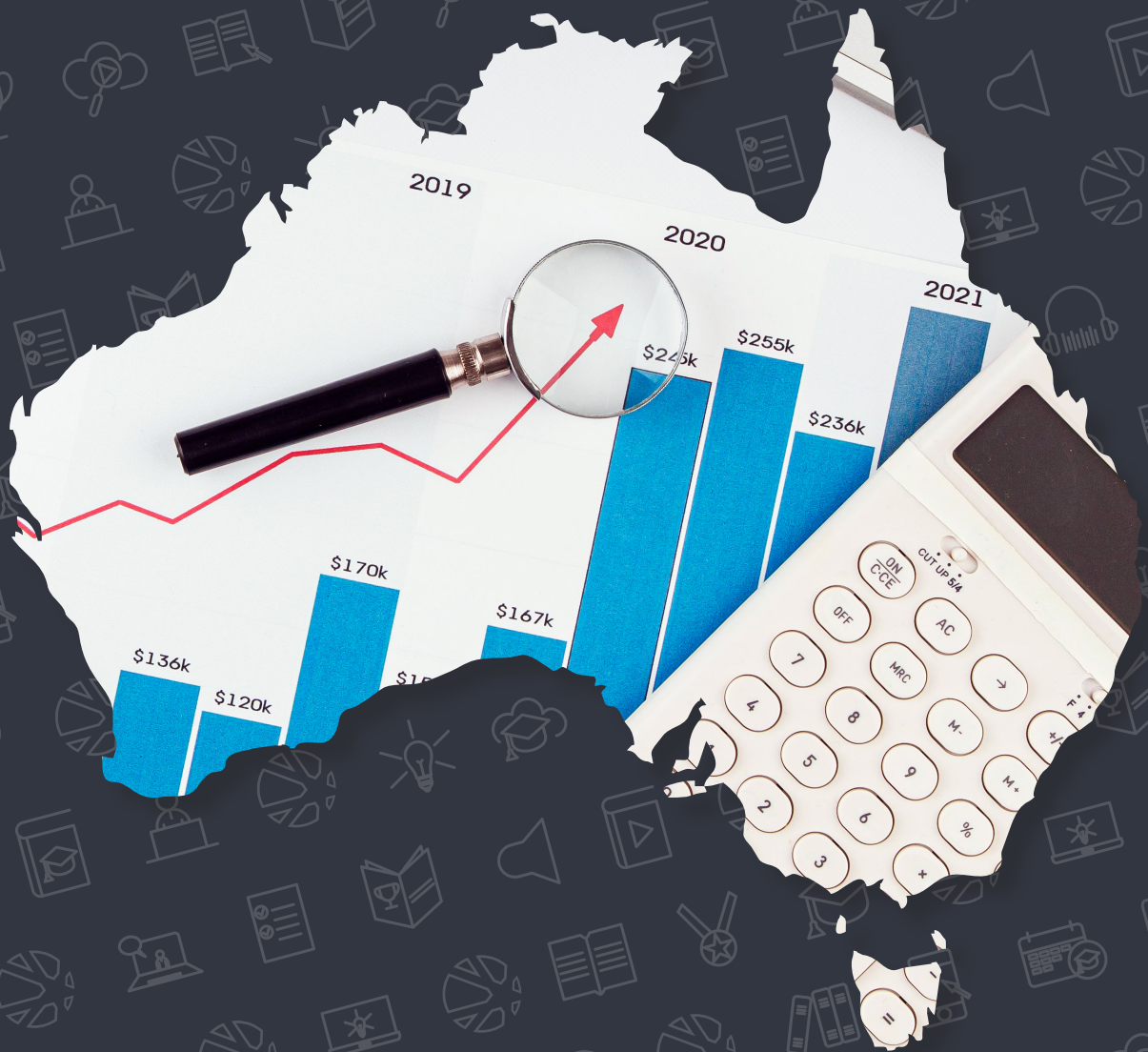


COVID-19 Impact On Higher & Vocational Education in Australia



Student success starts with
Learning Relationship Management

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A Note from Our CEO

It's been challenging times for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) with providers having to adapt their businesses to deal with both the health impact of COVID-19 and government policy responses aimed at containing it.

The Australian education and training industry, experienced **revenue drops of over 45%**. Moreover government support and subsidies have been given finite termination dates, all compounded by stresses around business sustainability. With this backdrop Wisenet decided to take a closer look at the impact of the pandemic on RTOs.

We invited a select number of members of the Australian vocational education industry to take part anonymously in our survey -The Covid-19 Impact on Higher & Vocational Education.

This was no ordinary survey as the scale on which we conducted it is unprecedented at Wisenet and Adapt IT Australasia.

Cheers!



Ben Hamilton

Wisenet: CEO & Co-Founder

Survey Objectives



To determine **how RTOs compare** to other providers in the industry.



