OUTDOOR EDUCATION INNOVATION HUB

RESEARCH REPORT SUMMARY

PREPARED BY

SCHOOL FOR THE VISITOR ECONOMY, VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

The Outdoor Education Innovation Hub (OEIH) research report presents the findings and recommendations from research undertaken for the project 'Re-Imagining workforce development in the outdoor industry for a sustainable future', supported by the Victorian Government Workforce and Training Innovation Fund.

The research was conducted by Victoria University's School for the Visitor Economy in collaboration with Box Hill Institute, the Outdoor Education Group and the OEIH Industry Partner Group. The larger project encompasses broad objectives around supporting the recovery, transformation and sustainability of the outdoor industry in Victoria through industry-lead, student-centred, and future-focused education training and research. The research objectives included: (1) to determine the needs, preferences and priorities of prospective and aspiring employees, and (2) to investigate the ongoing professional development requirements of future talent to meet the medium and longer-term needs of the evolving outdoor business environment.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION GROUP

BOX HILL INSTITUTE

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

OUTDOOR EDUCATION INNOVATION HUB
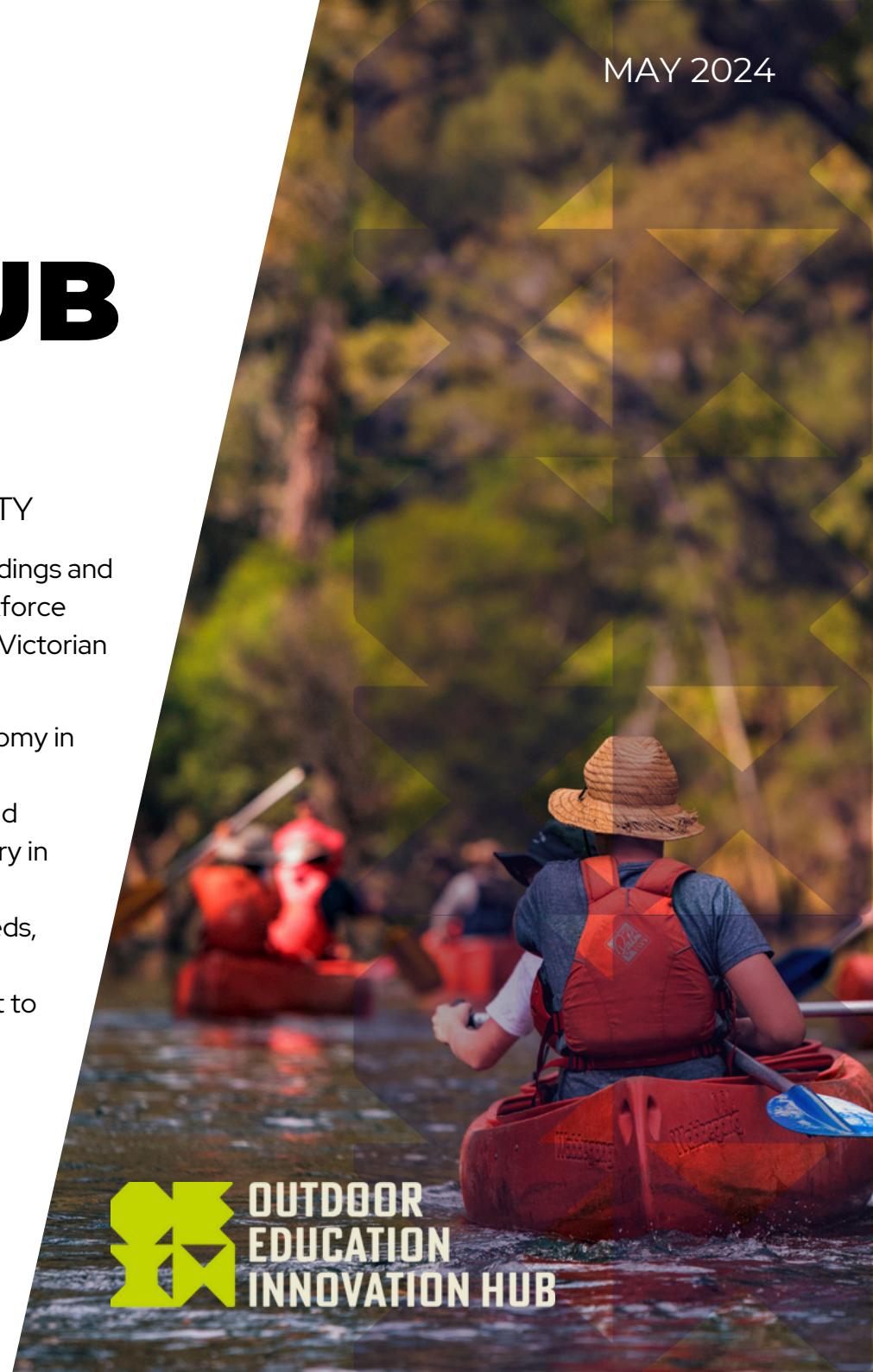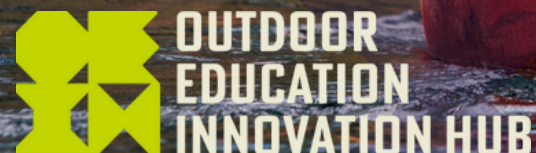
KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

