



ESTA STAFFING SURVEY

October 2020

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Introduction

One of the outcomes of the recent ESTA agreement was to form a staffing review of all aspects of operational staffing at ESTA. An independent chair, ESTA representatives and Union Delegates form the core of this committee, and are considering the following matters:

- Rosters
- Recruitment & Induction
- Training
- Attrition Rates

The AEAU conducted a survey of ESTA staff at the Ballarat and Tally Ho centres in support of submissions for the review.

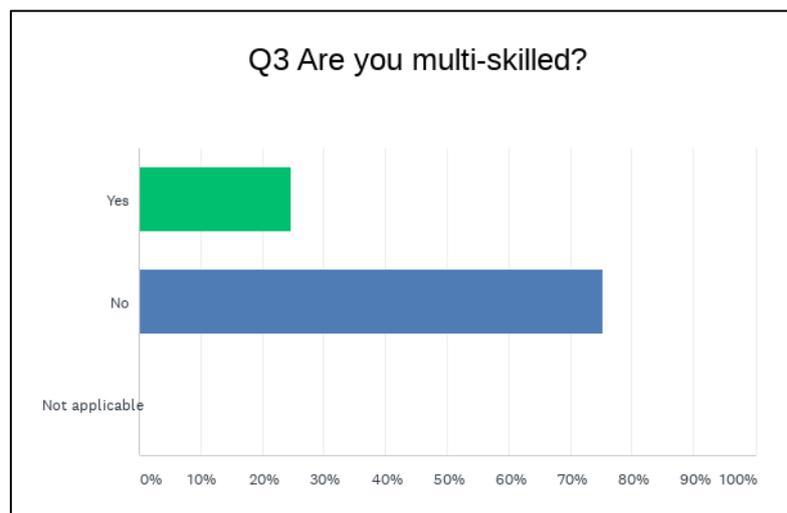
Survey Results

Demographics

Approximately 25% of ESTA staff who have a primary role in Ambulance completed this survey. 56% of these respondents were located at Tally Ho, 41% of respondents were located at Ballarat. A small number of respondents were from Fire or Police, and a small number were located at Williams Landing.

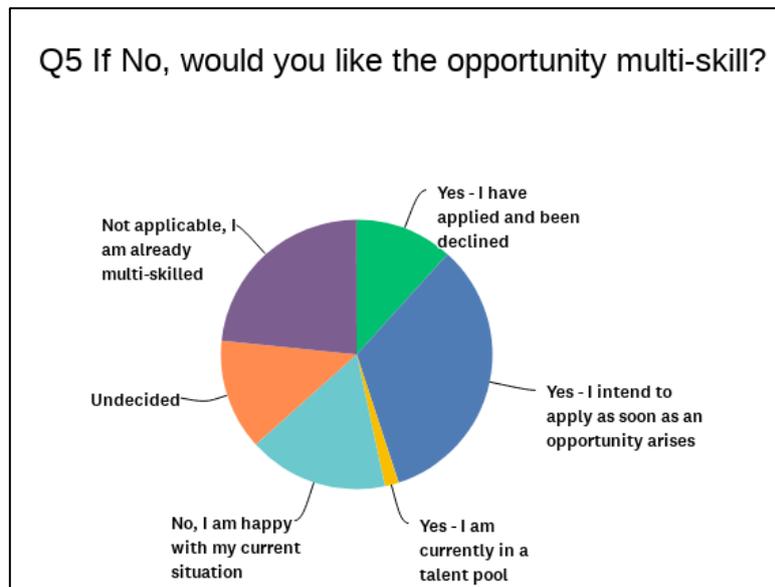
Multi-Skilling

Only 25% of respondents were Multi-Skilled employees, this figure reduced to 22% once the responses were filtered to only include Ambulance. Almost 80% of respondents would like the opportunity to multi-skill, and they highlighted the challenges with this in their comments.



Comments from respondents emphasised that becoming Multi-Skilled is a particular challenge if you are part-time, as they are not eligible. This seems short-sighted given the

numbers of staff that are part-time, and the ability of part-time staff to work overtime shifts. Additionally, respondents outlined that Ambulance staff are rarely able to be released for training, and they miss out as a result.



Selected comments from respondents are below:

