

Australian Animal Care and Management Industry Sector

Annual Update 2021

IRC Skills Forecast and Proposed Schedule of Work

Prepared on behalf of the Animal Care and Management Industry Reference Committee (IRC) and Pharmaceutical Manufacturing IRC for the Australian Industry Skills Committee (AISC).



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Purpose of the Annual Update

This 2021 Annual Update to the Skills Forecast and Proposed Schedule of Work 2019 – 2022 (Skills Forecast) presents additional industry intelligence from 2021 to build on previously reported information. This Annual Update from the Animal Care and Management Industry Reference Committee (IRC) includes intelligence based on national and industry data sources and input from key stakeholders. It proposes vocational education and training (VET) training package review and development work that the IRC deems necessary to meet the needs of industry. The Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) considers this information and includes commissioned work in the National Schedule¹.

In 2019, the AISC changed the requirements for the annual Skills Forecast. IRCs are now required to submit comprehensive Skills Forecasts once every three years, with abridged annual updates in the intervening two years. As IRCs submitted comprehensive Skills Forecasts in 2019, the next are due in 2022. This Annual Update should be read in conjunction with the Skills Forecast and previous Annual Updates.

This document is not intended to be representative of every issue encountered across all industry sectors; it identifies and addresses the challenges and opportunities that industry has determined as 'priority' for this stage of the schedule, and is a resource for industry and associated skills, learning and accreditation bodies seeking to act upon them.

Detailed information concerning industry skills needs across all sectors covered by the Animal Care and Management IRC, including information from previous Skills Forecasts and Annual Updates, can be found on the Skills Impact website: <https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/animal-care/skills-forecast/>.

Method & Structure

This is an annual update to the comprehensive Skills Forecast submitted in 2019. IRCs are required to answer the questions in **Section A** to provide updates on issues such as industry skills and workforce development, and qualification utilisation. Answers provided build on and are not repetitive of information reported in previous Annual Updates.

IRC's are also permitted to propose additional training package development work projects to be included in the Proposed Schedule of Work. These will now be submitted separately to the Annual Updates.

Section B details the extensive, robust and ongoing industry consultation undertaken by IRC members and Skills Impact, including with rural, regional and remote stakeholders. In line with Skills Impact's values², this helps to ensure transparency and accountability in the process of industry research and Training Package development work.

This Skills Forecast and Proposed Schedule of Work is developed in line with:

- Standards for Training Packages 2012³;
- Training Package Products Policy⁴;
- Training Package Development and Endorsement Process Policy⁵.

¹ <https://www.aisc.net.au/content/national-schedule>

² <https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/about/>

³ <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/standards-training-packages-2012>

⁴ <https://docs.employment.gov.au/documents/training-package-products-policy>

⁵ <https://docs.employment.gov.au/documents/training-package-development-and-endorsement-process-policy-0>

Industry Reference Committee

The Animal Care and Management IRC is responsible for national training package qualifications relevant to the animal care and management industry sectors.

Qualifications overseen by the IRC are in the ACM Animal Care and Management Training Package.

The Animal Care and Management IRC is supported by the Skills Service Organisation, Skills Impact.

Name	Organisation or Area of Expertise
Dr Julia Crawford (Chair)	Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)
Rebecca Coventry (Deputy Chair)	Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA)
Belinda Smith	Expertise in veterinary and related services
Brenton Myatt	Expertise in pet and companion animal services
Elly Neumann	Taronga Conservation Society Australia
John Sunderland	Expertise in animal breeding services
Julie Fiedler	Expertise in animal care, handling and welfare
Kaye Hargreaves	Expertise in pet and companion animal services
Michael Butcher	Expertise in animal control and regulation
Dr Robert Johnson	Expertise in captive wildlife operations
Dr Tim Mather	Expertise in animal technology
Vacant Position	Expertise in veterinary and related services
Vacant Position	Expertise in animal care, handling and welfare
Vacant Position	Expertise in veterinary and related services

Executive Summary

The Animal Care and Management (ACM) IRC has been carefully monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on the industry and this has been a major focus for the last 12 months. Of particular concern was ensuring that animal care and management was recognised as an essential service, with important animal welfare issues needing to be addressed throughout the crisis.

While workplaces were being shut down, those with animals on the premises, including zoos, aquariums, farms, studs and pet centres/animal shelters needed to continue operating to maintain the health, welfare and feeding of animals. The reasonably early declaration of these services as essential helped to address many issues and resulted in the impacts of COVID-19 on the industry being less severe than may otherwise have been the case.

The ACM IRC were very pleased to note the robustness of the training package, which has been updated in ways that allowed most challenges with training to be met. Despite concerns relating to mandatory work placements, these issues did not have an impact on training. The greatest impact came from RTOs not being able to deliver on-campus training and being unable to retain trainers.

Throughout 2020, work to update skills standards related to pet care and animal training, exhibited animal care and marine wildlife continued. During the process to update the skills standards, it became clear that the areas of assistance dog trainer and companion animal incident management are both emerging fields with new competencies required. This was outside of the scope of current projects, and the IRC are submitting Cases for Change for consideration by the AISC.

Currently, the IRC is overseeing work to streamline and provide clearer career pathways in equine occupations, including allied health occupations such as equine dentistry. Consultation is in progress and resulting in energetic and extremely useful debate, allowing the IRC to understand the many aspects to be considered when deciding on the standards to be submitted for approval. It is clear that there are job roles taking place in real conditions, which some view as being unsuitable without extensive professional qualifications. Others feel these occupations can be undertaken under supervision (personal or virtual) or even by appropriately trained workers. It is clear even at this stage that decisions will have to be made between a number of potential solutions, each with their own merits and reflecting different means of balancing the various interests. In the case of the IRC, critical will be the way in which work is actually being undertaken, the demand and supply for job roles and training, and the best outcomes for animal welfare that can practically be achieved.

Section A: Overview

Industry Developments

Please refer to the [2020 Annual Update](#), which identified several trends, challenges and opportunities that are still relevant now. Additional and emerging trends include:

Impacts of COVID-19

COVID-19 has disrupted every sector of the Australian animal care and management industry, including:

Veterinary Services

Veterinary services were classified as an 'essential service' following the outbreak of COVID-19 and associated restrictions, and businesses were permitted to remain open during mandated lockdowns. Many clinics introduced new customer interaction protocols ('COVID Safe plans'), including social distancing, customers waiting for appointments outside (e.g. in car parks), telephone and online video consultations, and home visits⁶ during this period. This helped to sustain veterinary services for pet owners and industry clients, such as animal exhibitors, though operators who normally cross state borders to provide services have been affected; for example, providers of equine dentistry in rural and regional areas⁷.

Overall demand for veterinary services has been disrupted during 2020, resulting from households delaying non-essential check-ups and surgery for their pets. However, the overall increase in pet ownership helped to reduce the downturn. While there was some reduced demand, and some veterinary practices are expected to be unable to continue operating, the impacts were inconsistent with some practices recording increases in demand and the need for additional staff. Overall, industry employment is also projected to decline in the short term but is likely to rebound over the next five years⁸ and may finish significantly higher with the increased levels of pet ownership. Practices reliant on travel for the majority of work were the most affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

Animal Exhibitors

As measures to control the spread of COVID-19 were implemented by state and national governments, wildlife sanctuaries, zoos and animal hospitals were among the first businesses to experience a sharp decline in revenue, which would normally be generated through public admissions (especially international tourists), school visits, field days and corporate events⁹. There have been resulting struggles to retain staff, maintain functional necessities (like feeding the animals) or even continuing to operate¹⁰. In late April 2020, the Federal Government announced that more than 100 exhibiting zoos, wildlife parks and aquariums could apply for a share of a \$94.6 million package to help pay for costs such as food, veterinary bills and power needed for animal enclosures¹¹.