To use as a cross-sectional **benchmark of the industry** as a reference point for future surveys

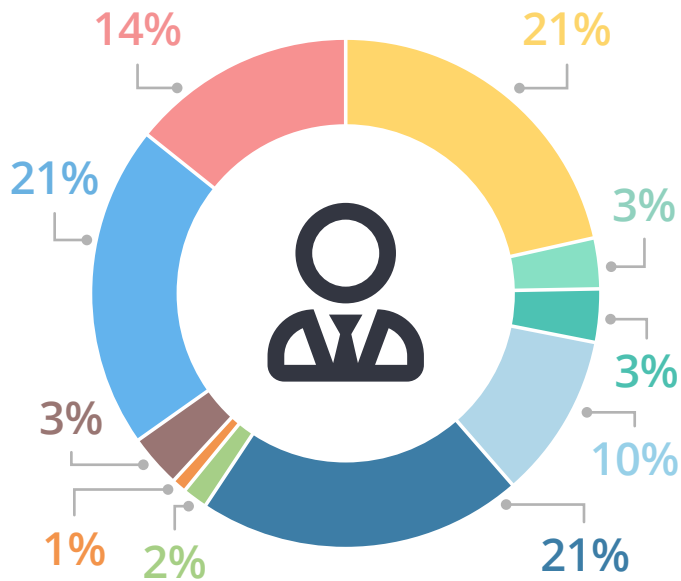


To use the data to **advocate on behalf of the industry** to government and regulatory authorities.

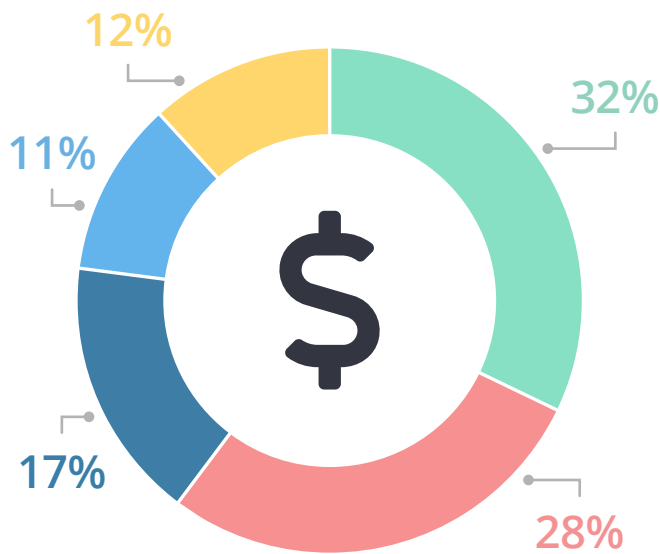


To help RTOs and individuals **plan and assist the industry** to come out of the other side of the pandemic in better shape.

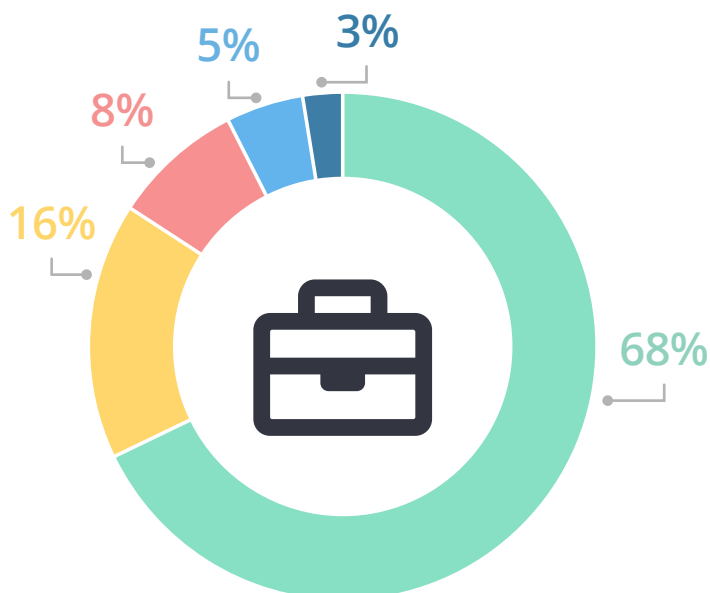
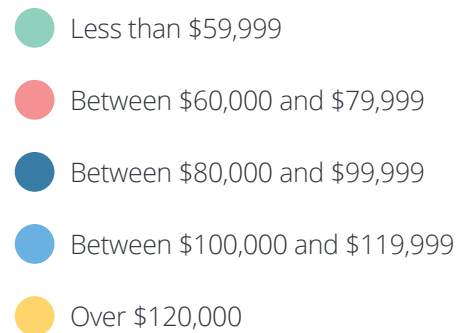
The Sample



