers with intelligence move on to more lucrative careers. It's frustrating as a parent and as a teacher.

I feel that the aquatics industry provides an essential service to the community and I am proud to be a part of it. I strongly believe that learning to swim is an essential skill to learn and everyone should be encouraged to learn.

More permanent positions and greater options to grow in the industry with higher pay rates and permanent positions would help people like me, this job isn't just a money maker while I'm going to uni it's not just a stepping stone while I wait for my "real" job to come along. This is the job I want to do FOREVER, I love what I do and honestly care about it and hope I can find ways to be able to continue to do it and not have to go back to another job just because I need to make more money to live.

There is a great amount of PD for full time management staff - we need to look at low cost PD for casual staff who usually have to fund themselves and give up their own time. I think online options with optional face to face would work for this.

In rural and remote areas it is often difficult to get to PD sessions and therefore online resources would be greatly valued.

I believe it is a great active industry to be involved in. I love how much you introduce and can grow with a community by being an outstanding aquatics centre. Your efforts are generally only limited to your staff of a facility and budget. (of course!).

Better pay, strong training and career paths will serve to encourage good staff and reduce turnover.

I love working in the aquatic industry and have for 24 years including sport and recreation, coaching etc. I think the larger presence for mentor/mentee programs are needed. There are so many knowledgeable and passionate people that could be utilized to support and grow the industry. Giving both the younger generation and new individuals a platform for development when coming into the industry will not only retain them and have longstanding expertise but allow more career paths for workers who wish to progress.

A very disappointing industry to work in over time, considering how important the messages are we are supposed to deliver. Not enough importance placed or pay directed on grass roots knowledge and participation. Very difficult to keep experienced and keen staff with such poor employment conditions.

The lack of career progression and frustration working at swim schools inspired me to start out on my own. I now manage, teach and train and have a great set of staff, I pay above award, offer perm contracts not casual after an initial period provide PD and part fund training to those staff who go the extra mile. I also pay for setup and clean away time. All things I did not get when working for some schools.

The varied health and safety practices across the industry are concerning. I think in general employees don't speak up because they are afraid to lose hours (being casual).

I love my job I enjoy helping others as living in a country area it would help with PD session made available in the region at affordable prices.

Living and working in a regional town can make it expensive to attend industry events - cost of travel and accommodation.

The aquatic industry lacks clear vision. There are very few available pathways for employees within the industry to advance/progress. Pay rates are very low, I am unable to earn enough with my full-time job to live out of home unless I lived 1.5-2 hours from where I work. I have been nominated for advancement several times, however, there are no opportunities available for me to advance into. For all of these reasons and more, I will not remain in this industry.

I would like to see more permanent -part time / full time jobs offered. Also some 'rules/guidelines' about consistency in shifts amongst workers to enable public relations to be built with staff and patrons. I.e: staff on the same day and shift each week to allow them to get to know the regulars at centres/pools. This helps by knowing people's movements, medical conditions, abilities etc and to help with safety etc.

Many employees do not receive the basic entitlements under the Fitness Award let alone anything more. I constantly see great people leave the industry because it is not a viable option for them to support themselves let alone a family, particularly when looking at aquatics as a 'career option' not just a job to support them whilst young and studying.

Through discussions with others and my own experience in my workplace, the wage we are paid is too little for the level of qualification we are expected to have and to continue to develop- the main reason I have seen people leave the industry is because they feel that they are not being paid on par with their qualifications and thus they seek work which acknowledges their skills and professionalism to a greater extent.

Love working within the industry. I think initial courses need to be adjusted to be more interactive and cohesive with what the workplace is like as an i.e. swimming and water safety teacher. I think more collaborative facilitation sessions would be useful to help get answers to problems we may have as teachers.

There is a disparity in the pay rates across not only Sydney but also across Australia. The pay structure needs to be brought into line so that all centres have equal opportunities in relation to hiring staff. I believe that employers should cover the cost of renewing all qualifications relevant to one's role and not only for permanent employees but also for casual employees.

