

Upskilling and reskilling: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employers and their training choices

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We wish to acknowledge and thank Anna Payton for her work in compiling a summary of government programs and initiatives targeting employers and workforce training.



Summary of key findings

The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a profound impact on Australian employers as a result of the social and economic restrictions imposed by governments to control the spread of the virus. To address this, governments have adopted a range of measures to support individuals and businesses. The initiatives most relevant to employers were the JobKeeper scheme, funding for infection-control training, a wage subsidy to support apprentices and trainees, an incentive to boost apprenticeship commencements and the JobTrainer scheme.

In the initial stages of the pandemic, many businesses had to adjust rapidly to changed operating conditions and the reduced demand for their products and services. Data collected by the National Skills Commission (2021a) indicated that between 40 and 50% of businesses in all states and territories were substantially impacted by the pandemic and associated restrictions during the April to June quarter in 2020. Impacts varied widely by industry, for example, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS; 2021a) data revealed that 80% of businesses in the accommodation and food service industry were significantly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, followed closely by arts and recreation services, at 70%.

Businesses of all sizes reported needing to modify their operations due to the pandemic. The most prevalent adjustments related to the way in which they provided their products and services, along with changes to staff roles or duties. Employers in the industries impacted most severely looked to pivot their operations, for example, restaurants moved from in-house dining to home deliveries (O'Dwyer 2021).

For many employers, the changes induced by COVID-19 in the way products and services are provided have accelerated the digitalisation of business operations. Data collected by the National Skills Commission (2021a) reported that around a third of businesses in Australia adopted new technology due to the pandemic, although this varied according to the industry. Factors driving this change were the increased use of digital technologies as a consequence of social restrictions; increased online shopping; businesses increasing their online footprint; and an increased proportion of the workforce working from home or remotely.

One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic on employers was the sudden transition to remote-working arrangements for their employees. The Productivity Commission (2021) reported that it is unlikely that Australia will return to pre-pandemic levels of working from home due to shifts in perspective on this approach to work on the part of both employers and employees. The Productivity Commission (2021) also highlighted that one of the potential costs to employees of remote working was fewer training, development and promotion opportunities as a result of their decreased visibility to managers.

In the second half of 2020, as restrictions eased in all states and territories apart from Victoria, the proportion of employers recruiting rose from 22% to 45% (National Skills Commission 2021). This corresponded with an increasing proportion of employers experiencing difficulties in finding suitable staff, particularly larger employers (ABS 2021a). These difficulties were mainly due to a lack of applicants for jobs, followed by applicants not having the necessary skills or qualifications (ABS 2021a). The closure of international borders, limiting access to the global labour market, was also a significant issue for large employers (ABS 2021a).

The impact of COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions not surprisingly had a flow-on effect on employers' training requirements. Following the end of the initial lockdowns, employers were faced with a significantly changed operating environment, one that included infection-control measures, employees working remotely, ongoing social restrictions, and, for many states and territories, intermittent lockdowns. Over 40% of employers in the 2021 Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System

(NCVER 2021c) reported the emergence of new training requirements due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher proportions of larger employers than smaller ones indicating this. The industries hardest hit by the pandemic, such as accommodation and food services and arts and recreation services, had the highest proportions of employers with new training requirements resulting from COVID-19.

The main reason given by employers for these new requirements was to enable them to operate effectively and safely in the COVID environment (83.6%) (NCVER 2021c). The next most common responses related to the requirement to train staff to undertake new tasks and responsibilities (32.8%) and the need to access training to help manage business operations in the COVID environment, for example, switching to online ordering of products (30.8%).

The new training requirements were predominately in the areas of health and safety (70.8%) and infection-control skills (68.0%) (NCVER 2021c). This was especially so for employers in industries that involve a high degree of social contact, such as accommodation and food services and health care and social assistance. A smaller proportion of employers also reported new training requirements in sales and customer service (25.1%), and computer and data literacy (18.6%).

To meet these new training needs, employers tended to use informal or ad hoc training (55.5%) and unaccredited training, which was provided either in house by the organisation (50.3%) or delivered by an external provider (22.0%) (NCVER 2021c). Employers chose the type of training they used because of an immediate need to respond to rapidly changing training needs (52.1%) and because of its availability (34.4%).

COVID-19 restrictions forced employers to rapidly transition training to online forms of delivery (Bowman & Callan 2021) and registered training organisations (RTOs) to transition a considerable amount of face-to-face training online (Hume & Griffin 2021). The consensus among employers was that the increase in this form of training delivery was here to stay – they viewed it as a time- and cost-effective way to skill their workforce (Bowman & Callan 2021; O’Dwyer 2021). However, concerns were raised over whether it could be as effective for those forms of training that were traditionally delivered in person, for example, training in the use of tools and equipment (O’Dwyer 2021).

An analysis of longer-term training trends by NCVER (2021c) revealed that the proportion of employers using nationally recognised training or had jobs that require vocational qualifications is currently at the highest level in 10 years. The proportion of employers with apprentices and trainees is also at its highest since 2011, reversing a steady decline over the past decade, with employers taking up the apprentice and trainees wage subsidies on offer from the government. The proportion of employers using unaccredited training is also at its highest since 2009.

Around one in five employers had changed training priorities for the coming 12 months compared with the previous 12 months due to the impacts of COVID-19 (NCVER 2021c). The main reasons given were: to catch up on missed training; to meet COVID-19 regulations; and to continue upskilling their staff. Just over 30% of employers expected the amount of training they will provide in the next 12 months to increase, with fewer than 5% expecting a decrease. The main reasons for increasing training were:

- they were hiring more staff or looking to expand their business
- they needed to upskill or provide additional skills to their employees
- the workplace had changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both employers and training organisations have shown themselves to be remarkably adaptable and innovative in their ability to provide training to the workforce, despite the challenges of the pandemic. During the pandemic, employers required training that could respond to their rapidly changing operating environments, with a large proportion utilising unaccredited and informal training to meet their needs.

The findings of this report and other research indicate a sizeable proportion of businesses are now looking to training to help them to recover and grow in the post-pandemic economy.

The challenge for the vocational education and training (VET) system in Australia will be to ensure that it continues to adapt and innovate its services in a responsive way, one that meets employer skill needs. We know from NCVET (2021c) that a large proportion of employers are satisfied with the training they use. However, for those businesses who are not satisfied with accredited training, the consistent reasons cited are:

- the relevant skills are not taught
- there needs to be more focus on practical skills
- the quality of the training needs to be improved (NCVER 2021c).

The nation's post-pandemic economic recovery, with the transition to new ways of working, offers opportunities for the VET system to address these ongoing concerns of employers, as well as meet new requirements such as:

- the need for employers to meet COVID-19 safe operating regulations
- new skilling needs due to technological change and the accelerating digitalisation of the workplace
- blended methods of training delivery (striking the right balance of online and face-to-face).

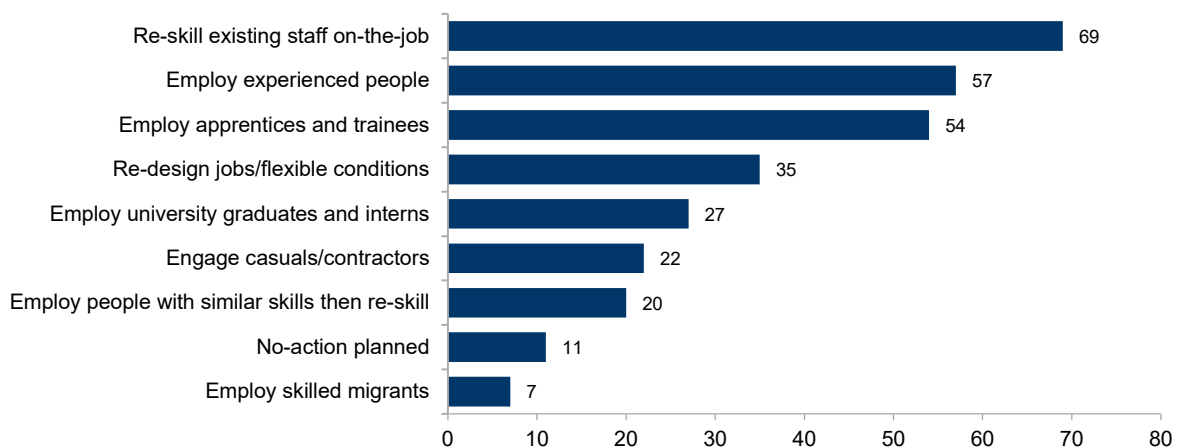
The VET sector's ability to respond to these challenges will play a key role in determining the future competitiveness of Australian employers in a post-pandemic world.

Introduction

The public health measures established to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have created uncertain economic conditions in Australia, significantly impacting on the activities of businesses. As the country continues to adjust to living with the virus, it is important that the VET sector understands the skill needs of employers as they navigate the accelerating technological advances and the structural changes to the economy created by the pandemic. Using findings from the 2021 Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System (NCVER 2021c) and other complementary sources, this report examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employers and its effects on their training choices.

Employers use a variety of human capital investment strategies to achieve their business objectives. A recent survey of Australian businesses conducted by the Australian Industry Group (2021) revealed that reskilling existing staff was the most common intended strategy for meeting skilling needs over the upcoming 12 months (69%), followed by employing experienced people (57%), and employing apprentices and trainees (54%). Only a small proportion of businesses claimed that they intended to employ skilled migrants, reflecting the current barriers to accessing this labour market (figure 1). Importantly, it means that, in the short-to-medium term, employers' skilling requirements will largely need to be met by Australia's existing labour force.

Figure 1 Employers' intended action to meet skill needs over the next 12 months (%)



Note: Responses are not a representative sample of the Australian economy but are from a mix of industry sectors: manufacturing (58.5%); construction (9%); services (13%); mining (3.5%); and other sectors (16%). Respondents represented all company sizes: 31% small-sized, 45% medium-sized, and 24% large-sized businesses.

Source: Australian Industry Group (2021).

The ongoing upskilling of the workforce is widely seen by Australian employers as being essential for competitiveness in a globalised post-pandemic economy, characterised by rapid technological change (Australian Industry and Skills Committee 2021). Smith et al. (2017) found that the reasons employers train their workforces had not changed appreciably over time. Online surveys and semi-structured interviews with employers revealed that the most important drivers of training were:

- the constant need to improve the quality of products and/or services
- the adoption of new technology
- the need to meet increasing regulatory requirements.

Similarly, Bowman and Callan (2021) found that employers train their workforces to improve their businesses, judging the proposed training by its relevance to the skill needs of their workers; its

flexibility in fitting in with their business cycles; the expertise of the training provider; and its affordability.

Types of training

Employers can choose between different types of training, depending on their skill needs – accredited, unaccredited, informal (refer to box one for definitions). Importantly, employers see these forms of training as complementary (Bowman & Callan 2021). The Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System, conducted by NCVET in 2021, found that, in the preceding 12 months, 56.6% of Australian employers had engaged with accredited training; 52.2% provided unaccredited training; and 76.6% used informal training (NCVER 2021c). Only 11.2% of employers did not provide any training at all to their employees (NCVER 2021c).

Box 1 Types of training

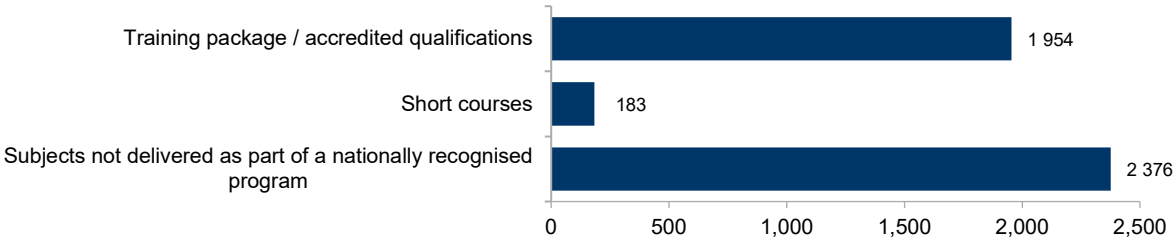
This report adopts the following definitions for types of training:

- *Accredited training* refers to a program of training leading to vocational qualifications and credentials that are recognised by the attainment of a formal qualification or award. This can include whole courses or selected modules of a course.
- *Unaccredited training* refers to a program of structured training or instruction that does not lead to the attainment of a formal qualification or award, for example, short courses, product-specific training and industry or organisation-specific training.
- *Informal training* refers to unstructured training that usually occurs on the job through interactions with co-workers as part of the day-to-day work, for example, on-the-job coaching, mentoring or reading on the internet.

Employers can engage with accredited training in three main ways: having jobs that require vocational qualifications, having apprentices and trainees; or by using nationally recognised training (other than through apprenticeships and traineeships).

The national VET system covers a broad range of skilling needs, from qualification-based training, which leads to vocational careers, to shorter courses or subjects, often undertaken for regulatory or licensing purposes. An estimated 21.7% of the Australian resident population aged 15 to 64 years participated in nationally recognised training in 2020 (NCVER 2021b). Some students enrolled in one or more programs, others in subjects that were not part of a nationally recognised program, and many in a combination of both (figure 2).

Figure 2 Students enrolled in nationally recognised training, 2020



Note: Short courses include training package skill sets and accredited courses.
Source: NCVET (2021b).

Employers also access unaccredited and informal training, which sits outside the mandatory reporting requirements associated with nationally recognised training. Consequently, administrative data relating to these forms of training are not systematically collected, other than that funded by the various state

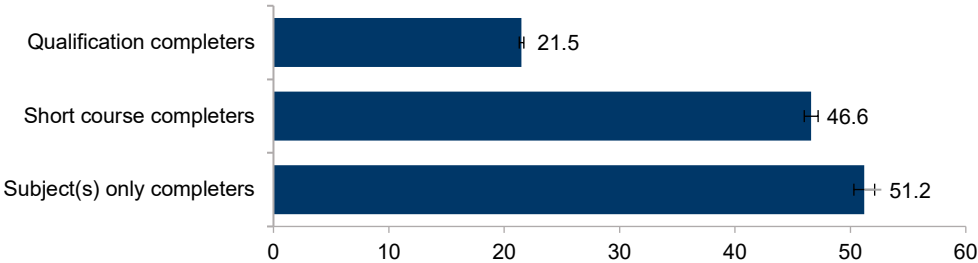
and territory governments, meaning that the true extent of their uptake in Australia is largely unknown. Previous research has shown that employers use unaccredited training to address job- or organisation-specific training needs and in response to new technology (White, De Silva & Rittie 2018). The key reasons for employers choosing unaccredited over accredited training are the ability to tailor the training to their needs; it is more cost-effective; and the flexibility in its provision (NCVER 2021c).

Employers’ contribution to training

Very little recent data on employer training expenditure are available, although it is known that employers make a significant financial contribution to skilling the workforce. The Training Expenditure and Practices Survey, conducted with employers in the financial year 2001–02, estimated the total direct employer training expenditure, net of subsidies, to be \$3.7 billion (ABS 2003). Burke (2016) calculated that the 2001–02 spending by employers, adjusted to 2014 prices, would total \$7 billion, assuming a 25% real increase, in line with employment growth in Australia. This was almost as much as government spending on the publicly supported VET system during 2014 (NCVER 2015). It is likely that employers have continued to increase their expenditure on training over recent years; for example, Smith et al. (2017) found that most employers reported increased training of staff over the previous five years, with one of the main drivers being the adoption of new technology.

The administrative data collections currently do not record whether training was paid by the individual or by the employer (only if it was government-funded or not). However, the National Student Outcomes Survey does ask students for the source of payment for their training. Figure 3 reveals that employers’ contribution to students’ training varies quite considerably, according to the type of training undertaken. For example, employers paid for over half of the students who completed an accredited VET subject(s) in 2020 that was not part of a nationally recognised program (subject[s] only completers).

Figure 3 Employer was main source of payment for nationally recognised training, by student group, 2021 (%)



Source: NCVER (2021d).

Data from the 2021 National Student Outcomes Survey reveals that a high proportion of subject(s) only completers (84.6%) were employed prior to commencing their training and, of these, 58.3% reported that they had undertaken the training because it was a requirement of their job (NCVER 2021d). Similarly, 82.5% of those who completed a short course during 2020 were employed before starting their training, of which nearly half (47.7%) said their main reason for training was that it was a requirement for their job (NCVER 2021d). This is consistent with Palmer (2021), who found that subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program are often undertaken to meet some form of occupational regulation or licensing, with the majority of training activity in this area funded on a fee-for-service-basis (Palmer 2021). The evidence presented above suggests that, when individuals undertake shorter forms of nationally recognised training that is required for their job, employers often foot the bill.



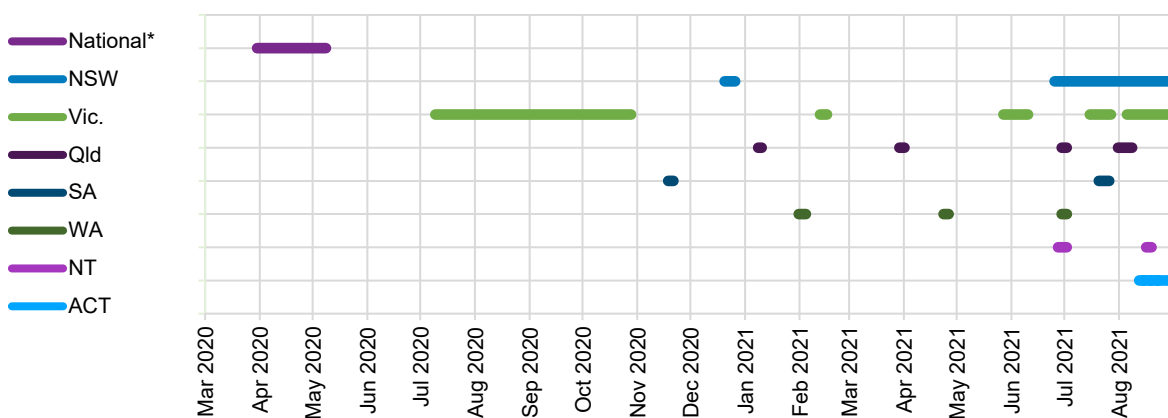
Australia's response to COVID-19

Australia's response to the pandemic has been extremely successful, relative to comparable countries, in terms of minimising the number of COVID-19-related deaths and avoiding overburdening the health system. By way of example, at 31 August 2021, Australia had recorded 39 deaths per million people compared with 1948 per million in the United Kingdom and 1926 per million in the United States (Johns Hopkins University 2021). The Australian Government and state and territory governments have employed a range of measures to limit the spread of the virus, although these have caused widespread economic disruption, significantly impacting on the activities of businesses. The restrictions applied include:

- closure of international border
- intermittent state and territory border closures
- limitations on the size of public and private gatherings
- closure of businesses, schools, and other educational institutions
- cancellation and postponement of events (for example, cultural festivals, sporting activities and community events)
- capacity restrictions on service industries (for example, hospitality, hair and beauty)
- national and regional lockdowns.

