

Press release
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Australian employers want more than a degree
Jobseekers should prioritise soft skills and technical capabilities to attract employers

- 78% of business managers forecast it will be more challenging to find qualified professionals in the coming five years despite 68% of the employed population holding a qualification
- The top three skills needed to successfully lead a company into the digital future are technical know-how (57%), delegating decision making processes (53%) and communication skills (52%)
- The top three soft skills that will be more in demand over the next three years will be strategic thinking (39%), leadership (35%), and adaptability (34%); strategic thinking (34%), and leadership (33%) will also be the most challenging to find.

Sydney, XX November – As we reach the end of the academic year, Year 12 students across the nation will evaluate the next steps in their academic journey, while 1.4 million Australians currently at a higher-education institution will seek to leverage their degree in the professional realm¹. However, independent research by specialised recruiter [Robert Half](#) suggests that a degree may no longer be enough in the eyes of an employer as organisations prioritise technical and soft skills to further their business transformation goals.

An independent survey of 620 hiring managers in Australia shows that 78% forecast it will be more challenging to find qualified professionals in the coming five years, despite 68% of the population holding a qualification². What's more, the qualities required to lead companies to success are evolving in line with this digitised shift. The top three skills managers will look for in candidates to successfully lead a company into the digital future are technical know-how (57%), delegating decision making processes (53%) and communication skills (52%).

Andrew Morris, Director of Robert Half says: *“Higher academic qualifications are no longer the primary pathway for those entering the workforce to achieve their career goals. Given the rate at which technology evolves, the skills and knowledge required to fulfil a role successfully are changing at a greater rate than traditional university courses can adapt to so holding formal qualifications is becoming a less relevant indicator of a candidate’s suitability for a job.”*

Does a degree still have value?

A strong academic record remains a valuable asset when looking for a job as it demonstrates intellectual capability, a learning mindset and a drive for success. As the [Australian Bureau of Statistics Education and Work report](#) indicates, more than 77% of the population who are employed hold a non-school qualification, with 33% holding a bachelor’s degree or above, indicating that non-school qualifications contribute to employability in Australia³.

Andrew Morris, Director of Robert Half adds: *“While higher education is certainly considered a strength in the eyes of an employer, it doesn’t reflect a candidate’s growth potential, industry*

¹<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6227.0Main%20Features30May%202019?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6227.0&issue=May%202019&num=&view=>

²<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6227.0Main%20Features40May%202019?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6227.0&issue=May%202019&num=&view=>

³<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6227.0Main%20Features40May%202019?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6227.0&issue=May%202019&num=&view=>

familiarity, or cultural alignment with a company. With every industry undergoing massive digital transformation, companies are looking for skilled candidates who can complement their automated processes with a depth of human insight and soft skills which an academic qualification cannot necessarily cultivate.”

“It’s important to note that while degrees may no longer be a requirement for a role, applicants with a higher education qualification usually receive a higher starting salary than those who don’t have one.”

What are employers looking for?

The new, heightened focus on business skills and digital innovation has meant employers are seeking professionals who can offer industry-specific insights and are equipped with strategic, innovative and customer-focused skills in order to quickly add value to the company overall.

Current technical skills

As technology evolves at such speed that very few technical capabilities remain relevant without some degree of regular upskilling, employers are not only looking for employees who have functional aptitudes relevant to the role, but also the ability to develop and apply new skills at speed. Professionals at every stage of their career therefore need to adopt a mindset of constant learning and regularly upskill their own capabilities to remain relevant in the market

Robert Half’s research has found that the technical know-how is considered the most important skill necessary to drive an organisation into the digital future, according to 57% of Australian managers. Finance and accounting companies are looking for professionals who can demonstrate skills in areas like Microsoft Dynamics 365 and SAP/Oracle. In the financial services sector, the top skills in demand include IFRS 17 reporting, fund accounting and regulatory reporting. And in the IT industry, candidates with backgrounds in coding, especially Java, C#, C++, and React are in high demand.

Soft skills

In a period of automation, employees are central to driving human-machine collaboration by overlaying automated processes and big data with human insight. This extends from extracting critical and analytical value from data, creating cross-functional collaboration between teams and processes, and communicating value back to stakeholders.

In line with this, research suggests that strategic thinking will not only be the most in-demand soft skill over the next three years, according to 39% of Australian managers, but also the most challenging to find, as indicated by 34% of leaders. This followed by leadership skills, with 35% of business leaders considering it an in-demand skillset and 33% acknowledging it will be hard to find.

“For those looking to enter the employment market, being able to demonstrate sound analytical, problem-solving and decision-making capabilities which underpin strong strategic thought alongside practical leadership experience means having a meaningful point of differentiation from competing candidates which can help to drive career progression and salary growth.” **Andrew Morris, Director of Robert Half** concluded.

About the research

The annual study is developed by Robert Half and was conducted in January 2019 by an independent research firm, surveying 620 hiring managers in Australia. This survey is part of the international workplace survey, an annual questionnaire about job trends, talent management and trends in the workplace.

About Robert Half

Robert Half is the world's first and largest specialised recruitment consultancy and member of the S&P 500. Founded in 1948, the company has more than 300 offices worldwide providing temporary, interim management and permanent recruitment solutions for accounting and finance, financial services, technology, and administrative professionals. Robert Half Australia has offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, Mount Waverley, Perth and Sydney. More information on roberthalf.com.au.

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