Comments from Preliminary Research Report – Investigating Job Demands, Resources and Occupational Stress in Pool Lifeguards in Australia

(Griffith University Keech, J.J., Smith, S.R. & Hamilton, K. (2020). Griffith University, Brisbane, & Royal Life Saving Society – Australia)

And then there's the parents who bring their kids to the pool who consider lifeguards to be babysitters. And they just sit on the side of the pool playing on their phone while we attend to their children who get into trouble every ten minutes because they're doing the things we've told them not to do. (Interview 11)

I just feel like it's a very community based job, it's kind of like how people explain the fireies or the police, kind of like brothers and sisters I guess. I feel like knowing the patrons and yes getting to know a lot of people that you wouldn't necessarily cross paths with normally and learning about them and seeing them every week. (Interview 12)



Duty Manager

Z

RESCUE

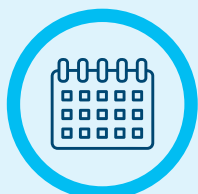
METHODS

Survey and Qualitative Research

The survey was developed in-house at Royal Life Saving National Office using Survey Monkey and a draft survey was piloted with members of the NAISC and the Royal Life Saving Training and Workforce Development Committee. This was subsequently refined based on feedback and then deployed.

In addition to this, a qualitative study involving a series of lifeguard interviews was conducted by Griffith University, Brisbane, and Royal Life Saving Society – Australia. Information from the Preliminary Research Report, 'Investigating Job Demands, Resources and Occupational Stress in Pool Lifeguards in Australia' has also been used in compiling this document. The results in the Charts in this Report may not sum to 100% due to rounding, or multiple options that could be selected.

THE SURVEY – QUICK FACTS



OPENED 15 April 2019
CLOSED 14 June 2019



**SURVEY DESIGN
AND DEPLOYMENT:**
Survey Monkey

PROMOTED THROUGH

National Aquatic Industry Safety Committee Member Organisations, Royal Life Saving National Office, Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations, aquatic facilities, local councils, swim schools, aquatic industry media providers, aquatic industry job site providers, and a range of other aquatic industry bodies, and government and non-government organisations.

PROMOTIONAL TOOLS USED



**ORGANISATION
WEBSITES**



EMAIL



**SOCIAL
MEDIA**



E-MAGAZINES



**TOTAL NUMBER
OF QUESTIONS**



**AVERAGE TIME SPENT
PER RESPONDENT**



**TOTAL
RESPONDENTS**

Industry Size

The total industry figure (67,000) was estimated through a modelling process using data from the sources below.

- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Sports Commission – Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017
- Australian Industry and Skills Committee – National Industry Insights Report
- AUSTSWIM – Annual Report 2017-2018
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research – VOCSTATS
- Royal Life Saving Society – Australia Databases and Reports
 - National Database of Swim Schools
 - National Database of Aquatic Facilities
 - Economic Benefits of Australia's Public Aquatic Facilities (2017)
 - National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey (2019)
- Royal Life Saving Society WA and Leisure Institute of WA (LIWA) Reports
 - Bigger, Safer, Better Report 2017-18
 - Bigger, Safer, Better Report 2016-17
 - Bigger, Safer, Better Report 2015-16
- Service Skills Australia – Environmental Scan 2015 Sport Fitness and Recreation
- Skills IQ – Sport and Recreation Industry Reference Committee – Industry Skills Forecast 2018

The aquatic industry research of the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia is supported by the Australian Government.

This estimate is based on the following assumptions and limitations:

- For the purposes of the study, the 'aquatic industry workforce' is defined as those who are paid workers
- Many roles are casual, part-time, seasonal and fluid in nature
- Many aquatic industry workers are self-employed (i.e. run their own business)
- Aquatic industry workers often fulfil multiple roles but this was not a question directly asked in the survey (e.g. an individual may be a centre manager, aquatic technical operator, swim school coordinator and lifeguard duty manager)

The assumptions and outputs were cross-checked against the above sources and subject to internal peer review.

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia would like to thank the following Organisations for their assistance in producing the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey and the and the subsequent Workforce Profile and Workforce Report publications that have followed:

- Aquatics and Recreation Institute (ARI)
- Aquatics and Recreation Victoria (ARV)
- Australasian Council for the Teaching of Swimming and Water Safety (AUSTSWIM)
- Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA)
- Belgravia Leisure
- Brisbane City Council – Queensland
- Griffith University, Brisbane
- Leisure Institute of Western Australia (LIWA)
- Lifesaving Victoria
- Recreation South Australia
- Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs)
- Swimming Australia
- The Y (YMCA)
- VIVA Leisure

Recommended Citation:




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