In October 2020, the Victorian Government announced a support package for animal exhibitors¹², which provides funding for specialised costs associated with housing, feeding and caring for exhibit animals. The \$1 million support package will help animal exhibitors, such as mobile petting zoos and travelling reptile exhibitors, to ensure their animals' welfare standards while businesses remain unable to operate¹³. The Queensland Government has also provided around \$250,000 in grants to 34 businesses that exhibit animals to ensure proper standards of care are maintained during the COVID-19 response¹⁴.

⁶ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-05/coronavirus-sees-vets-take-new-steps-to-continue-treatment/12122164>

⁷ <https://vetpracticemag.com.au/vets-call-for-essential-nationwide-border-permits-during-covid-19/>

⁸ IBISWorld (2020); *Veterinary Services in Australia: Australia Industry (ANZSIC) Report M6970*

⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-05/dark-days-still-ahead-for-regional-wildlife-parks/12215726>

¹⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-16/coronavirus-queensland-zoos-sanctuaries-native-wildlife-animals/12154058>

¹¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-28/zoos-battling-coronavirus-shutdown-95-million-funding-lifeline/12189972>

¹² <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/support-and-resources/funds-grants-programs/support-package-for-animal-exhibitors>

¹³ <https://www.miragenews.com/helping-mobile-exhibitors-care-for-their-animals/>

¹⁴ <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/90652>

Longer-term, the industry is concerned that international borders remaining closed will suppress the usually high revenues generated by tourists and so endanger the welfare of animals and the work of animal exhibitors, who play an important role in the community by enabling people to experience exotic wildlife close-up while raising awareness about Australian native animals.

Animal adoption and foster care services

Animal shelters and carers were inundated with requests to adopt or foster pets as people sought company and exercise companions during state-regulated lockdowns¹⁵,¹⁶ (especially following Victoria's new property rental laws that prevent landlords from unreasonably refusing a tenant's request to keep a pet¹⁷). For example, the Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne recorded 566 adoptions in May 2020, its highest monthly total in over two years¹⁸, while Adelaide's RSPCA shelter beat annual adoption records before June 2020¹⁹. Breeders have also reported rising demand leading to higher prices²⁰.

The Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne recorded 566 adoptions in May 2020, its highest monthly total in over two years. As people sought animal companionship during lockdowns, animal shelters were inundated with requests.

[7 News, 16 June 2020]

Groups such as the RSPCA are concerned that pets, who have become accustomed to their owners working from home, will struggle to adapt if and when people return to offices, perhaps leading to acute anxiety and behavioural issues in the animals and a higher rate of 'returns' or reselling by the owners²¹. This will likely sustain the increased workloads of shelters, many of which have launched stricter screening processes to mitigate these risks²².

As COVID-19 restrictions ease, there has been a surge in demand for companion animal services, including for pet groomers, trainers, exercisers and day care facilities. The importance of these services for animals' welfare has been highlighted, for example, by reports of harm being caused by owners attempting to groom dogs themselves²³. Echoing such concerns, the Pet Industry Association of Australia released an advocacy paper urging that the Victorian Government's roadmap out of Stage 3 and 4 lockdowns account for the welfare of domestic animals as well as people, with recommendations to open pet services businesses as early as possible²⁴. These experiences also highlight the need to consider increased regulation of non-veterinary service providers.

Animal Protection Programs and Legislation

In Western Australia, a \$500,000 grants program was announced in August that will boost the capacity of Local Governments to prepare for and respond to animal welfare during emergencies such as bushfires²⁵. The grants can be applied for companion, working, farmed or exhibited animals²⁶.

In Victoria, the Wildlife Welfare Bushfire Response 2020 Action Plan has been developed as a partnership between the State Government and wildlife welfare sector following the devastating 2019-20 bushfires²⁷. Outcomes will include establishing a new Wildlife Welfare Sector Liaison role to improve communications, and providing and coordinating veterinary services.

¹⁵ <https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/pet-adoption-during-covid-19/12273350>

¹⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/they-ve-wanted-a-dog-for-years-lockdown-has-finally-made-it-happen-20200424-p54n0n.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/housing/renting/applying-for-a-rental-property-or-room/pets-and-renting>

¹⁸ <https://7news.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/australian-pounds-record-spike-in-animals-as-coronavirus-lockdown-eases-c-1104986>

¹⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-30/more-people-adopting-pets-and-fewer-just-browsing/12303648>

²⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-16/demand-for-dogs-soars-during-lockdown-prompting-a-price-surge/12626294>

²¹ <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-can-i-prepare-my-pets-for-easing-of-covid-19-restrictions/>

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/oct/18/dog-gone-how-to-handle-your-dogs-separation-anxiety-when-you-return-to-the-office>

²³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-05/melbourne-dog-grooming-salons-booked-out-until-2021/12728828>

²⁴ Pet Industry Association of Australia (2020); *Including Domestic Animals in Redrawing Victoria's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Roadmap*

²⁵ <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/news/media-releases/grants-scheme-better-protect-animals-emergencies>

²⁶ <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2020/11/Emergency-preparedness-grants-to-protect-animals-and-their-owners.aspx>

²⁷ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/new-action-plan-improve-wildlife-response-during-fire>

Also, the latest round of the Animal Welfare Fund Grants Program was established in November to support the improvement of companion animal welfare in the Victorian community²⁸. The funding commitment includes:

- \$1 million for animal shelters and foster carers to purchase equipment or upgrade or expand their services
- \$2 million for not-for profit and community vet clinics to maintain and expand their services, and allow new low cost clinics to be set up in areas of need around Victoria.

Further to this, the Victorian Government has committed to modernising Victoria's key animal welfare legislation, with a new act proposed to replace the current Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986²⁹.

NSW has also responded to reports of increased animal cruelty during COVID-19, especially by unauthorised breeders, by proposing new laws before State Parliament^{30, 31}. Reform processes for modernising the policy and legislative framework for animal welfare in NSW are ongoing³².

National Horse Traceability Working Group

The inaugural meeting of the National Horse Traceability Working Group (NHTWG) was held on 30 October 2020. The NHTWG is a committee constituted by the Agriculture Ministers' Forum and the Australasian Racing Ministers' Conference to provide advice on matters relating to the design and introduction of a traceability system for horses, donkeys and mules in Australia. A major focus is on horse traceability in the context of the prevention and containment of disease; in particular, economically important emergency animal diseases and zoonoses (diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans). The Working Group is expected to deliver recommendations to the Agriculture Ministers Meeting in early 2022.

In addition, Ministers have agreed that Queensland will lead a review of horse welfare during transport, including whether existing Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock are suitable for horses³³. These developments are likely to see an increase in the number of welfare officers across the states.

The National Skills Commission and attracting new industry workers

The National Skills Commission (NSC) was created in 2019 when much of the national debate focused on skills gaps; but, with the onset of COVID-19, the focus is now firmly on managing skills surpluses and identifying training options for unemployed workers, especially young people, women and city-dwellers, who have been disproportionately affected³⁴. The animal care and management industries may be able to capitalise on the availability of people who have been displaced from their usual work and are seeking new opportunities, especially as the NSC's latest report³⁵ includes 'Animal Attendants and Trainers' as among the top 20 occupations that are resilient to the impacts of COVID-19.

As well as highlighting reskilling and upskilling options for improving the prospects of people already performing an industry role, the NSC are promoting 'skills transferability' to facilitate clearer pathways between roles in diverse industries that require similar capabilities. The IRC notes that skills transferability is an important objective that must be considered as complementary to the primary role of vocational education and training in enabling potential workers to reach competency and be job-ready. This contention recognises that specific skills are required for jobs in order to complete tasks safely and effectively.

²⁸ <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/community-and-education/animal-welfare-fund-grants-program>

²⁹ <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/new-animal-welfare-act-for-victoria>

³⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-08/nsw-animal-cruelty-laws-pet-demand-increases-in-covid-19/12860608>

³¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-24/puppy-prices-peak-dog-sale-scams-soar-amid-pandemic/12914416>

³² <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/animal-welfare/reform>

³³ <https://www.awe.gov.au/news/stay-informed/communiques/ag-ministers-forum-february-2020>

³⁴ National Skills Commission (2020); *A snapshot in time: The Australian labour market and COVID-19*

³⁵ National Skills Commission (2020); *The shape of Australia's post COVID-19 workforce*; p.31

VET Qualifications & Employment Outcomes

The data and literature references presented in the [2020 Annual Update](#) remain relevant.

