



National Aquatic Industry Workforce Report 2023

Data collected and collated from the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey.

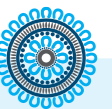


ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians and Elders past and present across Australia, with particular acknowledgment to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of the lands where our offices are located. We pay our respects to Australia's First Nations cultural and spiritual connections to water, and acknowledge the land where we work, live and play always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

> FOREWORD

In 2019 the Royal Life Saving Society - Australia, with the support of the then-National Aquatic Industry Safety Committee (NAISC), collected data about the workforce of the national aquatic industry. From that data it published a workforce profile in 2019 and a workforce report in 2020, which were critical in advocating on behalf of the aquatic industry during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The data and resulting publications raised the profile of the aquatic industry to policymakers and informed later work advocating the social, health and economic benefits of the industry.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia, with the support of the National Aquatic Industry Committee (NAIC), instigated a follow-up survey in late 2022 to collect national aquatic industry workforce data. The survey presents demographic information on the key roles and make-up of the workforce across Australia and received more than 2000 responses. The National Aquatic Industry Workforce Report 2023 is primarily based on data collected and collated from the survey and includes some additional datapoints.

This report will be used to inform advocacy, strategies and programs centered on challenges and opportunities for the aquatic industry. It will assist in shaping our collective activities and developing a workforce framework to support strengthened safety and quality of service and the attraction and retention of key industry roles.

In March 2023, Royal Life Saving Society – Australia held a National Aquatic Industry Symposium, which looked at the workforce challenges being faced by the sector's leadership. The data in this report and the outcomes of the Symposium Declaration highlight the skills, dedication, and resilience that characterise the aquatic industry.

This report provides an evidence base that can be used for reinforcing the industry's agenda to address key short-, mid- and long- term challenges facing the sector and policymakers.

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia would like to thank its State and Territory Members Organisations and the member organisations of the National Aquatic Industry Committee, listed on page 55, for their support of this vital workforce research and advocacy.



Scan the QR code to view the National Aquatics Symposium 2023 Report and Declaration



> EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The national aquatic industry workforce comprises approximately 65,000 workers, a contraction since 2019. There was an estimated workforce shortfall of around 5,000 workers over the summer of 2022-23.

The report provides a comparison to the 2019 workforce profile, as well as data on the direct effects of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns on individual workers and the workforce generally.

The findings demonstrate that many of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns are still having ripple effects today, particularly the loss of skilled staff and ongoing staff shortages. It highlights where improvements can be made, for example in supporting and retaining staff, and building a more diverse workforce.

It also highlights where strengths can be harnessed, for example around flexibility of roles, high value employability skills, connection to local communities, and a genuine passion within the workforce for helping people to enjoy the water safely.

Key recommendations include:

- > Encourage career pathways and support for workers to develop into higher roles in industry, particularly women.
- > Recognise that workers in the aquatic industry want not just a job, but a lifestyle, connection and meaningful engagement.
- > Develop incentives and strategies that attract and retain quality staff.
- > Foster a workforce that is representative of the local community by actively seeking workers from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds.
- > Investigate, review and develop a nationally consistent workforce framework which captures and standardises approaches to professional development, reaccreditation and career development pathways.

The expanded list of recommendations can be found on page 52 of this report.

Key findings include:

- > More than half of the workforce (58%) are female although there is greater gender parity compared to 2019.
- > One in every 25 workers (4%) identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- > Most workers draw satisfaction from making a positive impact on people's lives and the community and interacting with patrons and colleagues.
- > Sixty-one per cent of workers perform more than one role in the aquatic industry.
- > More than a third of workers think they will stay in their role for six or more years.
- > Half of all pool lifeguards work seasonally.
- > Students make up 60 per cent of the pool lifeguard workforce, and 61 per cent are under the age of 25.
- > Fifty-five per cent of swimming and water safety teachers are over the age of 45 and one in four (25%) are under the age of 25.
- > More work needs to be done to encourage gender parity in senior leadership roles, with only 44 per cent of centre managers being female.
- > More work needs to be done to encourage multicultural communities to take up employment in the industry with fewer than 13 per cent of industry employees born overseas, in contrast to the 27 per cent of the population who are born overseas.
- > More than one-third (34%) of the workforce work casually and just under half (43%) work 15 hours or less a week.
- > The percentage of workers that work more than 23 hours a week has increased from 25 per cent in 2019 to 37 per cent in 2022.
- > Forty-two per cent of workers that were employed in the aquatic industry during the COVID-19 lockdowns period were stood down and just under half received JobKeeper.
- > Of those stood down, 27 per cent found employment in another industry.



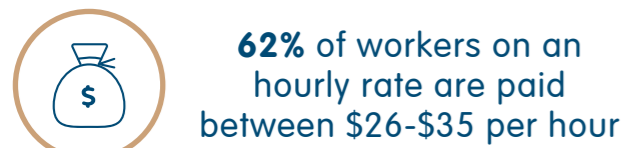
The industry is mostly female



- 1% Non-binary**
- 1% Prefer not to say**

Approximately one in every 25 workers identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

3.2% of the population identify as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2022)¹.



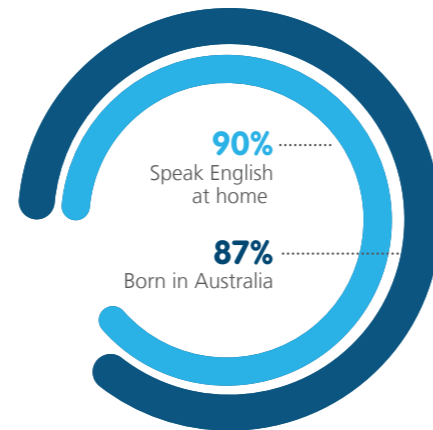
The median national hourly wage across all industries is \$37 per hour, and \$31.25 in community and personal service sectors².

Lifestyle and career were important factors to taking up work in the aquatic industry

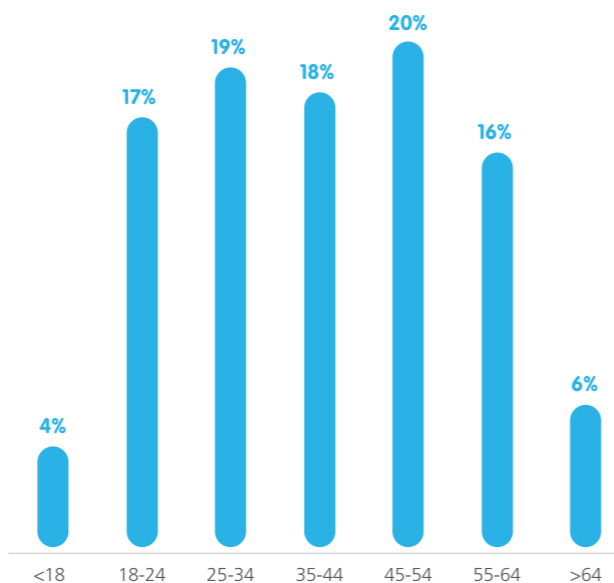
- #1** User of facilities prior to employment
- #2** It suited my lifestyle
- #3** Career opportunity

Most workers were born in Australia and speak English at home

27.6% of Australians are born overseas (ABS 2022)².



The workforce has a broad and evenly spread age spectrum

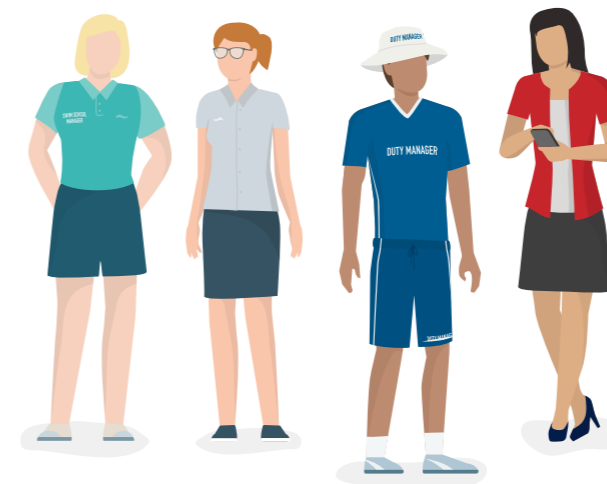
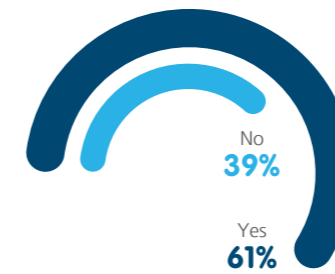


There is a significant casual workforce

*20% of the Australian workforce works casually (ABS 2022)⁴.



More than half perform more than 1 role

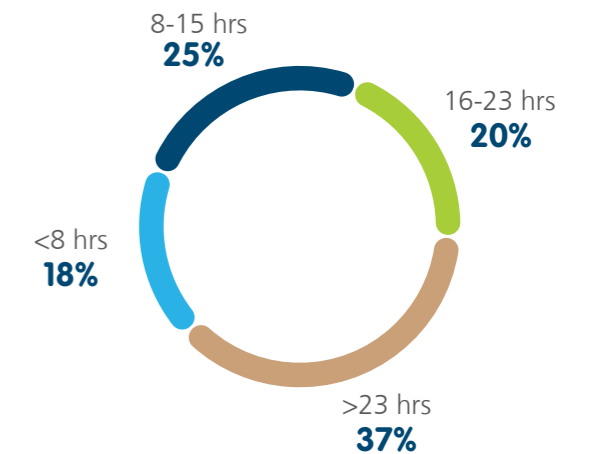


Most workers work at a public swimming pool managed by government or private operator

Public swimming pool managed by council or state govt
43%



A little less than two-thirds work less than 24 hours per week.



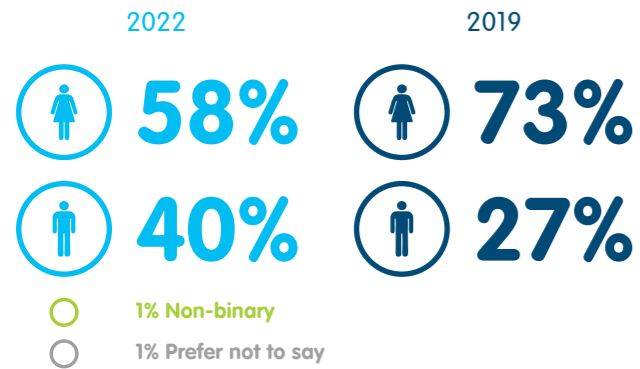
Workers ranked the following as most important:

- #1** Good management and leadership
- #2** Child-safe environment
- #3** Positive and collegial work environment
- #4** Water safety and drowning prevention
- #5** Improved pay and work conditions
- #6** Diversity and inclusion

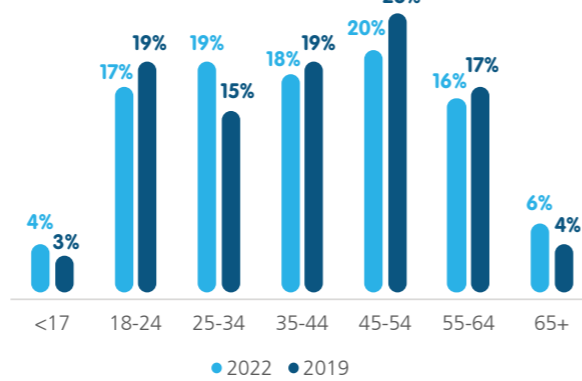
Workers gain enjoyment and satisfaction from

- #1** Making a positive impact on people's lives
- #2** Helping make people safe around water
- #3** Interaction with customers

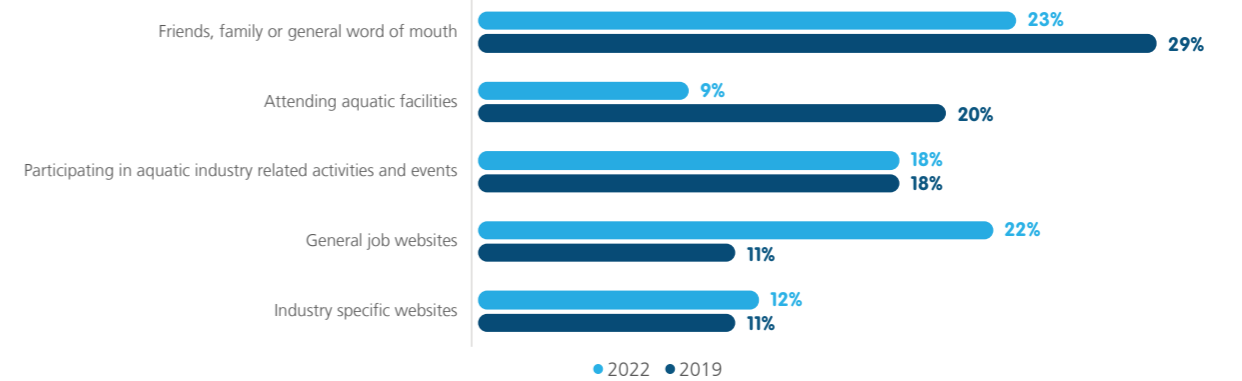
Gender



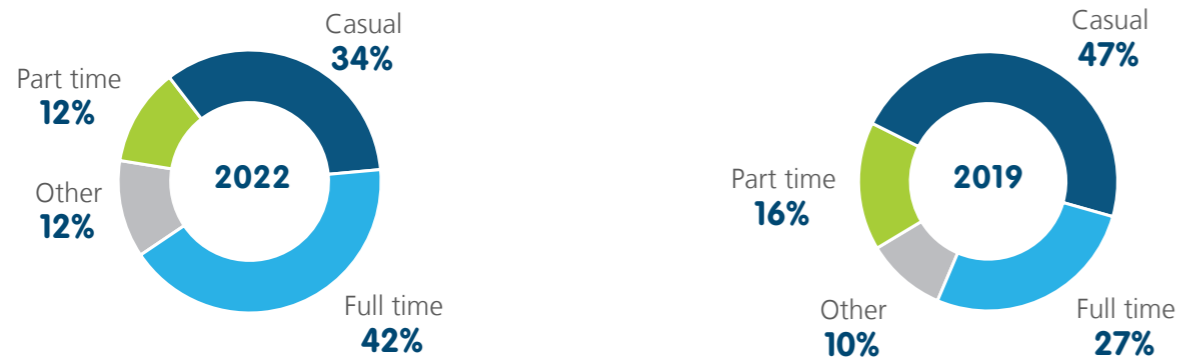
Age



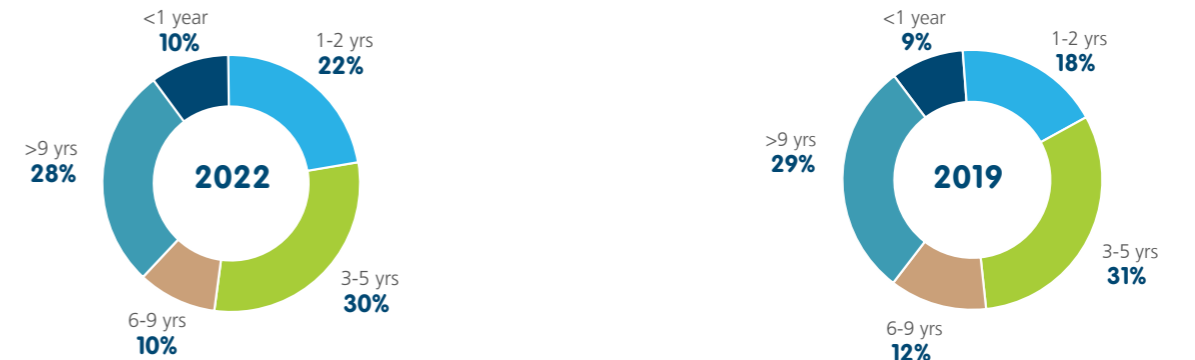
Learnt about jobs in industry



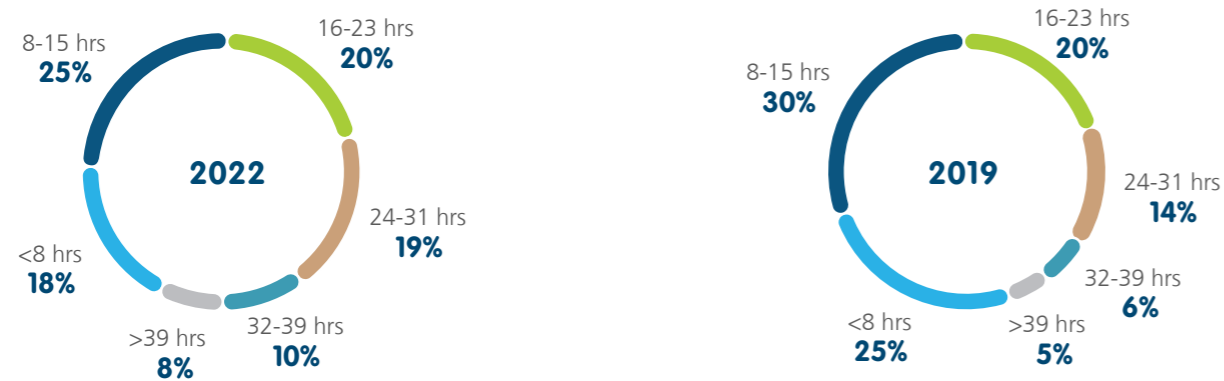
Employment Status



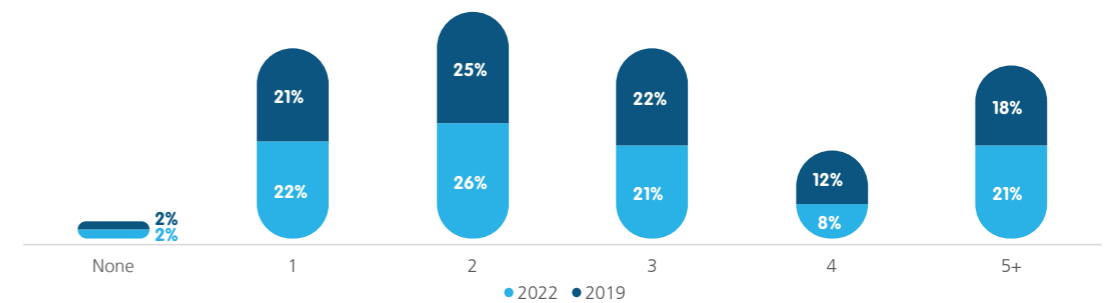
Intend to work in current role



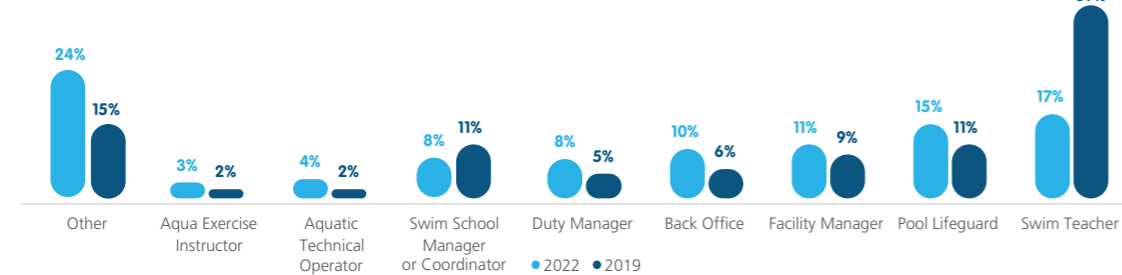
Hours worked per week



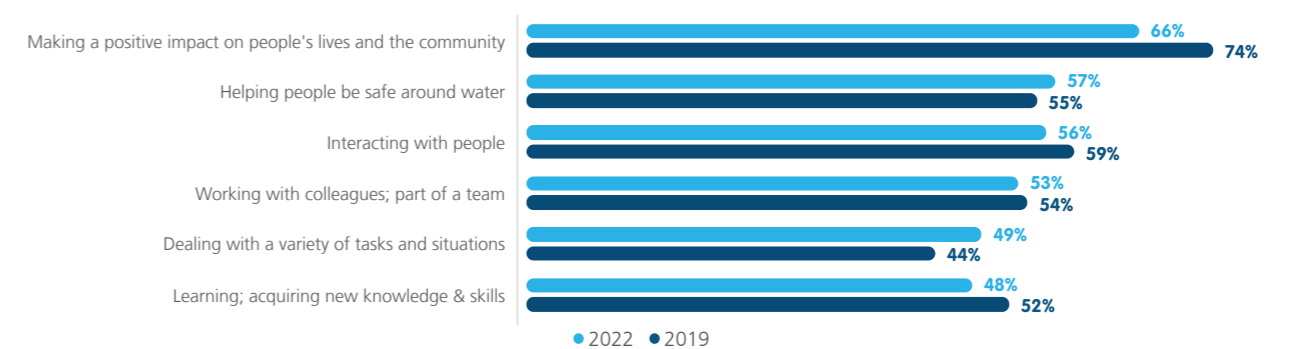
Professional development sessions per year



