

South West Victoria Aged Care Industry Workforce

**Applying the New Work Mindset –
Supplementary Research**



SETTING THE SCENE

South West TAFE in partnership with the Foundation of Young Australians, Lyndoch Living, Western District Health Service and Eventide Homes are working together using research to build localised, future-focused evidence of skills need for South West Victoria to equip current and future students and workers with the skills they need for the work of tomorrow.

The intent of the focus groups activity and staff survey is to support the regional research in determining whether the current and future workforce are equipped with the right set of skills and mindset to adapt to the changing trends in labour, particularly in the Carers cluster. The data obtained will provide benchmark information on the general perceptions of those intending to work and study in the healthcare and social assistance sector. The findings will be used to identify the necessary and in demand transferable skills in the healthcare and social assistance sector and develop training options to upskill and reskill the current workforce and also the TAFE Teaching workforce.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Victorian Government's Workforce Training Innovation Fund (WTIF) recognised the need for industry and training providers to work together and creates opportunities for the joint exploration of new ideas and solutions to enhance workplace productivity. South West TAFE (SW TAFE) was successful in a \$3.6 million application to WTIF for a joint project with Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), Lyndoch Living, Western District Health Service (WDHS) and Eventide Homes (the Consortium).

This project has been designed to address the following WTIF Objectives:

- the training and TAFE system delivers high-quality skills training that is relevant and responsive to evolving industry needs and business training requirements,
- partnerships between training providers and industry or employers are strengthened,
- workforces are equipped with the skills needed for identified future growth sectors and new and emerging industries,
- industry and/or business productivity is improved through training, and TAFE system involvement in industry-based applied research.

Project Goals

Research from FYA's *New Work Mindset* report will be used to inform, develop, test and trial new career development and management processes and tools for SWTAFE students and the Consortium employees. This will demonstrate and showcase a new learning model and develop a series of tools that can be used across industry and vocational education to provide evidence for training package design and delivery.

Theory into practice



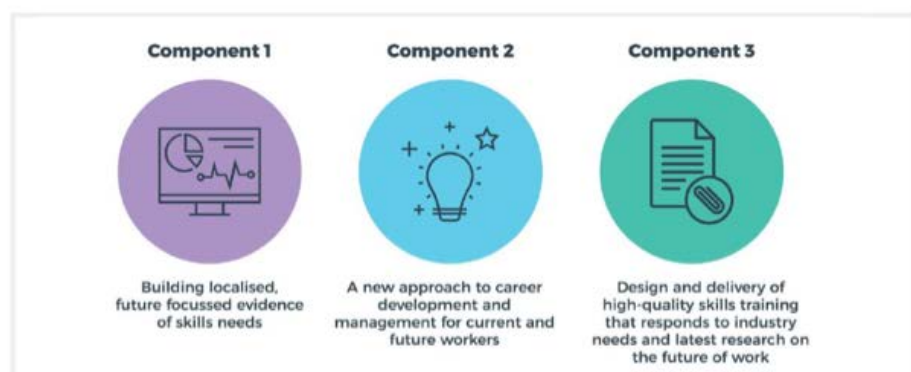
This model will be focussed on helping students develop a portfolio of transferable skills, rather than the current practice of narrow, job-specific training and enable future-focused workforce planning.

The project focuses on three components:

1. Building localised, future focused evidence of skills needs
2. A new approach to career development and management for current and future workers
3. Design and delivery of high-quality skills training that responds to industry needs and latest research on the future of work

