

**Unit 4: Report Writing
Research Report**

**THE CHANGE IN THE AUSTRALIAN WORK FORCE SINCE THE
END OF WORLD WAR II**

Prepared by: NAME SURNAME

Preparation for Tertiary Studies Course
Victorian University of Technology

Lecturer: NAME SURNAME

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Summary

This report discusses the changes that have occurred in the Australian workforce since the end of World War II (1945-2000). A review of some of the available literature provides insights into the changing role of women and migrants in the workforce, and the influence of new technologies and changing levels of unemployment have also been considered.

Key findings include:

- There has been a marked increase in women's participation in the workforce, particularly that of married women.
- While immigration was encouraged in post-war Australia as a way of providing labour for new industries and major projects, the migrant population continues to experience a high rate of unemployment in low-skilled jobs.
- During the period 1945-2000, the nature of work in Australia has changed with a shift from labour-intensive rural and manufacturing industries to 'white collar' industries like tourism and entertainment.
- The number and proportion of unemployed people in Australia has risen dramatically, and factors that influence a person's likelihood of experiencing unemployment include age, proficiency in speaking English, and geographic location.

The information presented in this report has been gathered from secondary sources, and from Australian Bureau of Statistics' data.

The report has been prepared for submission as Unit 4 of the Tertiary Studies Course at Victoria University.

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1 Introduction

The profile of the Australian workforce has altered markedly since the end of World War II. Australia has transformed from a nation of predominantly Anglo-Celtic culture and almost full employment to one of rich cultural diversity with relatively high unemployment. This report examines ways in which our workforce has changed, focusing on the following categories: women's workforce participation rates, migrant workers' participation rates, employment categories, unemployment rates and demographic profiles. This report will also consider new influences affecting the workforce.

This report is an assessable component of the Preparation for Tertiary Studies course at Victoria University of Technology, Werribee Campus.

1.1 Methodology

Information for this report was sourced from various secondary sources, all listed in the Reference List. Data from publications by the Australian Bureau of Statistics also proved valuable. This report is not a comprehensive review of the available literature, but provides a broad overview of the topic.

1.2 Scope of the report

Wherever the term 'workforce' on its own is used, it is in reference to the Australian workforce. Where the information refers to a particular state, this will be noted. The period under consideration is 1945 to 2000, although where available data does not cover the entire period, this is stated. The report focuses on several key aspects of the Australian workforce, and is not a comprehensive account of all changes that have occurred in the workforce since World War II.

2. Findings

2.1 Women's Workforce Participation Rates

The overall participation rate of women in the Australian workforce since the end of World War II has increased markedly. The absence of male workers during the war 'brought into the workforce considerable numbers of women who had not been employed before the war broke out' (Ryan and Conlon 1989, p. 137). However, many women gave up their jobs when the men returned. Their rates of pay compared to men were reduced in the post-war years (Ryan and Conlon 1989, pp. 140-144). Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon provide the following table, which shows that the proportion of women in the manufacturing industry peaked during the war, declined until 1959, and then began to increase gradually.

Table 1. Proportion of women in the manufacturing industry.

	Males to every 100 females
1932-3	239
1938-9	271
1943-4	237
1944-5	250
1947-8	308
1951-2	315
1954-5	325
1957-8	327
1958-9	330
1961-2	326
1962-3	319

Over the next 29 years, campaigns for equal pay (or at least for better than 75 per cent of the male rate for the same work) took place across many industries, and this was achieved in principle in 1974 (Ryan and Conlon 1989, ch. 6).

In 1945, 24 per cent of the workforce in Australia was women (Zajdow 1995, p. 3). By 1947, this had dropped back to 22.4 per cent. In 1973, this had increased to 33 per cent (Ryan and Conlon 1989, p. 174). In 1993, women made up 52 per cent of the workforce (Zajdow 1995, p. 3).

The increase in married women in the workforce has been particularly marked.

'In 1947 only 15.3 per cent of women in the female labour force were married, or 3.4 per cent of the total labour force. In 1971 56.8 per cent of women in the female labour force were married, or 18 per cent of the total labour force.' (Ryan and Conlon 1989, p. 174)

Married women's participation increased rapidly after 1971. This is due, in part, to the fact that until the 1950s, women in government employment, including teachers and university staff, had been required to leave their jobs upon marrying. In 1971, 36 per cent of all married women were in paid work. In 1995, 55 per cent of all married women were in paid work. During this time, the proportion of men in paid work declined by 10 per cent, and the proportion of unmarried women has stayed the same (Norris and Wooden 1996, p. 2).

