TRANSPORT, POSTAL AND WAREHOUSING   **AIR AND SPACE TRANSPORT**

ANZSIC: 5220   **Ground Operations**

Regulatory and/or Licencing Bodies

- The national regulator and lead State government agency overseeing activity in this space are the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and the Department of Transport (DoT).

INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENTS AND WORKFORCE CHALLENGES:

- Ground operations encompass airport operations, aerodrome maintenance and management, ground handling and other affiliated aviation support services.[i] In this instance, it excludes the mechanical and electrical engineering/servicing of aircraft. [ii]

- In May, Perth Airport had a total loss of 322,288 international passengers when compared with the same period last year. Similarly, passengers travelling to regional WA also fell by 257,919.[iii] This has negatively impacted the job security and availability of shifts and casual work for ground crew involved due to reduced flights.

- Many aviation and aviation support service workers have sought employment in other industry sectors as a result of reduced hours, being stood down or being made redundant. This encompasses but is not limited to baggage handlers, cargo and ramp services. There are concerns held over the permanent loss to the industry of those skilled workers that will not be willing to return to the sector.[iv]

- Some workers have managed to retain their jobs following organisational restructuring and the JobKeeper incentive from the Federal Government. Others have not been faced with job losses due to contracts linked to servicing the resources sector which relies on Fly-in-Fly-Out (FIFO). This has been ongoing despite falls in regular passenger transport services.

- Technological advances in ground operations have improved operational efficiency and safety.[v] Changes that have gradually been implemented include but are not limited to self-service technologies, automation and biometrics. By reducing the routine tasks associated with ground operations, operators are likely to free up more time to upskill in areas that interact with the new equipment and technologies. It should be noted that due to design constraints, the automation of some ramp operations is not yet possible.[vi]

- In relation to passenger screening, interpreting body-language is a skilling area that is still needed. Due to the limited machine/computer capability, a human interface is required to execute the task.[vii]

- There are currently minimal enrolments in ground operations which can be attributed to a couple of factors including the nature of the work (shift work/casual work). Some companies are training to meet regulatory requirements and prefer to use skill sets (micro-credentialing) as opposed to full qualifications to either bridge the gap or upskill particular aspects of a job role.[viii] The limited uptake of formal training by industry can be reflected in the strict regulatory environment that CASA imposes where the greatest focus lies on skill sets rather than qualifications.[ix]

- It has been identified that although there is a willingness to train, in some cases the training of ground staff in regional centres, including but not limited to Aerodrome Reporting Officers (AROs), is cost prohibitive due to the small numbers, high cost of training and the flexibility of some RTOs.[x]

- The job role for AROs has evolved considerably in recent years. Where previously they were seen more as groundskeepers, the regulatory requirements now mean they need training and experience in occupational safety and health (OSH), firearms training, asbestos handling, chemical certification, drug and alcohol management, planning, ICT and reporting. This has meant that those who had been employed before the regulatory environment changed have had to embrace a whole new range of skills with some not up to the task.[xi]

- Organisations have had a very short time frames in which to adapt and incorporate digital platforms to allow for online learning. Due to the practical components associated with tasks and duties performed, it should be noted that there are limitations to the use and effectiveness of this medium. Travel restrictions have also diminished the ability to deliver tailored training[xii]
- An ageing workforce continues to impact future planning capabilities for management roles that require significant experience. They are difficult to source, attract and retain and are therefore the most impacted.[xiii]

Regional Concerns

- There are significant implications on regional airports following the amendment of Federal Government Security measures within Aviation.[xiv] Although provisions have been made to purchase scanning equipment, ongoing operational costs such as additional staffing, training and maintenance requirements have not been factored in. This presents a challenge on Shire/Council run regional airports with limited resources and faced with passing on the costs to passengers thus affecting viability.[xv]
- $3.1 million worth of grants has been made available through the 2021-23 Regional Airports Development Scheme. The program will target infrastructure projects to increase planning, safety, operational capacity and security at regional and remote WA airports.[xvi] It is anticipated that this will be of assistance in response to the impact COVID-19 has had on the aviation and tourism sectors.
- Smaller regional airports do not have the capacity to provide the lower level on-the-job training required for people to move through a career progression process and therefore need an already experienced workforce.[xvii]
- Industry has identified that there is a shortage in experienced AROs. As competition across Australia has increased due to the growth in aerodrome numbers and regulatory requirements it has resulted in a need for more AROs.[xviii]
- At a senior level, regional airports are reporting a lack of succession planning due to a limited talent pool for roles such as Airport Manager and Airport Operations Manager. This is also true for Senior Airport/AROs and the airports have had to resort to relocating people from other areas both within the State and nationally to meet their workforce needs. These senior roles are also affected by an ageing workforce that are looking at retirement either now or in the near future, so this problem will only worsen.[xix]
- Regional airports are the most impacted by both skills and labour shortages, with those in the more remote locations struggling with a limited pool of available workers. This is worsened by the fact that training only occurs once people are employed at an airport (eg AROs). Due to a lack of appropriate entry points into this occupation regional airports are continuously having to train up inexperienced workers for the roles. For those smaller Shire airports these people have multiple roles within the organisation. Many Councils are putting through most of their workforce as AROs to ensure they always have coverage of the airport and for relief. However this is a very expensive strategy.[xx]
- In relation to infrastructure, maintenance skills gaps have been identified in engineering for runway construction. (It should be noted the skills and experience for this area are not the same as road construction and require a specialist skill set).[xxi]
- Several regional airports are at risk of losing adequately skilled staff that are being lured to larger airports and/or interstate. This may also be due to lifestyle changes and services being offered elsewhere. However, in the Northwest and Goldfields-Esperance regions airports/aerodromes are having to compete for workers with higher salaries being offered in the resources sector.[xxii]
- The lack of suitable and affordable housing has been identified as a significant issue to retaining the workforce. Although subsidies may be offered in some instances this has not been enough to rectify the situation.[xxiii]