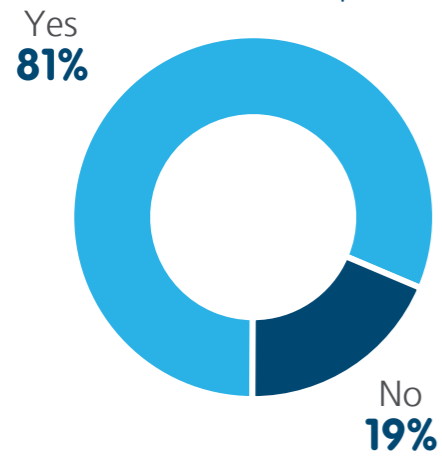
Main Role



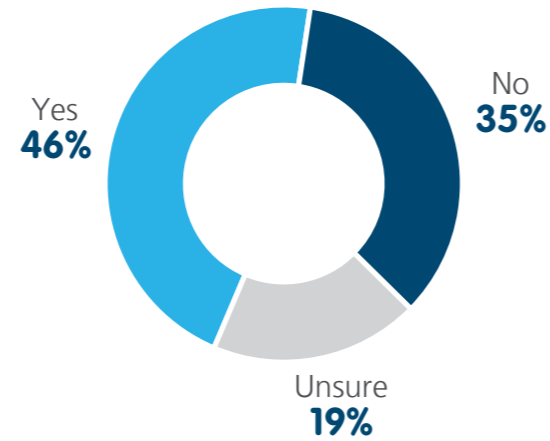
Enjoyment / satisfaction from the role



Majority of respondents were employed in the industry between Mar 2020 and Dec 2021 (COVID-19 lockdowns period)



A little more than one third (of those employed during COVID-19 lockdowns period) report that their employer didn't receive JobKeeper for their role



More than half said COVID-19 was responsible for moderate to large change in their role



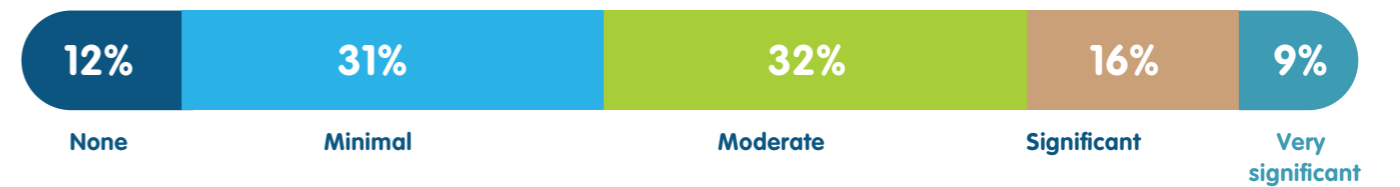
Almost half stood down at some point



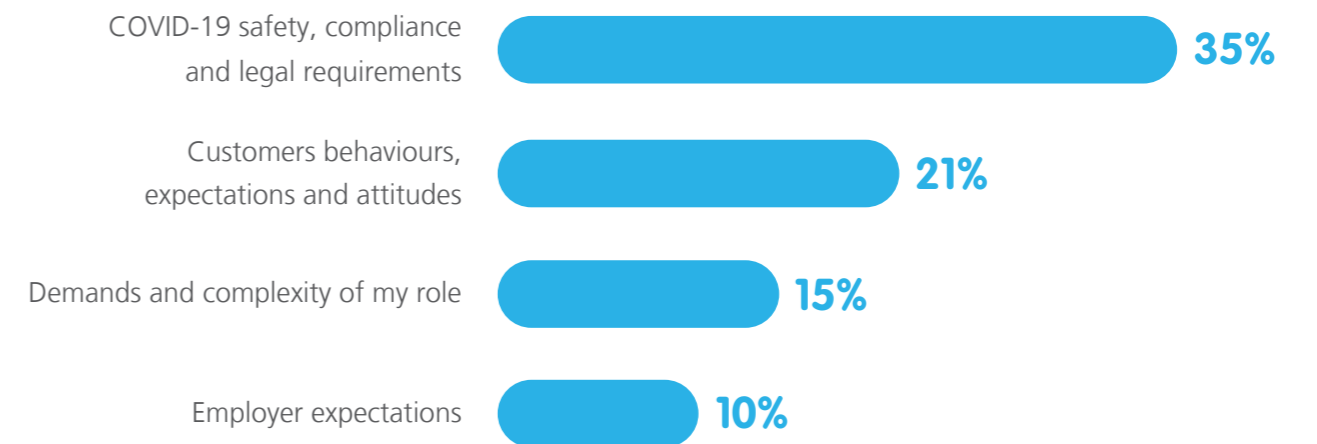
More than a quarter (of those stood down) found employment in another industry



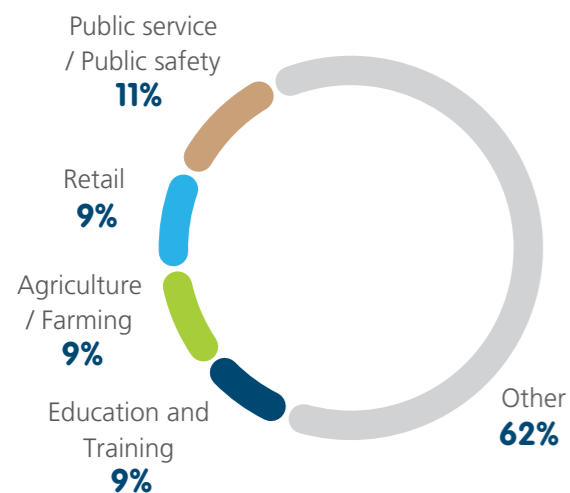
A quarter report COVID-19 had a significant or very significant negative impact on their wellbeing



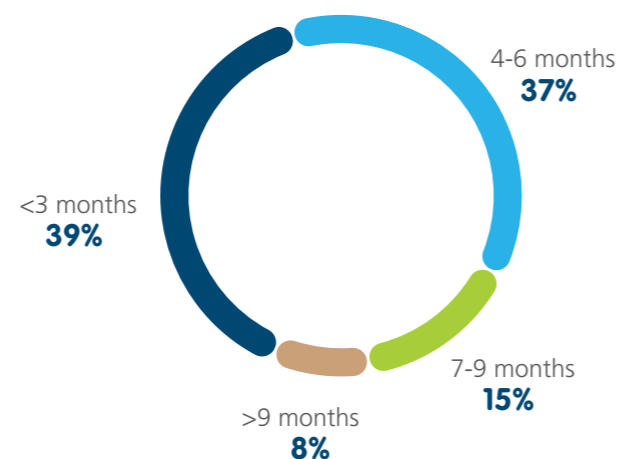
The largest change was in COVID-19 related safety and compliance



Alternative work was spread across a range of industries



More than one third (of those stood down) took between 4-6 months to return to work in the aquatic industry



Key Findings:

- > Many workers were stood down without pay during the COVID-19 lockdowns period.
- > Of those who were stood down, nearly a third ended up working in another industry.
- > Just under one quarter of those who returned to work in the aquatic industry took more than 6 months to do so.
- > As the survey was only completed by workers currently working in the aquatic industry, Royal Life Saving cannot say how many workers did not return to the industry following stand-downs.

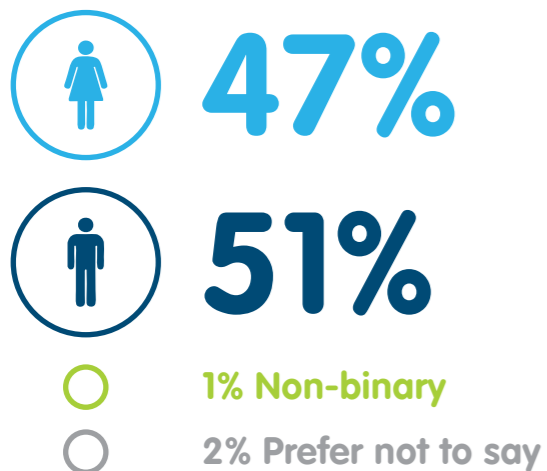
These charts capture data on the 81% of respondents that were employed in the industry during the COVID-19 lockdowns period, March 2020 - December 2021.

> A typical Pool Lifeguard...

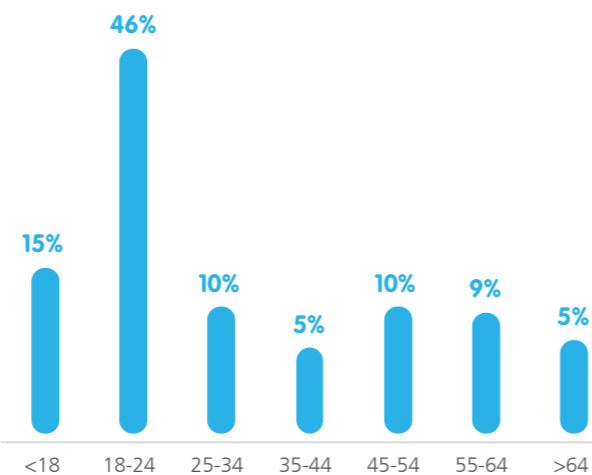


- is 24 or younger
- works part-time and casually
- earns between \$26 - \$35 per hour
- is studying
- works for a council or government run public pool
- most enjoys working with colleagues, being part of a team and being physically active
- thinks they will stay in their role for up to five more years

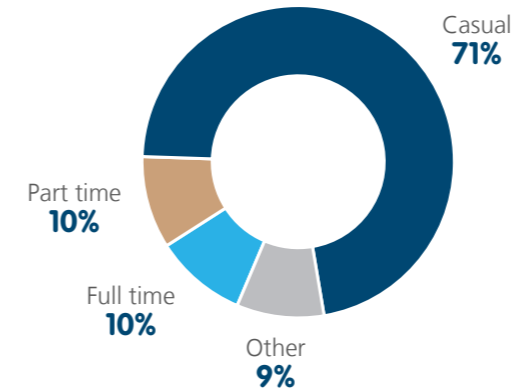
Gender



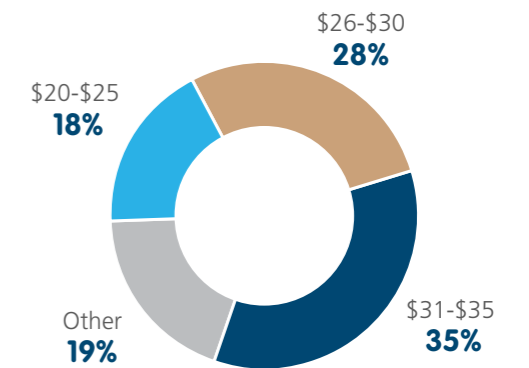
Age



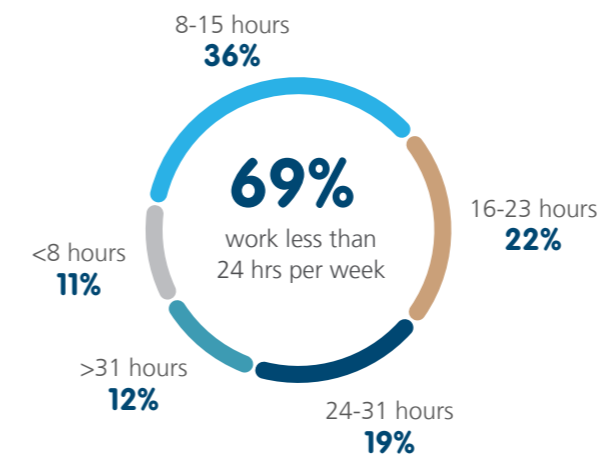
Employment status



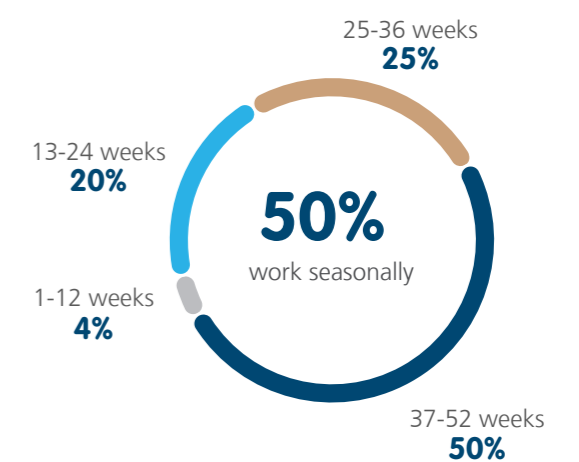
Hourly rate



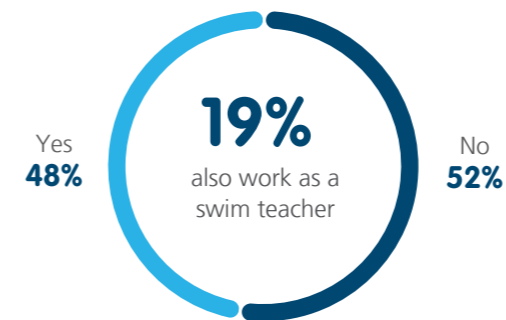
Hours worked per week



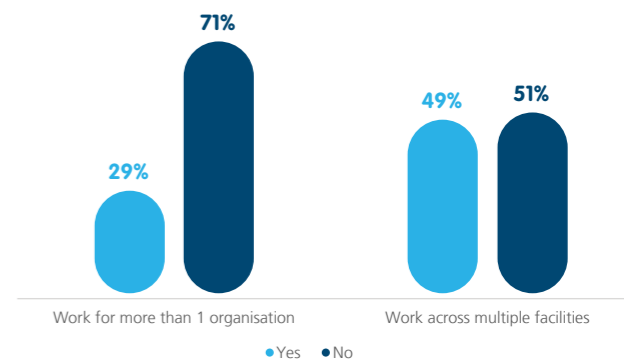
Weeks worked per year



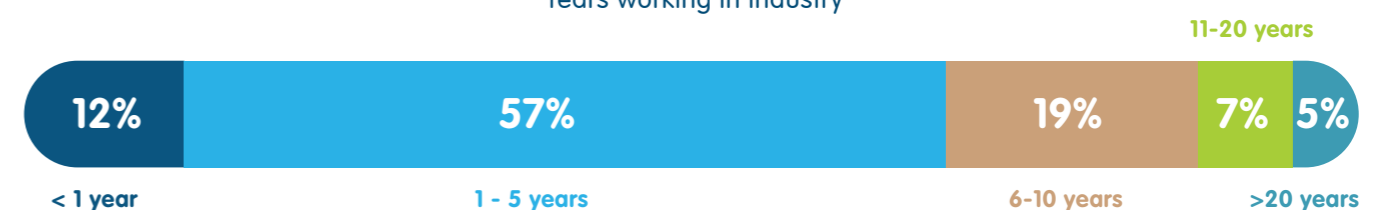
Perform more than 1 role



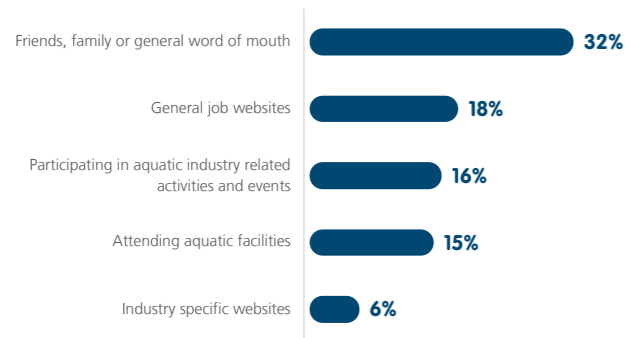
Employers / location



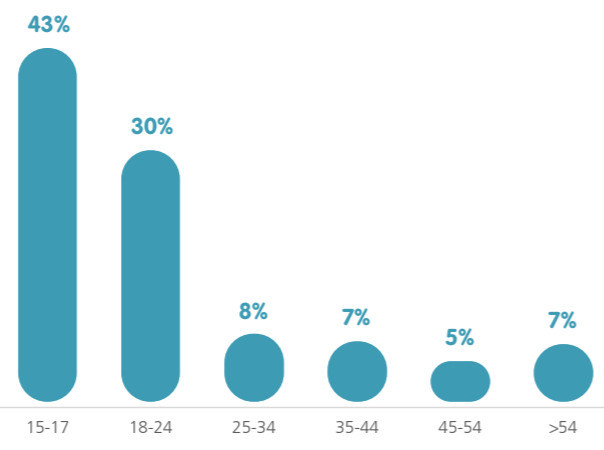
Years working in industry



Learnt about jobs



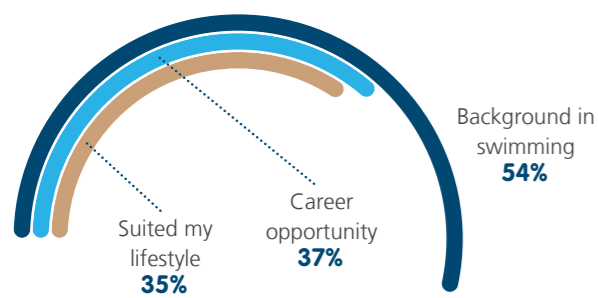
Age first commenced working in industry



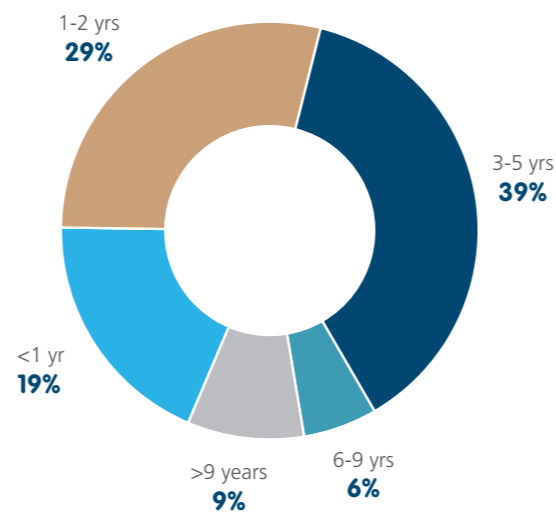
Most enjoyable parts of role



Why take up employment



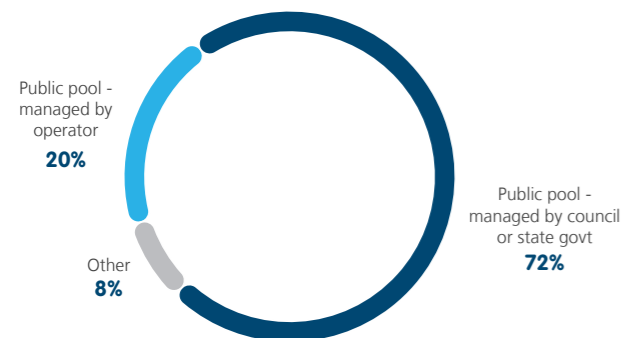
Future years in current role



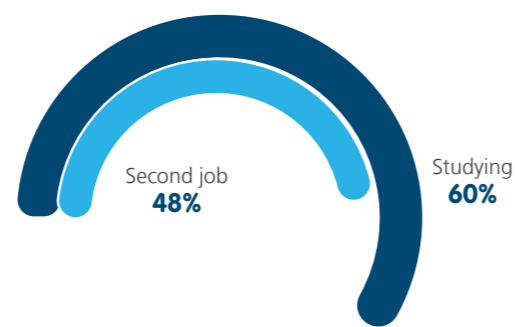
Reasons for leaving role (ranked average)



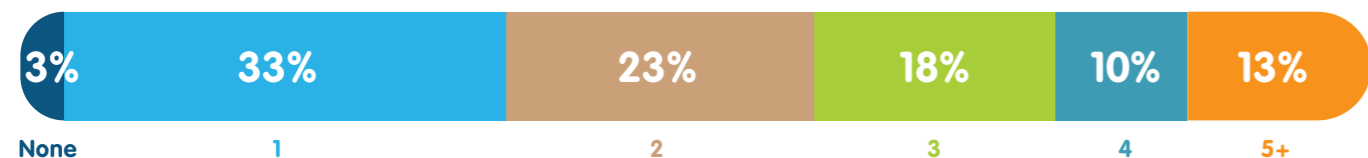
Employer type



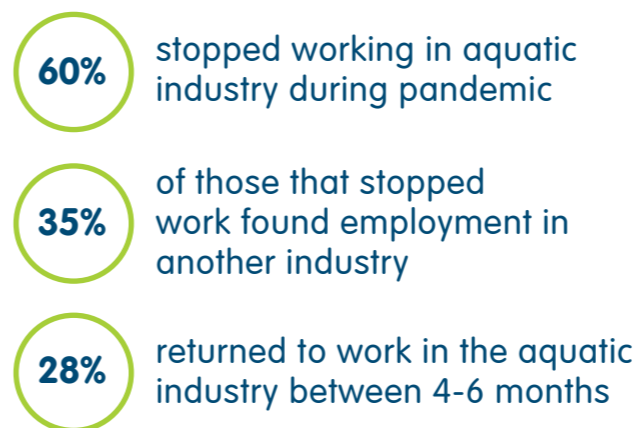
Other work and study



Professional development sessions per year



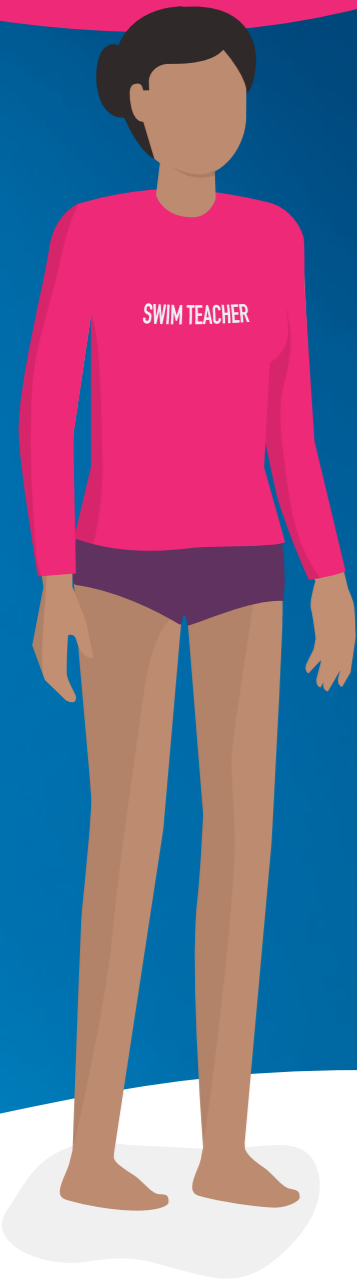
Impact of COVID-19



Skills for success

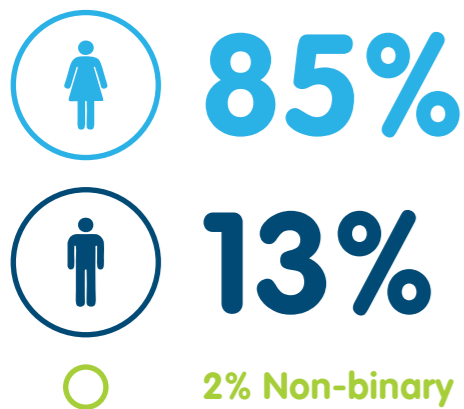
- #1 Verbal communication
- #2 Teamwork & collaboration
- #3 Emergency planning & incident management
- #4 Customer service
- #5 Conflict resolution

> A typical Swimming & Water Safety Teacher...