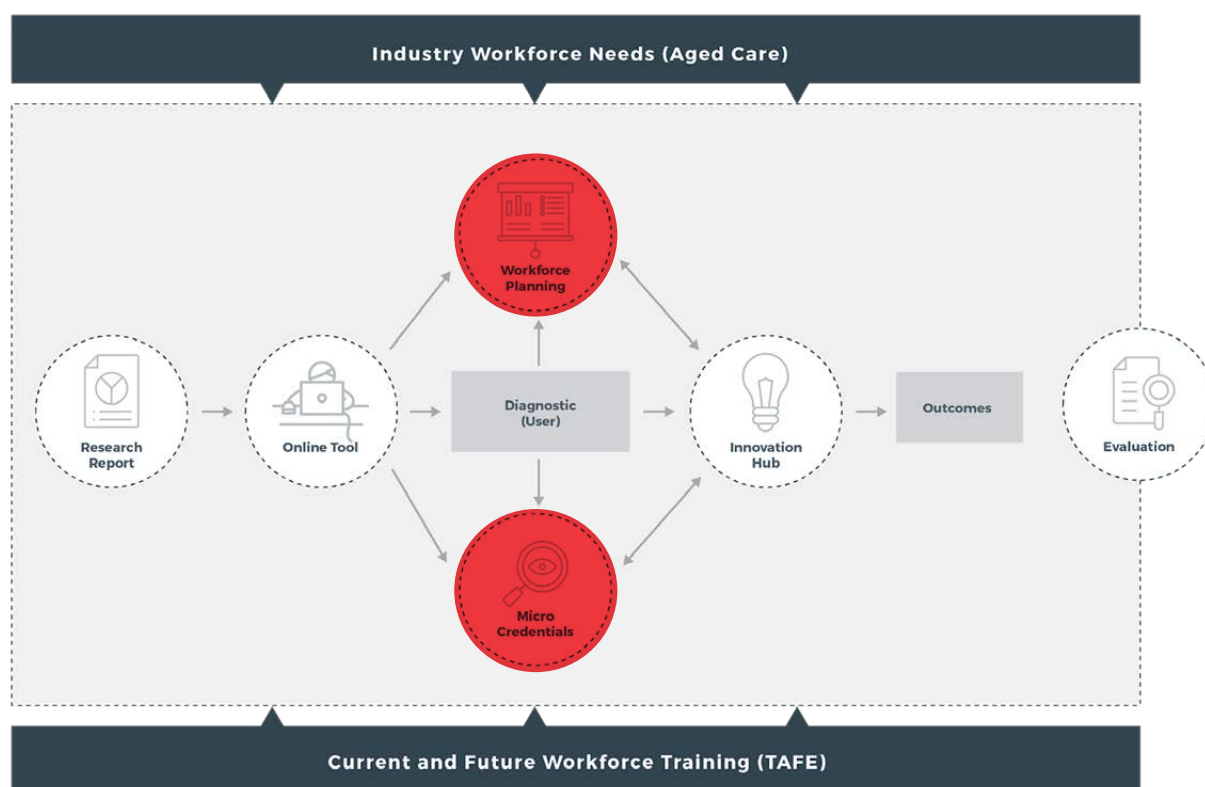
Scope

The project comprises three components to address workforce development needs in the healthcare and social assistance sector of South West Victoria.



Within these components, there are specific products being developed. These are:

This report focuses on the workforce planning component and acts as a supplementary report to the Research Report.





THE PROCESS

Qualitative (group discussions) and quantitative (online staff surveys) research was undertaken within the consortia partners, to obtain a snapshot in determining whether the current and future workforce are equipped with the right set of skills and mindset to adapt to the changing trends in labour, particularly in the Carers (Aged Care) cluster.

The data obtained will provide a benchmark for information on the general perceptions of those working or intending to work in the healthcare and social assistance sector and act as a complementary supplement to the overall project research and assist in framing the overall picture of professional development needed for the sector.

Participation in the survey was voluntary receiving a total of 137 respondents. Three focus groups were held with the consortia partners with a total of 32 participants. A further focus group was conducted with SWTAFE staff (Warrnambool) with 7 participants.

Depending on the venue and the numbers in attendance, the participants were asked a series of questions. In some instances, this was conducted as a small group activity, and in some other cases a broader, group discussion was facilitated, these included the following:

- How long have you been working in Aged Care?
- Why are you working in Aged Care?
- What provides you with the most satisfaction?
- What top 3 skills are required to do a good job?
- Would you recommend this job to others?
- How do we encourage younger people to enter the industry?
- How has the industry changed in the time you have been working there?
- Do you see more change happening in the future?
- Do you have current skills and knowledge to adapt to these perceived changes?

The findings will be used to identify the necessary and in-demand skills in the healthcare and social assistance sector and develop training options to upskill and reskill the current workforce.



The Findings

Demographics of employees

The data reveals a workforce gender and age disparity with almost 9 out of 10 respondent's female and over 36% of employees aged 45-54.



Demographic information sourced from each of the consortia partners indicates that:

Personal Care Workers, Enrolled Nurses and Domestic staff are for the most part female. They also have a long work history at their place of employment.