RESPONDENTS BY ROLE



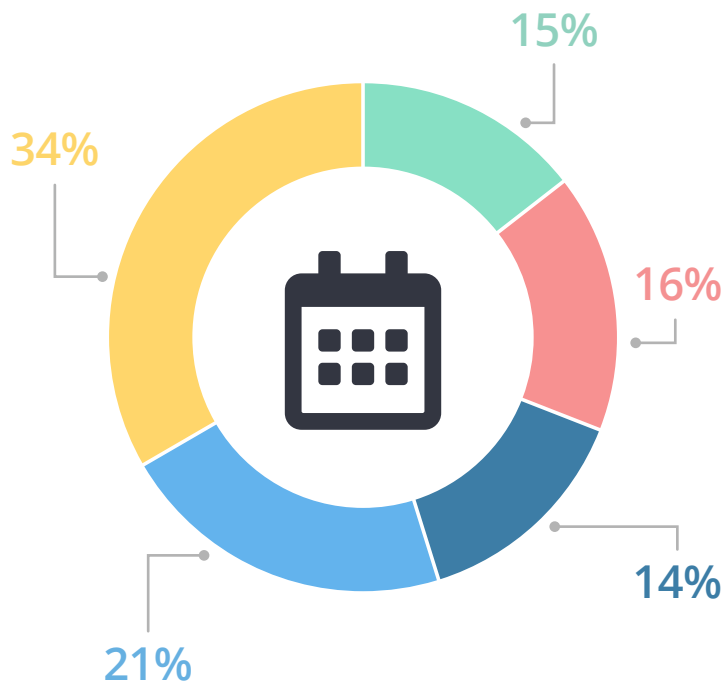
RESPONDENTS BY INCOME STATUS



RESPONDENTS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

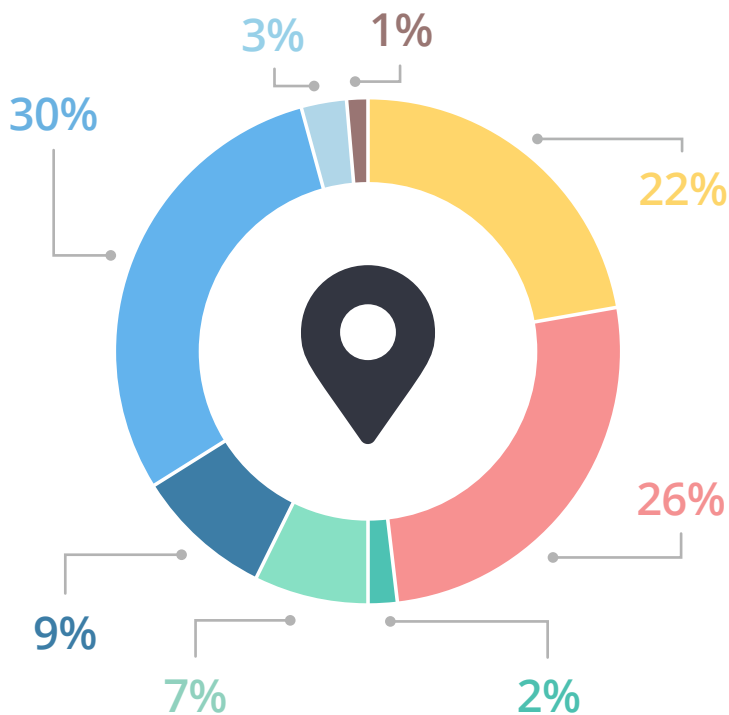


The Sample



RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

- Less than 2 years
- Between 2 and 5 years
- Between 5 and 10 years
- Between 10 and 15 years
- More than 15 years



RESPONDENTS BY STATE

- New South Wales
- Queensland
- Northern Territory
- Western Australia
- South Australia
- Victoria
- ACT
- Tasmania

Summary of Combined Responses

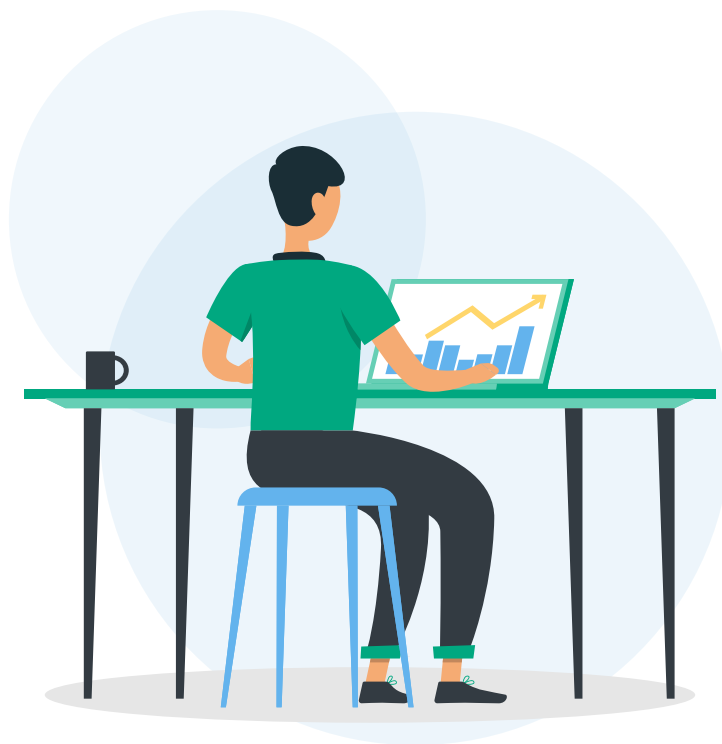
Most respondents are long term employees of RTOs with 54% having worked in the field for more than a decade. However, 60% earn less than \$80,000 of which 68% are full time employees.

