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Technicians Support Services
Industry Reference Committee
Industry Skills Forecast – 2020 Update

Contents

Introduction

Annual Update to Industry Skills Forecast and Proposed Schedule of Work 2020

In 2019, the Technicians Support Services Industry Reference Committee (IRC) submitted a detailed and comprehensive Industry Skills Forecast (ISF) to the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC). A copy is available on the SkillsIQ's website. Detailed ISFs are required once every three years, and annual updates covering key research questions instead are prepared in the intervening years.

The information and evidence provided in this *2020 Annual Update* is based on:

- Consultation with the Technicians Support Services IRC members, and their wider networks (see Section B)
- Desktop research (drawing on key government, industry and education publications and statistics)
- Evidence and feedback collected through Training Package review project consultations
- Insights gathered via SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey* (conducted during February and March 2020).

Note: The preparation of this document commenced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore many of the trends and sources shown will not reflect the true impact of COVID-19 on the Australian job market and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. Whilst the economic and social impact of COVID-19 is currently unprecedented and unknown, all industries across Australia are being affected. Future *Annual Updates* are expected to capture the impact of the pandemic across Australia as up-to-date sources and databases are made available.

IRC Sign-off

Sign-off of this Annual Update has been confirmed by the Technicians Support Services IRC.

Tony Badrick, Chair, Technicians Support Services IRC.

Section A Industry, Workforce and Training Developments

1. Inform the AISC of any new industry workforce, skills developments or trends to emerge since the submission of a full ISF.

The Technicians Support Services Training Package Products support workers in a wide range of health care and social assistance roles, and these roles may be operational (i.e. technician), supervisory, supportive or administrative.

Job roles supported by the Technicians Support Services Training Package include:

- Anaesthetic technician
- Audiologist technician
- Cardiac technician
- Medical laboratory technician
- Operating theatre technician
- Orthopaedic technologist
- Pharmacy assistant/technician
- Pathology collector
- Sterilisation Services Assistants.

COVID-19 has impacted this sector, as well as the respective job roles in different ways. The other main challenges faced by the technicians support services workforce continue to be advances in technology, access to a skilled workforce with practical experience, and the lack of career progression.

COVID-19 impact

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many sectors significantly with increased scrutiny on infection control, sterilisation practices and hygiene. The businesses supported by the Technicians Support Services Training Package are in the health sector where infection control, sterilisation and hygiene are a prominent concern due to the nature of the work. As such policies and procedures were predominantly already in place to address these issues prior to COVID-19. In many workplaces, additional measures have been taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to improve or reinforce practices to improve infection control and help keep patients and the workforce safe.

The impact of the pandemic, including emerging protocols and procedures for conducting health practices and/or supporting health care recipients is currently being considered as part of the Technicians Support Services Training Package review projects underway (see Item 9 for more details on these projects).

Advances in technology

New technology is continually being introduced into practice, requiring the ability to learn and operate new equipment and adopt new procedures. In the health sector there has been an increase in the emphasis on the quality of service and customer experience, and alongside this, technology can help reduce the invasiveness of various procedures. New technology impacts the equipment used in health assessments, health administration, as well as the devices individuals use to monitor their own health. The transition towards a national digital health care platform, My Health Record, requires knowledge on how to access and update

patient records. Digital skills and knowledge areas are becoming increasingly important for job roles within the technicians support services sector.

Staff shortages

Some employers in the technicians support services sector are experiencing difficulties in hiring appropriate staff due to a shortage of skilled workers, limited applicants, a lack of existing workers having suitable skills and an unwillingness to work nights, weekends or shifts. Evidence of this shortage of skilled workers can be seen in that some job roles are listed by the Australian Government as *Skilled Occupations* that would enable a person to migrate to Australia through the nominated skilled visa. Specific job roles listed include anaesthetic technician, cardiac technician and medical laboratory technician.[1]

The need for new workers to have relevant technical skills and knowledge continues to be a challenge, and a lack of placement opportunities and resources to enable student supervision make it difficult for students to gain the practical experience required to complete a qualification and take up a job role. In regional and rural areas, the opportunities to gain on-the-job experience required is further exacerbated, adding further challenges to completing a qualification.

The shortage of skilled workers in the sector is also due to an ageing workforce with a significant number of workers moving into retirement, meaning the number of workers with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience is reducing. This also means there are fewer experienced workers available to share their knowledge with new entrants to the sector and job roles.