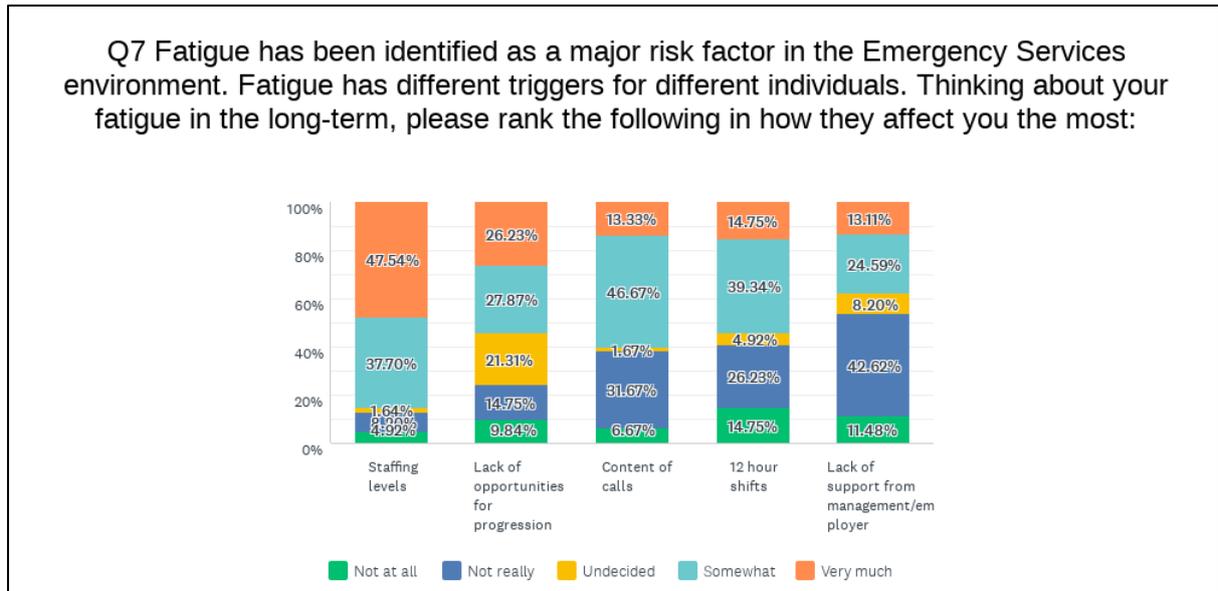
- Highly unlikely to be considered as I'm part time
- Due to covid and our inability to listen into other services, I haven't decided if this is a path I would like to pursue
- I would like the opportunity but as I am part time I am not eligible
- I'd like to apply for FSV but its rarely available
- I would like to but as I am part time I am ineligible
- Unlikely that a TL only skilled in one service would be released to multiskill in another without demotion.
- Due to the crap staffing levels, Ambulance staff are rarely ever released for multi skilling positions. Which would be way more beneficial for ESTA. But they can never release the staff.
- Unfortunately, now that pay increases are linked to upskilling (post thr two year cap) it is a disadvantage being within ambulance. We are constantly denied opportunities due to staffing levels. This doesn't make it equal opportunity anymore.
- I had previously applied 3 times and was not able to be released from primary service to multi skill
- Currently awaiting a multi skill opportunity for Amb dispatcher across to fire call taker.
- I've also put my hand up multiple times to sit on dispatch, to listen, so far haven't been able to.

Secondments

More than 20% of respondents said that they had undertaken a secondment over the last 12 months. Timeframes for these were variable, from occasionally to longer than 6-month blocks.

Causes of Fatigue

Respondents were asked to rate the key causes of fatigue and provide comments.



Unprompted commentary on this question included the lack of ability to access leave as a significant factor for fatigue. More than 10% of respondents added comments on this issue, which is a significant number. Had we included leave in the potential responses, this may have been a considerable contributor to the results.

One comment that provided some solutions for the issue of fatigue was, as has been suggested to ESTA, “A Peer Support Alert System be implemented to monitor burnout and implement strategies to mitigate it. A policy was meant to be drafted for a pilot program but this never occurred. Peer hasn't been retrained since the initiation of the program. This example shows that there is no emphasis on attrition of staff or their welfare.”

Retention

Less than 2% of respondents said they intended to leave ESTA within the next three years, and around 80% of respondents said they intended to stay. This means that the outcomes of the staffing review will have a lasting impact on staff.

Additional Comments

Respondents were asked to provide any additional comments they wanted to make. These highlight other issues not outlined in the survey questions.

A selection of these are included below.

- Would love to see more opportunities for part timers. Have been at esta for 4+ years and there is no foreseeable opportunity to move into any other roles. It would also be great to see a review on public holidays. With an option over Christmas to do half days or even 4 hour blocks.
- Equal opportunity. ESTA Ballarat is starting to feel like a real "boys club" in relation ATL permanent and secondment positions. This is really disappointing - even for 2020.
- More support needs to be given to all new takers for the whole first 12 months as this is where we lose the most staff before they've even had a chance to really settle in. Dedicated peer support staff need to be delegated to these crew members.
- While I appreciate it would be very hard to actually facilitate and would most likely contribute to a requirement for higher staffing numbers. Consider 4 on 5 off roster. Having 5 days off makes a huge difference to mental health and work attitude
- Just because service levels are being met, doesn't mean that at times some more staff couldn't be rostered to assist with fatigue levels. It looks at a 24 hour period but within that, one shift might get slammed whilst the other has an extremely low workload.
- Staff find it too hard to get leave approved to them and in turn get burnt out. We need more time off and longer periods of time away from work. We need a circuit break in order to regenerate and come back fresh.
- It seems to get busier every year yet ESTA seems to staff at minimum numbers based on the same date a year before which obviously changes days but they only up the staffing for major events if they are predicted, having an extra calltaker and extra dispatcher would take some pressure off for unexpected events and give call takers some recovery time between stressful calls.
- Busy but off days are the killer for fatigue in fire.
- One of the biggest factors is staff not being able to get adequate leave which then causes sick leave to increase which has an impact on staffing levels
- I feel as though we are always understaffed in ERT AV CT and DP and it makes it hard to get any kind of short notice leave which makes fatigue levels increase, sometimes you don't realise you need the break until its upon you. It also means busier days which are exhausting.
- I love the set up of hours worked vs days off. The only thing I would change is shifting my hours on day shifts to begin and end later.
- A huge issue at ESTA concerning fatigue is the difficulty any getting leave. I have worked here for over 10 years and since this time I have seen ESTA quadruple in size but leave allocation has not changed. Sometime you have to wait for over 12 months to get a block of leave and when it is raised their common response is yet and swap with someone
- My main concern with staffing is that our target is 90% of calls answered within 5 seconds for the day. Perhaps we could change this to 15 minute intervals with the

