



SKILLSIQ

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Dental
Industry Reference Committee
Industry Skills Forecast – 2020 Update



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Introduction

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

In 2019, the Dental 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 Dental 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 Dental Services IRC.

Dr Lanny Chor, Chair, Dental 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 dental services workforce consists of both registered and non-registered health care professionals, and job roles can involve undertaking a wide range of functions, including operational activities (i.e. technical and specialist), supervisory, management, administration and assistance. The Dental Training Package is specifically focused on the **skills training for non-registered job roles such as dental assistant, dental technician and dental laboratory assistant**; as well as for the following **registered job roles of dental hygienist and dental prosthetist**.

The Dental Training Package is specifically focused on the **skills training for non-registered job roles such as dental assistants, dental hygienist, dental technicians, dental laboratory assistants and dental prosthetist**. Other job roles supported by the Training Package include a number of broader health and community service workers involved in the provision of basic oral health care services and referrals.

COVID-19 has impacted this sector, as well as the respective job roles in different ways. The other main challenges faced by the dental services workforce supported by this Training Package continue to be those reported in the 2019 ISF which include 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 the dental services sector significantly, with the restrictions placed on dental procedures (such as routine check-ups and fillings), and only medical emergencies allowed.¹ Also due to COVID-19 there has been increased scrutiny on infection control procedures in the dental services sector, and steps taken to reduce risk by looking at the types of work practices or procedures that might create risk with this type of communicable disease. Infection control is a high priority and dental practitioners have in place a range of procedures to minimise risk, such as sterilisation procedures and use of personal protective equipment (PPE).² Steps have been taken to improve or reinforce practices to improve infection control and help keep patients and the dental workforce safe.

Advances in technology

Technology continues to be a key area of focus in the skills required by dental assistants and dental technicians. Increased use of technology with new equipment and new practices requires a flexible workforce able to learn how to operate new equipment and adopt new procedures. Digital and computing skills are also required in day-to-day office administration and clerical roles and help to support the quality of service provided to patients. Restrictions on dental practices during the COVID-19 pandemic have also encouraged greater use of digital photography and tele-dentistry.

¹ Australian Government Department of Health. *Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) Advice to National Cabinet on 25 March 2020* [Available at <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-advice-to-national-cabinet-on-25-march-2020>][Accessed 15 September 2020]

² Australian Dental Association. *Infection Control* [Available at: <https://www.ada.org.au/Dental-Professionals/Publications/Infection-Control>][Accessed 15 September 2020]

Staff shortages, especially in regional areas

Some employers in the sector are experiencing difficulties in hiring appropriate staff due to a shortage of skilled workers, limited applicants, and a lack of existing workers being skilled up. Access to a skilled workforce continues to be challenging, particularly in regional and rural areas. Evidence of this shortage in regional areas can be seen in that some dental services job roles are listed by the Australian Government as *Skilled Occupations* that would enable a person to migrate to Australia through the Regional Sponsor Migration Scheme, or as a temporary migrant as long as the employment occurs in regional Australia.³ Job roles listed include dental hygienist, dental prosthetist, and dental technician.

The level of practical experience required in order to complete a qualification through a work placement may be difficult to achieve, particularly in regional and rural areas, where access to workplaces providing opportunities to apply skills and knowledge in a practical setting is limited. This may lead to using simulated experiences to build skills and knowledge, and then determining whether this is sufficient prior to completing a qualification and being able to undertake this work. However, the preference is for experience with live patients through the use of work placement opportunities.

Lack of career progression

Lack of career progression continues to be an area of concern, and current Training Package review work on the *Certificate III* and *Certificate IV in Dental Assisting* aims to provide greater demarcation in skill levels between these qualifications in order to provide opportunities for further development by those interested in progressing to the higher qualification. Access to training that is linked to clear career pathways will be beneficial to ensure dental assistants and technicians are provided with opportunities to enhance their skills and grow within the dental services sector.

Future skills needs

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

- Technical job specific skills
- Communication
- Problem solving or critical thinking
- Teamwork
- Resilience or stress tolerance.