Lack of career progression

Lack of career progression and retention of staff continue to be areas of concern across the workforce supported by this Training Package. Access to training that is linked to clear career pathways will be beneficial to ensure assistants and technicians are provided with opportunities to enhance their skills and grow within the sector. This is an area currently being reviewed as part of the Technicians Support Services Training Package review projects (see Item 9).

Future skills needs

The SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey*, in addition to consultation with technicians support services sector stakeholders, has revealed that the top five short-to-medium term skills considered extremely important across the workforce supported by the Technicians Support Services Training Package include:

- Communication
- Capacity to learn
- Emotional intelligence
- Flexibility
- Resilience or stress tolerance.

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[1] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. Skilled Occupation List. [Available at: https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/skill-occupation-list][Accessed 14 September 2020]

2. Qualification utilisation:
• Identify circumstances in which employers employ people with VET qualifications
• Identify circumstances in which employers do not employ people with VET qualifications.

Across relevant job roles, the proportion of workers with VET-based qualifications is high. For example, **47.3% of medical technicians have a *Certificate III* or higher VET qualification**.[2]

General cross-industry research and NCVER studies indicate that the main reasons for employing people with VET qualifications are that the qualifications **provide the skills required for the job**, or that the **qualifications are required to meet industry standards**, and/or **legislative requirements**.

For the job roles supported by the Technicians Support Services Training Package there are minimum qualification requirements for legislative reasons, or minimum industry standards recommended by peak bodies.

From the SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey*, employers in the technicians support services sector indicated the reasons for hiring people with a VET qualification is that these are specialist fields, and the employer does not have the capability to provide this specialised training internally. Other reasons are for legislative requirements, to meet industry standards, to meet highly specific training needs, and to improve the quality of service. The employers indicated there are other specialist roles that require a university qualification, rather than a VET qualification.

Insights from the SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey* also revealed that for basic administrative or technical job roles, employers in the technicians services sector may consider hiring people who do not have a university or VET qualification, particularly if there is a shortage of skilled workers among job applicants as they feel they can provide on-the-job training so individuals learn the skills and knowledge needed.

3. Are employers using training outside the national system and if so, why?

Across the Australian workforce, the use of informal and non-accredited training by employers is prominent. The latest national figures available show that in 2019, approximately half (49%) of employers used non-accredited training and 74% provided informal training to their employees. These levels are similar when observing the broad Health Care and Social Assistance sector where 55% and 74% of employers used non-accredited training and informal training options for their employees respectively.[3]

Insights from SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey* indicated that overall, employers in the sector **use internal training**, as well as **other types of external training**. Online training that is not part of a university or VET qualification is being used to meet specific and short-term skills development requirements. Some employers use professional development courses, as

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[2] Australian Government JobOutlook (2020) Various Job Roles [Available at: https://joboutlook.gov.au] [Accessed 7 September 2020. Medical technicians encompasses many of the job roles supported by qualifications in the Technicians Support Services Training Package.
[3] NCVER (2019) Survey of employer use and views of the VET system 2019 [Available at: https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/infographics/employers-use-and-views-of-the-vet-system-2019]

well as workshops and conferences provided by peak bodies and specialist organisations. Examples include Wound Care Management, Leadership and Management. Another example is training given to physiotherapists, nurses and orderlies on how to apply, modify and remove a cast.

The SkillsIQ *2020 Future Skills Survey* also found that reasons for employers in this sector for using training outside the national system (that is not part of a university or VET qualification) include to **equip employees with the required skills**, to **meet industry standards**, to **maintain highly specific training needs**, for **career development**, to improve the **quality of service**.

Some employers are conscious of the need to upskill in the short-term, and in such cases may use other types of external training so it can be implemented immediately.

Quality professional development learning opportunities are necessary to ensure the technicians support services sector's workforce skills remain up to date and relevant.

4.	Identify qualifications with low and no enrolments. Provide reasons and evidence for the need to retain/delete these qualifications.

There are fifteen main qualifications overseen by the Technicians Support Services Training Package and for most qualifications, enrolments are consistently high or growing, as seen for the *Certificate III in Pathology Collection* (see Table 1). Each qualification is used to meet demand and valued for the specialist knowledge provided.

