Outdoor Sports and Recreation

HumanAbility

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The Australian Government has commissioned HumanAbility to undertake a review of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications within the outdoor recreation and leadership industry. This initiative aims to ensure that qualifications remain responsive to evolving industry needs and continue to support sector growth. These qualifications underpin the effective and safe delivery of activities across a range of settings, including national parks and purpose-built facilities. They are integral to workforce development, providing both staff and volunteers with the necessary competencies to meet current operational requirements and emerging challenges across the sector. HumanAbility conducts a functional analysis to identify the core competencies (knowledge, skills, and attributes) required for effective performance within a given occupational area. These insights are used to inform the design, structure, and content of qualifications and units of competency, ensuring that graduates are equipped with capabilities that are directly transferable to the workplace.

1.1 Design and purpose

Functional analysis is a methodological tool employed in the design and development of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications. It serves as a mechanism for aligning training products with the contemporary and anticipated demands of industry. By systematically investigating the essential tasks, responsibilities, and performance expectations associated with occupational roles, functional analysis ensures that training products remain relevant, purposeful, and reflective of real-world workplace requirements.

Specifically, it seeks to:

- analyse regulatory and workforce expectations to ensure qualifications support job readiness
- identify skill gaps in existing workforce and graduates
- map career progression pathways within the outdoor leadership sector, and across related industries
- apply evidence-based design principles to ensure qualifications remain relevant, adaptable, and responsive to future workforce needs identifying core functions that remain consistent across diverse settings and serve as the foundation for occupational competency regardless of environment
- analyse gaps, overlaps, and inconsistencies in training product design, with a view to improving coherence, reducing redundancy, and ensuring assessment practices are valid and meaningful
- explore the contexts in which functions occur, including geographical settings and diverse learner groups such as individuals, families, school cohorts, and community organisations, each requiring tailored communication, facilitation, and support strategies.
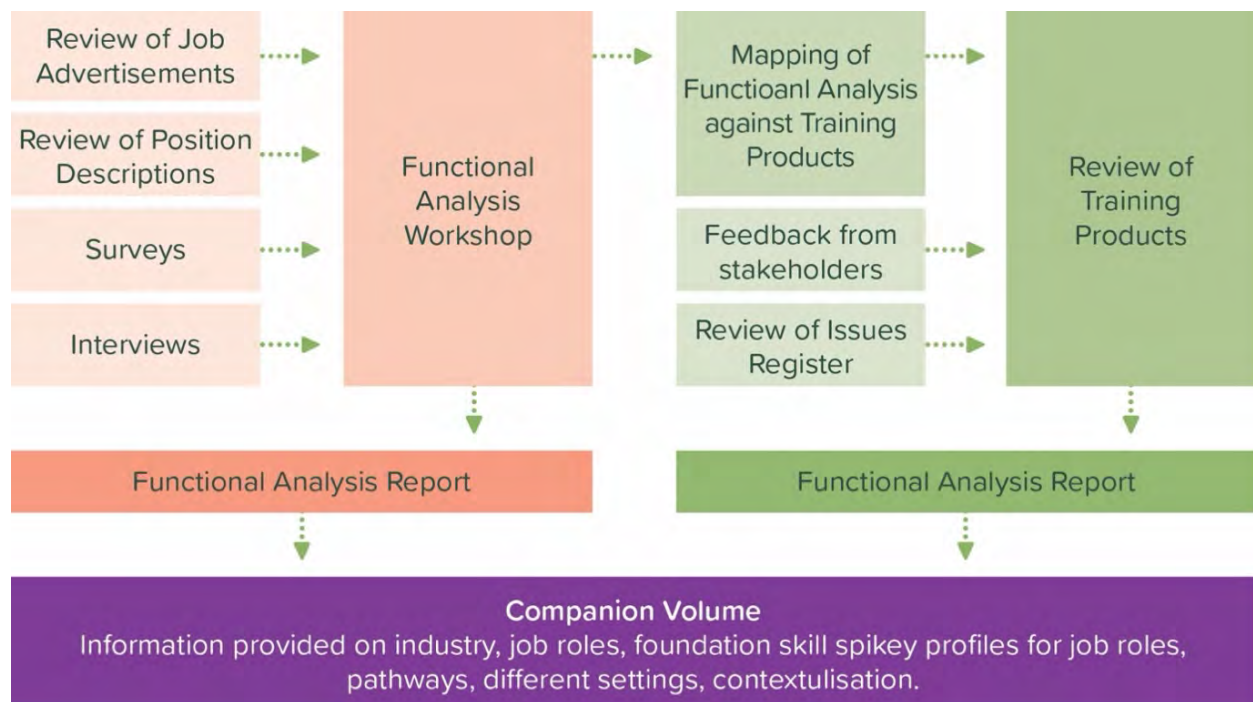
Image 1: The functional analysis process

Intended audience

This report is designed to communicate to industry stakeholders including, but not limited to:

- Skills Ministers, peak bodies, relevant government departments and industry associations
- The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)
- Industry representatives and stakeholders
- Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and VET professionals

Industry background

The outdoor leadership and recreation industry plays a vital role Australia's economy and contributes significantly to the health and wellbeing of its communities. Projections indicate continued growth over the next five years (IBISWorld, 2025). According to a 2018 report by SkillsIQ, the sector generates an estimated 16,000 to 30,000 full-time equivalent positions, contributing over $400 million to regional economies and approximately $11 billion to the national economy. Despite this substantial economic and social impact, the industry is confronted with persistent workforce challenges such as a shortage of skilled workers, and workforce casualisation, both of which contribute to reduced workforce stability (Blaer et al., 2024). Compounding these challenges is the misalignment between formal training and workplace expectations (Circelli et al., 2022).

1.2 Outdoor recreation and leadership qualifications

This review considers the following four qualifications.

SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation

This qualification provides individuals with the foundational skills required to support the delivery of recreational activities under direct supervision. It focuses on the development of basic activity techniques applicable to both indoor and outdoor environments. The SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation is commonly linked to entry-level roles such as outdoor adventure instructor assistant, recreation officer trainee, and widespread support staff in outdoor programs.

SIS30619 Certificate III in Outdoor Leadership

The SIS30619 Certificate III in Outdoor Leadership prepares individuals to supervise and lead participants in a range of outdoor recreational activities. Graduates are expected to demonstrate autonomy within defined parameters, operating in accordance with established plans, policies, and procedures. They are also required to respond adaptively to dynamic environmental conditions and participant needs. This qualification is associated with job roles such as outdoor adventure instructor, outdoor leadership instructor, outdoor activity leader, and outdoor recreation officer.

SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership

This qualification is designed for experienced practitioners responsible for planning, coordinating, and leading outdoor recreational activities with high autonomy. Graduates are equipped to operate in remote and challenging environments where communication may be limited, requiring them to make independent decisions related to activity planning, safety, and emergency response. The Certificate IV prepares individuals for advanced roles such as outdoor adventure instructor, outdoor leadership instructor, outdoor activity leader, group leader, and program manager.

SIS50421 Diploma of Outdoor Leadership

This qualification is designed to prepare senior leaders and managers to oversee the strategic and operational aspects of outdoor recreation programs. Graduates are equipped to lead complex activities, manage facilities and equipment, supervise personnel, and respond to diverse operational challenges. Core responsibilities include the planning, implementation, and evaluation of structured recreational programs. The qualification is typically aligned with advanced roles such as outdoor leadership program manager, senior outdoor leader, and operations manager. It is also commonly referenced in job advertisements for positions including coordinator, manager, director, and outdoor activity leader. The accompanying image illustrates patterns of qualification use and completion rates within the sector.

SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation
- Exploratory qualification
- Commonly school based & funded
- High enrolments & 30% completion
- Assisting level only

SIS30619 Certificate III in Outdoor Leadership
- Historically base level qualification
- Commonly used for traineeships & often funded 30% completion
- Meets employer needs with lead activities

SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership
- Considered by many to be a minimum requirement
- Lower enrolments but 50% completion
- Less RTOs delivering (compared to Cert III)

SIS50421 Diploma of Outdoor Leadership
- Closely matches Cert IV delivery
- Lower enrolments but 50% completion
- Intended as pathway into university

Image 2: Qualification usages

1.3 Preparing graduates for the workforce

Blaer et al. (2024) identified a critical shortage of graduates possessing essential core competencies such as facilitation, communication, and emotional intelligence. The study also revealed that graduates often enter the industry without adequate preparation for specialised domains, including risk management, adventure therapy, and environmental education. While many graduates demonstrate a general understanding of outdoor contexts, they frequently lack the technical expertise necessary for specialised roles such as marine-based activities, rafting, mountain biking, and high ropes operations (Blaer et al., 2024).

Workforce shortages and qualification gaps

A critical challenge facing the sector is the shortage of graduates holding a Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership. According to Blaer et al. (2024), 74% of employers report that they have trouble recruiting individuals with this qualification. Furthermore, completion rates across outdoor leadership qualifications remain low, raising concerns about the pipeline of suitably qualified professionals. In 2022, completions at the Certificate IV level accounted for only 21.6% of all Outdoor VET qualification completions, while Certificate III completions comprised 37.4%. These figures suggest that workforce shortages may be further compounded by limited attainment of higher-level qualifications. The following chart presents qualification completion data for the 2022 calendar year.
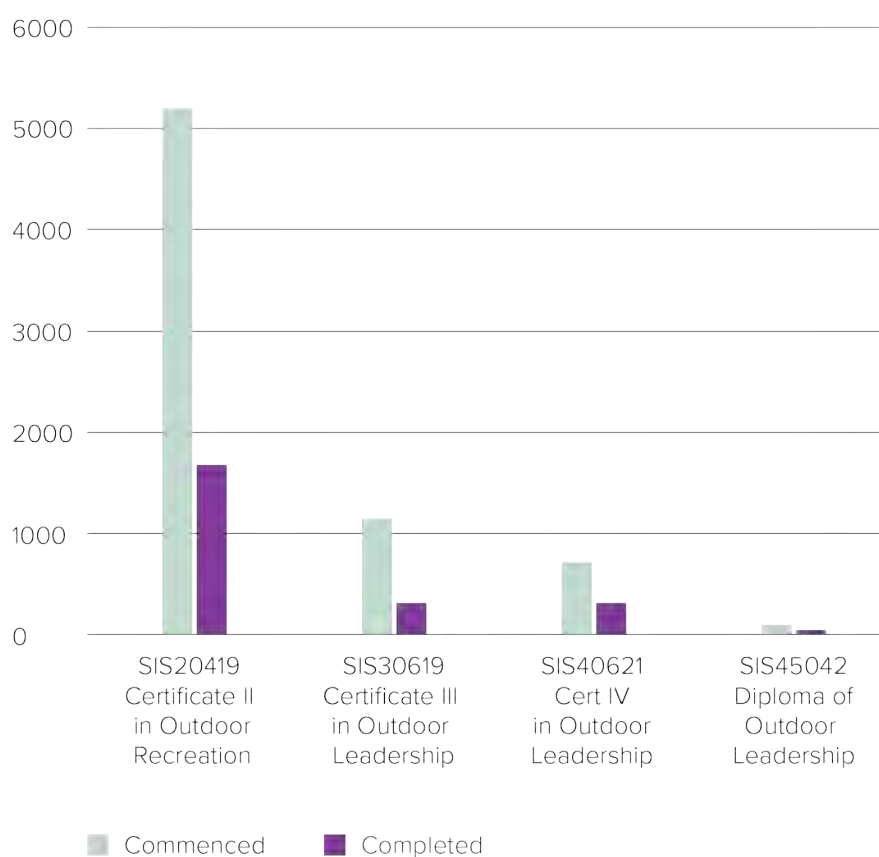
Chart 1: Total VET Students and Courses 2022 program enrolments and completions (NCVER)

Gaps in practical training and professional development

Stakeholders reported that many VET graduates lack confidence in applying their skills in real-world settings. This finding emphasises the need for students to engage in more on-the-job training prior to graduation. Blaer et al. (2024) also reported that many graduates are leaving the industry within the first 3 years due to limited professional development opportunities. Structured career pathways and ongoing professional development are essential for improving retention and ensuring workforce sustainability (Circelli et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2021).

