

INDUSTRY PROFILE - Aviation Ground Operations



**Transport, Postal and Warehousing
Air and Space Transport
Ground Operations**

ANZSIC: 5220

Report Prepared July 2022

Industry Regulatory / Licencing Bodies

- The national regulator overseeing activity in this space is the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). Together with the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, and Airservices Australia, they constitute a tripartite structure for providing safe aviation in Australia.
- At State level, the Department of Transport (DoT) coordinates, develops and influences government and the aviation industry in providing the best aviation services and infrastructure for Western Australia.

Industry Development and Workforce Opportunities and/or Challenges for Industry

2.1 Industry opportunities affecting the current and future supply and demand of industry's skills and workforce

- The Metropolitan airport continued to require some ground handling services as WA benefited from continued intrastate travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to the significant reduction in international airline traffic many ground handlers were no longer required during the height of the pandemic. Many permanent jobs were made redundant with some companies opting to outsource ground staff roles. As international companies (with ground handling contracts) and Council owned aerodromes not eligible to access subsidies to retain experienced workers adding to the skills drain) many skilled and experienced workers left the industry altogether to find permanent work in other industries who may not return to the sector. Currently there is only one RTO in WA providing the newly mandated Certificate II in Transport Security Protection as of January 2022 by CASA. This has created bottlenecks and delays in training these workers.
- With passenger capacity expected to continue to increase of the next few years, demand for these services will continue to grow and may be in short supply as the aviation sector continues to recover.
- Skyportz has formed a partnership with Secure Parking, which could see an additional 400 landing bases for electric air taxis throughout Australian cities in the future. As mentioned earlier under Flight Operations, the ground handling and mechanical/maintenance skills required to support this type aircraft and landing areas may evolve. This will require monitoring to determine any impacts of this.
- The use of drones is continuing to evolve and is increasing across many industries and areas such as the Defence (i.e. Navy), Agriculture, Maritime, Ports and Stevedoring, and Warehousing and Logistics Industries (please also see this response). With many capable of long distance unmanned navigation with many trials are occurring on the East Coast to test capabilities and operations. Currently the legislation and vertical infrastructure does not yet exist in WA to allow Drones to operate in the same capacity (i.e. deliveries) and this uptake (in WA) may be some years away. However, these areas will need to be monitored for how to incorporate this into training and development for roles within the supply chain and for aviation (including how to incorporate the legislative framework, compliance etc beyond the ability to operate the Drone).
- Drones as well as the proposed implementation of air taxi services (see comments above) may present an increased competition for shared air space. The way these vehicles operate with, and around each other, including landing/takeoff will need to be considered and built into the skills required for ground handling and airport staff (including air traffic controllers) to ensure the safe operation of these vehicles in any shared air space.
- Although there has been a significant decline in international air traffic due to COVID-19, within WA, charter flights and Regular Public Transport (RPT) routes to various intrastate sites have continued to be an integral part in supporting the resources sector through FIFO service offerings which did not subside (The Australian, Viral charter flights hit record heights, 30 August 2020). The continued provision of flights and in some cases, additional flights to regional centres and airstrips has been a challenge for some service providers due to capacity constraints¹. It is not a simple and quick process to transition repatriated pilots (either International or from interstate) into flying roles due to the

- differences in aircraft size and the internal training checking and training required (Aviation IWG, 2021).
- The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communities have announced a new interactive map and dashboard of aviation data which is now available through the National Freight Data Hub prototype website. This visualisation shows changes over time for international and domestic aviation routes to assist in planning. In addition, there are plans to launch a new prototype of the Freight hub to capture and share economic, industry and jobs data, together with population data. It is anticipated this will be available for stakeholders to access later this year. This information may assist the aviation industry in future workforce and route planning needs.