Table 1: Total number of enrolments (Total VET Activity [TVA]) by nationally recognised qualifications on scope – Technicians Support Services Training Package Products, 2016-2019
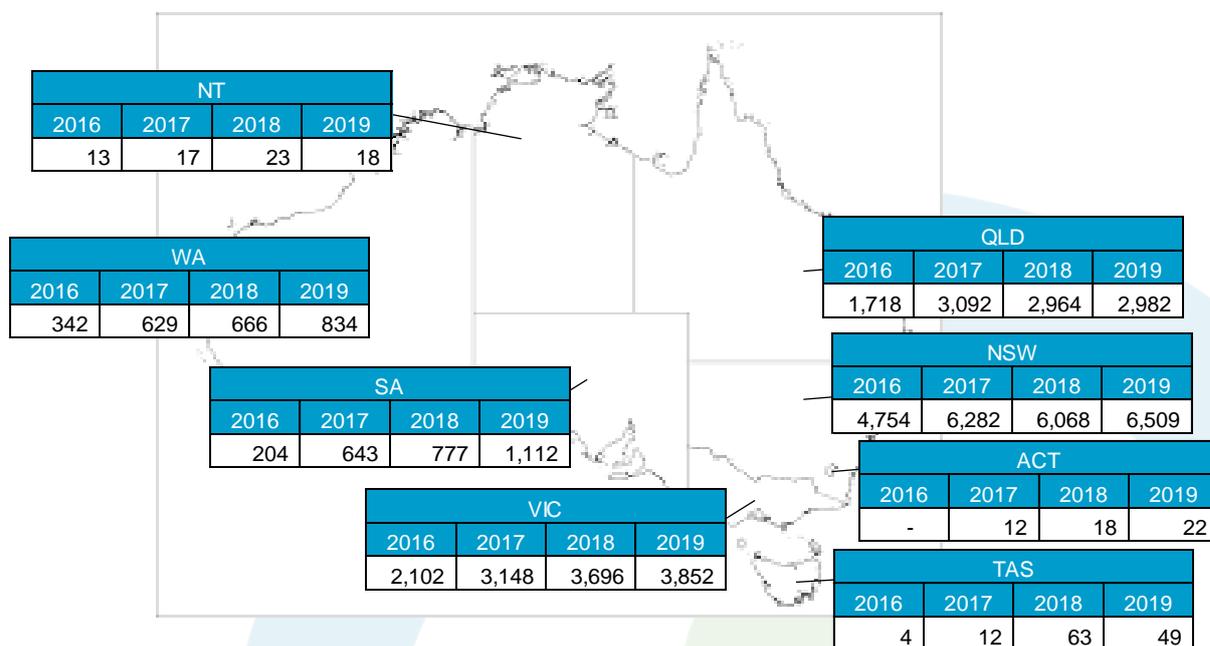
Qualification	2016	2017	2018	2019
Anaesthetic Technology				
HLT57915 - Diploma of Anaesthetic Technology	171	182	184	199
Audiometry				
HLT47415 - Certificate IV in Audiometry	37	48	36	29
HLT57415 - Diploma of Audiometry	138	208	222	199
Health Administration				
HLT37315 - Certificate III in Health Administration	1,035	1,728	1,998	1,922
HLT47315 - Certificate IV in Health Administration	777	1,269	1,268	1,637
Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support				
HLT37115 - Certificate III in Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support	42	127	134	101
HLT47115 - Certificate IV in Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support	201	323	403	405
Medical Practice Assisting				
HLT47715 - Certificate IV in Medical Practice Assisting	136	314	540	646
Operating Theatre Technical Support				

HLT47515 - Certificate IV in Operating Theatre Technical Support	128	226	278	285
Optical Dispensing				
HLT47815 - Certificate IV in Optical Dispensing	255	482	479	560
Pathology				
HLT37215 - Certificate III in Pathology Collection	2,332	4,704	5,308	6,217
HLT37415 - Certificate III in Pathology Assistance	193	229	161	162
Practice Management				
HLT57715 - Diploma of Practice Management	2,612	2,136	1,291	914
Sterilisation Services				
HLT37015 - Certificate III in Sterilisation Services	952	1,502	1,475	1,533
HLT47015 - Certificate IV in Sterilisation Services	128	370	546	609

Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, accessed September 2020.
Note: 1. From 2018 onwards, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) were required to submit enrolment and completion data for all qualifications to NCVER. Thus 2018 and 2019 represent more complete sets of data, compared to previous years where data may underrepresent the true counts of enrolments and completions for a qualification. The 2016 and 2017 data is shown for indicative purposes only. **2.** Public RTO and private RTO data is included in the enrolment and completion data.