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, **60.4% of dental hygienists, technicians and therapists have a *Certificate III* or**

³ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. *Skills occupation list* [Available at: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/skill-occupation-list>] [Accessed 11 September 2020]

higher VET qualification. Just over half (55.4%) of dental assistants have a *Certificate III* or higher VET qualification.⁴

General cross-industry research and NCVET 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**.

In the dental services sector, there are minimum qualification requirements for some job roles, but not all. The *Certificate III in Dental Assisting* is aimed at the role of dental assistant but is not a minimum requirement. In the dental services sector, employers indicate the main reasons for employing people with VET qualifications are that the qualifications provide the skills required for the job, for legislative requirements, to meet industry standards, to meet highly specific training needs and to improve the quality of service.

From the SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey*, employers in the dental services sector indicated that for basic administrative or technical work they 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.

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.⁵

Insights from SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey* indicated that overall, employers in the dental services 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.

The SkillsIQ *2020 Future Skills Survey* also found that the reasons employers' in this sector are using training outside the national system (that is not part of a university or VET qualification) included to **provide the skills needed for the job**, for **legislative requirements**, to **meet industry standards**, to **meet highly specific needs** and to improve the **quality of service**.

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

⁴ Australian Government JobOutlook (2020) Various Job Roles [Available at: <https://joboutlook.gov.au/>] [Accessed 7 September 2020]

⁵ NCVET (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/>]

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

There are five main qualifications overseen by the Dental Training Package and enrolments are consistently high or growing, as seen for the *Certificate III in Dental Laboratory Assisting*, or of a very specialised nature, as seen for the *Advanced Diploma of Dental Prosthetics* (see Table 1). Each qualification is used to meet demand and valued for the specialist knowledge provided.

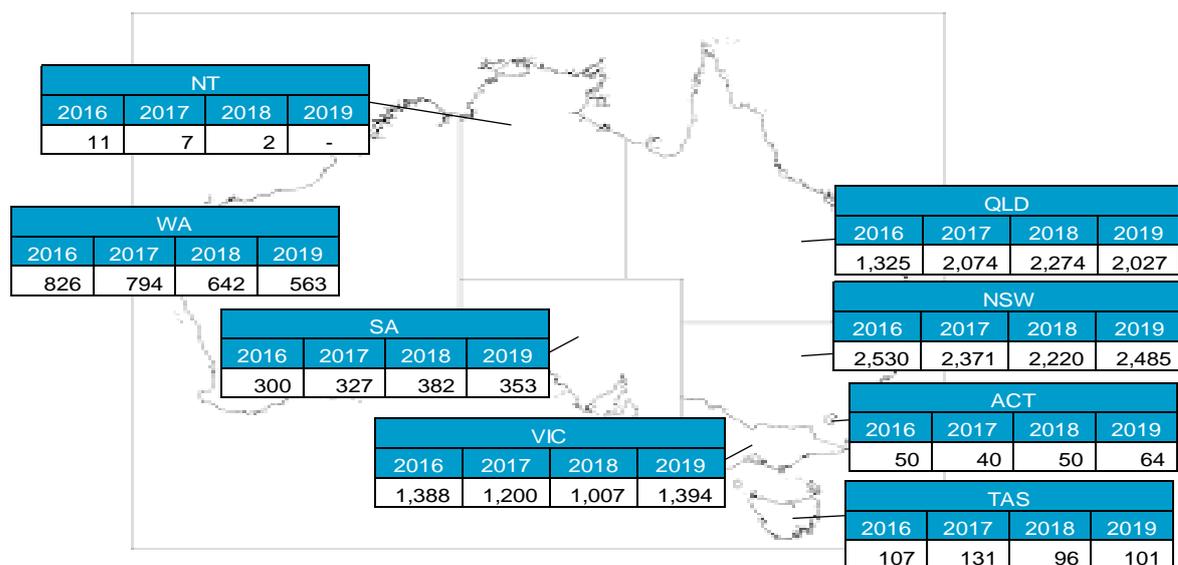
Table 1: Total number of enrolments (Total VET Activity [TVA]) by nationally recognised qualifications on scope – Dental Training Package Products, 2016-2019