As inferred by their name, 'lockdowns' have exerted the most extreme adverse impacts on economic and business activity, although the extent of impact varies greatly by industry. The restrictions imposed during a lockdown have differed by jurisdiction; however, they are characterised by strict limitations on the movement and travel of individuals (that is, an extremely limited number of permitted reasons for leaving the home); minimised social contact with other households; cancellation/postponement of all community sporting fixtures, events, festivals etc.; and enforced closure of non-essential businesses, schools and other educational institutions. Figure 4 shows the periods of lockdown experienced nationally and by state and territory, from the beginning of the pandemic until the end of August 2021.

Figure 4 Timeline of lockdowns in Australia by jurisdiction, March 2020 to end of August 2021



Notes: * After the initial national lockdown the speed of the gradual reopening of the economy was determined at a state and territory level

As of 31 August 2021 Tasmania had not experienced additional lockdowns after the initial national lockdown.

Not all lockdowns were applied state- or territory-wide, although all included main metropolitan areas and generally included the state or territory capital.

Source: National, state and territory government websites.

Government support initiatives

To counteract the impacts of public health restrictions on the Australian economy, governments have enacted a number of policies to support businesses and individuals. The most significant of these was the JobKeeper scheme (originally valued at \$130 billion), which commenced at the end of March 2020, and was designed to keep more Australians in jobs and support businesses affected by the significant economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was paid to eligible employees at a rate of \$1500 per fortnight until 27 September 2020 and, after this, at a reduced (two-tiered) payment rate from 28 September 2020 to 28 March 2021. State and territory governments also implemented their own support packages for their local economies and industries, including grants, loans, and tax deferrals. These announcements amounted to billions of dollars of spending nationally.

In addition to the JobKeeper scheme, a number of government initiatives and programs were established that specifically targeted employers/businesses and/or skills and training. The initiatives most applicable to the scope of this report are outlined below (see appendix A for a comprehensive list of Commonwealth, state and territory programs/initiatives):

- *Infection Control Training Fund*: in the initial stages of the pandemic, the Australian Government and all state and territory governments established an \$80 million infection-control training fund aimed at fast-tracking fee-free (or low-fee) infection-control training for workers in customer-facing businesses to minimise the spread of COVID-19 and support businesses in reopening safely.
- *Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy*: announced on 12 March 2020, the subsidy was estimated at \$1.3 billion and was expanded by \$1.5 billion as part of the JobTrainer skills package, announced on 16 July 2020. The program provided financial support to small and medium-sized businesses to enable them to retain their existing apprentices and trainees, and to new employers of any size if they re-engaged an apprentice or trainee who had been displaced from a small or medium-sized business. The program provided a wage subsidy of 50% of the eligible apprentice or trainee's wages, paid between 1 January 2020 and 31 March 2021, up to a maximum of \$7000 per quarter.
- *Boosting apprenticeship commencements*: announced as part of the 2020–21 Commonwealth Budget, with a \$1.2 billion allocation over four years, originally capped at 100 000 places, this scheme supports employers and group training organisations (GTOs) who engaged a new apprentice or trainee on or after 5 October 2020. The wages of eligible apprentices and trainees are subsidised by 50% for a 12-month period from the date of commencement, between 5 October 2020 and 30 September 2021, up to a maximum of \$7000 per quarter. In March 2021, the program was extended to remove the 100 000 cap on places. The program was again extended in the Commonwealth Budget 2021–22, with a further \$2.7 billion announced to cover new commencements, until 30 March 2022.
- *JobTrainer*: the scheme commenced in the second half of 2021, through a shared funding arrangement (JobTrainer Fund). The Australian Government, in partnership with the state and territory governments, is funding JobTrainer, whose aim is to help school leavers and job seekers gain new skills by retraining and upskilling in areas (industries) in demand. In the 2021–22 Budget, the Australian Government announced a further \$500 million (through a shared arrangement with states and territories) to expand the JobTrainer Fund to provide up to 163 000 training places and extend the program to 31 December 2022 (see appendix A for information regarding delivery by jurisdiction).



COVID-19 impact on businesses

As a result of public health measures to control the spread of COVID-19, many businesses initially experienced activity restrictions, adjustments to workplaces and work practices, and reduced demand, forcing them to cut work hours and/or employment (Australian Industry Group, 2020). The federal government’s JobKeeper scheme became an essential support for many businesses, proving decisive in stemming job losses and business closures (Australian Industry Group, 2020). As Australia recovers from the initial shock of COVID-19, businesses are turning their attention to the emerging skills gaps created by structural shifts within industries and the accelerating digitalisation of the economy (Australian Industry Group, 2021).

Business survival

The number of employing businesses in Australia increased by 14.4% from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, in early April 2020 (when stage 3 national restrictions were first implemented), to the end of June 2021 (see table 1). The number of non-employing businesses decreased slightly over the same period. The increase was seen across each employer-size range, with the most notable increase in businesses employing between one and four staff. The proportion of businesses employing between one and four staff increased from 25.7% at the beginning of April 2020 to 29.1% at the end of June 2021, a rise of 13.5%.

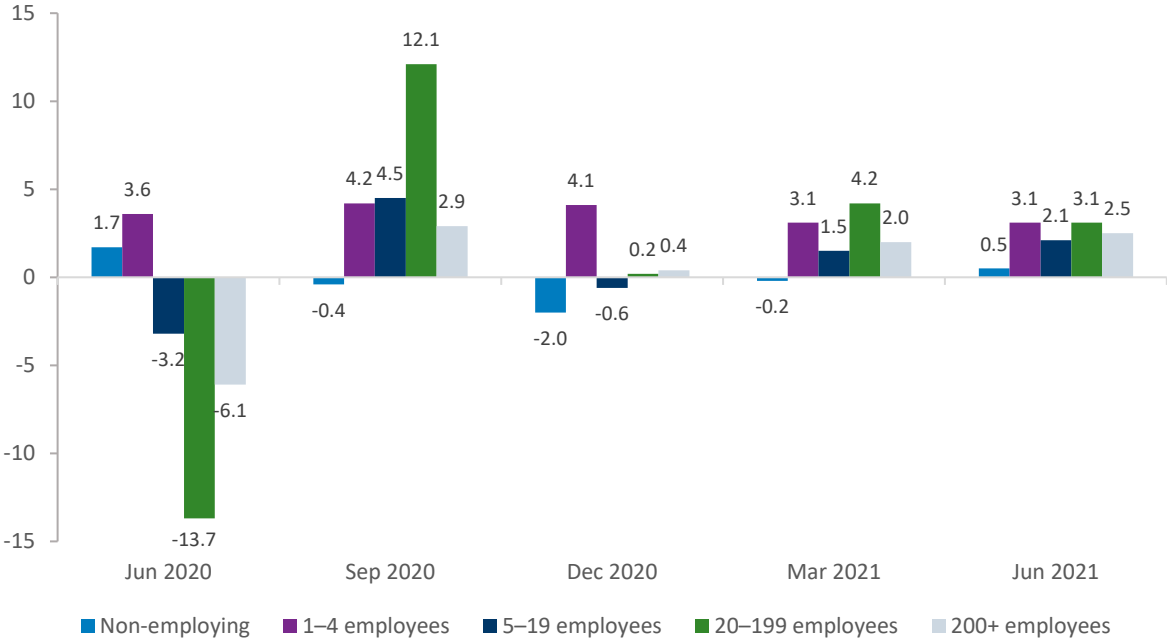
Table 1 Change in operating businesses by employment size range, April 2020 – June 2021

Employer size range	Operating April 2020	Operating June 2021	Change (n)	Change (%)
Non-employing	1 416 664	1 410 049	-6 615	-0.5
Employing				
1–4	586 108	699 623	113 515	19.4
5–19	221 580	230 633	9 053	4.1
20–199	55 193	57 470	2 277	4.1
200+	4 416	4 479	63	1.4
Total employing	867 297	992 205	124 908	14.4
Total	2 283 961	2 402 254	118 293	5.2

Source: ABS (2021b).

Figure 5 shows that trends in business entries and exits have varied widely across the course of the pandemic. The June 2020 quarter saw a substantial decrease in the number of businesses in the 20–199 employment-size range and to a lesser extent the 200+ and 5–19 employment-size ranges. These decreases coincided with first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the initial national shutdown and were likely primarily influenced by surviving businesses decreasing staff levels and moving to smaller employment size ranges. As restrictions eased across the nation in all states and territories, with the exception of Victoria during the September quarter, the number of businesses across all employer-size ranges increased. These increases were largely driven by surviving businesses increasing staff levels and moving to larger employment size ranges. The first half of 2021 has seen further increases in the number of businesses. Consequently, the number of employing businesses in the Australian economy was higher across all employer-size ranges in June 2021 than at the very beginning of the pandemic, in April 2020.

Figure 5 Quarterly change (%) in businesses, by employment size range, June 2020 – June 2021



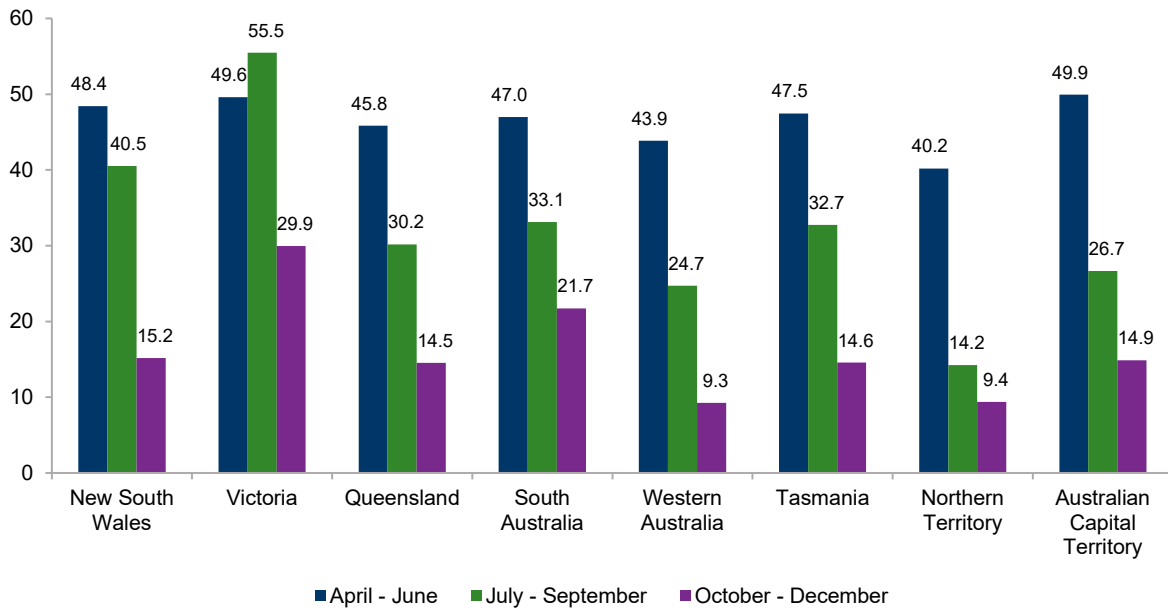
Note: Employees receiving JobKeeper payments, paid leave or other entitlements during the reference period are considered to be employees.

Source: ABS (2021b).

Business activity

Survey data collected by the National Skills Commission during 2020 (see figure 6) revealed that between 40 and 50% of businesses in each state and territory reported being significantly impacted by COVID-19 and its associated restrictions between April and June 2020. As restrictions eased over the second half of 2020, fewer businesses reported being greatly impacted. The amelioration of the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions for businesses in Victoria lagged behind the rest of the country due to the second wave of infections and the associated lockdowns in the state between July and September 2020.

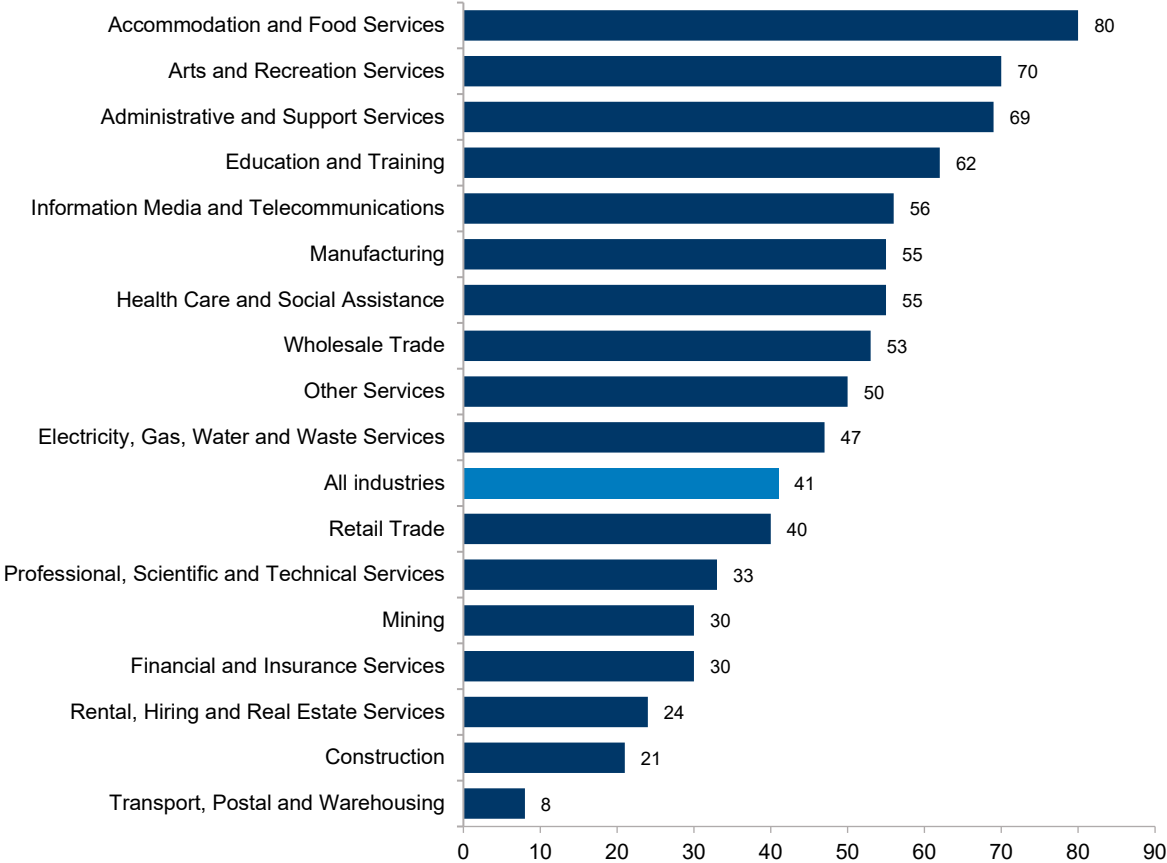
Figure 6 Businesses impacted by COVID-19 a great deal, by state and territory, 2020 (%)



Note: Prior to 10 August 2020, employers were asked about the level of impact of COVID-19 on the business since February 2020. From 10 August 2020, employers were asked about the current impact of COVID-19 on the business.
 Source: National Skills Commission (2020).

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions has varied widely across industries. The industries associated with activities such as travel and tourism, performing arts, entertainment, events and hospitality have fared the worst; for example, ABS (2021a) survey data revealed that 80% of businesses in the accommodation and food services industry were significantly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions in February 2021, closely followed by arts and recreation services, with 70% of businesses significantly impacted (figure 7). Much lower proportions of businesses in industries such as transport, postal and warehousing, and construction experienced significant impacts due to COVID-19 restrictions.

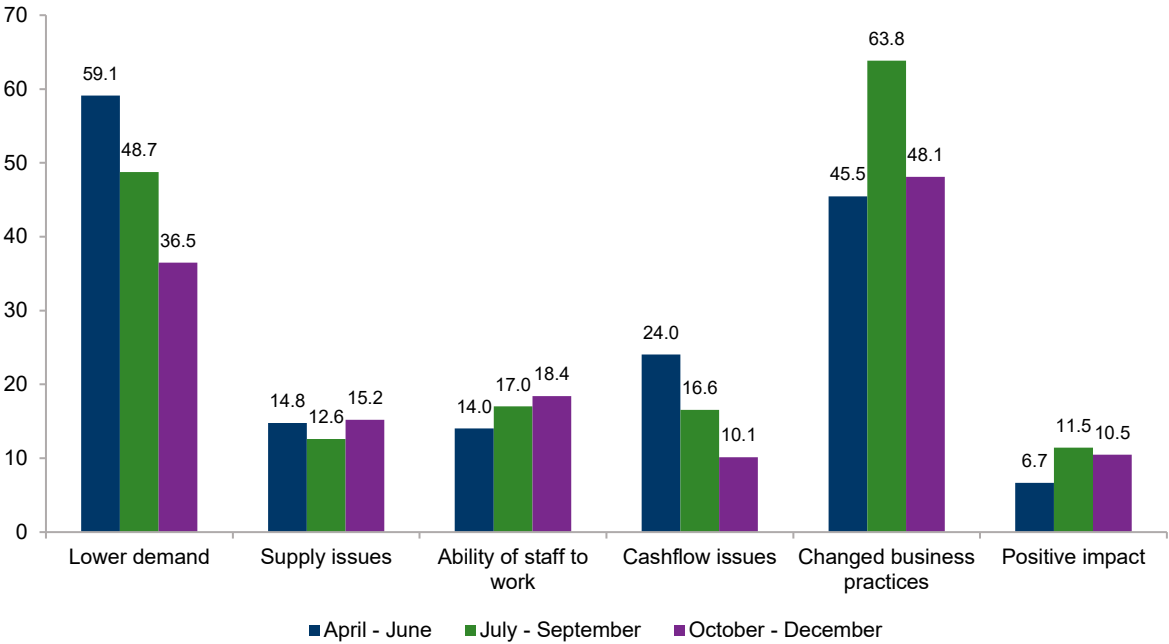
Figure 7 Businesses significantly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, by industry, February 2021 (%)



Source: ABS (2021a).

