



Australian Government



National Skills Commission

Impacts of COVID-19 on businesses – staffing changes and expectations by State

Publication date: 22 October 2020

The National Skills Commission is currently conducting a survey of businesses across Australia to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business operations, recruitment and expectations. This report provides an update on businesses' staffing changes and expectations for the coming months by State¹ using data collected between April and September 2020.

Businesses that increased staffing levels – April to September

- In September, 9 per cent of businesses had increased staffing levels over the past month, slightly below the peak of 11 per cent in June, but well above the 4 per cent recorded in April.
- Results for September also show that businesses in Tasmania (15 per cent) and Western Australia (13 per cent) were most likely to have increased staffing levels in the past month. Not surprisingly given ongoing COVID-19 restrictions businesses in Victoria (6 per cent) were the least likely to have increased staffing levels.
- Since July, the proportion of businesses in Victoria that had increased staffing levels in the past month has remained consistently lower than the national average.

Increased staffing levels in the past month
April to September 2020



¹ Data for Tasmania is based on a small number of records and should be treated with caution. Data has not been published separately for the Northern Territory and the ACT due to small sample sizes (however, data are included in the overall figures for Australia).

Businesses that decreased staffing levels – April to September

- The proportion of businesses that had decreased staffing levels in the past month remained largely unchanged between June (10 per cent) and September (9 per cent) and is significantly lower than in April when the peak of COVID-19 restrictions across most of the country were in place (32 per cent).
- In September, 14 per cent of businesses in Victoria reported a decrease in staffing levels, well above any other state and the national average. Businesses in Western Australia were the least likely to report a decrease (5 per cent), followed by Tasmania (6 per cent).

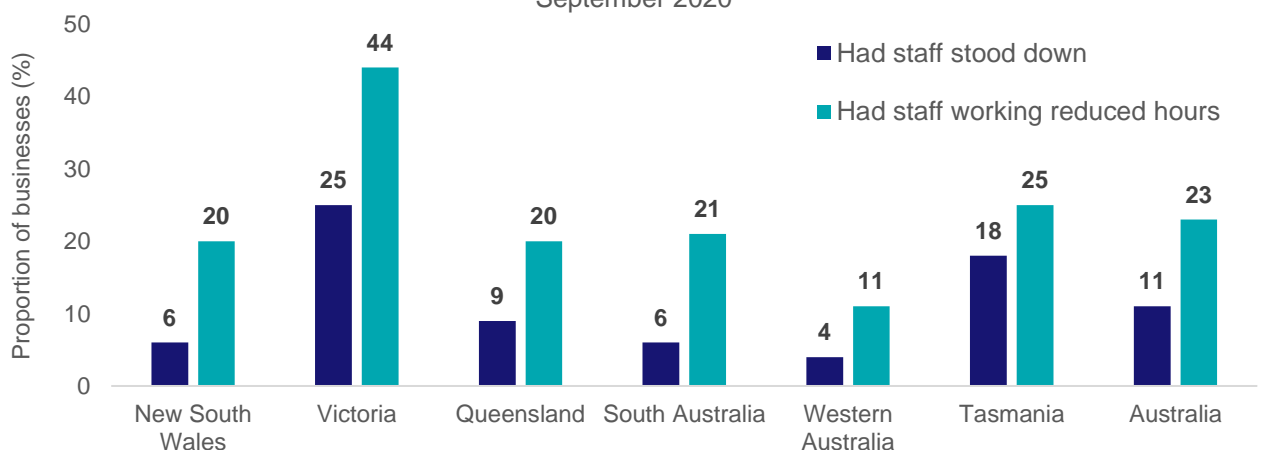
Decreased staffing levels in the past month
April to September 2020



