

Racing, equine and farriery

FutureNow is an independent body that provides industry informed advice to influence skills development strategies across the Creative, Leisure and Technologies sectors. Our work assists Western Australia to be prepared with the new order skills required by the evolving economy and our changing society.

Current industry environment

Horse and dog racing activities

Horse and greyhound racing contribute approximately \$970m to the Western Australian economy. **More than 49% of this is generated in regional parts of the State.** Further value-added income for the economy was generated by breeding, horse sales, prize money and wagering. Figures from Racing Wagering Western Australia (RWVA) indicate there are 6914 employees, 3426 volunteers and over 10,000 participants, such as owners and syndicate members, involved in this sector.¹

The racing and equine sector provide direct and indirect employment in both metropolitan and regional areas in racing and wagering activities, horse training, breeding, farming, farriery, supply and service businesses. It crosses over with employment in hospitality and tourism involving events, food and beverage. **The WA racing industry relies heavily on part time and casual labour.** These roles are also often specialist in nature for example Horse Trainer and Farrier. The full-time positions sustained by the WA racing industry result in almost \$498.7 million in wages and salaries for the people employed, as well as those employed in other down-the-line industries such as veterinary, transport, entertainment and fashion.²

There are 50 racing clubs across the State which returned a 26% increase in their wagering gross margin from 2020 to 2021.³ In 2021 there was a total of 3.2 billion turnover from all national wagering operators on WA racing. \$175 million of this was used to fund the WA racing industry. This funding supported industry infrastructure, such as the re-development project of the Bunbury Racecourse, and 1.7 million went to clubs for support from 2020 COVID impacts.⁴

Proof of Vaccination Requirements

As announced by the WA State Government, there is an introduction requirement of proof of vaccination (double dose) by patrons attending race meetings in the Perth and Peel regions which commenced early 2022.⁵

WA TAB Sale

The State Government has flagged interest in privatising the WA TAB for many years. The sale process was put on hold in 2020 due to COVID-19 however this process was re-commenced in late 2021. Expressions of interest for a new wagering operator closed on 16 November 2021.⁶ The WA TAB has been valued at between \$400 and \$500 million by the WA Government's commercial advisor Investec Australia.⁷ The purpose of the sale is to increase sustainability of the sector and is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.⁸

Animal welfare

The public's interest in animal welfare and care continues to rise. This can be seen in the response to investment in retraining and rehoming equine animals. This initiative was launched in September 2020 resulting in 70 horses being accepted into the re-training program and 40 being re-homed, as of 31 July 2021.⁹

Workforce opportunities

There continues to be a small shortage of jockeys in Western Australia, however track riders and farriers occupations that underpin the sector are in short supply.

Trackriders

The Trackrider role involves exercising a racehorse under the instruction of the horse's trainer in preparation for races. As trackriders do not ride in races they don't have to be as light as a jockey. RWWA and horse training businesses face a constant challenge in attracting enough trackwork riders to sustain the industry given the physical nature of the work, the high risk in exercising horses, the timing of work (mostly in the early morning) and the part-time, casual nature of many of the jobs. Trackriders are employed by trainers, with most ending up freelance riding for several trainers.

There are currently 457 thoroughbred track riders in WA. This demonstrates the decline from 539 in the 2016/2017 season.¹⁰ A Certificate III in Racing (Trackrider) is available in Western Australia. During times of trackrider shortages the industry has previously relied on experienced, but unqualified track riders on working holiday or other visa holders. This source of workers has been limited due to WA border closures during the 2020/2021 season.

Jockeys

The Western Australian racing industry operates with low numbers of professional and apprenticed jockeys. The sector held 2131 races during the 2020/2021 Western Australian racing year providing work for 55 licensed jockeys and 24 race riding apprentices. Thirty six percent of these races were metropolitan meaning travel outside the metropolitan region is a common occurrence for this role.¹¹ Jockey and race riding apprentice figures have remained relatively stable over the last 5 years and the current supply continues to just meet demand or be a small shortage.

Farriers

Farriers are responsible for keeping the horse hooves in good condition and placing the appropriate shoes on horses. This is a physically demanding job which means workers leave after a certain age. This, together with the small size of the workforce, make it vulnerable to increases in workforce demand. Currently this occupation is experiencing intermittent shortages in WA predicted to continue unless supply can be increased. Apprenticeship training is available through the Certificate III in Farriery.

The farrier workforce is slowly declining from 25 in the 2016/2017 season to 16 in the 2018/2019 and 20 in the 2020/2021 season. Farrier training in Western Australia is provided by Education Services and Consultants, a registered training organisation based in South Australia. Whilst this arrangement has found industry support, there is concern surrounding the sustainability of this process as it is reliant on one key assessor.

Greyhound Trainer and Kennel Staff

Greyhound trainers usually start their role within a volunteer/hobby capacity and build up to part-time and full-time employment. Their employment is often reliant on their ability as a trainer and the success of their greyhounds. For this role they must demonstrate welfare conditions of the greyhounds and complete a training knowledge assessment. Kennel staff assist with the preparation of the greyhounds prior to the race. No prior experience is required for this type of role. There are usually 6 staff employed each race meet on a casual or part-time basis. In 2021 there were 4065 races held in WA.¹²

Skills and Training Changes

Certificate II in Racing Industry Updates

In September 2021, the Certificate II in Racing Industry was endorsed for changes to reduce the number of core units and increase the number of electives. These included two elective greyhound units. There was also the removal of ACMEQU205 Apply knowledge of horse behaviour and addition of ACMEQU205 Apply knowledge of horse behaviour to Groups A and B.¹³

ANZSCO Code Change

The ANZSCO code is the Australian and New Zealand Classification of Occupations. It assists the Australian Bureau of Statistics collection and data analysis about occupations. It also helps guide the WA Jobs, Education and Training (WAJET) survey, which is a data source for the State Priority Occupation List (SPOL).

In 2021 the ANZSCO codes for Trackrider were revised and amended so that Trackrider, which used to sit under Stablehand, now sits with Horse Trainer, under the specialisation of Animal Attendants and Trainers.

Limited RTO's Available for Training

The Racing and Breeding Industry Reference Committee indicated there is concern about the sectors difficulty in attracting Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to delivery training for this sector. Whilst there are several professional development providers in Western Australia, the costs of offering RTO training and the small student numbers have been highlighted as a key challenge.¹⁴

Please get in touch with FutureNow

If you are interested in providing your perspective on this snapshot or related workforce matters for your sector, our Industry Development Manager, Kelly Perry, would appreciate hearing from you.

Mob: 0459 984 873

Email: kperry@futurenow.org.au

Web: www.futurenow.org.au

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