

Australasian Railway Association: skills gaps are growing

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The Australasian Railway Association has said that government and the industry must work together to help deal with what it identifies as a growing skills gap.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie told delegates to the AusRAIL PLUS conference that attracting and retaining the right people was one of the industry's most critical issues.

"The rail industry is in the midst of a wave of new investment that will transform our cities and towns to deliver sustainable, resilient infrastructure for decades to come," she said.

"The skills gaps that were already evident a few years ago have only increased as new projects got underway and recent border restrictions limited the movement of skilled workers between states and from overseas.

"There is a critical need to attract, train and develop outstanding talent in our industry to support its long term growth."

A report produced by the ARA confirmed expected workforce gaps of up to 70,000 skilled workers by 2023, with some areas of specialisation already experiencing shortages.

Its review of global initiatives to build rail skills capability identified four areas of action for industry and government to address:

- Work together to deliver an Australian rail training system that provides consistent, accessible, high-quality provision across jurisdictions
- Understand and plan for future workforce needs, ensuring skills supply meets industry demand
- Attract and retain a diverse workforce, as leading employers and as an industry of choice
- Build and future-proof industry capability and support individual carer progression through transferrable skills development

Ms Wilkie said collaboration as part of the National Rail Action Plan (NRAP) over the last two years had been a positive step, and the ARA looked forward to the creation of the National Rail Skills Hub in the near future.

“Industry and government must work together to address critical skills needs and it has been encouraging to see productive engagement taking place as part of the NRAP process,” she said.

“A truly national approach that makes it easier for people to join the rail industry, and advance their career within it, will be key attracting and retaining the right people to support our success.”

The ARA is continuing to engage with the NRAP on the establishment of the National Rail Skills Hub.

It is also progressing work on the development of national competencies through its Rail Industry Worker program to make it easier for people to move between companies, projects and jurisdictions within the industry.

Ms Wilkie said the ARA would launch a new careers website later this year to support the promotion of the rail industry as a source of rich and rewarding careers.

[View the ARA's report on building rail skills capability here.](#)