Businesses with staff stood down or working reduced hours – September

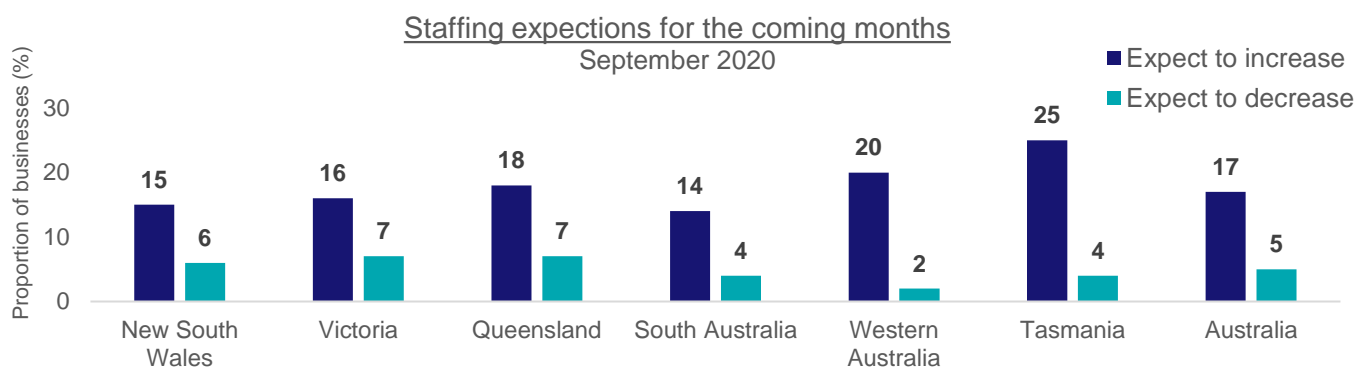
- In September, 11 per cent of businesses had staff stood down and 23 per cent had staff working reduced hours. One in four businesses in Victoria had staff stood down, while 44 per cent of businesses had staff on reduced hours. In Western Australia, only 4 per cent of businesses had staff stood down and 11 per cent had staff on reduced hours.

Businesses with staff stood down or on reduced hours
September 2020



Staffing expectations for the coming months – September

- Results from September show that 17 per cent of businesses expected to increase staff numbers in the coming months, while 5 per cent expected to decrease staff. These proportions are similar to those recorded in August (15 per cent and 5 per cent respectively).
- One in four businesses (25 per cent) in Tasmania expected to increase their staffing levels in the coming months, the highest of any state. This was followed by Western Australia (20 per cent) and Queensland (18 per cent).
- In Victoria, 16 per cent of businesses expected to increase staffing levels and 7 per cent expected to decrease staffing levels. This was a notable shift since August, when businesses were more likely to expect to decrease (9 per cent) than increase staffing levels (7 per cent) in the coming months.



Comments from businesses – August and September

Below is a selection of comments from businesses which provide further insight into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on staffing along with their current and future recruitment expectations.

- *"We have lost quite a few staff members who were on temporary visas. Once the lockdown restrictions have lifted, we will try to replace them with local staff."* (Abattoir in regional Victoria)
- *"Being in Western Australia, we are confident that it will soon be safe to start recruiting for Christmas casuals."* (Department store in Perth)
- *"Stage 4 lockdown means we aren't doing installations, and we have had to rent another facility to store equipment. We're working twice as hard to get the same amount of work done."* (Fabricator in Melbourne)
- *"Our program is starting up again and we will be able to host events. We are still quite hesitant and a bit nervous, but as long as border restrictions remain strict, we should be able to gradually return to normal operations."* (Museum in regional Western Australia)
- *"We are having difficulty hiring drivers due to the border closures. We would usually get staff from the east coast or from New Zealand."* (Building construction in regional Western Australia)
- *"We are having difficulty finding teachers for the area. We often recruit staff out of Melbourne, but it has become too much of a financial burden as the department will no longer pay hotel fees to quarantine new staff so that they can work here."* (Primary school in the Northern Territory)
- *"We were greatly affected by the onset of COVID-19, but business has started to bounce back even though we are still under some restrictions. We have hired staff recently and are still recruiting."* (Pub in Perth)
- *"We have been trying to recruit but have been receiving a large number of unqualified people applying for the role."* (Software developer in Canberra)