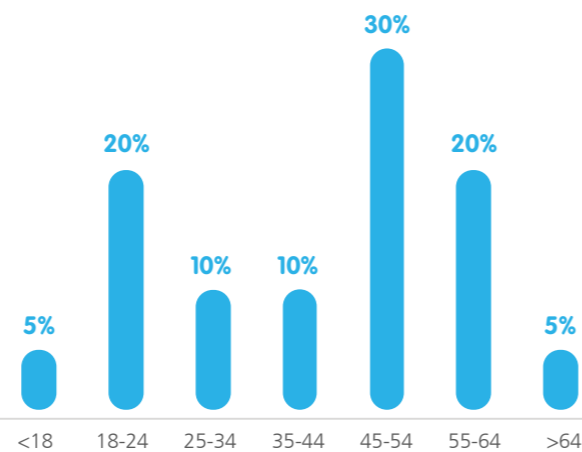


- is female
- earns between \$26 - \$35 per hour
- works between 37 - 52 weeks per year
- joined the industry between 15 - 24 years
- has been in the industry for less than six years
- works for more than one organisation and works across multiple facilities
- most enjoys making a positive impact on people's lives and the community and helping make people safe around water

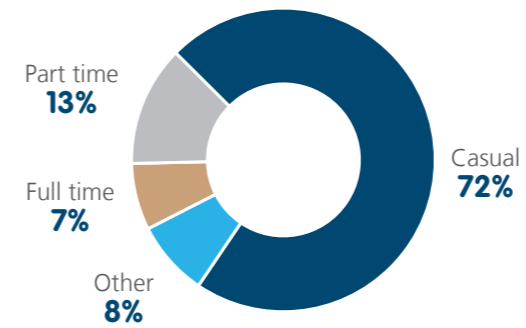
Gender



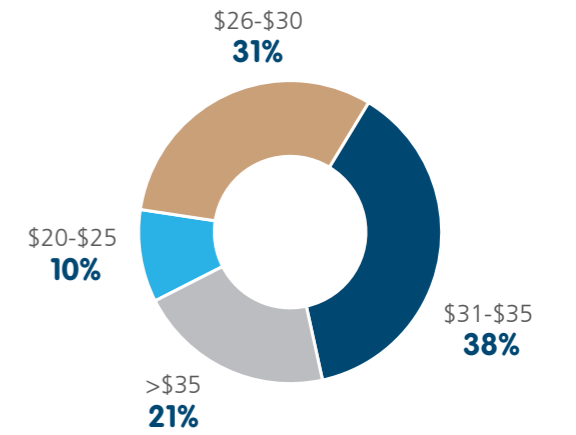
Age



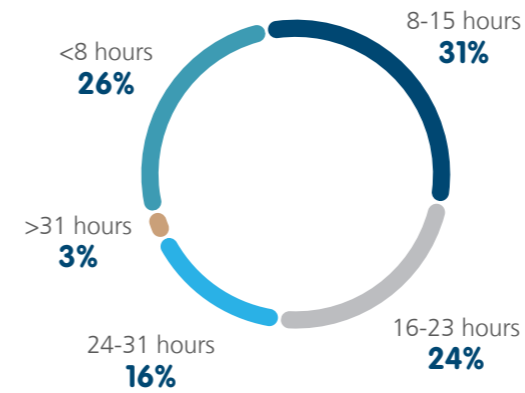
Employment status



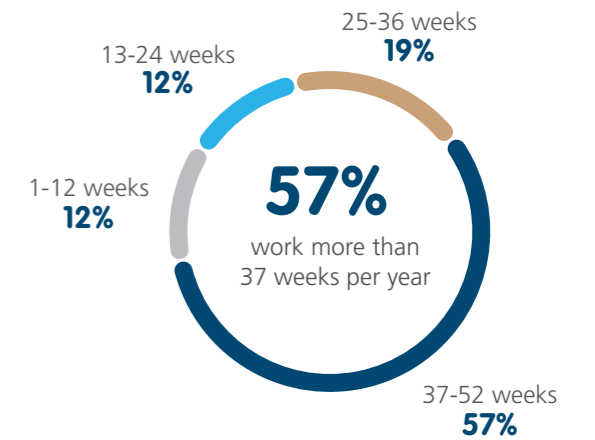
Hourly rate



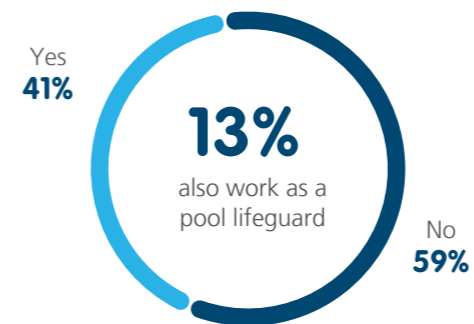
Hours worked per week



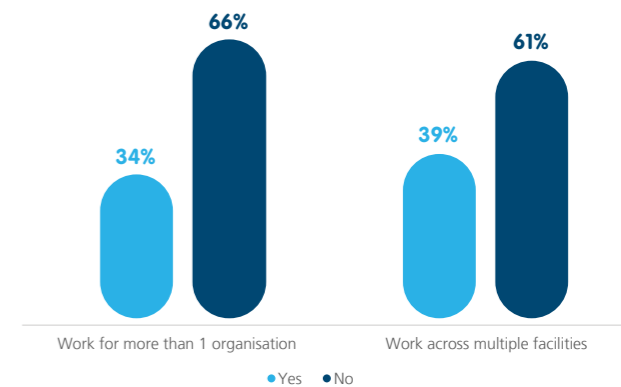
Weeks worked per year



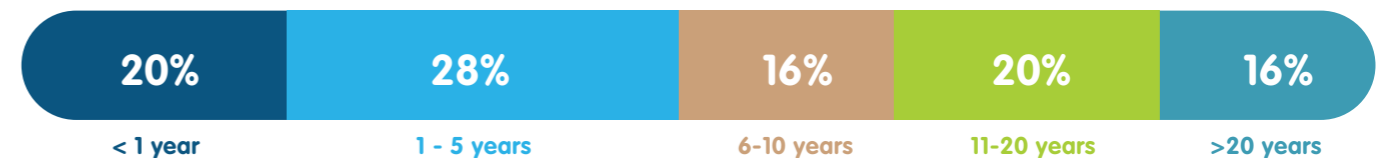
Perform more than 1 role



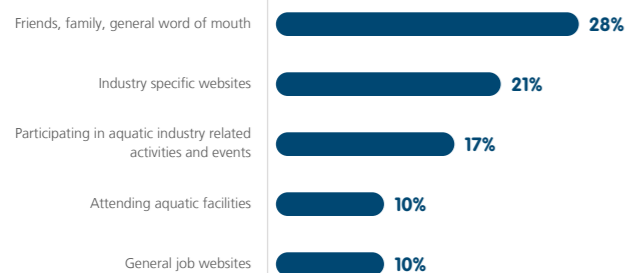
Employers



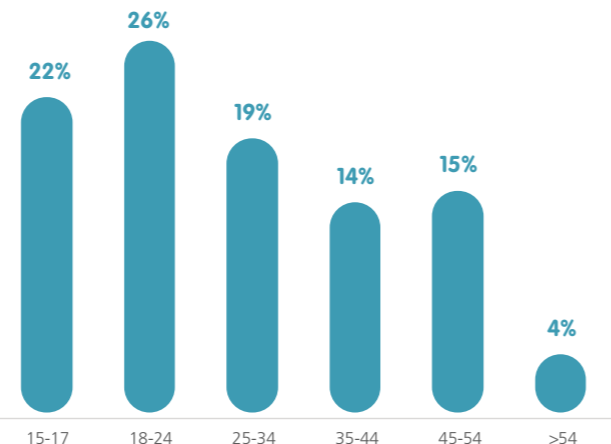
Years working in industry



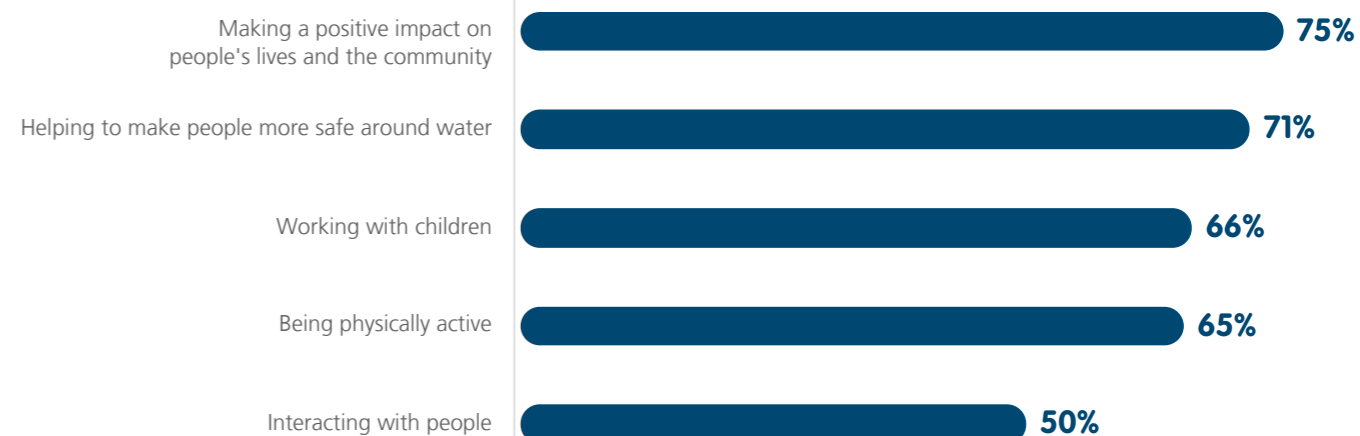
Learnt about jobs



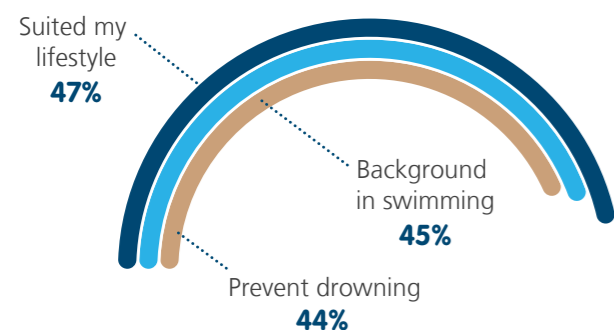
Age first commenced working in industry



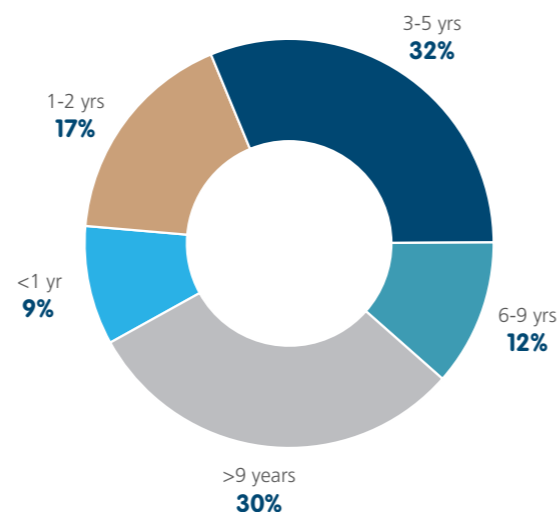
Most enjoyable parts of role



Why take up employment



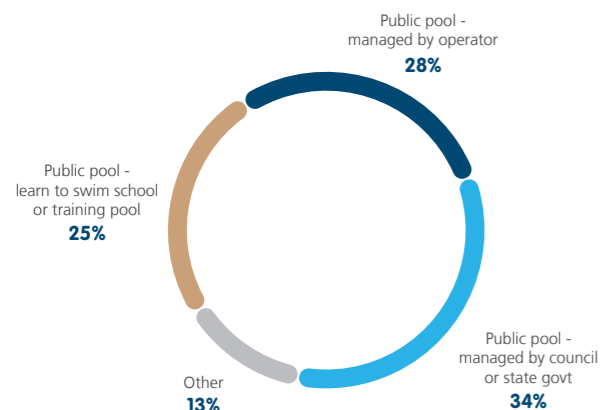
Future years in current role



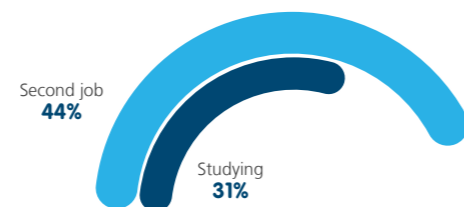
Reasons for leaving role (ranked average)



Employer type



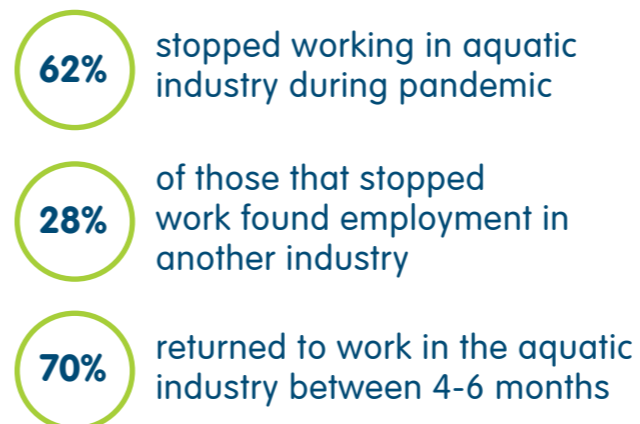
Other work and study



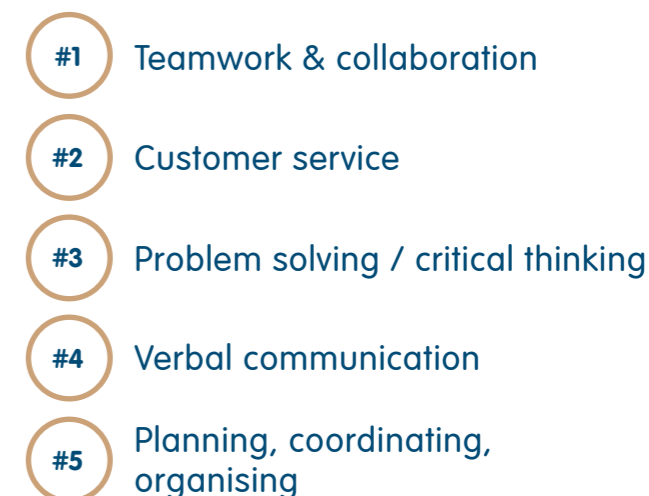
Professional development sessions per year



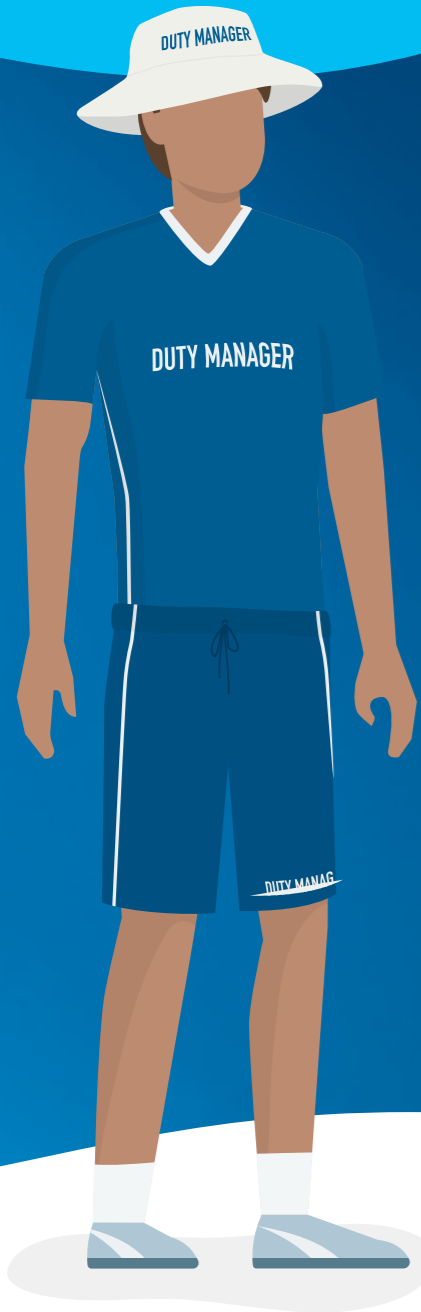
Impact of COVID-19



Skills for success

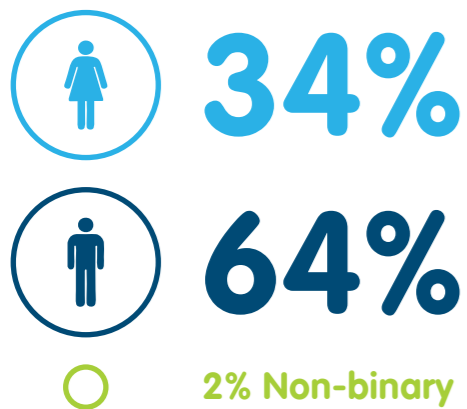


> A typical Duty Manager...