Much of the growth in women's employment has occurred as women have moved from the 'feminine' careers of teaching and nursing into respectable 'white collar' industries such as banking and retailing (Game and Pringle 1983, p. 19).

Participation in the work force is uneven across different groups of women such as sole parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have lower rates of participation. However, the participation rate of women in general is higher now than at the conclusion of World War II (Zajdow 1995, p3; Ryan and Conlon 1989, p. 174).

2.2 Migrant Workers' Participation Rates

The years since the end of the Second World War have seen an increase in immigration into Australia and therefore an increase in the number of migrants in the workforce. Post-war Australia saw the rapid national development of projects such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. This meant a great demand for labour, which the Australian workforce could not fulfil at the time. Migrants were therefore encouraged to come to Australia to fill such jobs, resulting in a period of high migrant employment (Carroll 1989, p. 48).

Workers born overseas now constitute a substantial proportion of the workforce; however, this group does suffer a high unemployment rate. Some of the reasons for this include their lack of proficiency in English, the undervaluing or lack of recognition of qualifications received overseas, the lack of a verifiable employment 'history' with which to impress employers, discrimination and under-representation in trade unions (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996, pp. 7-8). All of these factors are more pronounced among non-English speaking background (NESB) women.

'Prior to the 1980s, the conventional wisdom was that NESB immigrants, including women, had higher rates of labour force participation than their Australia-born counterparts... By the early 1980s, however, this situation had dramatically altered, such that labour force participation rates of both NESB men and women now lie well below that of Australia-born men and women.' (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996, p. 10)

The large increase in married women in the workforce applies only to Australia-born women (a 14 per cent increase from 1980-94), and English-speaking background (ESB) migrants (a 9.7 per cent increase). The proportion of married, NESB migrant women in the labour force dropped slightly over the period (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996, p. 10). Workforce participation for NESB women varies depending on their country of origin, but overall, their participation has decreased (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996, p. 11).

Unemployment rates for NESB women show that in 1980 there was little difference from the unemployment rate of 7-8 per cent for women regardless of their country of birth (including Australia). By 1994, figures for Australia-born and ESB women were still at that level, while the rate for NESB women had peaked at over 16 per cent in 1993 before falling to 15 per cent (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996, p. 15).

Post-war Australia saw a dramatic increase in immigration; however, the migrant population does experience a high degree of unemployment and participation in lower-skilled jobs compared to people born in Australia.

2.3 Employment Categories

The major types of employment dominating the workforce at the conclusion of World War Two differ greatly from the categories of employment available in recent times. After 1945, the Government encouraged manufacturing. This was initially to provide employment for returned servicemen, then later to lower imports as a means to ease its balance of payment difficulties. Rural industries also prospered at this time due to a short supply of food and basic commodities in countries badly ravaged by the war. By 1950, 28 per cent of Australians were employed in secondary industries and 17 per cent in primary industries (Carroll 1989, p48). The proportion of Australians employed in these areas has since fallen.

In the early 1970s, the government reduced tariffs for primary exports in an effort to enter into trade agreements with Asian countries. This was followed soon after by a recession, and the markets that the government had hoped to reach with their manufactured goods dried up. Australian rural and mining industries also suffered and this reduced employee numbers. In the early 1980s, a severe drought and another economic slump once again reduced employment opportunities in primary industries (Carroll 1989, p56).

From 1970 to 1995, the percentage of the total workforce engaged in agriculture and mining dropped from 9.6 per cent to 6 per cent. The proportion of the workforce engaged in manufacturing dropped from 24.5 per cent to 13.6 per cent. The services industry, including occupations like hairdressing, entertainment, hospitality and tourism, has seen significant growth during the same period. The proportion of the workforce engaged in services has increased from 47.8 per cent to 65.7 per cent. (Norris and Wooden 1996, p. 6). See Appendix A for a five-yearly breakdown of these shifts.

As the end of the century drew closer, entirely new types of employment emerged and are still growing. Many labour-intensive industrial jobs are now automated and performed by computers, microprocessors or robots. Information technology is quickly becoming a growing area of employment in Australia with many jobs centred around the selling, servicing, programming and operating of computers (Carroll 1989, p. 56).