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Employment Background

The 2017 Annual Report for Lyndoch Living indicates that 30% of their staff have worked there for 10 years or more, with 16% of these staff having over 15 years' experience. Thirty-six staff were recently awarded service badges and of these, six staff had 25 to 35 years' experience. A similar story occurs at Eventide Homes and WDHS. Sixteen staff were recently noted as having served between 20-35 years' service each at WDHS and similarly eight staff were acknowledged at Eventide Homes for clocking up between 10 and 25 years' service. In nearly every case they were women.

In the facilitated group discussions these indicators of service were confirmed, and in each discussion, there were staff present who had been working at the provider for more than 25 years.

The staff survey revealed a cohort of new entrants less than 5 years in employment (31%) and within the healthcare industry (21%).

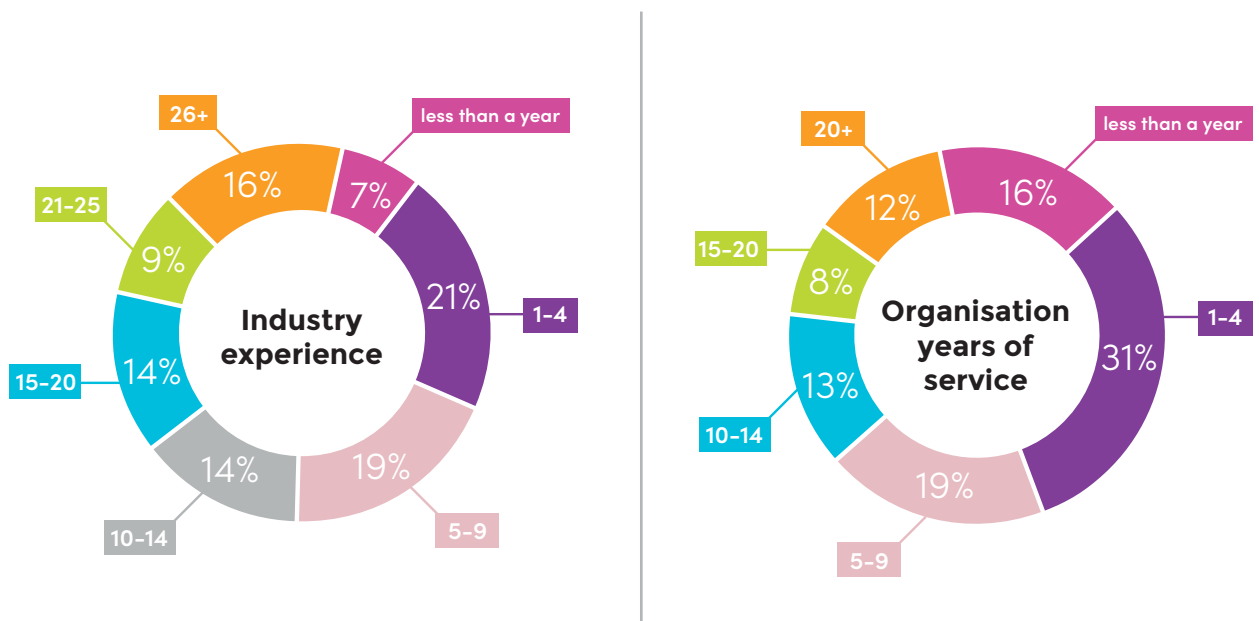


Figure 1. Comparison of work experience in health care and aged care facility

This result corroborates with a key message in research reports that the health care sector (particularly aged care) is becoming an emerging industry for the new and re-entering workforce (*AlphaBeta 2017, DDJSB 2018, HESTA 2018*).

