

# Return to industry - planning tool

A practical guide for trainers and assessors in automotive and mining Vocational Education and Training (VET) contexts.

*Part of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework*



## About this tool

A return to industry placement is one of the most effective ways to maintain your vocational currency. It reconnects you with current practice, technology, equipment, and the realities your students will face when they graduate. A well-planned placement is more than a professional development activity. It directly informs how you deliver and assess.

This tool helps you decide whether a placement is the next step right for your currency needs, and if so, how to plan it purposefully, what you need from it, who might host it, and how to apply what you learn when you return.

Your organisation may have its own requirements for recording industry currency under the Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2025. A well-documented placement can contribute directly to that evidence. Talk to your manager about how to record and submit what you gain from a placement.

## Start with reflection

Before deciding whether a placement is the right option, it's important to understand where your vocational currency currently stands and what may have changed since you last worked in the industry. The prompts below are designed to guide that reflection.

### Your industry and your delivery

How much time has passed since you last worked in the vocational area you deliver and assess? What has changed in that time, for example, technology, equipment, workplace practices, licensing requirements, and safety standards? Are there areas where you are less confident in current practice than you would like to be?

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## Your units of competency

Have the units of competency you deliver been updated recently? Do the performance criteria and performance evidence still reflect current workplace practice, as you understand it? Are there units where you are less certain about what competence looks like in a modern workplace?

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## Your assessment tools

Do your assessment tools reflect what is required in current industry workplaces? Are the tasks, equipment, processes and standards referenced in your assessments still current? Have your students or graduates raised any issues that suggest a gap between what you are assessing and what they encounter at work?

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## Addressing currency gaps - options other than placement

A return to industry placement is not always the only, or even the most practical, option. Before planning a placement, it is worth considering whether other approaches could address your currency gaps, either on their own or alongside a placement.

### Other ways to update your currency:

- reading industry publications, trade journals and technical updates in your vocational area
- completing original equipment manufacturer (OEM) or manufacturer online training and technical modules
- attending industry conferences, trade events or technical seminars
- inviting industry contacts to your registered training organisation (RTO) to discuss current practice and emerging developments
- participating in Training Advisory Group meetings where current industry representatives are present
- talking regularly with former colleagues, employers and graduates about what is changing at the coalface.

If your gap requires you to see and do rather than read and discuss, a placement might be the right choice.

## Planning your placement

Direct experience in the current workplace is often the most effective way to maintain currency, particularly when technology, equipment, or workplace conditions have changed. Sometimes the gap is about knowledge and awareness. Sometimes it is about getting hands-on with current equipment and practising the practical skills you teach, but may not have been used recently.

### What do you need from the placement?

What specifically are you hoping to gain? Is it exposure to new equipment or technology, or to observe current work practices? Are you seeking hands-on experience with the processes you teach? Do you want to understand how a specific unit of competency is applied in a real workplace? Or is it something else? Be as specific as you can. This will shape who you approach and what you ask of them.

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## Observation or doing?

The value of a placement depends heavily on the nature of your activity. Observing current workplace practice is useful. Hands-on work, such as working alongside tradespeople, handling equipment, and completing tasks, is significantly more valuable for currency and authenticity in your delivery and assessment.

When approaching a host employer, be clear about what you need. Some workplaces can easily accommodate observers but require additional induction, licensing, or safety clearances for hands-on participation. Knowing what you need enables an informed conversation about what is possible.

## How long do you need?

The duration of a useful placement varies considerably depending on what you are trying to achieve. A day or two may be sufficient to observe a specific process or see particular equipment in operation. A week or more may be needed to immerse yourself in current practice or to work through a complete job process from start to finish. Think about what your gap requires rather than defaulting to whatever is easiest to arrange.

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## Who might host your placement?