Over the last year, consultation with stakeholders has led to the identification of several key factors that lead employers not to seek or favour VET graduates, including:

- Absence of legislative, regulatory or licensing requirements governing an occupation or industry.³⁶
- Participants often enter animal industries, particularly the equine industry, as a result of pre-existing family involvement, especially in regional, rural and remote areas.³⁷
- Lack of value assigned to VET within industry cultures and networks.³⁸
- Dissatisfaction with the work-readiness of previously employed VET graduates³⁹, especially those whose learning did not include a workplace-based component.⁴⁰
- Alternatives to VET recognised by employers.⁴¹
- Worker shortages, especially within small businesses in RRR areas⁴², which leads to employers being often forced to hire candidates who do not possess the desired qualifications, but who subsequently receive informal, on-the-job training.
- The hiring of international consultants by zoos, who may then train staff informally.

The IRC notes, however, there is strong evidence that exposure to and engagement with quality VET-related outcomes are indicators of the system being valued and regarded as a yardstick by employers. Data released from NCVER's survey of employers' use and views of the VET system⁴³ shows that, of 'Professional, scientific and technical services' employers (including 'veterinary services') who are 'satisfied with training as a way of meeting their skill needs', 72% mandated 'vocational qualifications as a job requirement' (which is equal to the all-industry average).

There is further evidence that government-supported and -funded programs that encourage partnerships between training providers and industry raise the profile of VET – and so employers' receptiveness to hiring graduates – due to the successful outcomes facilitated for all stakeholders. A number of initiatives are successfully promoting pathways for graduates and increasing employers' engagement with VET. For example, TAFE Queensland and Dreamworld have teamed up to deliver the *Certificate III in Animal Studies* for future animal care workers⁴⁴. Learners are working with native wildlife alongside Dreamworld's industry professionals to gain practical skills such as handling reptiles, koala husbandry and quarantine procedures, wildlife rescue and prepping of animals' meals. The program also includes Indigenous cultural learnings on totemic relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Australia's unique fauna. Upon successful completion of the course students can work as an animal attendant or carer or continue their studies with TAFE Queensland's *Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing* program.

Other Training Used by Employers

The data and literature references presented in the [2020 Annual Update](#) remain relevant.

Responding to the challenges presented by COVID-19, state governments have been offering funded training

³⁶ L. Wheelahan & G. Moodie (2017); Vocational education qualifications' roles in pathways to work in liberal market economies; *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 69 (1): 10-27; p.13

³⁷ Peel Development Commission (2017); *Peel Equine Strategy 2017*; p.18

³⁸ Parliament of Victoria (2012); *Inquiry into agricultural education and training in Victoria*; p.41

³⁹ National Farmers Federation (2019); *Submission to Hon Steven Joyce: Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system*; 25 January 2019; p.10

⁴⁰ C. Smith, S. Ferns, L. Russell, Leoni & P. Cretchley (2014); *The impact of work integrated learning on student work-readiness*; Sydney, New South Wales: Office for Learning and Teaching

⁴¹ Commonwealth of Australia (2019); *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy*; p.27

⁴² D.Wright, A. Grand, B. MacLeod & L.K. Abbott (2018); Training as Part of the Capacity-Building Ladder in Australian Agriculture; *Int. J. Agr. Ext.* (2018): 83-97

⁴³ S. Gelade & T. Fox (2008); *Reality check - Matching training to the needs of regional Australia*; NCVER, Adelaide; p.33

⁴⁴ NCVER (2019); *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Employers' use and views of the VET system 2019*; NCVER, Adelaide

⁴⁴ <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/89242>

opportunities for employees of local businesses, including numerous courses delivered by non-VET providers. The NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, for example, has been developing and delivering wildlife first aid training for NSW firefighters, and are preparing training for wildlife emergency response taskforces that are deployed to firegrounds to conduct wildlife search and rescue efforts. TAFE NSW are now collaborating with NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service to develop online training resources for firefighters that are aligned with units from the *ACM Training Package* (albeit non-formally, and amalgamating elements from several units). These resources are also being extended for relevance to students working in the captive animal and wildlife industries. This partnership represents an RTOs' responsiveness to the needs of industry, which utilises a training package without the immediate requirement for formal delivery.

There are acute difficulties in sustaining viable formal training options in rural, regional and remote areas, leading businesses and associations to develop alternatives. Animal Management in Rural and Remote Aboriginal Communities Inc. (AMRRIC) has recently contributed SME expertise to ACM units based upon non-accredited training that they delivered as part of their Animal Management Worker Pilot Program between 2011 and 2014. This program, developed in collaboration with three remote Local Government Areas, was established to build local animal management capacity within remote NT communities. This addressed the Environmental Health branch of NT Health being unable to provide consistent funding to train, support or employ local animal management staff. The Animal Management Worker program was AMRRIC's attempted intervention; however, the program was unable to secure funding beyond the pilot period⁴⁵. Despite this, AMRRIC continues to regularly receive requests from Local Government Authorities in the NT and other jurisdictions for animal management staff training (usually community service managers whose roles, amongst others, include animal management tasks). AMRRIC also receive requests to provide advice and training on topics such as safe animal handling, animal management strategic planning, and effective remote community vet service program design and delivery.

There are acute difficulties in sustaining viable formal training options in rural, regional and remote areas, leading businesses and associations to develop alternatives.

ACM Training Package units have been a useful resource for informing and designing the content of training offered by AMRRIC, which has been delivered to Indigenous Organisation staff, including Animal Management Workers, Environmental Health Workers, Community Services Manager, and Indigenous Ranger groups. Due to on-going demand, AMRRIC are exploring accredited training options to increase incentives for building local animal management skills and capabilities. A continuing barrier, however, is the extremely limited funding for animal management training in remote communities.

The exhibited animals industry is using training outside the national system, with majority of animal husbandry training run through large zoos or zoo organisations, such as the Australasian Society of Zoo Keeping or the Zoo and Aquarium Association, or international zoo associations, for example, the International Congress of Zookeepers. Also, zookeepers are participating in international non-accredited courses to upskill to the level of, or beyond, the *Certificate IV in Captive Animals*, which is not widely offered by RTOs due to practical challenges that are barriers to delivery.

⁴⁵ Animal Management in Rural and Remote Aboriginal Communities Inc. (2014); *Animal Management Worker Program Evaluation*; https://mk0amrricqek1rx8x5cc.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AMRRIC-AMW-Evaluation-Report_280814_vFinal.pdf

Enrolment Levels

The data and literature references presented in the [2020 Annual Update](#) remain relevant.

Consultation undertaken on behalf of the IRC throughout 2020 has identified key information regarding the low use of qualifications, including:

- Unmet demand for 'flexible' training
- Negative industry perceptions of the VET system and training delivery
- Emerging preference for short courses and micro-credentials
- A lack of trainers demonstrating both pedagogical excellence and industry expertise
- RTO viability challenges, especially relating to:
 - compliance
 - training and assessment materials development
 - thin markets in RRR areas
 - government funding
 - creating and maintaining industry partnerships

Qualifications recently reviewed/updated/created

Two ACM qualifications, the *Certificate III in Animal Technology* and *Diploma of Animal Technology*, had relatively low enrolments over the past five years and have now been reviewed and updated, with first release on 10 September 2019. Table 1, below, includes enrolments in superseded versions of the qualifications where available; however, due to their recent releases, the current versions have not yet been widely delivered by RTOs, for whom the teach-out period for the superseded qualifications expires on 9 March 2021 (*Certificate III in Animal Technology*) and 9 September 2021 (*Diploma of Animal Technology*)⁴⁶. The ACM IRC advises that RTOs are currently applying to get the superseding qualifications on scope and developing training and assessment materials. As such, these qualifications should not yet be considered as 'low enrolment' because there has been insufficient time to analyse RTO/industry supply and demand. Demand may reasonably be expected to rise when a qualification has been significantly updated to meet industry needs (ascertained through extensive consultation regarding current and future skills and occupations).

