

Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry Reference Committee

The Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) commissioned the [Future Skills and Training Resource](#) which summarises data on current and future Australian and international megatrends, to support Industry Reference Committees (IRCs) in developing their Industry Skills Forecasts and Proposed Schedules of Work.

Future Skills Workshop Outcomes

The following trends and considerations are based on Textiles, Clothing and Footwear IRC discussions. This document presents the preliminary thinking of IRC members in order to stimulate broad discussion in industry.

The IRC welcome feedback in developing the Industry Skills Forecast.



Society and Culture

The key trends affecting the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry are:

Global Mobility: This trend is affecting the industry currently. The industry is steadily declining as labour moves offshore. Employers are struggling to fill current positions in general sewing, furnishing and preparation of specialised textiles. This will be further compounded by recent changes to 457 visa arrangements, which no longer assist employers seeking experienced overseas workers to fill labour gaps in Australia.

Many Australian workers consolidate their skills overseas, particularly around supply chain. Australia's SME environment results in workers having good versatility and understanding of different sectors.

Ageing Population: This trend will impact the industry within the next five years. Much of the industry's skills and knowledge is embedded in workers now in their 60s and 70s. Industry expertise and specific technical skill sets and knowledge are disappearing; there is no funded pipeline for new entrants to the industry. Ageing business owners are limited by not having successors and having to close their businesses.

Changing Work and Career Values: This trend will impact the industry within the next ten years. Careers advice on different sectors within the manufacturing industry needs to be improved as many perceive it as a 'declining' industry with limited future work opportunities; however, younger tech-savvy generations continue to buy, use and sell fashion.

Many new industry entrants are self-taught and undertake sporadic skills development through a do-it-yourself approach, accessing bites of training as needed via online or short courses (accredited and unaccredited). The result is that people are continually re-learning skills and specific industry skills like sewing, cutting and pattern making are dying out.

Business and Economics

The key trends affecting the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry are:

Changing Workplace Dynamics (Now): This trend is affecting the industry currently. Job roles are becoming more fragmented and less specialised; one person now provides a quote and project-manages the whole supply chain, outsources all or part of the production and, in some cases, coordinates the implementation. SMEs are subcontracting much of the local production but losing any influence over training these workers/contractors.

Changing Workplace Dynamics is linked to **Start-up thinking** and **Workforce vulnerability**. Increased pressures related to having to work across the supply chain has decreased work-life balance, with many skilled workers (the experienced doers) moving to new industries.

Behavioural Economics and Psychology/Empowered Customers: This trend will impact the industry within the next three years. Consumer behaviour is driving product demand, resulting in 'fast fashion'. The industry is grappling with how to respond and service the market. Consumers seeking serviceability are demanding a more hands-on approach with regard to designing their pieces and accessing end-to-end ability to repair and alter. Consumer behaviour is showing signs of shifting from owning to renting outfits.

Technologically advanced textiles for medical applications is another emerging market.

These changes have a polarising effect on the industry with the need for skilled workers in both bespoke manufacturing and large-run production skills.

Skills Mismatch: The training package qualifications in fashion design are focused on setting up their own label and do not currently include other key areas such as production or leadership skills. A tension within the qualifications exists as it's difficult to focus on both craft and production skills and employment or self-employment.

Start-up Thinking: This trend will impact the industry over the next ten years. Many need to start up their own business as there are limited opportunities to work elsewhere. These small businesses find it difficult to attract investors as corporates are risk-averse to entering new markets or trialling different production models.

Technology

The key trends affecting the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry are:

Digitisation/Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR): The industry is beginning to embrace new technologies with virtual stores. Some local designers are now able to use holograms to showcase their design on international catwalks. The introduction of 3D printing reduces the need for labour in some instances.

Automation in the form of Programmable Logic Controllers and sensors to gain efficiencies and lower costs also has a significant impact on some sectors such as Laundry Operations with larger operations. Smaller operators often find it cost prohibitive to automate and are unable to keep up with larger businesses.

Cross-Disciplinary Science/Big data: Workers now need to understand mathematics, provenance, quality management, due diligence, fabric type, and customer fit to participate in the industry. Large retailers now use big data to predict what people want to buy. However, boutique retailers remain attractive to consumers as they're able to provide customer service and retail expertise in regard to garment and textile knowledge.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning: The industry could see onshoring of some production as labour inputs are reduced in favour of robots.

Resources and Environment

The key trends affecting the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry are:

Financial viability: The ability for SMEs (which dominate the industry) to innovate and adopt new practices and technologies is hampered due to costs.

Access to Quality Internet: The need to access high speed, reliable internet is essential for online collaboration, real-time ordering and online tracking of orders through the supply chain.

International Sustainability Action: Australian industry is behind the international community in regard to becoming a sustainable industry. Many of the initiatives in this area are driven by consumers' growing interest in ethical products. There are very few textile recyclers in Australia, and the industry is grappling with ethical sourcing and how to treat the various synthetics in clothing. An emerging issue will be how to recycle the wearable technologies.

For the dry cleaning sector, consumers and government are seeking corporate and social responsibility and ethical buying and trade waste disposal.

Climatic weather shifts provide opportunities for the industry, as textiles are often used in response to adverse events, such as cleaning up oil spills, creating new materials which won't be damaged in weather events, as well as having emergency housing or tents.

Political and Institutional

The key trends affecting the Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry are:

Innovation ahead of regulation: The industry needs to strengthen self-regulation and promotion of good practice in some areas and sectors with inconsistent licensing requirements; for example the installation of textile structures which includes sails or shades.

Political **Appetite for Reform:** There seems to be no political appetite to make it easier for SMEs to run successful operations in the industry.

Considerations for Training

Employers/Industry

Employers and industry (with assistance from government) need to work together to establish collaborative partnerships which:

- Promote the industry as an attractive opportunity for apprentices
- Share production technologies to increase skills base
- Offer workers opportunities to upskill and learn about different areas of the industry
- Retain experience in the industry.

Learners/Workers

For the DIY learners, ensure the core industry skills are articulated and available and provide options to add on skills as needed using Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Upskill experienced workers to become industry mentors.

Demand for lower-level qualifications will decline in favour of automated production needing technicians to maintain operations.

Government

Reduce the bureaucracy for small businesses to be able to take on apprentices. Many businesses outsource their production, and legislation prohibits putting on a subcontractor as an apprentice.

Consider utilising existing government training facilities to create 'makers' spaces where microbusinesses and communities can access industry equipment and learn to collaborate.

Education and Training

The lack of apprentices is also compounded by thin markets as not every state has access to suitable training. Many Registered Training Organisations race learners through qualifications and don't take the time to embed the necessary skills.

The companion volume should be looked at for opportunities to 'cross-pollinate' with other industry's skills or adding other skills or qualifications in other areas which support the technical trade.

Trainers need to be better equipped for delivering digital skills such as CAD, digital measuring and 3D design. These skills are key to encouraging new entrants and making industry roles a little more exciting.

By streamlining Recognition of Prior Learning processes for experienced workers, it will give them recognition, value their skills and knowledge and retain their skills.

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