Type of employment

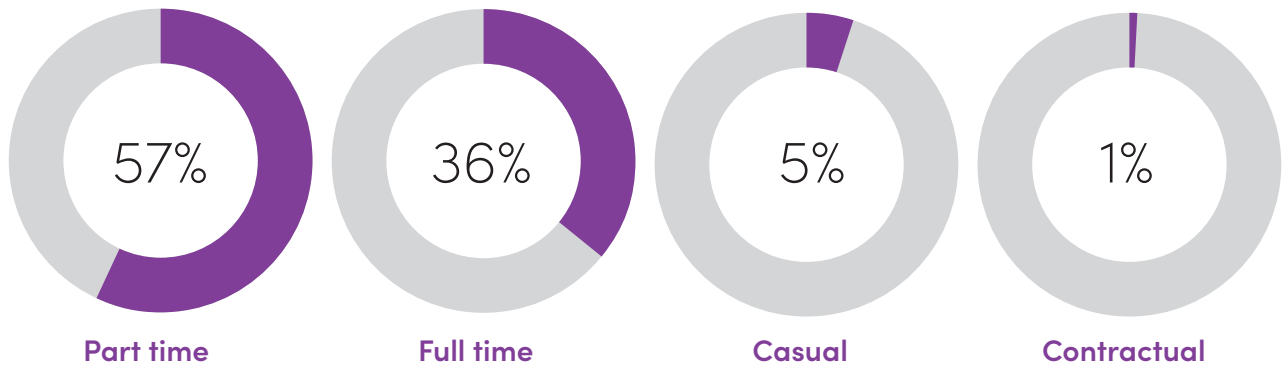


Figure 2. Type of employment of respondents

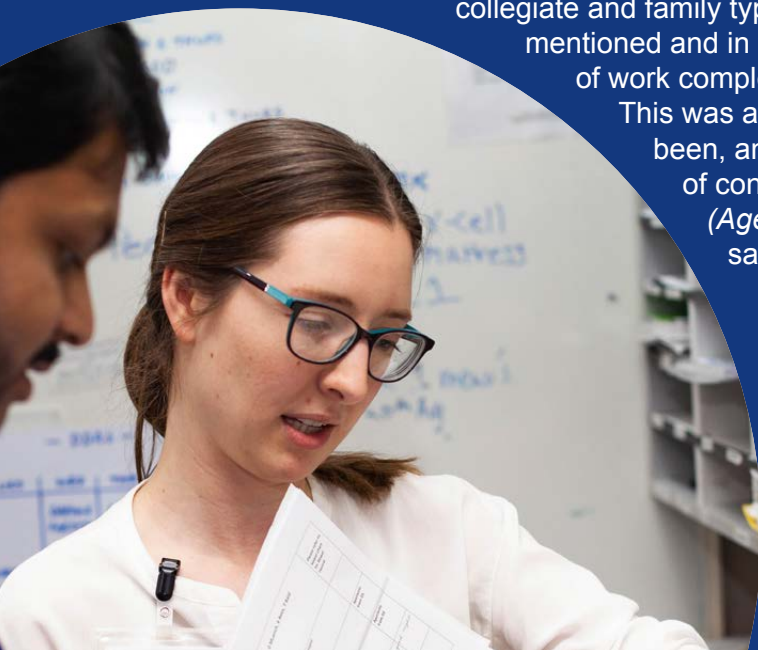
Over half the participants were mainly part time workers (57%). Such nature of work suits people with families who require a stable income.

The survey results also showed that more than half of the staff (67%) have maintained their job roles through the years. For others, promotion was the most common driver of change. This response is positive feedback from the consortia partners, which reflects their ability to provide work progression and incentive for professional development among their staff. 52% of respondents have undertaken work related short courses.

Reasons for working in the sector

In all of the discussions the common reasons for working in the sector included variety in the working day, flexibility of rostering and the availability of part-time work and the intrinsic enjoyment of working with and supporting the elderly. Other reasons included a steady and growing industry and working in a collegiate and family type environment. Only in one discussion was payment mentioned and in this instance it was in regard for acknowledgement of work completed and satisfaction for receiving this payment.

This was an interesting observation as wages in the sector have been, and remain, relatively low and are an ongoing source of concern for both employees and the sector more broadly (Aged Care 2017).¹ All respondents indicated great satisfaction working in the sector.



¹ Legislated Review of Aged Care, 2017

Education

This is a highly gendered industry and for the most part an ageing, and to some extent, unskilled workforce. Staff who participated in the survey and group discussion have certificate or degree qualifications. The online survey revealed 30% of the respondents, who were mainly personal care workers, possessed a Certificate III level.