Map 1: Total number of enrolments (Total VET Activity [TVA]) by RTO delivery location for Technicians Support Services Training Package Products on scope - 2016-2019

NT			
2016	2017	2018	2019
13	17	23	18

WA			
2016	2017	2018	2019
342	629	666	834

SA			
2016	2017	2018	2019
204	643	777	1,112

VIC			
2016	2017	2018	2019
2,102	3,148	3,696	3,852

QLD			
2016	2017	2018	2019
1,718	3,092	2,964	2,982

NSW			
2016	2017	2018	2019
4,754	6,282	6,068	6,509

ACT			
2016	2017	2018	2019
-	12	18	22

TAS			
2016	2017	2018	2019
4	12	63	49

Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, accessed September 2020.
Note: Less than 0.5% of enrolments were categorised as 'Other Australian territories or dependencies' or 'Unknown' locations.

5. Reasons for non-completion of qualifications and skill sets (including micro-credentials).

• Where students complete qualifications or skill sets, what was the purpose of undertaking them (e.g. finding employment, upskilling)?

Note: Completion and non-completion rate (%) data for individual qualifications is not available via NCVER VOCSTATS. The number of completions across qualifications is therefore provided instead however please note they should not be compared to enrolment counts in Table 1. NCVER enrolment counts include first year commencements (new students) and continuing enrolments in their second or higher year undertaking the qualification, and this means the comparison of enrolment to completions in one year may make the completion level look artificially low (for qualifications where the student is likely to be enrolled for more than one calendar year).

Table 2 Total number of completions (Total VET Activity [TVA]) by nationally recognised qualifications on scope – Technicians Support Services Training Package Products, 2016-2019

Qualification	2016	2017	2018	2019
Anaesthetic Technology				
HLT57915 - Diploma of Anaesthetic Technology	32	77	39	61
Audiometry				
HLT47415 - Certificate IV in Audiometry	3	13	8	5
HLT57415 - Diploma of Audiometry	2	22	54	41
Health Administration				
HLT37315 - Certificate III in Health Administration	201	439	555	558
HLT47315 - Certificate IV in Health Administration	131	221	325	367
Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support				
HLT37115 - Certificate III in Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support	-	39	32	11
HLT47115 - Certificate IV in Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support	28	83	102	130
Medical Practice Assisting				
HLT47715 - Certificate IV in Medical Practice Assisting	2	24	49	76
Operating Theatre Technical Support				
HLT47515 - Certificate IV in Operating Theatre Technical Support	-	98	147	121
Optical Dispensing				
HLT47815 - Certificate IV in Optical Dispensing	47	177	163	231
Pathology				
HLT37215 - Certificate III in Pathology Collection	770	1,915	2,167	2,461
HLT37415 - Certificate III in Pathology Assistance	89	76	79	104
Practice Management				
HLT57715 - Diploma of Practice Management	89	237	258	197
Sterilisation Services				
HLT37015 - Certificate III in Sterilisation Services	275	648	604	628

HLT47015 - Certificate IV in Sterilisation Services	-	135	208	311

Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, accessed September 2020.

Note: 1. From 2018 onwards, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) were required to submit enrolment and completion data for all qualifications to NCVER. Thus 2018 and 2019 represent more complete sets of data, compared to previous years where data may underrepresent the true counts of enrolments and completions for a qualification. The 2016 and 2017 data is shown for indicative purposes only. **2.** Public RTO and private RTO data is included in the enrolment and completion data. **3.** The 2019 completion data is preliminary based on what was available at the time of reporting and may not represent final outcomes for the full calendar year.

The NCVER 2019 Student Outcome survey[4] reveals that the most popular reasons in general for undertaking a qualification are work-related (85%), particularly to get a job (31%), as many qualifications link to specific job roles. The Technicians Support Services Training Package qualifications link to specific job roles and so it is likely a popular reason for undertaking a qualification is work-related.