The Australian Adventure Activity Standards (AAAS) and Good Practice Guides (GPGs)

The Australian Adventure Activity Standards (AAAS) and the accompanying Good Practice Guides (GPGs) serve to promote safety, consistency, and industry best practice across the outdoor leadership sector. These standards articulate core operational principles and outline requirements for specialised activity areas, thereby providing a cohesive framework for both service providers and participants. The AAAS and GPGs cover a broad range of activity groups, including abseiling and climbing (with bouldering), angling, bushwalking, camping, canyoning, caving, and challenge courses.
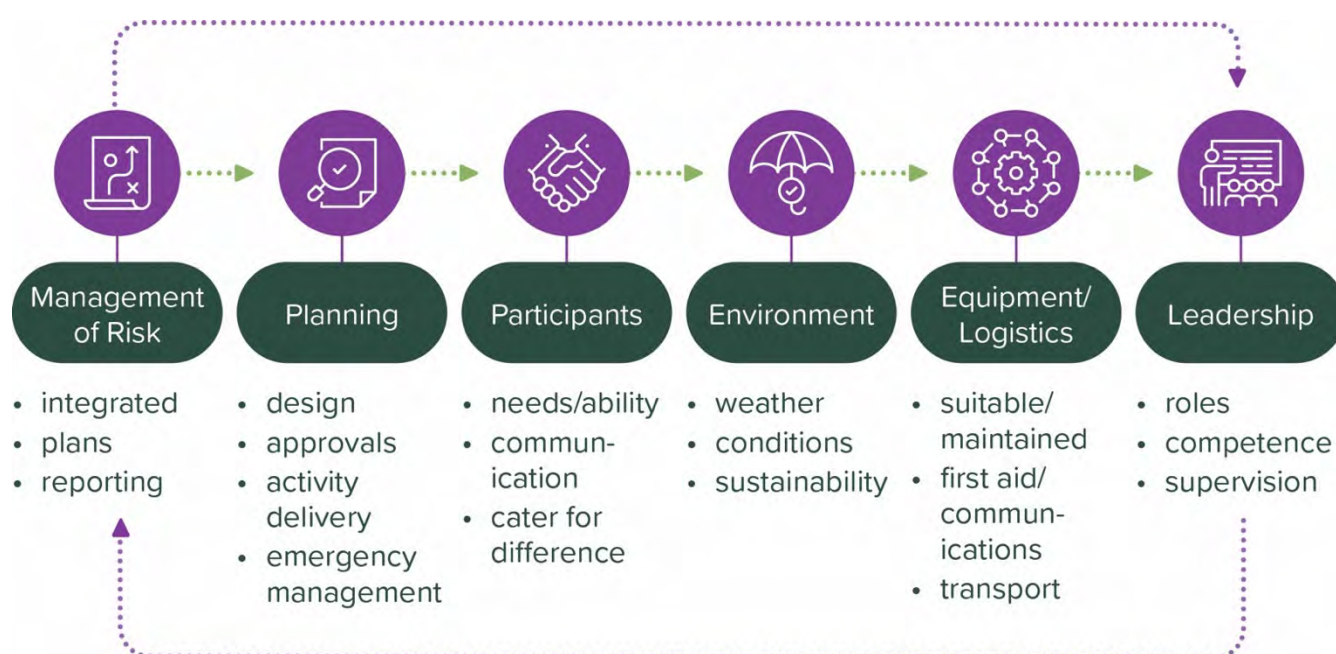
Image 3: Components within the AAAS framework

They also cover cycling disciplines, such as cycle touring and mountain biking, as well as paddlecraft activities conducted in enclosed and coastal waters. Additional activities include horse trail riding and snorkelling, reflecting the extensive scope of outdoor leadership practices in Australia. Widely regarded as a foundational reference across the sector, the AAAS is currently undergoing review. Ongoing coordination and information sharing between the AAAS review process and the review of this training product are critical to ensure alignment and sector-wide relevance. Image 3 illustrates the structural components of the AAAS framework and their interrelationships.

Interrelationships across the outdoor leadership industry

The outdoor leadership sector operates across a diverse range of industries and organisational types, including not-for-profit groups, community and faith-based organisations, government agencies, commercial enterprises, schools, peak bodies, and RTOs. These entities play a critical role in facilitating training, developing workforce capabilities, and delivering outdoor programs that promote adventure-based learning and support structured professional pathways. Outdoor recreation specialisations encompass multiple disciplines and intersect with a variety of sectors, such as tourism, sport, education, health, human services, emergency services, and volunteer initiatives. The competencies developed through outdoor leadership qualifications are highly transferable, fostering professional development and enabling cross-sector adaptability.

1.4 The VET qualification reform

The VET reform, as outlined in the Qualification Review Design Group Final Report (2024), introduces a qualification-first model grounded in purpose-led design, aiming to improve relevance, transferability, and learner outcomes across the sector. Key shifts include the integration of Application of Skills and Knowledge (ASK) units of competency, a move away from excessive unit-level prescription, and a commitment to streamlining qualifications. This new approach to VET qualification design includes seven Qualification Development Quality Principles that guide this review:

i. Qualifications and units of competency are informed by learners' needs and aspirations, enabling individuals to adapt to changing job roles and workplaces and transition across occupations and industries.

ii. Qualifications and units of competency are informed by industry needs and describe industry-relevant and future-oriented knowledge and skills that are adaptable to structural change.

iii. The application of skills and knowledge are considered in the design of qualifications and units of competency, providing coherent knowledge progression within qualifications, facilitating mobility within and across industries and between educational organisations and systems.

iv. Qualifications include an appropriate mix of technical and broader skills, including foundation, cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills.

v. Data and evidence underpin decisions relating to the development, update or maintenance of qualifications and units of competency.

vi. New or amended qualifications and units of competency do not duplicate other existing training products, except where a higher level of detail is required for licensing, high-risk, safety or regulatory reasons.

vii. Qualifications and Units of Competency are designed with an appropriate level of specificity that allows for flexible training and assessment, and minimises the need for frequent updates, except where a higher level of detail is required for licencing, high-risk, safety or regulatory reasons

Implications for the outdoor recreation and leadership qualification review

The VET reform introduces a qualification-first design approach, shifting the focus from discrete units to the development of coherent qualifications that align with occupational or cross-sectoral purposes. Central to this reform is the recognition of three distinct qualification purposes: occupation-specific, industry-aligned, and vocational/cross-sectoral. A key objective of the reform is the alignment of qualifications with learner progression, enabling clearer pathways from entry-level support roles through to autonomous leadership and management. This is particularly relevant in outdoor recreation, where repetition between units such as "assist," "lead," and "manage" has been identified as a barrier to efficient learning progression. The reform also promotes flexibility and mobility, enabling the development of qualifications that reflect real-world job roles and support transitions across sectors such as education, tourism, and community services. Finally, assessment reform aims to streamline requirements and eliminate duplication, encouraging holistic assessment approaches that reflect the integrated and dynamic nature of outdoor leadership. This reduces regulatory burden and supports the delivery of high-quality, relevant training experiences for learners and providers.

Chapter 2 Methodology

A functional analysis of outdoor leadership qualifications was conducted using a multi-method research approach, incorporating desktop research, online surveys, semi-structured interviews, and stakeholder workshops. This methodological framework was designed to ensure alignment between the training package and contemporary industry needs, while also addressing gaps in qualifications, units of competency, skill sets, pathway materials, and supporting documentation.

2.1 Desktop research

The desktop research involved a comprehensive three-month review of publicly available documents from October 2024 to December 2024. These included job advertisements, position descriptions, industry standards, and sector-specific reports, with key sources drawn from government bodies, industry associations, and academic institutions. Data were systematically captured and organised using spreadsheets to analyse trends in workforce needs, job role functions, and associated skills. This process enabled the identification of core functions, subfunctions, and performance expectations across a wide range of roles in outdoor recreation.

2.2 Surveys

Surveys were distributed online to industry stakeholders to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on training needs and workforce challenges. The survey instrument was disseminated via a QR code shared on the HumanAbility website and social media platforms, including LinkedIn. Respondents included employers, employees, RTOs, and volunteers. Survey findings were instrumental in validating patterns observed during desktop research and served as a comparative dataset to strengthen thematic insights. This method enabled broad engagement and captured views from across metropolitan, regional, and remote contexts.

2.3 Semi-structured interviews (employers and RTOs)

Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted online with stakeholders from every state and territory. Participants included employers, RTO representatives, and sector specialists from urban, regional, and remote areas. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and explored key themes such as recruitment challenges, skill gaps, program delivery contexts, and qualifications. These conversations provided a deeper understanding of performance expectations and operational realities.

Interview data were analysed using a categorised framework across the following themes: organisational structure, workforce composition, role responsibilities, required skills and competencies, existing qualifications, recruitment and retention strategies, safety and risk management practices, inclusion and accessibility initiatives, emerging trends, and sector-wide challenges. Further detail is available in Appendix C. Insights from these themes were used to identify areas for improvement and innovation within the training package.

2.4 Technical committee meeting

A technical committee meeting was convened to critically examine the preliminary findings and provide expert feedback on the proposed materials and discussion framework for the forthcoming functional analysis workshop. Contributions from this session were systematically documented, transcribed, and integrated into the subsequent analysis and discussion.

2.5 Functional analysis workshops

Additional data were gathered through structured workshops held with sector stakeholders. A face-to-face session was conducted at the National Outdoor Education Conference (NOEC) on 5 December 2024, complemented by student interviews and an online workshop held on 5 February 2024. These sessions validated earlier findings and facilitated the refinement of functional maps and core competency models. Appendix A summarises key findings related to job functions, subfunctions, performance expectations, and skill gaps. The analytic framework used for this thematic synthesis is detailed in Appendix B.

2.6 Stakeholder engagement overview

Stakeholder engagement was mapped across five dimensions: state/territory, respondent type, activity domain, business model, and client group. The following tables summarise participation:

Table 1a: Stakeholder engagement by state and territory

States and territories	Survey	Job ads	Employer & RTO interviews	Online workshop
NSW	21	24	5	4
VIC	23	21	3	9
QLD	7	13	3	8
SA	9	11	1	3
ACT	3	1	1	0
NT	2	4	1	1
TAS	3	1	0	1
WA	10	8	2	1

Table 1b: Stakeholder engagement by respondent type

Respondent type	Survey	Job ads	Employer & RTO interviews	Online workshop
Industry employer	40	102	14	12
Employee	n/a	n/a	0	12
Student/Trainee	n/a	n/a	n/a	2
RTO employer	10	0	4	3

Table 1c: Stakeholder engagement by activity domain

Activity domain	Survey	Job ads	Employer & RTO interviews
Rock and rope	30	77	9
Track and trail	26	80	13
Water-based activities	28	55	8
Challenge courses (incl. archery)	12	6	4
Indoor sports	0	2	1

Table 1d: Stakeholder engagement by business model

Business model	Survey	Job ads	Employer & RTO interviews
Hard top (site-based) organisations	15	45	3
Journey/expedition-based providers	10	28	12
School-based programs	6	12	13
Health and wellbeing providers	2	4	3
Activity specialisation providers	8	10	6
Tourism/leisure businesses	8	9	2
Providers that include an RTO	10	4	4

Table 1e: Stakeholder engagement by client group focus

Client group	Survey	Job ads	Employer & RTO interviews
School groups	35	45	13
Youth organisations	21	12	4
Community groups	11	8	6
Corporate teams	5	6	4
Adventure enthusiasts	9	8	2
Tourism/leisure	8	9	2
Wellbeing	2	4	3

This multi-stakeholder engagement strategy ensures that the revised training package reflects diverse workforce demands and prepares graduates for real-world roles across Australia's outdoor recreation and leadership sector.

Chapter 3 Findings and discussion

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of the Australian outdoor leadership and recreation sector, based on qualitative and quantitative data gathered from five sources: two functional analysis workshops; 16 semi-structured interviews with employers and RTOs; a survey of 50 industry representatives; a review of 105 job advertisements; and a stakeholder poll conducted at the 2024 National Outdoor Education Conference (NOEC). The data revealed key workforce needs, recruitment challenges, and role-specific competencies to inform the alignment of outdoor leadership qualifications with contemporary industry practices.

3.1 Sector overview and participation context

Sector identity: Values, diversity, and purpose

The outdoor recreation and leadership sector operates at the intersection of education, health, tourism, and community development. Its programs encompass a wide spectrum of delivery contexts, from school-based experiential learning and therapeutic interventions to remote expeditions and skill-specific training. As one program coordinator noted, "We work with school groups, NDIS clients, and international visitors: it's never one-size-fits-all".

This broad participant base necessitates a flexible, inclusive, and responsive approach to both program delivery and workforce development. Stakeholders explained that activities are designed to promote resilience, teamwork, leadership, and empathy through direct engagement with natural environments. They also reported that values underpin trust and cohesion within groups and are essential for fostering inclusive, ethical, and psychologically safe experiences. As one respondent explained, "We're trying to grow young people and make them better human beings… this is more than just a job for many of our staff."

Structural limitations and inequitable access

Despite its diverse strengths, the sector faces significant systemic barriers. One critical issue highlighted across interviews, surveys, and workshops was the unclear role of SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation in workforce development. Although commonly used to provide introductory exposure, stakeholders questioned its utility in preparing individuals for real-world roles. As one employer remarked, "It's not that the Cert II is bad; it's that we rely on it too much and expect too little from it."

Compounding this issue is the uneven geographic distribution of training opportunities. Interview and workshop data pointed to a widespread lack of RTO coverage in rural and remote regions. "There's no one offering Cert III near us. Our staff must drive hours just to attend a training block". Similarly, Interviews with two learners revealed that they needed to travel interstate to complete elements of their qualification due to limited access in their home state. This uneven access limits the development of skilled graduates and sustains ongoing workforce gaps in regional areas.

Casualisation, retention, and sector viability

Sustainability of the outdoor workforce emerged as a major theme across all five data sources. Document analysis and interview findings highlighted the sector's heavy reliance on a casualised employment model. Despite their strong commitment to the sector's values, many workers in the sector face persistent job insecurity and burnout: issues often overlooked because of their passion for the job. An outdoor instructor shared, "People burn out fast. It's hard to keep them when the pay is low and the hours are unpredictable".

In the absence of long-term contracts, professional development frameworks, or clear career pathways, many qualified staff leave the sector prematurely. As one camp director observed, "We invest in training, and then lose them". This ongoing loss of experienced personnel disrupts program continuity and compromises safety standards, particularly in contexts that demand advanced technical expertise, and the interpersonal skills needed for effective leadership.

Call for systemic cohesion and career pathways

Stakeholders called for more coherent pathways connecting school-based outdoor education, vocational qualifications, and university-level programs. This call was particularly strong in workshops and interviews, where the absence of recognised articulation routes between Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels was identified as a barrier to retention and advancement. "We need smoother transitions between TAFE and university". Moreover, survey and job advertisement analysis confirmed that employers are increasingly seeking candidates with mid- to high-level qualifications (Cert IV and above), yet relatively few training pathways exist to support progression from entry-level roles.