- For companies servicing the offshore oil and gas sectors, some organisations have expressed concerns over the ability to maintain a suitably qualified workforce (i.e. helicopter support services). [xxiv]

- Quality, compliance and risk are examples of other areas requiring adequate skills for amendments being made to CASA Manual of Standards (Part139 – Aerodromes). [xxv] Although flexible working conditions are offered when appropriate, some positions have a shift work or on call component (i.e. S/AROs) which can be viewed as a deterrent for those seeking family friendly working hours. [xxvi]

- In addition, the limited number of day care placements regionally and a growing wait list for new vacancies is considered to be a deterrent for any workers wanting to return to work or seek new employment due to inadequate childcare arrangements needed at short notice or unusual working hours. [xxvii]

- Some ground handling service providers have attributed the higher turnover of workers to the casualisation and sporadic nature of shifts, as well as to an ageing workforce. Previously, people who were partners of FIFO workers or who had school aged children were attracted to this type of role, however as these workers move out of the regions (i.e. to pursue other work opportunities) it has reduced workforce numbers. [xxviii]

- As ground handling activities in some regional areas within the South West are limited to scheduled charter services there is no requirement to maintain full-time staffing levels. The frequencies of flights are attributed to seasonal periods and resource-based contracts. This can make the role less attractive to prospective workers who are seeking full-time employment. Currently an older workforce may be utilised, however, finding replacement workers as they retire will be difficult over time. [xxix]

2. Emerging international, national or State training issues impacting your industry

- Australian Industry Standards is currently forming a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for 3D Computed Tomography Scanning to develop a Skill Set and one new Unit of Competency for aviation security workers in preparation for updated aviation transport regulations. [xxx]

INDUSTRY WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

- Industry has devised a strategy to mitigate the high cost of training and retraining of AROs that involves bringing together AROs to one location for training. Regional aerodromes have also embraced on-line training as a tool to assist with upskilling and reskilling where available. [xxxi]

- Project work was undertaken by the Aviation Industry Reference Committee for 2020-201 on developing units of competency related to 3D computed topography scanning equipment. This aligns skills attainment to changing industry requirements. [xxxii]

- In relation to amended CASR Part 139 requirements, it has been identified that upskilling in the areas of asset management, costings and planning would be beneficial to better support individuals assigned greater responsibilities. [xxxiii]

- Succession planning remains an ongoing concern for organisations as they attempt to plan for the future and build on relationship management and strategic thinking (ie operations). There is an opportunity to source candidates who possess these types of skills and knowledge. [xxxiv]

[i] Industry Consultation 2019
[ii] Industry Consultation 2019
[iii] Perth Airport: Aviation Sector Coronavirus losses continue to climb Accessed June 2020
https://www.perthairport.com.au/Home/corporate/articles/2020/06/26/10/11/coronavirus-losses
[iv] Industry Consultation 2020
[v] Australian Industry Standards, Aviation Skills Forecast 2019

[vi]   Industry Consultation 2019
[vii]   Australian Industry Standards, Aviation Skills Forecast 2019
[viii] Industry Consultation 2019
[ix]   Industry Consultation 2019
[x]   Industry Consultation 2019
[xi]   Industry Consultation 2019
[xii]   Industry Consultation 2020
[xiii] Industry Consultation 2020
[xiv]   Federal Register of Legislation, Aviation Transport Security Act Accessed from:
        https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A01242 20 June 2019
[xv]   New security screening costs could devastate regional air travel, councils warn, Dominique Schwarts. Accessed from :
        https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-21/regional-airports-face-new-costs-as-airfares-come-under-inquiry/11210812?section=business
[xvi]   https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2020/07/Regional-Airports-Development-Scheme-grants-now.aspx Accessed
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[xvii] Industry Consultation 2019
[xviii] Industry Consultation 2019
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[xxii] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxiii] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxiv] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxv]   Aerodromes Transitional Policy now available: https://www.casa.gov.au/about-us/news-article/aerodromes-transitional-policy-now-
available Accessed July 2020
[xxvi] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxvii] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxviii] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxix] Industry Consultation 2019
[xxx]   Australian Industry Standards source https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/projects/avi-3d-computed-tomography-scanning/ [
        last accessed 30 August 2019]
[xxxi] Industry Consultation 2020
[xxxii] Australian Industry Standards, Case for endorsement: Aviation Training Package
[xxxiii] Industry Consultation 2020
[xxxiv] Industry Consultation 2019