Qualification	2016	2017	2018	2019
HLT35015 - Certificate III in Dental Assisting	379	3,222	4,229	4,438
<i>HLT31812 - Certificate III in Dental Assisting</i>	<i>4,200</i>	<i>1,375</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>-</i>
HLT35115 - Certificate III in Dental Laboratory Assisting	25	66	134	202
<i>HLT32712 - Certificate III in Dental Laboratory Assisting</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
HLT45015 - Certificate IV in Dental Assisting	83	1,204	1,591	1,577
<i>HLT43012 - Certificate IV in Dental Assisting</i>	<i>982</i>	<i>372</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>12</i>
HLT55118 - Diploma of Dental Technology	-	-	23	486
<i>HLT55115 - Diploma of Dental Technology</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>447</i>	<i>606</i>	<i>215</i>
<i>HLT50512 - Diploma of Dental Technology</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>-</i>
HLT65015 - Advanced Diploma of Dental Prosthetics	10	50	60	56
<i>HLT60412 - Advanced Diploma of Dental Prosthetics</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

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. Qualifications in italics represent superseded qualifications.

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



Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, accessed September 2020.

Note: Less than 0.5% of enrolments were categorised as 'Overseas' 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 – Dental Training Package Products, 2016-2019

Qualification	2016	2017	2018	2019
HLT35015 - Certificate III in Dental Assisting	39	760	1,528	1,453
<i>HLT31812 - Certificate III in Dental Assisting</i>	<i>1,929</i>	<i>861</i>	-	-
HLT35115 - Certificate III in Dental Laboratory Assisting	12	34	37	97
<i>HLT32712 - Certificate III in Dental Laboratory Assisting</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>4</i>	-	-
HLT45015 - Certificate IV in Dental Assisting	13	233	540	486
<i>HLT43012 - Certificate IV in Dental Assisting</i>	<i>507</i>	<i>219</i>	-	-
HLT55118 - Diploma of Dental Technology	-	-	-	104
<i>HLT55115 - Diploma of Dental Technology</i>	-	<i>140</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>HLT50512 - Diploma of Dental Technology</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>1</i>	-
HLT65015 - Advanced Diploma of Dental Prosthetics	-	19	20	8
<i>HLT60412 - Advanced Diploma of Dental Prosthetics</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>10</i>	-	-

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. Qualifications in italic represent superseded qualifications 4. 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 survey⁶ 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 Dental 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-completion⁷ 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.

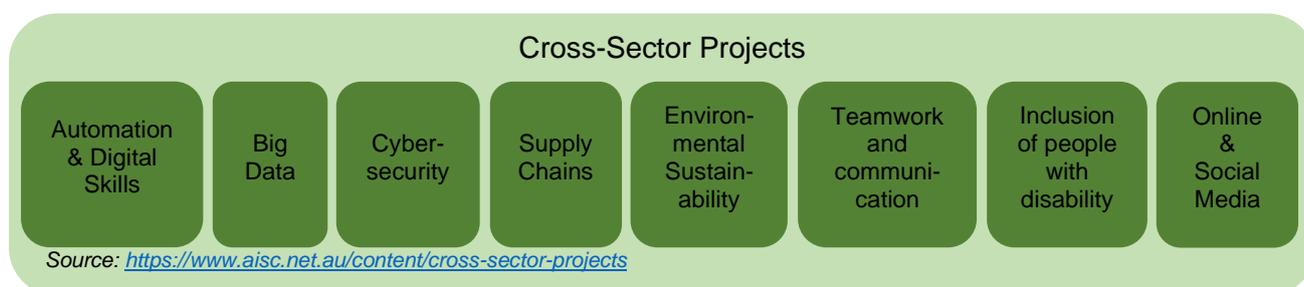
⁶ Source: VET student outcomes 2019 (NCVER 2019) <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/vet-student-outcomes-2019>. The requested information about students reasons for completing or not completing qualifications is collected in the annual NCVER Student Outcome 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.

