

MGT310 Management Dissertation

Pool Lifeguards.

A research study on recruitment and retention in aquatic facilities.

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Abstract

This research study focuses on the turnover of permanent lifeguards in the aquatics industry in districts with a population of up to 59,000 people. Emphasis is placed on investigating the causes of this problematic and on identifying the current recruitment and retention strategies in place to mitigate this challenge. A field study involving seven facilities in six different districts across New Zealand was carried out during 2020 that revealed outstanding numbers that can serve as the stepping stone to further studies in the subject. Turnover of permanent lifeguard is extremely high, and the aquatic industry approaches this issue systematically to try to revert it. High turnover causes ongoing operational complications and stress that adds up to the high costs of training new professionals, only to see them leave a couple of years after. It has been accepted that high turnover in the industry is a natural behaviour, however, by analysing the causes of this habit, recommendations are made to mitigate this tendency, which can become the starting point to promote a career in aquatics and in the wider recreation industry.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research will be based on the area of staff recruitment and retention in the aquatics industry which is a branch of the wider recreation industry in New Zealand. Among the different departments within aquatics, this research will be focused on the permanent lifeguard team, in workplaces that are located in districts with a population no bigger than 59,000 people.

1.2 Significance of this study

Having spent ten years in the aquatics industry in New Zealand, across different workplaces and regions, I identified a tendency where permanent lifeguards stay in the industry for a short amount of time, and quickly move on to different jobs or activities. This creates important shortages in workplaces where they are not quick or cheap to replace. It also creates vast consequences for their management teams and their businesses. This research will analyse this tendency, which would intend to recommend possible options to help the industry find a solution to revert this problem.

1.3 Objective

This research will intend to confirm this tendency and to explore its causes and any other relevant details. It will be based on aquatic facilities in New Zealand where the population of their district does not exceed 59,000 habitants, and of those who are PoolSafe accredited. (PoolSafe is an industry standard that is achieved by meeting a range of different criteria. One of those criteria is to have all current lifeguards nationally certified to New Zealand standard).

Once the results are given, the information will be analysed and used to identify possible solutions to this problem.

1.4 Research question

The primary research question is:

-If the industry suffers a genuine problematic in the area of recruitment and retention of permanent lifeguards in districts with a population of less than 59,000 habitants, what can be recommended to revert this tendency?

The secondary research questions arising from the above are the following:

-Is permanent lifeguard recruitment and retention in small districts a current problem?

-What causes the permanent lifeguard recruitment problem?

-What causes the permanent lifeguard retention problem?

-Where are the permanent lifeguards going?

1.5 Background

Public swimming pools in New Zealand are encouraged to have certified lifeguards to operate their facilities during opening hours. This is not a law, but it is considered industry's best practice. To achieve this, employers need to recruit from candidates who have a certain level of swimming fitness, who are able to respond to 1st aids, who have excellence in customer service and possess good cleaning skills with an eye for detail. The role of a lifeguard plays an important role in the operations of a swimming pool. Lifeguards are at the front line of service. To begin with, a pool must be actively supervised by a current certified lifeguard to be able to open to the public. There are customer to lifeguard ratios, which means that at times more than one lifeguard may be required in the same area to offer a correct level of supervision. On top of that, lifeguards monitor pool water quality, set up for recreational events such as inflatables and bookings, respond to incidents, manage hazards, and maintain general cleanliness of the poolside area. Activities and bookings, at the same time, require additional lifeguards to supervise its users. Aquatic facilities are severely impacted when they are short staffed from lifeguards. They may need to look at closing a pool or an area of the facility, cancel bookings or activities such as slides or inflatables. Services can be severely compromised very quickly, and it has a direct impact on the business and on the community.

In districts or towns with a population of up to approximately 50,000, lifeguard recruitment can be a challenge. For some reason, there are not many suitable applicants that fit the lifeguard's job description.

Once the right candidate is found the process to train and certify someone from trainee to a pool lifeguard can take up to 3 to 4 weeks. External providers are included in the training

and certification, as well as other lifeguard trainees to accomplish this goal. The process from the start of recruitment to the day the trainee becomes certified, can be costly and time consuming. This is only considering the basic and initial training. A lifeguard can attend additional courses and obtain further qualifications as they grow in their role, and to enhance their career pathway. During the time of the basic training, the organisation may be having to cope with being short staffed, until the new employee gets qualified. This would affect their availability of services that can be delivered to the public and their internal operations.

If this was a rarely or seldom process it would be tolerable. But the lifespan of a lifeguard at a workplace can range from 6 months to 2 to years approximately. Considering that a lifeguard normally becomes senior after a year approximately, this means that the aquatic industry is losing their experienced staff too early. This creates consequences for the business and the management team, who are frequently working on staffing their rosters, and training new staff members.

The public on the other hand, may suffer the effects of being continuously served by inexperienced staff, which can be frustrating in the long run, and which affects the reputation of the facility and specially the one of the lifeguards.

1.6 Definition of key terms

The table below provides a definition of key terms used in this study

| Key Term | Meaning |
|---------------------|---|
| Aquatic facility | A facility that operates at least one public pool for the use of the community. |
| Skills Active | The industry training organisation that provides national recognized qualifications for the aquatics industry. |
| PoolSafe | An accreditation achieved after an independent assessment of public pools takes place to ensure that their operations and facilities are safe. |
| Recreation Aotearoa | The voice of Recreation in Aotearoa, representing all professionals in the industry. They empower their members to deliver the quality Recreation experiences, places and facilities, that fuel a more active, healthy and connected New Zealand. |

Chapter 2: Literature review

The literature revised has been segmented into two main sections: recruitment, and retention. Each one will expand thoroughly to detail the topic around the aquatic industry. The purpose is to find relevant sources to analyse any tendency and provide details that can be put together to bring a solution. This will help to understand if there is a problematic around this area and how facilities or similar businesses are coping with it. Using such databases as SIT library, Internet, and aquatic industry manuals and websites. Search timeframes include the most recent years and no earlier than 2000.

2.1 Recruitment

Lifeguards are vital to the operations of the aquatic facilities. As explained earlier, without lifeguards pools cannot be supervised which means that aquatic facilities would need to cut down on services to ensure a safety environment for its public (LINDA WILSON FUOCO, 2003) (Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 2000).

Every year, lifeguards are recruited to operate different pools, seasonal or all year round. This constitutes a hardworking process to attract new employees (LINDA WILSON FUOCO, 2003). Employers face different barriers when recruiting this type of personnel.

Barriers to recruitment

-Physical requirements (Bhattarai, 2018). The role of the lifeguard involves physical demands that go from swimming to lifting heavy objects (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). To start with, lifeguard applicants need to pass several swimming tests to prove swimming competency. Once at the training stage, lifeguard training can be intense, with a mixture of both physical and theory activities and assessments, that will demand the applicant a strong grade of commitment (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). Once the certification stage is completed, the job itself can be physically demanding as well. It will be required to stand on the feet for long periods of hours, lift heavy objects and equipment, and regularly participate in lifeguard training so as to keep up the skills (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). This often may put off some potential candidates to sign up for a job of this calibre.

-Pay (Bhattarai, 2018) (LeValley, 2020). Lifeguard's starting rate normally begins at minimum wage, and in most cases as they acquire more experience and qualifications, they can increase their hourly rate (Skills Active Aotearoa, 2020). Lifeguarding involves specific requirements and a high level of responsibility. When job seekers compare the starting rates of the lifeguard role, versus the starting rates of other job alternatives like in the food and beverage industry, or retail, it may look

like the aquatic industry asks too much from their lifeguards who receive only minimum wage in return, while other workplaces that pay minimum wage, are not so demanding with the requirements of their role.

-Responsibility (LINDA WILSON FUOCO, 2003) (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). Even though the role of a pool lifeguard possibly starts on minimum wage, from the first day poolside they can be exposed to a life or death situation. There is a high level of responsibility that the lifeguards carry on their shoulders. From watching the pool to prevent drownings and other accidents, to responding to medical emergencies and first aids outside of the pool, the lifeguards are responsible for supervising every corner of the public area of the facility within the pool, and they may be accountable if they fail to react as expected (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). After the implementation of the new health and safety at work act 2015, lifeguards can be liable of up to \$300,000 or up to 5 years in prison if it is proved they did not respond accordingly after a serious incident occurred (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). When combining the hourly rate, and the amount of responsibility and consequences they are exposed to, an applicant may opt to a safer alternative when applying for a job.

-Tradition (Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 2000) (Bhattarai, 2018) (LINDA WILSON FUOCO, 2003). Generally speaking, the position of pool lifeguard can be associated as a first job and as a job for teenagers. Normally school kids in their final ages of school tend to seek for part time jobs to start engaging with real life experiences. Lifeguarding can be an attractive opportunity as it may involve an environment they already know from having learnt to swim, or simply because they have attended at a recreational activity. Therefore, it is very common to have a young group of workers representing the lifeguard team. Sometimes aquatic managers describe the lifeguard environment as that of a high school environment with youth drama and work ethics that can relate to the maturity level of their age. This may put off more mature applicants outside this age group from entering into a juvenile and emergent work force.

-Reputation (Bhattarai, 2018) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). Lifeguarding, like similar positions in the aquatics industry, is generally not considered as a career, but as a stepping stone or a transition to get another job, or as a temporary job until studies are finished or until the employee determines what they want to do with their life. Often this transition can last from a few months to a couple of years at the most. Generally speaking, lifeguards are recruited mainly from schools, as part timers. As they finish school they become full timers (if they do not go to study at a university or polytechnic in a different town), and then they move on to a trade, or studies, or a different job. From my experience as part of the interview panel, very few applicants had said they were interested in an aquatics career when interviewed.

-Small towns (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). Logically the number of residents in a town affects the number of applicants at any given job. The lifeguard position is no exception. The smaller the town, the smaller number of applicants, which added to the facts described previously affects the recruitment significantly.

-Competition (Bhattarai, 2018) (Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 2000) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). There are several employers who compete to attract the attention of the same target of workers. These are most predominately in the food and beverage industry such as McDonalds, KFC, Burger King, Pizza Hutt or any local café, or those in the retail industry, such as supermarkets and shops. The main disadvantage aquatic centres have against these other employers are the fact that their lifeguard role demands more requirements to be employed but pay a similar hourly rate (Skills Active Aotearoa, 2020). Other types of competition are trades or internships. These are normally associated with a career that may be more popular among the younger generations.

-Roster (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). Aquatic centres operate from early mornings till late evenings, and includes weekends and public holidays. This means their staff will be required to work outside of traditional business hours regularly. This may occur with a fix roster or most likely with a rotating roster. In the long run, the idea of consistently working weekends and public holidays may not be as attractive as a Monday to Friday job.

After a successful candidate is found, there are several processes required to incorporate a lifeguard. Added to the normal routine of the process of recruitment, as lifeguards are regarded as a sensitive position due to their responsibility towards safety and because of their natural contact with children, police vetting and pre-employment drug testing are common procedures that can not only extend the process of recruitment, but it can also add costs.

After a candidate successfully went through the recruitment process, an intensive and costly training regime will start to certify the trainee into a lifeguard (LeValley, 2020) (Skills Active Aotearoa, 2020) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). From day one, the lifeguard trainee will go through a thorough training course that includes theory training, bookwork, physical training, practical courses, and theory and practical assessments (Recreation Aotearoa, 2020). There are 20 credits at level 3 in the lifeguard certification, that adds to a day and a half first aid course. Lifeguard training's length can vary according to the facility, the trainer, the trainee, and the availability of space. The course itself generally involves up to four days including the assessments, and an extra day and a half for the 1st aid course. Considering the trainer and assessor's amount of time (who normally is an experienced and qualified employee or the manager), plus the time taken to deliver the training (all training is paid), plus the fact that lifeguard are trained in groups of 4 minimum so as to cater for all

the scenarios and team work activities and assessments, plus the actual cost of the certifications (lifeguard and 1st aid), it results in a costly and time consuming activity.