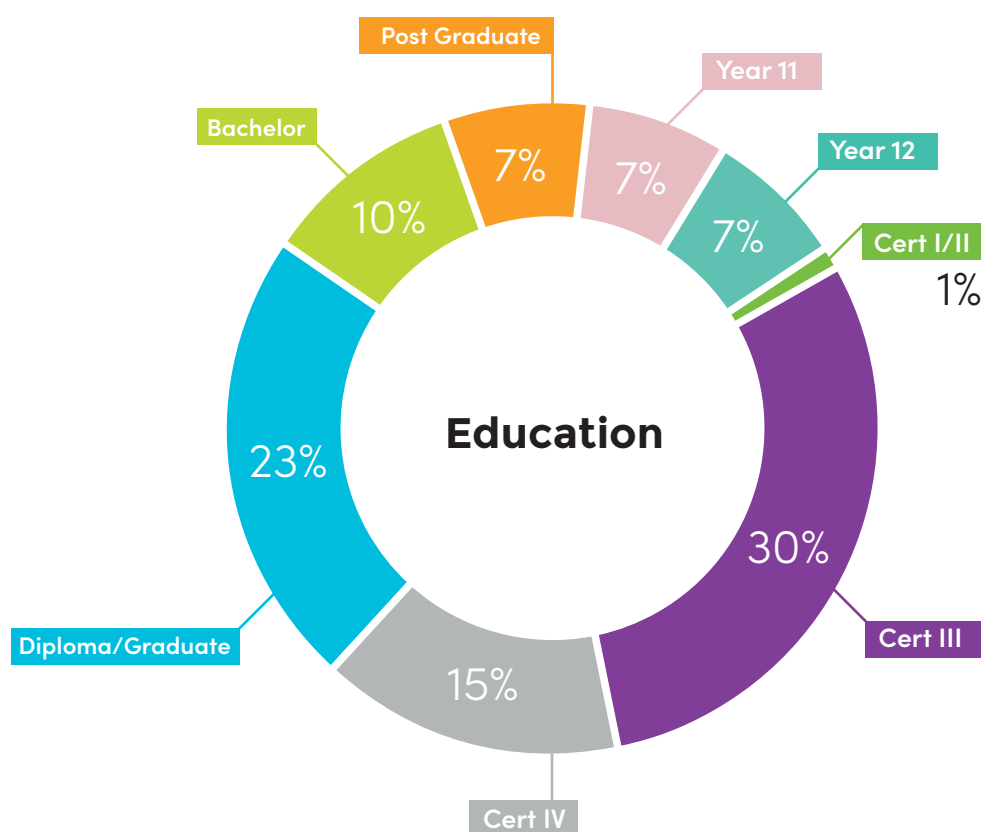


Figure 3. Highest educational qualification of respondents

Meeting the skills needs of the sector

The discussion indicated that there is currently a gap in the industry expectation of the skills and knowledge of graduates at a Certificate III level qualification. There is an expectation that these graduates will have the skills to undertake leadership positions, yet this would normally be expected of a Certificate IV level graduate. This confirms FYA data indicating the attributes expected of staff in the sector, as indicated in job applications, not matching the graduate attributes identified at course level. Some senior staff also identified that the Position Description requirements are at odds with the skills and competencies of Certificate III graduates and that there is an expectation that they will have higher order skills. This mis-match between expectations and the reality of the skills and knowledge of Certificate III graduates needs to be addressed; and this identifies a potential opportunity for further industry based training – either via Skill Sets or the proposed micro-credentials. However graduates from the SWTAFE courses obtain employment on graduation and are sought after in the local industry.

Skills and Training

Skills required

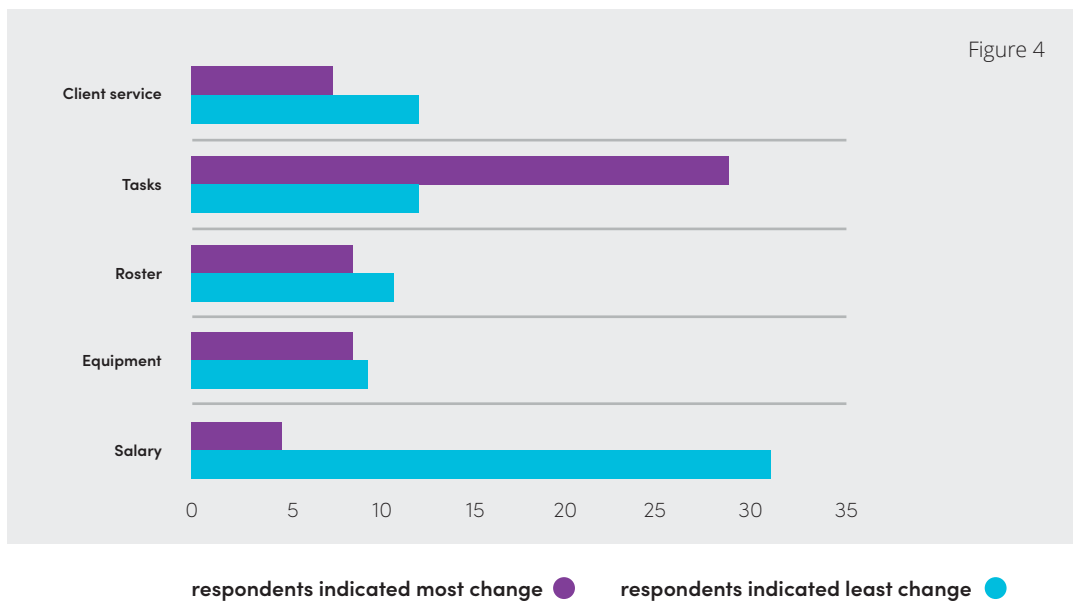
Respondents indicated that the industry had changed markedly as a consequence of a variety of factors including:

- Increased use of technology to meet business needs – this includes rostering systems; online application and assessment systems of intending residents; food service ordering and menus; greater technology use and expectation of Wi-Fi and related services by residents;
- Residents entering aged care at a later age. Eventide Homes reported that previously residents would move into Aged Care in their late 60s and early 70s but now are staying at home later and accessing services in their 80s and 90s. Lyndoch Living and WDHS staff commented on residents with greater mental health needs than previously and often drug and alcohol related issues. This impacts on the level of care now required and consequently different skills required of staff;
- The 2018 HESTA report² indicated that providers are now adapting more to a personalised aged care residential homes offering lifestyle as well as end-of life care. This was expanded upon by the CEO of Eventide Homes as she intends to reframe aged care in this environment 'from a hostel to a hotel';

- **In terms of personal attributes, all respondents indicated that Aged Care workers needed patience, empathy, good communication skills, flexibility, a sense of humour – all of which was summarised as having the 'it factor'; and**
- Other workforce issues include the need for stronger education and training; some participants expressed concern about the adequacy of entry level qualifications particularly in light of the new skills required.



The changing nature of work



²Transforming Aged Care, 2018. <https://www.hesta.com.au/transformingagedcare>

Skills required for the future

As well as some of the personal attributes identified earlier, respondents indicated that further training would be required to meet the needs of a changing resident demographic. These new skills and attributes **included better communication skills, flexibility to adapt to a changing environment, digital literacy skills and the ability to work in and across different teams – all identified as part of the Enterprise skills.** Technical skills in understanding dementia, working with drug and alcohol affected clients and understanding complex issues within the broader Aged Care sector were also identified. In particular it was noted that with the shift to a client centred focus of delivery, more attention would need to be paid to the personal skills and knowledge required of staff.

Respondents in all focus groups indicated they would recommend the sector while noting that it is not for everyone; one respondent commenting that a lot of young people are scared of older people due to limited opportunities for interaction.

The focus group identified that new entrants may be attracted if the focus is on **making a difference and identifying intrinsic satisfaction from working in this sector.**

Other ways to attract younger people include:



Orientation Days



Mentoring of new staff to assist them to settle in the job



Offering clear pathways within the organisation or service so staff could move around and gain new skills