As one curriculum advisor observed, "There's no bridge, just a gap. If someone does a Cert II, there's no clear next step unless they already have connections". Many stakeholders proposed modular, stackable units, and embedded leadership skill sets as solutions to this gap. These structures would enable learners to build progressively on foundational qualifications and gain recognition for experience accrued in non-accredited roles. Integrating Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms and formalising industry placements or on-the-job learning opportunities were also viewed as essential to aligning qualifications with real-world job roles.

3.2 Workforce composition, job roles and career pathways

Workforce composition and seasonal dependency

The sector's employment structure depends on the availability of non-permanent staffing. Desktop analysis of 105 job advertisements revealed that 58% of all roles were offered as casual, part-time, or short-term contracts, while just 38% were full-time. This pattern reflects the sector's peak activity cycles, typically aligned with school terms, public holidays, and favourable seasonal weather. Outdoor programs such as bushwalking, canoeing, and snow-based activities are often viable for only 3 to 6 months of the year.

This reliance on seasonal contracts and short-term placements was reported across both workshops and interviews. While it allows for cost-effective scaling, it also introduces instability, particularly among early-career professionals who seek consistent hours or long-term prospects. As one site manager

noted, "We might triple our staff over the school holidays, but most of them disappear after summer, and we start again the next term." Stakeholders reported that casual employment, while often necessary, can lead to uneven skill development. Short contracts limit opportunities for staff to engage in structured professional growth, participate in post-program debriefs, or transition into supervisory roles. A training supervisor remarked, "We see really talented people each season, but they don't come back. There's no incentive to stay when the work ends in three months." Chart 2 demonstrates the sector's reliance on casual and seasonal employment. The chart illustrates how the structural volatility of program demand drives the need for flexible staffing models, which in turn affects workforce retention, and continuity in skill development.
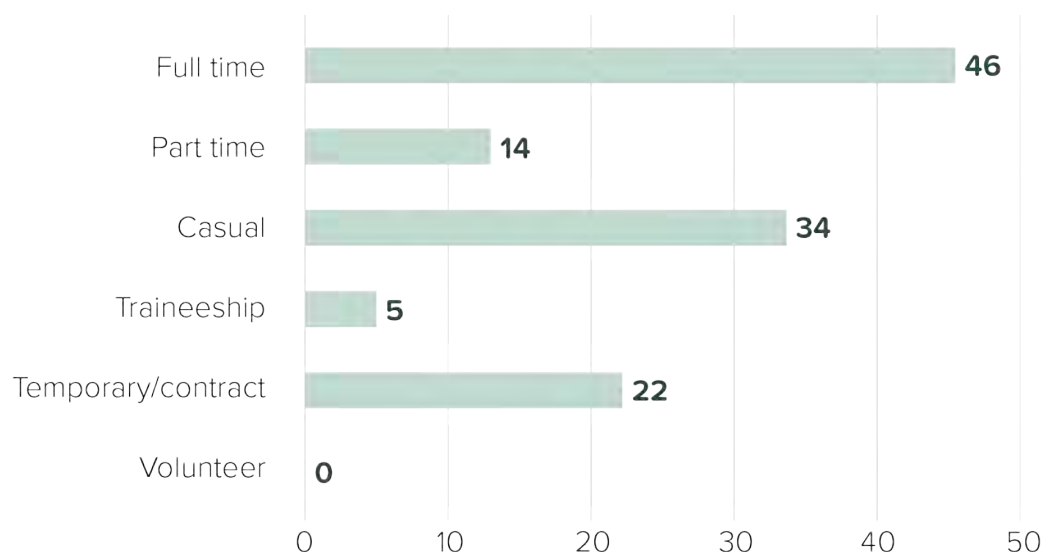

Chart 2: Demand for various employment types (multiple responses were enabled)

Career mapping and pathways

During functional analysis workshops, mapping was conducted of the career journey of workers across the sector. Participants were asked to identify the key skills required at various stages of a career pathway. This exercise provided valuable insights into the progression of competencies over time and highlighted potential areas for pre-employment training and the development of targeted skill sets. The findings are particularly relevant in this sector because qualification requirements vary significantly across activity domains, and employers have reported challenges associated with training and workforce preparedness. The identified career stages and the corresponding skill sets highlighted by participants are presented in Appendix A.

Mapping career stages in this way supports more coherent course sequencing. It also revealed that internal progression typically occurs in stages, from support roles to assistant instructor, then to lead instructor, senior leader, and coordinator. Many organisations described their internal development pathways that support career progression, including internships, traineeships, and mentoring programs. As shown in image 4, career progression in the sector is rarely linear. Individuals may enter the

workforce through internships, volunteering, or as junior assistants, progressing through structured or ad hoc pathways into senior technical, supervisory, or coordination roles.
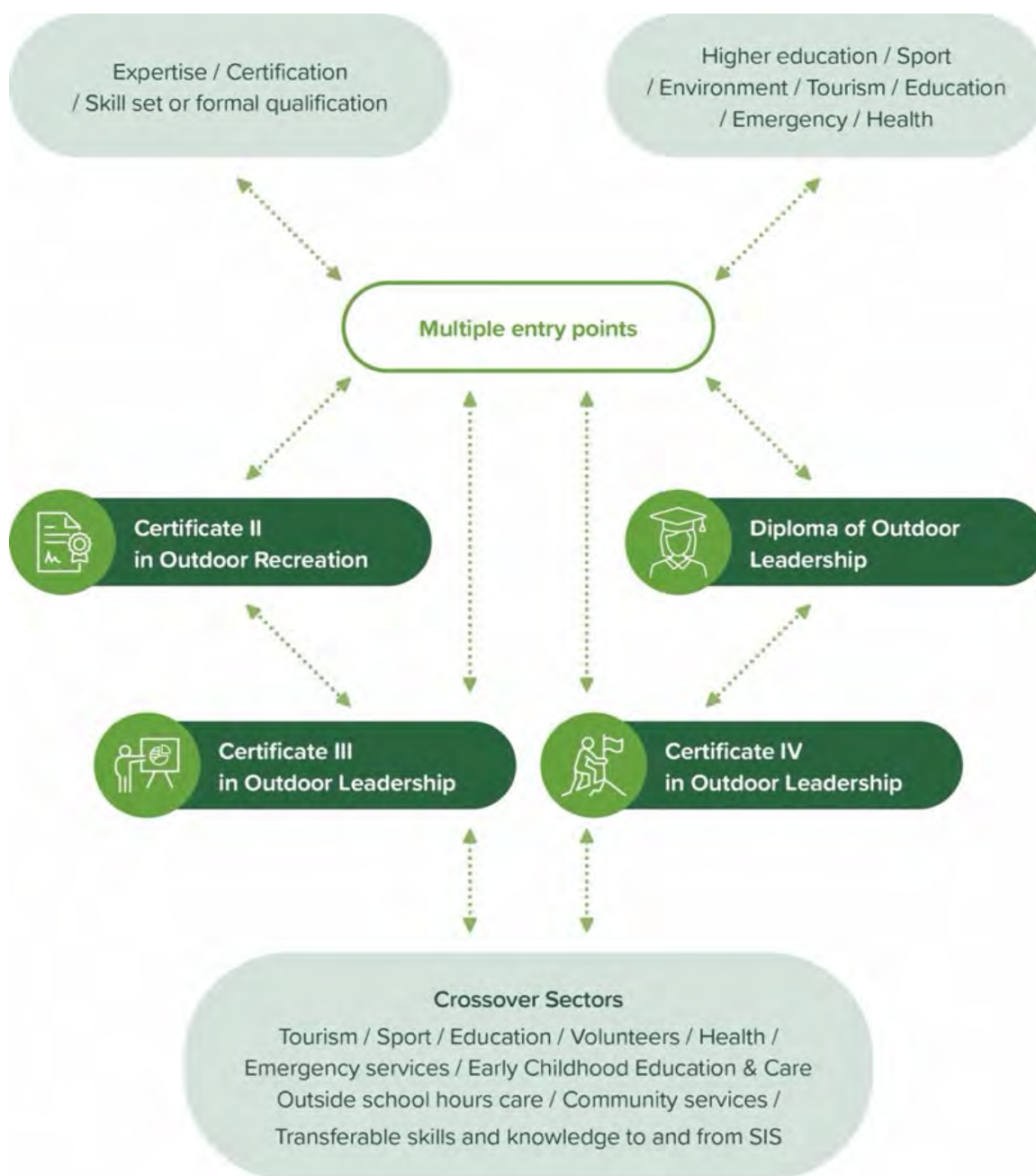

Image 4: Career progression pathways

Role variability across environments and business models

Career trajectories are influenced by environmental context, business model, and access to ongoing training. Chart 3 provides a breakdown of typical roles within the sector. These include both technical and facilitative functions, such as program managers, instructors, expedition leaders, logistics officers, maintenance staff, and trainers.

Chart 3: Job roles within outdoor leadership and recreation organisations

Stakeholders described how job roles varied according to the environmental setting and business model. In hard-top, site-based settings (e.g. school camps, retreats), staff tend to follow a structured timetable, deliver fixed-activity programs (e.g. archery, initiative games), and work within well-equipped, risk-controlled environments. In these settings, roles are more likely to include catering, administration, and facilities maintenance.

In contrast, soft-top or expedition-based environments (e.g. multi-day hikes, river trips, ski touring) demand higher levels of autonomy, technical proficiency, and contingency planning. Staff must demonstrate advanced navigation, weather interpretation, client support, and emergency response. These settings typically employ instructors, group leaders, or expedition coordinators with greater responsibility for decision-making and risk mitigation. As one expedition leader described: "When you're out there for five days, it's on you: navigation, safety, group morale. There's no one to call except a sat phone."

Business models also influence workforce structure. Not-for-profit organisations often operate year-round, delivering programs with educational, therapeutic, or community engagement aims. These

models may incorporate pastoral care, long-term mentoring, or integration with school curricula. Commercial adventure tourism operators, by contrast, tend to prioritise activity delivery efficiency, customer experience, and scalability.

As a program manager explained, "In our model, you need to know how to lead the trip and also sell the next one while you're still out there." This diversity creates pressure on training products to prepare graduates for different organisational cultures and client groups, ranging from adolescents in school-based settings to high-paying adult tour clients, and from NDIS participants to school groups.

Supporting roles and infrastructure

While outdoor instructors are highly visible, the success of programs depends on a broad range of behind-the-scenes roles. Site managers, logistics coordinators, kitchen staff, maintenance personnel, and administration teams play essential roles in ensuring that programs are safe, and well-resourced. However, these roles are frequently omitted from formal training discussions and competency frameworks. One logistics manager shared: "If we don't have gear in the right place at the right time, the whole trip falls apart. That's not a side job: it's the backbone." Supporting these functions with skill sets or micro-credentials could create alternative entry pathways for individuals who prefer non-facilitation roles.

Training demand and supply across qualification levels

An analysis of enrolment trends, delivery patterns, and employer preferences reveals a misalignment between qualification supply and sector demand. While lower-level qualifications are widely delivered, employer expectations increasingly favour more advanced credentials, exposing critical gaps in both RTO provision and student uptake. The following points summarise these insights using data from NCVER (2022) and training.gov.au.

SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation

- Comprises over 70% of student enrolments
- Delivered by approximately 40% of RTOs, often through school-based programs
- Valued for educational exposure rather than workforce readiness
- Only 10% of employers express demand for graduates at this level
- Indicates over-supply relative to limited employment relevance

SIS30619 Certificate III in Outdoor Leadership

- Preferred by 40% of employers based on survey and job advertisement data
- Enrolments remain modest (fewer than 20% of students)
- Offered by fewer than 30% of RTOs nationally
- Traineeships provide valuable practical pathways, yet uptake is constrained
- Employers often regard Certificate IV as more aligned with real job requirements

SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership

- Identified by over 50% of employers as the preferred qualification for employment
- Enrolments remain low (under 10%) despite high industry demand
- Delivery is limited, offered by fewer than 30% of RTOs, with pronounced regional disparities
- Represents a disconnect between labour market expectations and training system capacity
- Requires targeted expansion to address workforce readiness gaps.

SIS50421 Diploma of Outdoor Leadership

- Valued by over 50% of employers but rarely delivered by RTOs
- Primarily positioned as a pathway to higher education
- Limited evidence of effective transitions to tertiary study
- Role within the qualification hierarchy may need redefinition to align with both workforce and educational outcomes.

The data also shows that disparities in qualification delivery exist across states, particularly between Certificate II and Certificate IV courses. The Certificate II qualification has significantly higher enrolments than the Certificate IV. A discrepancy also exists between the number of RTOs approved to deliver Certificate IV courses and the number that offers them in practice. This suggests potential barriers in program implementation, which may limit accessibility to required qualifications.

3.3 Technical, foundational, and facilitation competencies

Effective practice in the outdoor leadership and recreation sector relies on staff having a mix of technical competence, interpersonal skills, and facilitation capability. While technical skills provide the foundation for activity safety and delivery, it is the foundational capacities, such as communication, empathy, and adaptive leadership, that determine the quality of the participant's experience and the sector's broader educational and social outcomes. Across all data sources, stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of robust technical skills for leading outdoor activities safely.

Technical aspects of activities include navigation, rope work, canoe/kayak handling, equipment setup, emergency procedures, and weather-based risk assessment. A site supervisor explained, "You need to know your environment and gear inside out. That's not just to deliver a good experience, it's to make sure no one gets hurt." Interview respondents frequently cited first aid, WHS, and remote area safety protocols as essential competencies. Employers noted that failure to meet these standards was a key reason for rejecting otherwise promising candidates. As one employer noted, "We can't put someone on a program if they're not certified to lead it, even if they're great with people."

