

A Decade of HR history

Ten years of the HR Opportunity Index:

Australia's only longitudinal measure of HR job market conditions, tracking every shift, shock and surge since October 2015.

520K+

JOB LISTINGS
TRACKED SINCE
INCEPTION

125

CONSECUTIVE
MONTHS OF
UNBROKEN DATA

+84%

GROWTH IN HR
OPPORTUNITIES
OVER THE DECADE

8

STATES AND
TERRITORIES
TRACKED

INTRODUCTION

What Ten Years Tells Us

When The Next Step launched the HR Opportunity Index in October 2015, the purpose was simple: give HR professionals and employers an authoritative, data-driven view of their own job market – something that had never existed before in Australia. A decade on, that dataset has become something far more significant: a chronicle of the most turbulent and transformative period in modern HR history.

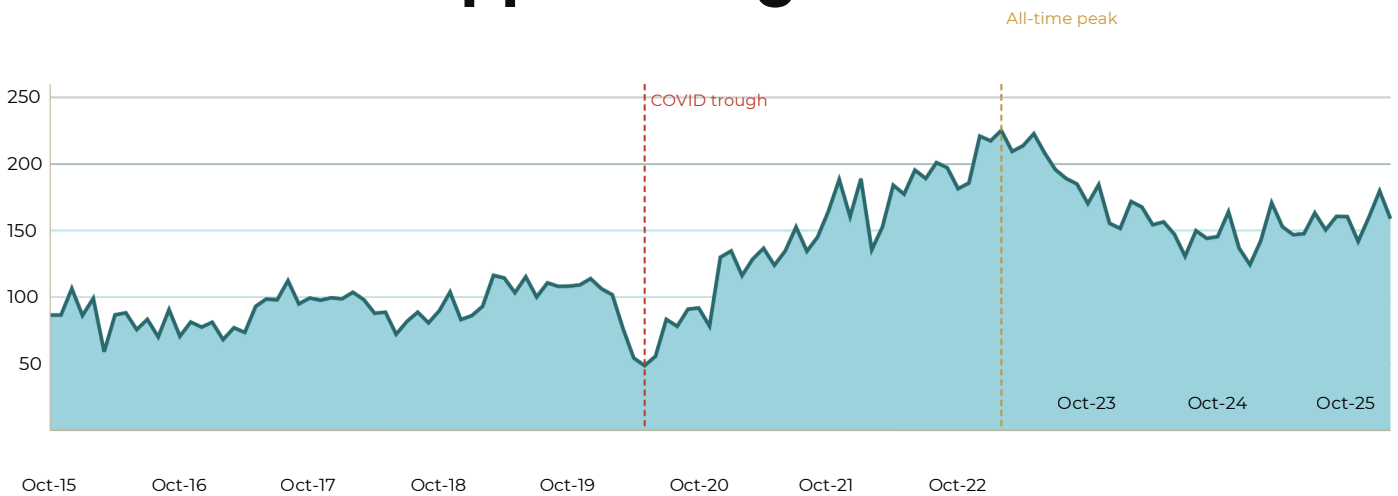
"When we started tracking this data in 2015, there was no authoritative benchmark for the HR job market in Australia. Ten years and half a million job listings later, we've built something genuinely unique – a continuous record of how this profession has grown, been tested, and ultimately emerged stronger than ever."

– Aaron Neilson, CEO, The Next Step & The Safe Step

Over 125 consecutive months, The Next Step has tracked more than 520,000 individual HR job listings across every state and territory, every major occupation, every industry sector, and every employment type. What emerges is a rich, proprietary picture of how the HR profession has evolved, contracted, surged, and matured.

THE FULL PICTURE

National HR Opportunity Index, 2015–2026



■ National Index (Seas. Adj.) Dashed lines indicate COVID trough (May 2020) and all-time peak (Feb 2023)

Seasonally adjusted. Base = 100 (October 2015).



The Decade in Data



225 

ALL-TIME INDEX PEAK
February 2023

 **48.6**

COVID19 TROUGH
May 2020 – lowest
ever recorded

52% 

COVID CRASH DEPTH
Feb → May 2020, in
just 90 days

363% 

RECOVERY FROM
TROUGH TO PEAK
May 2020 → Feb 2023

393K

PERMANENT ROLES
TRACKED
75% of all
listings over
decade 

71,754

ADS IN 2022
Busiest
calendar
year on
record 

"We're so connected to the market that we can see these trends playing out, but having the proprietary data helps us to forecast and provide valuable insights for our clients."

– Merridy Thomas,
Director, The Next Step

 **7,836**

PEAK MONTHLY LISTINGS
– February 2023

2,786 

ADS in October 2015 –
now doubled



The Defining Moments

2015

LAUNCH

Australia's First HR Job Market Index Goes Live

The Next Step publishes the inaugural HR Opportunity Index in October 2015 – the first proprietary, longitudinal measure of HR employment conditions in Australia. Tracking 2,786 listings in its first month, the index establishes a new standard for market intelligence in the profession.