To cope with the difficulties in recruitment, often aquatic centres need to become creative at the time to look for potential candidates (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). By simply putting an ad on the news or on popular job vacancies web sites may not be enough. Some places go out and about to seek for candidates, such as school, universities, polytechnics, and some even develop junior lifeguard programs to gain interest among the younger generations who might become candidates in the following years (HT Media Ltd, 2008) (Bhattarai, 2018) (LeValley, 2020) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). On occasion there are tendencies to hire semi-retired people who would like to take a few steps down and engage in a role that is less stressing. Aquatic centres benefit from getting mature, reliable employees, and in turn the employees fit in nicely for at least the first months.

Another point to consider is why lifeguard vacancies are created and what can be done to stop lifeguards from leaving the industry.

2.2 Staff retention

Most sources researched agree that staff retention is a key area for the success of a business (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019) (M2 Communications Ltd Manpower UK, 2007) (Moore, 2016), and that smaller companies in general are more concerned about it (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008) (M2 Communications Ltd Manpower UK, 2007) than the larger corporations. It is essential that all management levels, together with their Human Resources team, agree on a strategy to retain their workers and promote an efficient and healthy work environment. According to research, poor management is a critical reason of why staff leave workplaces (Moore, 2016). One of the key strategies is to apply a management style that is inclusive of all employees and that looks after them at the same time. Some key factors of successful management practices are described below.

- Work life balance & flexibility (Moore, 2016) (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019) (M2 Communications Ltd Manpower UK, 2007). Workers nowadays are attracted to workplaces that value employees personal time and commitments. Even though employees are hired to do a job, they are also conscious of the difficulties that life may throw at anyone's personal daily routine. Good employers are willing to be flexible to accommodate this and help their employees to cope with those complications that no one is extent of. Employees who find support in employers are likely to stay longer and promote a positive, healthier environment at work.

- Benefits (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008) (Moore, 2016). Perks and benefits constitute another factor that enhance the relationship between employee and

employer. Benefits and perks should be something relevant and useful to employees to keep them attracted to staying in the workplace. Retention cannot be relied only on this, but it helps if other factors are in place too. It all adds up. Some benefits may be similar from workplace to workplace such as discounts with banks or insurance companies. Employers may need to become creative and explore different options to make their benefits unique.

-Career pathways (Moore, 2016) (Australian Provincial Newspapers, 2012) (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019) (M2 Communications Ltd Manpower UK, 2007). According to research workers are strongly motivated by career progression and development. Regular performance reviews, constructive feedback, having goals, aiming at a direction, and improving themselves are practices that reward the employee in such way that they feel part of the company and not just working for it. When employees look back at the time they spent at a workplace and notice how much they have constructed and progressed, a sense of satisfaction and belonging may born naturally, which would make them part of the company and loyal to it.

-Pay (M2 Communications Ltd Manpower UK, 2007) (Anonymous, 2001). Employees work to get paid, but as much as pay is important, it does not constitute a key factor in determining if someone wants to leave an organization. Pay only becomes relevant if employees are underpaid for the job they do. It may then exist a feeling of dissatisfaction that may spread among other workers and into the culture of a place. Some places even give a bonus in cash to lifeguards who work until the end of a summer season in an attempt to retain their services (LINDA WILSON FUOCO, 2003).

-Job satisfaction (Moore, 2016) (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019) (M2 Communications Ltd Manpower UK, 2007) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). This is a key factor in employee morale. This factor involves a range of characteristics such as feeling accomplished with the job they do, feeling recognized and rewarded by their work environment (customers, peers, managers), celebrating milestones together (Australian Provincial Newspapers, 2012), getting paid accordingly, being comfortable and looked after, and plenty of other aspects that make an enjoyable work experience. Constant tension in the workplace, the feeling of not being appreciated or that no one cares about anyone can contribute to decrease the job satisfaction, which would encourage people to leave (Joshua-Amadi, Recruitment and retention in the NHS: A study in motivation, 2003) (Joshua-Amadi, Recruitment and retention: A study in motivation, 2002). Those employers who can manage to keep their employees satisfied, will more likely have better chances at retaining them.

-Sponsorships (Anonymous, 2001) (Urology Times, 2007) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). Some employers manage to sponsor their employees on their studies. Each employer may have its conditions, on whether those studies need to be relevant to their job, or whether the employer provides a list of options that each employee can choose from. On occasion, employers may have a good discount on fees that the employee can take advantage of to pursue their careers. Sometimes the industry training organisation provides a study pathway to enhance their careers, which can turn out to be an excellent option.

-Surveys (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019) (Urology Times, 2007). Exit surveys are commonly used by employers to obtain a general idea as to what made an employee leave, where they are heading, how was their experience at the workplace, and any other comment the employee would like to leave before departing. This is generally used by workplaces to investigate any possible trend or issue and try to fix it. As the employee is leaving they may feel relaxed to make any comments without the feeling of a retaliation. It may also depend on who does the exit survey, whether it is their direct manager or a member of Human Resources. The content of the survey or the answers may vary, and it may be used for different purposes. A stay survey is also useful as it captures the staff who are still working for the company. They can provide information about the good things the organisation is doing, together with what areas may need attention to make the employee feel more comfortable and satisfied. This gives the employer a chance to fix anything that may not be right before the candidate starts thinking departing.

-Training (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019) (Anonymous, 2001) (Urology Times, 2007) (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). Although like a sponsorship, ongoing inhouse training is an efficient practice to keep workers engaged and loyal to the company, while they are becoming upskilled. Internal training can be less costly than paying an external provider to deliver a course, and it preferably needs to be part of a bigger structure that involves performance reviews and career development. Training needs to come along with providing the right tools to do the job right tools (Urology Times, 2007) and giving the employee space or an allocated time to apply the knowledge learn. Training for the sake of training would lead to wasting resources and time. Training needs to be ongoing, relevant and applicable.

It is more expensive to replace good quality employees than to retain them (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019). And that is only considering the economic effect, without contemplating how a constant flow of new staff members can affect team morale and the normal operating procedures of a facility. Retention should play a key part in any organisation, but especially in an industry that struggles to recruit new employees. Any strategies implemented should be reviewed at least once a year to keep up the success (HT Digital Streams Limited, 2019).

2.3 Conclusion

After analysing the findings on the literature review I consider that many factors contribute to the lack of popularity of becoming a pool lifeguard. However, there is a group that still see it beneficial and interesting, and who meet the requirements of the position. To beat the competition (other workplaces that target the same market of workers), an organisation needs to become competitive when hiring and retaining employees (Moore, 2016). A successful aquatic management team cannot rely only on advertising at the most popular job searches engines to obtain a good number of strong candidates (Royal Life Saving Society Canada, 2008). This industry requires management to do the hard work of going out and promoting the job in their area of influence, or even further away. They might need to become creative at the time of recruitment. Retentions plays a key role, as it can anticipate the problem of recruiting new staff. By stopping or minimising the exodus of qualified staff, the problem of recruiting can be avoided. There is plenty of growth in this area of management, as I found little evidence of this kind of practices being held at aquatic sites. Normally the pressure of daily routine triggers to work on what is more immediate rather than what it is more important, therefore much of the planning can be delayed and sometimes missed, or worked under an extremely short amount of time. More effort can be placed in the retention of employees in the aquatic industry.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the field study is to confirm whether there is a real difficulty in recruiting and retaining permanent lifeguards in the aquatic industry in New Zealand, in districts with a population of up to 59,000 people. This project has been carried out between the months of April and July 2020, and the field work was done between the months of June and July of the same year, based on information recurred from the month of March 2019 to March 2020. The content of this chapter includes several sub sections that explain the investigation carried out.

3.2 Overview

After working ten years in the aquatic industry in New Zealand, which included working in different regions and islands of the country, it made me aware of a potential issue that the industry might be facing. I perceived that permanent lifeguards were constantly leaving the industry at their peak of performance in their role and that it was not easy to find a replacement for them. Once found, the same cycle occurred. The investigation will reveal if this tendency exists in different areas of the country with similar demographics and it will explore the causes and how the different facilities work on strategies to face this challenge. The results of the field work will be analysed in the following chapter.

3.3 Tools

To do the field work, a mixed methodology approach was utilised, using both a quantitative research method being a survey and qualitative method being an interview.

3.3.a Survey (Appendix 3)

The survey consisted on a total of thirteen questions that ranged from multiple choice questions, to closed questions and open questions. The thematic was divided into two, recruitment and retention. Statistics were based on the total amount of permanent lifeguard positions at each facility.

The questions about recruitment were oriented to find out data regarding the total number of permanent lifeguards that were recruited between March 2019 and March 2020. When compared against the total number of permanent positions, it would tell the percentage of staff turnover in one year. Additional data was enquired about the number of candidates that were recruited to become lifeguards, such as age group, reason for applying to be a lifeguard, how they become aware of the job

opportunity, whether they were locals or from out of town, and what they were doing prior to applying to the job. The reasoning behind this was to capture the main interest of the successful applicants to enter the aquatic industry, together with their motivations and expectations.

The second section of the survey was based on the resignations of the permanent lifeguards. The number of resignations should technically match the number of permanent lifeguards recruited as technically every staff member needs to be replaced, unless there is a change in the structure or the replacement cannot be found. Additional questions were asked such as reasons for leaving, age group, where they left to, how long they were in the job for, their performance in the role, and whether the exit was expected or if they were caught by surprise. The reasoning behind this was to capture different data that could be associated with the causes or tendencies to identify this leakage of staff. Once the problem is identified, it can then be analysed and worked on solving that problematic.

The survey was estimated to take no more than 30 minutes to complete. The questions were straight forward, and the person completing it only had to write numbers or short phrases to answer. To complete the survey, a little research was required though, based on the permanent lifeguards that were recruited and that resigned during March 2019 and March 2020, and on any notes taken during that time. The amount taken to gather that information varied according to the organizational skills of each person who was selected to complete the survey. At the end of the survey, there was room to add any other relevant comment associated with the study.

3.3.b Interview (Appendix 4)

The interview consisted of a series of 6 main questions and 3 subsequent questions that were divided into two main topics, recruitment and retention. These questions were a complement to the survey, as some questions were based on the data collected at that stage. They included topics such as the different strategies employers used to recruit and retain their permanent lifeguards, and how they overcame any barriers along the way. The reasoning behind this format was to identify what the different managers were doing to help their situation and what plans in place there were to implement in the future.

The interview was scheduled to be completed in no more than 30 minutes, depending on how much information the interviewee was prepared to share.

3.3.c Explanation & justification

These two research tools were chosen for different reasons. It gave the person completing the survey the possibility to do it at their own pace and at a time of their convenience. The survey questions were carefully created to gather key information without the need to make the process too long or for the interviewee to spend too much time searching for information. The format of the survey was cautiously designed so that it could fit different facilities, regardless of their location, size, or amount of staff. It also met the need to not reveal any sensitive data, such as names or location, and to base the information on facts rather than personal opinions or perceptions. This way the survey was an anonymous tool that could provide a good amount of reliable information while protecting the person or organisation delivering it.

The interview was a complement to the survey. It was designed to capture additional information to help explain the answers given in the survey. The questions were prudently made so that they revealed facts rather than personal opinions or perceptions as well, however, with a few open questions, the interviewee could expand their answers as much as they preferred. The people who agreed to participate in this project were quite passionate about their job and the industry, so long and detailed answers could be expected, but if they were short of time or caught with a busy schedule, short concise answers could be expected. The interview questions were handed in beforehand, together with the survey questions so the interviewee could come to the interview prepared. The interview was done over the phone and in some cases through video call.

how these tools are valid to achieve answers to the research questions

The content of the survey and of the interview are in straight relation to the questions of the research. They were technically created to provide the material to analyse the problematic and they were distributed throughout different regions of the country. The interviewees were contacted beforehand and given an explanation on how the research tools were going to be utilised and what their role would be. They were also explained how to fill in the survey, and were given the time they required to complete it. Once they were completed, they were contacted again to arrange and complete the interview.