goal of answering 90% of calls within 5 seconds for every 15 minute interval of the day. We sometimes see some shifts with a high workload with the expectation that IDP looks good for the last few hours of the day which should help to recover from poor performance earlier on.

- I'd like to see more opportunities for progression - especially for AMB CTs as the pathway to AMB DP seems to be a bit of a bottle neck.
- The staff often want to multi skill and assist. I know personally in ambulance I suggested years and years ago we could do a quick multi skill course is SES / Storm for example to assist with peak period burn offs or storms. We often see excessive amount of calls Quine and there is nobody to take them and us operators would have been more than happy to help out. The people who are high up and make the decisions for staff development are usually wrong. That's why we turn to shit, the loyal, hard working staff with great attendance and behaviours etc are not rewarded. You only hear about the things you've done wrong. You also can't even take leave without feeling guilty about leaving the centre short staffed because the attrition rate here is such a disgrace.
- I think that the regional dispatchers have a lot more CAD work to function which can make regional dispatch more tiring mentally that metro and we don't have the numbers here, or the ability for TL support as we only have the 1 TL per team, which is very taxing on all. Fatigue management is next to none at the moment, and because of that, a lot of other things are falling by the way side - training, leave management, mental health / self care, team engagement etc.
- 17/10/20-night shift- short notice leave was offered to police call takers with 3 taking the leave. It was then non stop busy with calls waiting for majority of the night- this made it extremely tough on the crew and was very exhausting there were no breaks between calls at all for a lengthy period of time. That's just one example of low staffing not supporting the crew in one service that I can think of but there has been similar experiences of this happening. Or no extra coverage for people taking leave or staff calling in sick.
- It is my belief that ambulance dispatch safe staffing levels should always include the required amount to cover a channel plus one. This would allow the ability for an Assistant Radio Operator or major event channel to be opened should it be require. ESTAs current model of expecting a team leader to take this on is not adequate as they are likely to have responsibilities if busy or a major event in progress
- I see a lack of variability as a leading contributor to fatigue. Not enough opportunities for staff to have more than 1 skill. Either wishing a service or across multiple.
- It is disappointing to see that we have not run dispatch courses for over a year. Considering we run on minimums almost every other day, it becomes apparent that its desperately required. Potentially review whatever is used to measure the required DP levels to ensure it reflects real world situations!

Proposed Solutions to Survey Issues

While all of the issues that exist at ESTA could be resolved through additional staffing, some complementary solutions are highlighted below.

Training Time “on shift”

Training release time for employees at ESTA is piecemeal, there is not a consistent approach to providing time and ensuring that employees stay up to date for their protocols and procedures which change constantly. Employees are expected to conduct their own “e-learning” training online, sometimes during breaks or at unusual hours – such as 3am on a night shift. Often staff are asked to complete online training on a laptop whilst also being ‘plugged in’ to take emergency calls or whilst on dispatch. Training can therefore become rushed and interrupted. The ad-hoc allocation of training time is not conducive to a healthy or helpful learning environment.

ESTA need to start taking training more seriously – employees need time to read, process and absorb important information and updates.

Potential Solutions: A better way would be to allocate staff training days/time. This could be 3 hours every month and could be cumulative so that it could be used as 2 x 6 hours for example. Time should be allocated on shift in advance or given as Time in Lieu by mutual agreement with employee.

Access to Leave.

ESTA Employees will often be declined leave, and this is a significant issue for staff as it is demoralising. Employees noted within the survey that this had an impact on their fatigue and their mental health.

There is a restriction around the numbers of people that can take leave based on the rules that are in place for granting of leave. For example, only two call-takers and one dispatcher may be allowed leave at one point in time. Comments indicate staff are willing to complete

Potential Solutions: ESTA could trial relaxing their rules for leave availability assessing if this has a positive impact. The positive benefits of improving leave access would be reduced leave liability and staff feeling more supported. It may also result in a decrease in sick leave & unplanned absences, which means ESTA will have greater ability to plan for staffing levels.