Businesses have been impacted in a number of ways, as shown in figure 8, with many experiencing reduced demand for their goods and services. This was most notable between April and June 2020, when 59.1% of businesses reported experiencing lower demand, gradually falling to 36.5% of businesses in the October and December quarter 2020, as restrictions eased and seasonal factors likely exerted an influence. As a result of restrictions, many businesses made changes to the way they operated, rising from 45.5% of businesses at the start of the pandemic, between April and June 2020, to 63.8%, between July and September 2020, likely reflecting the time needed to evaluate and implement the changes made. The proportion of businesses that changed business practices decreased during the October - December 2020 quarter as they adjusted to the new economic landscape in which they were operating.

Figure 8 Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses, 2020 (%)

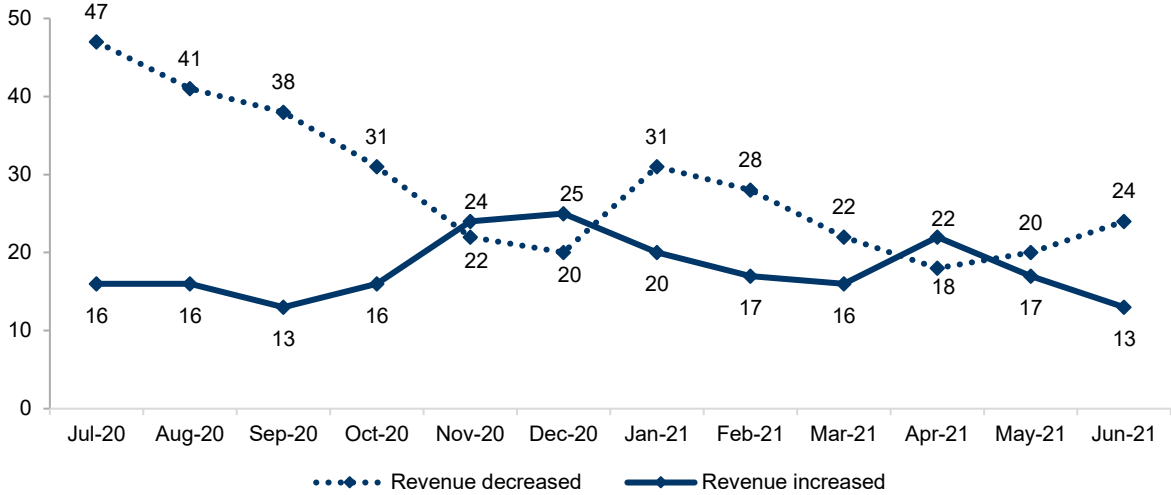


Source: National Skills Commission (2020).

Using semi-structured interviews in three case study industries (manufacturing, healthcare, and hospitality and tourism), O’Dwyer (2021) investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on industry innovation, skills and the need for training in Australia. The study found that businesses implemented a range of responses to the impact of COVID-19, with the type of response dependent on the employer’s industry and the products or services offered rather than on the size of the business. For example, some manufacturers were able to capitalise on the situation by pivoting operations to make in-demand products such as personal protective equipment (PPE). Many other businesses merely adapted to the changed conditions, making changes to survive while under intense strain resulting from reduced demand, disrupted supply chains and labour shortages.

Trading restrictions and lower demand for goods and services due to COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in decreases in revenue for many businesses. The ABS (2021a) collected data from businesses on changes in revenue between July 2020 and June 2021. Figure 9 shows that in July 2020 nearly half of all businesses in Australia reported that revenue had decreased compared with the previous month. This proportion was likely even higher between March and May 2020, when Australia was in a national lockdown, in efforts to combat the spread of the virus. Over the second half of 2020, as restrictions eased, the proportion of businesses reporting a decrease in revenue from the previous month declined to a low of 20% – in December – although this trend was also likely influenced by seasonal factors. Since April 2021, case numbers in areas of Australia have started to rise again and restrictions have been reintroduced or tightened, coinciding with an increase in businesses reporting a month-on-month decline in revenue.

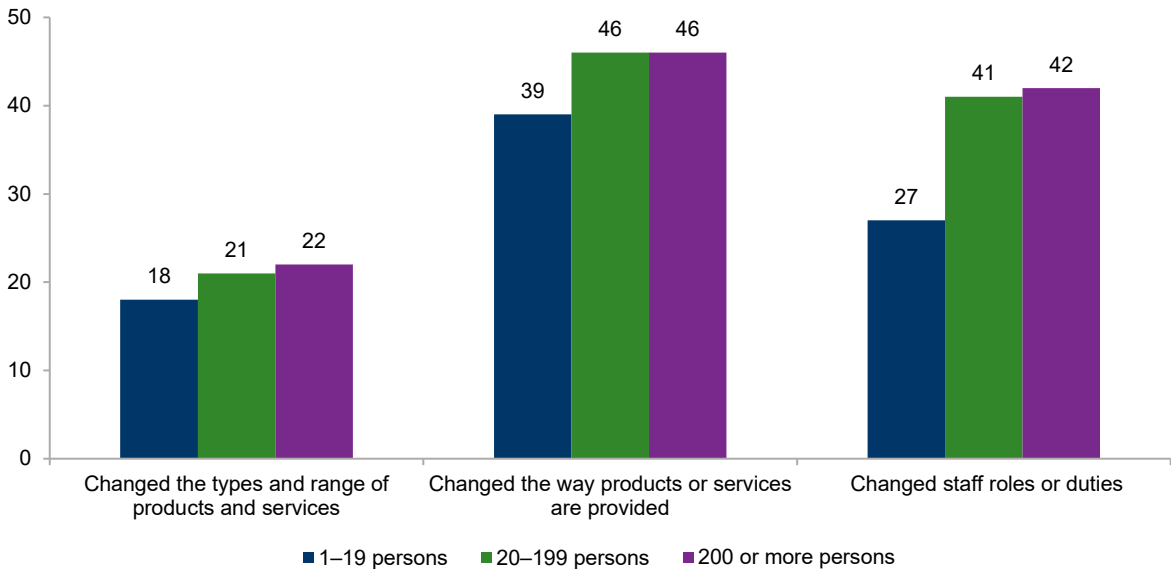
Figure 9 Businesses reporting monthly changes in revenue, July 2020 – June 2021 (%)



Note: Businesses reported changes over the last month.
 Source: ABS (2021a).

To accommodate the social and economic restrictions implemented to control the spread of the virus, many businesses have been forced to modify their operations. Figure 10 shows that, in response to COVID-19, over a third of all employing businesses changed the way their products or services were provided. Changing staff roles or duties was another strategy used by these businesses to adapt operations to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions, with a higher proportion of businesses in the larger employment size ranges engaging in this tactic than in the 1–19 employment size range. Around 20% of employing businesses changed the types and range of their products and services. According to O’Dwyer (2021), this type of response was more likely to be implemented as a survival technique in those industries hit by a severe decrease in demand for their typical products or services; for example, restaurants pivoting their operations from in-house dining to the supply of home-delivered fine-dining ingredients (O’Dwyer 2021).

Figure 10 Modifications to business operations due to COVID-19, by employment size (% employing businesses, September 2020)



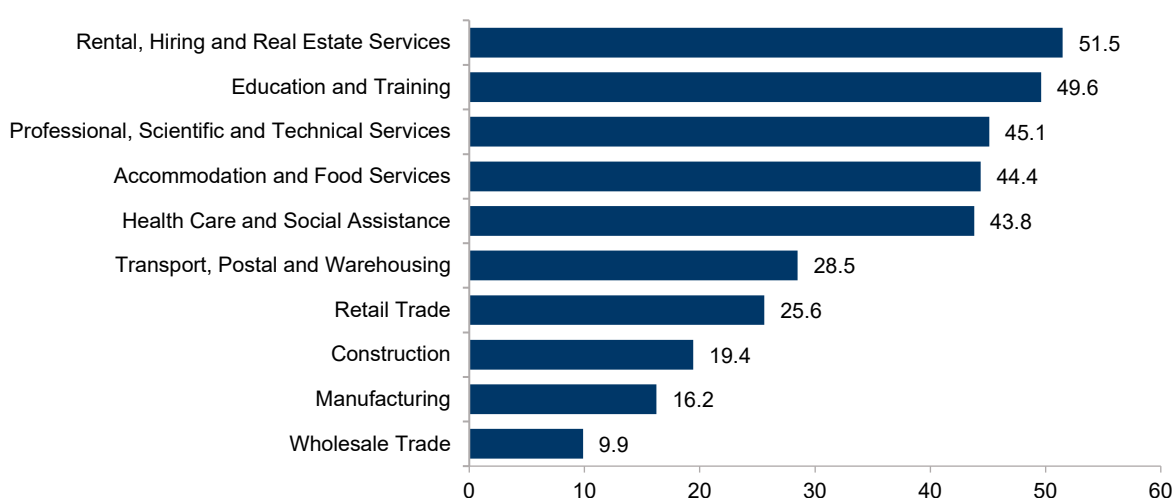
Source: ABS (2021a).

Adoption of new technology

Data collected by the National Skills Commission at the end of 2020 revealed that, due to COVID-19, around a third of businesses in Australia adopted new technology. The rate of adoption varied widely by industry, as shown in figure 11. These upgrades in technology largely resulted from changes in how businesses operate and the way services are delivered (National Skills Commission 2020). Factors driving these technological changes include:

- increased use of digital technologies and IT services due to restrictions in movements
- increased use of online shopping for products and services
- businesses increasing their online footprint
- increased proportion of the workforce working from home or remotely.

Figure 11 Businesses adopting new technology due to COVID-19, by selected industry, 2020 (%)



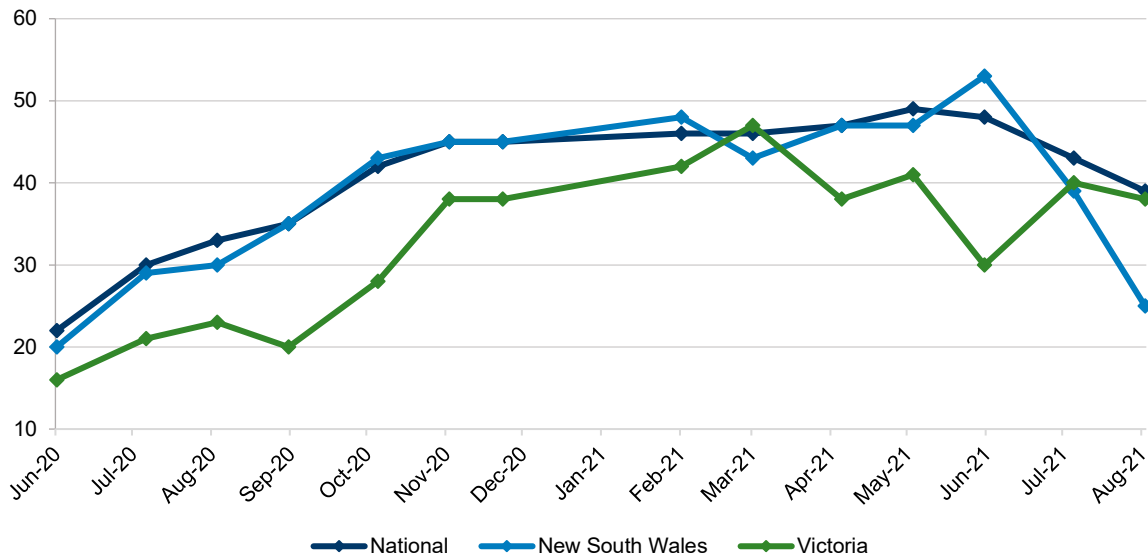
Note: Data were collected in November and December 2020. Some industries have been excluded due to a low number of records.
Source: National Skills Commission (2020).

Ongoing advances in technology are reshaping existing industries, creating digital skills gaps (Australian Industry Group, 2021). The Australian Industry Group (2021) asked employers to indicate the digital areas where their employees most needed their capabilities increased. Of all the digital skills, employers ranked basic digital skills as the area most requiring attention, closely followed by cyber security and then data analysis. It is likely that demand for these particular digital skills is due to the technological changes employers were forced to implement as they digitalised operations due to COVID-19.

Recruitment and skill needs

Figure 12 illustrates the negative impact of harsher lockdown periods on employer recruitment activity. Nationally, the proportion of employers recruiting doubled, from 22% to 45%, over the second half of 2020 as restrictions eased, Australia gradually reopened, and the economy recovered from the initial shock of the pandemic. Notably, the proportion of employers recruiting in Victoria lagged well behind the national level over the same period, as a consequence of a second wave of infections and the associated lockdown. Similarly, the proportion of employers recruiting in New South Wales halved between June and August 2021 as restrictions were tightened and lockdowns reintroduced with the arrival of the Delta strain.

Figure 12 Employers recruiting, June 2020 – August 2021 (%)

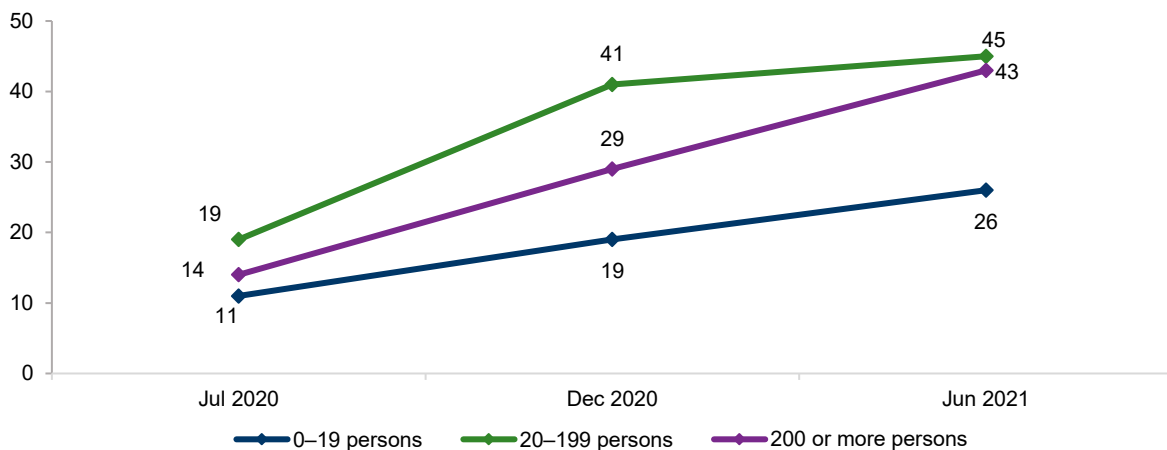


Note: Data are not available in January 2021 due to a break in fieldwork; Employers recruiting refers to employers who were currently recruiting at the time of the survey or had recruited in the past month.

Source: Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey June 2020 – August 2021 (National Skills Commission, 2021b)

As the proportion of employers recruiting trended higher between June 2020 and June 2021, so did the proportion of employers experiencing difficulties in finding suitable staff (figure 13). Difficulties in finding suitable staff were more acute for larger employers than for their smaller counterparts.

Figure 13 Employing businesses having difficulty finding suitable staff, July 2020 – June 2021 (%)



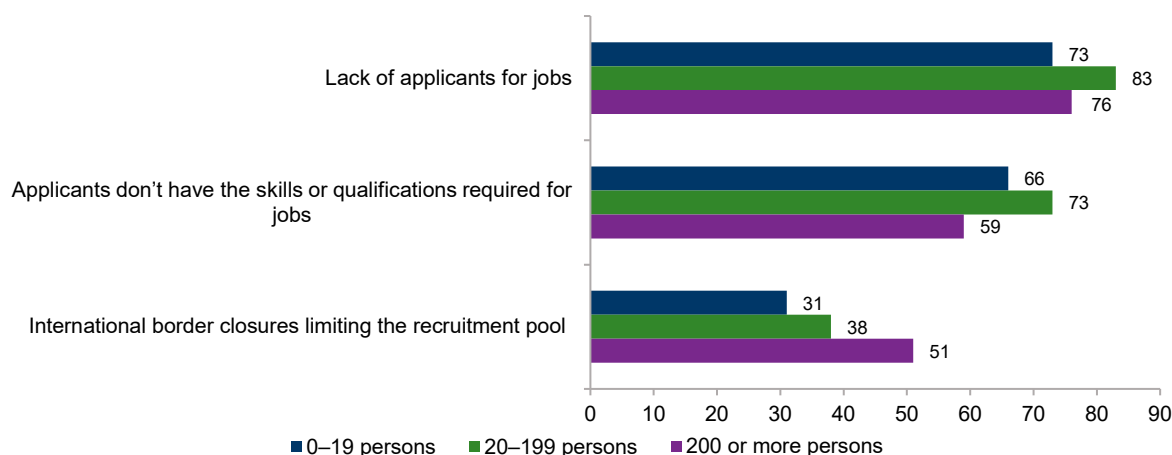
Note: Caution should be used when comparing time series as question was worded slightly differently over the three periods:

- July 2020: Is the business experiencing any difficulties in finding staff to fill job vacancies?
- December 2020: Are there any jobs the business is having difficulty finding suitably skilled or qualified staff for?
- June 2021: Is this business having difficulties finding suitable staff to fill any jobs?

Source: ABS (2021a).

Data collected by the ABS (2021a) revealed that the top three reasons for recruitment difficulties for employing businesses were: lack of applicants (74% of employing businesses); lack of suitable skilled applicants (66%); and international border closures, limiting access to the global labour market (32%). As figure 14 shows, the proportion of employers citing each reason varied somewhat by employer size. For example, international border closures impacted on recruitment for a higher proportion of larger businesses (that is, those employing 200+ persons) than smaller businesses.