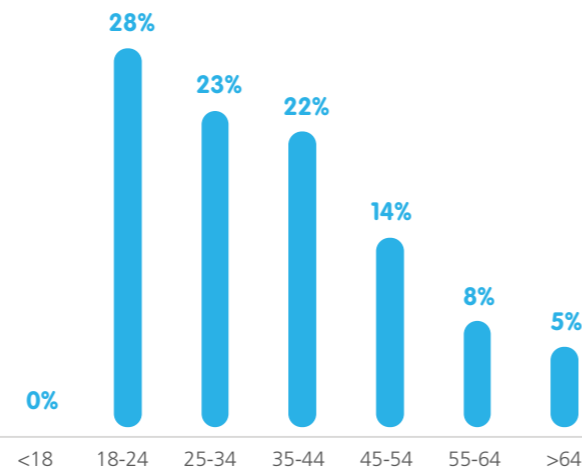


- is male
- earns between \$26 - \$35 per hour
- performs more than one role
- joined the industry between 15 - 24 years
- has been in the industry for more than six years
- thinks they will continue to work in current role for five years or less
- also works as a pool lifeguard
- works more than 26 weeks per year
- works for one organisation

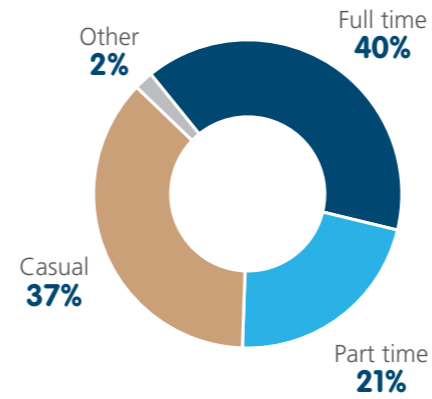
Gender



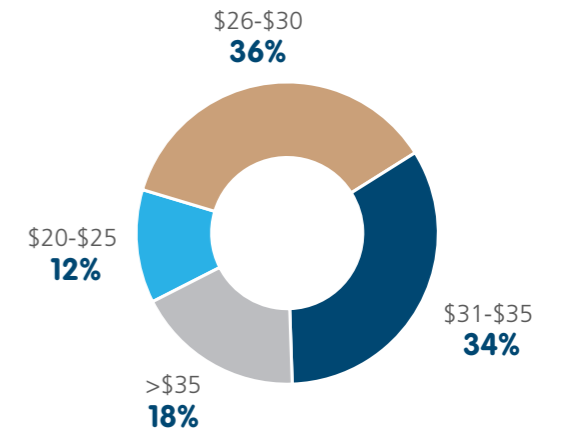
Age



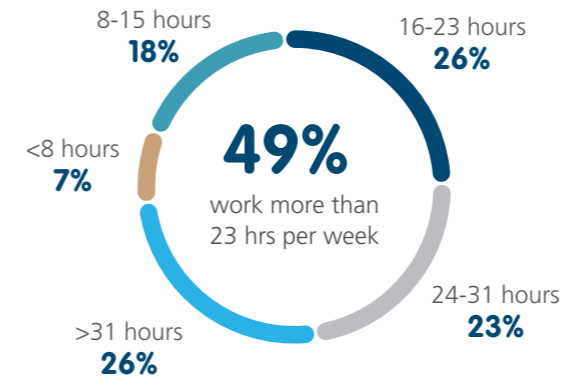
Employment status



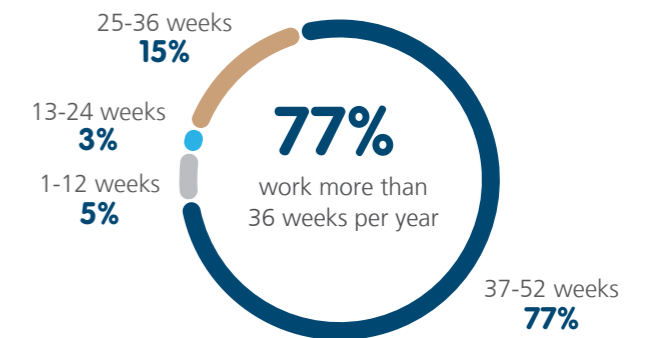
Hourly rate



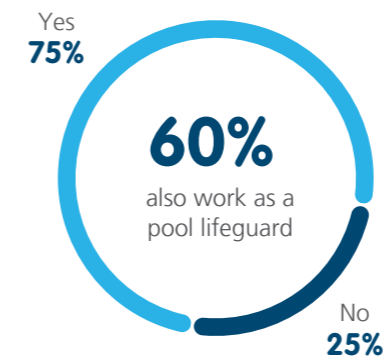
Hours worked per week



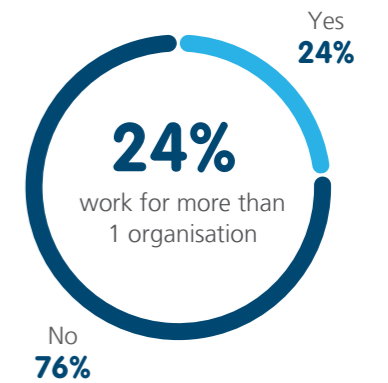
Weeks worked per year



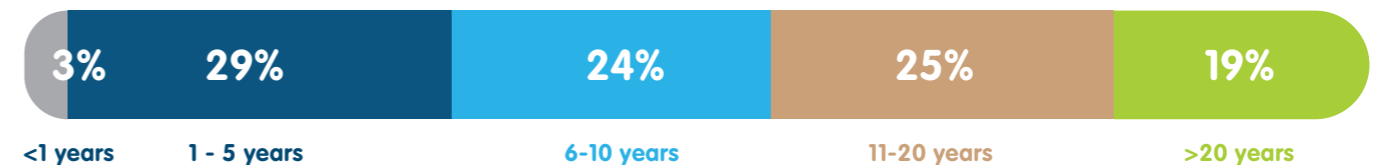
Perform more than 1 role



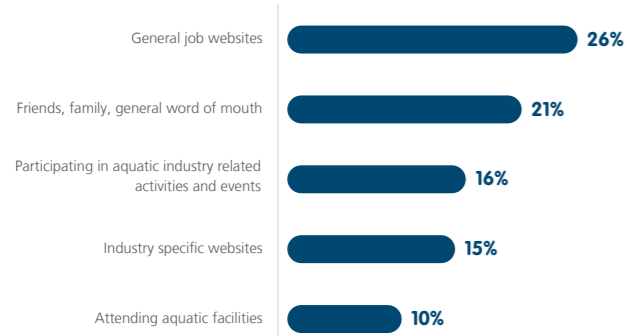
Employers



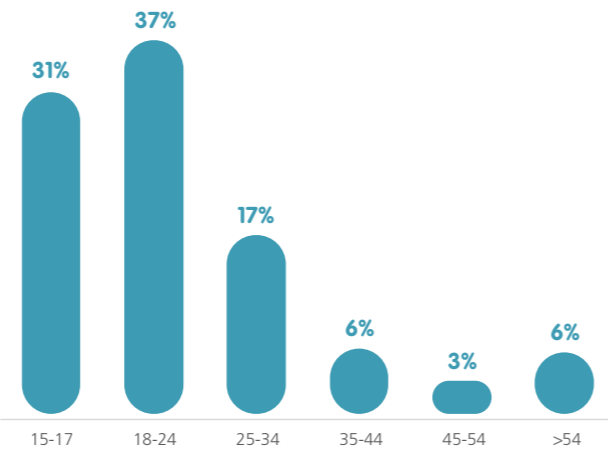
Years working in industry



Learnt about jobs



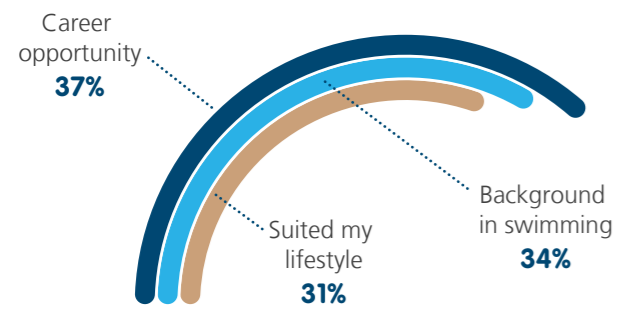
Age first commenced working in industry



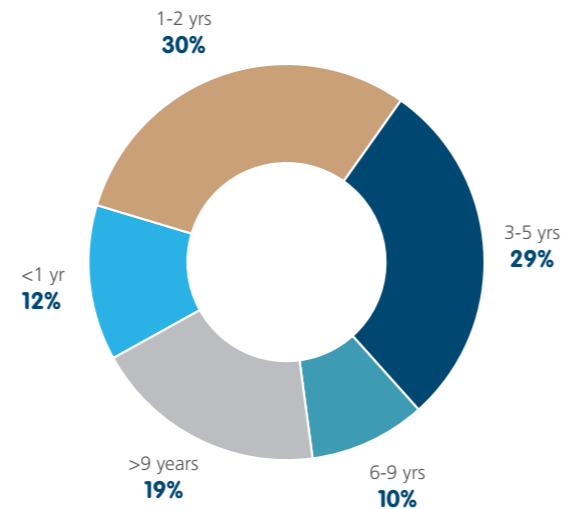
Most enjoyable parts of role



Why take up employment



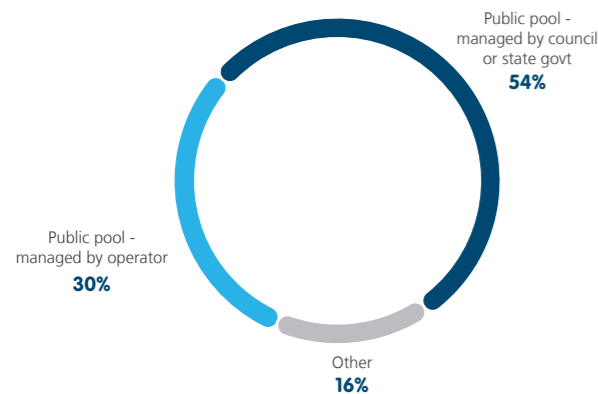
Future years in current role



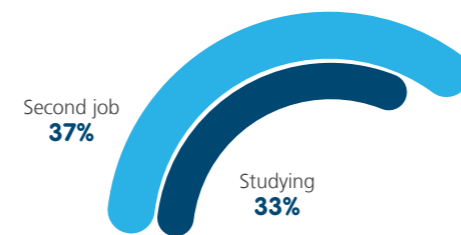
Reasons for leaving role (ranked average)



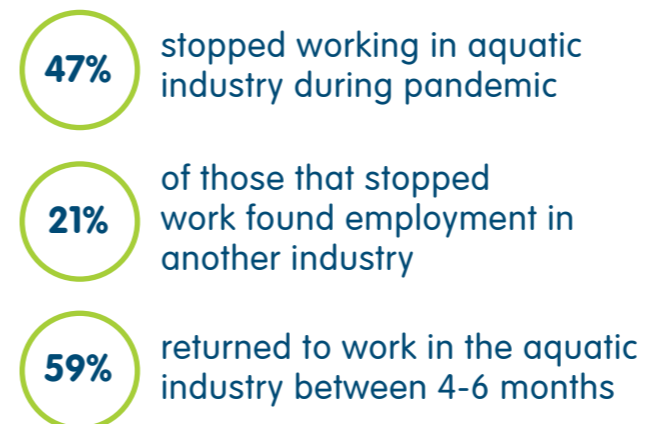
Employer type



Other work and study



Impact of COVID-19



Skills for success

- #1 Verbal communication
- #2 Emergency planning & incident management
- #3 Conflict resolution
- #4 Customer service
- #5 Problem solving / critical thinking

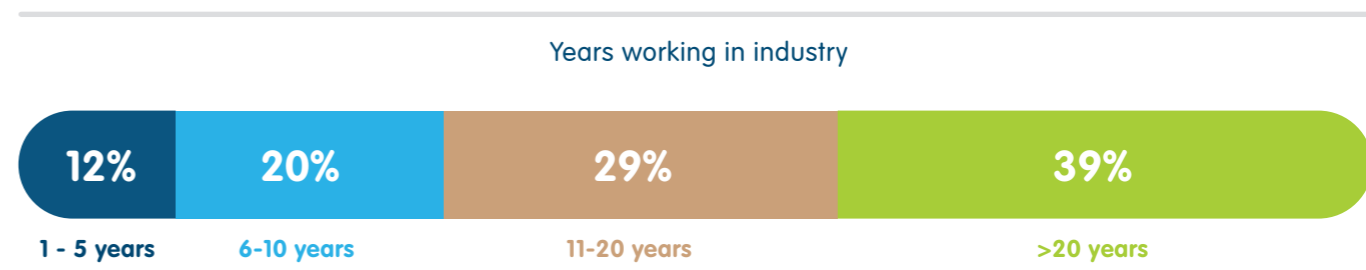
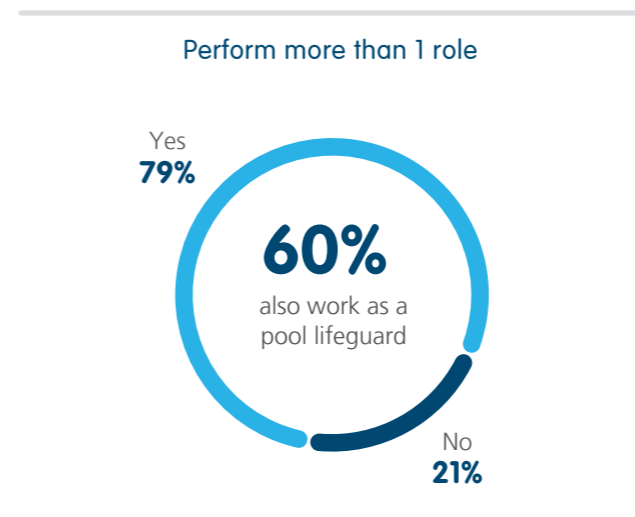
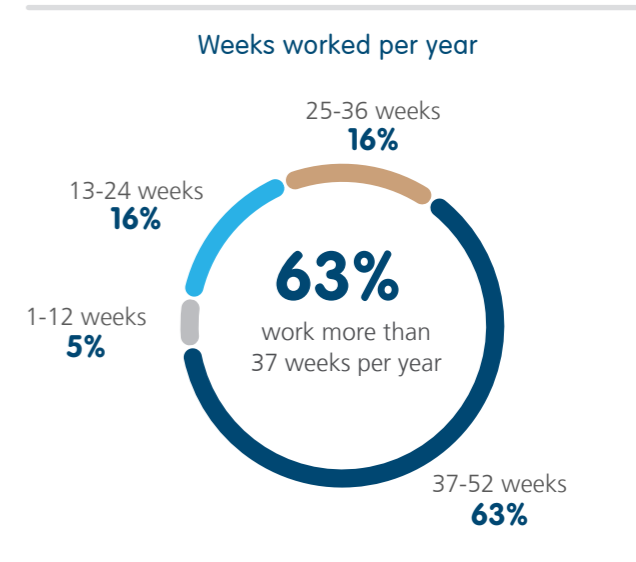
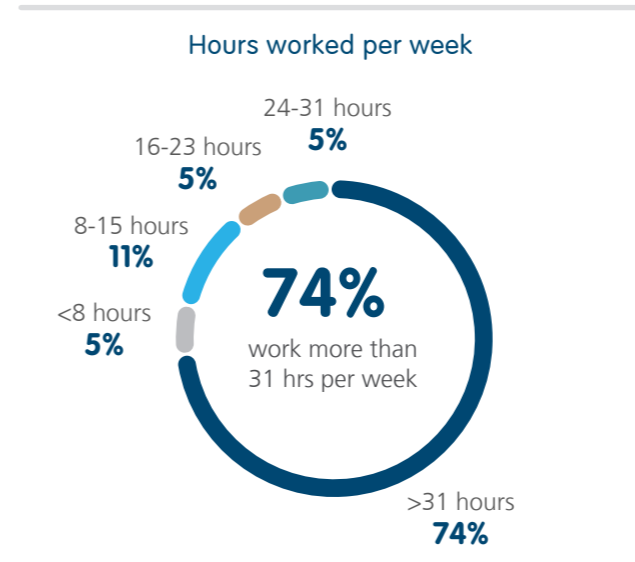
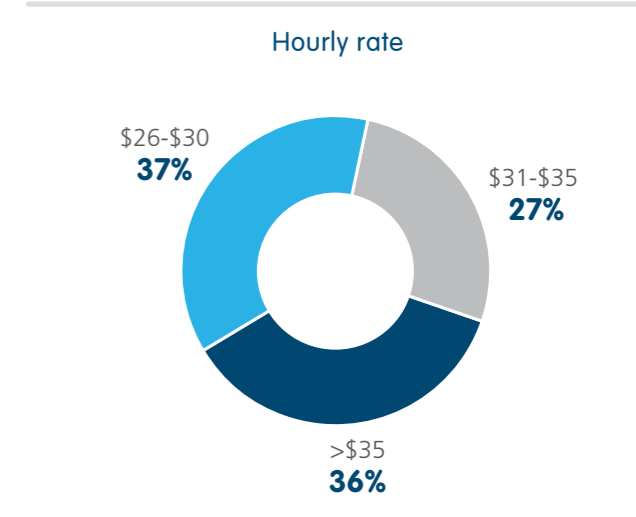
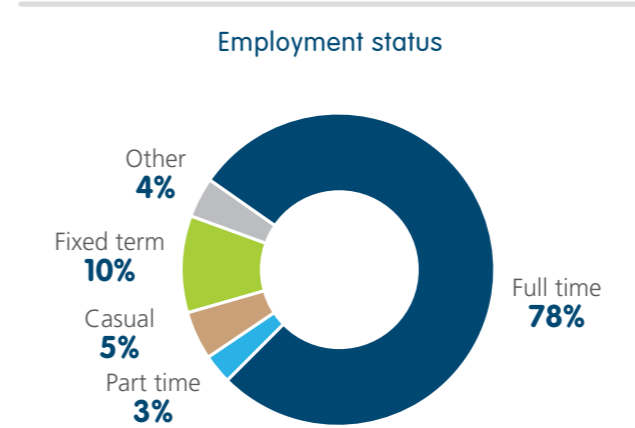
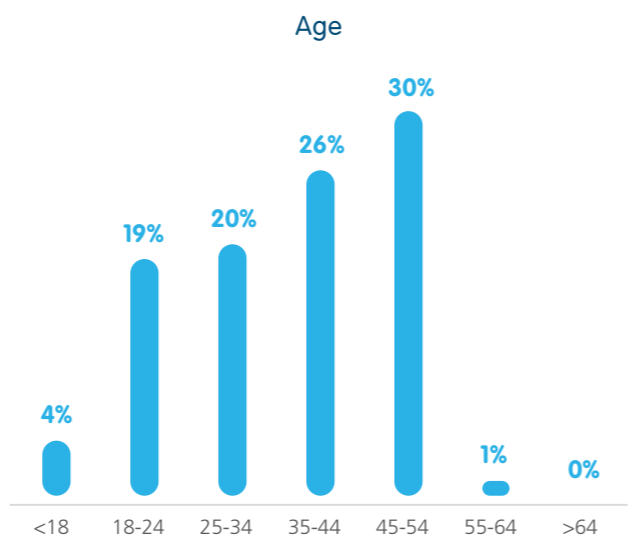
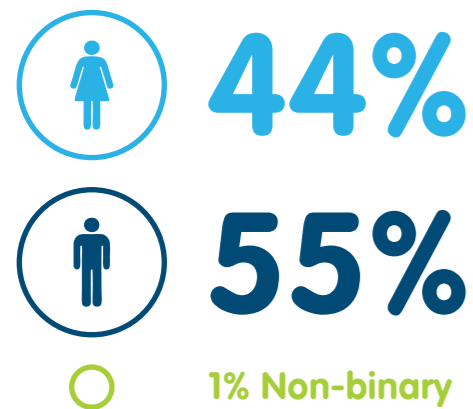
Professional development sessions per year



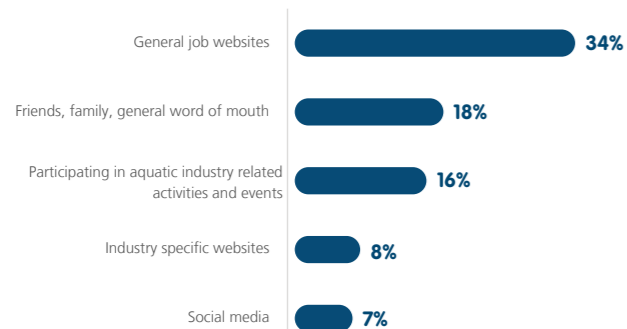
> A typical Centre Manager...