3.4 Sample

3.4.a Type, size, and rationale

Six different districts were selected across the whole country to be part of the research. The condition of each district was that they had to have a population of no more than 59,000 residents, and to have at least one aquatic facility in it. The aquatic facility had to have a current PoolSafe accreditation at the moment of being contacted.

Within the aquatic facility, the person requested to complete the survey and the interview was the one that was responsible for the recruitment of the lifeguard team, who normally was the head of that department or the facility manager.

The six districts surveyed contribute to 14% of the total districts that are home to a population of up to 59,000 residents in New Zealand (CityPopulation, 2019). From that total amount of districts, at least one aquatic facility is present in most of them, however not all of those aquatic facilities are PoolSafe accredited.

3.4.b Validity & reliability

The tools utilised made focus on information gathered mostly from facts. The validity of these facts was based on the reliability that the person sharing the information had done the appropriate research within their database to provide trustworthy and accurate answers. The person involved was at a management level and was responsible for the recruitment of the permanent lifeguards. Further evidence was not sought other than the trustworthiness on the authority that was delivering it.

3.5 Procedure

The potential problematic in the aquatic industry was identified years ago, however it wasn't until 2020 that a decision to formally investigate the issue took place. An evaluation of different strategies took place at the beginning of the year 2020, and the proper field work was carried on during the months of June and July of that same year.

3.5.a Ethical & cultural considerations

An informative document (Appendix 1) was written to explain what the research was aiming for and how the information gathered was going to be utilised. It detailed that all sensitive data was going to be kept confidential and that any names, locations, organization's name, or any term that could identify an individual or organization was not going to be revealed in the project. It also explained what the interviewee was expected to do, and how much of their time was going to be

needed. It also explained that all sensitive data collected was going to be destroyed after the presentation of the project, and that all raw material was going to be destroyed after five years. Until then, only the researcher and the supervisor could access.

The participants were also given a consent form (Appendix 2) that acknowledged their agreeance to participate in the research project. This consent form had to be signed and returned together with the survey or at the moment of the interview. It was specified that the participation was entirely voluntarily and that the participants could choose to withdraw from the project at any time until 24 hours after having completed the interview.

3.5.b How research was carried out

Seven participants that represented six districts were contacted via phone to communicate about the research study. In that conversation the main details of the project were explained, and the selected participants were asked to confirm whether they would be interested in participating in it, and if they had the time to complete what was being asked. All of them agreed to participate, and immediately afterwards, instructions on what the next steps would be were briefly explained.

An e-mail containing the survey, the consent form, the informative document, and the interview questions was sent on the same day to all participants. The interview questions were sent as a heads up of what was going to be discussed at the interview, however the survey was meant to be completed prior to the interview in their own time. Over the phone, each interviewee indicated the time required to collect the information and an estimate on when the survey would be completed. After a friendly follow up, the survey was returned, and the interview was completed. The interview was conducted over the phone and in some cases via video call.

3.5.c Method of analysis

All information was brought together into one document as a summary for the results of the survey, and another document was created as a summary for the answers of the interview. As the interview had open questions, the different answers were summarised into key points to help the reader get a quick representation of the results of the interview without the need to read each transcript.

The results based on numbers gave a clear indication of the tendencies in the industry, and pictured how serious the situation was. The combined results based on the open questions revealed the different strategies the aquatic industry utilised to face the situation. These strategies were based on the views expressed by each interviewer at their facility and was subject to their own interpretation.

3.6 Issues

The field work was no exempt of issues, although they were minor and did not jeopardized the overall outcome of the study.

Upon contact with the potential interviewees, they all expressed desire to help and participate in the investigation. At the time of contact the industry was heading into the end of the financial year and the beginning of the school holidays, which is known to be a busy period in aquatics. In addition to this, the time requested by each individual to complete the survey was affected by different eventualities that can be expected in the industry and in life, such as being short staffed with very short notice, or being sick, where priorities can change unexpectedly.

In spite of the eventualities and of the busy period, each individual was able to commit to their word and deliver the survey on time. They also managed to be available to be interviewed at their most convenient time and showed excellent disposition to expand their answers about the staffing situation.

The questions in the survey and in the interview were designed to target the operators of the aquatic facilities. All questions answered reflect the facts and on occasion, the point of view, of the person who participated in the survey and interview. To have a complete understanding of the problematic of lifeguard recruitment and retention, it may be also necessary to contemplate the facts and point of view of those permanent lifeguards that were recruited and that resigned between March 2019 and March 2020. It is well known that sometimes employees are not always truthful to their employers as to why they genuinely applied for a job, or as to why they genuinely left it. For this study the staff that had left each facility was not included as I would have found it very difficult to reach them due to confidentiality reasons (for example, I would have had to ask each aquatic facility for the contact details of their past employees, which I am sure they would have not been given to me. Plus, it would not be the way I would have liked to approach the situation). To do this, a further research would be necessary that considers both parties, and more time would need to be allocated for this project, estimated in years instead of weeks.

The current research project, however, can be the stepping stone for a bigger project for the future.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the information collected from the field work carried on during the month of June to July 2020. Different sub sections will analyse the results of the survey and of the interview, to finally discuss how they relate to answering the primary and secondary research questions.

4.2 Overview

Seven representatives from six different districts across all New Zealand participated in the field work. After agreeance to participate as subjects, they were handed in a survey which it was completed by all of them within two weeks. A phone interview was carried after the survey was received. The districts selected shared similar conditions, such as having a population of up to 59,000 residents, and having at least one PoolSafe accredited aquatic facility in their district.

4.3 Description of results

The main source of information was gathered by the survey and the interview. Each participant was contacted in advance where they were firstly informed about the project and upon agreeing to participate, they were immediately given the survey and interview questions. This allowed the participants to research all necessary information within their database and experience to deliver accurate information.

4.3.a. Survey

The survey provided statistical information that is analysed below.

Permanent Lifeguard positions

From the total of the six regions surveyed, and seven aquatic facilities, it was revealed that there was a total of 99 permanent lifeguard positions that worked at those facilities, which included part time and full-time lifeguards. 57% of the permanent lifeguards were hired between March 2019 and March 2020, and during the same year, 42% of the permanent lifeguard staff resigned.

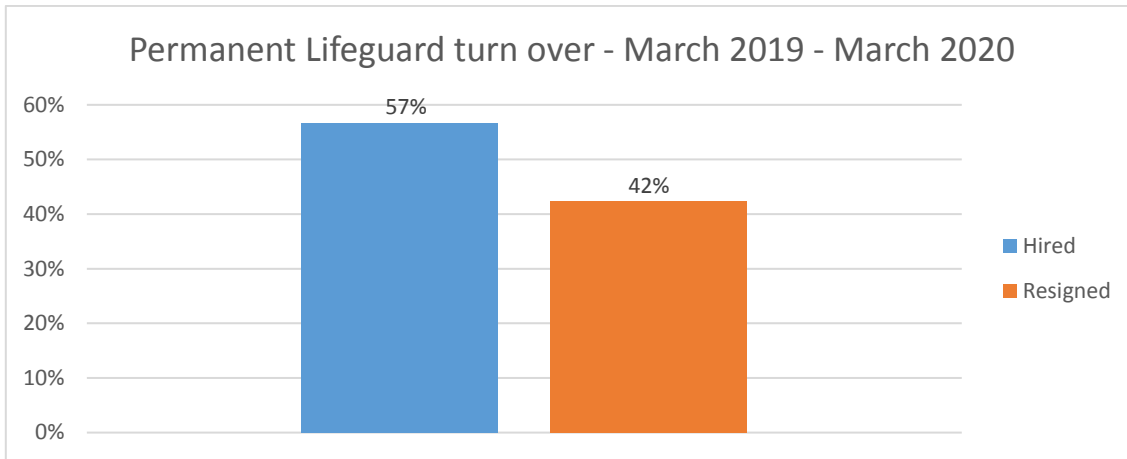


Figure 1.0

Motivation to enter the industry

There were different factors that motivated the lifeguards to apply for this position. The most recurrent one was the desire of the candidate to enter the aquatic or recreation industry (23%), followed by good pay (15%) and because it was the only alternative in the area outside working at a farm or at a café (15%). It is important to highlight that these two last reasons were selected only by one of the pool operators who completed the survey. None of these options were considered by any of the other participants who completed the survey. It is likely that in that particular workplace, the pay was better compared to other jobs in the same town, however it is yet to be seen if the average lifeguard pay rate is better than the average hourly pay rate in small towns. The most recurrent option selected by more than one workplace after wanting to enter the aquatic or recreation industry was because it was good as a first job (9%).

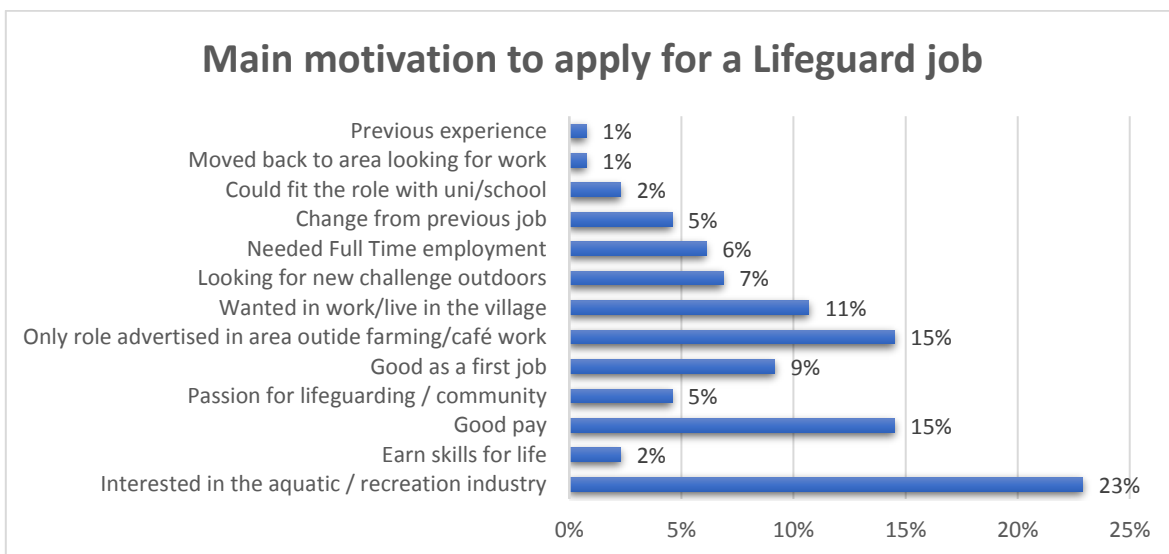


Figure 2.0

Age Group

The main age group that was successful as an applicant and became a permanent lifeguard was the one that ranged from 18 to 24 years (57%), followed by the applicants in the range of 17 years old and under (20%). This meant that 77% of the workforce that became a lifeguard between March 2019 and March 2020 was 24 years or under.

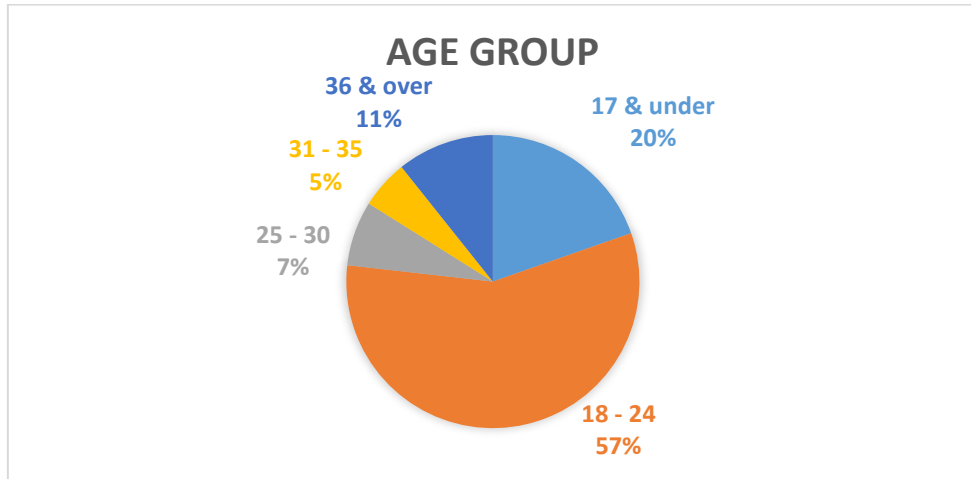


Figure 2.1

How the Lifeguards found out about the vacancy

Most of the applicants found out about the vacancy via a job search website such as Trade Me, Seek, Qjumpers or the company web site (64%), while a smaller group found out about it by word of mouth (13%), and by walking into the facility and enquiring (11%). This supports the idea that online advertisement is the most efficient way to capture a larger group of candidates.