2.2 Existing and anticipated supply and demand for skills

- As the Aerodrome Reporting Officer (ARO) occupation, particularly at the Senior level (i.e. S/ARO) continues to be in shortage for many regional organisations, employers would have been reluctant to reduce their number, even temporarily, given the level of skill and other difficulties associated with recruiting and retaining these experienced workers. However, succession planning for these roles will become ever more critical as workers age out. This will need monitoring.
- The access to JobKeeper was well received by industry as this gave employers the ability to retain experienced staff during the peak of the lockdowns and minimised trade activity.
- The availability of infrastructure and other amenities such as childcare, housing availability, internet connectivity etc continues to have a bearing on the availability and retention of workers within Ground operations. Industry has welcomed efforts made by the State Government to increase the level of childcare options available to workers in regional or remote areas, however it is too early to tell if this has been successful in increasing the attractiveness of these positions to potential workers (i.e. AROs). State Government Initiatives recently announced such as strategies to boost childcare, regional telecommunication, and housing will be well received by industry and seen as a means to retain staff to these roles.
- There has been a significant reduction in baggage handlers across WA. Many workers left the industry due to the lack of job security and reduced demand for services brought on by COVID-19. The loss of experience and skills will take some time for industry to recover as they replace and retrain new workers to these roles. This has also been further exacerbated by the recent surge in domestic and international travellers.
- Drones/RPAS continue to be a hazardous issue for regional aerodromes. More training is being incorporated into existing courses to develop user's awareness of drones as a hazard (i.e. for drone users). Additionally, the Regulators are also covering courses on drone usage, both within and beyond visual line of site. There is an increasing number of applications and capabilities that are being added to drone capability which include but are not limited to data analytics LiDAR, geothermal imaging and swarming.

2.3 The impact of COVID-19 to the workforce

- Australian Airports have undertaken several strategies to cope with significant skills and labour shortages. For instance, increasing the number of trainees employed, training employees and teams to undertake dual roles (i.e. at Council-owned aerodromes). In addition, employers are offering more incentives to attract and retain staff such as offering additional training and skills to enhance future career options and to upskill their workforce.
- Fluctuating border openings, closures and lockdowns have resulted in planning and operational pressures on businesses affiliated with Aviation other than airlines (i.e. airports, cargo operators and ground handling service providers). Challenges include but are not limited to resource allocation, the ability to quickly pivot, ramp up and scale down services on short notice ⁱⁱ. This makes it difficult to forecast and plan long-term.
- Regional Aerodromes continue to experience pressures (i.e. high costs and access to trainers) when accessing training) particularly for mandated/refresher training. These employers continue to look at strategies (such as sharing training costs across several aerodromes) to facilitate training to continue. Regional employers would look favourably at strategies and/or assistance to reduce these associated costs which would increase the availability, viability and accessibility of training.

- Several government payments such as the JobKeeper Payment and the ATO Cash Flow Boost provided partial relief to operators (particularly smaller flight operators) to sustain their workforce. Additionally, the Aviation Recovery Framework is a Federal Government initiative in response to COVID-19 which will further support workforce development and training needed for the aviation sector. The Plan supported operations and jobs through the most severe phases of the crisis and detailed how the Government will boost recovery, in line with the National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response. Additionally, it also sets out new policies to *reposition* aviation post COVID-19 to ensure a competitive, safe and secure aviation sector that meets the needs of Australians now and into the future. Additionally, the WA Government announced a \$77 million business support package for industries hardest hit by WA's border reopening delay Safe Transition Industry Support Package). The package has nine support programs including tourism and other travel related support. This included a \$10 million boost to the existing Aviation Recovery Fund as part of the Reconnect WA package (taking the total in this fund to \$75 million) and a \$3 million Travel Agent Support Fund. This offers grants of up to \$10,000 for eligible home-based businesses and \$20,000 grants to eligible brick-and-mortar businesses. These initiatives have and will continue to assist the aviation sector in its recovery, including future workforce development and training needed to resume operations.
- As with other sub sectors of Transport, Aviation is predominately a male occupation. To encourage diversification and female participation in its workforce Qantas in collaboration with the Aerospace Gateway to Industry Schools Project (AGISP) and the Royal Aeronautical Society's STEM outreach program Cool Aeronautics, brought female students from Year 7 to 10 to introduce and inspire female students to consider aviation careers (from Air Traffic Control, aeronautical and aircraft engineering, as well as flight instructing and airline pilots).
- Additionally, the Federal Governments Women in Aviation Industry Initiative also provides support to the aviation sector. The Australian Government has provided an additional \$4 million over the next four years to continue to support a range of activities including conferences, workshops and careers events to deliver grassroots programs and significantly boost outreach to female school and university students, as well as those considering transitioning into an aviation career. These strategies to attract, train and increase female participation is seen as key to assisting the aviation industry to meet future demands for skilled workers.
- During the pandemic the compliance requirements of airport staff increased significantly. Passengers were required to demonstrate vaccination status, a negative RATs test prior to boarding for domestic travel; whilst internationally the requirements became even more complicated where other COVID-19 apps and declarations forms were required. Airport staff were required to check the status of passengers and ensure they complied with any social distancing or other mandates (i.e. mask wearing). In addition, the rescheduling and cancellation of flights also increased workloads as well as dealing with aggressive behaviours of non-compliant or dissatisfied passengers. Whilst staff are trained in how to deal with these situations, the mental welfare of staff has become of increasing concern to employers as these situations are encountered, negotiated and resolved. Employer's are becoming concerned regarding the ability of staff to 'bounce back' after dealing with an increase in these types of situations and its potential to effect turnover. Indeed, across all transport and logistics industries, the mental health and resilience of staff is becoming more recognised as essential to ensure staff remain fit for work. This area will need to be monitored to determine if there are any opportunities for the training and education sectors to provide support in this area.