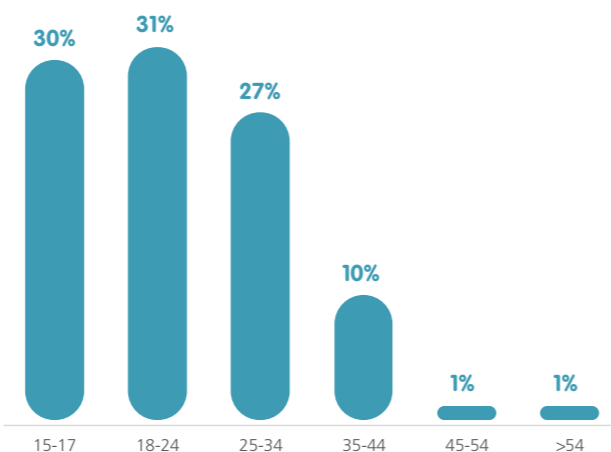
- is over 35 years old
- works full time
- performs more than one role
- has been in the industry for more than 11 years
- joined the industry between 15 - 24 years
- performs more than one role
- most enjoys dealing with a variety of tasks



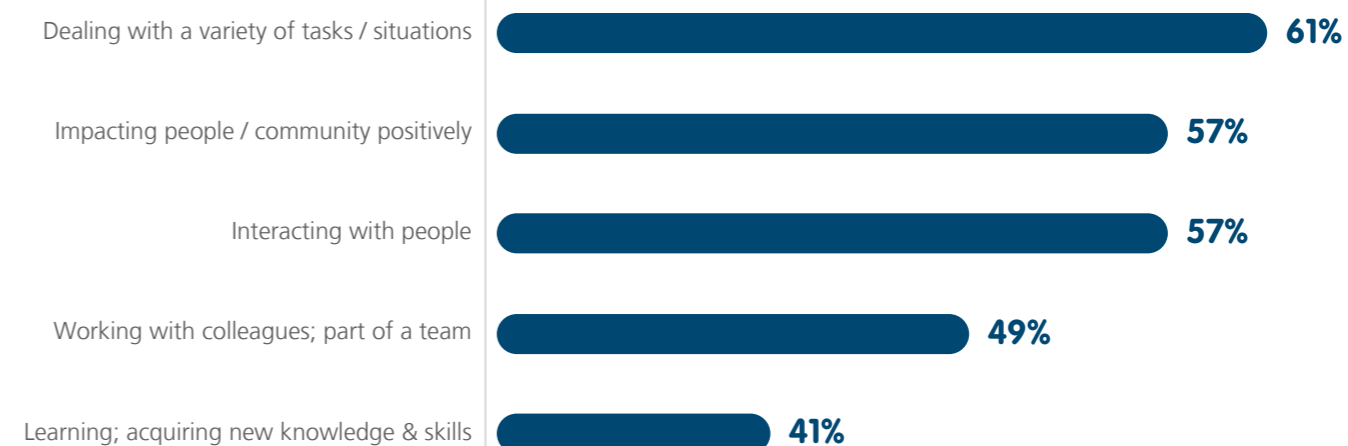
Learnt about jobs



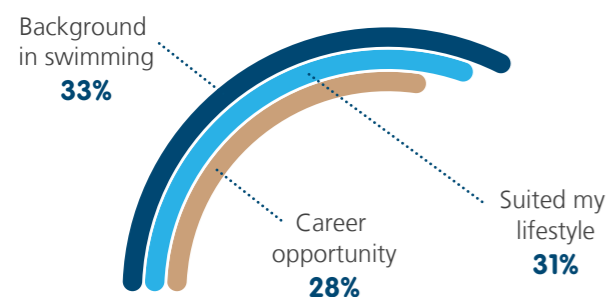
Age first commenced working in industry



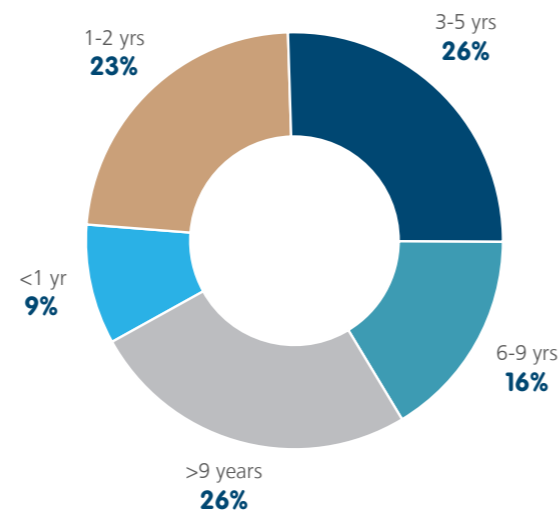
Most enjoyable parts of role



Why take up employment



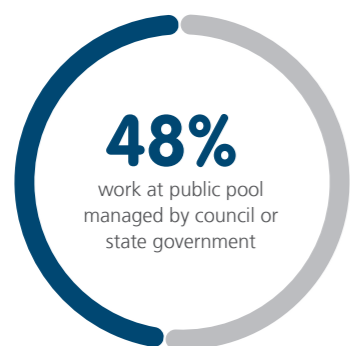
Future years in current role



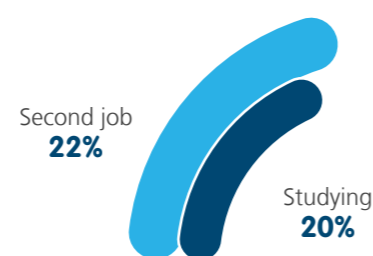
Importance of matters



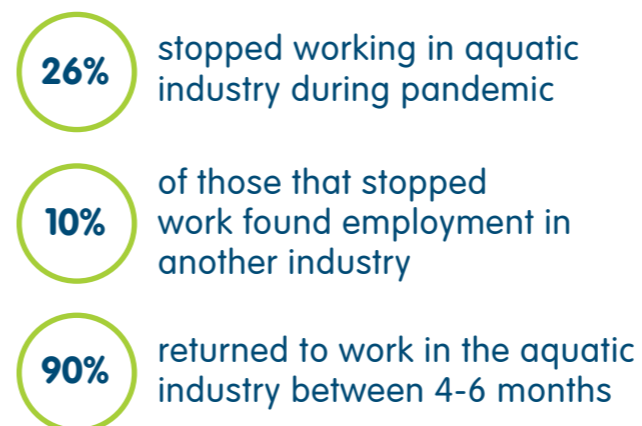
Employer type



Other work and study



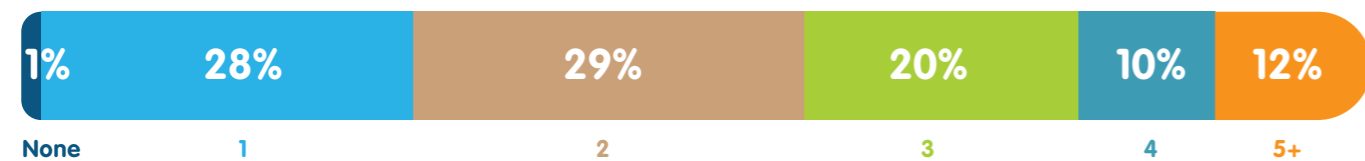
Impact of COVID-19



Skills for success

- #1 Problem solving / critical thinking
- #2 Conflict resolution
- #3 Planning, coordinating, organising
- #4 Customer service
- #5 Verbal communication

Professional development sessions per year

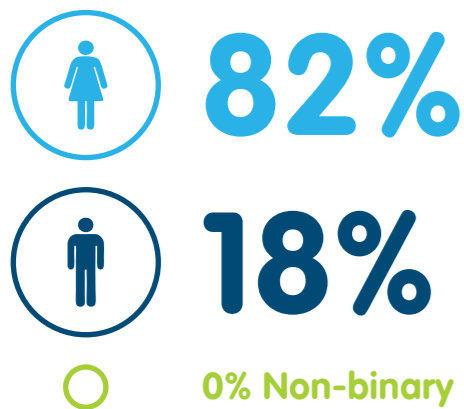


> A typical Swim School Manager or Coordinator...

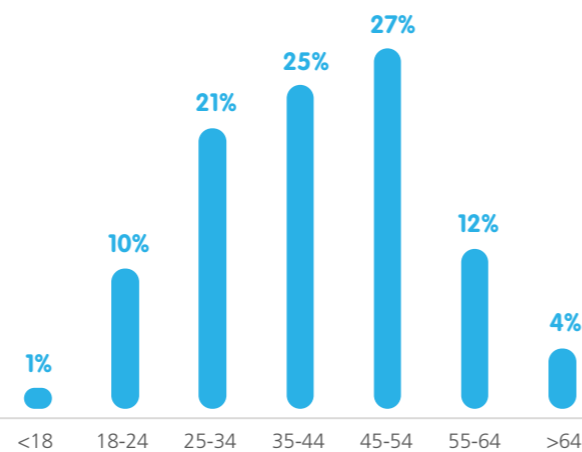


- is female
- is between 35 - 54 years of age
- works full time
- also works as a swim teacher
- commenced work in the industry between ages 15 - 24
- isn't studying or working outside of the industry
- most enjoys interacting with people and helping people be safe around water

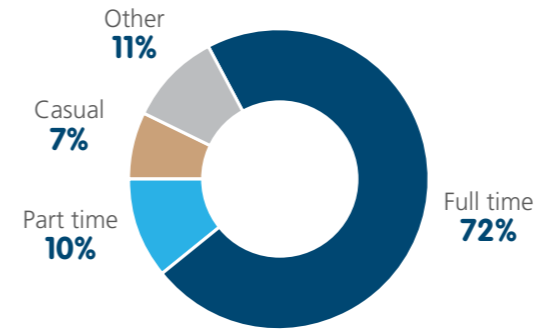
Gender



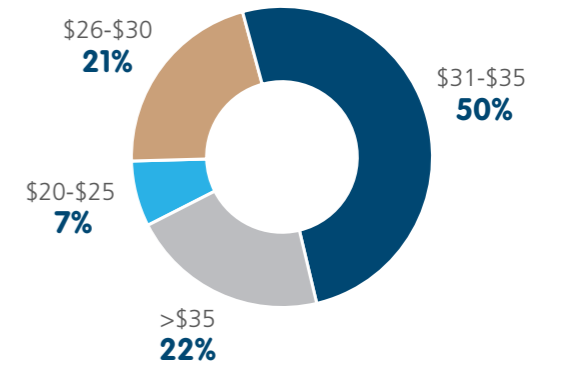
Age



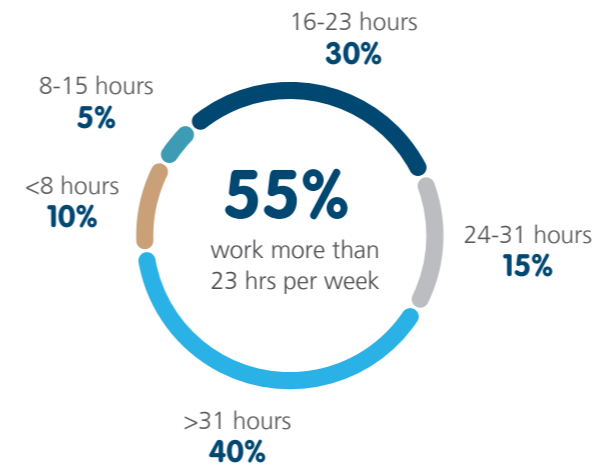
Employment status



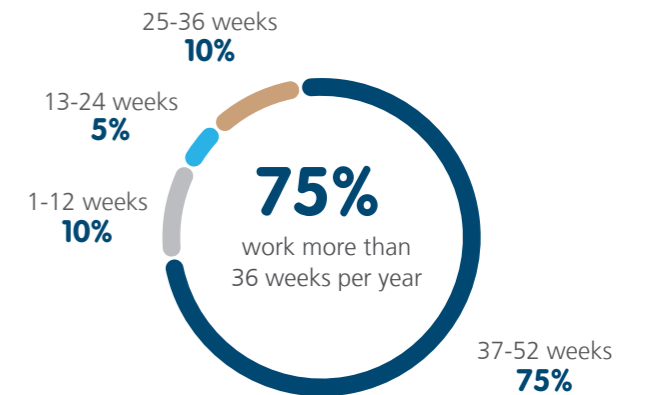
Hourly rate



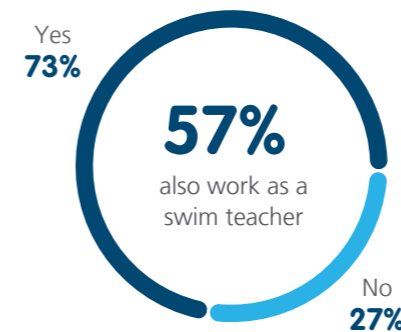
Hours worked per week



Weeks worked per year



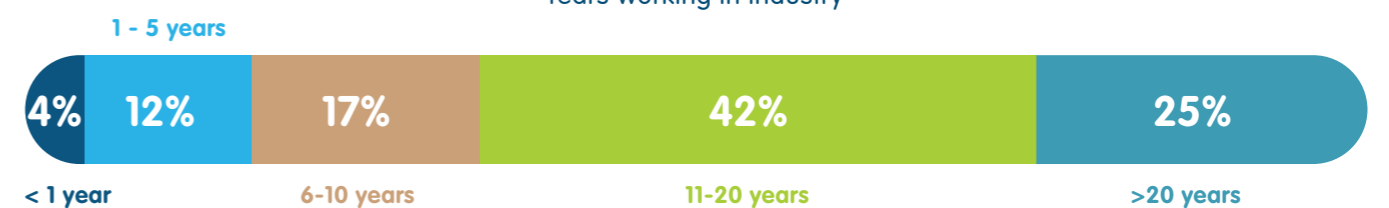
Perform more than 1 role



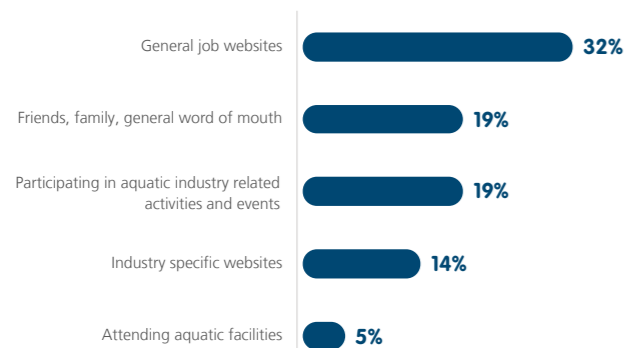
Employers



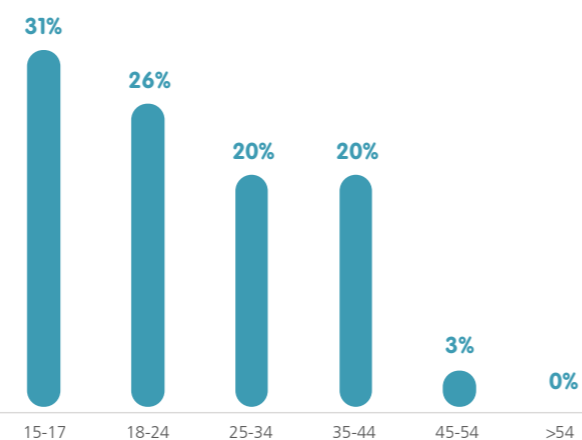
Years working in industry



Learnt about jobs



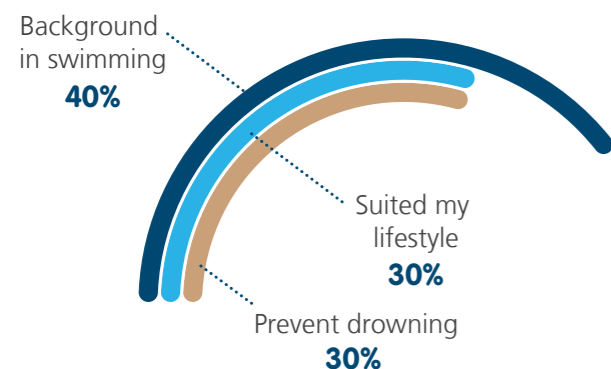
Age first commenced working in industry



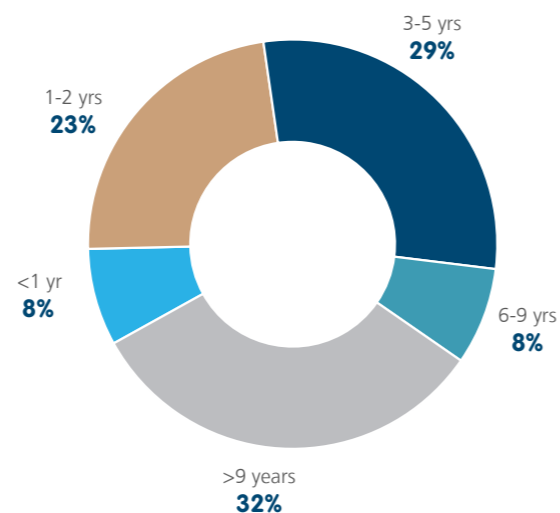
Most enjoyable parts of role



Why take up employment



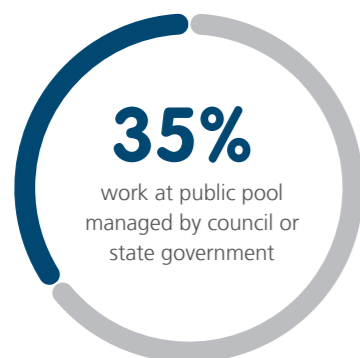
Future years in current role



Reasons for leaving role (ranked average)



Employer type



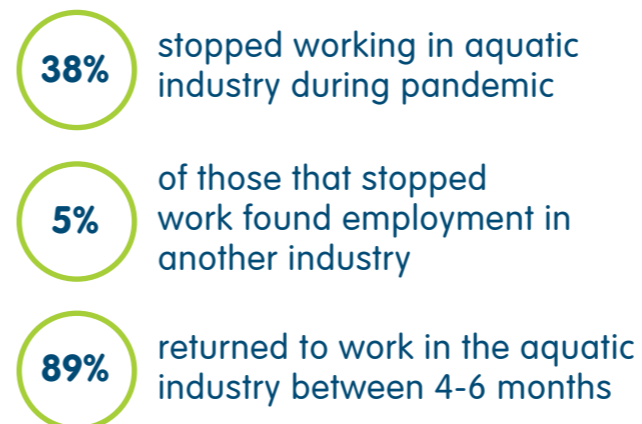
Other work and study



Professional development sessions per year



Impact of COVID-19



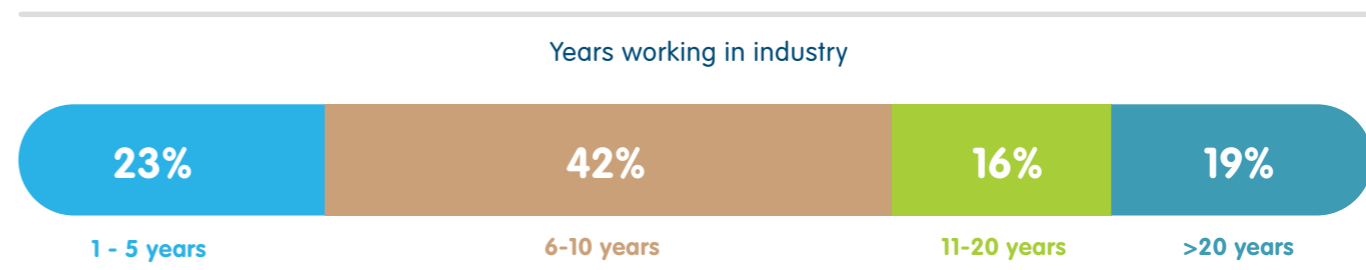
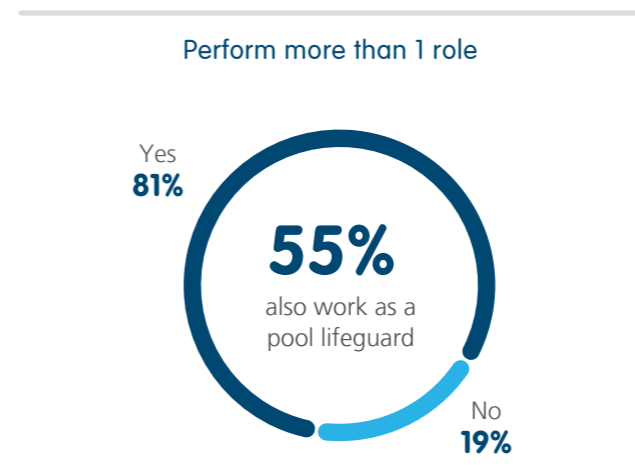
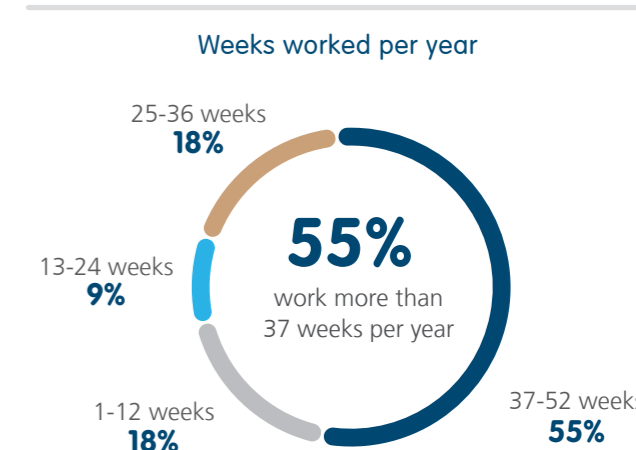
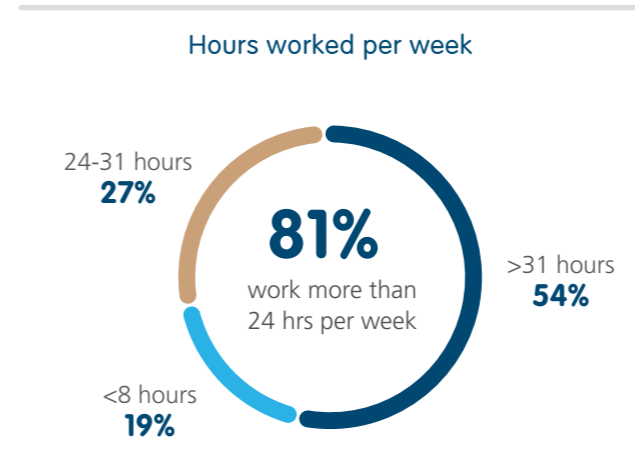
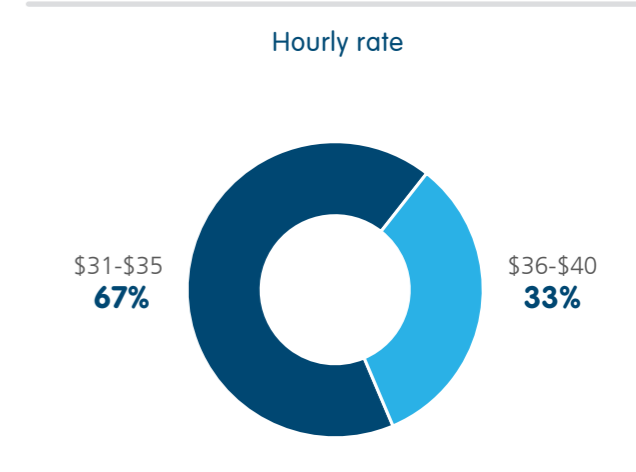
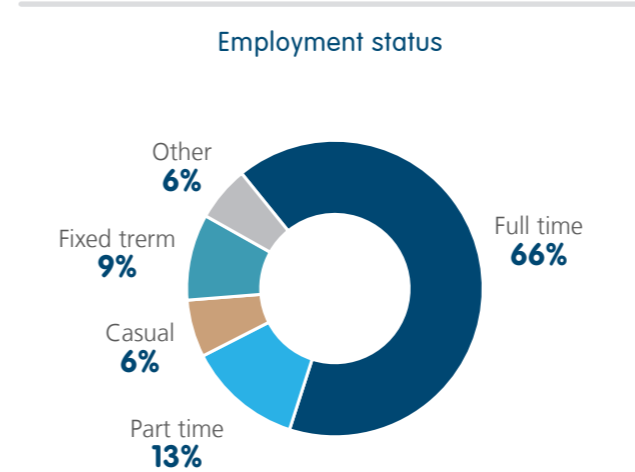
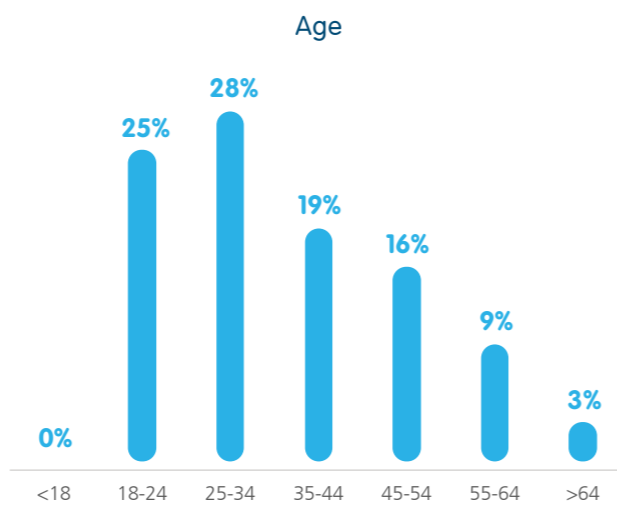
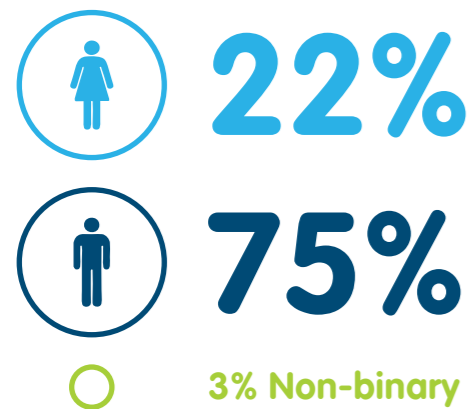
Skills for success

- #1 Problem solving / critical thinking
- #2 Teamwork & collaboration
- #3 Customer service
- #4 Conflict resolution
- #5 Verbal communication

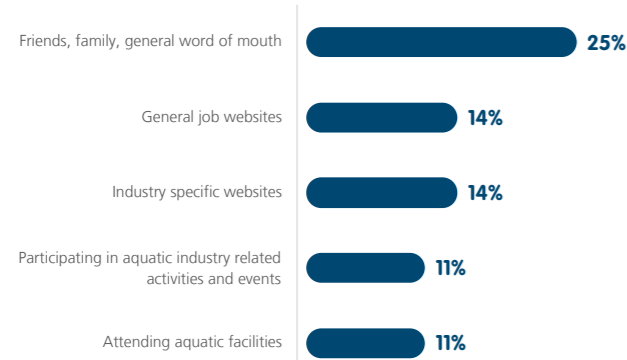
> A typical Aquatic Technical Operator...