Professional development

Respondents stressed the critical role of training and qualifications in ensuring competency and safety in outdoor programs. As one respondent stated, "Staff must have certifications like Wilderness First Aid and lead qualifications for specific activities." However, many reported persistent challenges in recruiting appropriately qualified personnel. To address these gaps, some organisations invest in internal upskilling programs, mentorship, and structured professional development. Ongoing training is used to maintain high standards and adapt to evolving safety protocols and program offerings. One employer noted, "We provide ongoing training to ensure staff meet our high standards." Collaboration with external training providers and educational institutions supports access to recognised and specialised qualifications.

Facilitation and adaptive leadership

The ability to facilitate meaningful group experiences emerged as a defining feature of outdoor leadership, distinguishing it from basic instruction or supervision. Stakeholders described facilitation as "the bridge between logistics and transformation," noting that it encompasses everything from setting group norms and supporting reflection to managing conflict and adjusting plans in response to group needs. An employer explained, "What we really want are leaders who can read a group and adjust, not just stick to a plan." This adaptability was linked to emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and a clear understanding of program purpose. It also requires critical judgement about when to intervene, when to step back, and how to balance safety with challenges. As one stakeholder shared, "We put applicants into a scenario and see how they manage the group: it tells us more than a certificate ever could."

Interpersonal and emotional competencies

Effective facilitation relies heavily on interpersonal skills. Empathy, active listening, group awareness, non-verbal communication, and humour were cited as essential qualities. These skills were especially important when working with vulnerable cohorts, such as youth at risk, individuals with disabilities, or trauma-affected participants. As one stakeholder summarised, "In outdoor programs, connection builds safety. If your group doesn't trust you, they won't follow you into the bush." Data from the NOEC poll reinforced this view. Graduates were rated lower on interpersonal interaction and communication than on technical competence or theoretical knowledge. Respondents recommended the integration of trauma-informed practice, mental health first aid, and inclusive communication strategies into outdoor leadership qualifications.
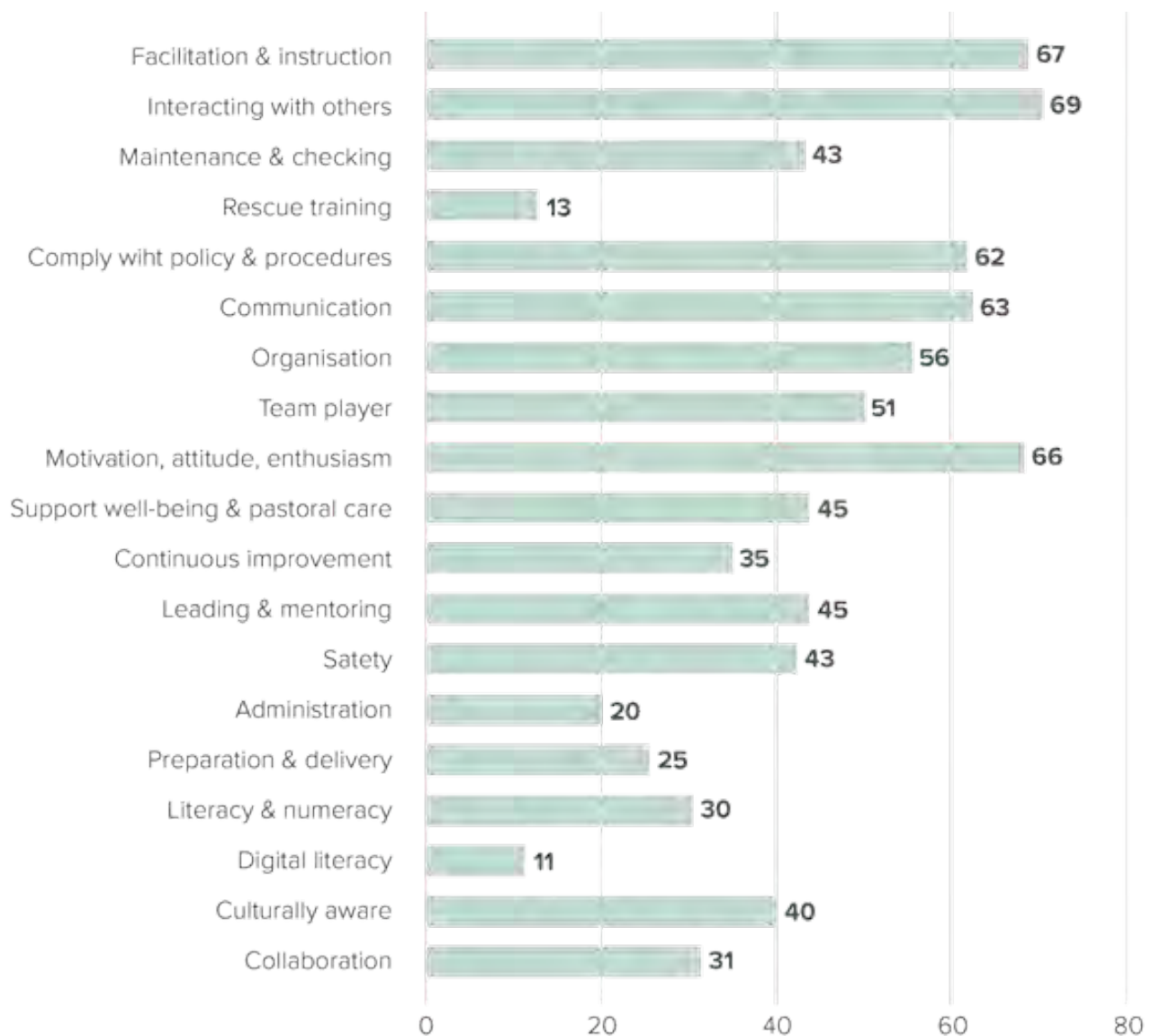
Chart 4: Skills and qualifications most frequently requested in outdoor recreation job advertisements

Chart 4 presents stakeholder perceptions of the most valued non-technical competencies within the outdoor recreation and leadership workforce. Across the dataset, motivation, attitude, and enthusiasm emerged as the most highly prioritised attribute, highlighting the significance of interpersonal disposition and engagement. As one stakeholder commented, "The question isn't whether it's bushwalking or canoeing. It's whether the leader can assess risk, hold space, and adapt in real time." Other leading attributes included interacting with others, communication, facilitation and instruction, all of which highlight the importance of relational and group-facing capabilities. Competencies such as organisation, teamwork, and supporting wellbeing and pastoral care were also frequently cited, reflecting the complex interpersonal dynamics of outdoor program delivery. In contrast, more administrative and technical skills received fewer mentions, suggesting that stakeholders perceive success in this sector to be more dependent on adaptive, people-centred attributes.

Integrating competencies across learning pathways

The survey and job advertisement data highlighted the key skills most frequently required for outdoor roles, organising them into three clear categories:

- Technical skills such as bushwalking, paddling, and climbing

- Regulatory and safety credentials including CPR, Working with Children Check (WWCC), and a driver's license with trailer endorsement

- Interpersonal and adaptive competencies like facilitation, communication, and emotional intelligence

Many stakeholders called for a more integrated approach to competency development. Rather than teaching technical, facilitative, and interpersonal skills in isolation, they advocated scenario-based training models that simulate real-world program delivery. During a workshop, one RTO representative proposed that "every graduate should finish with a portfolio of facilitation reflections, technical logbooks, and a real leadership case study."

3.4 Graduate readiness, recruitment, and workforce shortages

Stakeholders emphasised the mismatch between graduate capabilities and employer expectations, particularly with respect to applied leadership experience, soft skills, and regulatory readiness. These gaps contribute to a cycle of ineffective recruitment, high turnover, and ongoing skill shortages.

Perceptions of graduate readiness

Data derived from the poll conducted at the 2024 National Outdoor Education Conference (NOEC) shows how graduates were rated across four dimensions:

- Knowledge of outdoor recreation (mean score: 2.63/3)
- Readiness to assist with activities (2.63/3)
- Participant engagement and interaction (2.22/3)
- Depth of technical knowledge (1.74/3)

Data from both the NOEC poll and semi-structured interviews revealed mixed assessments of graduate preparedness. While most employers acknowledged that graduates possess a strong foundation in technical skills and a willingness to learn, there was concern about their ability to perform autonomously in dynamic environments or to lead groups with confidence. Survey outcomes (Chart 5) revealed the preferred skills sought by employers. The results indicate that while graduates are viewed as capable assistants, they lack the required depth of technical knowledge. One employer commented, "They know the names of knots, but they don't yet know when or why to use them in a pinch." Stakeholders attributed these gaps to compressed training timelines, with one stakeholder stating, "We're under pressure to qualify people fast, but deep learning takes time, especially when it comes to leadership and judgement."
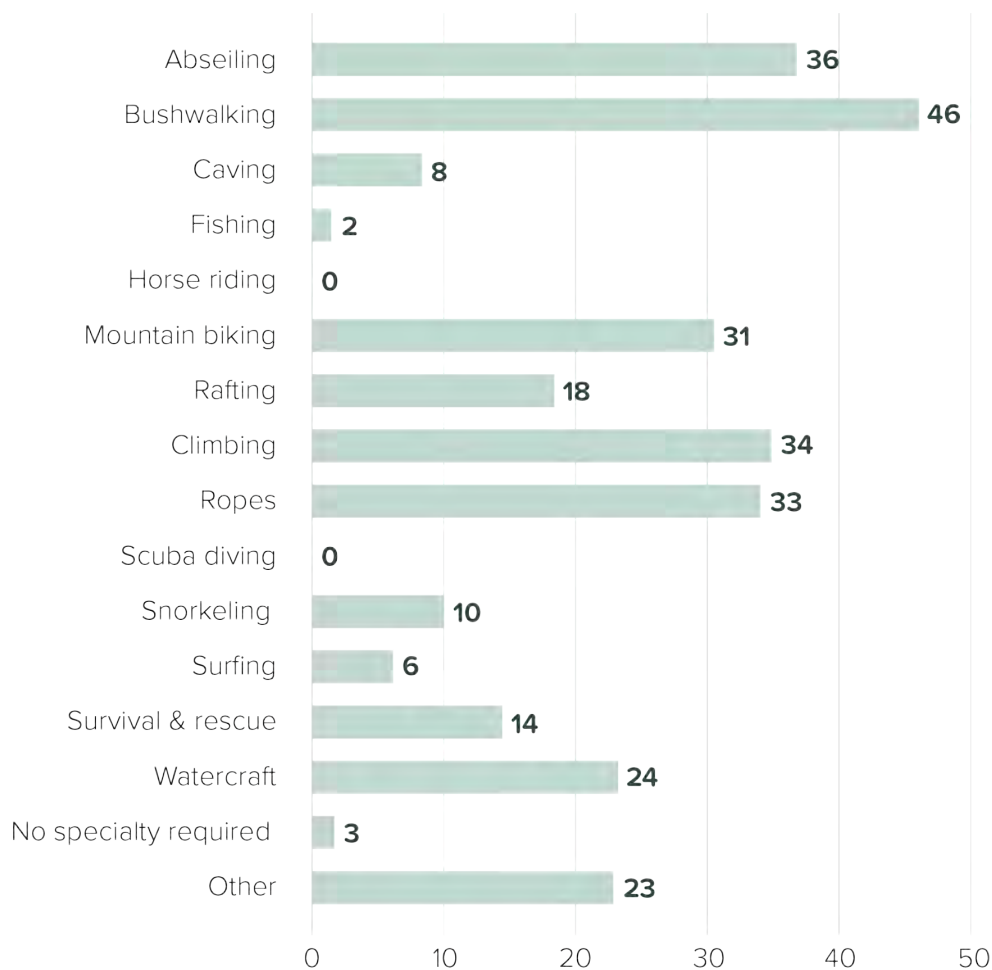
Chart 5: Frequency of preferred technical skills sought

3.5 Recruitment constraints and qualification alignment

A major theme emerging from interviews involved the difficulties experienced by employers in sourcing appropriately qualified staff. Employers reported receiving numerous applications from enthusiastic candidates who lacked the required certifications, such as wilderness first aid, surf rescue, or vertical rescue qualifications. One hiring manager stated, "For every job ad, I might get 40 applications, but I'm lucky if I get one who's fully qualified."

Several stakeholders highlighted that qualifications do not always reflect the operational realities of the sector. For example, an employer explained, "We often get Cert IV graduates who've never had to lead a group through a crisis or make real-time decisions in the field." This disconnect suggests that graduates need more exposure to authentic workplace experiences or simulations. Graduates require integrated opportunities to experience and develop leadership skills and knowledge in real-world situations. The absence of nationally standardised assessment of leadership capacity was also noted as a gap. One stakeholder suggested, "We need to assess leadership the same way we assess abseiling, through direct observation in real-world settings."

3.6 Implications for training and policy

These workforce challenges highlight a broader structural issue that demands coordinated responses across training, policy, and employment systems. Stakeholder discussions revealed that qualifications must embed real-world leadership experiences to ensure that graduates are not only technically competent but also prepared to manage group dynamics, safety, and decision-making in unpredictable outdoor environments. Additionally, traineeships and structured placements could be more effectively integrated into qualification pathways to provide learners with authentic workplace exposure and gradual responsibility development. Further, stronger collaboration between RTOs and employers should ensure that training content remains aligned with current and emerging workforce expectations.

An additional workforce challenge, discussed by stakeholders, is the shortage of experienced outdoor guides and leaders holding the TAE40122 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, a qualification essential for the effective training and assessment of new staff. This shortage highlights the sector's unique combination of technical, educational, and logistical demands, which require a multifaceted skill set not commonly found within the existing labour pool. Stakeholders reinforced that regionally, the absence of SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership delivery in Western Australia and the Northern Territory further limits the supply of qualified professionals in these areas.