The biggest impact on providers was reduced enrolments, 57% of the total sample reported they were down whilst 68% of CEOs and GMs said they were down - which may be a more reliable indicator given the information available to them.

78% of staff were asked to work from home, with 48% saying that this created work life balance issues including **mental health issues**.



Check out our supported initiative **R U OK?**, there are many tools and techniques available to assist you, your staff, and learners to know more about the signs & when it's time to ask R U OK?



61% said that working from home was the best thing about their RTOs response to the pandemic with the same percentage saying not commuting was the reason why, with 46% identifying fewer work interruptions as the second highest benefit.

40% reported changing government guidelines as the second most difficult aspect of adapting to the pandemic.

61% also gave credit to the leadership team of their RTO for managing the adaptation, with 58% identifying support from colleagues as the next most important factor.

64% of GMs and CEOs said their organisation accessed JobKeeper payments, whilst 52% of the wider sample that were not management thought that they did. 66% of respondents supported government policy responses to the pandemic - which is a high level of support in a political context.



How to ask R U OK?

Simple steps that could change a life

54% reported performing better than expected although 20% of CEOs said their organisation's position was precarious once JobKeeper was removed.

48% of CEOs nominated the **shift to remote delivery** as the most positive difference in their delivery approach. 42% experienced a shortage of work placements. 31% identified student's lack of ability to access remote learning as a key drawback to expanded online delivery.



TIP

Get your **eLearning Environment** set-up so that you're prepared for various modes of course delivery.

Despite this 68% nominated an effective online delivery strategy as the most important focus area for future use of technology. Another 40% identified the benefits of **workflow automation**. To support this 60% wanted their trainers to have greater skills in the use of technology and 56% wanted their technology to better enable remote learning.



TIP

Get things done quickly and with more accuracy: program and automate processes based on your RTO's real-time student lifecycle events. Use **Learncycle Workflows** in your own fashion to create unique control over your data, administration, and reports.

The professional development priorities were noted to be "moving to a fully digital environment" which had 53% support from all respondents but 69% support from CEOs, followed by 46% support for an **innovation mindset** (although interestingly only 28% of CEOs rated this as a priority).



TIP

Not sure where to start? Here are **five critical action points** that will help you to successfully emerge from the pandemic.

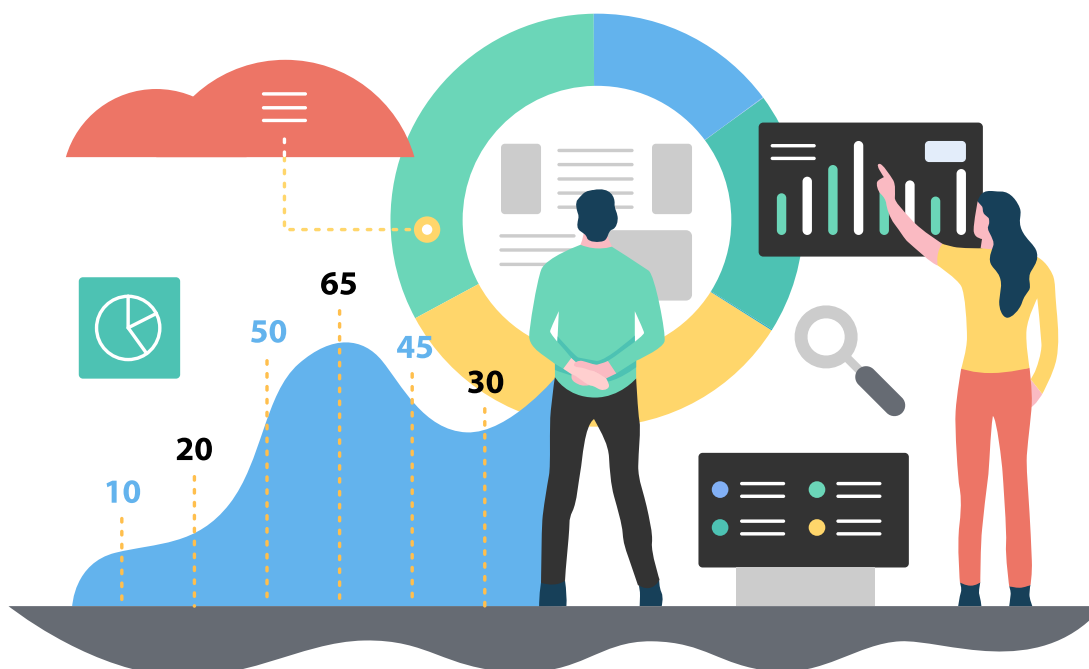
The consistently highest-ranking results for the Student Information System was that it helped track student progress - 61% and helped with compliance - 58%.