Figure 14 Top three factors impacting on ability to find suitable staff, by employment size, June 2021 (% Employing businesses with difficulties finding staff to fill jobs)



Source: ABS (2021a).

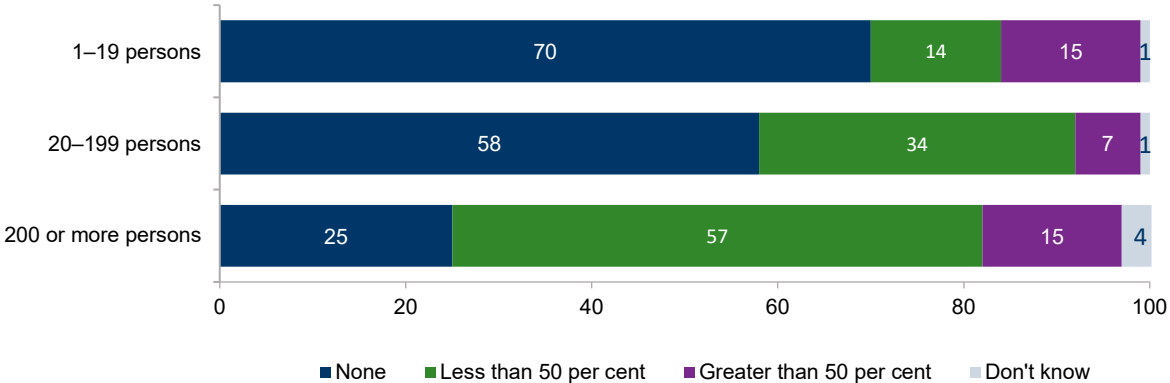
As noted above, international border closures have limited businesses' use of migration to help in meeting their skills needs. In 2018–19, prior to COVID-19, around 110 000 people entered Australia through the Skill stream of the Migration Program. This number fell to just under 80 000 in 2020–21, representing a decline of approximately 27%¹ (Department of Home Affairs 2021). In addition to permanent skilled migration, employers can meet short-term skills needs through temporary visas; however, this source of labour has also been constrained by international border closures. As at 30 June 2021, there were 55 031 Temporary Work (skilled) visa holders in Australia, of which 15 599 were in Technicians and trades worker occupations (Department of Home Affairs 2021). This was down from 80 064 Temporary Work (skilled) visa holders as at 30 June 2019, of which 22 784 were in technicians and trades worker occupations, representing a decline of 31% and 32% respectively (Department of Home Affairs 2021).

Working from home

One of the most significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and employees is the forced experiment of working remotely from home (Productivity Commission 2021). Figure 15 shows the percentage of employing businesses with employees working remotely as at April 2021. The proportion of employers with some staff working remotely increased with the size of their workforce, with 72% of large employers having part of their workforce working remotely compared with only 29% of employers with fewer than 20 staff.

¹ These data refer to primary visa holders (whose skills are assessed against an occupation for visa purposes) and secondary visa holders (that is, spouses and dependents who are not assessed against an occupation or aligned to an occupation for visa purposes).

Figure 15 Percentage of employing businesses whose workforce was teleworking, by employment size, April 2021

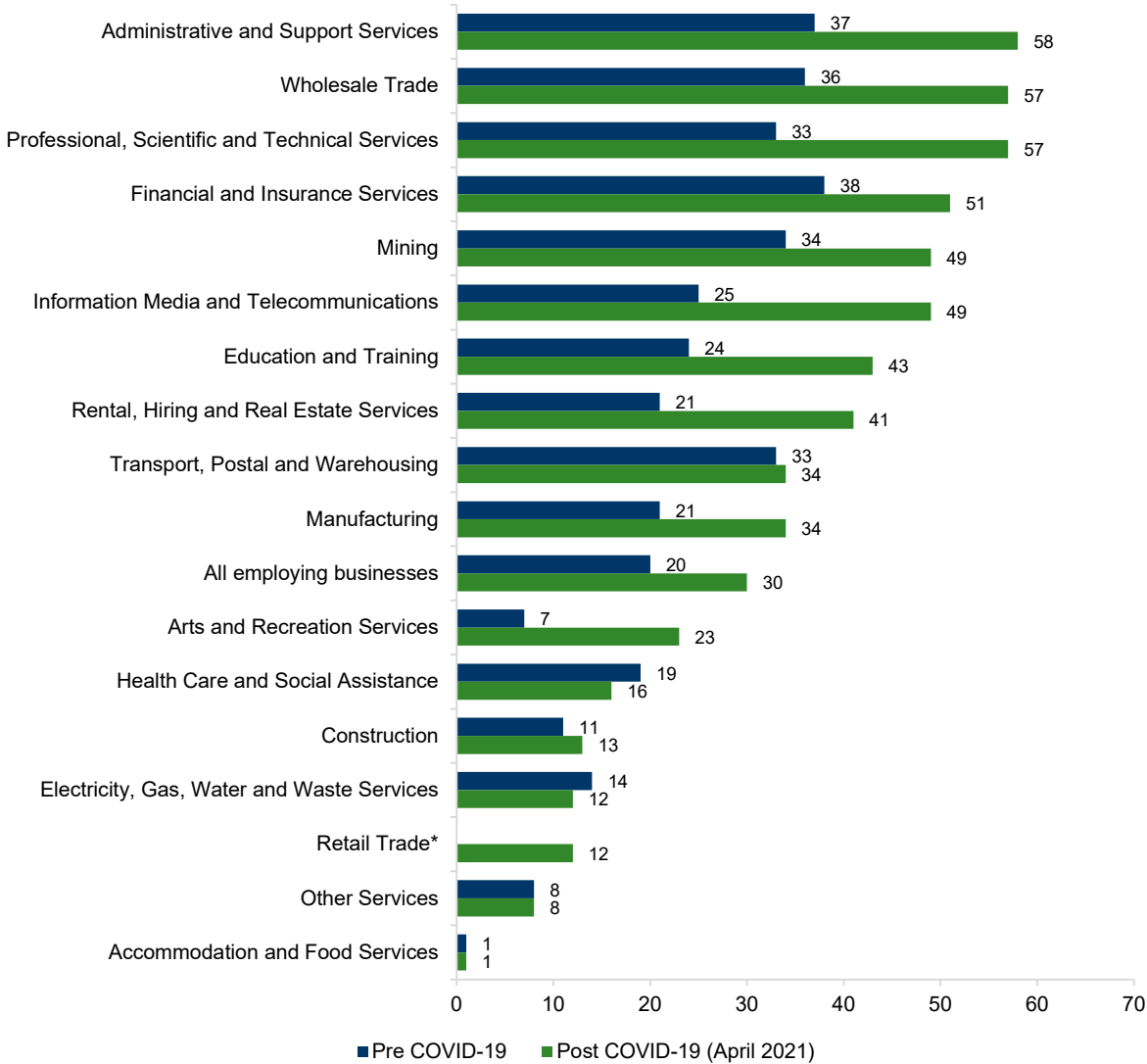


Source: ABS (2021a).

The ability for people to do their job from home is strongly tied to their occupation and, ultimately, to the tasks they are required to perform (Productivity Commission 2021). Jobs that can feasibly be undertaken remotely typically use computers and require less interaction with the public (Dingel & Nieman 2020). Jobs involving outdoor work, physical activities, handling and moving objects or inspecting equipment, structures or materials are less amenable to working-from-home arrangements (Dingel & Nieman 2020).

Figure 16 shows the proportion of employing businesses, by industry, with staff working from home before the pandemic and then in April 2021, at what was, at the time, considered after the pandemic. Consistent with the findings of Dingel and Nieman (2020), industries with a high percentage of office-based or ‘knowledge’ workers such as professional, scientific and technical services and information media and telecommunications had the largest increases in the proportion of employing businesses with some staff working from home. Conversely, industries requiring a great deal of on-site work, such as electricity, gas, water and waste services, or physical interactions with people, such as health care and social assistance, experienced a decrease in the proportion of businesses with staff working remotely since COVID-19.

Figure 16 Employing businesses with staff working from home before and after COVID-19 (April 2021), by industry (%)



Note: Data on proportion of businesses in retail trade with staff working from home before COVID-19 were not published by the ABS. Source: ABS (2021a).

Prior to the pandemic, working from home may have been discouraged by management policies, cultural norms in workplaces, and the stigma associated with working from home (Productivity Commission 2021). That said, it is unlikely that Australia will return to pre-pandemic levels of working from home, given both employer and employee shifts in perspectives on this approach. These include the benefits for employees of avoiding the daily commute to the office, along with flexible working arrangements, which suit other lifestyle factors such as childcare and out-of-work pursuits (Productivity Commission 2021). Employers came to recognise that remote working was potentially both feasible and beneficial to the business (Productivity Commission 2021). The process of trial and adaptation is likely to continue for some time as businesses adopt differing remote-working models, based on judgments on what will work best for them (Productivity Commission 2021).

The impact of increased remote-working arrangements on employee training practices is currently unknown. However, the Productivity Commission’s report (2021) does highlight a potential disadvantage of remote working for employees, this being fewer training, development and promotion opportunities due to employees’ decreased visibility to managers. To ameliorate the impact of remote-working arrangements on employee training opportunities, the International Labour Office’s Skills and

Employability Branch (2021) recommends that employers adopt digital technologies to ensure continuity of training provision for employees; for example, using digital logbooks for the monitoring and supervision of learners, who in turn use them for documenting training tasks and reflecting on their performance (International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch 2021). The International Labour Office (2021) also highlights the importance for employers of close communication between trainers and learners and the provision of pedagogical support, as this is key to maintaining motivation and ensuring progress during online training.

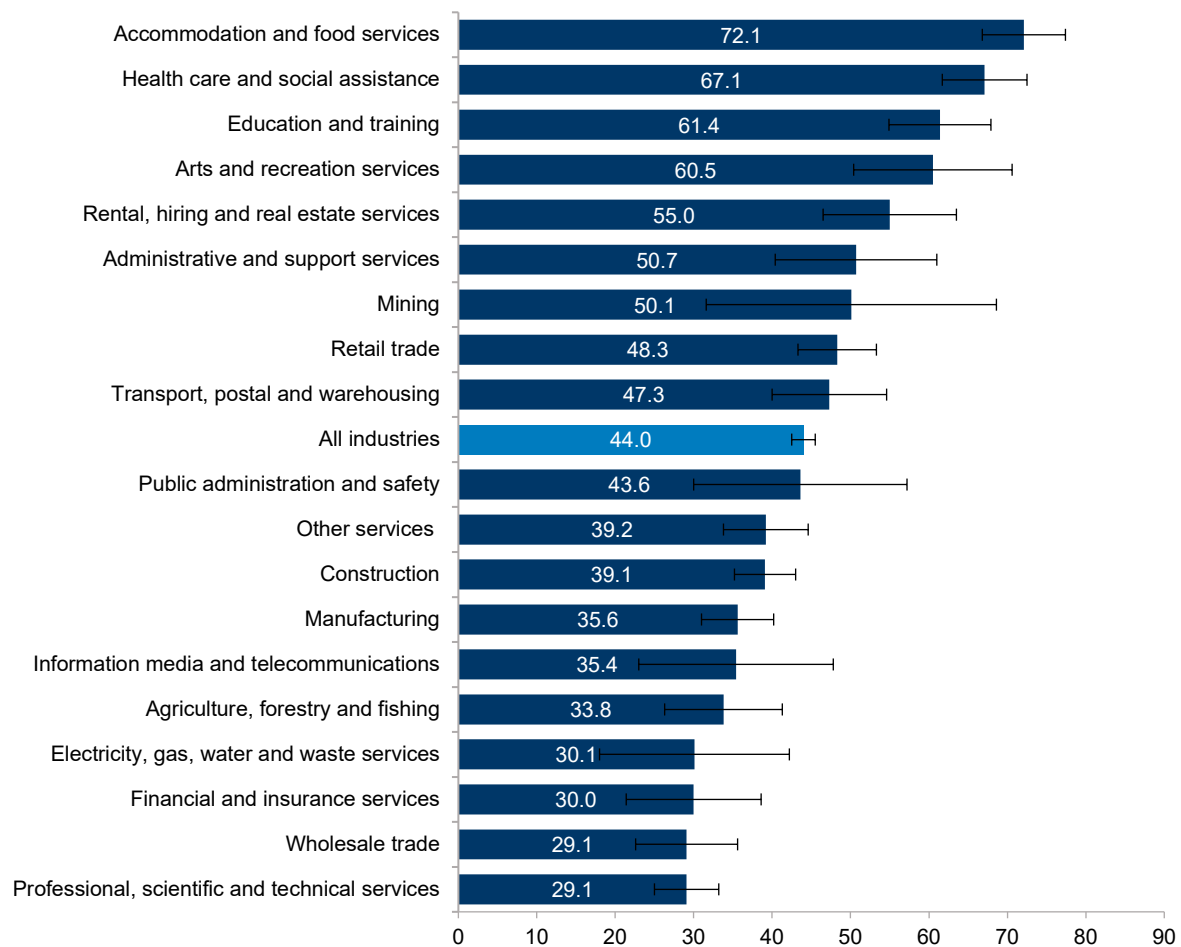


Impact of COVID-19 on employers' training requirements

Not surprisingly, the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on business activity have also affected employer training practices. For example, due to lockdowns and the closure of both public and private training providers, businesses of all sizes have had to temporarily revise and downsize their training strategies (Bowman & Callan 2021). As the Australian economy gradually reopened during May 2020 following the initial shock of the first wave of infections and associated national lockdown, many employers encountered a new operating landscape, one that included infection-control measures, working-from-home arrangements and social and economic restrictions.

NCVER data show that over 40% of employers had established new training requirements to counter the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (NCVER 2021c). This was especially the case for large employers (68.8%), compared with medium (51.5%) and small (40.0%) employers. There was also wide variation by industry, with high proportions of employers in industries that were significantly impacted by the pandemic such as accommodation and food services and arts and recreation services, also having new training requirements as a result of the pandemic (figure 17).

Figure 17 Employers that had new training requirements due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, by industry, 2021 (%)



Source: NCVER (2021c).

The overwhelming reason given by most employers for having new training requirements as a result of the virus was to enable them to operate effectively and safely in the COVID-19 environment (83.6%, table 2). This was the case across all industries, states and territories, and employer sizes. The next most cited reasons concerned the need to train staff to undertake new tasks and responsibilities and the requirement for training to help manage business operations in the COVID environment, such as transferring to online ordering.

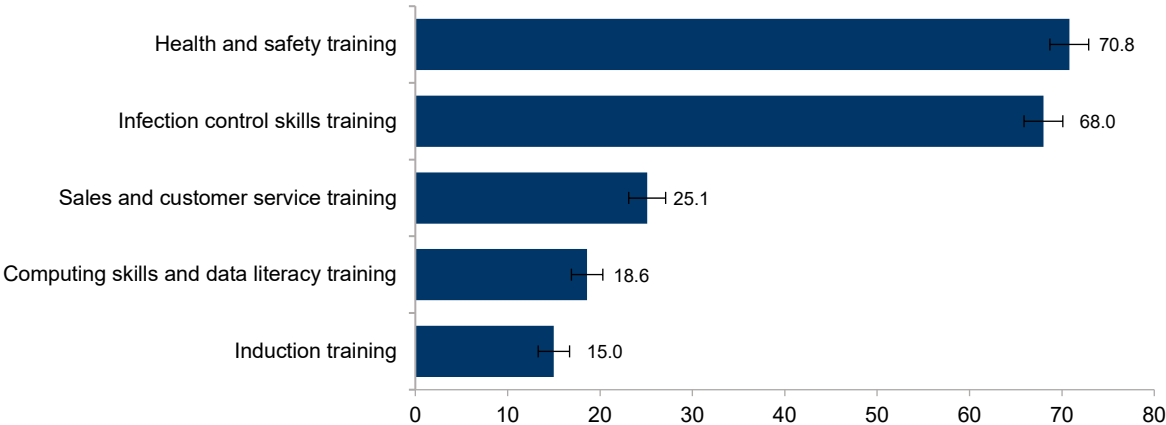
Table 2 Reasons organisation had new training requirements due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 (% of employers who had new training requirements due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic)

Reasons for new training requirements	%
Needed so we could effectively/safely operate in COVID environment	83.6
Needed to train staff to undertake new tasks and/or responsibilities	32.8
Needed to access training to help manage business operations in COVID environment	30.8
Legality/compliance requirements	6.7
Pre-existing skills not readily transferable to new operations/services/products	4.0
Other	0.6

Source: NCVET (2021c).

The key areas covered by these new training requirements were health and safety (70.8%) and infection-control skills (68.0%), as shown in figure 18. These training areas were most reported by employers in industries that involved a high degree of social contact, such as in accommodation and food services, and health care and social assistance. A smaller proportion of employers also reported new training requirements in more operational areas, such as in sales and customer service, and computing and data literacy. Sales and customer service training was particularly prevalent in client-facing industries such as retail trade (43.6% of employers) and accommodation and food services (39.6%), likely reflecting the changes in the way in which staff serve and interact with customers in the new COVID-19 environment. Employers in the education and training industry (45.0%) recorded the highest proportion of those requiring training in computing and data literacy, undoubtedly mirroring the enforced transition to online learning prompted by COVID-19 restrictions.

Figure 18 Key areas of training these new training requirements covered, 2021 (% of employers who had new training requirements due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic)

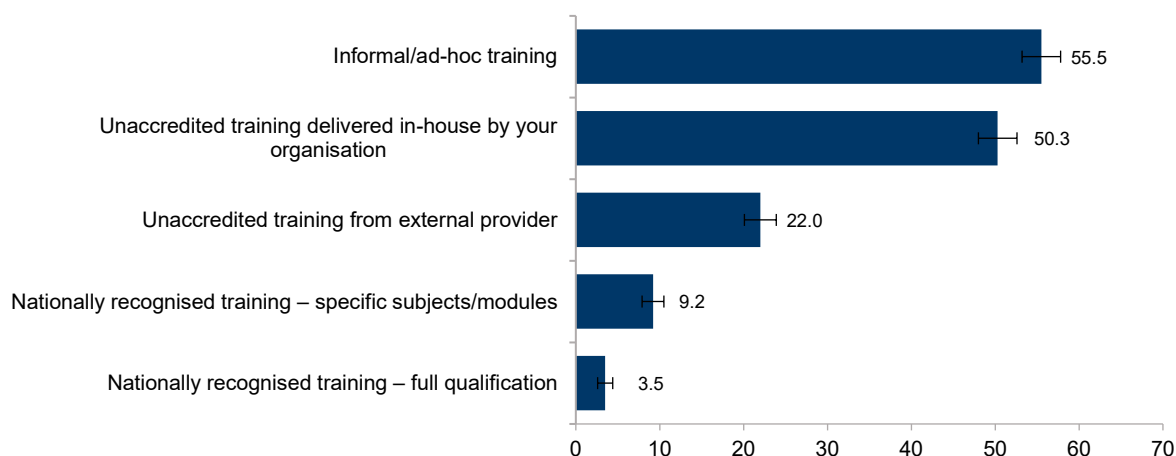


Source: NCVET (2021c).