3.7 Safety, risk management, and regulatory alignment

Safety remains the non-negotiable foundation of outdoor leadership. Across all data sources, functional analysis workshops, interviews, and stakeholder polls, there was clear consensus that high standards of risk management are essential for protecting participants, maintaining sector reputation, and meeting legal obligations. However, stakeholders also identified systemic inconsistencies in safety practices, regulatory interpretation, and training delivery that undermine workforce confidence and sector credibility.

Safety as a foundational principle

Stakeholders emphasised that safety is not merely about avoiding incidents; it is a core enabler of positive participant experiences, group trust, and professional legitimacy. One senior coordinator summarised this sentiment: "If a group doesn't feel safe, physically or psychologically, learning won't happen. Safety is the floor everything else stands on."

Safety protocols were described as encompassing multiple domains:

- Physical risk mitigation (e.g. equipment checks, environmental awareness, dynamic decision-making)
- Psychological safety (e.g. clear expectations, inclusive facilitation, conflict resolution)
- Behavioural safety (e.g. managing group dynamics, responding to escalations, trauma-informed care)
- Regulatory compliance (e.g. following Australian Adventure Activity Standards [AAAS])

Stakeholders agreed that effective outdoor leaders must demonstrate proactive, context-sensitive risk assessment, often under conditions of uncertainty. As one stakeholder from the online functional analysis workshop noted, "You need to plan, yes, but also adapt. Plans don't stop rivers from rising."

Regulatory compliance

Many stakeholders recommended implementing mandatory refresher training for all high-risk activities, ideally every three years, to ensure current practice is maintained. One organisation shared its internal model: "We run shadow shifts and rescue drills twice a year, more useful than paperwork when the real thing happens."

Most stakeholders reported formal alignment with AAAS and Good Practice Guides (GPG), using these as a baseline for operational policies. However, significant variability exists in how these standards are applied, interpreted, and audited across different regions and providers. As one regional provider explained, "Everyone says they follow AAAS, but how do we know? There's no consistent auditing. That's a risk in itself."

Risk management and leadership readiness

Risk management was also described as a key leadership indicator, requiring judgement, prioritisation, and ethical awareness. Leaders must evaluate not only immediate hazards but also group capacity, environmental context, and program goals. One employer commented, "We don't just want staff who can tick boxes. We want leaders who can make sound calls under pressure and justify them later."

Leadership was identified as a core differentiator across qualification levels, yet stakeholders expressed concern about inconsistent or insufficient emphasis in existing units. Employers described wanting staff who are "ready to lead from the front," not just support existing programs. A key distinction was made between:

- Assisting: Following directions under supervision
- Performing: Delivering activities independently within known contexts
- Leading: Taking full responsibility for group safety, engagement, and outcomes in dynamic or remote conditions

This progression was seen as both technical and relational. As one outdoor education coordinator explained, "It's not about having done more activities. It's about whether you can hold a group, adjust on the fly, and debrief with meaning."

3.8 The imperative for inclusion

Stakeholders consistently noted that while the sector values diversity, it lacks systematic strategies to support equitable access and meaningful participation. One respondent stated, "We talk about inclusion, but we don't always plan for it. It needs to be built into how we lead, train, and design programs."

Several critical inclusion domains were identified:

- Disability inclusion: supporting both visible and hidden disabilities, such as mobility challenges, autism, or mental health conditions
- Cultural inclusion: recognising the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, including First Nations participants

- Religious and gender inclusivity: accommodating religious observances, gender expression, and safety for LGBTQ+ participants
- Socio-economic accessibility: reducing barriers for under-resourced participants through subsidised programs, equipment provision, and community partnerships.

Leaders were expected to demonstrate adaptive facilitation, cultural humility, and trauma sensitivity. As one instructor explained, "It's not just about ramps or interpreters. It's about attitude, whether people feel they belong." The findings point to an urgent need to embed inclusive principles into all aspects of program design, delivery, and training. Some stakeholders also reported an increase in participants with lived experiences of trauma. A senior leader stated, "We work with kids who've been through a lot. If we don't understand how trauma affects behaviour, we can re-traumatise without meaning to."

Inclusion and leadership identity

Practical strategies for inclusive programming were shared by interviewees. Examples included:

- Adjusting program timing to align with Ramadan or cultural holidays
- Offering sensory regulation tools and quiet spaces for neurodiverse participants
- Using adaptive equipment and modified activities to ensure access
- Building collaborative partnerships with disability organisations, community elders, and cultural consultants

Currently, these efforts are often locally driven. However, many stakeholders expressed concern that such practices were not consistently reflected in training, funding models, or regulatory frameworks. One provider noted, "We're making it work on the ground, but the system doesn't always support us."

Finally, inclusion was described as a leadership attribute, not just a skillset. Leaders who model inclusive behaviour, by being open-minded, respectful, and adaptable, were seen as shaping organisational culture and community trust. One coordinator reflected, "It starts with how leaders treat staff. If we build inclusive teams, we'll run inclusive programs."

3.9 Qualification design, career pathways, and expectations

Stakeholders advocated for a clearer alignment between qualifications and job roles, a more deliberate structuring of career progression pathways, and an enhanced emphasis on leadership development. As illustrated in Chart 6, the SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership was identified as the most preferred qualification by employers, cited as the minimum standard for roles involving independent group management, high-risk environments, and client-facing facilitation. The SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership was regarded as highly desirable for advanced leadership and coordination roles. In contrast, SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation is widely delivered, particularly in school-based contexts, but is seen as having limited employment value.
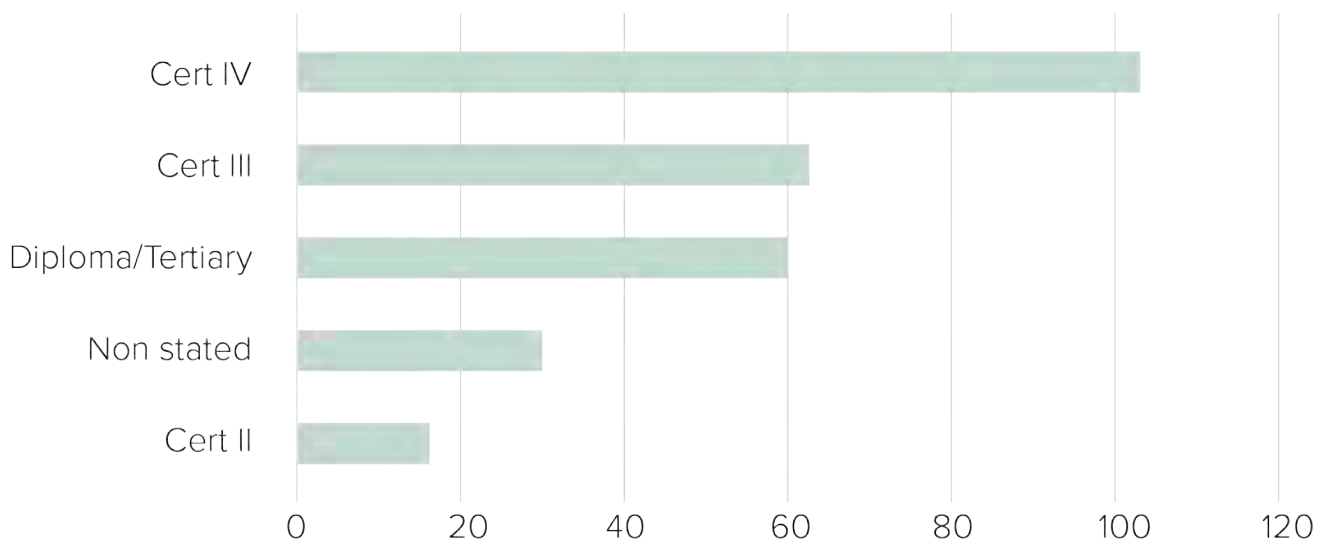
Chart 6: Employer preferences for outdoor leadership qualifications across AQF levels based on survey feedback.

The issue is heightened by limited career progression frameworks, with only 46% of organisations reporting clear pathways for employee development. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for addressing skill shortages through structured, practice-based learning. Notably, 77% of organisations currently host students for work placements, and an additional 15% indicate a willingness to do so, signalling the potential to expand workforce capacity through targeted, experiential training initiatives.

Balancing specificity and flexibility in qualification design

The tension between specificity and flexibility in training design emerged as one of the most complex and recurrent themes across the functional analysis process. This balance directly impacts the sector's ability to deliver qualifications that are both industry-relevant and widely transferable, particularly in a workforce characterised by casualisation, geographical diversity, and broadening scope of practice.

Stakeholders were clear in their view that current training structures must evolve to reflect the operational realities of contemporary outdoor leadership, while retaining enough precision to ensure safety, job readiness, and regulatory compliance. Views differed across activity domains, and it became clear that different specialisations have their own unique challenges. For instance, some stakeholders expressed their frustration with the units that differ only in geographic or environmental details (e.g. "lead bushwalks in tracked environments" vs "lead bushwalks in difficult tracked environments"). These units were often seen as functionally similar, with one participant describing them as "splitting hairs while doubling our paperwork."

This over-fragmentation was seen by stakeholders as contributing to multiple systemic issues, including duplication of content across units, confusion for both learners and employers regarding skill expectations, inefficiencies in RTO delivery models, and the creation of barriers to developing cross-

activity competence and transferability. One RTO representative reflected, "We've had to deliver three separate units for what is essentially the same leadership framework, just in different terrain. It's not sustainable."

Whilst there was strong support for consolidating technical units where the core skills are similar (provided that context-specific risks and techniques could be addressed through assessment conditions or elective content) there were distinct cases where stand-alone units are required. Stakeholders who train and deliver water-based activities explained the importance of learners engaging across multiple settings, in different crafts, with varied numbers of participants for the purpose of reinforcing safety and progression across environments.

Chapter 4 Stakeholder meetings

4.1 Technical Committee meeting

The Technical Committee endorsed the draft functional analysis report and recommended that indicative AQF levels be incorporated to enhance clarity and alignment with qualification outcomes. These levels are now reflected in Appendix A. The committee also engaged in critical discussion on several key issues: the multi-disciplinary nature of outdoor recreation, which intersects with education, health, and adventure tourism; the need for clearer differentiation between the 4 outdoor recreation and leadership qualifications; the potential role of micro-credentials and skill sets in addressing emerging market demands; and the value of applying the principles of the National VET Qualification Reform to guide the ongoing review and redesign of the training package.

4.2 Meetings with subject matter experts (SMEs)

This section presents a synthesis of feedback obtained through a series of structured stakeholder meetings conducted during May 2025, as part of the broader Outdoor Recreation and Outdoor Leadership Qualification Review. These meetings engaged subject matter experts (SMEs) from across the sector, including trainers, assessors, outdoor leaders, and employer representatives. The process was designed to elicit insights grounded in their lived experience and current operational practices.

The overarching objective of this engagement was to inform the redevelopment of the training package so that it:

- accurately reflects contemporary practices and evolving job roles within the sector
- supports clear and coherent skill progression across AQF levels
- eliminates unnecessary repetition in content where it does not correspond with an increase in complexity, whilst preserving robust and meaningful assessment standards

Meetings were completed with representatives from the following activity groups:

- Abseiling, climbing, canyoning, and caving (16 attendees)
- Bushwalking (17 attendees)
- Challenge course (10 attendees)
- Core and general units (14 attendees)
- Cycling (8 attendees)
- Equine (attendees unavailable)
- Fishing (attendees unavailable)
- Paddlecraft (19 attendees)
- Sailing (8 attendees)
- Scuba diving and snorkelling (7 attendees)
- Surf and water rescue (attendees unavailable)
- Skiing (8 attendees)

4.2.1 Abseiling, climbing, canyoning, and caving

- Identified shared foundational skills, especially between abseiling and climbing (e.g. rigging, anchor setup, rope handling)
- Proposed environment-based grouping to reduce duplication and agreed that artificial and natural environments require different skillsets
- Supported a "career journey mapping" process to create clearer developmental pathways that allow skill progression without re-enrolment
- Stressed embedding psychosocial and child safety in performance criteria
- Warned against overly broad units that risk reduced relevance for specific roles

4.2.2 Bushwalking

- Highlighted the need to retain three separate units, with performance and assessment evidence tailored to environment complexity
- Requested clearer skill progression across qualification levels, aligned to environment complexity and responsibility
- Emphasised transferable, not location-specific, skills such as judgment, self-reliance, risk management, and gear/food preparation
- Recommended the removal of shared knowledge (e.g., group dynamics, conflict resolution, and briefing techniques) from activity-specific lead units, and suggested a generic leadership unit to consolidate group management content
- Highlighted the need to avoid over-simplification in assessments to preserve credibility

4.2.3 Challenge Course

- Proposed merging or clarifying lead, supervise, and manage roles to reduce confusion
- Agreed rescue skills must be embedded at the lead level
- Confirmed that adventure-based learning (ABL) units are valuable for soft skills but do not specifically support technical challenge course competencies
- Suggested relocating ABL to general facilitation units
- Highlighted the need to include flying foxes and giant swings in the training package
- Supported broader, system-based units over site-specific configurations

4.2.4 Core and general units

- Supported using some core units across multiple AQF levels and others as level specific
- Proposed consolidating facilitation, ethics, and industry context into a shared leadership unit
- Stressed that skills like campcraft, bushcraft, setting up campsites, and basic navigation are essential foundations across many roles and contexts
- Recommended child safety, ethics, and legal duties be elevated or stand-alone

- Flagged excessive overlap in WHS, navigation, and facilitation content needing resolution

4.2.5 Cycling

- Highlighted need to distinguish between environments (e.g. on-road, off-road, urban etc.)
- Supported separating core skills (e.g. maintenance) from contextual riding units
- Noted the need for prerequisites and clearer qualification pathway.
- Suggested using descriptive trail terminology rather than colour-coding
- Recommended incorporating basic maintenance skills in delivery units, with advanced tasks as separate micro-credential or workplace-based training
- Identified e-bikes and trail maintenance as emerging skills needing coverage
- No consensus on mandating external accreditation; flexibility is preferred.