The *Certificate III in Equine Hoof Care* was a new qualification (with no superseded versions), first released in December 2018. The ACM IRC advises that, normally, it can take up to two years for RTOs to develop training and assessment materials and get a new qualification on scope. COVID-19 has understandably deferred the training delivery plans of RTOs, many of which have been struggling to attract new customers throughout 2020 and, consequently, have delayed applications to gain approval to deliver new qualifications until there is greater market stability. At the time of writing, two RTOs have this qualification on scope.

The *Certificate II in Horse Care* was a new qualification first released on 29 November 2017 and, following RTOs' preparations, enrolments began to grow in 2019. There are now ten RTOs with this qualification on scope, indicating their intentions to offer and deliver training; however, industry feedback has suggested that anticipated growth in enrolments may be lessened because of COVID-19.

The *Diploma of Performance Horse Management* was also a new qualification first released on 29 November 2017. No RTO has yet been able to put the qualification on scope, and this is likely further delayed in 2020 due to COVID-19 and its impacts both on training delivery and the performance horse industry.

⁴⁶ <https://www.asqa.gov.au/rto/change-scope/transition-items/training-products-current-transition-extensions>

Table 1: Qualifications recently reviewed/updated/created

Qualification	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
ACM20217- Certificate II in Horse Care	0	0	0	0	78
ACM30219- Certificate III in Animal Technology	103	48	35	43	44
ACM30918- Certificate III in Equine Hoof Care	0	0	0	0	0
ACM50119- Diploma of Animal Technology	211	163	142	115	82
ACM50417- Diploma of Performance Horse Management	0	0	0	0	0

Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, TVA program enrolments 2015-19

PLEASE NOTE: Qualification data includes enrolments in superseded versions where available

ACM Training Package products in project stage (commissioned by AISC)

The *Certificate IV in Captive Animals* is part of a current project managed by Skills Impact, having been commissioned by the AISC on the basis of industry consultation and evidence of demand for this training package product subject to its being reviewed and developed. For more information, please go to <https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/animal-care/training-package-projects/pet-care-animal-training-project/>

The *Certificate IV in Pet Styling* is proposed for deletion. It has very low enrolments and industry has advised that it is no longer required. It is being replaced with a new skill set that requires five pet grooming units to complete. This change was to ensure at least five grooming units are achieved by a person prior to claiming credentials as a professional pet groomer.

Table 2: ACM Training Package products in project stage (commissioned by AISC)

Qualification	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
ACM40217- Certificate IV in Captive Animals	149	306	245	135	61
ACM40617- Certificate IV in Pet Styling	22	27	27	15	21

Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, TVA program enrolments 2015-19

PLEASE NOTE: Qualification data includes enrolments in superseded versions where available

Specialist industries

Some qualifications cannot reasonably be expected to encourage high enrolment figures when they are intended for employment in a niche occupation or specialist industry (which, by their nature, tend to have low turn-over of staff and relatively few new entrants). Such qualifications often facilitate socially and environmentally valuable or geographically specific skills that are critical for jobs with few employees nationwide. They may also address critical safety factors, both for learners and the animals for which they care or manage.

The *Certificate IV in Equine Dentistry* is a qualification intended for a niche occupation and there are connected regulatory considerations. Regardless of the economic sector in which horses participate (be it for racing, breeding, competition, working or leisure), engaging service providers regularly for equine dental care is strongly recommended⁴⁷. Industries that utilise horses are largely dependent on their positive welfare outcomes and equine dentistry is a vital factor.

⁴⁷ <https://au.virbac.com/health-care/horse-dental/dental-care-for-horses>

Table 3: Specialist industries

Qualification	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
ACM40517- Certificate IV in Equine Dentistry	3	10	20	16	2

Source: NCVER VOCSTATS, TVA program enrolments 2015-19

PLEASE NOTE: Qualification data includes enrolments in superseded versions where available

Reasons for Non-Completion

The data and literature references presented in the [2020 Annual Update](#) remain relevant.

Industry feedback collected by the ACM IRC indicates that non-completion of qualifications and skill sets is largely caused by RTOs' operational challenges, including financial unviability, staff lay-offs, unpreparedness for online delivery, social distancing requirements on-campus, and restrictions on travel limiting trainers' access to relevant RRR locations. For many learners, COVID-19 restrictions have meant participating online from home, which has created additional challenges associated with time, resources and connectivity (especially in RRR areas), issues which are often intensified when family members are also learning and working from home. As a result, there have been greater rates of non-completion due to dissatisfaction with, or logistical barriers hampering, training and assessment delivery.

Completion rates of qualifications and skills sets have been affected by RTOs' operational challenges, such as financial unviability, staff lay-offs and restrictions on travel, as well as learner challenges associated with participating from home.

Generally, these issues have had a greater impact on non-completion rates than mandatory work placements, which remain strongly supported by industry, especially for learning that involves caring for and handling animals, due to these experiences being irreplicable in virtual environments. In November 2020, ACM IRC members participated in the Veterinary Nursing Educators Network forum concerning mandatory work placements in Veterinary Nursing. They reported that, despite COVID-19-related delivery challenges, work placements have generally been easier to secure due to employers' increasing receptiveness to facilitating learners' development (especially as learners may help to ease operational pressures⁴⁸). Furthermore, a high proportion of learners secured employment while on work placement due to the positive relationships developed and workplace experience gained. This has resulted in RTO feedback that mandatory workplace hours (for example, the 400 hours mandated by TAFE NSW) have resulted in positive outcomes, with completion rates increasing (which will be reflected in NCVER data released in August 2021). Similar feedback was gained at a Victorian Network Provider meeting in December 2020, during which RTOs reported that there has been a higher rate of work placement learners being offered employment and a higher rate of completions (which have only been delayed due to logistical problems in conducting classroom-based practical assessments).

Cross-Sector Units

The response presented in the [2020 Annual Update](#) remains relevant. There is no additional information to add at this time.

⁴⁸ ABC News (2021); As pet ownership skyrockets during pandemic, a national vet shortage puts pressure on clinics and pets at risk; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-26/vet-shortage-puts-pressure-on-clinics,-puts-pets-at-risk/13009562>

Changes to Skill Requirements

Animal-assisted services

Multiple sectors in the animal-assisted services industry are now becoming established. The skill needs in each sector varies depending on the service, the professional practitioner and the species of animal used. Different combinations of skills are required for training different animals, different tasks and being responsive to different conditions, including intellectual, physical, sensory, cognitive and psychosocial conditions. Distinct sectors have emerged, requiring skills for training animals to assist with:

- Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): services delivered by qualified allied health professionals such as counsellors, psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health nurses, community health workers, social worker, trauma specialists.
- Animal-Assisted Learning (AAL): services provided by educators and coaches, involving an animal in a learning environment assisting an individual or group to develop skills, tools and strategies to achieve specific learning outcomes.
- Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA): an animal with its trained handler or animal team delivering informal therapeutic visits to people in workplaces, hospitals, aged care facilities, and schools to contribute to wellbeing.
- Assistance Animals (usually dogs) (AD): animals trained to support people with impairments to participate in and access various aspects of personal and public life. Dogs are trained to perform specific tasks related to their owner's special needs, such as vision or hearing impairment, mobility impairment, medical conditions (diabetes, seizures, asthma), psychiatric and physiological conditions.