To meet these new training requirements, employers tended to use informal or ad hoc training (55.5%) and unaccredited training, which was either provided in house by the organisation (50.3%) or delivered by an external provider (22.0%). Only 9.2% of employers used subjects or modules from nationally recognised training, with the highest proportions of employers using this type of training operating in the industries

of health care and social assistance (21.7%), education and training (18.5%) and public administration and safety (18.2%).

Figure 19 Types of training used to cover new training requirements, due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 (% of employers who had new training requirements due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic)



Source: NCVET (2021c).

The immediate need to respond to rapidly changing training needs was the most common reason cited by employers (52.1%) when making decisions between training types. This was followed by the availability of the training (34.4% of employers).

Transition to online training

Recent research has shown that COVID-19 restrictions forced employers to swiftly transition training to online forms of delivery (for example, Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch 2021; Bowman & Callan 2021). In Australia, for example, O’Dwyer (2021) found that in the manufacturing, healthcare, and hospitality and tourism industries most staff were able to transfer existing skills to new tasks, although some training was required to address the enforced digitalisation of business operations and services. Consistent with findings of the 2021 Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System, most of this training was unaccredited or informal and was conducted online via government, industry associations or vendor websites. Accredited training was used in the aged care sector, especially training in infection control, which was also conducted online. In line with the findings of Bowman and Callan (2021), employers interviewed by O’Dwyer (2021) viewed the delivery of online training as here to stay, as they recognised it as a time- and cost-effective way of delivering training to their workforce; however, there were concerns over whether it could be as effective as face-to-face delivery, particularly training in the use of tools and equipment.

Bowman and Callan (2021, p.22) offer an example from warehousing demonstrating the widespread take-up of online learning during the pandemic:

In warehousing, training for a minority of businesses was curtailed due to the rapid growth in business during the pandemic. But for a majority, decision-making about training was centred on the mode of delivery, whether face-to-face or online, rather than on content. An employer explained: ‘Most of our courses were delivered online because trainers couldn’t travel to sites’. Consequently, greater use was made of online team sessions, and it was expected that this would continue. In general, the pandemic has led to greater use of online technology, both in warehousing itself and in training, and has, to some extent, changed the mix of internal and external provision. The pandemic particularly had the effect of overcoming any remaining hesitancy about the utility of more online training.

The move to online training by employers reflects the broader VET sector's response to COVID-19. Hume and Griffin (2021) found that approximately three-quarters of RTOs surveyed in early 2021 who delivered face-to-face training prior to COVID-19 transferred at least some of their training and assessment to the online environment in response to the pandemic. Similar to O'Dwyer (2021), Hume and Griffin identified the main barriers to transitioning to online training and assessment as subject matter being unsuitable for online delivery and online delivery not being suitable for students. Furthermore, 61% of RTOs who moved to at least some training online in response to COVID-19 indicated they would be more likely to use blended learning in the future.

Australia is not alone in the transition to online training. A global survey of employers by the International Labour Office's Skills and Employability Branch (2021) found that skills development in enterprises and organisations was almost at a standstill due to pandemic lockdown measures, with training interrupted for 90% of employees. In response to lockdown measures, many employers increased access to online training for their staff; however, they report some challenges in doing so, the most common being:

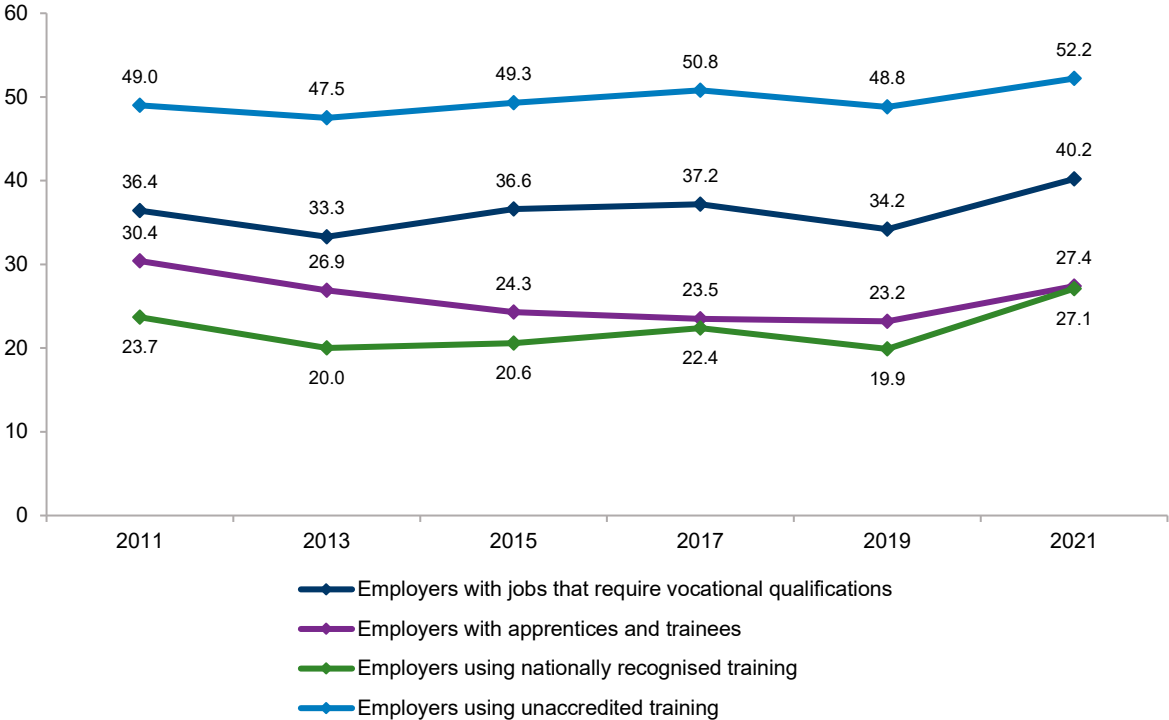
- infrastructure issues (for example, inadequate internet connectivity and poor access to computers)
- limited digital literacy among users
- a lack of adapted training programs and resources
- difficulties in delivering practical training online.

While the 2021 Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System did not capture mode of delivery for training, the proportion of employers satisfied that nationally recognised training was meeting their skilling needs (78.7%) remained virtually the same as in 2019, suggesting that there was little to no substantial impact on moving this type of training online. The proportion of employers satisfied with unaccredited training did decrease by 3.9 percentage points, from 87.4% in 2019 to 83.5% in 2021. The survey does not ask employers their reasons for dissatisfaction with unaccredited training; therefore, it is not known whether this decrease in satisfaction was related to the move to online training delivery.

Impact on longer-term training trends

In terms of meeting skilling needs, figure 20 shows that the proportion of employers using nationally recognised training or who had jobs that require vocational qualifications is at the highest level of the last 10 years (NCVER 2021c). Similarly, the proportion of employers with apprentices and trainees is at its highest since 2011, reversing a steady decline over the past decade. Unaccredited training is also at a 10-year high.

Figure 20 Employers' training choices 2011–21 (%)

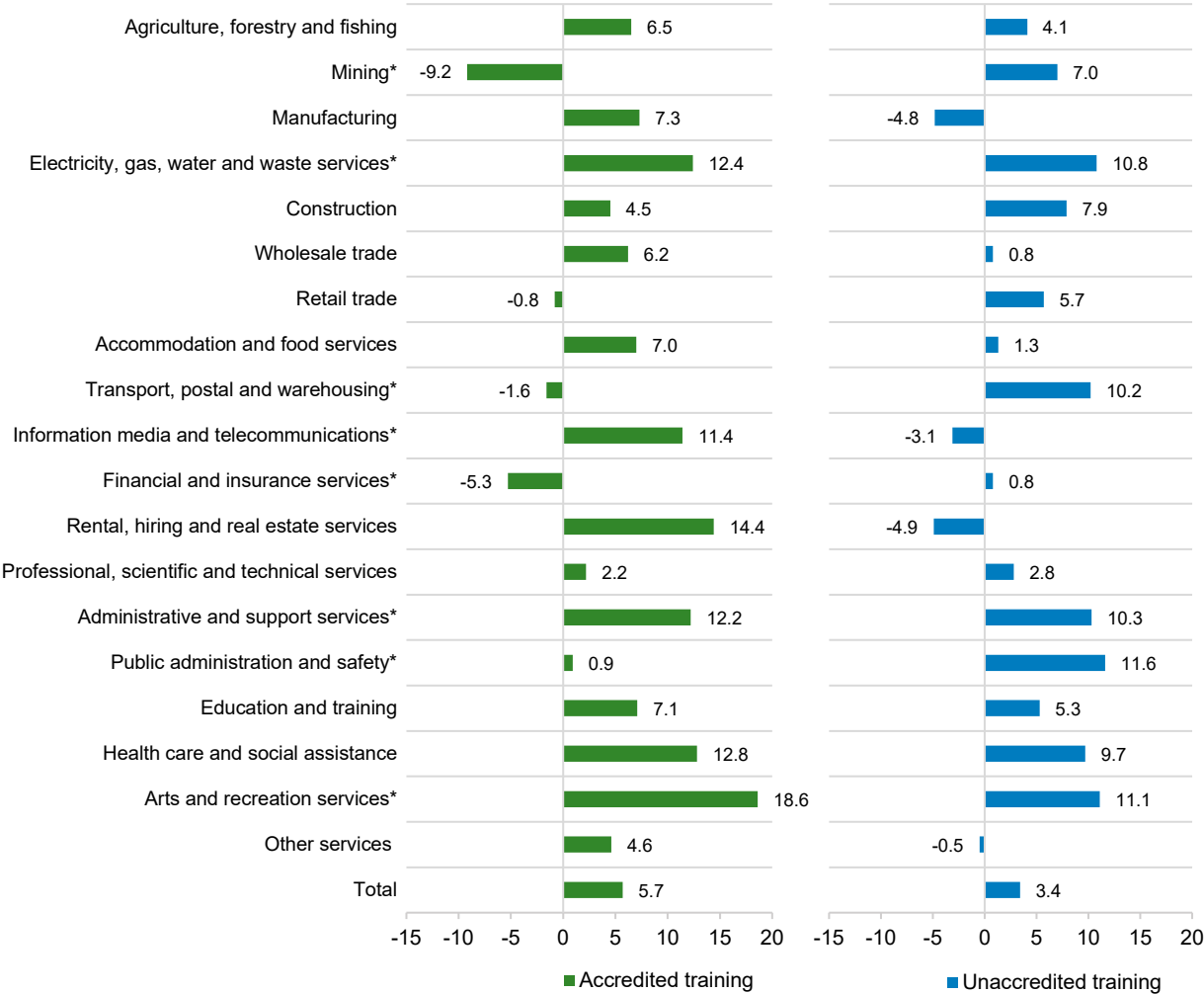


Source: NCVET (2021c).

Of the employers who provided nationally recognised training to their employees (other than through apprenticeships and traineeships) in the previous 12 months, 32.2% reported delivering more by comparison with previous years, a percentage fairly consistent across all employer-size ranges (NCVER 2021c). Only 6.4% of employers who had provided nationally recognised training in the previous 12 months reported delivering less than in previous years.

Figure 21 shows that changes in the proportions of employers engaging with accredited training and/or unaccredited training since the COVID-19 pandemic vary widely by industry. The industries with the largest increases in the proportion of employers engaging with accredited training were: arts and recreation services (18.6 percentage points); rental, hiring and real estate services (14.4 percentage points); and health care and social assistance (12.8 percentage points). The largest increases in proportions of employers using unaccredited training were found in: public administration and safety (11.6 percentage points); arts and recreation services (11.1 percentage points); and electricity, gas, water and waste service (10.8 percentage points).

Figure 21 Change in employers engaging with training between 2019 and 2021, by industry and type of training (percentage points)



Note: *Should be used with caution as at least one estimate used to calculate % point change has a margin of error greater than or equal to 10%
 Source: NCVET (2021c).

Apprentices and trainees

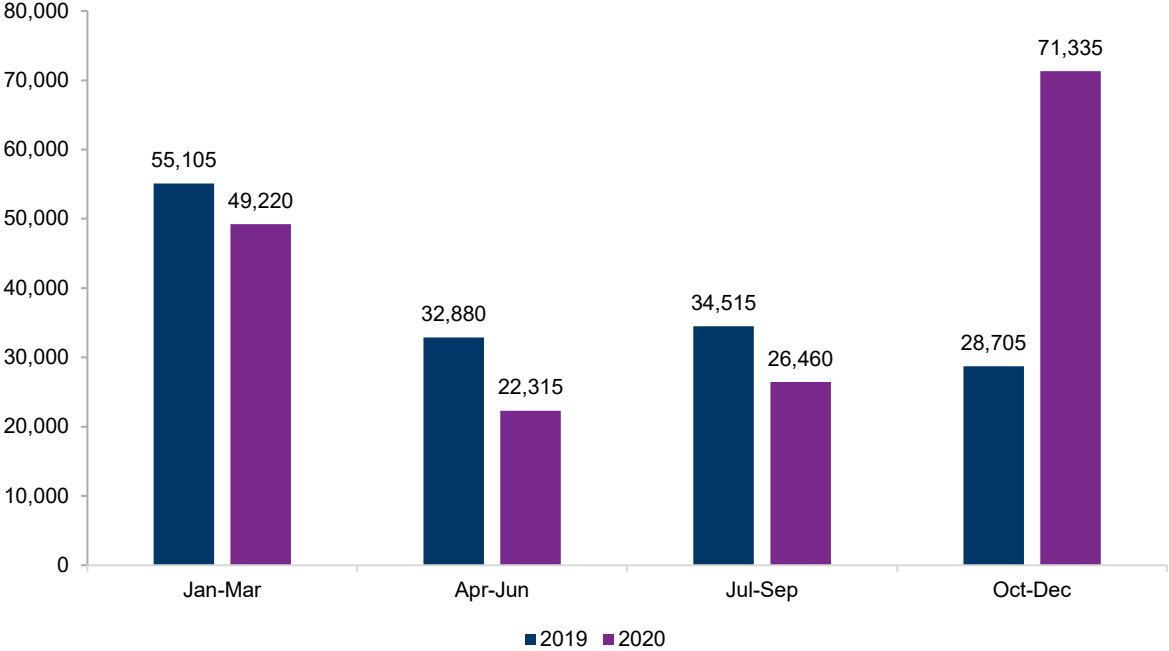
Apprenticeships and traineeships play a very important role in meeting the future skilling requirements of employers and, in turn, the broader Australian economy (Stanwick, Ackehurst & Frazer 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic had, and continues to have, significant effects on apprentices and trainees (Hall 2021). This is partly due to their inherent nature – of being tied to a contract of employment – making them sensitive to labour market conditions (Stanwick, Ackehurst & Frazer 2021). Bowman and Callan (2021) reported the widespread suspension of the on-the-job training component of apprenticeships, along with other workplace-based training for many qualifications. COVID-19 restrictions affected the availability of the practical component of training and students’ ability to assess what they have learnt on the job (Bowman & Callan 2021).

Figure 22 demonstrates that apprentice and trainee commencements during 2019 followed a typical seasonal trajectory. They were at their highest at the beginning of the year, between January and March, with a smaller spike between July and September 2019, coinciding with mid-year intakes.

The number of commencements in the first three quarters of 2020 follow a fairly similar seasonal pattern, all be it with much lower numbers than during 2019. This was particularly the case between

April and June 2020, when the national lockdown was in place and employer recruitment activity was at its lowest. Commencement numbers began to recover slightly between July and September, before spiking dramatically during October and December, coinciding with the introduction of the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy program. This support package was undoubtedly a major contributor to the rise in commencements in the latter months of the year, as employers embraced the wage subsidies on offer. Other factors may also have contributed, such as latent employer need for apprentices and trainees due to constrained commencement activity through the middle of 2020, as business came to terms with the impact of COVID-19 on their operations.

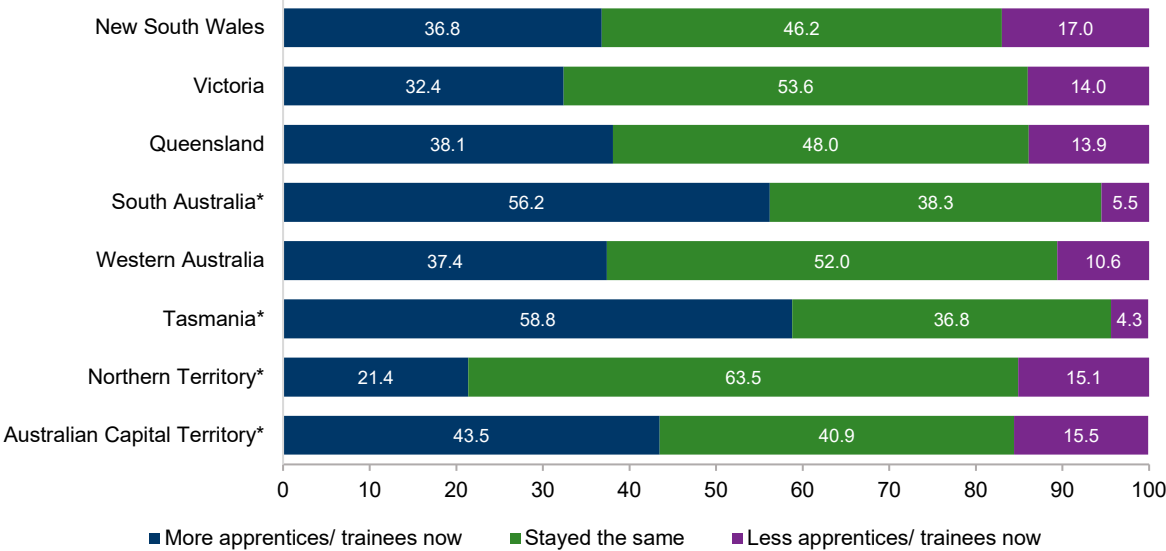
Figure 22 Quarterly apprentice and trainee contract commencements, Australia, 2019 and 2020



Source: NCVET (2021a).