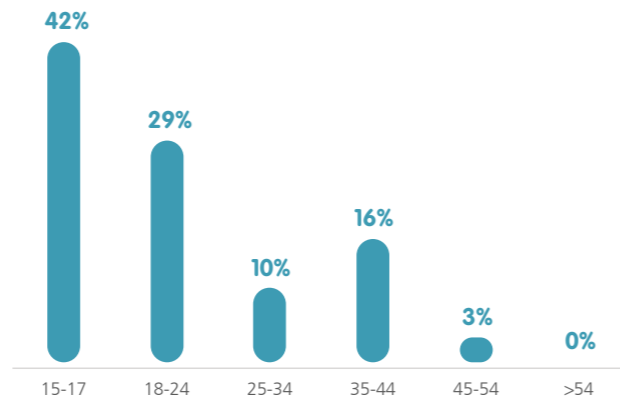
- is male
- is between 18 - 34 years of age
- works full time
- also works as a pool lifeguard or duty manager
- earns between \$31 - \$35 per hour
- has worked in the industry six or more years
- most enjoys dealing with a variety of tasks and situations



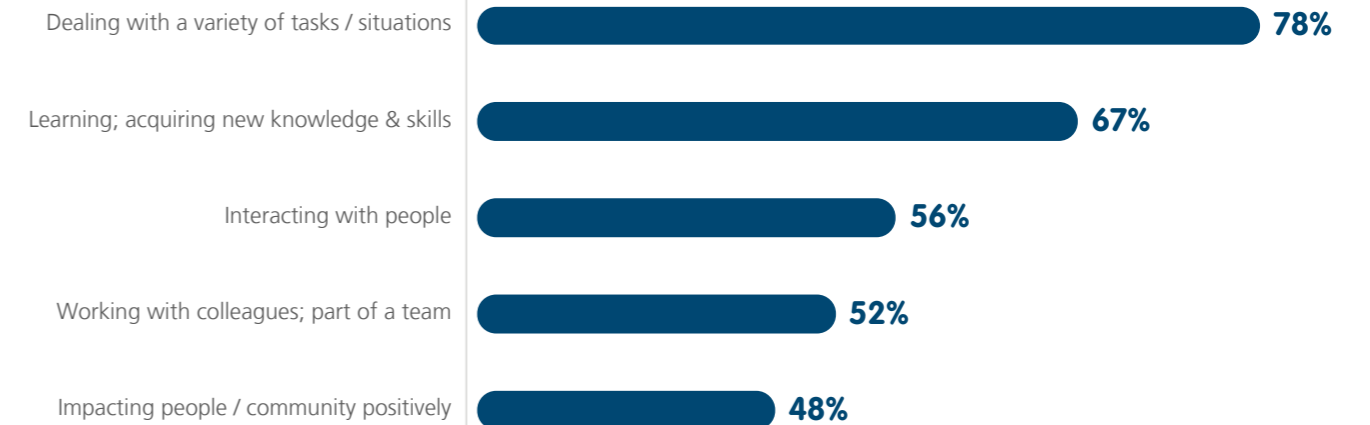
Learnt about jobs



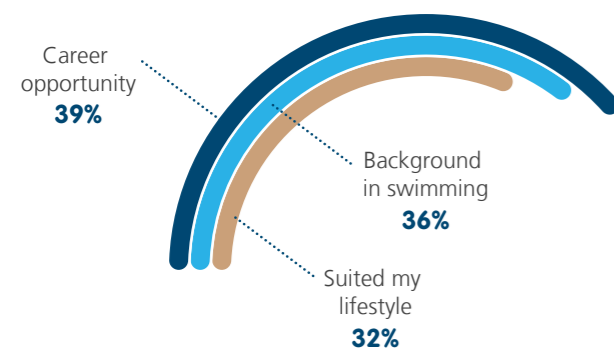
Age first commenced working in industry



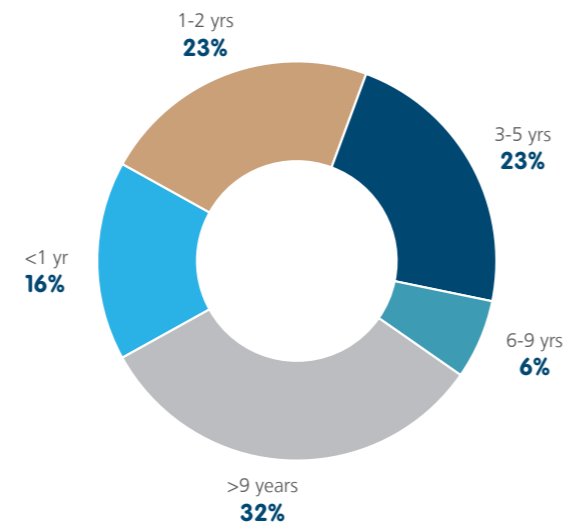
Most enjoyable parts of role



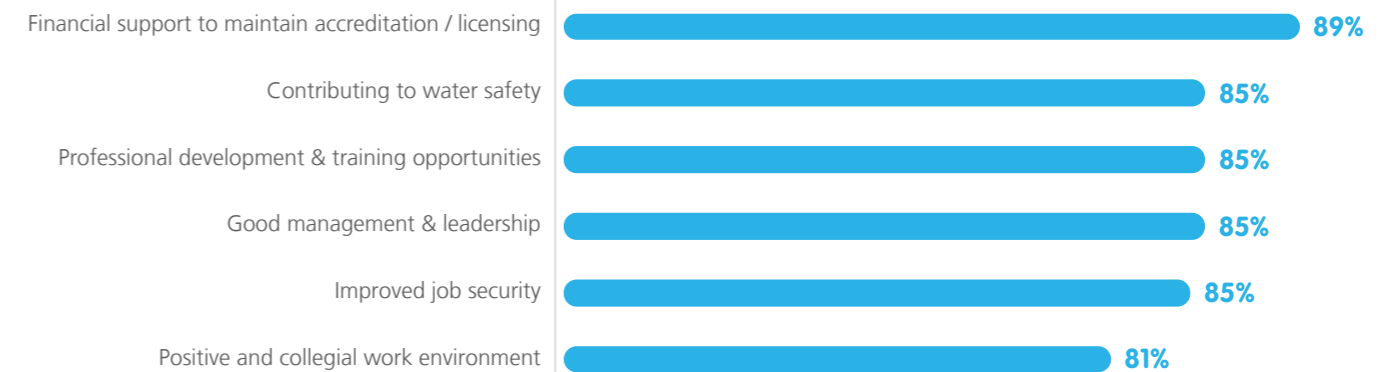
Why take up employment



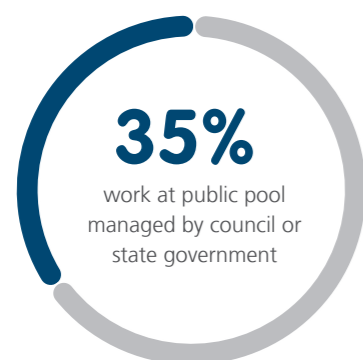
Future years in current role



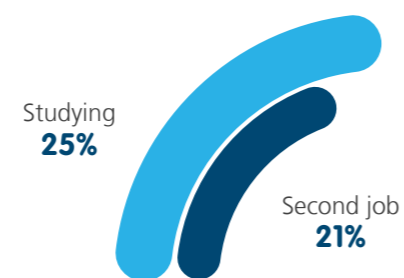
Importance of matters



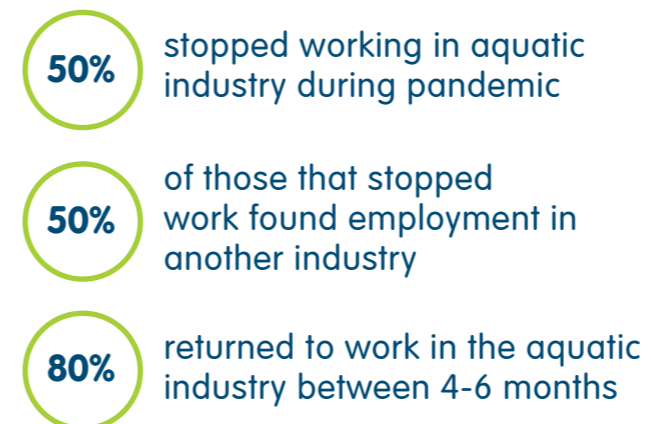
Employer type



Other work and study



Impact of COVID-19



Skills for success

- #1 Emergency planning / incident management
- #2 Problem solving / critical thinking
- #3 Verbal communication
- #4 Conflict resolution
- #5 Teamwork & collaboration

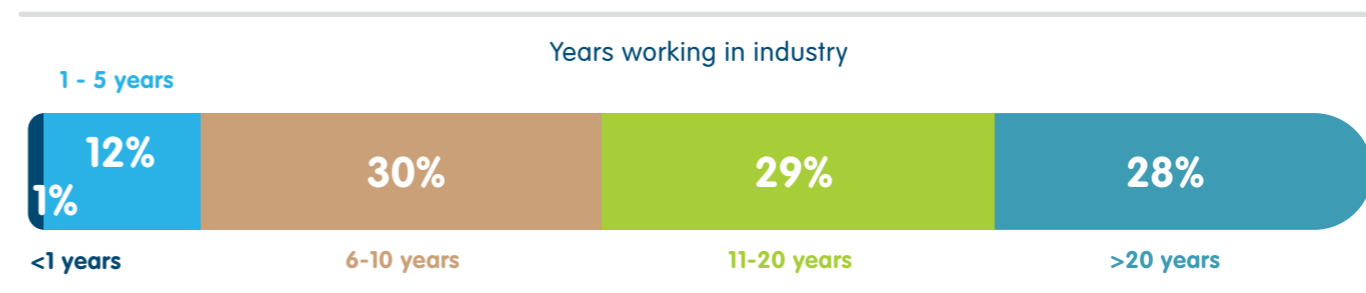
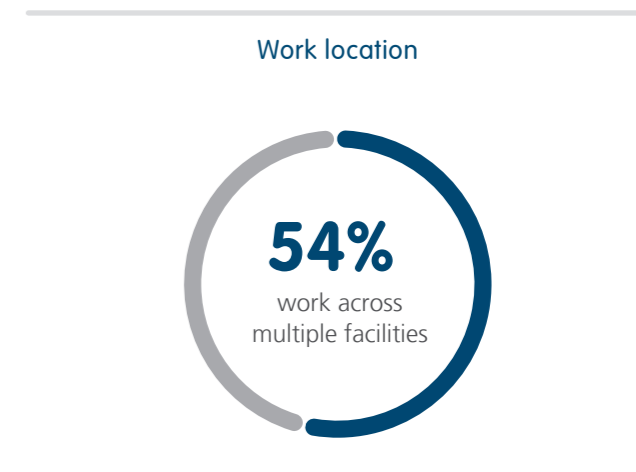
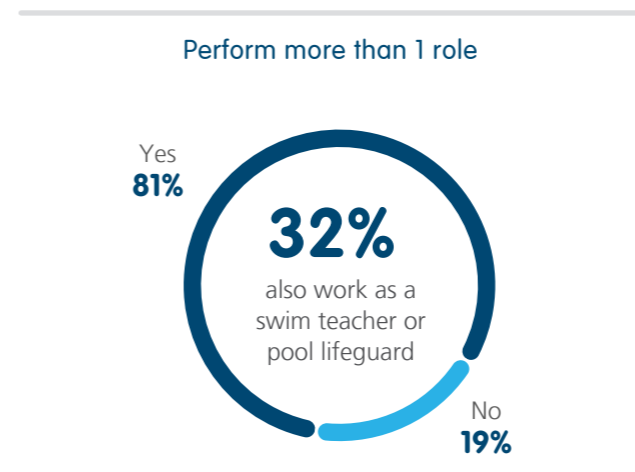
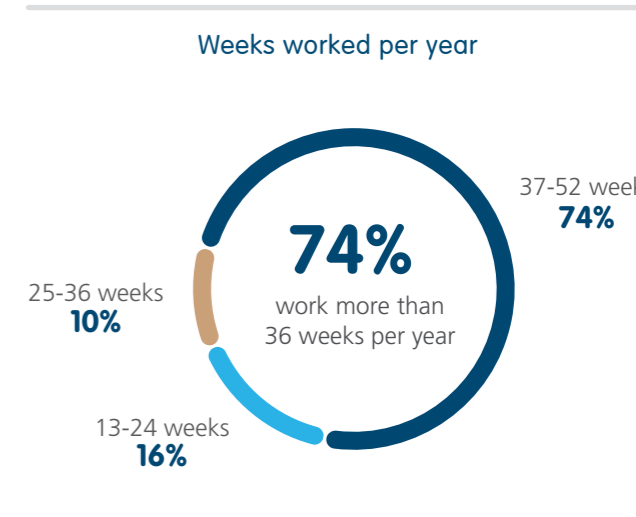
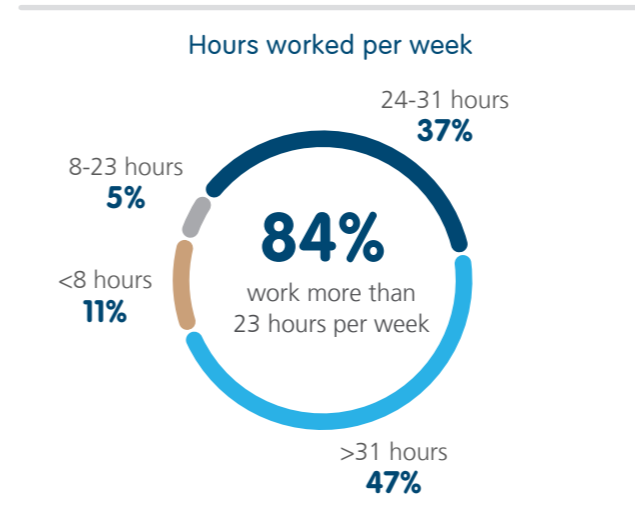
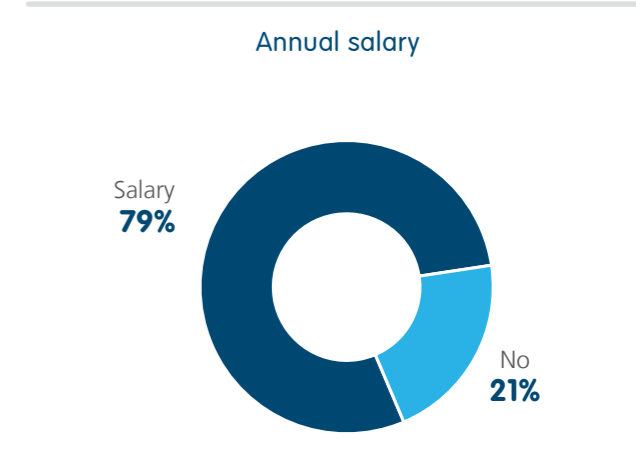
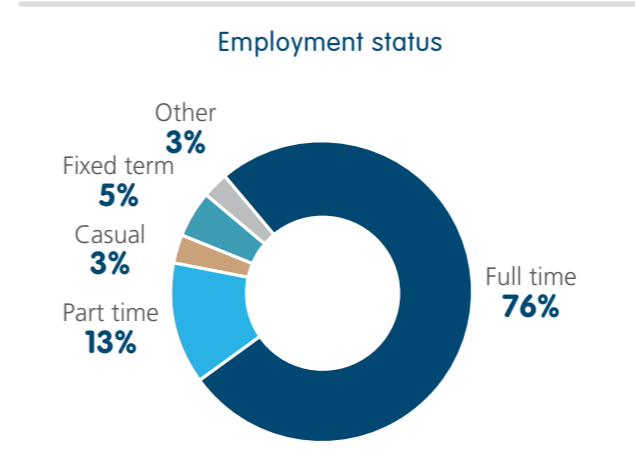
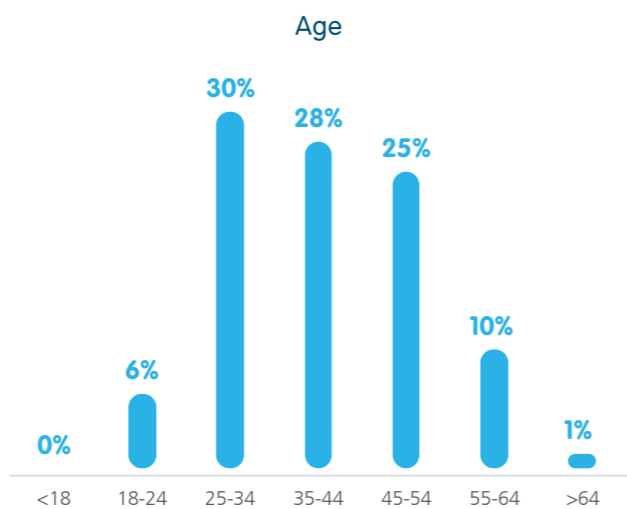
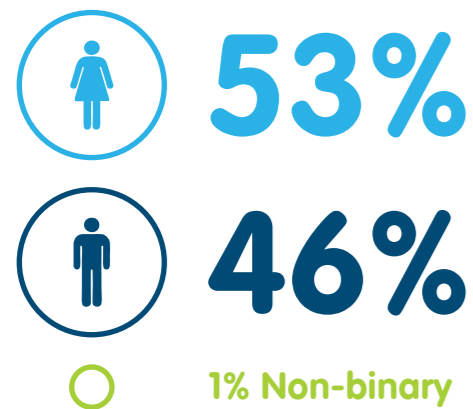
Professional development sessions per year



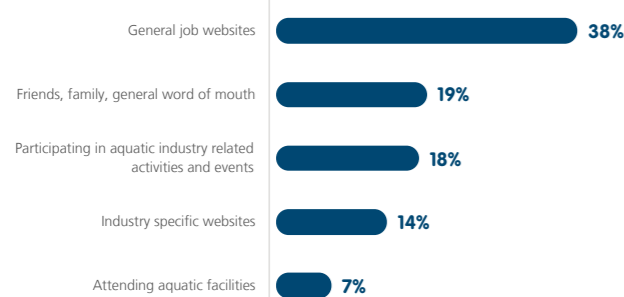
> A typical aquatic industry Office Worker...