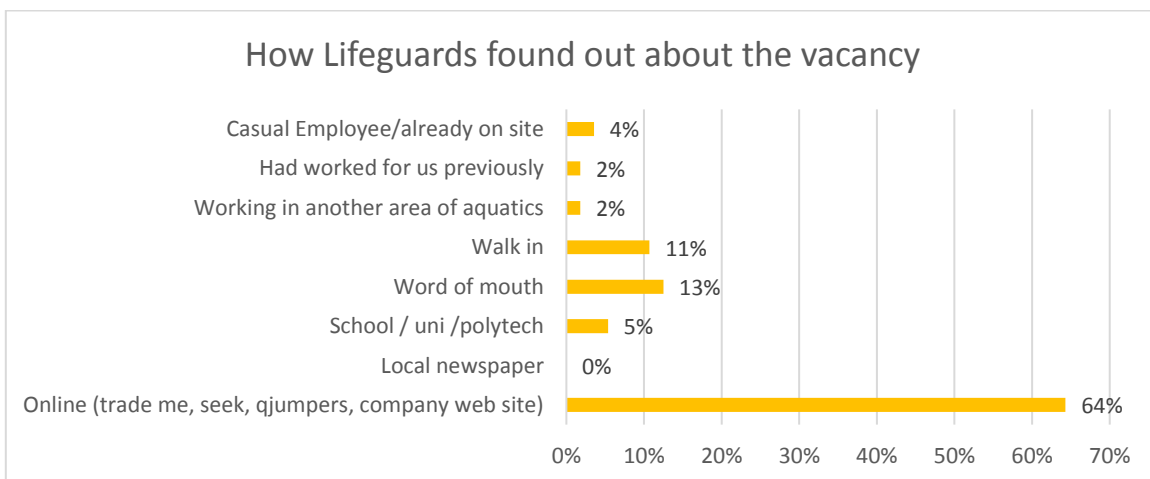


Figure 2.2

Where Lifeguards come from

When considering where the applicants came from, there was an even number of applicants from within town versus applicants from out of town. This in fact is a good indication, as it means that people from other towns are considering moving for a lifeguard job.

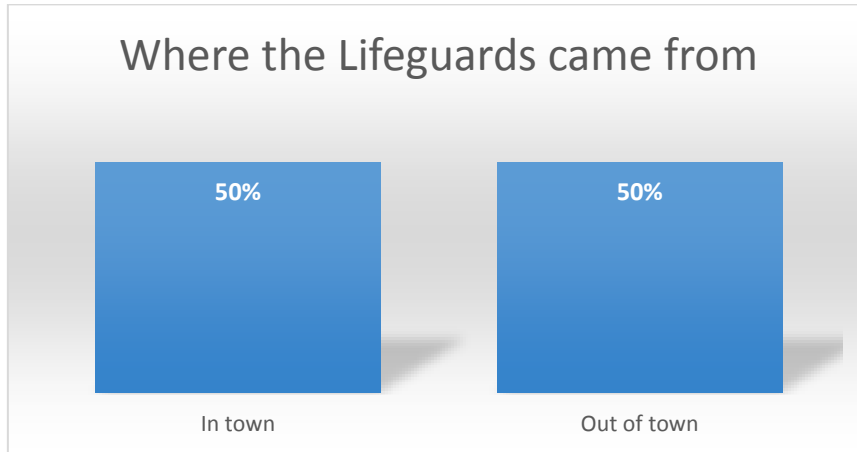


Figure 2.3

What the Lifeguards were doing before becoming lifeguards.

41% of the lifeguards were working somewhere else before applying to be a lifeguard, while 27% of them were studying at university or polytechnic. 13% were not employed or studying or were under the governments subsidy for unemployed workers. This is another good sign about lifeguarding. It means that at least beforehand, people consider lifeguarding or the aquatics industry as an opportunity to change their job.

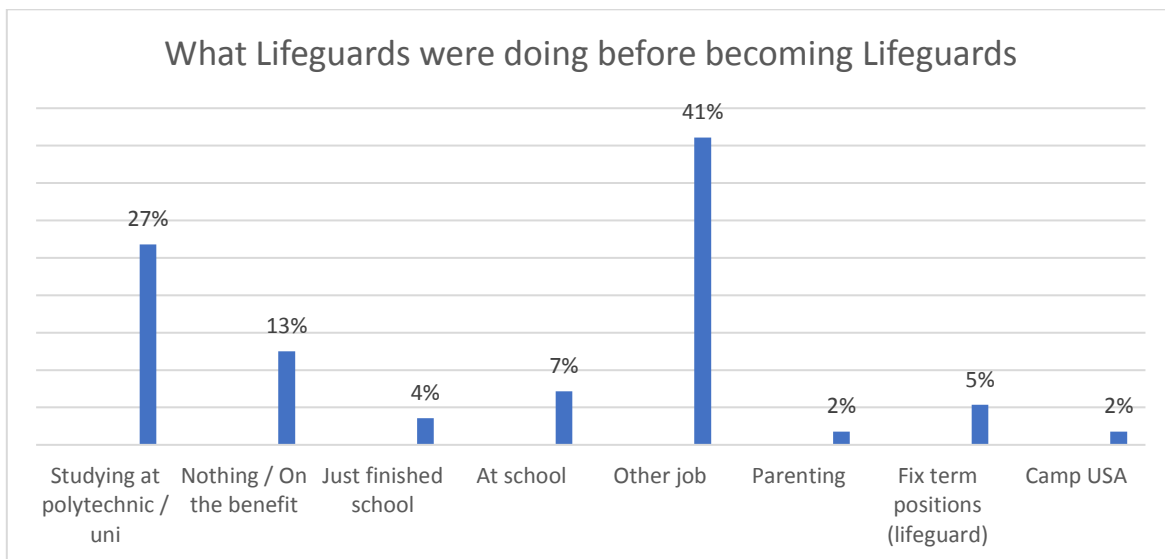


Figure 2.4

Reasons for leaving the industry

According to the managers, 25% of the permanent lifeguards that left their workplace indicated that lifeguarding was a temporary job until something else came up, and that they found a better opportunity elsewhere. Among the less popular options, but still relevant for the study, 10% mentioned they considered that living in the town was expensive, 7% expressed a desire to dedicate themselves to full time study at university, another 7% would not want to carry on doing shift work, and 5% thought the pay was too low. This data partially explains why the lifeguards left, however this was the information that was captured by their managers at that time. It would be ideal to find out from the employee point of view, what their reasons were to leave their position, so as to have a more accurate analysis.

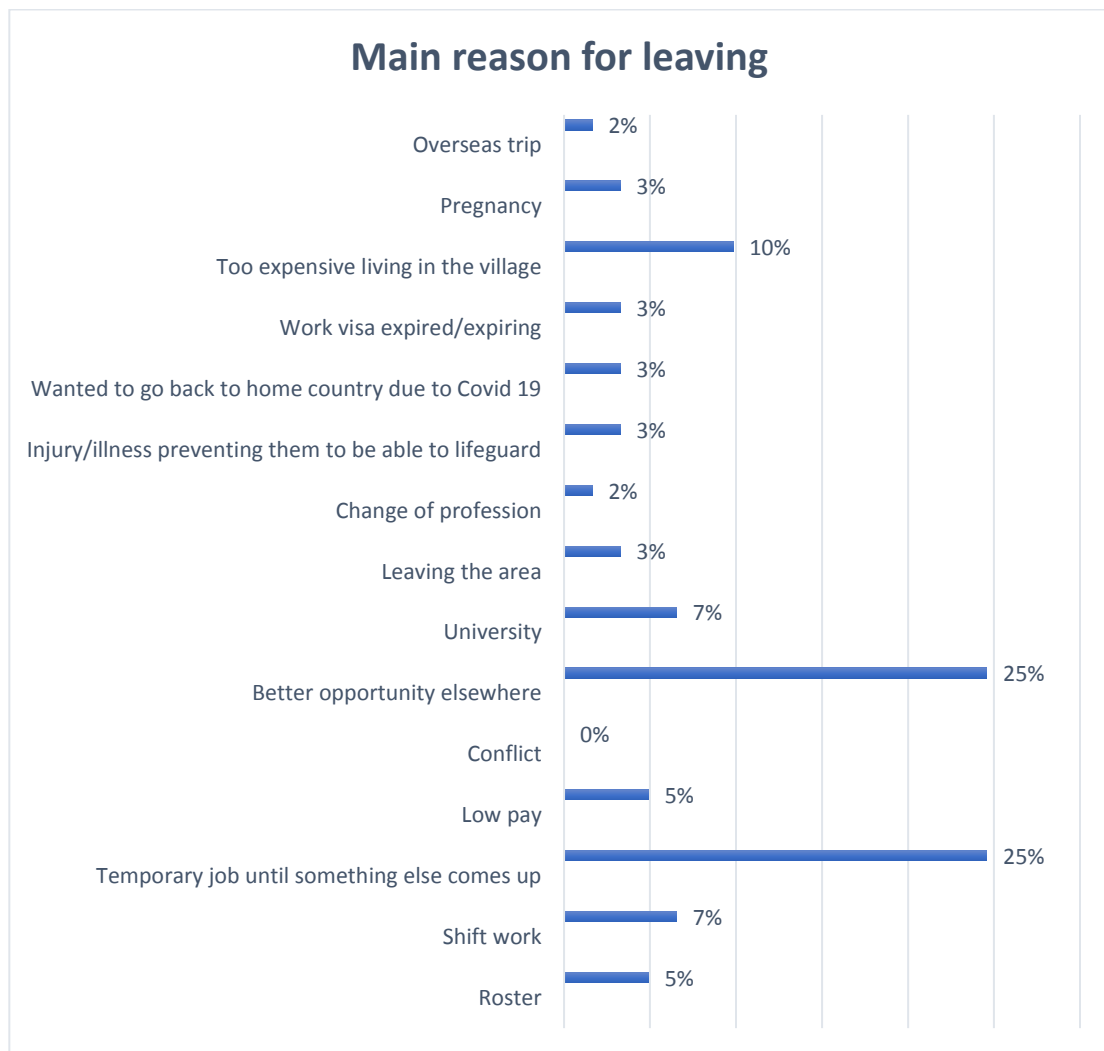


Figure 3.0

Where the Lifeguards went

More than 50% of the permanent lifeguard staff went to another job. The most popular alternative among the job options were other service delivery positions (21%), followed by retail positions (10%), and finally the police or the army employed a good portion of them as well (10%). The next popular destiny of the permanent staff was to study full time at university or a polytechnic (14%). These numbers indicate that the majority went to other positions among the service delivery. It would be useful to find out what attracted them from that new position. Lifeguarding is considered a position among the service industry, so if applicants are leaving to other service delivery organisations, it may mean that there might be room to retain those employees in aquatics.