Opportunities for work experience

Future Proofing the industry

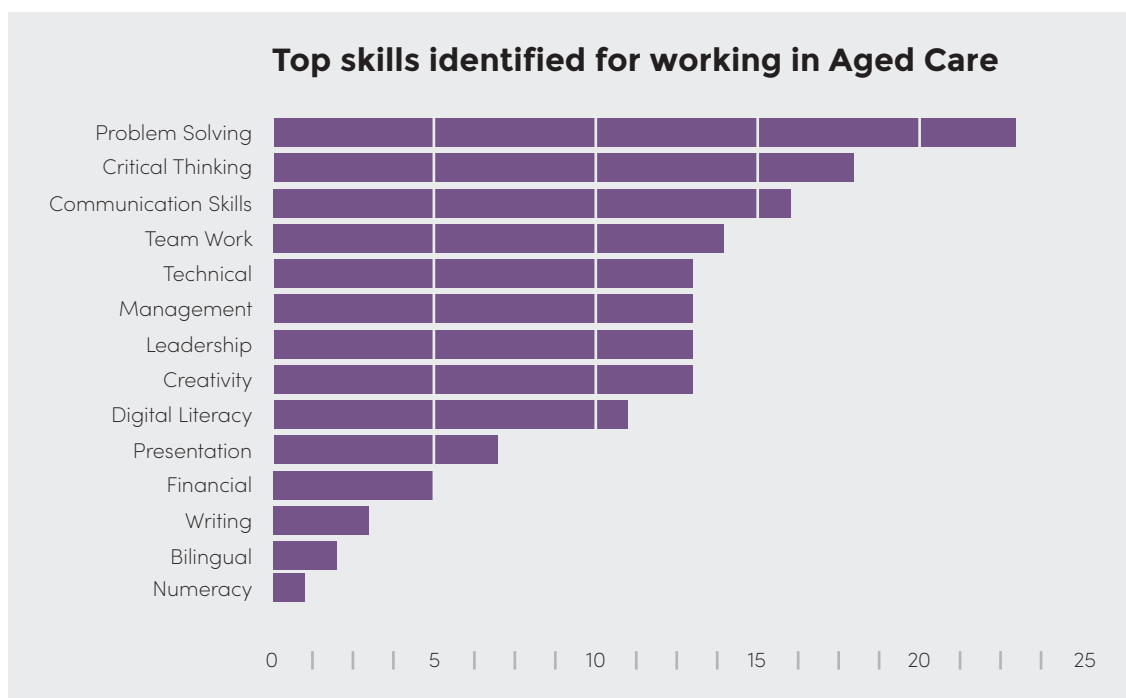


Figure5: Top skills identified for working in Aged Care

Participants indicated that students need the enterprise skills such as passion, empathy, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, adaptability, communication, teamwork and problem solving – all identified by the discussions with the consortia partners. Staff working in the sector need to have practical skills including knowledge of compliance, adequate literacy and numeracy skills, the ability to respond in a professional manner, as well as good communication and networking skills. They also need to be digitally literate and have the appropriate level of technical skills for the job role. To ensure well rounded graduates appropriate work placements are required, and this is often difficult accessing enough placements in the region.

Encouraging younger people

With the changing demographic bulge due to impending retirement of the baby boomer generation, employees in aged care in Australia are expected to increase to one million by 2050³. But as a consequence of the ageing nature of the workforce there will be a shortfall of trained staff unless the industry can be reframed to attract a younger staff cohort. New entrants may be attracted if the focus is on making a difference and identifying intrinsic satisfaction from working in this sector- this accords with some of the sentiments expressed by the focus group attendees. Other ways to attract younger people included orientation days, mentoring of new staff to assist them to settle in the job, offering clear pathways within an organisation or service so that staff could move around and gain new skills. Some opportunities for work experience could be explored. Even though participants wanted to encourage young people, they also indicated that a level of maturity and common sense is required to work in the sector. Potentially 'young people' may mean 30+ rather than under 30.

³ Productivity Commission Caring for Older Australians Final Report, 2011

Requirements of teaching staff

SWTAFE has an issue of attracting teachers/trainers with the right skills and qualification due to the high levels of employment currently available in the industry. As well as having the appropriate teaching qualification, staff need to have recent and relevant industry experience. They also need to complete a specified number of hours of professional development to maintain their industry registration. For the most part staff at SWTAFE have appropriate industry currency but the ongoing challenge is to maintain effective networks and to undertake regular Professional Development to meet the future changes to the industry.

For staff to meet the future needs of the industry and to encourage younger entrants to the sector the participants indicated that staff needed further training in technology use and digital literacy, new ways to facilitate learning and effective networking strategies. They also indicated that teaching skills could be improved through collaborative resource development and opportunities for action based research. In light of the New Work Mindset project further training in enterprise skills adaptation was indicated and ways to further embed these and core skills for work in an innovative delivery style into the current training programs.

All staff were positive about the industry and welcomed initiatives to encourage greater participation.

References

¹ Legislated Review of Aged Care, 2017 **Page 9**

² Transforming Aged Care, 2018. <https://www.hesta.com.au/transformingagedcare> **Page 11**

³ Productivity Commission Caring for Older Australians Final Report, 2011 **Page 13**

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Disclaimer:

SWTAFE standard disclaimer

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