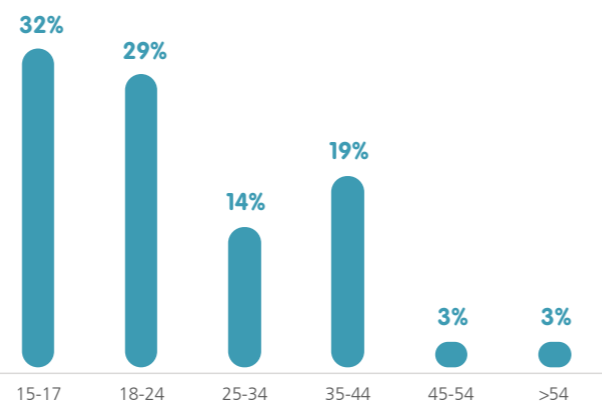
- works full-time
- works more than one role
- joined the industry between 15 - 24 years
- has been in the industry for more than six years
- works across multiple facilities
- undertakes three or more professional development sessions per year
- most enjoys having a positive impact on people lives and the community



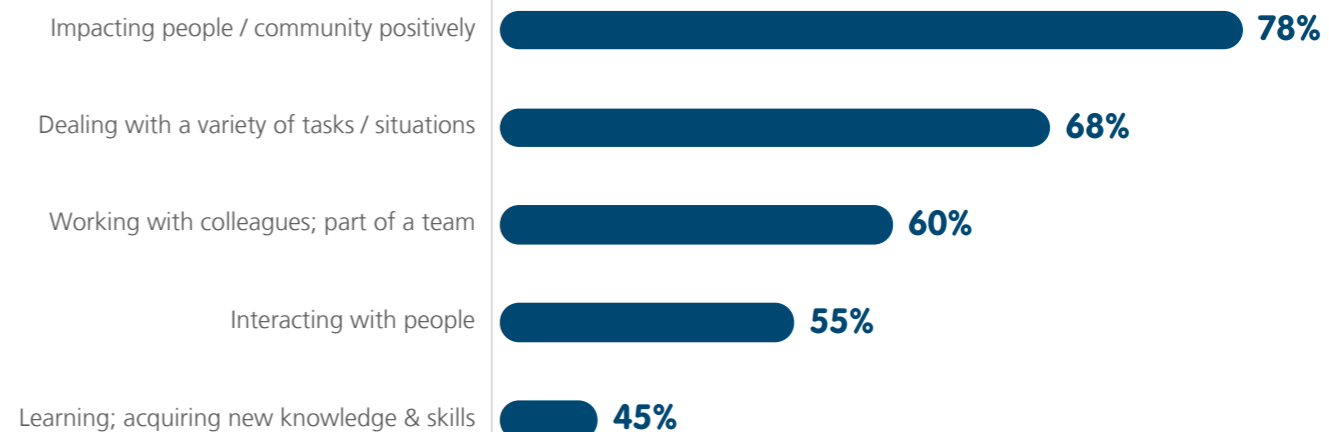
Learnt about jobs



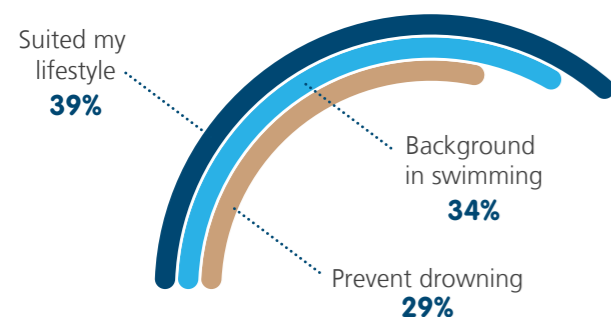
Age first commenced working in industry



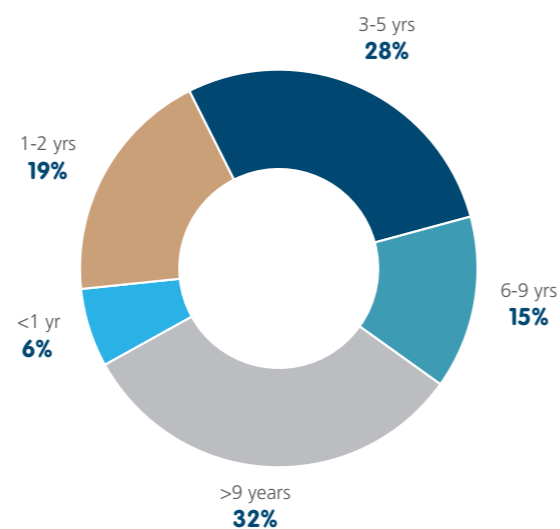
Most enjoyable parts of role



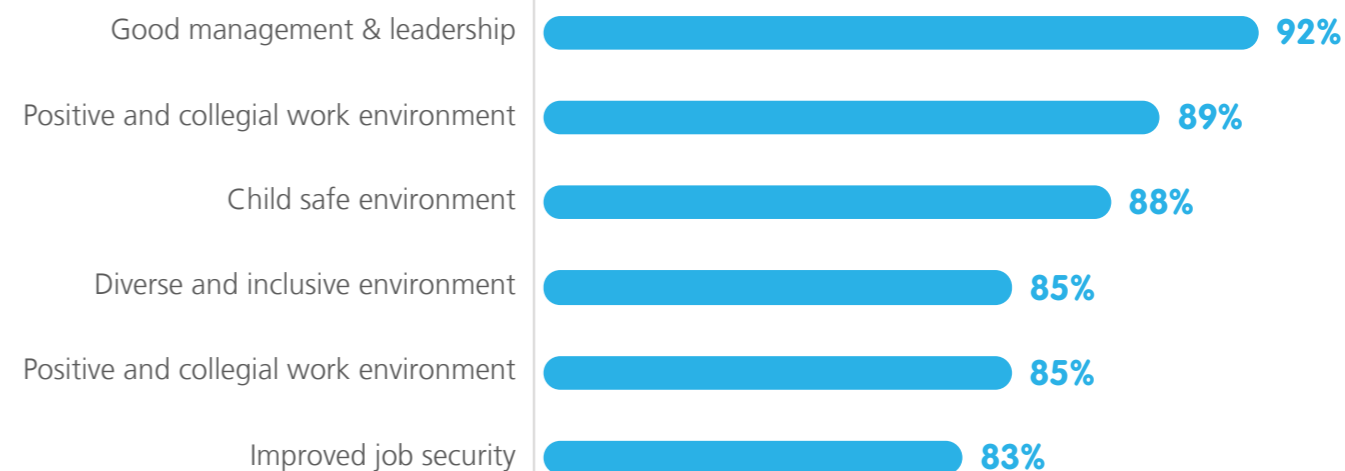
Why take up employment



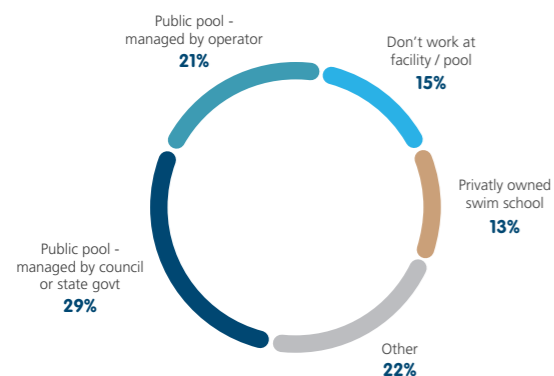
Future years in current role



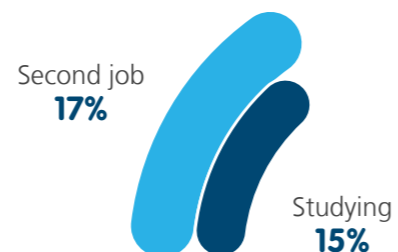
Importance of matters



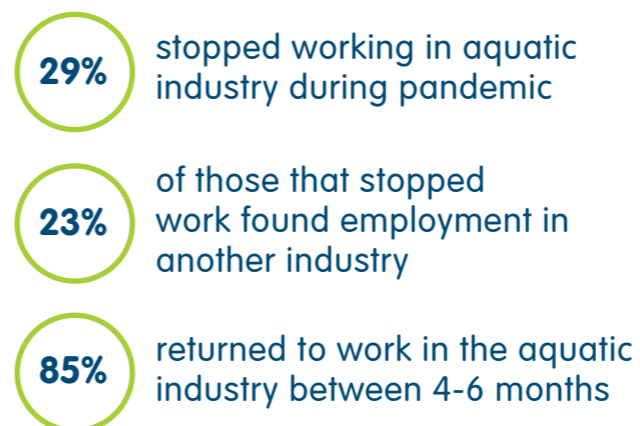
Employer type



Other work and study



Impact of COVID-19



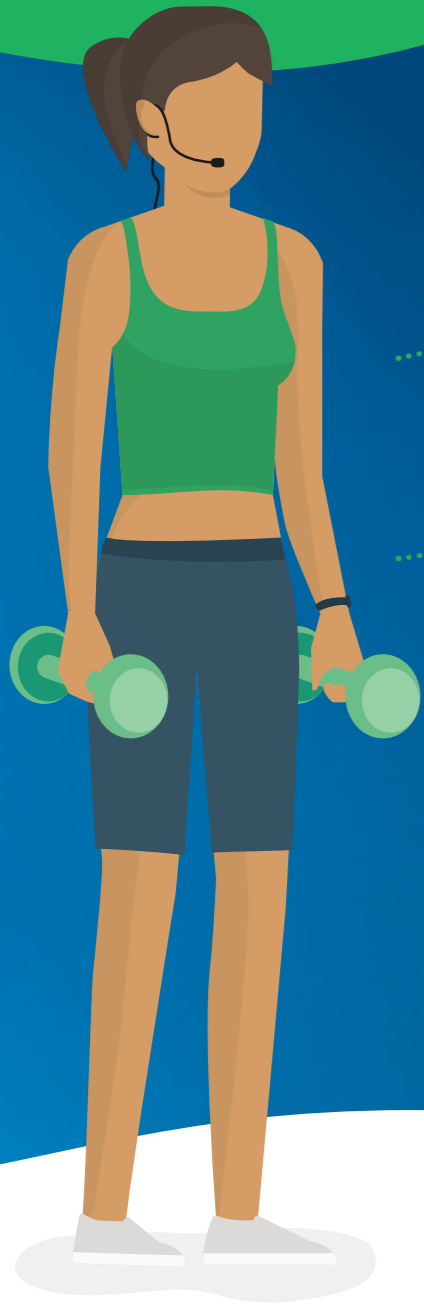
Skills for success

- #1 Problem solving / critical thinking
- #2 Teamwork & collaboration
- #3 Verbal communication
- #4 Planning, coordinating, organising
- #5 Conflict resolution

Professional development sessions per year

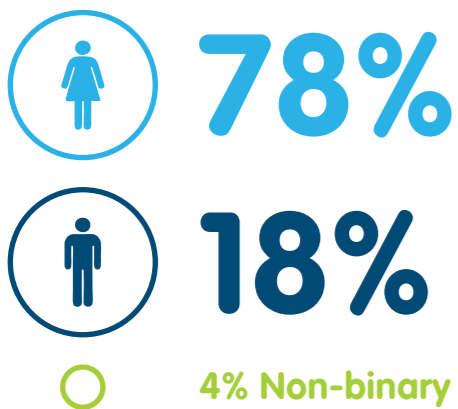


> A typical Aqua Exercise Instructor...

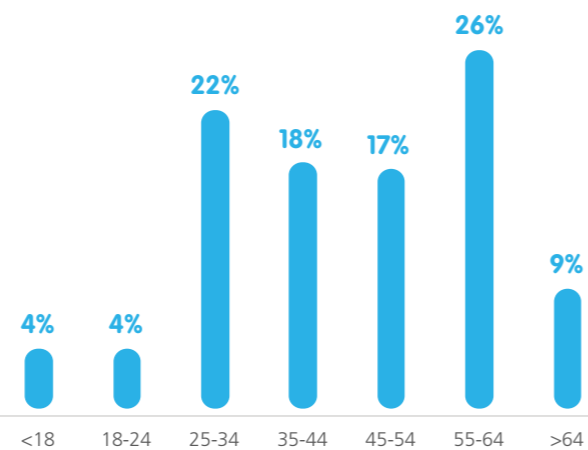


- is female
- performs more than one aquatic industry role
- works less than eight hours a week as an aqua exercise instructor
- has a second job
- undertakes three or more professional development sessions per year
- works for more than one organisation and works across multiple facilities
- most enjoys being physically active and interacting with people

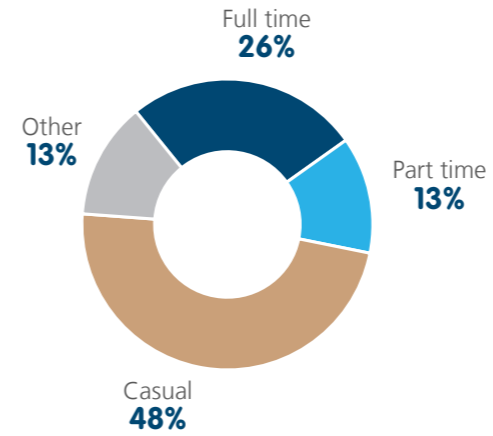
Gender



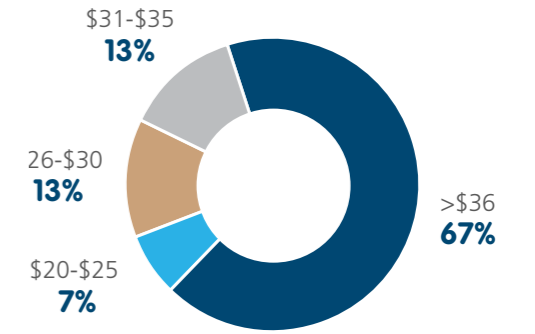
Age



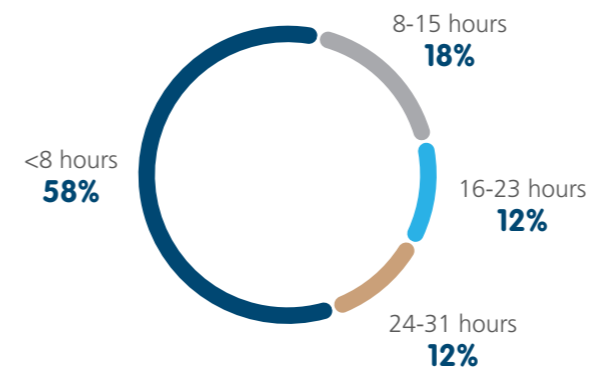
Employment status



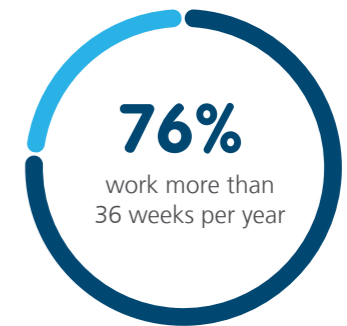
Hourly rate



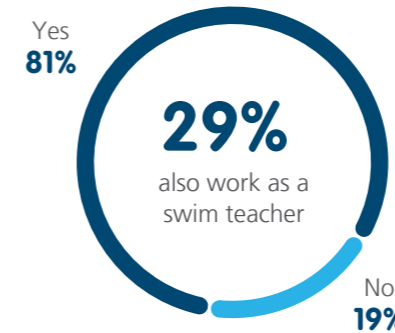
Hours worked per week



Weeks worked per year



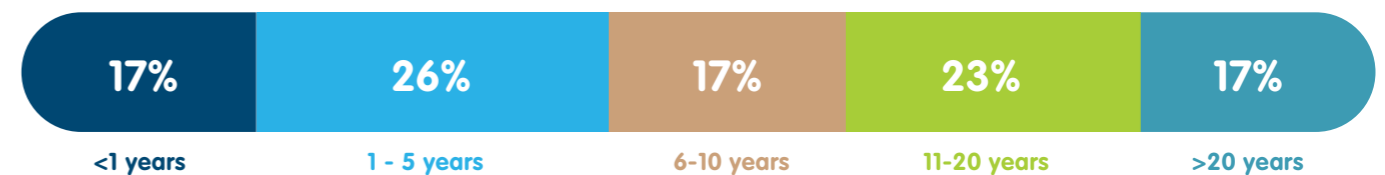
Perform more than 1 role



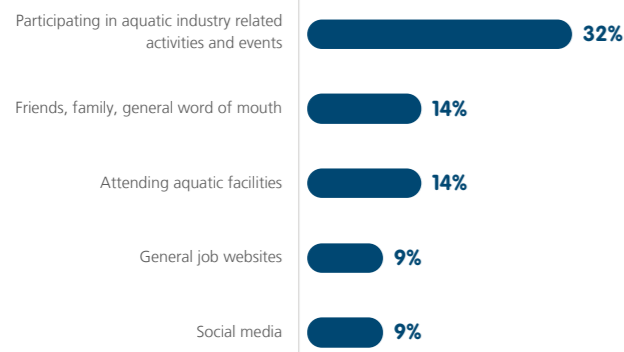
Work location



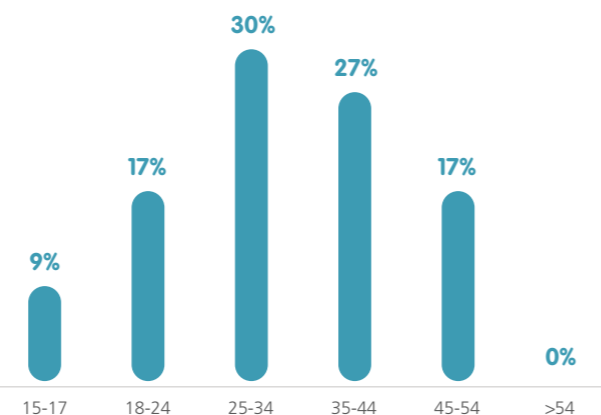
Years working in industry



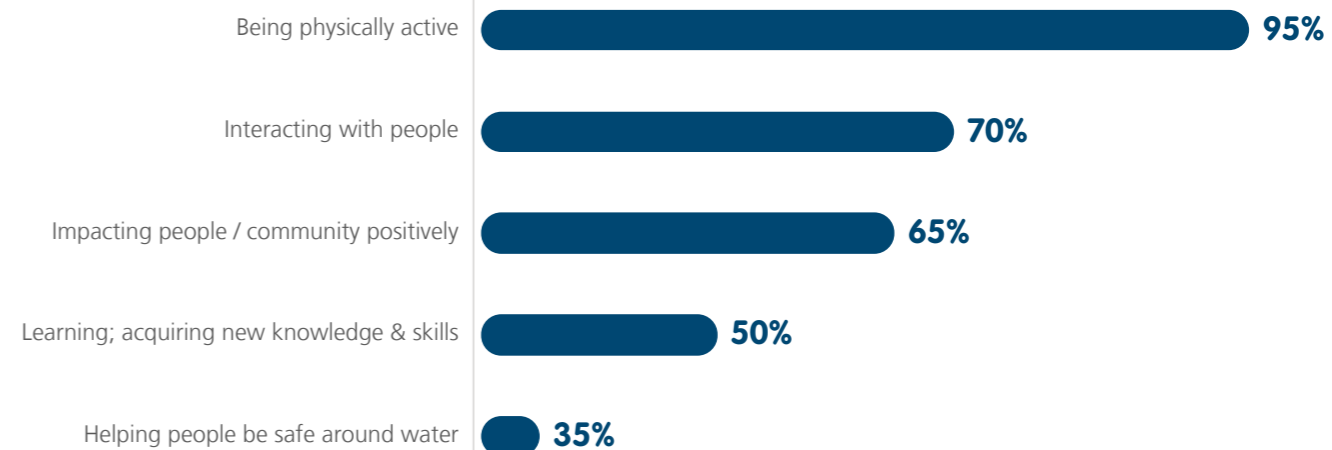
Learnt about jobs



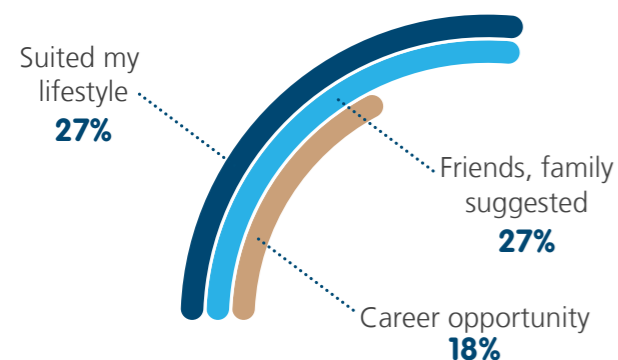
Age first commenced working in industry



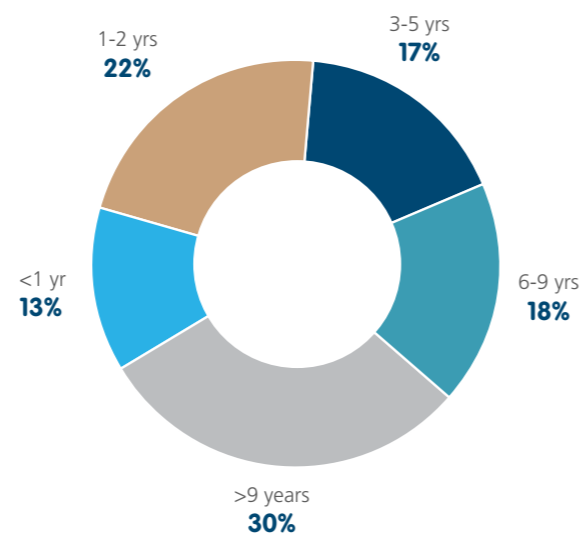
Most enjoyable parts of role



Why take up employment



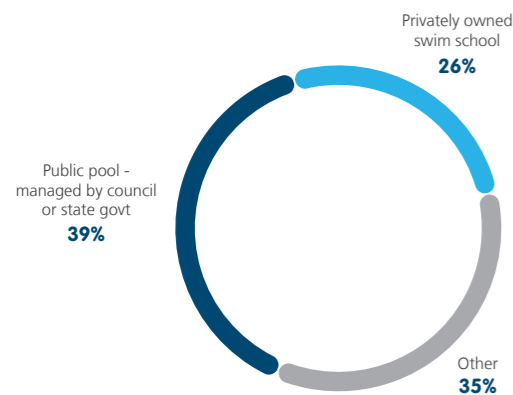
Future years in current role



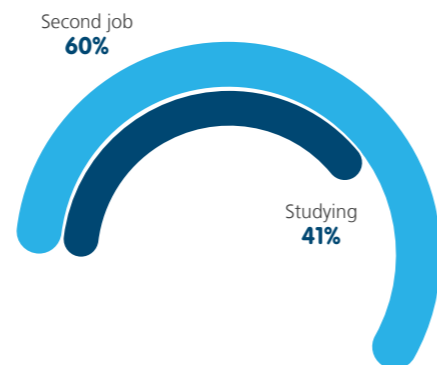
Reasons for leaving role (ranked average)



Employer type



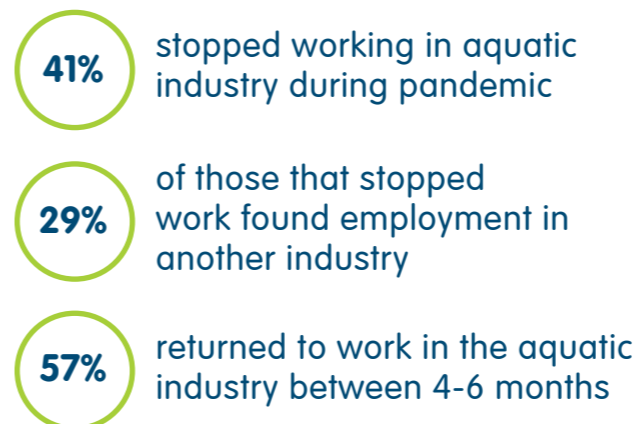
Other work and study



Professional development sessions per year



Impact of COVID-19



Skills for success



> DISCUSSION AND KEY FINDINGS

Comparison between 2019 and 2022

The aquatic industry was significantly affected by lockdown closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the first industries to close and last to re-open each lockdown, all 2,113 aquatic facilities were forced into closure at some point throughout 2020 and 2021, causing many of the 67,000 frontline workers to be stood down.