4.2.6 Paddlecraft

- Supported distinct units for canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) at advanced levels.
- Emphasised that environment type is a stronger basis for unit structure than craft type
- Accepted repetition for reinforcing safety and progression across environments
- Called for better inclusion of high wind risk on flatwater
- Supported a tiered learning model progressing from flatwater to more complex environments.
- Advised against over-consolidation that compromises clarity and employability

4.2.7 Sailing

- Supported retaining units as standalone based on sailing environments to reflect regionally dependent sailing contexts across Australia
- Identified gap in expedition sailing content requiring new or revised units
- Suggested including rescue/powerboat skills in core or dedicated units
- Critiqued repetitive assessments across multiple wind conditions
- Raised concerns about delivery barriers due to high cost and access issues

4.2.8 Scuba diving and snorkelling

- Agreed that the existing scuba diving units are technically sound and well-mapped to the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) standards
- Supported merging overlapping leadership units
- Endorsed separating complex skills such as search/recovery and navigation
- Called for clearer performance criteria language
- Emphasised snorkelling units need to be linked with water rescue training

4.2.9 Skiing

- Requested inclusion of alpine touring and backcountry skiing
- Highlighted the underdeveloped integration of snowcraft and safety skills
- Supported using equipment-neutral language for inclusivity and flexibility
- Identified duplicated content (e.g. between easy and intermediate skiing) and called for clearer skill progression.
- Stressed alignment with seasonal and freelance job roles

Chapter 5 Key insights

5.1 Emerging suggestions from the SME stakeholder meetings

The following suggestions were put forward by stakeholders who participated in recent subject matter expert (SME) meetings. These ideas reflect the opinions and experiences of those present and are offered as points for consideration at this stage of the review process. They do not represent final decisions but will inform the broader consultation, where additional contributions and perspectives are welcomed.

- Introduce core generic units in leadership, facilitation, and group management that are applicable across all activity areas.
- Structure technical units based on environmental complexity (e.g. terrain, weather, remoteness) rather than location-specific or equipment-specific variations.
- Explore the development of progressive, stackable credentials and training pathways that allow learners to build skills incrementally without the need to re-enrol in full qualifications.
- Reduce repetition by embedding transferable skills within foundation units, whilst retaining separate units where safety risks or environmental complexity require context-specific training.
- Ensure units reflect real-world job roles, with clear differentiation between job roles.
- Embed psychosocial safety and child protection considerations across all relevant core units.
- Consider incorporating underrepresented areas such as trail maintenance, e-bike use, rescue boat operation, and high-wind navigation into the training package.
- Clarify terminology and assessment conditions to support consistent delivery across RTOs.

These stakeholder-driven suggestions are intended to guide ongoing discussions. Broader consultation will provide further opportunity for industry feedback and ensure that the final training package reflects a wide range of views and practical insights.

5.2 Preliminary conclusions from the SME stakeholder meetings

The SME meetings reflect a shared commitment amongst stakeholders to enhance the clarity, job alignment, and practical relevance of the Outdoor Recreation and Outdoor Leadership Qualification Review. Whilst there is broad support for reducing unnecessary repetition, stakeholders consistently advised caution against excessive consolidation that could obscure important differences in risk levels, decision-making demands, and environmental complexity. Stakeholders suggested that a flexible yet structured model, one that consolidates common skills into generic units while preserving detail where safety or context requires it, may offer a balanced path forward. These initial insights will inform the next stages of work. Ongoing consultation will capture a broader range of perspectives to ensure they are considered before final decisions are made.

5.3 Themes and priorities

The consultation process identified several critical themes and strategic priorities to inform the redevelopment of the Outdoor Recreation and Outdoor Leadership qualifications. These priorities are intended to guide the restructuring of qualifications and units to ensure relevance, coherence, and alignment with contemporary workforce demands. Key insights for qualification redevelopment follow.

- **Qualifications and job realities:** The current training products are often misaligned with the realities of outdoor roles. Stakeholders report on graduates who are technically competent but underprepared for the demands of autonomous leadership, participant facilitation, or situational judgement. They highlighted the absence of structured and hands-on workplace experience, noting that this deprives learners of exposure to real-world group management and decision-making skills.

- **Repetition without progression:** Across multiple units and qualifications, stakeholders identified significant redundancy. Units such as those differentiating "tracked" from "difficult tracked" environments illustrate how minimal linguistic changes can obscure meaningful progression. This repetition can dilute the credibility of competency development and undermine learner confidence in some instances. A more effective model could articulate a knowledge and skills continuum, from assistance to autonomy, embedded within activity clusters and mapped across AQF levels.

- **Employment insecurity and challenges in retaining skilled staff:** The sector is characterised by job casualisation, high turnover, and shortages of skilled instructors. Employers often invest in early-stage training, only to have staff leave for more stable jobs in sectors like education, tourism, or related industries. This process undermines continuity and increases recruitment pressure. Clear leadership and management pathways that begin at Certificate III and build progressively to Diploma level could support long-term career development. Stakeholders also recommended the introduction of stackable and portable credentials to enable greater professional mobility.

- **Rising demand, shifting identity:** Stakeholders observed increasing demand for outdoor programs that support educational tourism, mental health-informed approaches, and inclusive participation. The sector's scope has expanded beyond traditional notions of "adventure" to encompass psychosocial development, environmental education, and cultural engagement. As a result, training products must evolve to reflect this broader purpose, incorporating competencies in cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, client-centred facilitation, and ethical leadership. Ongoing consultation will be necessary to determine how best to integrate these skill areas.

- **Need for clarity and streamlining:** The workshop and interview data revealed strong support for a restructured training package that reduces fragmentation without compromising meaningful distinctions between roles and environments. Stakeholders recommended organising units according to environmental complexity, rather than based on minor contextual differences. A shared set of core units, focusing on facilitation, navigation, work health and safety (WHS), and environmental ethics, was proposed as a foundation for all qualification pathways, with technical electives customised to specific activity domains. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of retaining several standalone units to ensure that key technical and contextual competencies are not diluted.

Chapter 6 Recommendations and next steps

This review uses broad stakeholder input, functional analysis, and cross-industry comparisons to propose changes that address persistent challenges in workforce readiness, role clarity, and training relevance. A key theme across all qualification levels is the need to treat foundational leadership, facilitation, and operational skills as essential components of professional practice, not optional extras. Stakeholders repeatedly noted that previous training structures placed disproportionate emphasis on technical activity delivery, often at the expense of interpersonal, psychosocial, and program design skills critical to contemporary job roles. The following recommendations outline the key proposed changes.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen core units to build foundational and transferable skills

Recommendation: Reclassify selected elective units as core to ensure all learners develop essential foundational and transferable skills. This change supports consistency across qualification levels and job role**s.**

Justification: Shifting these units to the core ensures alignment with the evolving expectations of the sector, particularly in education, wellbeing, tourism, and community settings. It supports the vertical integration of key capabilities from entry-level to advanced roles and reflects the sector's transition from task-oriented instruction to inclusive, participant-centred, and values-driven leadership.

Recommendation 2: Introduce a core unit on facilitation and leadership development

Recommendation: Introduce a core unit focused specifically on leadership theory and group facilitation, separate from technical skill instruction. This unit should address group dynamics, inclusive leadership, effective communication, and experiential learning strategies tailored to a range of outdoor settings.

Justification: Stakeholders highlighted a systemic gap in the current training products, pointing to a lack of structured opportunities for developing leadership and facilitation skills. Existing units emphasise activity delivery but neglect interpersonal, reflective, and group management skills essential for effective leadership. This recommendation responds to the sector's evolving focus on psychosocial, cultural, and educational outcomes, and will equip graduates to lead inclusive, learner-centred experiences. It also supports progression into advanced roles requiring program design, mentoring, and complex group coordination.

Stakeholder **quotations:**

"We don't actually seem to teach leadership and explore what leadership is." (highlights the systemic absence of structured leadership training)

"Facilitation is very much about working with groups… quite different [from instruction]." (emphasises the need to distinguish facilitation from technical instruction)

"It's about drawing out learning, reflection, emotional safety, not just task completion." (links

facilitation to deeper learning and participant growth)

"Outdoor leadership is about the whole person; not just what they can do, but who they are." (positions leadership as a whole-person capability, not just technical skill)

"Even junior instructors need to know how to manage reflection and learning outcomes." (identifies the gap in reflective and interpersonal skill development)

"We run a lot of school and youth programs where this is the whole point." (connects facilitation to the purpose of youth and educational programs)

Recommendation 3: Reinstate and expand the sector knowledge

Recommendation: Reinstate *SISXIND011 Maintain sport, fitness and recreation industry knowledge* as a core unit across outdoor recreation and leadership qualifications, with expanded content. The updated unit should cover professional ethics, compliance, engagement with peak bodies, industry career pathways, duty of care, and structured mentoring.

Justification: Stakeholders identified the removal of this unit as a critical gap, particularly for early-career professionals requiring orientation to sector structures, responsibilities, and ethical standards. The unit's reinstatement would provide foundational knowledge of industry expectations and regulatory frameworks. Including formal mentoring in this unit addresses strong stakeholder support for structured guidance. It is especially important for improving staff retention, knowledge transfer, and leadership development in settings where informal support is limited.

Stakeholder quotations:

"I really miss it… these things have been greatly missed." (reflects on the removal of the previous sector knowledge unit)

"They need to understand the role of peak bodies, pay and conditions, the bigger picture of the sector." (emphasises the importance of orienting learners to structural and regulatory frameworks)

"It would benefit people… a mentor program would [also] be super cool." (supports formalised mentoring structures to aid early-career transitions)

"There's nothing that helps them connect the dots between qualifications, roles, and what their pathway might look like." (identifies the need for a clearer understanding of industry pathways and progression)

"Duty of care should be front and centre; people underestimate how important that is." (highlights the critical nature of ethical and legal responsibilities in training)

"You can't just hope someone picks that up in the workplace. It needs to be taught properly." (advocates for formal education in professional conduct and compliance expectations)

Recommendation 4: Integrate inclusive, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive practices

Recommendation: Embed competencies in cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed facilitation, client-centred practice, and ethical leadership across qualification levels. These should be integrated into core units to ensure graduates can deliver inclusive, safe, and socially responsive programs.

Justification: Stakeholders emphasised the sector's shift toward programs focused on psychosocial wellbeing, cultural engagement, and inclusive participation. Current training products must evolve to reflect this broadened purpose. Embedding these practices will equip graduates with the interpersonal and ethical capabilities needed to support diverse groups respectfully. Ongoing consultation with First Nations leaders, educators, and lived experience experts is essential to ensure content is contextually relevant, appropriately delivered, and nationally consistent.

Stakeholder quotations:

"It's not just about ramps or interpreters. It's about attitude—whether people feel they belong." (highlights the importance of attitudinal inclusion beyond physical access)

"We talk about inclusion, but we don't always plan for it. It needs to be built into how we lead, train, and design programs." (emphasises the need for intentional, embedded inclusion strategies in program design)

"Facilitation is very much about working with groups… quite different [from instruction]." (distinguishes facilitation from instruction, emphasising the need to address group dynamics)

"We need leaders who reflect and plan their growth… If we want people to stay in the sector, they need those tools for self-development."
(links reflective practice to workforce sustainability and sector retention)

"Burnout is real. We need leaders who reflect and plan their growth." (reinforces the connection between self-management skills and wellbeing in the field)

"It's about drawing out learning, reflection, emotional safety, not just task completion." (positions facilitation as a process that fosters deeper learning and emotional safety)

Next steps

Qualifications must reflect real job functions, support progression, and embed applied learning opportunities. Alignment with the seven VET reform principles, particularly those promoting increased learner-agency, industry responsiveness, and knowledge application, provides a critical scaffold for this transformation. Appendix B provides examples of how the VET reform principles can underpin positive change for sector learning and employment outcomes. The next stage of the review process will involve focused engagement with SMEs to engage in additional discussions aimed at refining the proposed qualification changes. The technical committee input will be essential in guiding the final drafting phase to ensure that the updated training products align with workforce needs and broader strategic goals. These discussions will focus on integrating lived experience-informed practices and adopting flexible delivery strategies, particularly to meet the needs of regional and remote communities.

Appendices

Appendix A

The following AQF levels reflect the anticipated level of qualification typically required to perform each role, rather than a formal AQF alignment of the role.