In terms of future government support, 68% identified a strong economic recovery as the best strategy for governments to follow, with 62% identifying health measures that prevent future waves of the virus. Anticipated reliance on stimulus measures scored much lower.

Only 33% of respondents anticipated offering the JobTrainer courses. This perhaps reflects the percentage of providers eligible to operate in contestable markets.

A similar 33% thought they would have continuing problems accessing work placements in the year ahead. To overcome this, 46% identified the expansion of simulated work environments and 40% said they would extend the course delivery time to rotate students through available work placements.

When the pandemic is over 75% of respondents attested that would like to continue working from home. With the average preferred split being 3 days at home and 2 days at work.



Trainers and Assessors



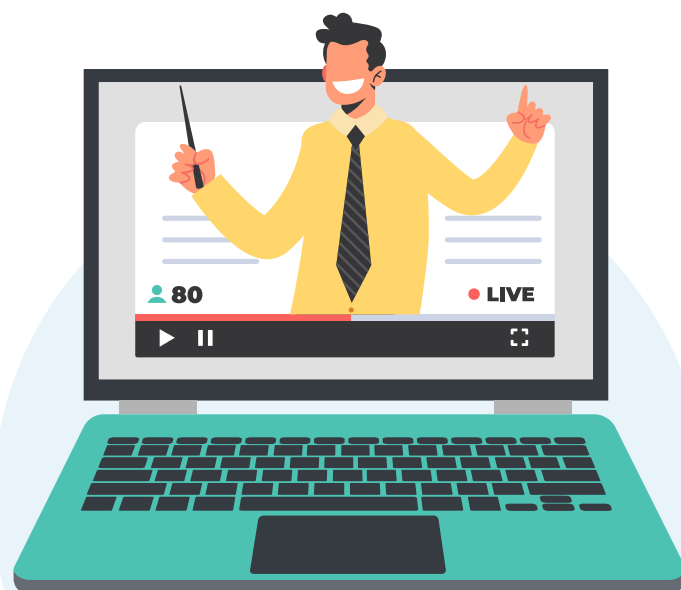
Almost a quarter of responses to the survey were by Trainers and Assessors. Most respondents were full time (55%) with 13% part time and 29% casuals or contractors. Total earnings for Trainers and Assessors were comparatively low with 73% earning less than \$80,000, perhaps reflecting the sessional nature of the work. 63% of Trainers have worked in the industry for more than 5 years.

Only 47% of Trainers reported a reduction in enrolments this year by comparison to the CEO group, 68% of whom said enrolments were down. Both positions could be true given that respondents were potentially reporting on different companies, but it's a large discrepancy none-the-less, perhaps reflecting that Trainers and Assessors may not have a full overview of the enrolments across the company, or that Trainers in courses with no enrolments did not respond to the survey because they are now less attached to their RTO.

74% of Trainers and Assessors have been required to work from home this year, reflecting the move to remote "COVID-19 safe" delivery. 71% reported that it was the best thing their RTO has done to adapt to Covid-19 with 44% saying the switch to remote delivery was the second most positive adaptation. The things that Trainers most enjoyed about working from home was not having to commute (58%) and having fewer interruptions (43%).

The biggest downside to adapting to COVID-19 is reported to be the achievement of a work life balance (47%), rapidly changing government guidelines (33%) and physical health and safety (31%). These will be primary considerations for those RTOs that continue to allow staff to work from home after the COVID-19 is finished. 78% of Trainers would like to do so with most identifying 3 days working at home and 2 days in the training facility as their preferred mix.

Trainers reported that 57% of courses were best suited to remote delivery whilst CEOs thought 48% of courses were well suited to remote delivery. Allowing for sampling discrepancies this means that around 50% of courses are probably not suitable for remote delivery.



Trainers reported that a lack of work placements had the biggest impact on students learning during COVID-19, although there was an even spread across all other factors. However, 73% of trainers thought there would be enough work placements in the year ahead, perhaps reflecting an easing of lockdown measures across Australia.

Trainers and Assessors are relatively optimistic about the future with 67% reporting that their RTO is performing better than expected, and 42% saying they are optimistic that school leavers will be well prepared to enter tertiary study, with 33% identifying that additional support may be required for these students.

Given the move to deliver many courses remotely, 71% of Trainers and Assessors identified technology that could deliver an effective online learning strategy as the highest priority. This was followed by 34% identifying workflow automation to reduce time on repetitive tasks. 57% are seeking professional development to further their technology skills, another 57% support technology that will better enable remote learning whilst 52% said technology could be used to improve the digital literacy skills of students.