STAFF ATTRACTION & RETENTION

- **Skilled labour shortages:** over the past 12 months, employers reported labour and skills shortages, particularly for experienced front-line staff (76%) and entry-level front-line staff (70%).

- **Young, highly motivated, and passionate workforce**: most employers (43%) and employees (44%) are aged 26-35; **top 2 motivators to join and stay in the industry are meaningful work and job content** (interesting work & autonomy).

- While **the majority (57%) of employees intend to stay in the industry 10+ years**, pay, long hours, poor working conditions, limited career progression opportunities, time away from families and burnout are the main reasons people consider leaving the industry. Disparate wages and conditions are reinforced by the absence of a dedicated industrial award.

$ **Low salary was the top reason employees (56%) consider leaving the industry**

- **Precarious work and high casualisation, especially in outdoor educator & activity guide/instructor roles:** While 83% of employers/ senior managers are full-time, 43% of employees are full-time, of which almost half (46%) are employed as teachers, mainly in secondary schools; 37% of employees are casual, freelance or studying and working.

INDUSTRY IMAGE & IDENTITY

- Research participants perceive **generally low industry awareness & limited access to the outdoors for children**, especially children from CALD communities and lower socio-economic families and schools due to a range of socio-cultural & economic factors.

- While the majority of the workforce is qualified, research participants believe **outdoor jobs have a low-status** (it is not seen as a 'real' job nor 'serious' career).

73% of employers require or prefer employees to have qualifications

84% of employees have a relevant qualification

RESEARCH DESIGN & PROCESS

Participatory workshop #1 10 November 2022	Literature review & secondary data analysis	Participatory workshop #2 1 August 2023	Primary data collection	Participatory workshop #3 14 December 2023
Discussions with 10 industry stakeholders to confirm research objectives & inform research plan & design	Review of existing research including academic studies & industry reports to inform research plan & design	Presentation of preliminary findings and discussions with 10 research stakeholders to inform qualitative research priorities	297 surveys and 40 in-depth interviews with research stakeholders, including employers, employees & aspiring employees	Focus groups with 25 industry stakeholders to validate findings & inform an implementation plan

Research findings are based on a mixed-methods participatory action research approach that actively involved research stakeholders.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION & ACCESSABILITY

- Women, CALD, LGBTQIA+ & First Nations communities, people with disability, neurodiverse & body diverse people face additional challenges, including highly masculine workplaces, harassment, and a lack of representation.

- Male-dominated industry, particularly in management, and low cultural diversity.

68% employers are male; 52% employees are male; 50% aspiring employees are female & 2% non-binary

2% of employers, 3% of employees & 5% of aspiring employees identified as culturally or linguistically diverse

PROFESSIONALISATION, DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

- **Discrepancy between the types of roles that aspiring employees seek and the types of roles in which outdoor staff are employed.** For example, 36% of aspiring employees sought a role as an outdoor therapist, but only 2% of employees surveyed were employed in this role, and only 5% of employers reported the recruitment of outdoor therapists. Similar scenarios played out with the roles of outdoor education primary school and kindergarten teacher. Most employees are outdoor activity guides/instructors (46%) or outdoor educators (39%).

- **Employers perceive a disconnect between graduates' work readiness and the skills/knowledge required in the field:** 63% of employers agree that training organisations provide the type of training industry needs; 81% of employees felt their training provider prepared them for work in the industry.