Animal Incident Management

Various sources report on the need for additional skills in managing animals during disasters because of past shortcomings:

- The *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*⁴⁹ has advocated for disaster planning to extend beyond the protection of human life and property to the broader social environment, including companion and working animals.
- Macquarie University⁵⁰ is researching how different groups and organisations manage animals in disasters, including the uptake and implementation of the National Planning Principles for Animals in Disasters (NPPAD), which were designed to support jurisdictions' animal-related disaster management planning. One objective of this study is to establish what additional skills are required given the widely-reported animal management inadequacies during the disastrous 2019-2020 bushfires.
- The *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*⁵¹ describes how evacuation centres were overwhelmed and unable to accommodate all the domestic animals needing care and management. Some people put their lives at risk to evacuate those domestic animals that could not be transported to, or accommodated by, welfare facilities, with many unwilling to be separated from their pet or leave them in potentially smoke-affected areas outdoors.
- In their submission to the Productivity Commission, World Animal Protection⁵² report on a lack of coordinated bushfire response mechanisms to help save domestic animals. They argue that cross-border organisations and agencies lacked clear planning and often had to rely upon in-kind support from animal care professionals and volunteers. They also describe insufficiently trained response workers and reports of untrained individuals mounting their own animal rescue efforts. World Animal Protection conclude that bushfire response animal care and management was 'not of an appropriate standard'.

⁴⁹ https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.au/sites/default/files/media/au_files/national-planning_principles-for-animals-in_disasters.pdf

⁵⁰ <https://ausemergencyservices.com.au/emergency-disaster-management/new-research-into-planning-for-animals-in-disasters/>

⁵¹ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020); *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report*; p.280

⁵² World Animal Protection (2020); *Submission to the Productivity Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*; <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-07/NND.600.00255.pdf>

The Royal Commission recommends that evacuation centres review and update their plans to cater for people who are evacuating with animals. This view is supported by the *Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry*⁵³, which recommends that evacuation protocols and procedures be developed to ensure appropriate support is provided for people and their animals, including a process for animal registration at evacuation centres and effective identification of overflow sites when preferred facilities are at capacity. The RSPCA⁵⁴ likewise highlight that boarding kennels need to be prepared for various eventualities, including their own evacuation or sudden influxes of animals needing food, medicines, treatment and places to rest. With adequate planning and staff training, local boarding kennels and shelters could be used as evacuation centres, while existing evacuation centres would be enabled to cater for people bringing their domestic animals.

Apprenticeship & Traineeship Barriers

The data and literature references presented in the [2020 Annual Update](#) remain relevant. Likewise, barriers to VET delivery and the reasons for industry's low engagement with the system, detailed in the sections VET Qualifications & Employment Outcomes, Enrolment Levels, and Reasons for Non-Completion, should also be considered relevant here.

Industry-specific data relating to the Australian Government's \$2 billion JobTrainer skills package, which includes objectives to attract new apprentices and keep existing apprentices in jobs, has yet to be released. Its design is in part a response to research⁵⁵ forecasting that COVID-19 will cause apprenticeship/traineeship commencements to decrease over the next few years because they have fallen during past economic downturns, with struggling employers reluctant to commit to three- to four-year apprenticeship arrangements⁵⁶. JobTrainer anticipates such challenges and will further be supported by industry strategies to expand apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities.

The IRC will assess the relevant outcomes of such initiatives as information becomes available.

Other Relevant Activities

The ACM IRC has been busy during 2020, with many responsibilities bestowed upon it, requiring extensive time and resources, for dealing with the impacts of COVID-19, workforce, industry and trade issues.

The IRC has assisted the AISC and the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee (ERSC) by seeking industry input and responding to a number of requests for information. These requests have taken place in several stages.

Immediate crisis response

- Identification of immediate training issues relating to workplace and campus-based training (completed April 2020).
- Identification of skills needs and delivery challenges for essential workforces (completed May 2020).

Supporting training for worker movement and potential surge workforces to meet current needs

- Identification of existing training products and potential surge workforces (completed May 2020).
- Analysis of available infection control training (completed June 2020).

⁵³ NSW Government (2020); *Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry*

⁵⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-09/evacuation-risky-for-ill-prepared-pet-owners/10701998>

⁵⁵ Hurley, P. (2020). The impact of coronavirus on apprentices and trainees. Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy, Victoria University.

⁵⁶ Hurley, P. (2020). The impact of coronavirus on apprentices and trainees. Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy, Victoria University.

Support for workforce recovery

- Critical Response Projects to create pathways for displaced workers (submitted July 2020, in progress).
- Promotion of pathways for displaced workers (first projects submitted July 2020, under consideration).

Mandatory Work Placements Analysis and Response

- Initial analysis of units requiring mandatory work placements or assessment/training conditions that were likely to require the use of physical workspaces, most likely in workplaces (completed April 2020).
- Analysis of units within qualifications with high levels of enrolments (completed October and November 2020).
- ACM IRC Members attended meetings with the Victorian Skills Commission (who were undertaking this work on behalf of all jurisdictions) to provide advice on the scope of any issues and to aid in the development of principles.

The IRC is extremely pleased to report that the current *ACM Training Package* is robustly standing up to the additional logistical challenges brought about by COVID-19. Since the establishment of the IRC, the components of the training package that have undergone review have enabled:

- Flexible options for training and assessment to meet fluid and urgent industry needs.
- Coverage of the major training requirements for all industries associated with the training package.
- Minimal requirements for mandatory work placements or onsite training and assessment (there are multiple delivery mode options), while recognising that many units cannot be delivered virtually or online.
- Extensive and suitable options of recognised skill sets and units for use by the states that have decided to develop their own training offerings outside the national system (without IRC consultation).

The IRC has also responded to a Ministers' request to delete units and qualifications which had zero enrolments in the years 2017 to 2019. The IRC has offered advice on the units and qualifications identified by the Ministers, which, in many cases, were already under review in current projects. In other cases, there were expected enrolments in 2021, or in the near future, as a result of recent major changes made to those training package products.

The additional work detailed above has required that the IRC meet more regularly and that members conduct many more additional "out of session" discussions and consultations than in previous years. This has been achieved without additional IRC members or secretariat support. The Chair of the IRC would like to express their gratitude to all IRC members and stakeholders who have given up so much of their time and energy in 2020 to complete this important work.

Section B: Ongoing Consultation

Details of industry consultation undertaken by IRC members and Skills Impact, including with rural, regional and remote stakeholders will be included in the final document that is submitted to the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC). Once submitted, the final document will also be published on the Skills Impact website.

DRAFT

Section C: Proposed Projects

2021–2022 Project Details

Project 1: Assistance Dog Trainer

Description

Growing evidence for how assistance animals can improve the quality of life for people with impairments and disabilities is driving demand for more skilled trainers of assistance dogs. This proposal is for the development of national units of competency to support the range of skills required of dog trainers in this important specialisation. The units would be packaged as a specialisation in existing qualifications. Assistance dogs are now supporting an expanding range of disabilities and impairments (e.g. epilepsy, dementia, mental ill-health, mobility and hearing impairment), all requiring distinct training methods to prepare the dog for interpreting and reacting to various symptoms and situations. Trainers not only require knowledge of the impacts of health-related conditions and how to train dogs for specific tasks, but they must also understand applicable legislation, risk management strategies, and public and workplace health and safety guidelines. Assistance dogs are covered under numerous laws for public access rights when assisting a person living with a disability. Accredited training, that utilises national units and qualifications, will support existing regulation and alleviate concerns associated with non-accredited trainers.

Case for Change

Rationale for Change

This project proposes to develop up to 13 new units of competency to address the skills required for animal trainers to specialise in Assistance Dog Training. This will help meet the high demand for assistance dogs, ensure readiness for changing regulatory environments, and alleviate concerns associated with non-accredited trainers.

Reasons for developing the training products

This proposal emerged through consultation for the Pet Care & Animal Training Project in 2020.

The drivers of demand for training which are likely to ensure RTO enrolments and jobs growth are:

- Forthcoming changes to state-based and NDIS licensing and regulation requirements means new industry entrants and current trainers will seek – and perhaps be required to obtain – formal credentials (only Queensland currently registers assistance dog providers and trainers, but there are signals other states and territories will follow this model).
- Employers, including not-for-profit agencies e.g. Assistance Dogs Australia and mindDog, are seeking qualified dog trainers to help shorten the lengthy waiting lists for assistance dogs, but are reporting shortages of adequately trained candidates.