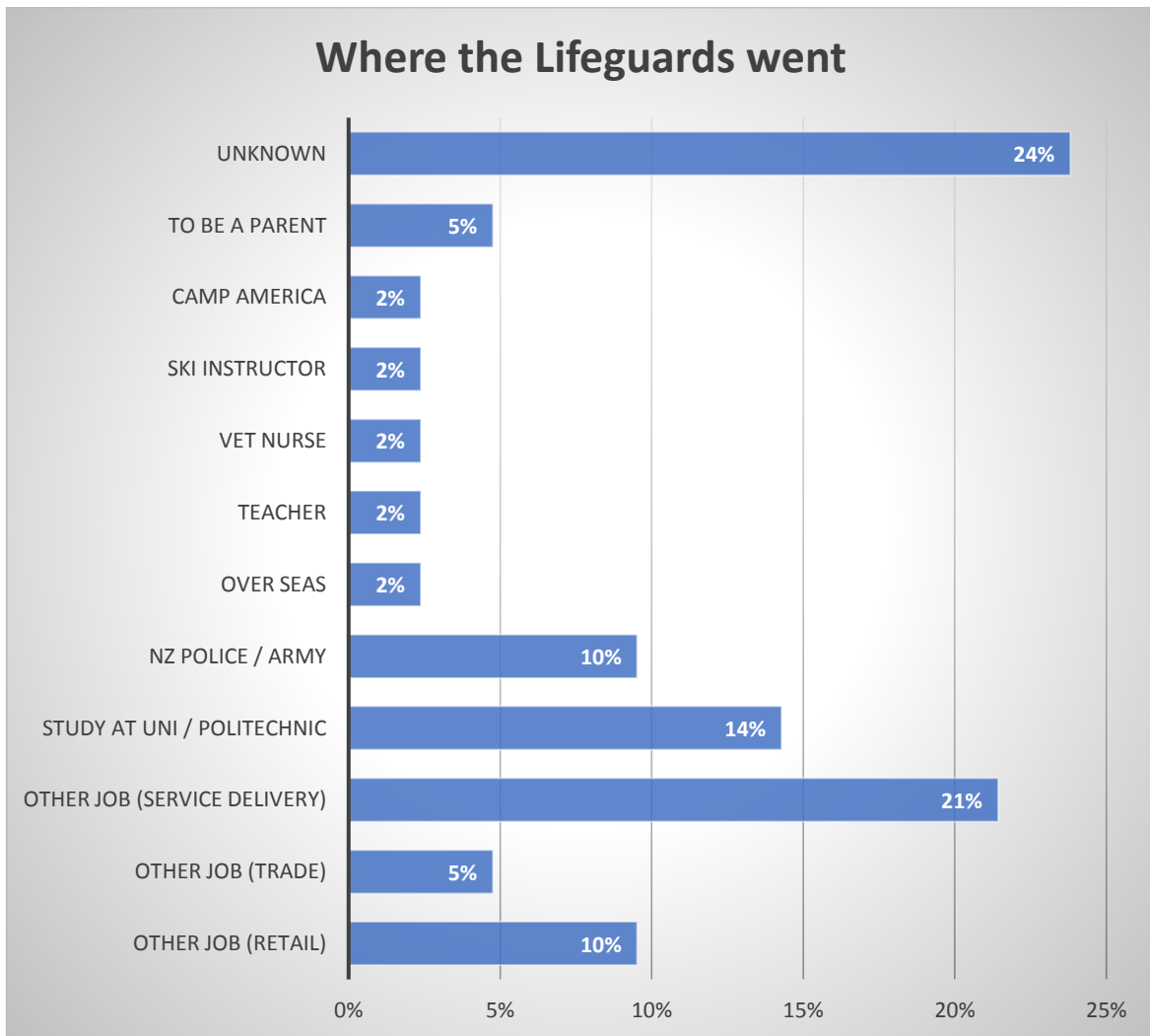


Figure 3.1

Age group

Among the permanent lifeguards that left, 10% were 17 years old and under, and 57% were between 18 and 24 years old. This meant that 67% of staff aged 24 or under left the industry in one year.

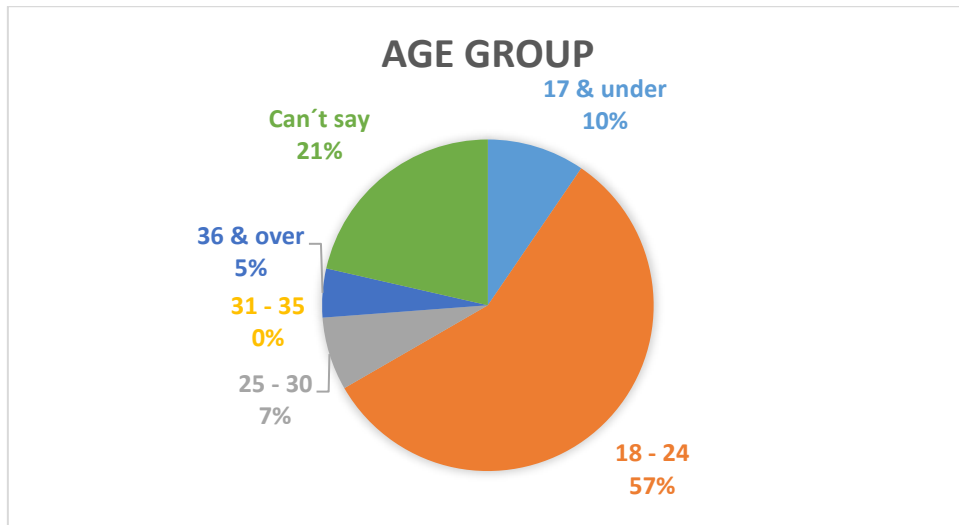


Figure 3.2

Length in the industry

29% of the permanent lifeguards that resigned had been in the aquatics industry for between one and two years, while 22% had been working for less than 1 year. This meant that more than 50% of the applicants that were trained to be a lifeguard left the workplace in less than 2 years.

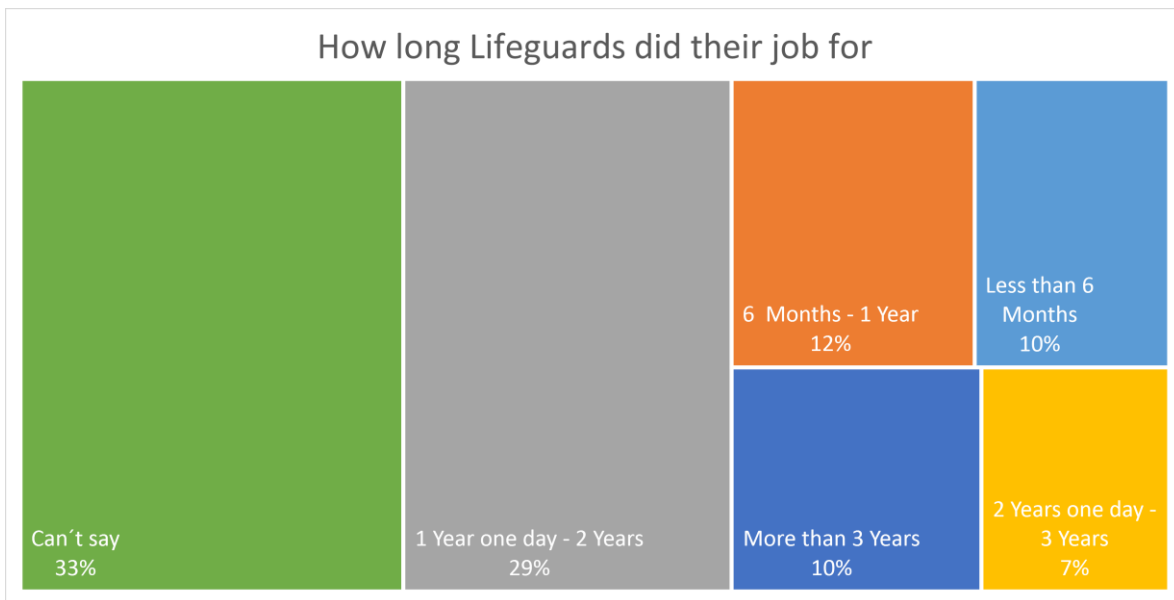


Figure 3.3

Overall performance

The overall performance of the permanent lifeguards that resigned was between average (26%) and good (38%), according to their managers. 7% were considered excellent workers. There are many ways to read this. One way to read it is that the industry is losing 45% of their good and excellent workers in less than one year.

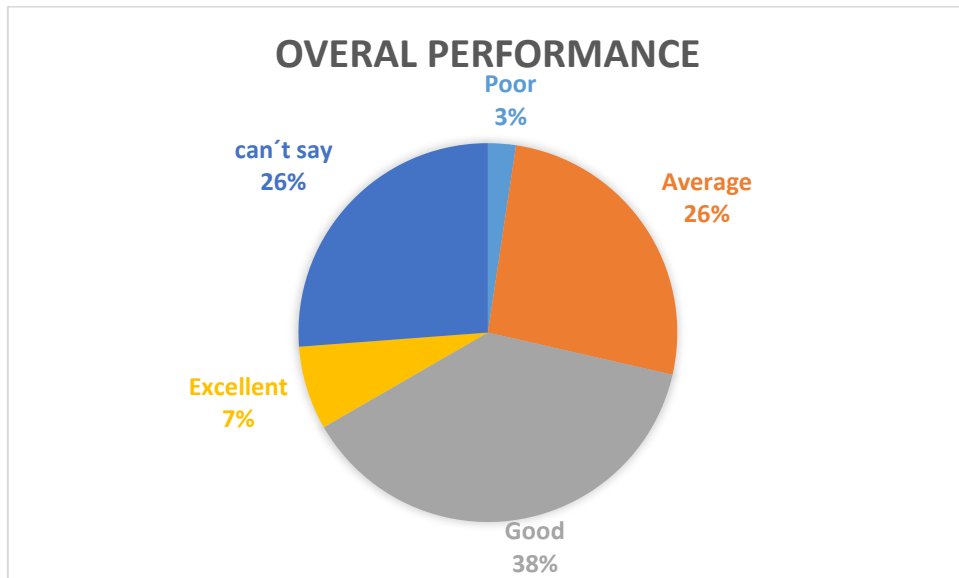


Figure 3.4

Departure details

The resignations on most cases were expected (60%) due to the fact that it was announced in advance (61%) and that management sensed it coming (21%). Only a small portion was unexpected (19%), and this was due to the fact that their manager thought they were happy at their job (25%), they had given them what they wanted (19%), and they looked promising (19%).