- **Barriers to industry collaboration include:** a highly competitive business environment, disparate industry definitions, a lack of industry data and insights, fragmented industry strategy development and conflicting approaches to professionalisation (e.g., self-regulation, mandated standards, industry bargaining agreement).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

action area	Staff attraction & retention	Industry image & identity	Diversity, inclusion & accessibility	Professionalisation, development & training
objective	To raise employment standards & increase business capacity to access a skilled & stable workforce pipeline	To improve the image of the outdoor industry as an employer of choice, connect stakeholders, collect data & communicate the outdoor industry's socio-economic value	To foster inclusive, safe & supportive workplaces, a diversified workforce & employee wellbeing	To strengthen internal & external collaboration, define clear pathways & develop a coordinated strategy for a sustainable & skilled workforce
immediate priorities	• Employ recruitment metrics to track & optimise hiring process & success where possible • Implement & communicate a total reward management strategy • Undertake work analysis & job design processes to craft jobs that are mutually beneficial for employers & employees • Provide PD for employers & employees (both permanent & casual); enhance strategic HRM skills through internal & external resources (e.g., Australian Human Resource Institute)	• Support access & exposure to outdoors for young people, especially children from CALD & low socio-economic families/schools (e.g., formal inclusion of OE in F-10 curriculum) • Increase engagement with diverse communities to enhance awareness of the industry, jobs, careers & pathways (e.g., through schools, TAFEs, universities, jobs & fair expos, media) • Engage with secondary school/VCE students as a promising source of future workforce talent • Actively recruit through both industry networks & mainstream online employment platforms like Seek; develop & maintain an online 'Outdoor Industry Job Board' • Investigate comparable models of industry development (e.g., tourism, care & emergency professions) to inform future strategies	• Build shared and comprehensive understanding of diversity • Diversify leadership by nominating leaders with diverse backgrounds to join industry boards • Include more diverse representation in marketing & communications • Support education & training scholarships to increase access for students from minority groups & lower socio-economic backgrounds • Educate management & staff by providing diversity & inclusion training & policies • Protect staff by developing & implementing codes of conduct for both staff & clients	• Continue & increase industry collaboration, internally & externally, including engagements with education providers • Strengthen national peak body to advocate & support congruence across states & territories & develop national strategy • Collaborate across industry associations in other sectors (e.g., VTIC, ATIC, AABAT) to explore mutual benefits • Vocational & higher education providers to explore how to support students' soft skills & competency-based skills respectively • Enhance education pathways through building better bridges between vocational and higher education (e.g., AQF levels 1 to 10) • Build cases for the inclusion of outdoor industry courses in government support schemes (e.g., Fee Free TAFE, Skills First and Training Needs List)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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longer-term strategies

Staff attraction & retention
- Review industry awards & working conditions (e.g., assess comparative industries, define different business requirements, explore industry-wide bargaining agreements)
- Balance staffing flexibility & job continuity (e.g., through job rotation, cross-skilling, job sharing)

Industry image & identity
- Build a consensus of industry identity through consultative workshops; outcomes can inform an industry-wide repositioning/rebrand
- Gather & share outdoor industry data (e.g., through building a digital data warehouse & dashboard); leverage insights to inform industry/business strategies & commentate the value of the industry to attract support, investment & funding
- Conduct further research (e.g., economic modelling, attitudinal analysis, impact analysis)

Diversity, inclusion & accessibility
- Enhance physical accessibility of workplaces (e.g., through applying for grants, liaising with Parks Victoria, Universal Design for Learning)
- Continue to develop & promote toolkits/resources in consultation with experts to support businesses to be more inclusive
- Continue to develop & deliver programs designed to engage more diverse groups in the outdoors
- Further research investigating how to best promote diversity, inclusion & accessibility in the outdoor industry

Professionalisation, development & training
- Review of the AAAS & consider revisions/additions (e.g., include Mental Health First Aid; equivalent qualifications for minimum standards; requalification requirements; translation of university graduates' competency)
- Strengthen industry-informed training & education pathways; explore opportunities for new & existing educational offerings (e.g., Master of Outdoor Therapy)
- Engage in strategy development to build a strong strategic plan with shared goals, vision & mission for the outdoor industry
- Explore similar industries professional structures for frameworks that would support the outdoor industry (e.g., associations, unions, accreditation requirements)
- Further evaluation of OEIH AGSM courses

SUMMARY

The summary of the research findings and recommendations highlights that extensive industry collaboration and a systems thinking approach is needed to address a range of complex and interrelated issues. The outcomes of the OEIH research underscore the need for outdoor industry stakeholders, including industry associations, peak bodies, employers, operators, government (local, state and federal) and other interested parties such as researchers and educators to collaborate productively to reimagine the outdoor industry, leverage its future potential, and support sustainable workforce development, stakeholder wellbeing and industry resilience.