AQF	Job title	Core functions	Sub-functions	Skills
Level 2	Outdoor assistant	Performs core activities in the outdoors Uses a wide variety of equipment in different terrains Works under supervision assisting with outdoor activities & logistics	Completes tasks involving known routines & procedures Interprets and carries out instructions Identifies hazards & risks Uses equipment safely	Schedules own activities Communicates with participants Helps to set up & organise equipment Collaborates & works in a team
Level 2 to 3	Outdoor recreation assistant Assistant activity guide Camp assistant General outdoor support worker Interns & trainees	Performs core activities in the outdoors Uses a wide variety of equipment in different terrains Works under supervision assisting with outdoor activities & logistics Demonstrates activities (e.g., Climbing)	Assists in conducting the session Checks participants for safety Interprets & carries out instructions Identifies hazards & risks Uses equipment safely Assists with set up & mealtime	Develops communication skills Applies & communicates solutions to a variety of predictable problems Requires organisational skills
Level 3	Outdoor recreation guide Outdoor adventure guide	Ensures safety & provides instructions	Completes routine activities Adjusts activities as required	Engages & facilitates participants Develops problem-solving skills

	Outdoor tour guide	Guides & facilitates outdoor activities with some autonomy in known contexts Leads participants in indoor and outdoor activities with limited supervision Prevents injury & provides first aid Engages in set up & pack up Delivers engaging commentary about local history, culture, flora, & fauna	Troubleshoots issues related to weather, route changes, etc. Works under supervision but with increased responsibility Prepares & maintains adventure gear Assists with set up & mealtime	Interprets & acts on information Manages issues using known solutions Uses technical skills to undertake routine & some non-routine tasks
	Administrative staff	Administers tasks for program delivery	Manages client bookings & communicates with stakeholders Coordinates schedules & logistics Maintains operational documents	Uses administrative & planning skills Applies time management skills Develops proficiency in office software
Level 4	Outdoor recreation leader Outdoor recreation instructor	Guides & engages participants Develops & delivers programs Soft top instructor leads groups out on journeys in various environments (e.g., Bushwalking & canoeing)	Plans & leads specialised activities Provides instruction on outdoor skills, safety procedures & equipment use	Requires conflict resolution skills Builds rapport with participants to create a safe, inclusive, & positive environment Provides technical advice

	Role			
		Hard top instructor lead site-based activities (e.g., Climbing &team-building exercises) Manages overnight camps Manages risk & safety Works independently Supervises junior staff	Imparts knowledge of conservation, sustainability & responsible practices Customises experiences to groups	Leads & mentors others Communicates environmental knowledge Requires digital skills in GPS navigation & online resource management Supports risk assessment & emergency procedures
	Camp facilitator	Facilitates group dynamics Ensures participant safety Supports camp logistics Assists with daily routines such as mealtimes, campfires, transitions between activities, & evening programs	Sets up & packs away equipment Helps coordinate accommodation, schedules, & any special requirements (e.g. Dietary needs or accessibility supports) Guides group discussions and reflection activities	Connects with participants using empathy Works with first nations partners Promotes cultural awareness & environmental stewardship Requires literacy, numeracy & an understanding of 'leave no trace' Requires wilderness first aid for managing emergencies in remote areas Needs proficiency in outdoor activities like climbing, kayaking & bushwalking, Along with first aid
	Expedition leader	Guides & manages multi-day journeys Manages logistics & emergencies Ensures expedition equipment is safely maintained & used correctly Manages safety, food & water	Manages environmental education Secures permits & accommodation Plans transport Designs & coordinates expedition routes, schedules & objectives Uses maps, GPS & compasses	

	Specialist activity instructors	Teaches specialist skills (e.g., Biking, bushwalking etc.) Manages group dynamics Fosters participant development Promotes environmental awareness More experienced instructors manage high-risk activities (e.g., Abseiling or multi-day expeditions)	Leads specialised activities Trains participants in techniques Ensures adherence to safety standards Inspects & maintains equipment	
	Outdoor adventure & recreation instructors	Teaches technical skills for hard-top & soft-top programs Fosters team building during activities Ensures participant safety	Delivers engaging outdoor experiences Teaches technical skills Ensures adherence to safety protocol Facilitates team-building exercises Assists with daily setup & pack-up	
	Program coordinator	Oversees the planning and execution of programs Ensures programs align with client expectations	Designs, promotes, implements, and manages a range of outdoor education programs	

		Manages logistics, scheduling, & instructor assignments		
Level 4 to Diploma	Outdoor leadership trainer	Educates aspiring instructors in leadership & safety compliance Demonstrates expertise in outdoor leadership & safety, training & instructional skills	Develops & delivers training programs Adheres to industry standards Prepares trainees for leadership roles Trains participants on proper use & maintenance of outdoor equipment	Uses clear communication, inclusive practices, & adaptive facilitation strategies Expresses ideas using specialist technical & creative skills Collaborates with teachers to align to align program delivery Designs and delivers multi-day programs Transfers knowledge to others Leads staff and participants Fosters group cohesion & inclusion Applies mentoring skills Utilises organisational skills Solves sometimes unpredictable problems Makes quick, sound decisions in high-pressure or emergency situations
	Training supervisor	Oversees practical training & skill development of interns & junior staff Designs, implements & evaluates programs Manages trainers & facilitators Ensures compliance with qualification standards during hands-on learning	Updates training to align with standards Assesses trainees' skills & knowledge through tests and observations Conducts quality checks on training	
	Outdoor recreation senior leader	Oversees outdoor programs Provides guidance, coaching & support to staff & participants Conducts safety & risk assessments	Leads high-risk activities Trains staff & develops competencies Plans & delivers programs	

Level	Role			
		Assesses & adapt activities for different terrain, weather, & participant needs	Plans gear, transport & site bookings	
Diploma	Outdoor recreation manager	Oversees & executes programs Manage logistics & compliance Manage facilities, staff & equipment Plan, implement, & evaluate programs Manages, mentoring, & develops staff	Designs & manages outdoor activities Recruits, trains & supervises instructor Aligns program delivery with business Enforces safety protocols & standards Manages resources & budget	Leads and manages others Ensures safety & risk management Evaluates quality assurance Communicates with stakeholders Builds strong relationships with staff, clients, & the broader community Uses a range of sources to create programs Solves sometimes complex problems Appraises staff competencies & progress Applies organisational skills Plans, designs & evaluates approaches to unpredictable situations Applies specialist technical & creative skills to express ideas & perspectives Transfers knowledge & specialised skills
	Program manager	Plans & delivers complex programs Ensures quality & safety Manages multiple programs & staff Manages budgets & schedules Coordinates timelines & resources	Liaises between teams & management Aligns program goals to client needs Establishes frameworks, reports structures &standards Coordinates programs	
	Site manager	Manages outdoor recreation settings Assesses maintenance, safety & program functionality	Oversees safety frameworks, training & strategic development Addresses site-specific challenges	

		Coordinates business operations, staff management & compliance	Organises daily operations onsite Coordinates & evaluates teams' work	
	Logistics manager	Plans & executes program logistics Coordinates logistics for multi-day or multi-site operations (transport, accommodation, equipment, etc.)	Coordinates transportation Optimises scheduling Manages resources Monitors resource availability	
	Operations manager	Oversees organisational functionality Coordinates departments Manages challenges Ensures adherence to regulations, safety standards & company policies Presents the organisation in meetings, negotiations, & public forum	Develops & implements processes to improve efficiency & meet goals Addresses operational challenges Manages budgets, optimises costs, & ensures resources are used effectively Develops & oversees schedules, rosters, & resource use	

Many of these roles also require teaching-related functions, skills, and sub-skills as outlined in the following table.

Teaching – Core function	Skills	Sub-skills
Teachers require a blend of: Technical expertise Interpersonal capabilities, and Organisational proficiency.	Instructional skills	Ability to teach content effectively Ability to access & use resources & equipment Knowledge of core learning and safely
	Communication skills	Clear & effective expressive skills Strong receptive skills Active listening English language skills Ability to provide feedback
	Group dynamics / behaviour	Maintain order Create a comfortable and safe environment Collaboration skills
	Planning & organisation skills	Lesson planning Time management skills Organisation skills
	Interpersonal skills	Empathy and patience Collaboration skills Cultural competence
	Adaptability & problem-solving	Flexibility Critical thinking

	Subject matter expertise	Ability to assess learners' competence & understanding
		Keeping updated with changes in the field (currency)
	Leadership skills	Inspire and motivate others
		Passion for learning & sharing knowledge
		Resilience
		Ability to act as a role-model
		Desire to learn from others

Appendix B

The following table aligns the VET Qualification Review principles with the Outdoor Recreation and Leadership Review.

Qualification reform principles	Review considerations	Examples
Principle 1: Qualifications and Units of Competency are informed by learners' needs and aspirations, enabling individuals to adapt to changing job roles and workplaces and transition across occupations and industries	**Learner-centred design** Provide opportunities for learners to develop specialist expertise in consumer demand areas **Learner-centred design** Create stronger pathways into the sector from both education and volunteer experiences **Learner-centred design** Investigate portable qualifications to address staff turnover and support workforce stability	*Enable learners to select electives aligned with distinct career pathways, allowing personalisation of qualifications to support diverse aspirations and cross-sector mobility* *Redesign leadership or facilitation units to be cross-sectoral, so a graduate can use those skills in sport coaching, youth work, or eco-tourism* *Design qualifications to formally recognise prior informal or non-accredited learning (e.g. community volunteering, lived experience in outdoor leadership, or sport coaching), enabling learners to access higher-level qualifications without repeating content*
Principle 2: Qualifications and Units of Competency are informed by industry needs, and describe industry-relevant and future-oriented knowledge and skills that are adaptable to structural change	**Industry relevance and future-focus** Advocate for RTO and employer partnerships to strengthen workplace integration **Industry relevance and future-focus** Develop clearly defined career pathways and structured progression routes that enable learners to transition effectively from training into employment, spanning from entry-level to advanced qualifications .	Collaborate with key industry stakeholders, technical committees, and leaders to maintain alignment with the AAAS *Update units to reflect growing needs in risk management, remote supervision, and digital safety protocols* *Include remote client check-ins in wilderness leadership units, reflecting technological advances in outdoor work*

		Evaluate the relevance of the Certificate II qualification, which currently offers limited direct employment outcomes but may serve an increasingly valuable role as an entry-level pathway into the sector
Principle 3: The Application of Skills and Knowledge are considered in the design of Qualifications and Units of Competency, providing coherent knowledge progression within qualifications, facilitating mobility within and across industries, and between educational organisations and systems, as appropriate	**Application of Skills and Knowledge (ASK) and progression** Embed more structured on-the-job learning models to prioritise real-world learning **Application of Skills and Knowledge (ASK) and progression** Assess the different qualifications to ensure there is coherent knowledge progression within qualifications **Application of Skills and Knowledge (ASK) and progression** Improve transferability and standardisation across states and training providers to establish greater consistency, and improve transitions between training and employment	*Ensure navigation or safety units build coherently across AQF levels: from basic (follow a trail) to advanced (plan complex expeditions)* *Establish a clearly articulated knowledge and skills progression framework within activity areas such as climbing and paddling, outlining a continuum from support roles to leadership and management* Re-evaluate Certificate III as an entry point, with a focus on improving structured workplace learning and aligning industry expectations with training outcomes Identify barriers to delivery of Certificate IV, which is sought by industry, and explore options to increase uptake
Principle 4: Qualifications include an appropriate mix of technical and broader skills, including foundation, cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills	**Balance of technical and broader skills** Assess qualifications to include technical skills (e.g. activity expertise), foundation skills (e.g. literacy), interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (e.g. facilitation and leadership skills), and cognitive level (AQF)	*Ensure that graduates can manage emotional wellbeing in group settings, enhancing safety and inclusivity* *Integrate group facilitation, cultural safety, and reflective practice into adventure leadership units, not just technical climbing or kayaking skills*

Principle 5: Data and evidence underpin decisions relating to the development, update or maintenance of Qualifications and Units of Competency Data and evidence underpin decisions relating to the	**Evidence-driven design** Use desktop research, interviews, and surveys as a part of a functional analysis report **Evidence-driven design** Talk with stakeholders to gain insight into their lived experience and operational needs	*The NOEC stakeholder poll data and semi-structured interviews as evidence to prioritise core skills (e.g. empathy, communication, group management)* *Workforce enrolment and completion trends to justify streamlining under-used electives or duplicative units*
Principle 6: New or amended Qualifications and Units of Competency do not substantially duplicate other existing training products, except where a higher level of detail is required for licencing, high-risk, safety or regulatory reasons	**No unnecessary duplication** Reduce duplication and focus on core competencies applicable across multiple roles to simplify training structures **No unnecessary duplication** Identify opportunities to consolidate similar units, embed shared competencies, and streamline assessment processes	*Rationalise emergency response across units (e.g. integrate WHS, first aid, and emergency response into a single adaptable unit)* *Merging repetitive performance evidence found across units like* "Navigate in tracked environments" *and* "Lead bushwalks in tracked environments"
Principle 7: Qualifications and Units of Competency are designed with an appropriate level of specificity that allows for flexible training and assessment, and minimises the need for frequent updates, except where a higher level of detail is required for licencing, high-risk, safety or regulatory reasons.	**Flexibility and specificity balance** Support rigorous safety and leadership training to suit high-risk activities by maintaining high safety and competency standards **Flexibility and specificity balance** *Activity-specific requirements could be addressed through contextualised assessment or guidance, reducing the need for frequent revisions while maintaining alignment with industry safety practices*	*Group units by environmental complexity (e.g. calm vs white-water paddlecraft), allowing for flexible delivery based on local context* *Use broad descriptors (e.g.* "vertical environments") *instead of duplicating content across climbing, canyoning, and abseiling.* Where licencing or higher-risk environments apply (e.g. lead climbing), additional skill sets or endorsements could be layered on to meet safety or regulatory requirements

Appendix C

Categorisation framework

Organisational overview

This category explores the mission, organisational structure, geographical reach, types of programs offered, participant demographics, and unique challenges specific to each organisation. The analysis of this data helps to build a comprehensive understanding of how organisations operate and align with their stated goals. The data from this category highlights the diversity of organisational approaches within the outdoor leadership sector; the importance of tailoring programs to meet community needs; and the regional challenges organisations face. The insights gained from this data can be used to design training content that aligns with organisational needs, focusing on regional adaptability, program design, and operational efficiencies.