Do you or your RTO already have relationships with organisations that could host a placement? Are there employers whose workforce you train, or former colleagues still working in industry? Are there OEM or manufacturer sites relevant to your delivery area? Does your RTO have existing arrangements with any employers that could be utilised? If your RTO does not have an existing relationship, who might you approach, and what would you offer in return for their time and access?

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## Your placement objectives

Use the table below to map out what you are looking to achieve from a placement, what you need from the host employer and how long you estimate you will need for each focus area.

| Placement objective | What I need from the host employer | Estimated duration | Notes |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|-------|
|                     |                                    |                    |       |

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## Discussing with your manager

Before approaching a potential host employer, talk to your manager or program leader. A placement requires your organisation's support with scheduling, backfill arrangements, and, potentially, making or facilitating the initial approach to an employer.

A useful conversation with your manager covers:

- what you have identified as your currency gap and why you think a placement is the right way to address it
- how long you estimate you will need, and when it might work within your delivery schedule
- what backfill or scheduling arrangements would need to be in place to make the placement possible
- whether your RTO has an existing relationship with a suitable employer that you could draw on
- how the placement will be documented and recorded as evidence of your industry currency.

Your manager may also be aware of placement opportunities or employer relationships that you are not aware of. Discussing it with your manager gives the organisation time to consider and make plans.

## Approaching a host employer

When you contact a potential host, be clear and specific. Most employers are willing to support a trainer or assessor who explains what they need and why, particularly if there is an existing relationship between the employer and your RTO, or if you have a personal connection with someone in the workplace.

### A useful approach to conversation covers:

- who you are and the training you deliver
- what specifically you are hoping to see or do during the placement
- how long you are asking for, and when it would work
- any safety, licensing or induction requirements you are aware of and prepared to meet
- what the employer gets from the arrangement. For example, a trainer who better understands their workplace, stronger assessment tools, graduates who are better prepared for the current workplace and/or an opportunity to support the training sector.

If your RTO already has a relationship with the employer, involve your manager when making the approach. This is more likely to strengthen the existing organisational relationship and improve the chances of a successful placement than approaching it as a personal arrangement.



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## During the placement

Go in with clear focus areas, but stay open to what you observe beyond them. Current workplaces often reveal what you did not realise you were missing. This may include a changed process, a piece of equipment you had not encountered, a safety requirement that has evolved, or a way of working that differs from your delivery.

Take notes as you go. Record what you observe, what you do, what has changed since you last worked in this context and what questions it raises about your delivery and assessment. These notes are the raw material for the reflection and action you will do when you return.

### Things worth noting during your placement:

- equipment, tools or technology that is new, updated or different from what you currently reference in delivery or assessment
- digital technologies used in industry that may have evolved since your last experience
- processes or work sequences that have changed or that differ from how you describe them in your teaching
- safety requirements, licensing conditions or regulatory expectations that have evolved
- the language, terminology and culture of the current workplace
- anything your students have mentioned that now makes more sense, or anything that challenges what you have been telling them
- what competence looks like in this workplace and whether your assessment tools would capture it.

## Applying what you learnt

The value of a placement lies in the changes that result. Returning to your RTO with new knowledge and experience is only the beginning. You have a responsibility to bring what you observed and did back into your practice. This means reviewing your:

- training and assessment strategies
- delivery approaches
- assessment practices
- resources, tools and equipment you reference.

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Where your placement has revealed a gap between current industry practice and what you are delivering or assessing, that gap needs to be addressed. The table below provides a framework for systematically working through that process.

| What I observed or did | What this means for my delivery and resources | What this means for my assessment tools | Action I will take |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|
|                        |                                               |                                         |                    |
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## Sharing with colleagues

What did you learn that would be useful to colleagues who work in the same or adjacent areas? A brief conversation, a team meeting discussion, or a shared set of notes can multiply the value of your placement beyond your own practice. Consider what is worth sharing and how you might do that.

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Explore more practical tools, guides and resources supporting VET capability, wellbeing, industry engagement and career development