⁷ 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.

To help improve a student's chance of completing a qualification and to enable students to progress along a career pathway, there have been discussions (in the Draft 1 Consultation during the project currently underway) to minimise the duplication of units that currently sit in both the *Certificate III* and *Certificate IV in Dental Assisting*, whereby rather than enrol for a *Certificate IV* and drop out due to difficulties completing the *Certificate IV*, a student can enrol in *Certificate III* and successfully complete it, and then consider progressing to *Certificate IV* when they are ready.

From the SkillsIQ's *2020 Future Skills Survey*, employers in the dental services sector indicated that they were not aware if their employees had or were undertaking a micro-credential.

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



Stakeholders in the Dental IRC indicated the cross-sector projects provide a wide range of content that has general relevance. However, at present each qualification in the Dental Training Package has dedicated content within existing units to enable such content to be covered very specifically in a relevant context to the work environment. This tailored approach is deemed more appropriate by the dental services sector for these qualifications in the present work environment.

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

The project to update *Certificate III* and *Certificate IV in Dental Assisting* is currently underway and is at final submission preparation stage. The purpose of the qualification review is to ensure the skills training is aligned with current industry needs for these job roles.

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

The most commonly used qualification for an apprenticeship or traineeship is the *Certificate III in Dental Assisting*. From the SkillsIQ 2020 Future Skills Survey, employers in the dental services sector indicated that the main reasons for having apprentices or trainees are to fill a specific role and for employees to gain specific skills. One employer in this sector experienced difficulties recently when recruiting a trainee due to limited applicants and a lack of existing workers having the right skills and so their solution was to hire someone who had already completed the qualification instead.

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

Qualification	2017	2018	2019
HLT35015 - Certificate III in Dental Assisting	609	700	773

Source: NCVET VOCSTATS, accessed September 2020.

An example provided by a stakeholder in the Northern Territory explained that due to skilled staff shortages they have made use of apprenticeships to help students develop their skills and knowledge, and to obtain the required hours of practical experience that would allow them to complete the qualification and graduate.

9. Other relevant activities.

The project to update *Certificate III* and *Certificate IV in Dental Assisting* is currently underway and is at final submission preparation stage.

Section B Ongoing Consultation

A widespread multi-channel consultation involving the stakeholders tabled below has been conducted to identify key developments across the job roles in the dental services sector reported in this *Annual Update*. Stakeholders listed represent members of the Dental 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	Organisation Name	State	Rural / Regional / Remote (RRR)	Activity
Amanda Blyton-Patterson	Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association (ADOHTA)	National and ACT	Representative	A, B, C, D
Chantelle Adams	Oral Health Professional Association (OHPA)	National and NSW	Representative	A, B, C, D
Barbara Hayes	Dentists Assistants Professional Association Inc (DAPA)	National and NSW	Representative	A, B, C, D
Jenine Bradburn	Australian Dental Prosthetists Association (ADPA)	National	Representative	A, B, C, D
Jodie Davis	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)	National	Representative	A, B, C, D
Dr Kang Kim	Australian Dental Association Incorporated (ADA)	National	Representative	A, B, C, D
Karen Such	Directorate of Defence Force Dentistry (Department of Defence)	National	Representative	A, B, C, D
Kelly Di Manno	Dental Hygienists Association of Australia LTD (DHAA)* and TAFE SA	National and SA	Representative	A, B, C, D
Dr Lanny Chor	Hunter New England LHD Oral Health. The Centre for Oral Health Strategy, NSW Health.	NSW	Representative	A, B, C, D
Leonie Short	CQ University	QLD		A, B, C, D
Peter Czech	Precision Smiles	VIC		A, B, C, D
Susan Lawton	Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA)	WA	Representative	A, B, C, D

Note:

1. 130 stakeholders have participated in national consultations across the Dental Training Package review project. 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 Dental 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.