Trainers were supportive of government measures to respond to COVID-19 with 67% saying the government's role now is to ensure a strong economic recovery and 60% identify stopping future waves of the pandemic as a priority. Similarly, Trainers were positive about the support they had received from their RTO to adapt to COVID-19 with 63% valuing the support of their colleagues and 49% the effective guidance of their leadership team as the most important factors.



Overall Trainers and Assessor responses indicated they are:



Optimistic about the future



Pleased with how their RTO has responded to COVID-19



Happy to continue to work from home with the right support



Focused on improving the online learning environment for students



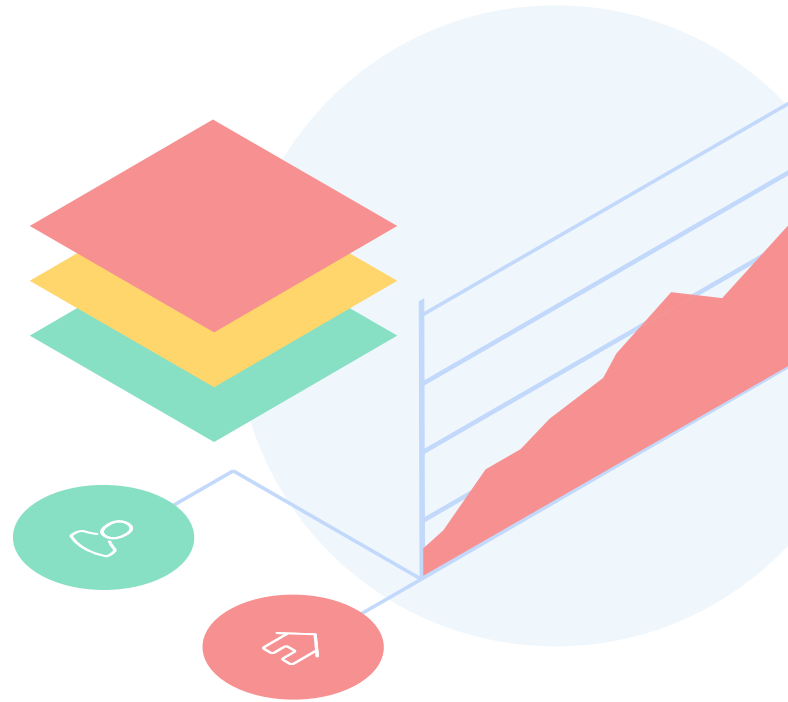
Keen to learn how technology can help them improve their practice

Administrators

A quarter of the survey respondents described themselves as Administrators. 88% earned less than \$80k and 90% are on recurrent contracts. 56% of Administrators have worked in the industry for less than 5 years.

Like the CEO group, 68% of Administrators said that enrolments had dropped in their RTO. A further 68% said they had been required to work from home. 63% said that not commuting was the best part of working from home with 44% nominating fewer interruptions as a major positive.

39% would like to return to the office full time after COVID-19 compared with only 22% of Trainers and 19% of CEOs. Administrators nominated rapidly changing government guidelines as the most difficult part of adapting to COVID-19 with 53% saying this was the biggest impact followed by 47% saying that achieving a work life balance became harder.



39% of Administrators nominated a richer online learning environment as the most important role for improved technology, with an even spread amongst all other factors. Streamlining repetitive tasks and better capturing compliance data ranked lowest with 16% each perhaps implying that their technology already largely achieves these functions.

Lack of work placements (53%) and students falling behind (34%) were nominated as the two biggest impacts on students during the pandemic, with social distancing and international border closures identified as the government policies that had the biggest negative impact on the RTO.

Enabling staff to work from home (60%) optimising the use of technology (42%) and moving to remote delivery (42%) were the top three strategies that assisted their RTO to respond to COVID-19. Accessing JobKeeper payments (40%) came a narrow fourth. Administrators said their leadership team and their colleagues were equally supportive (61% each) in adapting to COVID-19 which seems to bode well for a positive workplace culture.



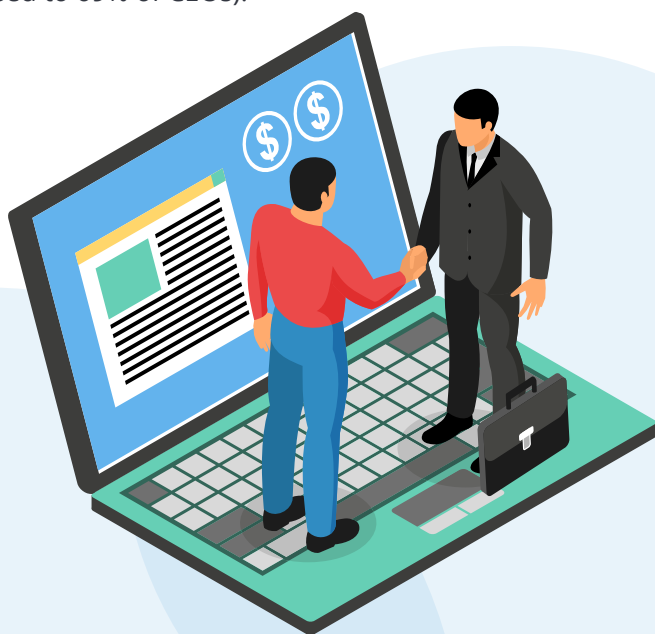
Administrators are quite optimistic with half saying their RTO is performing better than expected a step lower than the 67% of Trainers and Assessors. Whilst 89% of Administrators nominated technology that enabled an effective online strategy as the highest priority for the future. 46% of administrators also said that workflow automation should be a future technology priority.