Where insights are available regarding non-completion[5] for VET in general, the main reasons are due to training related reasons (32%) and within this that the training did not meet expectations (13%). The other main reasons for non-completion were due to personal reasons (22%) and because the student got what they wanted from the training (22%).
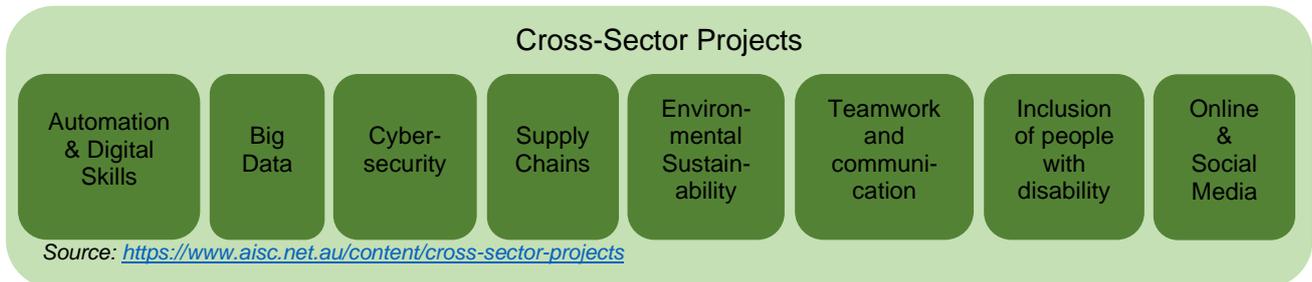
The NCVER Student Outcome survey provides the following information in relation to the broad health sector and among those who completed a health-related qualification, 86% were satisfied with the overall quality of the training; and 85% achieved their main reason for doing the training. These results suggest highly positive perceptions towards the training being worthwhile for those who do complete the qualification.

From the SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey*, employers in the technicians support services sector feel the reasons for undertaking a qualification are to find employment, to upskill or as part of professional development. Employers believe the reasons a person might not complete a qualification, skill-set or micro-credential could be for personal reasons, an inability to gain employment, or that the person became interested in another field. The employers did not know of cases where an employee undertook a micro-credential, nor of cases where employees did not complete a micro-credential.

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[4] Source: VET student outcomes 2019 (NCVER 2019) https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/vet-student-outcomes-2019 The requested information about students reasons for completing or not completing qualifications is collected in the annual NCVER Student Outcome survey, and this information is freely publicly available at the total VET aggregate level each year. However, this information is not able to be freely accessed in relation to specific training packages or qualifications.
[5] The NCVER Student Outcome survey report uses the term "subject completers" for students who complete a subject when enrolled in a qualification but do not complete the full qualification.

6. Identify, where possible, opportunities for use of cross-sector units developed by the AISC.

Cross-Sector Projects

Automation & Digital Skills	Big Data	Cyber-security	Supply Chains	Environ-mental Sustain-ability	Teamwork and communi-cation	Inclusion of people with disability	Online & Social Media

Source: https://www.aisc.net.au/content/cross-sector-projects

The cross-sector projects provide a wide range of content and members of the Technicians Support Services IRC indicated possible units of interest could be environmental sustainability, digital skills, cyber security and social media, however they would need to be contextualised for the technicians support services sector.

7. If there are jobs that have experienced changes in skill requirements, provide evidence for these changes and their impact.

New technology is replacing some job roles, thus there is a need to upskill and to look for emerging skill requirements to provide staff with the skills and knowledge they need into the future. Industry stakeholders in the technicians support services sector are continually focused on being informed about new technologies as they arise and whether this impacts the skill requirements of their workforce, and they are also mindful of the need for VET qualifications to be updated as appropriate in order to meet the current and future needs of the Australian health care system.

Current projects are underway for the Technicians Support Services Training Packages in relation to Clinical Coding; Hospital Pharmacy; Orthopaedic Technology; and Health Administration. These projects are reviewing job roles with skills needs. Please refer to Item 9 for further information.

8. Identify barriers to employers hiring apprentices and trainees. Are employers using alternative pathways/labour strategies to address these barriers?

There are limited enrolments of apprentices or trainees in the Technicians Support Services Training Package qualifications. The most commonly used qualification for an apprenticeship or traineeship is the *Certificate III in Pathology Collection* (see Table 3).

From the SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey,* employers in the technicians support services sector have reported that tighter budgets have made the use of apprenticeships or traineeships relatively unlikely for the foreseeable future. Instead there is a preference for workers who already hold a qualification.

The SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey* also found among employers who do use trainees, that the main reasons for having trainees are to fill a specific role, to get skilled staff, and because it is part of their organisation's 'training culture'.