Index at launch: 86.6

2017

MILESTONE

The Index Breaks 100 for the First Time

By late 2017, the national index surpasses the 100 mark for the first time, signalling that HR job opportunities have grown meaningfully beyond the baseline established at inception. Permanent roles lead the recovery; talent acquisition and HR generalist roles begin their long upward trajectory.

Year-end 2017: 99.6

2019

MILESTONE

Pre-COVID High: A Market at Full Stride

The index reaches its pre-pandemic peak of 116.4 in June 2019, as strong employment conditions across Australia drive sustained demand for HR capability. QLD and WA markets begin their outperformance, and part-time HR roles accelerate as organisations embrace flexible workforce models.

Peak: 116.4 (Jun-2019) · Year-end: 113.9

2020

HISTORIC LOW

COVID-19: The Deepest Crash on Record

IHR job opportunities fall 52% in 90 days – from 101.9 in February to 48.6 in May 2020, with fewer than 1,700 monthly listings nationally. TA roles are hardest hit. Yet the Index ends the year at 130.0 – its highest December reading to that point – as organisations mobilise HR functions to manage the crisis.

Trough: 48.6 (May-2020) · Year-end recovery: 130.0

2021

RECOVERY

The Great HR Talent War Begins

As lockdowns lift and labour markets tighten, the HR Opportunity Index embarks on a sustained rise. By October, the index is up 48% year-on-year. TA roles peak at 138.2 in November as organisations scramble to staff up. HR generalist roles surge over 50%. Vic posts the biggest state turnaround in index history.

Year-end: 160.6 · TA peak: 138.2 (Nov-2021)

2022

RECORD YEAR

The Busiest Year in HR Job Market History

2022 becomes the most active year recorded, with 71,754 HR job listings nationally – more than double the pre-COVID baseline. The national index spends the entire year above 135, peaking at 221.0 in December. Demand is broad-based across all occupations, states, and industries.

Year total: 71,754 listings · Year-end index: 221.0



2023

ALL-TIME PEAK

Index Reaches Its All-Time High of 225.3

Feb 2023 sees the index hit 225.3, with 7,836 monthly HR job listings. 2023 also sets the record for total annual listings at 78,315. HSE roles peak at 449.0 in May, driven by surging psychosocial safety obligations. The second half of the year sees a normalisation as interest rates bite.

All-time peak: 225.3 (Feb-2023) · Annual record: 78,315 listings

2024-
2025

RECALIBRATION

A Market Finding Its New Level

Post-boom normalisation sees the index moderate to the mid-130s by late 2024, recovering through 2025. TA roles, which peaked in 2021, fall to near-decade lows, reflecting the unwinding of tech-era hiring. HR generalist and management roles set new highs, underscoring HR's elevated strategic standing.

2024-year-end:136.9 · 2025-year-end:160.0

2026

TODAY

Ten Years On: A Profession Transformed

The February 2026 index stands at 159.1 – 84% above where the decade began, with 5,540 monthly HR listings nationally. From a niche professional services category to a strategic business-critical function, HR's decade-long journey is written in every data point this Index has recorded.

Current index: 159.1 · Monthly listings: 5,540

STRUCTURAL SHIFTS

How HR Work has Changed

The Part-Time Revolution

Part-time HR roles have grown 89% over the decade – from under 5% of listings in 2015 to nearly 7% today. This reflects both demand for flexible arrangements post-pandemic, and the growing viability of fractional HR leadership in mid-sized organisations.

The total volume of HR work in Australia – measured by seasonally adjusted listing counts – has grown from approximately 3,200 monthly roles at inception to over 5,200 today.

The Permanence Premium

The preference for permanent HR employment has strengthened markedly over the decade. Permanent roles now account for approximately 82% of all HR listings, up from a roughly even split at inception. The permanent index has grown 119% against just 6% for contract – signalling that organisations increasingly view HR capability as a long-term investment rather than a flexible cost.

This shift accelerated post-COVID, as businesses that had relied on contract HR during the pandemic moved to secure talent permanently during the 2021-2023 boom. Total permanent listings tracked over the decade: 393,000. Total contract: 127,000.



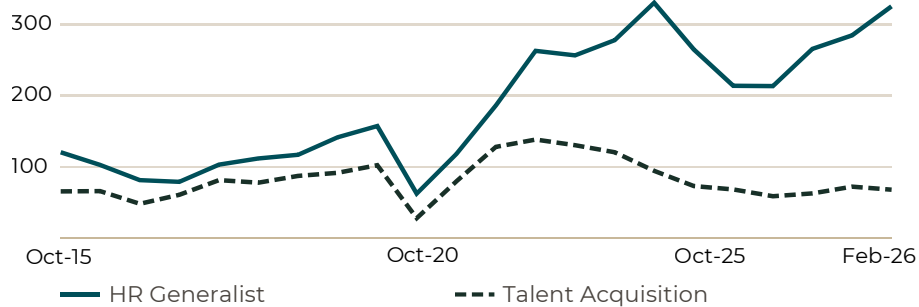
Winners, Standouts and Trends

Not all HR disciplines have moved in tandem. The decade reveals stark divergences in demand across specialisations – from transformational growth in HR generalism to the volatile rise and fall of talent acquisition.