Despite 60% of administrator organisations being in receipt of JobKeeper payments only 21% nominated extending them as the best form of government support in the future. Instead, 80% said the government's role should be to stop future waves of the pandemic and avoid lockdowns.

When it came to further technology improvements 65% of administrators would like to see Trainers develop greater technology skills - perhaps reflecting the different priorities for data integrity between the two groups. 59% nominated better enabled remote learning as the second future technology priority. Administrators thought exactly half of courses were best suited to remote learning, a median point between the Trainer and CEO groups.

Administrators thought students would need more assistance to complete years 11 and 12 (41%) and additional support for school leavers (30%) with only 18% saying they were optimistic about school leavers preparedness. This compared with 42% of Trainers being optimistic.

In terms of professional development 47% of administrators would like to develop an innovation mindset (compared with only 28% of CEOs). 38% of administrators felt that operating in a fully digital environment was their second highest priority (as opposed to 69% of CEOs).



Overall administrator responses indicated that:



They were supportive of the way their RTO had adapted



Were equally positive about the leadership team and colleagues' support



Were more pessimistic about the preparedness of students than the Trainers



Were twice as likely to want to return to work full time as their colleagues



But enjoyed not commuting and having less interruptions whilst working from home

CEOs and General Managers

About a quarter of survey respondents were either CEOs or General Managers. This group were mostly (84%) employed full time and most frequently earned over \$120k. 8% were contractors perhaps indicating an interim or locum role. 68% had more than 15 years industry experience.

69% said enrolments had reduced since COVID-19 and that this had the biggest impact on their business due to the resulting decline in income. 71% were required to work from home with 53% nominating not commuting as the most positive upside followed by 47% who enjoyed not being interrupted as much.

This group found rapidly changing government guidelines (49%) and a lack of online learning expertise (40%) as the two main challenges they faced. Whilst 36% said the pandemic impacted on their work life balance. CEOs thought improved technology would assist them create a richer online learning environment (38%) and provide faster bandwidth (31%) with all the other benefits of technology scoring equally.

With regards to students, this group saw the stop-start nature of lockdowns as the biggest challenge (36%) with a lack of work placements (33%) also having a large impact. This was reflected in perceptions of negative government policy impacts which were nominated as lockdown arrangements on client businesses (49%) and social distancing restrictions (37%).



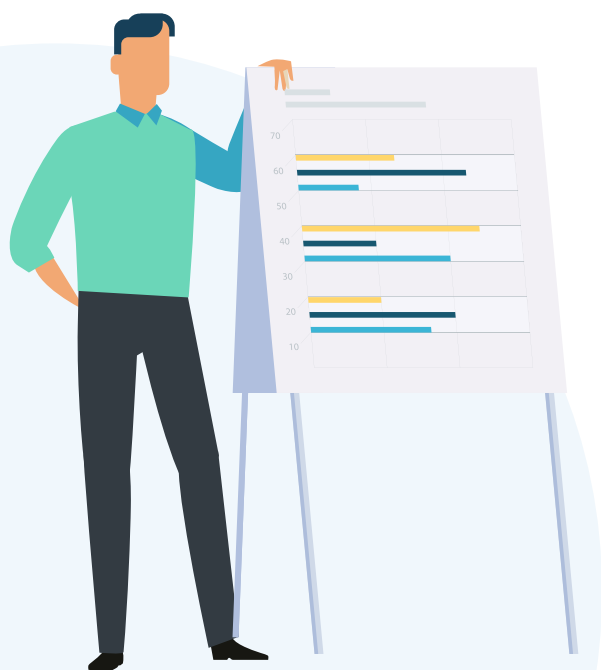
A feature of the CEO and GM responses is a relatively even response rate across many variables in the survey which perhaps reflects a nuanced perception of the interrelated factors at play.

They did nominate accessing JobKeeper payments (58%) as the best adaptation strategy with enabling staff to work from home and moving to remote training (38%), as equally weighted secondary success factors.

They also nominated the actions of their leadership team as the most effective support strategy for their staff. At 65% it was marginally higher than the rating achieved from administrators (61%) and significantly higher than the 49% rating trainers assigned to them. CEOs said support from colleagues was the second most important factor at 44%, significantly lower than the administrators and trainers who rated colleague support in the 60's. This is an interesting divergence worthy of further research by CEOs.

Similarly, only 49% of CEOs think their RTO is performing better than expected which is significantly lower than the other groups. 51% of CEOs say they will need ongoing government support or will be in a precarious position when JobKeeper is removed.