The dramatic increase in apprentice and trainee commencements during the final few months of 2020 was also reflected in data from the 2021 Survey of Employers Use and Views of the VET System. Of employers who had apprentices/trainees in the last 12 months, 37.6% had more apprentices or trainees compared with previous years and 14.1% had fewer. Higher proportions of larger employers said they had more apprentices or trainees compared with previous years than smaller employers. There were also considerable differences by region, as shown in figure 23, although caution should be exercised in interpreting this data for smaller jurisdictions due to small sample sizes.

Figure 23 Change in the number of apprentices and trainees that employers had in the last 12 months compared with previous years, by state and territory, 2021 (% of employers with apprentices or trainees in the last 12 months)



Note: * Use with caution as at least one estimate for the state or territory has a margin of error greater than or equal to 10%.
 Source: NCVET (2021c).

Of employers who said they had more apprentices and trainees in the last 12 months than in previous years, 25.5% claimed this was due to COVID-19. Of employers who had fewer, 39.2% said it was due to COVID-19 (NCVER 2021c).



Employers' future training needs

The COVID-19 pandemic has created extreme challenges for employers and industries across the world. Although the pressures on employers to reskill and upskill their workforce resulting from technological and structural changes existed prior to COVID-19, the pandemic has exacerbated and accelerated this imperative. Disruption in business operations, the implementation of new technologies, and the increased digitalisation of businesses have meant that the intrinsic nature of work in some industries has been forced to evolve rapidly (International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch 2021). In the initial stages of the pandemic, employer recruitment, employee training and skill development activities were interrupted. As economies have reopened in the 'new COVID normal' environment, enterprises and organisations have demonstrated their ability to improvise and adapt to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, which includes the development of innovative training strategies for their employees (International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch 2021).

Digitalisation

As noted earlier in this report, one of the key impacts generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has been the rapid digitalisation in the way businesses deliver their products and services. The Australian Industry Group (2021) flags the accelerating digitalisation of industries as creating urgent skilling demands for employers. This is consistent with Bowman and Callan (2021), who identified that one of the key driving factors for workforce training across most industries is the digitalisation of work processes. Bowman and Callan (2021) argue that, as the pace of technological change continues to accelerate, the workforce will need to learn new skills quickly to adapt and stay competitive. There are concerns that current education and training models are not responsive enough to meet these needs (Australian Industry Group, 2021). The federal government's establishment of the Digital Skills Organisation Pilot in 2020 represents one of the key initiatives for ensuring that digital training meets the future skills needs of employers and builds Australia's digital workforce.

Bowman and Callan's (2021, pp.38-39) research provides an indicative example of the requirement for digital skills from a respondent from the transport and logistics industry:

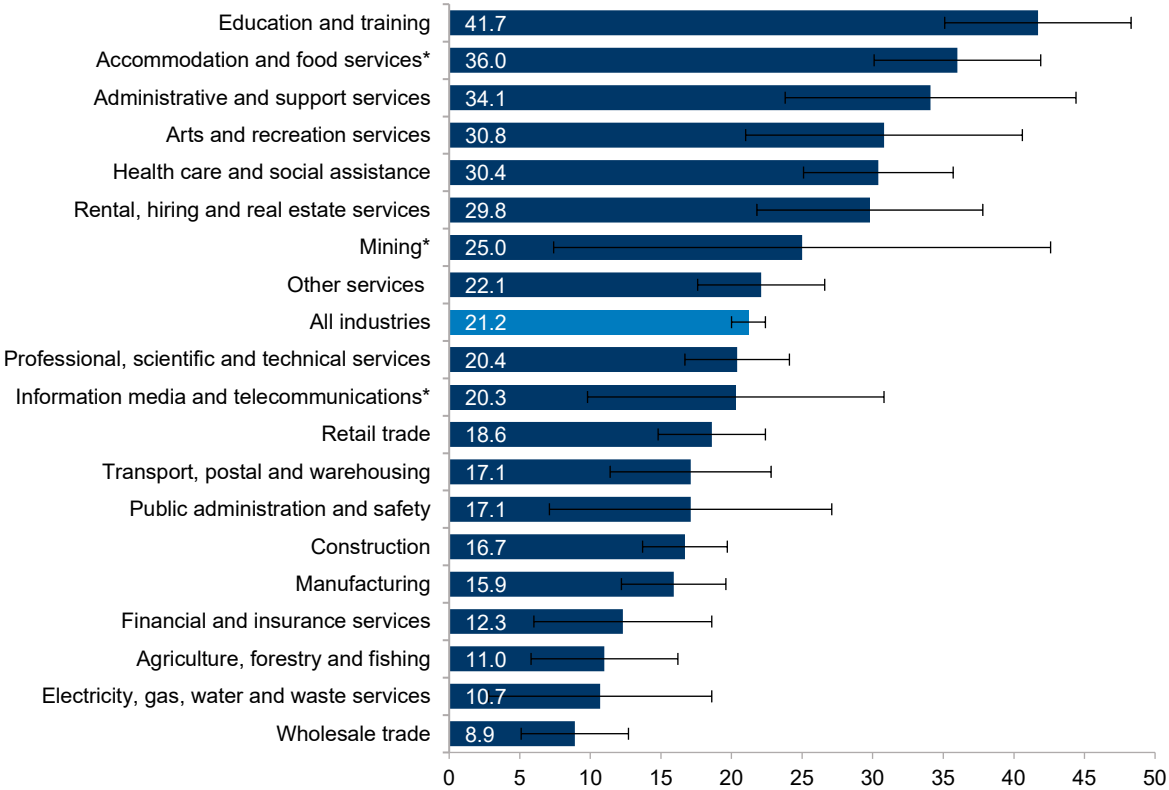
With our warehousing, logistics and packaging group, most of the staff are unskilled. They tend to be long-standing employees with very little interest in training. But increasing automation and digitalisation of supply chain functions may well challenge this attitude. These employees will need to become more skilled around automation and the company would like to professionalise this part of their business more and use more national standards.

Impact of COVID-19 on training priorities

The 2021 Survey of Employer Use and Views of the VET System asked employers whether their training priorities for the next 12 months were different from those of the previous 12 months due to the impacts of COVID-19. Around one in five employers indicated they now had different training priorities (NCVER 2021c), a figure less than the two in five employers who initially reported having new training requirements due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (refer figure 17). This suggests that many employers have adjusted their training and business requirements to the new COVID environment and, in the short term, do not anticipate having to make further changes to their training programs due to COVID-19.

A higher proportion of large employers plan to change their training priorities than do smaller employers (31.4% compared with 19.6%). Industries that have been most disrupted by COVID-19 also tend to be those with the highest proportion of employers with different training priorities for the next 12 months, such as in education and training and accommodation and food services (figure 24).

Figure 24 Employers whose training priorities for the next 12 months are different to those of the last 12 months, due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, by industry, 2021 (%)



Note: * Use with caution as estimate has a margin of error greater than or equal to 10%.
Source: NCVET (2021c).

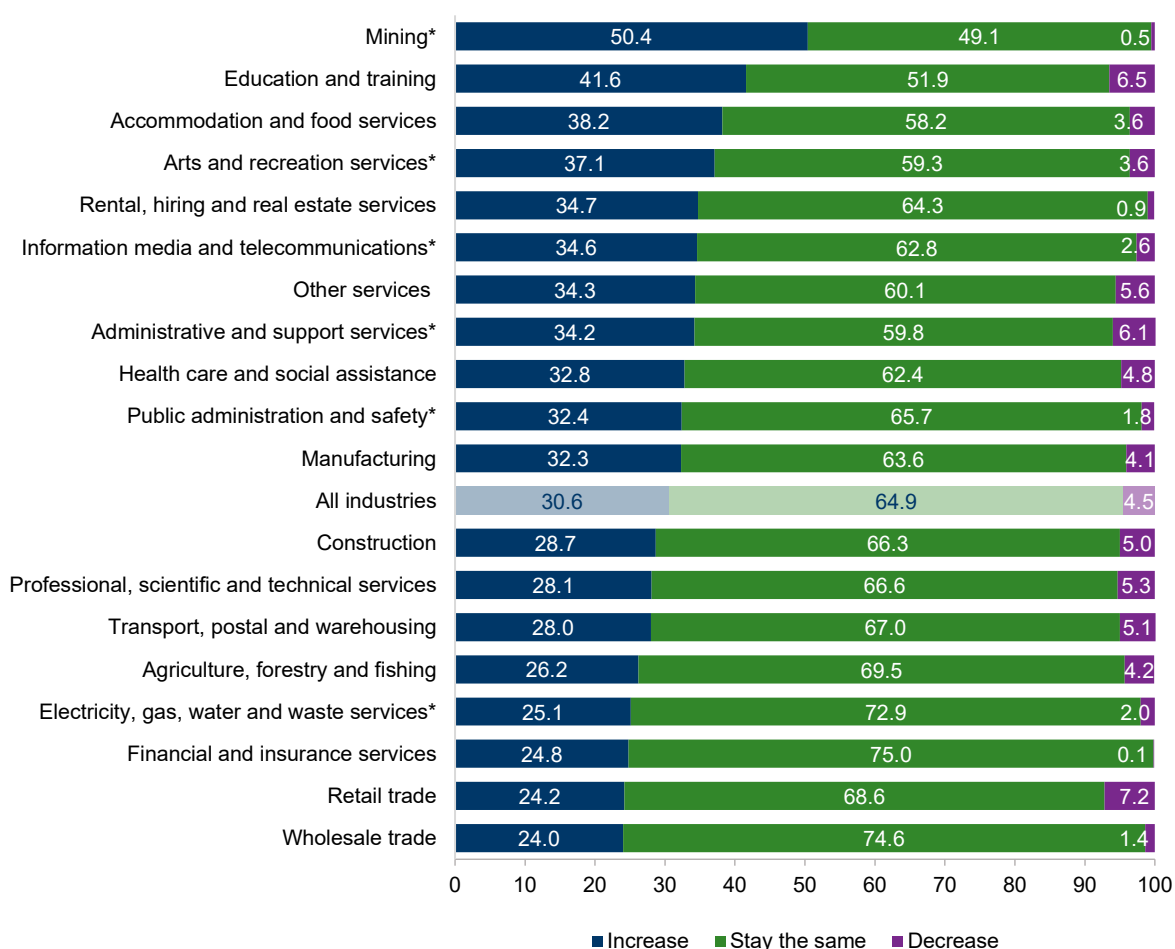
The main reasons provided by employers for these new training priorities were:

- to catch up on training that has been missed out on/things are returning to normal (22.9%)
- to cover regulations to control the spread of COVID-19 (19.3%)
- to upskill current staff (19.2%) (NCVER 2021c).

NCVER (2021c) also asked employers if they expected to change the amount of training provided to their employees in the next 12 months. Overall, 30.6% of employers expected to increase training, with fewer than 5% anticipating a decrease, and the remainder estimating that the amount of training would stay the same. As the size of the business increases, so does the proportion of employers expecting to undertake more training over the next 12 months, with 26.7% of small business, 37.7% of medium and 53.9% of large businesses expecting the amount of training to increase.

Future training plans also varied by industry, as shown in figure 25. Some of the industries with the largest proportions of employers expecting to increase training in the coming year were again those that were most impacted by the pandemic, such as education and training, and accommodation and food services.

Figure 25 Expected change to amount of training the organisation will provide in the next 12 months, by industry, 2021 (%)



Note: * Use with caution as at least one estimate for the industry has a margin of error greater than or equal to 10%.
Source: NCVER (2021c).

Of those employers who expect the amount of training they provide to employees to increase in the next 12 months, the top reasons were:

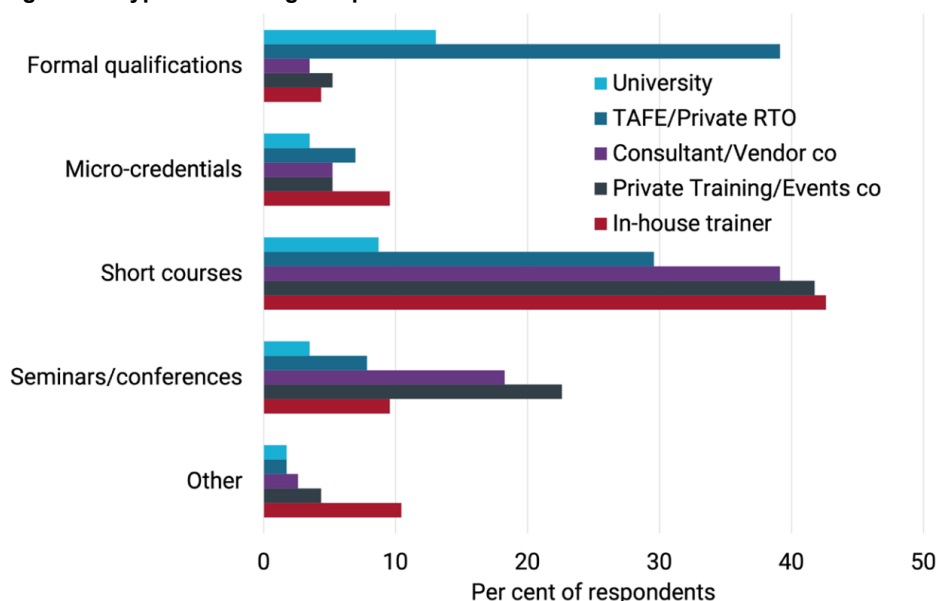
- they were hiring more staff or looking to expand their business (40.7%)
- they needed to upskill or provide additional skills to their employees (25.8%)
- there were changes in the workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic (24.4%) (NCVER 2021c).

For those employers expecting to decrease the amount of training, the top reasons provided were:

- staff have already finished their training (29.2%)
- the business was small or not looking to expand (24.9%) (NCVER 2021c).

The Australian Industry Group (2021) asked employers what types of training and providers they expected to use over the next 12 months. The most common preference was for short courses from a range of providers, including vendors and consultants; and in-house trainers, a finding that indicated that employers were planning to use unaccredited training that was highly tailored to their skilling needs. Employers also said they would be using formal qualifications, with TAFE (technical and further education) institutes, private training providers and to a lesser extent universities being the main source for this type of training. Micro-credentials, as part of employee training and development, were the least common type of training that employers planned to use (although this may be due to lack of employer awareness and understanding of micro-credentials).

Figure 26 Types of training and provider to be used over the next 12 months



Note: Responses are not a representative sample of the Australian economy but are from a mix of industry sectors: manufacturing (58.5%); construction (9%); services (13%); mining (3.5%); and other sectors (16%). Respondents represented all company sizes: 31% small-sized, 45% medium-sized, and 24% large-sized businesses.

Source: Australian Industry Group (2021).

Mode of delivery

Australian employers interviewed by Bowman and Callan (2021) expected that the transition to online training initially prompted by COVID-19 restrictions was here to stay. They also anticipated that there was considerable scope for increased improvements to this mode of delivery. For example, effective digital learning and development systems, as well as embedding social platforms, became crucial during COVID-19 restrictions in enabling the implementation of workforce strategies (Australian Industry Group, 2021). Online delivery has offered flexibility with when and where people train, also allowing greater reach of training (Bowman & Callan 2021). Moving beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, employers are looking to build on the forced transition to online training by increasing investment in digital platforms, tools and resources (International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch 2021). This includes building the capacity of staff to design and deliver online training, acquiring equipment and software, and investigating new technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

The national VET system provided a quick and decisive response to COVID-19 through a speedy transition to online delivery (Hume & Griffin 2021). Many employers interviewed by Bowman and Callan (2021) agreed, indicating that, during the pandemic, the VET system has displayed an ability to adapt to changing employer needs relating to training – including online and remote – offering more connected learning experiences to fulfil key demands for upskilling, reskilling and cross-skilling. A future challenge for the VET system is finding the right blend of online and practical training to support employers' skill needs as COVID-19 restrictions ease and they adjust to a new operating environment.

New and old challenges

Both employers and training organisations have shown themselves to be remarkably adaptable and innovative in their ability to provide training to the workforce, despite the challenges of COVID-19. The findings highlighted in this report indicate that a sizeable proportion of businesses are looking to training to help them to recover and flourish in the post-pandemic economy. The challenge will now be for the VET system to provide training services in a responsive way – one that meets employers' evolving skill

needs. We recognise that a large proportion of employers are satisfied with the accredited training they use (NCVER 2021c). For those businesses that are not satisfied, the consistent reasons cited are:

- the relevant skills are not taught
- there needs to be more focus on practical skills
- the quality of the training needs to be improved (NCVER 2021c).

The nation's post-pandemic economic recovery and the transition to new ways of working bring opportunities for the VET system to address these longstanding concerns of employers, as well as meet new challenges such as:

- the need for employers to fulfil COVID-19 operating requirements
- technological change and the accelerating digitalisation of the workplace
- blended methods of training delivery (striking the right balance of online and practical).

The VET sector's ability to address these issues will play a key role in determining Australian employers' future competitiveness in a post-pandemic world.



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Appendix A

Government initiatives/programs targeting businesses/employers and/or skills and training

Note: programs or initiatives targeting international students are not included below.