Table 3: Average number of in-training apprentices / trainees (Apprentice and Trainee Collection) by nationally recognised qualifications on scope – Technicians Support Services Training Package Products, 2017-2019

Qualification	2017	2018	2019
Pathology			
HLT37215 - Certificate III in Pathology Collection	93	161	251

Source: *NCVER VOCSTATS Apprentice and Trainee Collection – In training, accessed September 2020.*

9. Other relevant activities.

The following five projects are currently in progress that fall under the scope of this IRC:

• The **Clinical Coding project** to develop a new entry-level Clinical Coding qualification, the *Diploma of Clinical Coding*; a new skill set; seven new Clinical Coding Units of Competency; and the update of three existing Clinical Coding Units of Competency to ensure that entry-level clinical coders have access to appropriate skills and knowledge, in order to meet the current and future needs of the Australian health care system.

• The **Hospital Pharmacy project** to update the packaging rules of the two Hospital/Health Services Pharmacy Support qualifications; update nine existing Hospital Pharmacy Units of Competency, and develop eleven new Units of Competency to align to the existing and future job roles of all pharmacy assistants, pharmacy technicians and senior pharmacy technicians.

• The **Anaesthetic Technology project** to update the existing *Diploma of Anaesthetic Technology Qualification* and seven existing Anaesthetic Technology Units of Competency to ensure that Anaesthetic Allied Health Practitioners have access to current skills and knowledge, in order to meet the current and future needs of the Australian health care system.

• The **Orthopaedic Technology** (previously known as Cast Technology) **project** to develop a new nationally accredited *Diploma of Orthopaedic Technology Qualification* and seven new Cast Technology Units of Competency to ensure that orthopaedic technologists have access to current skills and knowledge, in order to meet the current and future needs of the Australian health care system, and especially the needs of patients visiting hospitals or accessing outpatient services.

• The **Health Administration project** to update the existing *Certificate IV in Health Administration*, four existing Health Administration units and to develop three new Health Administration units to meet the current skills and knowledge requirements for workers in the Health Administration sector.

Section B Ongoing Consultation

A widespread multi-channel consultation involving the stakeholders tabled below has been conducted to identify key developments across the technicians support services sector reported in this *Annual Update*. Stakeholders listed represent members of the Technicians Support Services IRC.

Consultation activities involved:

    A. ongoing engagement and validation with industry and stakeholders
    B. collection of industry intelligence
    C. promotion of the VET system
    D. cultivating and maintaining networks and partnerships with industry including engagement in rural and regional areas.

Entity Name	Sector	State	Rural/ Regional/ Remote (RRR)	Activity
Tony Badrick	Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia	National and NSW	Representative	A, B, C & D
Kim Lally	Australian Private Hospitals Association	National and ACT	Representative	A, B, C & D
Alma Cassells	Fiona Stanley Hospital	WA		A, B, C & D
Jane O'Keefe	Sonic Healthcare	NSW		A, B, C & D
Lorah Hickman	Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA)	National and VIC	Representative	A, B, C & D
Elinor Radke	Federation Sterilising Research Advisory Councils of Australia	National and Qld	Representative	A, B, C & D
Vicki Swaine	Australian Anaesthesia Allied Health Practitioners (AAAHP)	National and QLD	Representative	A, B, C & D
Karyn Calcino	Health Industry Training	QLD	Representative	A, B, C & D
Athanasia (Soula) Siafakas	TAFE NSW, Sydney	NSW		A, B, C & D
Leigh Svendsen	Health Services Union (HSU)	National and VIC	Representative	A, B, C & D
Jodie Davis	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation	National and ACT	Representative	A, B, C & D
Tamara Lee	NSW Health (Government)	NSW		A, B, C & D

Note:

1. 294 stakeholders have participated in national consultations across the Technicians Support Services Training Package review projects. Feedback from stakeholders has been gathered via multiple channels including SkillsIQ's Feedback Forum, workshops, webinars and email submissions.

2. Over 600 stakeholders participated in SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey*, with a small number representing organisations in the technicians support services sector. The survey was administered as a research tool to provide stakeholders with a confidential and anonymised channel to input their views and opinions on the topics questioned. In accordance with the Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) Privacy Principles regarding anonymity of participation in survey research, the individual names and organisations of respondents are not disclosed.

Section C Proposed New Work

No new projects are proposed in this update.