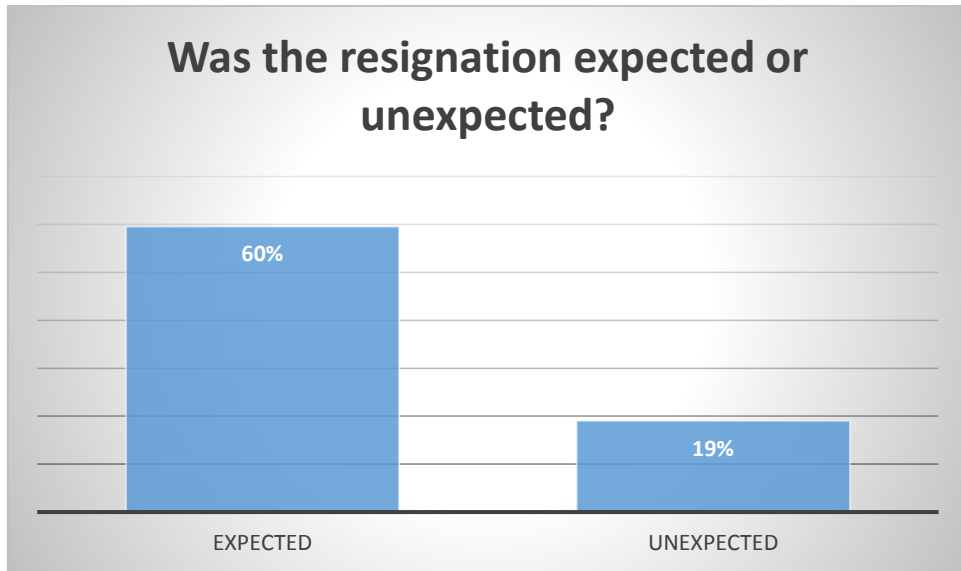


Figure 3.5

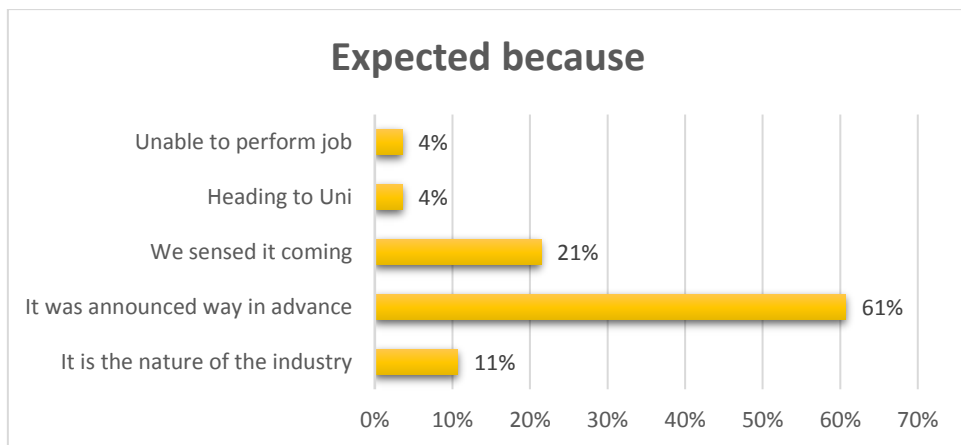


Figure 3.6

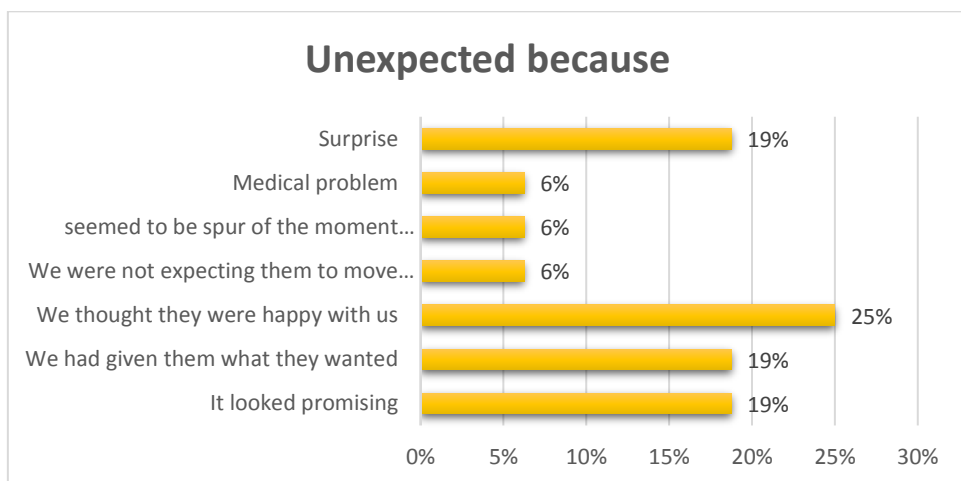


Figure 3.7

4.3.b. Interview

The interview provided general information about the different perceptions the managers have about how they face the recruitment and retention of permanent lifeguards. They were also able to explain what strategies are in place to develop the industry.

How long it takes to find a lifeguard

Consensus is that general processes takes between two to three weeks to advertise, however it can take up to 8 weeks from the moment a permanent position is advertised until the candidate is qualified and ready to do the job.

Is it hard to recruit Lifeguards?

Most of the pool operators expressed that they find it difficult to recruit for permanent lifeguards. A good portion of them added that the success of the recruitment depended on the time of the year it was done. There were times of the year where they found it easier to recruit than others. At the same time, they also expressed that there were seasons when they got good candidates, but there were seasons where they did not.

Difficulties & barriers

Some of the reasons as to why they find it hard to recruit for lifeguards, are described below.

- Swimming. Many applicants lack the swimming abilities or fitness to meet the criteria to become a lifeguard. Candidates are asked to swim 200 metres under 6 minutes to meet the minimum requirement to become a lifeguard. Some candidates are not able to meet this criteria and their application is automatically declined.

- Lack of qualified applicants. Most of the candidates that apply have no background in aquatics and are not certified. This means the industry must constantly train new people into the role, which involves time and cost.

- Shift work. Some managers say that the fact that the business operates 7 days a week, it puts off candidates who are only looking at working Monday to Friday and have weekends off. Applicants are not ready to give up some of their weekends and public holidays to work. Especially the younger generations in their teens or early twenties, they are more interested in committing to social events during weekends than to work. If given an opportunity, these candidates

usually end up working for a short time until something else that better suits their lifestyle comes up.

-Part time vs full time. Particularly with permanent part timers, the struggle is not so much as many school kids apply for these roles, and their availability around their sporting commitments often suits the business needs. They normally have set work days which may involve a fix day during the weekend. However, when looking at the permanent full-time staff, then the struggle is more intense as full-time availability is required across all 7 days of the week, usually with a rotating roster covering from early mornings till late evenings.

-Accommodation. Small towns, especially touristic towns, can be known for being expensive to rent a house or room and to live. Taking into account that the younger generations are the majority that apply for these roles, finding suitable accommodation may add a barrier when applicants think of moving to such towns to work on low paid jobs.

-Legal work permit. On occasion suitable candidates appear, who may not have a legal permit to work in New Zealand. These candidates are often qualified lifeguards in their country of origin and have extensive aquatic knowledge and experience. Some of them are already in New Zealand under a different visa, and some others are overseas seeking for an opportunity to work in New Zealand. Not only the workplace misses out in recruiting qualified international staff, but the industry as well.

-Maturity level. The average candidate that applies to a lifeguard role is sometimes not mature enough to take such a role and face the responsibilities that lifeguarding involves. Occasionally they are young inexperienced candidates who are seeking a first job and can be too timid to respond to a life or death situation that this role may expose them to.

Strategies in place to recruit

The research showed that there are current strategies in place in the aquatic industry to optimise recruitment.

-Standing ad. Some workplaces managed to incorporate a standing advertisement that is publicised all year round to capture all applicants regardless whether there is a genuine vacancy or not. This way once a vacancy is generated, the managers already have the interested candidates details to contact them. This proves to be efficient as it skips the operational processes to generate an advertisement every time a vacancy is generated, and the time it takes for candidates to apply for the position.

-Accommodation. An idea exists where the workplace can provide accommodation to their permanent staff to facilitate their relocation to the town. This idea exists as the candidates who apply from other areas find it hard to find suitable accommodation and the workplace may end up losing a candidate that is suitable to do the job. This idea was progressing well, but it was placed on hold lately as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

-Marketing. One of the pool operators has increased their exposure in recruitment expositions and stands, with the purpose of capturing people interested in entering the aquatic industry and working for them. As a result, they find that more people approach them to find out about employment opportunities.

-Career. Many managers try to implement the concept of the career in aquatics, where the applicants may start working as a lifeguard, but they would also be trained in other departments such as reception or the café. This idea, combined with an efficient training framework would give the lifeguards knowledge and qualifications, which would in turn give the potential employee a wide variety of opportunities and skills.

-Roster. The idea of creating an attractive roster can be attractive to new comers to the industry. Rotating rosters can be physically demanding in the long run, so strategies to improve the rostering system is constant at the different workplaces. One of the pool operators had applied a system where the lifeguards would get two consecutive days off, which included a weekend day and a week day, every week.

-Social media. In addition to the traditional advertisements over the online job search web sites, some aquatic facilities include the use of social media to promote job opportunities, as they can reach out more people.

Strategies to retain

Similarly, as it happens with recruitment, several strategies to retain permanent lifeguards were revealed at the interview.

-Training. Most facilities look at upskilling their permanent lifeguards for the role they perform, and for other roles in the facility, such as reception, the gym, swim school, or the café. The positive about upskilling lifeguards with aquatic knowledge such as staff management or water quality is that it keeps them motivated and learning new skills. However, when a chance of promotion is denied because of the strong competition, they tend to leave, and they take with them all that training and knowledge they received. Upskilling staff in other departments is another way of keeping them motivated learning at the same time. Training can be in house or external, which often is supported by a recognised certification

-Multi-tasking. A common strategy in aquatics is to offer the possibility to the permanent lifeguards (and any other staff), to train to work in different departments to help out cover breaks or shifts. Some of these examples are swim school or instructors, café staff, receptionists, cleaners, or even to work in the office as administrative assistants. One of the pool operators allows lifeguards to take a week off during the school holidays to develop holiday programmes for the kids. This motivates the staff as they can do other tasks other than lifeguarding. In the long run, the risk they might end up working in a different department exists, but at least they stay within the industry and in the facility.

-Flexibility. Flexibility is key to retain employees. One of the pool operators implemented a policy to attract school kids where them, as an employer, can guarantee leave to the school kid whenever school trips are planned in advance.

-Perks. The industry normally provides free access and use of their facility to all aquatic staff. This include pool and gym access and it may include discounts on swim lessons or products of the café. Other perks can include free soup during winter, free ice creams during summer, social events for staff, the offer of an employment

assistance program (EAP), and recognition schemes where staff can gain instant prizes. Staff rooms have been upgraded for employee comfort and uniforms have been changed.

-Roster. The roster is something the pool operators are constantly looking at, to maximise staff satisfaction. An idea of a roster where permanent staff would work 4 days and would have 3 days off was drawn, although it needs to work for everyone, business and employee, and it needs to be a win-win situation.

What else could have been done?

Considering the permanent lifeguards that resigned between March 2019 and March 2020, consensus was that there was not much that them as an employer could have done to retain them.

-Lack of opportunities. Lifeguards who had been trained and upskilled, and that had gained certain level of experience had been interested in stepping up on a new permanent role. These opportunities did not come up as often, and when they did there was a healthy competition for them. As expected, some people missed out and thought their time with aquatics, or at least with that employer, was done. Unfortunately, this kind of behaviour is common in this industry, where managers find that when an employee is denied a promotion, they automatically think that it is time to move on as the employer does not value them. Sometimes there is simply not enough positions to get everyone promoted and managers need to make a decision.

-Other jobs. Most of the permanent lifeguards that resigned and went to other jobs were motivated to move on and start a new career in their lives. Common choices were to join the police or the army, or to become a teacher or a nurse. Some even went overseas to camp USA to grow their life experience. Other permanent lifeguards moved to other jobs within the same facility, which was not a total loss. Some were interested in starting a new career as a gym or swim school instructor, as a receptionist, or in any other area within the aquatic facility.

-Roster. A few employees were after more hours in their roster, and to have the roster structure revised. Unfortunately, at that time, those changes could not happen immediately. However, after they left, the roster was revised, which led to more hours per employee. This helped the retention of future employees.

-Pay. Some permanent lifeguards who left got a job where they got better paid. Unfortunately, lifeguard rates are not something the managers could modify, especially not in the short term.

-Study. Some permanent lifeguards decided to resign to their job to study full time at a university or polytechnic. Similar to when they choose to follow a new career, the decision to study full time for a number of years is in fact a life changing decision that goes beyond a manager's ability to retain staff. Some of these staff were retained at a casual capacity, available to work during their university breaks or during weekends in case the university is nearby.

4.4 Summary

The field work brought relevant information to the purpose of the study. The numbers from the survey and the information gathered from the interviews helped to confirm the tendencies that were described earlier in the study and show the evidence required to formally analyse the problematic. The area of recruitment and retention was thoroughly investigated, and the results showed outstanding numbers that will help answer the research questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the focus will be on using the results from the previous chapter to assess the current situation in the aquatic industry regarding recruitment and retention of permanent lifeguards. The data collected will be used to answer the research questions and picture the present situation. Towards the end of the chapter, recommendations will be presented to overcome the current problematic in the industry.

5.2 Conclusion

The emphasis in this section will be on analysing the turnover of permanent lifeguards in the aquatic industry, and on answering the research questions announced at the beginning of the study.