La Trobe University researchers recently reported on widespread calls by industry for nationally-recognised training for assistance dog trainers to ensure workers possess the core skills to prepare dogs for a variety of purposes and client needs. Assistance dogs are now supporting an expanding range of disabilities and impairments (e.g. epilepsy, dementia, mental ill-health, mobility and hearing impairment), all requiring distinct training methods to prepare the dog for interpreting and reacting to various symptoms and situations. Trainers not only require knowledge of the impacts of health-related conditions and how to train dogs for specific tasks, but they must also understand applicable legislation, risk management strategies, and public and workplace health and safety guidelines. Current dog trainers need to be upskilled to train dogs for newly-offered services in the context of a changing regulatory environment, while a specialisation stream is required for new trainers entering the industry.

What would be the implications of not making the change?

There remains significant confusion regarding the legal status of non-accredited animal assistance training. Federal Law does not stipulate who can accredit a dog to be an assistance animal, or what specific training is required. The current regulatory framework surrounding assistance animals is described as 'inadequate' due to a lack of guidance on appropriate training standards for the expanding range of disabilities and impairments that assistance animals are employed to assist with⁵⁷. In the absence of nationally-recognised skills standards, there is evidence of poorly trained assistance animals failing to support people with disabilities to participate in aspects of personal and public life, and falling short of the Disability Discrimination Act's standards for hygiene and behaviour. By not making the proposed changes, the risks to clients will not be mitigated. The lack of national standards furthermore sustains legal ambiguities over whether a dog is a 'companion' or 'assistance animal', with concerns that this leads to fraudulent disability benefits claims. Research indicates that this 'grey zone' in turn facilitates demands for fake or inadequately trained assistance animals to be ratified.

There is currently a 2-5 year waiting list for an assistance dog. Due to the lengthy waiting lists through not-for-profit agencies, NDIS agencies are employing dog trainers without specific formal credentials, but are struggling to obtain evidence to indicate that these trainers will meet appropriate QA requirements.

Evidence for Change

ABS data shows there were 20,234 'Animal Attendants and Trainers' in November 2020. This occupational field has one of the highest projected growth rates to 2024, which, at 10.5%, means there will be over 2,000 new entrants to the industry requiring skills training (in addition to training for employed persons who are upskilling). National Skills Commission IVI data indicates there were 123 job vacancies in December 2020. With positive media exposure and evidence of assistance animals raising the quality of life for people with impairments and disabilities, there is a growing demand for assistance dogs, particularly in regional and rural areas. Organisations such as Assistance Dogs Australia and Guide Dogs Australia have waiting lists with waiting times over two years. As a result, many owners are wanting their pets trained by private trainers to be their assistance dog.

There is significant support for nationally-recognised training to upskill dog trainers to help reduce waiting times, increase the number of adequately trained dogs to fill the demand (particularly in regional and rural areas), and to support occupational therapists who are required to recommend NDIS funding for assistance dogs. Assistance Dogs Australia believe that the availability of formal training in Australia will attract international students.

Key tasks requiring training

- Interpret behaviour and train dogs using operant and classical conditioning techniques
- Train Assistance Dog in specific tasks
- Train Assistance Dog in complex tasks
- Handle a dog in an assistive role to support a client
- Fitting and use of equipment specific for Assistance Dogs
- Prepare animals for public access training and testing
- Assess clients for suitability and requirements for an Assistance Dog
- Assess teams for public access and provide follow up support
- Instruct assistance-animal handling and welfare to a handler with a disability
- Select and place assistance animals
- Assist clients with using a dog to achieve goal-based disability objectives (consistent with NDIS guidelines)
- Understanding and meeting regulatory requirements and adapting to changing regulations
- Instructing handlers on how to use dogs specifically as a mental health tool

⁵⁷ P. Harpur, S. Bronitt, P. Billings, N. Pachana & M. Verreynne (2018); Regulating Fake Assistance Animals - A Comparative Review of Disability Law in Australia and the United States; *Animal Law Review* 24 (1): 79

Consideration of Existing Products

Two units of competency, *ACMAAS401 Manage animals and facilitate human-animal interaction in animal-assisted services* and *ACMAAS402 Apply disability awareness to animal-assisted services*, were developed during the Pet Care and Animal Training project in 2020 to deliver training for people working in the Animal-Assisted Services Industry. These units were added as electives in the newly revised *ACM40321 Certificate IV in Animal Behaviour and Training*, which delivers core skills for working as an assistance animal trainer. However, during the project it was identified and reported to the IRC that there are further skill requirements specific to assistance dog training. Given the breadth of the Pet Care and Animal Training project, the IRC agreed with Subject Matter Experts that these additional matters deserved the attention of experienced dog training professionals, and that completion of the existing project (and updated training package products) would be unduly delayed if its scope were expanded. As a result, it was determined that a new Case for Change should be developed.

Approach to Streamlining and Rationalisation of the Training Products Being Reviewed

Rather than proposing to develop a new qualification, this project recommends creating up to 13 new units, which would be packaged as a specialisation in existing qualifications. Hence, the proposed specialisation recognises and supports the distinctiveness of this industry's job roles but is not inconsistent with streamlining and rationalisation objectives.

Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholder consultation undertaken in the development of Case for Change

In addition to the Subject Matter Expert Working Groups that were engaged in the previous project, the IRC recommended industry specialists to be consulted during the development of this Case for Change. Several focus groups were also engaged online, including participants from across Australia; for example, remote areas of Queensland and Northern Territory. Participants and other stakeholders have facilitated introductions to further interested parties, such as industry organisations, special interest groups, independent and university research centres, training providers and not-for-profit assistance dog organisations. Many of these groups support the proposed development of assistance dog units and have registered their interest in contributing to further consultation activities.

Evidence of Industry Support

Industry support for the proposed units was elicited through extensive email and telephone contact with a wide range of stakeholders, many of whom have stated their support for this project and willingness to contribute further.

Proposed Stakeholder Consultation Strategy for Project

Proposed stakeholder consultation will include:

- Subject Matter Experts Working Groups (SMEWGs) to be established. Regular meetings will be held throughout the project (approx. 2-6) and will include:
 - Representatives from current regulators and those working on regulation proposals in different states and territories
 - Participants based in rural, regional and remote areas.
- Direct correspondence with key stakeholders, including relevant regulators and policy-makers.
- Direct consultation with State Training Authorities (STAs)
- Industry associations and other stakeholders from all states and territories to be invited to participate in consultations.
- Details of consultation dates will be published online, and an online forum will be facilitated for wider public consultation.
- RTOs will be engaged, and presentations and discussions will be held at trainer network events.

- Public web project page will be updated with project progress.
- Direct email promotion will be sent to stakeholders, including RTOs, regulators, industry associations.
- Skills Impact's feedback hub will display all draft materials.
- Validation meetings on final drafts will be held with industry participants.
- A validation survey on the final drafts will be published on Skills Impact's website
- The project will be promoted on social media, e.g. Twitter and LinkedIn.

Licencing or Regulatory Linkages

This project proposes to develop a unit of competency specific to understanding and meeting regulatory requirements and adapting to changing regulations.

Project Implementation

Prioritisation Category

It is proposed that this product development is progressed as a routine project.

While there is a clear need for the formalisation and professionalisation of skills for this industry's workforce, this is partially being met through a range of non-accredited, informal and ad-hoc training methods. The proposed development of units will facilitate greater industry recognition and comprehensive skills development; however, this is neither urgent nor complex.