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia estimates that 10 million swimming lessons were missed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period. Cost of living pressures and worker shortages continue to affect aquatic facilities and hinder the nation's 'catch-up' of those missed swimming lessons.

Demographics

There was a significant reduction in the ratio of female workers to male workers in the aquatic industry in 2022 compared to 2019, with the ratio moving closer to parity. Additionally, workers tended to be older in 2022, with increases in employment of workers aged between the ages of 35 and 64 years old.

Learning about job vacancies

There was a significant shift in where people found out about jobs in the aquatic industry, with a noticeable increase in finding out about jobs through general job advertisement websites, and a noticeable reduction from attending aquatic facilities and becoming aware of job opportunities. This suggests that the industry is competing more heavily for talent in online recruiting markets.

Employment status

There has been a significant increase in full-time employment across the industry as well as a significant reduction in casual employment. This is likely a reflection of industrial relations reforms and the increased competition in securing talent.

Hours worked per week

The number of workers who work more than 23 hours per week has increased by 12 per cent. This is consistent with the shift towards full-time employment and is likely a result of staff shortages and the increased pressures on retaining talent.

Drivers for working in industry

Workers continue to be attracted to the industry to make a positive difference to their community, helping others to be safe, interacting with people, and learning new skills.

Professional development & in-service training

The percentage of employees who have completed four or more professional development sessions per year is concerningly low, particularly for Swim Teachers and Lifeguards from whom four in-service training sessions per year on key safety duties and techniques are recommended. An increased emphasis on recruitment and retention for service continuity may have had adverse impacts on ensuring safety training and procedures are consistently implemented.

Pool Lifeguards

Australian pool lifeguards (lifeguards) are world-renowned for their high levels of skill and knowledge in accident prevention and rescue response. Being a lifeguard comes with significant responsibilities.

A career as a lifeguard brings challenges and rewards and can lead to further job opportunities in the aquatic industry. It uses many core workplace skills such as communication, risk management, decision making, problem solving, teamwork, customer service and performing under pressure, all of which are transferable to other industry sectors.

Lifeguards should be strong swimmers, and, naturally, the job requires a certain degree of fitness, strength, and stamina to act quickly in case of an emergency.

Key findings on lifeguards from this report include:

- > Half work seasonally.
- > Half work across multiple aquatic facilities.
- > Nearly a third have multiple employers.
- > Nineteen per cent also work as swim teachers.
- > Sixty-one per cent are under the age of 25.
- > Only 10 per cent are full-time lifeguards.
- > Sixty per cent are students.
- > They most enjoy being part of a team.
- > They leave the industry due to insufficient hours and the seasonal nature of the work.
- > Concerningly, only 23 per cent undertake 4 or more in-service training sessions per year. Given half of the lifeguard workforce work year-round, the number should be closer to 50 per cent to meet the requirements in the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations.

Swimming and Water Safety Teachers

Swimming and water safety teachers (swim teachers) play a vital role in saving lives by educating Australians on swimming and water safety. They help people become confident swimmers, contribute to the creation of safer communities, and engage with people to teach the essential principles and practices of water safety.

Swimming teachers generally provide students with water familiarisation activities, water safety education, skill acquisition and parent involvement/education.

Key findings on swim teachers from this report include:

- > The vast majority (85%) are female.
- > Fifty-five per cent are over the age of 45 and 25 per cent are under the age of 25. This may be attributable to the flexibility of swim teaching hours which are suitable for students and parents with caring responsibilities. The peak periods for swim lessons are in the early evenings and on weekends.
- > They most value making a positive impact and helping people be safe around water.
- > They leave the industry due to insufficient hours and poor pay.
- > Similar to lifeguards, the percentage of swim teachers who participate in sufficient in-service training is much lower than the minimum recommended safety standard in the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations.

Office Workers

Aquatic facilities require a range of administration roles to ensure the management and operations of the facilities. Roles like customer service coordinators, marketing and communications coordinators and customer service officers are common roles in most year-round and/or indoor aquatic facilities.

Similar to centre managers, aquatic technical operators and swim school managers and coordinators, aquatic industry office workers are dedicated to the industry, with 57 per cent having worked in the industry for 11 years or more and 32 per cent intending to stay in their current role for 10 years or more.



Duty Managers

Duty managers provide on-shift supervision and leadership of aquatic facility staff, ensuring day-to-day frontline operations run smoothly at an aquatic facility. In addition to being responsible for coordinating emergency and incident response, acting as chief wardens and completing incident reports, they provide backup support to lifeguards to always ensure the safety of patrons and appropriate pool supervision.

Often, duty managers assist in covering key areas of frontline service, update rosters, ensure aquatic facilities are clean and presentable, monitor water quality and ensure service area procedures are followed to comply with regulations and standards.

Key findings on duty managers from this report include:

- › The percentage who are female remains well below parity at 34 per cent.
- › Sixty per cent also work as pool lifeguards.
- › One-third are students.
- › They report leaving the industry due to poor pay and having poor management and leadership.

Swim School Coordinators and Managers

Swim school coordinators and managers are generally responsible for the management and development of the swimming lesson programs at aquatic facilities. They oversee the leadership and management of swim teachers at the facility. Responsibilities often include reporting, payroll, rostering, recruitment, performance management, managing qualifications and compliance, managing customer feedback and implementation of the swimming and water safety program. They generally report to centre managers.

Key findings on swim school coordinators and managers from this report include:

- › Eighty-two per cent are female.
- › They are very committed to their role, with 67 per cent being in the industry for more than 11 years and 32 per cent saying they intend to stay in their current role for more than nine years.
- › Forty per cent have a background in swimming.
- › They are better at undertaking professional development than their industry colleagues, with 33 per cent undertaking more than four sessions per year.

Aquatic Technical Operators

Aquatic technical operators are responsible for safely managing water quality and pool plant operations at aquatic facilities. This function is generally captured in the operations coordinator and manager role in the aquatic industry. They coordinate day-to-day operations and ensure that appropriate risk and asset management regimes are in place and being followed in line with industry standards and regulations, including the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations. They are generally responsible for overseeing duty managers and lifeguards.

Key findings on aquatic technical operators from this report include:

- › Less than a quarter (22%) are female. This could be because of reduced flexibility or lack of suitable pathways from the swim teacher stream.
- › Thirty-five per cent have been in industry for more than 10 years and 32 per cent intend to work in their current role for more than nine years.

Professional Development

Survey respondents were asked to list two professional skills they would like to develop over the next 12 months. The word cloud below captures a thematic analysis of their responses. The responses reflect a wide range of skills, however it is notable that there is a strong trend towards general workplace and leadership skills as opposed to job-specific technical skills.

This may be because in-service training will typically cover job-specific skills and therefore respondents are indicating their desire for training and support in developing other relevant skills. These results also align with data indicating that workers want more opportunities to expand their skill set and pursue other opportunities and career pathways within the aquatic industry. This is borne out in the qualitative answers covered in the next section.



Strengths, Improvements, Opportunities

Questions 53-55 were free text questions which asked respondents the following:

What are some things that organisations/employers in the aquatic industry do well?

What are some things that organisations/employers in the aquatic industry could improve?

What areas of opportunity do you see for the aquatic industry?

The below direct respondent answers are reflective of the themes raised across the breadth of responses.

Respondent quotes

Organisations / employers do well

Top themes: communication, teamwork, safety, community, training / development / pathways

Communication:

- "Communicate well and have a structured program."

Teamwork:

- "Some organisations are able to create great teams, who work well together and help each other with their strengths and weaknesses."

Safety:

- "In the industry I believe we take our job very seriously and we try our best to perform at high levels to ensure everyone feels safe. If an incident does occur, we consider it a failure on our part even if it ends successfully."

Community

- "Allowing communities, especially smaller or regional communities, to access aquatic venues and lessons."

Training, Development, Pathways:

- "The PD training and conferences by organisations tend to be very good."
- "I work with three different organisations and all have been incredibly supportive and helpful to ensure that I am able to do the job that I was hired to do."
- "I have worked with a lot of really talented managers and colleagues over the years. The issue is not attracting talent, it is keeping it. They all leave for better things as soon as they appear. Particularly at the management level."

Organisations / employers could improve

Top themes: communication, career development, professional development / training, community

Communication:

- "Acknowledge and respect staff, implement required training, value your team, build work/life relationships meaningfully. Take responsibility and ownership for the culture of the business."
- Feedback to staff on performance. Make employer expectations of staff clear, with constructive feedback regarding any issues or potential issues."
- Management listening to staff members who are at the bottom, i.e. lifeguards, CSOs, swim teachers. These staff have experience dealing with customers and situations and therefore have a greater understanding of what needs to happen at that level than management does."

Career Development:

- "Higher remuneration, faster on-boarding process, help with requalification requirements."
- "Provide better opportunities for staff, too much casual/part time work, find ways to make teaching learn to swim and ideal career."
- "Giving long term casuals the option of being permanent part time."
- "Giving middle management opportunities to act in higher roles for experience."

Professional Development / Training:

- "I personally have left jobs as a swimming teacher when supervisory staff actually lack the skill/education/professional development to lead a team."
- "Professional development in regional areas."
- "Recognition, payment for skills development."
- "Cost of requalification and the need to work in the industry at least once to keep education department clearance. The recognition of prior learning for upskilling."
- "Subsidise payment of swim instructor/lifeguard courses and updates. Fast track those whose qualifications have expired and who were confident and competent instructors."
- "Bring more incentives to re-hire learn to swim instructors who have either retired or not worked for years. There is not enough! The government incentive to employ the 16 – 19-year-olds who were given free courses doesn't work. Allow free courses to be completed by those who have the skill set and would come back to be employed."

Community:

- "Strategic planning for the community they work with, 5-10-year plans."
- "Pay people that are willing to travel and work in remote/regional places and pay them well. Also, reduced power, water and rent for facilities in regional areas."

Opportunities (for industry)

Top themes: career development, professional development, community / diversity and inclusion, promotion / evolution / expansion

Career Development

- "Develop ways that employees can identify the long-term potential of working in this industry. Reduce turnover of staffing."
- "Promote career pathways."
- "Stop keeping important, long-term employees in a casual position. Provide opportunity for upward mobility/promotion within ALL aspects of aquatic industry."
- "Employing staff more permanently - paying for professional development and licences."
- "There is not much real career path that encourages long-term investment in aquatic education. How many swim teachers could retire as self-funded retiree?"
- "Formal recognition of staff service, i.e., 10, 15, 20+ years of service."
- "Planning career paths for staff - not just a job for a gap year."

Professional Development

- "Mentorship (paid) for the more experienced swim teachers helping the new teachers coming through."
- "Strong focus on interpersonal skills as a core component of aquatic roles."
- "Often times the technical professional development is taught however fundamental interpersonal skills are not, which sets staff up for a challenging time in the role."
- "More accessible professional development in rural locations."

Community / Diversity and Inclusion

- "I see a lot of potential in community building and inclusion."
- "I see diversity as an opportunity as many swimming pools are now accessible for each and every person wanting to swim."
- "I would like to see more community events at pools and pools with periods where lane ropes are removed so the community can enjoy like they did in the past. Not everyone is a lap swimmer. More interactive activities for teens."
- "Providing activities to reach the aging population that may not like swimming laps. Variations of water walking and aquatic exercise classes. Including water rehab facilities and services to help older bodies but also provide a greater linkage to physiotherapists."
- "In the next few years, I can see our industry being a lot more inclusive of cultures and genders. This will be a huge positive for not only business but also for reducing drowning rates and increasing safety around water."
- "Diversifying teams - welcoming more people with disabilities - removing barriers."
- "Rehabilitation, social interaction between seniors, mothers' groups."
- "More opportunities for immigrants to have access to swimming programs would be fantastic."
- "Expand adult learn to swim opportunities, especially for migrants, including gender segregated lesson opportunities for those with cultural restrictions."

Promotion, Evolution, Expansion

- "Tie aquatic centres into the health care system more, councils that run pools generally are tied to parks & rec. Aquatics is all about health and well-being, the more people we engage, the less strain on the welfare system there is."
- "Huge growth opportunities in learn to swim if staff can be increased and retained."
- "Addressing the staff shortages by looking into casual employment, can the industry investigate with Fair Work how we address the casual nature of our industry? Can workplace agreements be streamlined in a way they can be used by all councils, leisure management agencies etc?"
- "Cross council collaboration on facility planning and location."
- "Hydrotherapy is almost completely under-developed."
- "Huge opportunity for more swimming lessons to be run whether that to be private or through department of education to improve water safety."
- "Like overseas, expansion in not just swimming programs but also aquatic exercise & rehabilitation for all ages abilities & cultures. Separating pool space times for different programs to work harmoniously. Another opportunity is the demand for aquatic exercise professionals."
- "Promoting the industry for the positive things that come from using the facilities, i.e., fitness, the social side (mental health) etc."

> RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information collected from the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey 2022, Royal Life Saving proposes the following recommendations to strengthen and support the aquatic industry workforce:

Risk, Professional Development and Career Pathways

- > In line with recommendations from Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations (GSPO), increase the availability of in-service training covering safety and key technical skills for pool lifeguards and swim teachers in particular.
- > Investigate, review and develop a nationally consistent workforce framework which captures and standardises approaches to professional development, reaccreditation and career development pathways for workers. This would improve retention, reduce risk, and increase quality of service provision across the national aquatic industry.

Community and Diversity

- > Foster a workforce that is representative of the local community by actively seeking workers from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds.
- > Investigate, review and develop national strategies and fit-for-purpose incentives that will attract and retain quality staff.
- > Support advocacy bodies, including Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and others, in raising the profile of the aquatic industry as a career pathway and the positive impacts of working in the industry at an individual, community and socio-economic level.

Health and Safety

- > Strengthen training around skills, knowledge and requirements for ensuring staff safety in an aquatic facility context.
- > Investigate research needs and opportunities in worker health and safety in the aquatic industry.

Leadership and Management

- > Encourage career pathways and support for workers to develop into higher roles in industry, particularly for women. Advocating success stories may be one way to encourage greater cut through and improved outcomes.
- > Recognise that workers in the aquatic industry want not just a job, but a lifestyle, connection and meaningful engagement. Investing in leadership and purpose may assist to attract and retain talent.
- > Support advocacy bodies, including Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and others, to sustain advocacy and share success stories.
- > Consider and support staff involvement in strategy development and decision making.

Further Research and Data

- > Review and evaluate the state of the aquatic industry workforce at a minimum of every three years.
- > Understand the impact of emergency incidents, including rescue and resuscitation, on the mental health of workers.
- > As part of the workforce framework development, investigate the feasibility of a national data collection system for aquatic industry workforce data.
- > Evaluate programs which support lowering barriers to access training and entry-level vocational qualifications and implement findings.



> METHODS

Survey

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 National Aquatic Industry Committee (NAIC) and the RLS Training and Workforce Development Committee. This was subsequently refined based on feedback and then deployed.

THE SURVEY - QUICK FACTS



OPENED 15 November 2022
CLOSED 15 December 2022



SURVEY DESIGN AND DEPLOYMENT:
Survey Monkey

PROMOTED THROUGH

National Aquatic Industry 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 organisations – government and non-government.

PROMOTIONAL TOOLS USED



ORGANISATION WEBSITES



EMAIL



SOCIAL MEDIA



INDUSTRY PAPER-BASED/
E-MAGAZINES



TOTAL NUMBER OF QUESTIONS



AVERAGE TIME SPENT PER RESPONDENT



TOTAL RESPONDENTS

> INDUSTRY SIZE - REFERENCES

The total industry figure (65,000) was estimated through a modelling process using data from the below sources.

- Aquatics and Recreation Victoria (2022). 'COVID-19 impacts and recovery survey report'. Victoria, Australia
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.abs.gov.au/>
- Australian Government Australian Sports Commission (2017) Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017
- Australian Industry and Skills Committee - National Industry Insights Reports (website decommissioned early 2023)
- AUSTSWIM Annual Report 2021-2022
- Life Saving Victoria (2022). 'Swim teacher shortage report'. Victoria, Australia
- Life Saving Victoria (2022). 'Victorian public pools - State of the sector report / 2021-22'. Victoria, Australia
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research, VOCSTATS site
- PwC Australia. 2021. 'The Health, Social and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry'. Prepared for Royal Life Saving, Melbourne, Australia
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia – Sydney, 'Annual Report 2021/22'
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia - Sydney, 'Economic Benefits of Australia's Public Aquatic Facilities', Barnsley, P. Peden, A. Scarr, J. (2017)
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia – Sydney, 'National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey' (2019)
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia – Sydney, 'National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey' (2022)
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia – Sydney, 'National Database of Swim Schools'
- Royal Life Saving Society Australia – Sydney, 'National Database of Aquatic Facilities'
- Royal Life Saving Society WA and Leisure Institute of WA (LIWA) 'Bigger, Safer, Better Report 2021-22', 'Bigger, Safer, Better Report 2020-21', 'Bigger, Safer, Better Report 2019-20'
- Sherry, E., Karg, A. J., Storr, R., Yeomans, C., Houston, R.J. (2021). Social Impact of the National Aquatic Industry. Swinburne Sport Innovation Research Group and Royal Life Saving Society – Australia

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.
- Aquatic industry workers often fulfil multiple roles
- Many aquatic industry workers are self-employed (i.e. run their own business)

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

Note that data proportions in this report have been rounded to nearest whole number.

Footnotes

- 1 <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/australia-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-population-summary>
- 2 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/employee-earnings/latest-release>
- 3 <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>
- 4 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/characteristics-employment-australia/latest-release>

Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia would like to thank the following organisations for their support in promoting the National Aquatic Industry Workforce Survey (2022) and production of this report.

- Aligned Leisure
- Aquatic and Recreation Institute (ARI)
- Aquatics and Recreation Victoria (ARV)
- Australasian Council for the Teaching of Swimming and Water Safety (AUSTSWIM)
- Australian Swim Schools Association (ASSA)
- Belgravia Leisure
- Bluefit
- City of Greater Geelong, VIC
- City of Norwood, SA
- Leisure Institute of Western Australia (LIWA)
- Lifesaving Victoria
- Moreton Bay Regional Council
- Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs)
- Sunshine Coast Council, QLD
- Swimming Australia
- Swimming Coaches and Teachers Australia (SCTA)
- Swimming Pool and Spa Association Australia (SPASA)
- VIVA Leisure
- The Y (YMCA)

Recommended Citation:

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