5.2.a Answering the research questions

After analysing the results of the survey and of the interview, it is clear that there is a genuine problematic with the turnover of permanent lifeguards in aquatic facilities in districts with a population of up to 59,000 residents. Within a year, 57% of the permanent lifeguard staff in the selected districts were hired, and 42% resigned. If this tendency continues, we would be looking at having a completely new group of permanent lifeguards every two to three years.

5.2.b Recruitment

The situation of having to renew the staff every two to three years is not practicable to the employers, who must constantly recruit and train the staff, only to do it again every couple of years. All managers agree that whenever recruitment is done, it is difficult to find suitable candidates to play the role of a lifeguard. Once found, employers put a considerable amount of time and money to train them to be certified and to teach them how to perform in the role.

However, a positive point found is that whenever a recruitment process takes place, even though the quantity may not be numerous, suitable candidates appear. These candidates show interest in the aquatics industry (at least to the eyes of the manager), and it may appeal for them as a first job. The age group that is interested is predominately the one under 24 years old, and most of them come from other jobs or from school. Some even come from other areas of the country and are happy to relocate to start a new job as a lifeguard.

The fact that there are people interested in aquatics is a good sign and a good starting point to begin working towards capitalising that interest and maximising the use of the new work force.

The most effective method to recruit permanent lifeguards is to advertise online, through traditional web sites such as Trade Me or Seek, or the company's website. This predominately captures the younger generation as it was described earlier. It would be interesting to analyse if by using other alternatives to advertise the vacancy, a new target could be captured.

There are a few barriers that challenge the aquatic industry when searching for new permanent lifeguards. The most common one is the lack of swimming ability or fitness. Many applicants are unaware of the fitness level that is required (even though it is included in the advertisement) to become a lifeguard and apply for the job anyway. Sometimes they underestimate the requirements of the swim test, only to find out at the time of the actual test, that they are unable to make it.

Among other typical barriers are the fact that there is not a large supply of certified lifeguards looking for a lifeguard job. Normally after two years of service permanent lifeguards move on to a different role. It is not common to find lifeguards looking for lifeguarding jobs. Consequently, employers need to constantly hire unqualified staff and utilise their resources to certify a new professional every time. On occasion applicants with experience in lifeguarding may appear, but they do not have the legal permit to work in New Zealand.

Furthermore, the fact that the work pattern of a permanent lifeguard involves a rotating roster, it does not attract as many applicants as a job that is characterised to be Monday to Fridays with weekends off does. Aquatic facilities operate seven days a week including most public holidays, and their front-line staff need to be available to work every day. With a typical rotating roster, regular commitments outside work are limited as it is guaranteed that 100% attendance will not be achievable.

To enhance the recruitment process, aquatic facilities have adopted different strategies to make the lifeguard role more attractive or to just to simplify the process. Aquatic facilities tend to try to promote the role of a lifeguard as a stepping stone to a career in aquatics, where applicants can start as a lifeguard, and work their way through different departments such as at the gym or at the café (in case the facility provides this service), reception or swim school. This would give them variety and different pathways, in order to make the role more attractive to those who are interested to start a new chapter in their lives. In addition to this, pool managers constantly work on adjusting the roster to make it more attractive for applicants. It is inevitable that lifeguards will end up working weekends and public

holidays, but their aim with these adjustments is to try to minimise this and to offer a more efficient work life balance pattern.

In order to capture a bigger audience, aquatic facilities advertise outside the traditional advertisement channels. They promote themselves in recruitment expositions, they advertise in social media platforms and they have all year-round advertisements published where anyone interested in joining the team is captured and later contacted when the vacancy is created.

5.2.c Retention

Despite all the efforts made to make the lifeguard role interesting and to reach a larger audience, the permanent lifeguard on average stays in the role for a period of no more than two years and then moves on to other jobs or to study at a university or a polytechnic. Among the other jobs that the lifeguards go to are those in the service industry or they join the police or the army. Among the reasons why the permanent lifeguards leave their role are in great part because they consider that lifeguarding is a temporary job until something else comes up or because a better opportunity came up elsewhere.

The majority of permanent lifeguards that leave are 24 years or under and a good portion of them are considered good or excellent employees by their managers. However, managers are normally expecting to receive these resignations as the lifeguards communicate them in advance or they sense it coming.

Managers in the aquatic industry are a principal witness of how short the cycle of a permanent lifeguard can be. To mitigate this, they put in place different strategies to revert the situation.

Training and multi-tasking are the preferred options to motivate staff to stay in their roles, or at least in their facility. Training can be done in house or externally, through the designated industry training organisation (Skills Active) which provides national recognised qualifications and help the lifeguard gain more knowledge and build a stronger CV. Other recognised providers are also used that provide relevant certification and qualifications, such as the ones related to water treatment, or management. This practice helps the lifeguard to develop in their role and to be ready to step up whenever the opportunity comes up. Training can also lead to develop themselves in a different area of the facility, such as reception, the gym or the swim school. Even though the lifeguard moves on from lifeguarding, it is not a complete loss for the employer.

Flexibility, perks, and an attractive roster are other focus points the pool managers use to retain staff. Managers tend to be flexible when lifeguards require time off, trying to please all requests, especially to school kids whose leave is related to their school education. All staff have free access to use the services of the facility and discounted rates for special classes or the café. The roster is constantly reviewed for alternatives to improve the work life balance of the permanent lifeguards. The attention is placed on reducing the number of weekends worked per year and having enough days off per week.

When the permanent lifeguards opt to resign, there is little that the pool managers feel that they can do. The permanent lifeguards often leave to follow a better opportunity at another job because they feel there are not enough opportunities to progress in aquatics; to follow another career such as nursing or teaching; to join the police; or to study at university or a polytechnic.

5.2.d Summary

Permanent lifeguard turnover is high, and costly resources are utilised every year to cope with this tendency. Not to mention the time involved, and the operational impact that it may have to lose experienced staff in a workplace. The aquatic industry is attractive enough to gather the younger work force's attention, and even to attract people from other towns. However, permanent lifeguards leave while they are still young and many of them leave the industry completely. The aquatic organizations are aware of this situation and consensus is gained among the managers when explaining the causes and reasons for this tendency. This helps to analyse the situation and explore ideas and thoughts to recommend to the industry.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations below arise from the data collected from the current research project. It will be a starting point to begin to revert the situation.

1. Promote the aquatics career nationwide. Even though the industry has a professional pathway in place, the general public are unaware of it. Most consider the job of a lifeguard as a good temporary or first job, but what people do not know is that many of the professionals involved in the recreation industry (where aquatics is a branch of) have started their career as a lifeguard. By promoting the many opportunities that may come up within aquatics and the wider recreation industry, the public perception may change and instead of the permanent lifeguards looking for opportunities elsewhere, they may start to progress within the industry they are already in.

2. Pathway to a higher hourly rate. The lifeguard role can be a demanding and stressing job at times. Not to mention the responsibilities and consequences it may bring when things do not go to plan. As a lifeguard is new to their role, it is fine to start them on the current hourly wage as they do not have experience, and most of the knowledge is yet to be learnt. As lifeguards progress and develop, their hourly rate should be comparable to those of teachers, police officers or nurses. This way, the aquatic industry would create a more competitive market to attract or retain lifeguards.

4. Pre-lifeguard course. Many of the pool operators indicated that swimming skills and fitness were a barrier for applicants to progress in their job application to become lifeguards. To overcome this, pre-lifeguard courses could be made available during the year for those who are interested in becoming a lifeguard. This would prepare them and keep them motivated until the lifeguard vacancies are created. In these pre-lifeguard courses, emphasis could be put on not only in the swimming fitness, but also on the key features a lifeguard needs to have to be successful in their role. Once completed the course, the progression to get a lifeguard job would be a natural, smooth process.

5. Application of exit & stay surveys. Considering the proportion of resignations of permanent lifeguards, it would be practical to incorporate a survey or interview process where the employee can tell in confidence the true reasons of their departure (not only where they are going, but as to why they began to search for alternatives in the first place), and of their experience in aquatics. This will need to be done in a friendly, confidential environment where the employees can feel comfortable to express themselves without being given a hard time. Stay interviews would be important to implement as well to capture what the industry is doing well and what can be done to improve; before the employee considers leaving the job.

6. Incorporate International lifeguards. The aquatic industry should capitalise the opportunity to incorporate international lifeguards to the workforce by supporting suitable candidates from overseas to obtain a legal permit to work in New Zealand. The industry would not only benefit from gaining international lifeguarding experience but from incorporating multicultural personnel to their staff. Although some conditions need to be met to support a work visa, there is little or no cost to the employer other than the waiting time until the visa is processed.

7. Sponsor education. As many of the lifeguards who resign go to study at a university or a polytechnic, a good strategy would be to offer support to those permanent lifeguards who will be studying something related to the aquatics or recreation industry and choose to carry on with their permanent employment. This support could cover some of the costs of the study, offer special leave to prepare for exams or attend classes if distance study is not an option. Not only it may retain staff, but it may also be attractive to the general public who may apply to become lifeguards to enjoy the perks of the job.

8. Further research. A more complete research study can be done that captures the views of the permanent lifeguards that are still in the industry and of the ones that left. This would provide further information and resources to identify other areas of the problematic and hence, more recommendations could be made. To do this I recommend a new research study with the same principles, plus agreeing with the permanent lifeguards of several workplaces to be regularly contacted for a period of years to monitor development and motivation of the individual in the industry. This would provide more accurate first-hand material on expectations, disappointments, and reasons for leaving for example. At the end of the study, the information collected would be vast and precise, and it would complement the research of this study.

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Appendices



**Pool Lifeguards. A research study on recruitment and retention in aquatic facilities.
Information Sheet for Participants**

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

Introduction

I am Gastón Vélez, a student from the Graduate Certificate of Applied Management programme at the Southern Institute of Technology. I am carrying out this research as part of my dissertation.

What is the aim of the project?

This project aims to identify if there is a genuine problematic in the area of recruitment and retention of pool lifeguards in aquatic facilities that are located in towns of a population of approximately 50,000 residents or less. It intends to provide options and tools to help revert this situation. This research will collect data from different aquatic centres to provide an understanding on their recent experience with the recruitment and retention of lifeguards. The information will be analysed in order to determine the best strategies to help the industry.

What type of participants are being sought?

I wish to interview / survey managers and operators of aquatic facilities located in areas where the population is approximately 50,000 people or less, as well as people who have experience in operating seasonal aquatic facilities. The aim of the interview is to gain an understanding of the challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of the pool lifeguard staff, and to gain information about the best way to help the aquatic industry.

What will participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in the project, I would like to hand in a 15-question survey to you and interview you about your experience and opinion on the recruitment and retention of pool lifeguards at your facility. To complete the survey, you may need to retrieve information that occurred between March 2019 and March 2020. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. It would take place via telephone at a time that is convenient to you.

Can participants change their minds and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time, without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind, up until the point at which the data will be anonymised and amalgamated into the dissertation, which would occur 24 hours after receiving the survey and completing the interview.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

The interview will be recorded on a digital audio recorder for later transcription and analysis. Your name will not be mentioned in the recording or transcription and you will not be identified at any time. Your name will not be used in the dissertation and any identifying features in the data will be withheld or disguised to protect participant anonymity. All information (including the survey) will be kept confidential, and the data will be used by the researcher only for the purposes of this study.

What will happen to the results?

The results of the project will be presented in the form of a dissertation for the Graduate Certificate in Applied Management. A copy will also be available in the Southern Institute of Technology library (Invercargill). The anonymised information may also be included in a conference presentation or academic journal article. You are most welcome to request a copy of the final report should you wish to read the completed project.

How will the data be stored?

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researcher and the supervisor will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by SIT's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which time it will be destroyed.

What if you have any questions about the project?