Project Milestones

Key project milestones include:

- **June 2021** - Expected approval by the AISC of proposed work
- **June to August 2021** - The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) commissioned activity order
- **August 2021** - Engage Subject Matter Expert Working Group to develop draft training package components
- **November 2021** - Draft 1 is put forward for public consultation
- **December 2021** - Review feedback and update training package components, as per SMEWG advice
- **January - February 2022** - Validation drafts put forward for public consultation
- **February 2022** - Finalise quality assurance and edit and equity
- **March 2022** - Send project to STAs for sign off
- **March 2022** - Lodge project to DESE
- **April 2022** - AISC considers project for implementation

Delivery or Implementation Issues

There is a high level of interest amongst stakeholders, who anticipate that enrolment numbers will be adequate. RTOs have expressed concerns over obtaining TAE-qualified trainers, meaning applications for scope registration could be delayed. There is an urgent need in regional and rural areas for this training, but thin markets may present barriers to RTOs servicing these areas.

Implementing the Skills Minister's Priority Reforms for Training Packages (2015 and October 2020)

Ensure that more information about industry's expectations of training delivery is available to training providers to improve their delivery and to consumers to enable more informed course choices

The proposed units will provide guidance to the assistance animal sector and to training providers regarding the skills required to work within this industry. This will empower RTOs and consumers in making informed choices

over nationally agreed, transferable and relevant training and skills development. It will also strengthen the industry such that it attracts more participants and funding.

Ensure the training system better supports individuals to move more easily between related occupations

he proposed units will better support dog trainers to upgrade their skills and comprehend and comply with changing state and territory standards and guidelines. As a result, they will be better placed to move between occupations in the animal care industry owing to the transferability of skills in dog training and behaviour across all animal welfare endeavours.

Improve the efficiency of the training system by creating units that can be owned and used by multiple industry sectors

The proposed units will be of specific use to assistance dog trainers. During the project, Subject Matter Experts and the IRC will consider whether each of the units has applicability beyond assistance dog trainers (for example, task training for a wider range of animals) or could apply to a broader group of learners (which may be possible for the units focussing on the regulatory environment).

Foster greater recognition of skill sets and work with industry to support their implementation

During this project, skill sets may be identified for future development in recognition of the rapid growth, maturation and changeability of this industry.

This Case for Change was agreed to by the Animal Care and Management IRC

Name of Chair
Signature of Chair

Date

Project 2: Companion Animal Incident Management

Description

The 2019-2020 bushfires highlighted the important role of animal facility workers, emergency service workers and evacuation centres in supporting injured and displaced animals. With many evacuation centres overwhelmed, the need for revised evacuation protocols, procedures for accommodating companion animals and staff training were recommended by several reports, including the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission recommended 'national consistency in training and competency standards' to encourage resource and information sharing, and to enable 'someone trained in one state or territory to work effectively in another'. This proposal is for the development of companion animal incident management units of competency. The proposed project will provide a national approach to the skills standards for responding to incidents involving companion animals, which could also be used by local boarding kennels, shelters, and evacuation centres to upskill staff.

Case for Change

Rationale for Change

Nearly three billion animals were killed, injured or displaced during the 2019-2020 bushfires. Not only was native wildlife decimated, tens of thousands of farm animals and domestic pets either perished or were evacuated and required emergency boarding. The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements⁵⁸ describes how evacuation centres were overwhelmed and unable to accommodate all the domestic animals needing care and management. Some people put their lives at risk to evacuate those domestic animals that could not be transported to, or accommodated by, evacuation facilities, with many unwilling to be separated from their pet or leave them in potentially smoke-affected areas outdoors. The Royal Commission recommends that evacuation centres review and update their plans to cater for people who are evacuating with animals. This view is supported by the Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry⁵⁹, which recommends that evacuation protocols and procedures be developed to ensure appropriate support is provided for people and their animals, including a process for animal registration at evacuation centres and effective identification of overflow sites when preferred facilities are at capacity. The RSPCA likewise highlight that boarding kennels need to be prepared for various eventualities, including their own evacuation or sudden influxes of animals needing food, medicines, treatment and places to rest⁶⁰.

With adequate planning and staff training, local boarding kennels and shelters could be used as evacuation centres, while existing evacuation centres would be enabled to cater for people bringing their domestic animals. This project proposed to develop up to 12 new Units of Competency and three new Skill Sets to address the skills required for animal facility workers and emergency services to plan, respond and care for companion animals during emergency situations.

What would be the implications of not making the change?

In their submission to the Royal Commission, World Animal Protection report on a lack of coordinated bushfire response mechanisms to help save native wildlife, livestock, and companion animals⁶¹. They argue that cross-border organisations and agencies lacked clear planning and often had to rely upon in-kind support from animal care professionals and volunteers. They also describe insufficiently trained response workers and reports of untrained individuals mounting their own animal rescue efforts. World Animal Protection conclude that bushfire response animal care and management was 'not of an appropriate standard'. If evacuation centre and kennel workers are not provided with opportunities to develop capabilities for animal care during emergencies, these places may continue not to offer space for pets. As a result, owners and untrained residents will continue to feel under-supported and put their lives at risk both to rescue and stay with their pets.

⁵⁸ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020); *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report*; p.280

⁵⁹ NSW Government (2020); *Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry*; p.382

⁶⁰ ABC News (2019); *Pet owners warned to prepare bushfire survival plan as fire danger season continues*; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-09/evacuation-risky-for-ill-prepared-pet-owners/10701998>

⁶¹ World Animal Protection (2020); *Submission to the Productivity Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*; <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-07/NND.600.00255.pdf>

Evidence for Change

ABS data shows there were 20,234 'Animal Attendants and Trainers' (including kennel hands, animal facility workers and not-for-profit animal welfare workers) in November 2020. This occupational field has one of the highest projected growth rates to 2024, which, at 10.5%, means there will be over 2,000 new entrants to the industry requiring skills training (in addition to training for employed persons who are upskilling). The National Skills Commission rates 'Animal Attendants and Trainers' as one of the most resilient occupations in terms of its relative employment growth prospects, while its IVI data indicates there were 123 job vacancies in December 2020. The proposed training package products furthermore have relevance for a broader variety of jobs, including emergency service workers and evacuation centre workers.

The Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC presents evidence-based research (led by Macquarie University) that, during emergencies, peoples' decision-making and behaviour is significantly affected by whether they own animals. Given that pet ownership is a risk factor for survival, 'animals need to be considered and integrated into emergency management and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery', which 'poses additional challenges for traditional responding. Extra preparation, knowledge and skills are required to ensure the safety of animals, their owners, and responders. In this context, animal emergency management has emerged as a relatively new area, with a more complex and often less experienced set of stakeholders requiring integration and coordination.'

In support of enhancing capabilities for managing animals in disasters, State Governments are funding initiatives; for example, WA's Animal Welfare in Emergencies Grant, which will assist local governments to improve animal welfare protocols during responses, backed by appropriate facilities to keep animals and their owners safe. Around \$100,000 is earmarked for procuring resources to house and care for animals in the event of an evacuation, while around \$80,000 is to fund improving response capabilities.

The Royal Commission (p.28) recommends 'national consistency in training and competency standards' to encourage resource and information sharing, and to enable 'someone trained in one state or territory to work effectively in another'. The proposed project will provide a national approach to the competencies for the skills required in dealing with companion animals in disasters. These products will be suitable as electives in both ACM qualifications and Public Safety (PUA) qualifications.

Key tasks requiring training

- Designing marketing strategies and promotional materials to inform animal owners how to evacuate pets and what resources are required.
- Databases: how to access and use databases tracking animals and animal facility locations.
- Risk assessment and planning: preparing for all tasks using a risk-based approach to ensure safety.
- Animal handling training for service providers
- Assessing and setting up evacuation centres (including local facilities)
- Communication skills:
 - Liaising with emotionally distraught owners
 - Contacting and being instructed by councils and other government departments who oversee emergencies
- Tracking animals as they enter and leave facilities:
 - Scanning microchips
 - Record keeping
- Managing and inducting volunteers
- Managing animals in evacuation centres
 - Separating species
 - Managing animal behaviour, including stress
 - Identifying and coordinating any outside services that are required, e.g. veterinarians
 - Animal first aid
- Transportation

- Post-disaster management
 - Sending animals back out to owners
 - Assessing whether their home spaces are safe for pets' return
 - Preparing contingency plans for pets that cannot yet be returned to their owners.
- Resilience: caring for self in times of emergency, when there is increased risk of mental and physical fatigue

Consideration of Existing Products

This project will review existing Animal Incident Management (ACMAIM) units for their relevance to the proposed Companion Animal Incident Management units. Minor changes to existing units may be appropriate so that they can be contextualised to include Companion Animals.