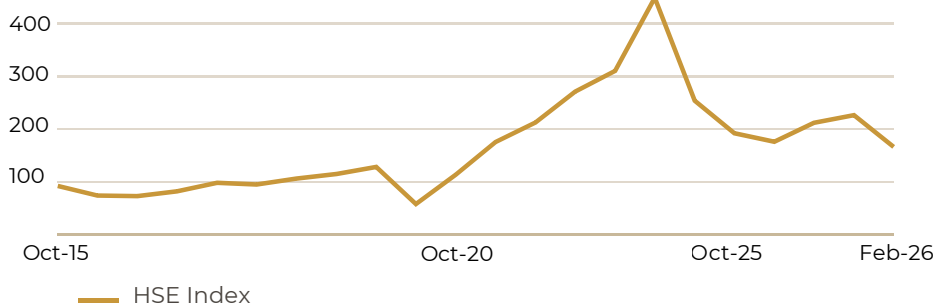
DISCIPLINE	START (OCT-15)	CURRENT	10-YEAR CHANGE	PEAK
HR Generalist / Consultant	120.4	325.2	+170%	406.2
HR Management	84.6	194.6	+130%	317.3
Workplace Relations / Remuneration	76.0	143.3	+89%	225.2
Health, Safety & Environment	92.2	166.6	+81%	449.0
Learning & Development	85.3	143.1	+68%	214.7
Talent Acquisition	65.5	68.1	+4%	138.2

Index values are seasonally adjusted. Peak reflects highest recorded monthly reading across the full decade.

HR GENERALIST VS TALENT ACQUISITION

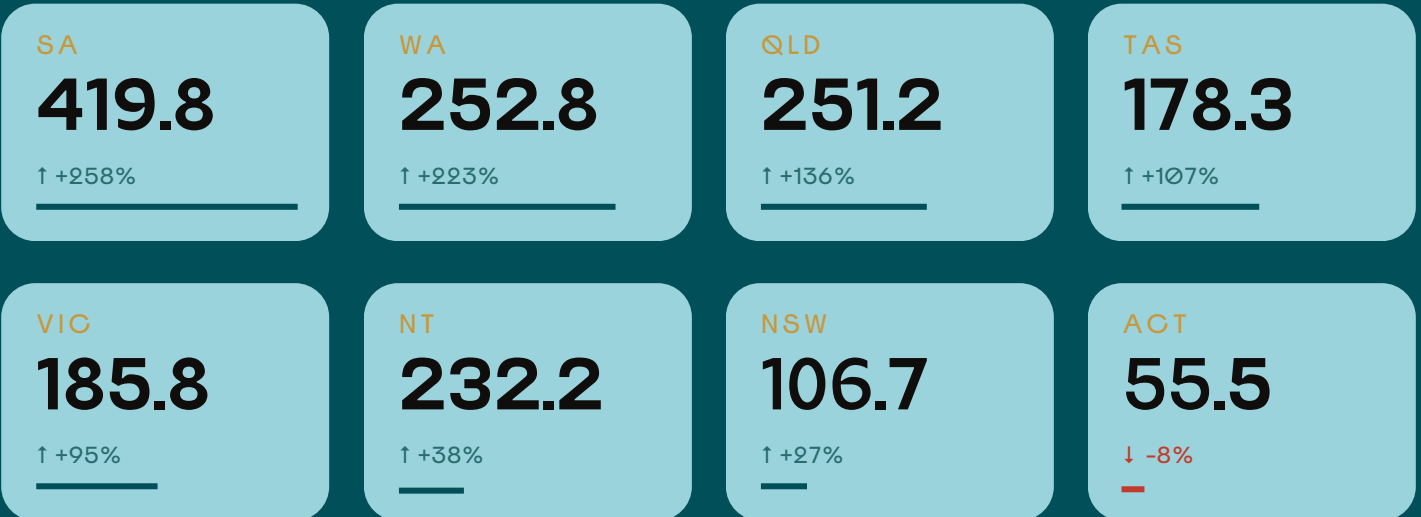


HSE – A DECADE OF GROWTH



The Geographic Story

Australia's HR job market is far from uniform. The decade reveals dramatically different trajectories across states – from South Australia's extraordinary 258% surge to the ACT's modest contraction.



Regional Rises

South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland have all more than doubled (or even tripled) their HR opportunity indices, driven by resources investment, population growth and the decentralisation of corporate HR functions. NSW, despite hosting the largest absolute volume (177,231 listings – 34% of the national total), has grown the least proportionally among growth states.

The ACT Anomaly

The Australian Capital Territory is the sole state or territory to sit below its 2015 index level today, down 8%. This reflects the particular dynamics of a public sector-dominated labour market, where Federal Government hiring constraints have subdued demand for HR professionals throughout the period.

FUTURE FOCUS

Looking Forward

"Eighty-four percent growth in a decade is remarkable. But when I look at what's ahead – AI adoption, psychosocial safety obligations, industrial relations complexity – I think the next ten years will test and reward great HR professionals even more. The demand for people who can navigate that is only going one way."

– Aaron Neilson, The Next Step