National

Programs targeting business/employers

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Supporting apprentices and trainees wage subsidy (part of Economic survival package)	12 March 2020 (original announcement) 16 July 2020 (program extension)	<p>This measure had two key objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to help businesses retain apprentices and trainees to re-engage apprentices and trainees who may otherwise lose their jobs. <p>Originally, the retainment aspect targeted small businesses (with fewer than 20 employees) and was expanded in July 2020 to include medium-sized businesses.</p> <p>The wage subsidy reimbursed 50% of the Australian apprentice's gross wage (up to a maximum of \$7000 per quarter), from 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2021. This measure was in addition to other payments available to employers under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program.</p> <p>Support is also provided to the National Apprentice Employment Network to coordinate the re-employment of displaced apprentices and trainees (see below; 3 April 2020).</p> <p>Group training organisations (GTOs) were able to access the wage subsidy at a rate of \$1500 per fortnight, where the host employer of any size is receiving the JobKeeper payment and retains their apprentice.</p> <p><https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/13-billion-support-package-keep-apprentices-and-trainees-job> (12 March 2020)</p> <p><https://www.pm.gov.au/media/jobtrainer-skills-package-economic-recovery-and-growth> (16 July 2020)</p> <p><https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/fact_sheet-supporting_apprentices_and_trainees_1.pdf></p>
JobKeeper	30 March 2020	<p>JobKeeper was designed with three objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to help businesses and jobs survive COVID-19 restrictions preserve the employment relationship (between employer and employee) and provide needed income support. <p>The wage subsidy is reimbursed (a month in arrears) to eligible employers with a flat payment of \$1500 per fortnight (before tax) per employee. For workers in the accommodation, hospitality and retail sectors (those hardest hit by business restrictions), the payment equated to a full median replacement wage.</p> <p>The initiative was originally intended to be in operation for six months (30 March to 27 September 2020), and was extended in July 2020.</p> <p>Eligibility was determined by self-assessed reduction in revenue and was tiered. Employers with an annual turnover of less than \$1billion, were eligible to claim JobKeeper if revenue declined 30% or more from 1 March 2020 over a minimum one-month period. Employers with an annual turnover of \$1billion or more were required to demonstrate a reduction in revenue of 50% or more to be eligible.</p> <p>Eligible employees included Australian residents, New Zealand citizens in Australia on a subclass 444 special category visa and migrants who were eligible for JobSeeker or Youth Allowance.</p>

		<p>On 21 July 2020, the Australian Government announced that the wage subsidy would be extended from 27 September 2020 to 28 March 2021. However, as the economy showed signs of opening up, the payment (\$1500 per f/night) was tapered in the December and March quarters. Further, the wage subsidy (flat rate) paid to employees decreased and was tiered, based on the employee's average working hours prior to 1 March 2020.</p> <p>Note: employers could not claim the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy if they chose to claim the JobKeeper payment.</p> <p><https://www.pm.gov.au/media/130-billion-jobkeeper-payment-keep-australians-job> (30 March 2020)</p> <p><https://www.pm.gov.au/media/jobkeeper-payment-and-income-support-extended> (21 July 2020)</p> <p><https://www.ato.gov.au/General/JobKeeper-Payment/In-detail/JobKeeper---timeline-of-content-updates/></p>
Apprentice and Trainee Re-engagement Register	3 April 2020	<p>To support re-engagement efforts of apprentices and trainees, the Australian Government supported the National Apprentice Employment Network (NEAN) in its coordination of the Apprentice and Trainee Re-engagement Register.</p> <p>The Apprentice and Trainee Re-engagement Register aimed to connect apprentices and trainees who have lost their jobs with potential employers. The register is open to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apprentices and trainees from small businesses who were in a training contract at 1 March 2020 or 1 July 2020 and have since lost their jobs • apprentices and trainees from medium businesses who were in a training contract at 1 July 2020 and have since lost their jobs • employers of any size, including group training organisations, who wish to register their details and post a vacancy for an apprentice or trainee. <p>The register stopped taking new registrations on 31 March 2021.</p> <p><https://naen.com.au/national-register-will-connect-apprentices-and-trainees-with-employers-to-safeguard-jobs-and-careers/></p> <p><https://naen.com.au/apprentice-and-trainee-re-engagement-register/></p>
Regional Employment Trials – extended to 30 June 2021	Extension announced 26 June 2020	<p>The Regional Employment Trials (RET) program was introduced in 10 disadvantaged (in terms of employment opportunities and growth) regions to address employment issues.</p> <p>It provides grants of between \$7500 and \$200 000 for employment-related projects such as: pre-apprenticeship placement programs; mentoring programs for job seekers; skilling job seekers for employment in upcoming infrastructure projects; and work experience projects targeting local employment opportunities.</p> <p>The program began on 1 October 2018 and was due to finish on 30 June 2020.</p> <p>On 26 June 2020, the Australian Government announced the program's extension for a further 12 months to allow existing projects affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to be completed.</p> <p><https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/extension-regional-employment-trial-program></p>
Fringe Benefits Tax exemption	2 October 2020	<p>The FBT exemption is provided for employer-provided retraining and reskilling, for employees who are redeployed to a different role in the business. Prior to 2 October 2020, FBT was payable if an employer provided training to its employees that was not sufficiently connected to the employee's current job.</p> <p>The exemption does not extend to retraining acquired by way of a salary package arrangement or training provided through Commonwealth-supported places at universities (as they already receive a benefit).</p> <p><https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/josh-frydenberg-2018/media-releases/boost-skills-training-fringe-benefits-tax-exemption></p>

Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements	5 October 2020	<p>This initiative supports employers and GTOs who engage an apprentice and trainee by reimbursing 50% of the apprentice's/trainee's wages up to \$7000 per quarter for a period of 12 months from the date of commencement or recommencement.</p> <p>Existing workers who are offered and accept a new apprenticeship are also eligible for the wage subsidy provided they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • start a trades-based apprenticeship, or • start a non-trades-based apprenticeship and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ transfer from casual employment to a part-time or full-time apprenticeship (limited up to 30 existing worker apprentices), or ○ transfer from part-time employment to a full-time apprenticeship (limited up to 30 existing worker apprentices). <p>Originally, the initiative was capped at 100 000 places and was to be operational from 5 October 2020 to September 2021. However, in March 2021 the Australian Government announced the initiative's expansion (to demand-driven) and extension to cover the full 12 months of an apprenticeship/traineeship, provided they were signed up before 21 September 2021 (to 31 March 2022).</p> <p><https://www.pm.gov.au/media/100000-new-apprenticeship-positions-lead-covid-19-economic-recovery> (5 October 2020)</p> <p><https://www.pm.gov.au/media/thousands-new-apprentice-and-trainee-jobs> (9 March 2021)</p> <p><https://www.dese.gov.au/boosting-apprenticeship-commencements></p>
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Programs targeting skilling/training

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Foundation Skills for Your Future Program	July 2020 (Expansion of program) April 2019 (Program released)	<p>This measure was released as part of the Australian Government's Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow package (see 2019–20 Budget factsheet) to support those eligible to develop their language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills for study or employment. Funding is available for workplace training projects that are employer- or industry-specific (provided they meet program criteria/requirements).</p> <p>In the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update the Government expanded the scope of the program to enable the development and delivery of online learning, literacy, numeracy and digital teaching resources.</p> <p><https://www.dese.gov.au/foundation-skills-your-future-program></p>
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	16 May 2020	<p>Through a project agreement, the Australian Government and all state and territory governments established the \$80 million (via shared funding arrangement) Infection Control Training Fund.</p> <p>The fund is aimed at fast-tracking fee-free (or low-fee) infection-control training for workers in customer-facing businesses to minimise the spread of COVID-19 and support businesses reopen safely. A minimum of 80 000 training places are targeted at workers across industries including retail, food handling, and transport and logistics. Additional training is also available to increase infection-control skill levels in the health sectors, such as aged and disability care.</p> <p>Five national infection-control skill sets were developed by the Australian Industry Skills Emergency Response Sub-Committee (see timeline above, 3 April 2020).</p> <p>Information regarding delivery is included under each jurisdiction, noting there may some variation in targeted industries.</p> <p><https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/infection-control-training-fast-tracked-re-opening-businesses></p>
JobTrainer	16 July 2020	<p>Through a shared funding arrangement (JobTrainer Fund), the Australian Government, in partnership with the state and territory governments, is funding JobTrainer, which aims to help school leavers and job seekers gain new skills by retraining and upskilling in areas (industries) in demand.</p> <p>The program is expected to provide up to an additional 340 700 training places in areas of identified skill needs. Participants are able to access free or low-cost short and long courses to develop new skills. Public, not-</p>

for-profit, and private training organisations can apply for funding to deliver these courses.

Included in the 2021–22 Commonwealth Budget was a further \$500 million, announced by the Australian Government (through a shared arrangement with states and territories) to expand JobTrainer Fund to provide up to 163 000 training places and extend the program 31 December 2022.

Information regarding delivery is included under each jurisdiction.

<<https://www.pm.gov.au/media/jobtrainer-skills-package-economic-recovery-and-growth>> (16 July 2020)

<https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf>

Local Jobs Program	1 September 2020	Announced as part of Australia’s economic recovery from COVID-19, this program will operate in 25 regions across Australia, and aims to support tailored, localised approaches to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment. The program will include employment facilitators chairing Local Jobs and Skills Taskforces (one in each region) to develop a local jobs plan (developed for each region, based on priorities, opportunities and skills gaps) and initiate projects. Local Recovery Funds will be available to support this approach. https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/local-taskforces-aid-jobs-recovery
Higher Education Relief Package	12 April 2020	<i>To be aware of (in case employers refer to short course training at private provider or private university)</i> The Australian Government funded short, online courses (‘micro-credentials’) at ‘world-class universities and private providers’ in priority areas, starting in May and running for six months. As such, eligible participants can access courses with heavily reduced fees if they undertake courses in nursing, teaching, health, IT and science. < https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/higher-education-relief-package > < https://tda.edu.au/newsletters/vet-should-never-be-the-same-comment-by-ceo-craig-robertson/ > (see ‘Government uses coronavirus to trial short online courses’)

NSW

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Fee-free TAFE courses	6 April 2020 30 April 2020 (new fee-free courses announced)	TAFE NSW, with support from the NSW Government, released a suite of 21 fee-free accredited short courses, available online. The fee-free courses were targeted at job seekers, workers seeking to diversify their skills (upskill) and business owners responding to changing business operations/models. On 30 April, the NSW Government announced that 13 new fee-free TAFE NSW short courses were available, following an ‘overwhelming response to the initial suite of courses’. The new courses replace those which reached enrolment capacity to ensure 21 accredited courses were still available. < https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/free-tafe-courses-to-support-nsw-in-pandemic > (6 April 2020) List of courses, via online archival website (6 April 2020) < https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/new-free-courses-to-support-nsw-pandemic > (30 April 2020) List of courses; via webpage archival website (from 30 April 2020); note: fee-free short courses limited to a maximum of two courses per person.
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	Signed Project Agreement 4 June 2020	Through shared funding arrangements between the NSW and Commonwealth governments, a combined \$25.5 million funds fee-free training places for workers in the retail, tourism, transport and logistics, hospitality, cleaning and security services industries. Training places are also prioritised to increase infection-control skill levels in aged and disability care sectors.

		< https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf >
JobTrainer – Skilling for Recovery	16 September 2020	<p>Delivered through the Smart and Skilled program, it is expected to fund approximately 108 000 fee or low-fee training places in NSW in short and long courses; targeted at job seekers and young people, including school leavers.</p> <p>NSW Government media release (via online archival website)</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p> <p><https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/significant-boost-skills-training-nsw></p>
Summer Skills	4 November 2020	<p>As part of JobTrainer – Skilling for Recovery initiative, Summer Skills provided 'bite-sized', fee-free training in a range of industries, including agriculture, construction, conservation, fitness, engineering, coding, communication and digital literacy.</p> <p>The short courses were funded through JobTrainer Part Qualifications.</p> <p><https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/skilling-for-recovery-fee-free-training></p> <p><https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/career-and-study-pathways/jobtrainer/Job-trainer-part-qualifications></p>

Victoria

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Economic Survival Package to support businesses and jobs (\$1.7 billion)	21 March 2020	<p>The package aimed to support Victorian small and medium businesses that were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions through a wide-range of measures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$500 million to establish the Business Support Fund – to direct support to the hardest hit sectors, including hospitality, tourism, accommodation, arts and entertainment and retail • \$500 million to establish the Working for Victoria Fund to help workers who have lost their jobs to find new 'opportunities'. <p>The government also facilitated a job-matching service to help Victorians find short-term or casual roles.</p> <p><https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/economic-survival-package-support-businesses-and-jobs></p>
Working for Victoria (\$500 million)	21 March 2020	<p>This initiative, within the Economic Survival Package, was delivered in partnership with Sidekicker and supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job seekers to find work • job seekers to access online training • employers to find workers quickly, with the skills and experience they need. To be eligible, job seekers were required to have Australian working rights. <p>The initiative also included a \$50 million Agriculture Workforce Plan to provide dedicated support for the agriculture, food processing and critical food supply chain businesses in rural, regional and outer metropolitan Victoria. It helped with recruitment and financial support for: worker relocation and transport (worker accommodation and travel-to-work transport); worker induction and retraining; and business adaptation.</p> <p>More than 10 610 people completed the free short courses, available through Working for Victoria (as advised by Vic DET to NCVER; not for publication).</p> <p><https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/economic-survival-package-support-businesses-and-jobs></p>
COVID-19 support package for training providers	17 April 2020	<p>The Victorian Government announced this measure to ensure Victoria's TAFE and training system was ready and able to train Victorians through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$191.9 million to secure funding at expected pre-COVID-19 levels and to fund TAFEs' and training providers' transition to delivering more online and remote learning

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$68.9 million over three months for crisis support so Victoria's public training system can respond and recover from the pandemic. <p><https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/skilling-victorians-get-through-coronavirus-crisis></p> <p><https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/tafe-students-funding-and-support></p>
Jobs Plan	24 November 2020	<p>A key program of the Victorian 2021—22 Budget was the Jobs Plan, which is dedicated to getting more Victorians back to work (target to create 400 000 new jobs by 2025; half by 2022) and building a state economy that is fairer and more inclusive. In terms of training, the plan sets out funding for (among other initiatives):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80 000 new training places over four years arrangements that support flexibility in accessing government funded-training for Victorians affected by the pandemic, including women, young people, retrenched workers new skills program for existing and emerging industries for skills development in selected major projects, such as Clean Economy Workforce Capacity Building Program and new places in accredited skill sets expanded opportunities for apprentices and trainees through the Big Build training pathway and support for women to move into male-dominated trades. <p>Further, there is funding (\$64 million) for the Digital Skills and Jobs Program for job seekers to acquire skills for jobs in digital roles.</p>
Retrenched Apprentices and Trainees Program	15 May 2020 17 September 2020 (further funding announced)	<p>Established in collaboration with the Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN), this initiative built upon the Apprenticeship Support Officers program. It aimed to help retrenched apprentices and trainees to complete their training. Employers could also use the program to register apprenticeship and traineeship vacancies, making it easier to match them with displaced trainees and apprentices.</p> <p>In September 2020, an additional \$900 000 was invested in the program to fully fund it until June 2021. This money is part of the \$163 million package of investments to boost skills, create jobs and drive the state's economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic announced in July.</p> <p><https://aen.org.au/outoftrade/></p> <p><https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/new-initiative-keep-apprentices-learning> (May 2020)</p> <p><https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/extra-funding-keep-apprentices-learning> (September 2020)</p>
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	Project Agreement signed on 16 June 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements, free short, accredited training courses (skill sets) are offered by Victorian TAFEs and RTOs to help upskill workers to administer and implement infection-control policies and procedures within workplaces. The courses are available to employers and employees in businesses where COVID-safe practices are vital, with a focus on six priority sectors that represent 50% of the Victorian economy: retail trade; accommodation and food; transport, including postal and warehousing; construction; manufacturing and health care and social assistance.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p>
JobTrainer	November 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Victorian and Commonwealth governments, this program will increase access to training for young people and job seekers through an additional 50 000 free or low-fee training places. JobTrainer started for full qualifications in Victoria in November 2020, with JobTrainer skill sets following in February 2021 in conjunction with the introduction of the Victoria's new skill sets policy.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p>

Queensland

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Free online training	Date(s) unknown	<p>The Queensland Government supports online training courses in response to COVID-19. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TAFE Queensland's isolearn – funded training for eligible students in COVID-safe training for hospitality and personal services sectors, micro-credentials to improve specific skills, infection-control skill sets, skill sets, small business CQ University free online skill sets (for eligible students) Skills Focus Queensland training hub – free online library of courses to help those whose employment was impacted by COVID-19 get 'job ready'.
Queensland Economic Recovery Strategy: Unite and Recover for Queensland Jobs	19 May 2020	<p>The Queensland Economic Recovery Strategy aimed to lay the foundation for long-term recovery, focusing on health protection, job creation and social cohesion (working together). The strategy comprised three phases (with phase two consisting of two stages). The first phase focused on immediate economic stimulus. The second phase, with stages one and two, focused on targeted support for infrastructure projects across various industries and projects to support change in other industries. The final phase focused on a long-term plan for six economic recovery priority areas: safeguarding health; backing small business; manufacturing; building; regional development; and skill development.</p> <p><https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/our-economic-recovery-strategy></p> <p>Queensland's economic recovery plan (August 2020)</p> <p>Updated economic recovery plan (Budget update)</p> <p><https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/89840> (May 2020)</p>
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	Project Agreement signed 16 June 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments, fee-free training places are available with restricted eligibility to students who are existing workers in customer-facing roles (including business owners, supervisors and volunteers) who may already hold a certificate III or higher-level qualification.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p>
JobTrainer	25 September 2020 24 February 2021 (program expanded to include 32 more courses)	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments, this program commenced in September 2020 to deliver additional training places in short courses, certificate and diploma qualifications to job seekers, school leavers and young people living in Queensland. Free-training is available in a range of short courses and certificates and low-fee training of no more than \$400 is available for higher-level qualifications.</p> <p>Students must enrol before September 2021 and complete their training by 30 June 2022.</p> <p><https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/more-skills-training-queensland-school-leavers-and-job-seekers></p> <p><https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/91123> (Qld announcement 9 December 2020)</p> <p><https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/91533> (program expanded 24 February 2021)</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p>

South Australia

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Economic stimulus package	11 March 2020 26 March 2020	<p>The economic stimulus package included funding for major infrastructure maintenance projects, new tourism infrastructure and expansion of the Economic and Business Growth Fund. Projects funded under this package had to meet specific criteria, including ability to start quickly; projects must be</p>