Part 3: Training and Education Needs

3.1 Current and anticipated training needs of industry

- Regional Airports are continuing to experience issues relating to limited access to suitably trained staff, access to trainers, LLND (Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital) issues, and long lead times to train. These issues may impact the skill needs of future workers, potentially placing additional constraints on the operational capacity of airports (particularly where skills shortages and other pressures also apply).
- Following all the protocols being observed of the 'new normal' as a result of COVID-19, Ground

operations within the Aviation sector are being faced with scope creep. Dealing with incidences such as de-escalation of aggressive behaviours of airport patrons.

3.2 Training challenges/opportunities existing for industry within the training sector

- The rise and prevalence of digital skills will continue to grow and will affect all occupations with road freight, postal and warehousing and logistics sectors. According to the Future of Jobs Report (2020) and the National Skills Commission State of the Australia's Skills 2021 Report, the way we do our jobs, known as task change, and the acceleration of changes that were already underway, such as increasing activity online and the ongoing need for post-secondary qualifications will endure post COVID-19. According to the research undertaken by the Digital Skills Organisation (DSO) Australia is facing a digital skills shortage where our current workforce does not currently possess these skills to keep pace with the level of change technology is bringing. The need for workers to possess digital fluency will increase and become even more vital as entre-level occupations transform (or decline) due to the use of technology and innovation changing the way organisations work within transport and logistics sectors, with 87% of jobs now requiring digital literacy skills according to the DSO.
- Concerns have been raised from a regional standpoint over the inflexibility to deliver training to meet business needs. Navigating and coordinating block releases in peak businesses periods is not a viable option for employers, especially with limited staffing levels in addition to being faced with attraction and retention challenges (such as loss of experienced personnel to other sectors or retirement).

3.3 Career pathways and graduate outcomes

- Skill sets tend to provide opportunities to progress further in a niche area or be awarded an endorsement to perform additional duties/roles. Micro credentials or skills sets continue to be desired by industry as a way to quickly upskill their workforce. Strategies to develop skill sets for the workforce in the following areas are desired by industry:
 - Managerial/Leadership skills
 - Mental health and resilience
 - Communication
 - Collaboration and teamwork (includes social/interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence)
 - resilience
 - Self-management Technology (use and application skills i.e. automation)
 - Situational awareness
 - Environmental and sustainability skills
- Industry highly regards work placement and experience from potential candidates, as this provides necessary exposure to what occurs within a workplace (i.e. the culture of an organisation, meetings, OH&S and other policies etc) which is outside of the remit of formal qualification (i.e. theory components) needed to perform roles and participate in workplaces.

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- 1 large operator, Metropolitan area, 2021
- 1 Industry Consultation 2020
- 1 Industry Consultation (large organization, National)

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