If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either the researcher or supervisor:

Researcher: Gastón Vélez
Southern Institute of Technology
Telephone Number: 022 034 2757
SIT student email address: 2018002596@student.sit.ac.nz

Supervisor: Nathan Chicken
Southern Institute of Technology
Telephone Number:
Email address: Nathan.chicken@sit.ac.nz

This research has been covered by blanket approval as a student research project by the Human Research Ethics Committee at SIT.

If you have concerns about the **ethical conduct** of this research or the researchers, the following procedure should occur.

Write to the following:

The Secretary of the Human Research Ethics Committee
Southern Institute of Technology
133 Tay St
INVERCARGILL 9840 NZ
Tel: 03 211 2699

All information is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible.

Southern Institute of Technology

Declaration of consent to be interviewed for “Pool Lifeguards. A research study on retention and recruitment in aquatic facilities”

I have had the scope and nature of the research fully explained to me. Any questions about the research have been satisfactorily answered, and I understand that I may request further information at any stage. I accept and note that:

1. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
2. I may withdraw from participation in the research at any time up to 24 hours after the interview has been completed without explanation, disadvantage or disincentive.
3. The information given during the interview is being utilised solely for the purpose of the specific research project and will not be disclosed to any other person or agency without my express consent.
4. The interview will be recorded for later transcription.
5. This information may be incorporated into the research report but actual names or other characteristics that may lead to identification of individuals or organisations will not be disclosed.
6. I may at any time request to view any completed drafts or sections of the research report to which I have contributed.
7. A copy of the completed research report will be made available to me, on request, at the conclusion of the research.

DECLARATION

I have read and understood the information set out on this form, and give my informed consent to be interviewed in accordance with the stated terms and conditions.

Name of Participant:

.....

Name of Researcher/Interviewer:

Gastón Vélez

Signature

Signature

Date

Date 30/06/2020

Appendix 3

Survey

IMPORTANT- for the questionnaire below, please take into account the year between March 2019 and March 2020. Please consider only **permanent** lifeguards (full time and part time) and exclude all casuals and seasonal lifeguards.

Instructions: Please complete the highlighted cells

Q.1- How many permanent lifeguard positions are there at your facility?

A.1-

Q.2- What was the total number of permanent lifeguards hired between March 2019 and March 2020?

A.2-

Q.3- What was their main motivation to apply to become lifeguards? (you can choose more than one option per lifeguard)

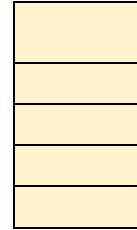
| A.3- | Reasons | Number of people who fall in this category |
|------|---|--|
| | a- Interested in the aquatic / recreation industry | |
| | b- Earn skills for life | |
| | Good | |
| | c- pay | |
| | d- Passion for lifeguarding / community | |
| | e- Good as a first job | |
| | f- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | g- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | h- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | i- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | j- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | k- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | l- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | m- (Other - Please specify) | |
| | | 0 |

Q.4- What was their age group?

A.4-

- a- 17 & under
- b- 18 - 24
- c- 25 - 30
- d- 31 - 35
- e- 36 & over

Number of people who fall in this category



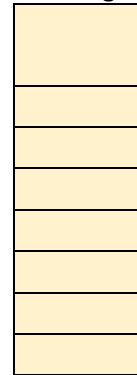
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Q.5- How did they find out about the vacancy?

A.5-

- a- Online (trade me, seek, qjumpers, company web site)
- b- Local newspaper
- c- School / uni /polytech
- d- Word of mouth
- e- Walk in
- f- (Other - Please specify)
- g- (Other - Please specify)
- h- (Other - Please specify)

Number of people who fall in this category

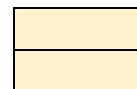


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Q.6- How many of those candidates were found in town, and how many out of town?

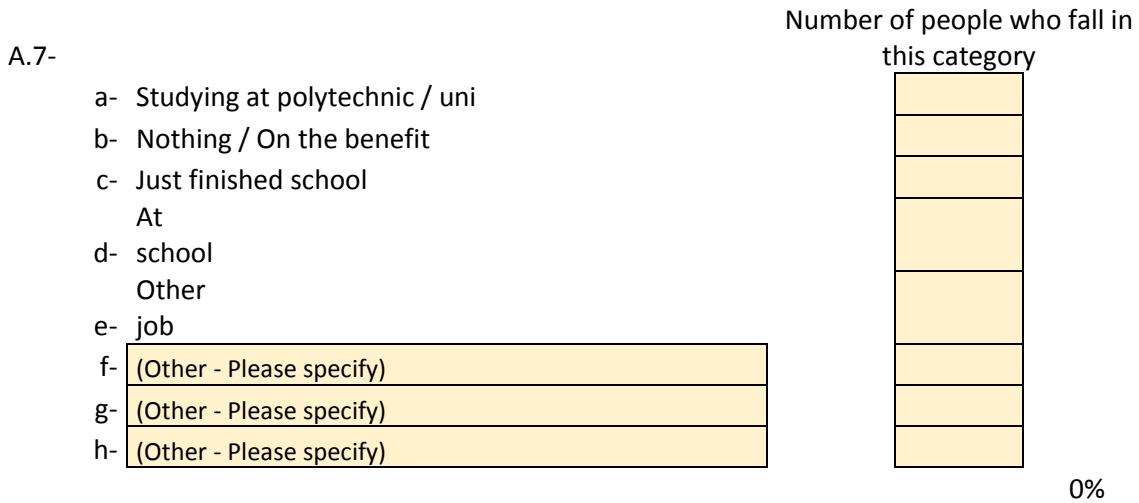
A.6-

- a- In town
- b- Out of town

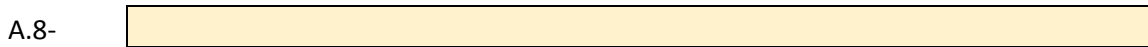


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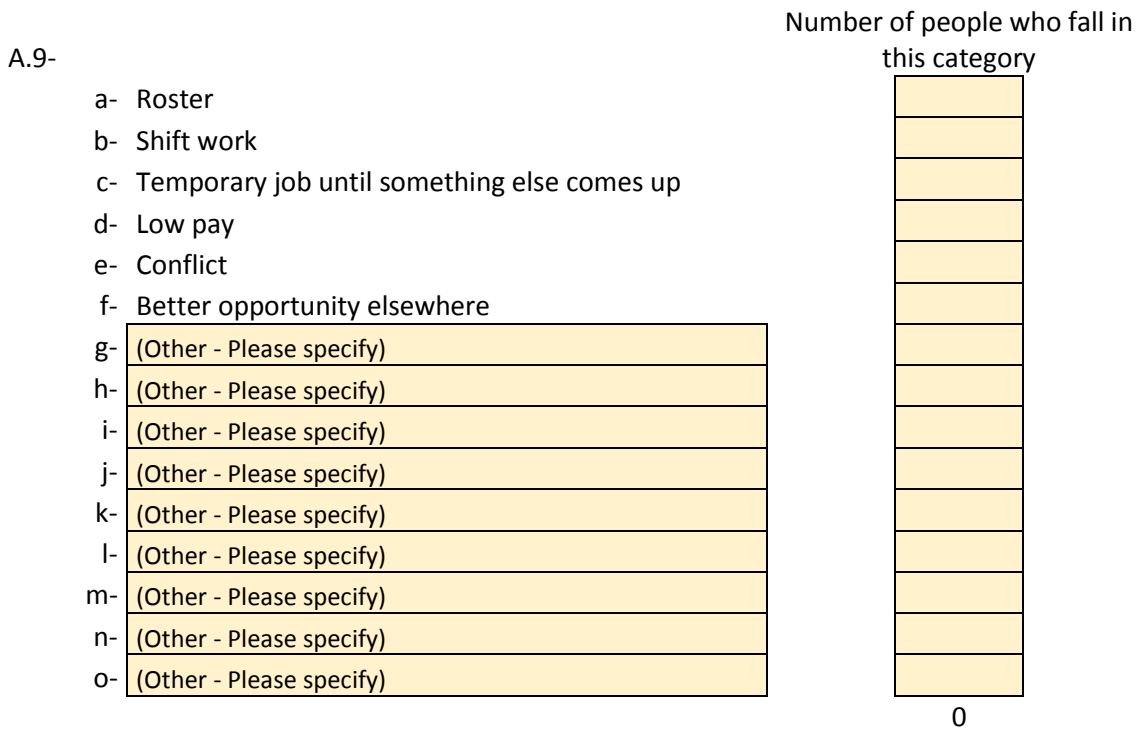
Q.7- What were those applicants doing before applying to become lifeguards?



Q.8- What was the total number of permanent lifeguards that resigned between March 2019 and March 2020?



Q.9- What was their main reason for leaving? (you can choose more than one per lifeguard)



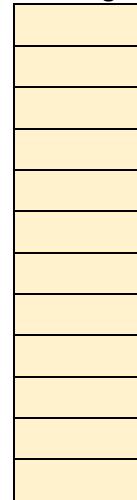
Q.10- Where did they go?

A.10-

- a- Other Job (Retail)
- b- Other job (Trade)
- c- Other job (Service delivery)
- d- Study at Uni / Politechnic
- e- NZ Police / Army

| | |
|----|--------------------------|
| f- | (Other - Please specify) |
| g- | (Other - Please specify) |
| h- | (Other - Please specify) |
| i- | (Other - Please specify) |
| j- | (Other - Please specify) |
| k- | (Other - Please specify) |
| l- | (Other - Please specify) |

Number of people who fall in this category



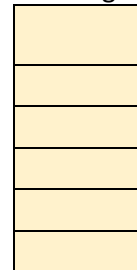
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Q.11- What was their age group?

A.11-

- a- 17 & under
- b- 18 - 24
- c- 25 - 30
- d- 31 - 35
- e- 36 & over
- f- Can't say

Number of people who fall in this category



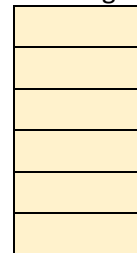
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Q.12- How long have they been in the job for?

A.12-

- a- Less than 6 Months
- b- 6 Months - 1 Year
- c- 1 Year one day - 2 Years
- d- 2 Years one day - 3 Years
- e- More than 3 Years
- f- Can't say

Number of people who fall in this category



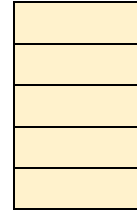
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Q.13- What was their performance overall?

A.13-

- a- Poor
- b- Average
- c- Good
- d- Excellent
- e- can't say

Number of people who fall in this category

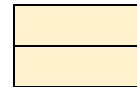


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Q.14- Was their departure expected or unexpected? Why?

A.14-

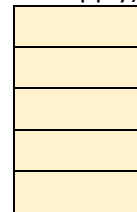
- a- Expected
- b- Unexpected



Expected because

- a- It is the nature of the industry
- b- It was announced way in advance
- c- We sensed it coming
- d- (Other - Please specify)
- e- (Other - Please specify)

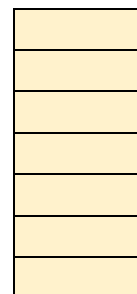
Number of people who fall in this category (more than one can apply)



0

Unexpected because

- a- It looked promising
- b- We had given them what they wanted
- c- We thought they were happy with us
- d- (Other - Please specify)
- e- (Other - Please specify)
- d- (Other - Please specify)
- e- (Other - Please specify)



0

Q.15- General comments you may want to include that was not covered.

A.15-

| |
|--|
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |

Thank you for your time

Appendix 4

Interview – To finalise my field work, I will ask you the following questions over the phone after you complete the survey. Please let me know a suitable date and time to contact you. Thank you.

Recruitment.

- How many weeks do you need to advertise to find a suitable candidate to become a lifeguard?
- Do you find it hard to recruit for lifeguards? why?
- What difficulties or barriers do you normally find when recruiting for lifeguards?
- What strategies are there in place in your facility to optimise lifeguard recruitment?

Retention.

- What strategies are there in place to retain lifeguards? Were these ones applied on the staff who left between March 2019 and March 2020?
 - As an employer, could anything else be done to prevent them from leaving? If yes, why was it not done?