The Australian workforce has gone from being largely based around manufacturing and exporting to being largely based around importing and consumerism.

2.4 Unemployment and Demographic Rates

Australia has experienced a dramatic increase in the rate of unemployment since the end of World War Two. At that time, and for approximately the next thirty years, unemployment was virtually non-existent and work was readily available (Carroll 1989, p. 48). In 1970, the unemployment rate was 1.5 per cent of the labour force, and the underemployment rate was less than 1 per cent (Norris and Wooden 1996, p. 8). Underemployment is defined as part-time workers who would prefer to work more hours and full-time workers who worked less than their usual hours for economic reasons.

This is in contrast to current trends. Between 1970 and 1995, underemployment rose fairly steadily to 7 per cent of the total labour force, while unemployment rose in three dramatic jumps in the mid-1970s (to 4 per cent), the early 1980s (to 9 per cent) and the early 1990s (to 10 per cent). The late 1980s saw the unemployment rate drop back to less than 6 per cent and, after peaking again at over 10 per cent in the interim, in 1998, the unemployment rate had fallen to eight percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999; Norris and Wooden 1996, p. 8). It is not uncommon for job seekers to be without employment for several years at a time. In 1994, 35 per cent of unemployed people had experienced long-term unemployment. This rate has decreased since that time (Norris and Wooden 1996, p. 9). A range of demographic factors and indicators affects the current high rate of unemployment.

Several factors determine a person's likelihood of experiencing unemployment in the current working climate. These include socio-economic background, area of residence (rural versus urban areas), proficiency in speaking English, age, and to a lesser degree, sex.

The following data was obtained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in September 1997, and pertains to job seekers nationwide. At this time, an average of twenty-seven percent of job seekers from the lowest socio-economic background had not worked at all, compared to seventeen percent of those from higher socio-economic areas. The proportion of job seekers that had not worked since May 1995 was highest in major urban areas (27 per cent) and lowest in rural areas (20 per cent). There is also a solid link between a person's lack of proficiency in speaking

English and unemployment. Sixty one per cent of persons who do not speak English proficiently or at all had been unemployed since 1995. It also appears that the older a person is, the greater the chance of being unemployed for a long period of time. Forty three per cent of job seekers between the ages of forty-five to fifty-nine had not worked since May 1995. Fifty per cent of these people reported that they were considered to be too old by employers. Virtually the same proportions of male and female job seekers were in stable employment at September 1997. The only variation was that for males, this work was predominantly full-time, while for females, half were working part-time (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, p. 20).

In a period of fifty-five years, Australia has transformed from a nation of practically no unemployment to one of reasonably high unemployment with rather complex and varied causes.

3. Conclusion

The Australian workforce has altered greatly in the fifty-five years since the end of World War II. Many of these changes have been very positive, such as the growth of women in the workforce, the formation of many new employment categories and the introduction of migration to cope with a time of great industrial growth, which has in turn enriched our culture.

There are, however, some negative aspects associated with the transformation. Many areas of employment have been replaced by machinery or other technologies, displacing unskilled workers. Consequently, Australian society is now experiencing a high demand for a skilled labour force, and an increasing sector of the population without such skills is suffering long-term unemployment. The change experienced in such a relatively short period of time leads to the question: what do the next fifty-five years hold?

4. Recommendation

The information collected for this report provides a broad overview of key changes in the Australian workforce. Further analysis would be possible if the relevant data for each year from 1945-2000 was purchased from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The reliance on secondary sources has resulted in some patchy data. For example, it is not possible to identify for any given year a breakdown of the Australian workforce by the following categories:

- unmarried Australia-born women
- married Australia-born women
- unmarried Australia-born men
- married Australia-born men
- unmarried immigrant women
- married immigrant women
- unmarried immigrant men
- married immigrant men

Greater access to primary data would enable a more thorough analysis to be made.

5. Reference List

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6. Appendix

Appendix A: Employment by Industry, 1970-1995 (% of total employment)

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
Agriculture and mining	9.6	8.2	7.8	7.7	6.6	6.0
Manufacturing	24.5	21.6	19.7	16.7	15.3	13.6
Utilities, construction, transport & communication	18.1	18.3	17.2	17.1	15.8	14.7
Services	47.8	52.0	55.4	58.6	62.3	65.7

Table from Norris and Wooden 1996, p. 6.