



MEDIA RELEASE

Retail sector facing major labour shortage – National Skills Week

Over 40,000 retail positions remain unfilled

9 August 2022 . National Skills Week Chairman Brian Wexham has pointed out a major labour shortage in the retail sector is making it harder for this large employer to flourish and provide the quality service experiences expected by today's customers.

Mr Wexham said: "Australian retailers simply can't find enough staff be they back of house, frontline roles or more specialist positions in digital and other high-tech products. There were 40,300 vacant positions in retail trade in May, which was up 38.5 percent compared to February. The national popularity of online shopping has not reduced demand for retail workers at bricks and mortar stores.

"The retail sector continues to advocate for mobilising more mature age workers and pensioners into the workforce. They also want accelerated training solutions and less immigration red tape to get more skilled foreign workers and international students into the country. The importance of childcare measures to help increase the participation of parents with young children has also been raised with government."

Public health experts agree that COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns were absolutely the right response to slow the spread of the virus over the last two years. However, lockdowns have also caused significant labour dislocation, particularly for casuals. The connection with a large part of the retail and hospitality workforce has also been lost due to the stop-start economic activity surrounding lockdowns (*Source: Australian Chamber of Commerce Position Paper, March 2022*).

According to Paul Zahra, CEO Australian Retailers Association (ARA) the shortfall in people available to fill retail positions will require ongoing effort to change over the next few years.

"The labour shortages are putting a handbrake on business, and hence, retailers are not trading at their full potential. The impacts are that many small retailers are not opening every day and are limiting their trading hours, while at larger retailers, we're seeing services affected with longer queue times during peak periods.

There are practical measures the government could adopt, which include a doubling of the amount pensioners can earn before their pension payments are affected, which would mobilise a willing and able cohort of workers to help address the staffing shortfall.

Businesses are also constrained by the lack of skilled foreign workers coming into the country along with international students, which have always supplemented the Australian workforce. We'd like to see reduced red tape around immigration so we can streamline the process for foreign workers and attract more people into the country.

At the same time, we need to connect more young Australians to a career in retail . something the ARA is doing through the Retail Institute . our registered training organisation. Retail is one of the most exciting and diverse career paths, offering a wide range of roles from sales and customer service to sustainability and digital roles. Highlighting retail as a career is a key focus of our efforts as part of National Skills Week.

Now moving into its twelfth year, National Skills Week 2022 is being held this year, August 22 to 28, inviting Australians to explore the Universe of Skills on offer through Vocational Education and Training.

A key objective of National Skills Week is to identify and highlight industries with the most in-demand jobs of the future as well as sectors forecast to see the biggest growth in coming years, to ensure Australians can gain the training and education they need to secure those jobs and maintain stable long-term employment.

Mr Wexham said it is critical that school leavers, job seekers, parents and career changers are informed of what the jobs of the future are, and what Australia's most critical skills shortages and jobs needs are.

This will ensure our young people, yet to start careers, can gain training and skills in education which is going to secure them a job at the end of that training.

Further, it will assist in funnelling Australia's labour market into the training opportunities which are most likely going to lead to their employment ie the most in-demand jobs of the future.

Held annually, the vision of **National Skills Week** is to raise awareness on the diversity of careers which can be realised through vocational education and training, the skills for an economically viable future, and the incredible range of new jobs and skills in demand for the future.

This year's Week will be centred around the theme of **A Universe of Skills** encouraging people to go beyond their imagination to discover careers, pathways and opportunities in skills and Vocational Education that they may not know about, thought about or even imagined.

National Skills Week plays a pivotal role in strengthening and communicating the key messages of industry and government in an environment shaped by the fluid nature of skills requirements and ever-evolving technologies,+said Mr Wexham.

This initiative is designed to achieve real, transformative outcomes for Australian people . to inspire people to undertake active, participative education and training that VET provides resulting in skills that can realise immediate rewards in jobs, success and contribute to building our economy.+

All you need to know about National Skills Week 2022:

When:	August 22-28 2022
Purpose:	To raise awareness of the myriad of rewarding, lucrative and prestigious career pathways available via vocational education and training
Key message:	A skilled workforce leads to an employed workforce.
Theme:	‘A Universe of Skills: Go beyond your imagination. Discover careers, pathways and opportunities in skills and Vocational Education that you may not know about, thought about or even imagined.

Interview options / talent:

Capital has access to a wide range of Government leaders, CEOs of industry bodies and organisations across industries facing the biggest skills shortages (healthcare, manufacturing, construction etc) as well as more than 15 VET Alumni from all parts of the country who have completed VET courses and won awards.

National Skills Week Chairman Brian Wexham is also available for interviews upon request.

For further information, visit nationalskillsweek.com.au

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