		<p>labour-intensive, and/or require significant local purchasing of materials, services and supplies (stimulate local economic activity).</p> <p>Second economic stimulus focused on the \$650 million Jobs Rescue Package, which included the Business and Jobs Fund (\$300 million) and the Community and Jobs Support Fund (\$250 million). The latter included provision of training for South Australians who were seeking new skills and employment.</p> <p><https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news/media-releases/news/unprecedented-response-and-economic-stimulus-to-drive-sa-jobs,-economy-in-wake-of-bushfires,-coronavirus2> (11 March 2020)</p> <p><https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news/media-releases/news/\$1-billion-stimulus-package-to-save-sa-jobs,-businesses> (26 March 2020)</p>
Skills for Business package	19 March 2020	<p>The Skills for Business scheme targets small business through financial support of up to \$5000 to help offset the costs of employing new apprentices or trainees. This payment was implemented through the Equipped for Growth program.</p> <p>The scheme was part of a \$12 million skills package to boost local jobs. The additional funding (on top of other government programs/funding) was available only to new paid training contracts signed by 31 August 2020.</p> <p>Minister for Innovation and Skills media release (19 March 2020)</p> <p><https://www.sasbc.sa.gov.au/latest-news/archive-news></p>
Group Training Boost	19 March 2020	<p>The aim of the Group Training Boost was to reduce the cost for an employer taking on an apprentice or trainee through group training. The measure also helped to reduce the charge-out rate for first-year apprentices and provided further support to group training organisations to encourage moves into new markets and increase their business development capacity and deliver the skills needs of industry.</p> <p>A key eligibility requirement is that the incentives were for new paid training contracts signed by 31 August 2020.</p> <p>Minister for Innovation and Skills media release (19 March 2020)</p> <p><https://www.sasbc.sa.gov.au/latest-news/archive-news></p>
VET market continuity package	4 April 2020	<p>The VET market continuity package supported non-government training providers, as well as TAFE SA, to adapt and remain viable as the impacts of COVID-19 evolved. Support enabled continued delivery of skills, implementation of delivery modes and technology to support training, students and employers, and continuity of subsidy payments at pre-COVID activity levels, from March to June 2020.</p> <p>Some support continued for training providers that continued to experience difficulties because of COVID-19, becoming available in July for support up to 30 June 2021 on a case-by-case basis and subject to budget availability.</p> <p><https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news/media-releases/news/\$16-million-vet-continuity-package-to-maintain-skills-pipeline></p>
COVID clean infection-control training	Project Agreement signed 26 May 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the South Australian and Commonwealth governments, this measure provides nationally recognised training for people working in a customer-facing role, including business owners and supervisors, in infection prevention and control designed for the retail, tourism, transport and logistics, hospitality, cleaning, security services and health (aged care and disability services) sectors. A small co-contribution of \$15 per enrolment is payable by the individual or their employer.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p>
JobTrainer	15 October 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the South Australian and Commonwealth governments, this provides up to 15 000 training places for young people (aged 17 to 24 years), school leavers and job seekers, in qualifications (from the Subsidised Training List), short courses (micro-credentials) and low-fee apprenticeships and traineeships. Enrolments started 15 October 2020.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p>

JobTrainer Transition Initiatives for Employer and Student Supports	15 October 2020	Through an additional investment, this initiative helps transition young people from JobTrainer courses into employment or further training pathways. This program started on 15 October 2020.
Mentoring Suspended Apprentices and Trainees project	Date unknown	The Mentoring Suspended Apprentices and Trainees project delivers ongoing support to South Australian apprentices and trainees employed by businesses and who had their training contracts suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It helps apprentices and trainees to remain engaged and focused on completing elements of their learning during the period of suspension. It also provides support to participants by connecting them to specialist services where required.

Western Australia

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Construction industry COVID-19 support package	23 April 2020	<p>The construction industry package aimed to maintain construction industry jobs and to support the industry's workforce to be ready to help with the state's post COVID-19 economic recovery.</p> <p>As such, the package comprised funding for an immediate, one-off payment to eligible employers of existing apprentices and trainees, a grants scheme to help retain existing apprentices, and funding to help construction apprentices and trainees undertake short training courses to upskill.</p> <p>Premier and Minister for Education and Training media release (23 April 2020)</p>
COVID-19 Direct Care Skill Set	27 April 2020	<p>The COVID-19 Direct Care Skill Set was co-designed by employers, the Community Services, Health and Education and Training Council and the VET sector with the aim of increasing the number of skilled workers in the aged care and disability sectors. The skill set was originally 99% subsidised (available for \$22) before becoming part of the fee-free infection-control skill sets, which are 100% subsidised.</p> <p>Premier and Minister for Education and Training media release (27 April 2020)</p> <p><https://www.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/skillsready></p>
Infection control training and skill sets	2 June 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments, this measure provides nationally recognised training in infection prevention and control for people working in customer-facing roles, specifically the aged care, disability support, retail, hospitality, and transport and logistics sectors. All infection-control skill sets are 100% free</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p> <p><https://www.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/skillsready></p>
Free training for displaced apprentices and trainees	5 June 2020	<p>Developed to help maintain the supply of skilled apprentices and trainees for the recovery, the WA Government funded course and/or resource fees for training undertaken by eligible apprentices and trainees for up to six months. The fees were paid by the Department of Training and Workforce Development directly to training providers from 1 July 2020. This measure was expected to support more than 3000 displaced apprentices and trainees.</p> <p>Premier and Minister for Education and Training media release (5 June 2020)</p>
WA Recovery Plan	26 July 2020	<p>The WA Government released the WA Recovery Plan to drive economic and social recovery. It included significant investment in infrastructure in schools, TAFE and community facilities, support for specific industries (tourism, local manufacturing, construction and renewable technologies), a 'blitz' on maintenance upgrades to support work for local 'tradies'.</p> <p>Premier and Treasurer media release (26 July 2020)</p> <p>WA Recovery Plan</p> <p>Rebuilding our TAFEs plan announcement</p>
Apprenticeship and Traineeship Re-engagement Incentive	28 July 2020 13 August 2020 (update)	<p>Part of the Rebuilding our TAFEs Program, this incentive aimed to provide financial support to employers who take on a displaced apprentice or trainee. Employers who took on an apprentice or trainee whose training contract was terminated or cancelled by a previous employer on or after 1 March 2020</p>

		<p>received a one-off payment of \$6000 for an apprentice and \$3000 for a trainee. Eligibility requirements applied to employers and GTOs seeking the incentive.</p> <p>The incentive was available to 30 June 2021.</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (28 July 2020)</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (13 August 2020)</p>
JobTrainer	13 October 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments, it provides free or low-fee training places for young people (aged 17 to 24 years), school leavers and job seekers, to undertake qualifications short courses. Training opportunities funded through JobTrainer became available from 1 January 2021, through the Lower fees, local skills program and Job Ready skill sets.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p> <p><https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/significant-boost-skills-training-western-australia></p> <p><https://www.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/skillsready></p> <p><https://www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/uploads/dtwd-vet-fees-charges-policy-v1.1-april2021.pdf></p>
Infrastructure Ready TAFE Program	7 October 2020	<p>This program is part of a wider initiative aimed to drive the sustainability of the civil construction industry by developing an ongoing pool of entry-level workers. The program, a partnership between the WA Government and industry, offer incentives to contractors to employ and retain program participants. The pilot program began in late October, with the first round of job-ready participants given the opportunity to gain entry-level prospects with contractors from the civil construction industry by early 2021. The program includes the new Infrastructure Ready skill set to prepare people for entry-level roles and further study pathways.</p> <p>Premier and Minister for Education and Training media release (7 October 2020)</p>

Tasmania

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Rapid Response Skills Initiative (RRSI; suite of programs)	27 March 2020	<p>In response to people losing their jobs as a result of the trading restrictions implemented to restrict the spread of COVID-19, the Tasmanian Government expanded the existing Rapid Response Skills program. The program provides up to \$3000 for career advice and training to help displaced workers find a new job or retrain for a new career, and to connect them with services and/or jobs in industries with immediate demand.</p> <p>Included in the expansion was the Rapid Response Skill Matching Service to help match and prepare workers with industries that had immediate job demand. See May 2020 update for number of participants.</p> <p>Train Now Fund, part of the RRSI, was a \$1.5 million fund that subsidised training and workforce development activities for existing workers and sole traders during COVID-19 restrictions. It targeted industries significantly impacted, such as agriculture, retail and manufacturing, and in areas of health and safety, licensing and plant training. In August 2020, the Tasmanian Government reported that the fund had helped almost 1500 Tasmanians and 69 local employers.</p> <p>The Rapid Response Skills Training Support Program (2021) is a new training fund that supports training of unemployed and underemployed workers to work in the growing Aged Care and Disability Support sectors.</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (27 March 2020)</p> <p>Train Now Fund announcement (29 April 2020)</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release -update (26 May 2020)</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (6 August 2020)</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release re new program (25 March 2021)</p>
	29 April 2020	
	26 May 2020	

Rapid Response Skills Training fact sheet

Skill Up for your future (or TasTAFE SkillUp)	11 May 2020	<p>This program aimed to help Tasmanians to quickly upskill, reskill or gain new skills, in preparation for entering into employment or changing careers once the economy starts to recover. It comprised a suite of online short courses and skill sets, many of which had no fees, specifically focused on transferable skills useful to employers across various jobs and industries, as well as skills to support people to successfully enter employment.</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (11 May 2020)</p>
Rebuilding Tasmania Construction Blitz	4 June 2020	<p>The Tasmanian Government announced a ‘record’ construction blitz over two years, which would underpin about 15 000 jobs and support an estimated construction value of \$3.1 billion. The expansion of infrastructure was to stimulate investment (grow business confidence) and strengthen and underpin the economy.</p> <p>Included is funding for extra assistance for the Trades and Water Centre of Excellence (for trade training). The blitz is also expected to support apprenticeships, as the Building and Construction training policy includes a requirement for contracts in excess of \$250 000 to use apprentices for a minimum of 20% of the labour.</p> <p>Premier media release (4 June 2020)</p>
Tasmanian Recovery Plan	20 July 2020 16 March 2021	<p>The Premier’s Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) was announced on 30 April 2020. The council was established to provide advice on how best to support Tasmania’s short, medium, and longer-term recovery from COVID-19, and delivered its interim report to the Premier on 20 July 2020.</p> <p>About PERSAC</p> <p>PERSAC Interim Report</p> <p>PERSAC Final Report</p>
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	28 July 2020 Project Agreement signed 15 June 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Tasmanian and Commonwealth governments, Skills Tasmania-endorsed RTOs are funded to provide nationally recognised training (industry-specific infection-control skill sets) at no (or low) cost to workers in customer-facing roles, including retail, food-handling and transport and logistics. Workers in community and health care sectors were also eligible.</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (28 July 2020)</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p> <p>ICTF info Skills Tasmania website</p>
Skills Fund (funding boost)	30 July 2020	<p>Funding boost to Skills Fund to support more than 1500 training places across seven RTOs to deliver training in targeted areas, including construction, manufacturing and disability care. Extra funding also made available through Adult Learning Fund to support training for 550 Tasmanians across 10 RTOs in high-demand areas, including aged services, disability and early childhood education and care</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (30 July 2020)</p>
JobTrainer	23 September 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Tasmanian and Commonwealth governments, JobTrainer provides grant funding for up to 7000 additional training places (in approved full qualifications and skill sets) to help young people (aged 17 to 24 years), school leavers and job seekers into employment as Tasmania emerges from COVID-19. The qualifications and courses are in areas of strategic importance to Tasmania and where there are strong future job prospects. Applications for the JobTrainer Fund opened on 17 October 2020.</p> <p>Minister for Education and Training media release (23 September 2020)</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p> <p><https://www.skills.tas.gov.au/about/current_projects/jobtrainer></p>
Mentoring for Success Program	3 March 2021	<p>This program supports an escalation in the use of group training organisations (GTOs) by small-to-medium enterprises in all industries across the state. Grants will be offered to GTOs who place an apprentice or trainee with an</p>

eligible host employer. Up to 200 places (or full-time equivalent) will be supported by the grants.

Minister for Education and Training (3 March 2021)

Mentoring for Success info (Skills Tasmania website)

Northern Territory

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Free training courses	Date unknown	<p>A suite of over 50 free training courses was developed to help Northern Territory workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to upskill and reskill. The short courses cover a range of industries, including digital, environmental studies, finance, emergency and disaster, health and education, practical business skills, skills for tradies and hospitality, and can be taken online or in classrooms with reduced class sizes. Courses are open to Territorians who meet the eligibility criteria, which is determined by the training organisations contracted to deliver the courses.</p> <p>These short courses have been replaced by the Infection Control Training and JobTrainer program.</p>
The Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission	22 May 2020	<p>The Northern Territory Government announced the initial membership of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission on 22 May 2020, and released Operation Rebound, the green paper on the Territory's recovery, developed to help guide the commission's work.</p> <p>The Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission's first report was released on 20 July 2020, with its final report released on 1 December 2020. Chapter five focuses on a skilled workforce; recommendations include embedding workforce planning (for the future) now, establishing a Territory Careers Pathway, and expanding key programs that improve remote Aboriginal education.</p> <p>The Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission (22 May 2020)</p>
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	19 May 2020 Project Agreement signed 4 June 2020	<p>A joint initiative between the Northern Territory and Australian governments that funds the accredited unit HLTINF001, this provides practical skills focused on prevention of transmission and ensuring a safe workplace for staff and customers. The courses are open to Territorians who meet the eligibility requirements</p> <p>https://newsroom.nt.gov.au/mediaRelease/33289</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p>
JobTrainer	Date	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments, it provides funding for approximately 3100 new free or low-cost training places from January 2021. Training places are targeted at young people aged 17 to 24 years (not at school), job seekers and underemployed people who meet eligibility requirements. Training is available in full qualifications and skill sets in specified areas of skill needs, such as building and construction, community services, health and education, computing, general education and training, primary industry and tourism and hospitality. Participants can complete more than one short course.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf></p> <p><https://nt.gov.au/learning/adult-education-and-training/free-training-courses></p>
Small Business Financial Fitness Fund		<p>The Small Business Financial Fitness Fund is a \$2 million program to support businesses to access financial sustainability training programs specific to their needs.</p> <p>The program has two components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peak industry bodies will be able to apply for grants of up to \$250 000 to develop a training program specific to their sector, with support from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. Peak industry bodies were able to register their interest to participate from November 2020, with applications opening March 2021.• Training providers can register to deliver financial and business sustainability training for small businesses from late November 2020. This may include accredited and non-accredited programs that target industries

in need. Individual businesses will be able to directly apply for a grant of up to \$10 000 to attend the training.

NT Budget 2020 factsheet

Critical Worker Support Package for Hospitality and Tourism industries	23 April 2021	<p>A \$2 million package aimed at increasing hospitality and tourism skilled workers in the Territory to alleviate 'current pressures around a worker shortfall', the package focuses on skilling local Territorians, as well as attracting intrastate and interstate workers.</p> <p>Initiatives to skill local Territorians include access to free short courses in Responsible Service of Alcohol, Housekeeping and Tour Guiding; matching apprentices and employers (aimed at filling approximately 200 vacancies in the hospitality industry); and English literacy training for hospitality and tourism workers.</p> <p><https://newsroom.nt.gov.au/mediaRelease/34382></p> <p><https://nt.gov.au/learning/adult-education-and-training/free-training-courses></p>
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Australian Capital Territory

Program	Date	Summary – about the program
Support for the VET Sector	27 March 2020	<p>The ACT Government announced the following measures to support the capacity of the VET sector during the COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed pricing measures introduced in January 2020 to address User Choice and Skilled Capital program budget pressures until 2021. Subsidy levels will be reinstated to 2019 levels. The changes apply only for 2020 enrolments and payments were backdated for User Choice commencements and Skilled Capital enrolments from 15 January 2020. • Released an additional 1965 Skilled Capital training places across 60 qualifications and 39 skills sets to address emerging workforce needs in response to the COVID-19 crisis. • Provided eligible RTOs with an ACT Government Training Initiative Funding Agreement access to a 50% unit payment where a student has commenced a unit of competency, but the RTO is not able to finalise assessment due to workplace access and social distancing policies. <p>ACT Government announcement (27 March 2020)</p>
Training/skilling initiatives in response to COVID-19 measures	Date unknown	<p>Out of contract training – apprentices and trainees</p> <p>The ACT Government allowed apprentices and trainees to continue training out of trade if displaced from work, if the RTO delivery allowed.</p> <p>Extension to Skilled Capital contracts (RTOs)</p> <p>Extended Skilled Capital contracts by six months (allowing learners additional time to complete the qualification)</p> <p><i>(As per information confirmed by NCVER with CMTEED; included in the national briefings for annual VET data releases)</i></p>
Infection Control Training Fund and skill sets	Project Agreement signed 26 May 2020	<p>Through shared funding arrangements between the ACT and Commonwealth governments, the Infection Control and Training Fund provides funding for up to 3800 fee-free places in infection-control training. Training targeted customer-facing workers and prioritised workers in the retail, tourism, transport and logistics, hospitality, cleaning, security service, aged and disability sectors.</p> <p><https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/project-agreement/Final_ICTF_website_all%20signatures.pdf></p>
Youth Support Package	12 August 2020	<p>The ACT Government's Youth Support Package provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a six-month payroll tax exemption for businesses that pay wages for new employees who are apprentices or trainees. The exemption applies to six months of wages for eligible employees recruited between 1 August 2020 and 31 January 2021 • a \$2 million extension of the ACT Public Service graduate program to provide additional graduate positions over the next two years, including cadet and apprentice recruitment

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- an additional \$250 000 for targeted mental health support for young people, building on the Mental Health Support Package previously announced as part of the economic survival package.

ACT Government media release (12 August 2020)

JobTrainer

8 September 2020

Provided funding for up to 3500 fee-free training places targeted at young people (17–24 years) and job seekers under JobTrainer. The training places are available in community services, healthcare, renewable energy and sustainability, digital and cyber security, construction, and hospitality, through three streams: the Skilled Capital program (delivered by private RTOs), the Canberra Institute of Technology and the Ginninderry SPARK training and employment initiative.

<https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/skills/national-partnership/JobTrainer_Fund_Schedule.pdf>

Minister for Tertiary Education media release (8 September 2020)



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