Workforce composition

This category examines the size of the workforce, key roles within the organisation, diversity within the team, staff turnover rates, recruitment challenges, and strategies for maintaining staff well-being. Understanding workforce composition allows for an assessment of workforce stability and the identification of gaps in skills. This knowledge is essential for guiding targeted training initiatives and improving recruitment strategies. Workforce composition data can reveal trends in employment models, the importance of diversity within teams, and the challenges that organisations face in sustaining a skilled workforce for outdoor programs. This data informs the development of training modules that address workforce needs, such as skill shortages, workforce diversity, and strategies for improving staff retention.

Job roles and responsibilities

This category explores the duties associated with different staff roles, distinctions between several types of programs, the evolution of roles with experience, and specific responsibilities tied to job functions. Gathering this information ensures that role-specific expectations and operational requirements are clear. It also helps identify any gaps that need to be addressed through targeted training. The data highlights the complexity of job roles within the sector and the need for clear role definition and progression pathways to support organisational objectives. These insights can guide the creation of training modules that reflect real-world responsibilities, ensuring that staff are adequately prepared for specific roles and can see clear pathways for career progression.

The following occupational categories emerged from the research, reflecting the breadth of roles within the sector:

Program and leadership roles

- Outdoor leadership manager: Provides strategic oversight of program delivery, staff supervision, operational planning, and compliance with regulatory standards.

- Outdoor leadership program manager: Leads the design, implementation, and evaluation of outdoor programs, ensuring effective resource management and adherence to safety and quality benchmarks.
- Senior leader: Oversees complex program delivery and high-risk activities, and trains junior staff.
- Operations manager: Coordinates cross-functional organisational operations, maintains service quality, and addresses systemic challenges.
- Program manager: Manages multiple programs, including budgeting, scheduling, personnel coordination, and stakeholder engagement.

Site and logistics management

- Site manager: Oversees the daily operation of outdoor facilities, ensuring site maintenance, program viability, and compliance with safety protocols.
- Logistics manager: Plans and facilitates logistical components of programming, including equipment preparation, transportation, and scheduling.
- Camp facilitator: Manages the delivery of residential camp programs, coordinating activity schedules and supporting participant engagement.

Activity-specific roles

- Outdoor adventure and recreation instructor: Facilitates both site-based (hard-top) and expedition-based (soft-top) activities, focusing on participant engagement, safety, and foundational skill development.
- Specialist activity instructor: Provides technical instruction in specialised disciplines such as abseiling, kayaking, mountain biking, and bushwalking. Responsibilities include leading wilderness expeditions, ensuring equipment integrity, promoting environmental awareness, and managing group dynamics in diverse outdoor settings.

Training and development roles

- Training supervisor: Supports workforce capability by mentoring interns and junior staff, coordinating on-the-job training, and monitoring skill acquisition.
- Outdoor leadership trainer: Delivers formal instruction in leadership competencies, safety standards, and compliance requirements, typically aligned with accredited training programs

Participant engagement and group facilitation

- Outdoor leader: Delivers tailored activity sessions, prioritising participant safety and engagement through effective facilitation and support.
- Group leader: Manages group experiences, fostering cohesion and responsiveness to group dynamics.
- Expedition leader: Leads extended journeys, integrates environmental education, facilitates planning, and provides team mentorship.
- Outdoor adventure/tour guide: Conducts guided outdoor experiences, offering instruction, ensuring safety, and interpreting environmental or cultural features.

Operational and training support

- Maintenance staff: Maintains site infrastructure and technical equipment, ensuring operational safety and compliance.

- Administration staff: Manages communications, client engagement, scheduling, and documentation to support program logistics.

- Seasonal (casual) staff: Delivers activity-specific support during peak periods, contributing to flexible workforce capacity.

- Intern/trainee: Engages in structured training programs under supervision, supporting activity delivery and progressing towards industry-recognised qualifications.

Skills and competencies

This category focuses on the technical and core skills required for various roles, including cultural competence, safety awareness, and sustainability practices. Collecting data on skills and competencies helps identify the essential abilities needed for effective program delivery and areas where staff may require further development. The emphasis on technical expertise and core skills demonstrates the sector's need for well-rounded professionals who can adapt to diverse participant needs and operational challenges. By aligning training content with identified skills and competencies, the package can ensure staff are better equipped to deliver high-quality and inclusive outdoor programs.

Training and qualifications

This category investigates mandatory certifications, gaps in current qualifications, the effectiveness of training programs, and partnerships with educational institutions. Understanding training and qualification needs allows for the identification of opportunities to improve staff readiness and the quality of program delivery. This data highlights the importance of consistent standards, ongoing professional development, and the need for collaboration with educational institutions to address skills gaps. Insights from this category can guide the development of updated and standardised training materials, to ensure alignment with sector needs and enhance the overall quality of training.

Recruitment and retention

This category explores recruitment methods, barriers to attracting skilled staff, strategies for staff retention, the role of remuneration, onboarding processes, and challenges in recruiting for specialised roles. Understanding recruitment and retention challenges helps identify workforce gaps and develop targeted strategies to attract and retain skilled staff, ensuring organisational stability. This data reveals the ongoing challenges that organisations face in recruiting and retaining staff, especially for specialised or remote roles, as well as the importance of fair remuneration and career development opportunities. These insights can inform the creation of modules focused on workforce management, including recruitment strategies, onboarding best practices, and staff retention techniques.

Safety, risk management, and standards

This category examines safety protocols, risk management training, emergency policies, behavioural safety, and compliance with industry standards. Assessing safety measures ensures that programs meet regulatory requirements and helps identify areas where risk management practices can be improved. This data highlights the critical role of safety and risk management in the outdoor leadership industry and underscores the need for consistent safety standards across the sector. This is useful in guiding the development of comprehensive safety and risk management training modules, ensuring staff are well-prepared to handle emergencies and minimise risks.

Inclusion and accessibility

This category explores measures to ensure program inclusivity, training for working with disabilities, accommodations for hidden disabilities, mixed-ability group management, and First Nations engagement. Understanding inclusivity practices helps organisations create accessible programs that meet the needs of diverse participants, enhancing equity and inclusion. This data reflects the sector's commitment to inclusivity whilst highlighting the challenges in accommodating diverse needs and accessibility; and informs training content to ensure staff are well-equipped to support all participants effectively.

Emerging trends

This category examines changing participant demographics, the role of technology, environmental sustainability practices, and the adoption of hybrid learning models. Identifying emerging trends helps organisations anticipate future needs and adapt programs to align with evolving participant expectations and sector developments. The data reveals a growing emphasis on mental health, sustainability, and technological integration in outdoor leadership, as well as changing participant needs. Insights from this category can guide the inclusion of forward-looking content, such as digital skills, sustainability practices, and mental health awareness in the training products.

Sector challenges and needs

This category focuses on sector-wide challenges, funding constraints, inter-organisational collaboration, knowledge sharing, and systemic improvements. Understanding sector-wide challenges enables targeted recommendations to address systemic issues and promote growth and sustainability across the sector. The data can highlight systemic challenges, including workforce casualisation, inconsistent standards, and funding limitations, as well as opportunities for greater collaboration. The insights inform the development of training content addressing systemic challenges and aligning with broader industry needs, ensuring the package remains relevant and impactful

Appendix D

The following table outlines the key industry challenges, stakeholders' responses to these issues, and the resulting opportunities for reform identified through this process.

Challenge	How industry describes the challenge	How the qualification review can address the challenge
Employers cannot find qualified staff for crucial vacancies	"Our internships and clear career progression make us attractive to those starting in the industry." "Simplification of the training package to focus on core skills would be beneficial for the sector." "For every job ad, I might get about 40 applications, but I'm lucky if I get one who's fully qualified." "We get a lot of applicants for entry-level positions, but the 3-to-8-year experience group is minimal." "One of the major hurdles is finding and retaining skilled staff while maintaining consistent standards across the sector."	Provide stewardship to industry on developing pathways and partnerships to enhance entry and retention. Clarify and align entry requirements to employment, whilst minimising barriers. Provide units of competency that have tangible and transferable industry applications. Focus on the core skills and knowledge for each qualification level. Include guidance about industry engagement in the Companion Volume Implementation Guide for RTOs. Support progression from lower to higher-level qualifications and strengthen links with other disciplines.

Challenge	How industry describes the challenge	How the qualification review can address the challenge
There is a shortage of candidates with deep experience in specialist fields	"Simplification of the training package to focus on core skills would be beneficial for the sector." "We provide ongoing training to ensure staff meet our high standards." "Practical experience is critical to filling gaps that formal training misses." "Rescue units should be mandatory, and electives need to allow more flexibility." "It's very hard to find someone with the specific qualifications needed for high-risk activities like rock climbing." "Rafting trip leaders need years of experience, and the pool of candidates is minimal". "Recruiting for expedition roles is harder due to the advanced skills and leadership required"	Package each qualification to provide essential knowledge, skills and application at each level. Promote the importance of practical experience and ongoing training. Minimise duplication of written assessments to increase focus on developing and applying practical skills. Consolidate activity groupings and units of competency to maximise specialist training. Work with SMEs to ensure specialist activity units are aligned to good practice. Recruiting for high-risk activities and employees with extensive experience is unlikely to be met through qualification review alone; it will continue to rely on deep networks, cross sector employees, conditions to attract the required level and a dedicated commitment to training and developing professionals.
There is a shortage of candidates with the core skills required to lead and facilitate groups	"We need qualifications to ensure candidates are assessed as leaders, not just learners." "Help new entrants build skills progressively and stay in the industry longer." "We look for people who are not just skilled but can also engage participants and mentor others."	Include units of competency that develop base skills and knowledge in the appropriate area. Strengthen units of competency to address participant and industry needs. Ensure assessment conditions are balanced between rigour and practicality.
There is a shortage of candidates who can multi-task to meet other business needs	"We educate staff on environmental sustainability, embedding it into every program." "Staff can transition to maintenance or support roles in the off-season."	Embed facilitation and rescue and safety at all levels, with particular focus on entry level qualifications. Include cross-sector units as electives to address emerging needs.

Challenge	How industry describes the challenge	How the qualification review can address the challenge
Current qualifications do not meet complex requirements	"Cross-sector partnerships have allowed us to expand our impact, blending educational outcomes with adventure experiences for a broader audience." "National qualifications should include more emphasis on practical skill applications." "More consistent qualifications, better funding, and collaboration would transform the sector." "A clear, industry-backed training model would give employers more confidence in hiring and developing new staff." "Formal qualifications often fail to fully prepare staff for real-world scenarios". "Each training institute interprets the package differently, creating inconsistency". "There simply aren't enough structured programs to get new staff up to speed quickly."	Update units of competency to focus on application of skills under realistic assessment conditions. Clarify and strengthen units to minimise misinterpretation. Align units with regulatory requirements and the AAAS. Strengthen the focus on transferable skills that are needed across the sector, including leadership, risk management and working in outdoor environments. Enhance the consistency and transferability of qualifications. Address gaps identified in training for real-world positions. Enhance the practicality of delivery for RTOs. Emphasise the benefits of collaboration between industry partners and RTOs. Consider the use of a qualification as a pre-employment program.

Appendix E

The following image presents a structured overview of the essential components related to outdoor activity instruction under the Australian Adventure Activity Standards (AAAS) framework. The content is divided into four key domains: activity coverage, pedagogical knowledge, pre-employment requirements, and supplementary skills.

Activity groups covered by AAAS

- Abseiling & climbing (including bouldering)
- Canyoning
- Caving challenge courses
- Angling
- Bushwalking
- Camping
- Cycling
- Paddle-craft – enclosed & coastal waters
- Horse trail riding
- Snorkelling

Not currently included

- Sailing
- Scuba
- Ski/alpine
- Surfing

Pedagogical knowledge

- Awareness of neuro diversity
- Engagement
- Managing groups
- Switching activities
- Switching environment
- Understand connections to learning & developmental needs & foundation skills teaching & learning
- Cultural awareness
- Outdoor learning
- Nature play

Other skills

- Food preparation
- Equipment
- Logistics
- planning
- Weather
- Fire
- Flood
- Navigation
- Safety
- Risk
- First Aid & CPR
- Remote First Aid
- Facilities
- Non technical skills

Pre-employment requirements

- First Aid & CPR
- Remote First Aid
- Drivers licence LR/MR
- Bronze medallion
- Police check
- WWCC
- Swift water rescue

This image presents a categorised overview of competencies, responsibilities, and systemic expectations relevant to professionals operating within outdoor learning and recreation environments. The content is grouped into six domains: environmental and experiential knowledge, therapeutic considerations, logistics and coordination, regulatory and operational obligations, inclusive and cultural practice, and pedagogy.

Multiple activities required across environments & able to switch to alternative activities if needed

Non technical skills

- Facilitation
- Group work
- Decision making
- Participant characteristics
- Work ethic
- Debriefing
- Experience
- Initiative
- Differentiation
- Adjustments
- Client & customer service
- Organisation
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Being comfortable with being uncomfortable
- Being ok with balance/pendulum between different activities & environments
- Flexibility
- Calmly navigate challenges
- Resilience Empathy, to create connections
- Open to feedback & mentorship
- Adaptable in dynamic environment & things changing compared to the plan

Skills levels

- Participate
- Assist
- Coordinate
- Plan

Activity levels

- Easy
- Intermediate
- Difficult
- Lead

Other knowledge

- Children/youth
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- NDIS
- Accessibility
- Mental health
- Environment

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