Approach to Streamlining and Rationalisation of the Training Products Being Reviewed

The proposed units will be housed as electives in the ACM30121 Certificate III in Animal Care, ACM40221 Certificate IV in Animal Facility Management and ACM40121 Certificate IV in Animal Regulation and Management. They may also be packaged within skills sets to deliver the additional skills required for different job roles.

Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholder consultation undertaken in the development of Case for Change

Rural employers involved in companion animal rescue operations during the 2019-2020 bushfires were targeted for consultation. With permission, members of focus groups and survey respondents for 'Managing Animals in Disasters' research conducted by Macquarie University were also approached. The Animal Care and Management IRC further recommended industry specialists to be consulted during the development of this Case for Change. These individuals facilitated introductions to other interested parties, such as industry organisations, primary industry departments, independent and university research centres, training providers and not-for-profit animal welfare organisations. Many of these groups support the proposed development of units and have registered their interest in contributing to further consultation activities.

Evidence of Industry Support

Industry support for the proposed units was elicited through extensive email and telephone contact with a wide range of stakeholders, many of whom have stated their support for this project and willingness to contribute further. See attachment D for a list of organisations consulted and for letters of support.

Proposed Stakeholder Consultation Strategy for Project

Proposed stakeholder consultation will include:

- Subject Matter Experts Working Groups (SMEWGs) to be established. Regular meetings will be held throughout the project (approx. 2-6) and will include:
 - Representatives from current regulators and those working on regulation proposals in different states and territories
 - Participants based in rural, regional and remote areas.
- Direct correspondence with key stakeholders, including relevant regulators and policy-makers.
- Direct consultation with State Training Authorities (STAs)
- Industry associations and other stakeholders from all states and territories to be invited to participate in consultations.
- Details of consultation dates will be published online, and an online forum will be facilitated for wider public consultation.
- RTOs will be engaged, and presentations and discussions will be held at trainer network events.

- Public web project page will be updated with project progress.
- Direct email promotion will be sent to stakeholders, including RTOs, regulators, industry associations.
- Skills Impact's feedback hub will display all draft materials.
- Validation meetings on final drafts will be held with industry participants.
- A validation survey on the final drafts will be published on Skills Impact's website
- The project will be promoted on social media, e.g. Twitter and LinkedIn.

Licencing or Regulatory Linkages

Relevant regulations covering the learner's jurisdiction will be addressed within a unit selected for inclusion in the development units and will not need to be addressed separately.

Project Implementation

Prioritisation Category

It is proposed that this product development is progressed as a routine project.

While there is a clear need for national skills for this industry's workforce, this is partially being met through a range of state by state non-accredited, informal and ad-hoc training methods. The proposed development of units will facilitate greater national consistency, industry recognition and comprehensive skills development.

Project Milestones

Key project milestones include:

- June 2021: Expected approval by the AISC of proposed work.
- June – August 2021: The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) commission activity order.
- August 2021: Engage Subject Matter Expert Working Group to develop draft training package components.
- November 2021: Draft 1 is put forward for public consultation.
- December 2021: Review feedback and update training package components, as per SMEWG advice.
- January – February 2022: Validation drafts put forward for public consultation.
- February 2022: Finalise quality assurance and edit and equity.
- March 2022: Send project to STAs for sign off.
- March 2022: Lodge project to DESE.
- April 2022: AISC considers project for implementation.

Delivery or Implementation Issues

The length of time that it will take RTOs to develop learning resources and scope applications has been identified as a possible implementation issue.

Implementing the Skills Minister's Priority Reforms for Training Packages (2015 and October 2020)

Ensure that more information about industry's expectations of training delivery is available to training providers to improve their delivery and to consumers to enable more informed course choices

New and existing units of competency will be developed so that they can be packaged in skill sets and as electives in existing qualifications to deliver nationally consistent training for those required to work in a range of emergency response sectors that involve dealing with and managing animal-related incidents.

Ensure the training system better supports individuals to move more easily between related

occupations

The proposed products will better support people in developing the transferable skills to move between animal care and public safety occupations due to their focus on planning, responding and managing emergency situations.

Improve the efficiency of the training system by creating units that can be owned and used by multiple industry sectors

The proposed units can be of use to specific companion animal incident management work but they are also flexible enough to be used for broader animal-related training, including veterinary nursing, exhibited wildlife workers and public safety.

Foster greater recognition of skill sets and work with industry to support their implementation

The proposed project will strongly consider new skill sets as a way for emergency responders to upskill and for new workers to be introduced to companion animal emergency management.

This Case for Change was agreed to by the Animal Care and Management IRC

Name of Chair
Signature of Chair

Date

Attachment A: Training package components to change

Project number	Project name	Qualification/ unit / skill set	Code	Title	Details of last review (endorsement date, nature of update transition, review, establishment)	Change required
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Interpret behaviour and train dogs using operant and classical conditioning techniques	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Train Assistance Dog in Specific Tasks	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Train Assistance Dog in complex tasks	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Handle a dog in an assistive role to support a client	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Fitting and use of equipment specific for assistance dogs	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Prepare animals for public access training and testing	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Assess clients for suitability and requirements for an assistance dog	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Assess teams for public access and provide follow up support	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Instruct assistance-animal handling and welfare to a handler with a disability	Establishment	New

Project number	Project name	Qualification/ unit / skill set	Code	Title	Details of last review (endorsement date, nature of update transition, review, establishment)	Change required
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Select and place assistance animals and Assisting clients with using a dog to achieve (NDIS) goal-based disability objectives	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Understanding and meeting regulatory requirements and adapting to changing regulations	Establishment	New
Project 1	Assistance Dog Trainer Addition	Unit	New	Instructing handlers on how to use dogs specifically as a mental health tool	Establishment	New
Project 2	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Marketing strategy to advise animal owners/clients on how to prepare to evacuate pets		New
Project 2	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Database co-ordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to access database • Not only require database on animals but where animal facilities are located. 		New
Project 2	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Pre-planning for disaster emergencies.		New

Project number	Project name	Qualification/ unit / skill set	Code	Title	Details of last review (endorsement date, nature of update transition, review, establishment)	Change required
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Risk Assessment – Preparing for all tasks using a risk approach to ensure safety.		New
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Animal training required for services eg RSPCA, & AWL volunteers, Red Cross, evac centre personnel		New
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Setting up evacuation centres		New
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Communication skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaising with emotionally distraught owners, • contacting and getting instructions for councils, and other government departments who oversee these emergencies DPI, Local Land Services etc in NSW. 		New

Project number	Project name	Qualification/ unit / skill set	Code	Title	Details of last review (endorsement date, nature of update transition, review, establishment)	Change required
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Tracking of animals in and out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scanning microchips etc • Record keeping 		New
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Managing volunteers		New

Project number	Project name	Qualification/ unit / skill set	Code	Title	Details of last review (endorsement date, nature of update transition, review, establishment)	Change required
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Managing animals in the evacuation centres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separating species etc • Managing animal behaviour in stress situations • Identifying and coordinating what outside services are required eg private veterinarians • Animal first aid 		
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Post disaster management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning animals back to owners • Are there suitable environments for pets to go back to owners • What to do if owners are not in a position to have their pets come back to them. <i>{Consider ACMAIM305 - Carry out casualty and post-rescue management of animals}</i>		

Project number	Project name	Qualification/ unit / skill set	Code	Title	Details of last review (endorsement date, nature of update transition, review, establishment)	Change required
Project 2:	Companion Animal Incident Management	Unit		Resilience – Caring for self in times of emergency where both mental and physical fatigue are highly likely and probable <i>{Consider ACMGEN304 Promote positive wellbeing in self and others in animal care workplaces}</i>		