But interestingly, 69% say a strong economic recovery is the best way in which governments can assist followed by 55% nominating avoiding future waves of the virus. But 43% of CEOs would like JobKeeper to be further extended.



Only 36% of CEOs plan to access JobTrainer funding with 0% thinking that the additional JobKeeper enrolments will see them through. This is a startling finding given that JobTrainer increases total Vocational Education and Training (VET) funding by almost 20% and accounts for 340,000 funded places. This could reflect the way JobTrainer places are being rolled out through existing preferred providers in each state and territory. As well as the fact that very few places had come on stream at the time of the survey. Perhaps views will change as the funding starts to flow. But currently JobTrainer is not viewed as a lifeline by RTOs whereas JobKeeper is identified as very important.

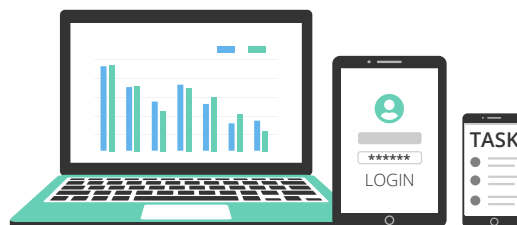
In terms of the way technology can assist in adapting to COVID-19 54% of CEOs thought that an online learning strategy was essential followed by 44% that identified reporting and statutory compliance. 50% want to help trainers develop greater technology skills while 48% want improved digital literacy for students and better enabled remote learning. CEOs thought that 48% of courses were best suited to remote delivery, much lower than trainers and assessors.

43% are optimistic that school leavers were prepared for further study with 31% saying they would need additional support.

In one of the few outlier results 69% of CEOs highlighted operating in a fully digital environment as the professional development priority for their RTO. This may reflect the need to catch up on the pace of change that has occurred this year.

38% thought work placements would be difficult to come by in the year ahead, with 45% planning to expand simulated work environments as a primary response.

81% of CEOs want to continue to work from home for part of the time, with most wanting 3 days at home office and 2 days in the office. This is a higher percentage than trainers and much higher than administrators.



Overall, the CEO and General Managers responses were characterised by:



A much more even spread of responses to most questions indicating perhaps a more nuanced understanding of the factors at play



A detailed appreciation of the financial impacts of COVID-19 on their businesses and the support required to recover from it



Low planned uptake of JobTrainer places



A priority on compliance with requirements and standards



A recognition of the benefits of working from home for themselves and presumably for their staff.



Professional development to catch up with the changes that had to be made to respond to COVID-19

Correlation with wider business sentiment - Ai Group surveys

In September 87% of businesses reported negative impacts from COVID-19. The most frequently reported impact every month has been a sharp drop in customer demand. This tapered off somewhat in July and August but rose again in September with Victoria's 'second wave' of COVID-19 cases and restrictions.

Innes Willox, Ai Group's Chief Executive said: "The restrictions on activity in Victoria was the second most cited impact with 21% of businesses nationally identifying this factor. As would be expected, the Victorian restrictions were most severe in Victoria but were also a major factor for NSW businesses. In Victoria, the inability to visit their own or their customers' work sites was identified by close to half of businesses (47%) as a major impact.

"Across the country the proportion of businesses pointing to improved business conditions was dragged lower for a second month by the experience of Victorian businesses."

"Reflecting these responses, businesses identified that easing activity restrictions and easing border restriction as the steps that would most assist businesses manage through the crisis. Lifting activity and border restrictions were both ranked ahead of financial assistance as measures that would be of greatest value to businesses in their management of the crisis."

Ai Group's Report Business Experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic: March to September 2020 is [available here](#).

There's Always an Opportunity in a Crisis

Here's five ways you can future proof your RTO

Thousands of RTO's have trusted Wisenet for over two decades and we can help you too! We have put together resources that have kept us afloat in these difficult conditions and we want you to do the same!



Kickstart your Online Learning Strategy



Have Your Website Up and Running



Be 100% Cybersecurity Savvy.



Keep Everyone in the Loop with Voice & Video



Keep in the Know with Powerful Survey Tools



Tell me more!

About Wisenet

Established in 1997, Wisenet is the market leader in cloud applications for the vocational training sector in the APAC region.

With over 3 million records under management and over 5,000 users, Wisenet's integrated cloud platform is designed to help training organisations manage risk and reputation, reduce business costs, and grow revenues.

Wisenet was acquired by Adapt IT (JSE:ADI) in 2019 and has offices in Australia, Singapore, New Zealand and South Africa.

About Adapt IT

Adapt IT is a leader in the ICT market through the provision of specialised software solutions to the Education, Manufacturing, Energy, Financial Services, Communications and Hospitality sectors, employing over 1,000 technology professionals and servicing more than 1,000 customers in 53 countries.

The company is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE:ADI). Adapt IT has offices in South Africa, Mauritius, Botswana, Ireland, Kenya, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore.

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