

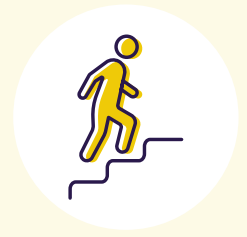
AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework Guidance Manual

Career

Making career pathways in
VET visible



Making career pathways in VET visible



This section is part of theme 4: Career pathways

This section applies across all four career stages. The visibility of career pathways, the nature of progression and the type of support needed all shift significantly at each stage. From near total invisibility at the new entrant stage through to sector-level contribution and succession planning at the expert stage. The career stages section describes these shifts in detail.

Making career pathways visible means clearly showing the diverse, non-linear ways careers in Vocational Education and Training develop.

What is it

Making career pathways visible means ensuring that trainers and assessors can see what a career in automotive and mining Vocational Education and Training (VET) contains. Whether they are considering VET, just entering it, or well-established in it. This includes the range of available roles, the directions careers can take, and how contributions are recognised over time.

Career pathways in VET are not linear. They move sideways as well as up, pause and return and take different shapes depending on the type of organisation, the sector and the individual. Making them visible means describing this honestly, rather than presenting a tidy ladder that does not reflect reality.

Why it matters

When career pathways were clearly explained, not as pressure to progress but as information, trainers and assessors had a stronger sense of purpose and a clearer reason to stay.

When trainers and assessors cannot see where a VET career leads, motivation diminishes and the risk of departure increases. When organisations do not recognise the full range of career movement, lateral as well as vertical, capable people may feel their careers have plateaued when they have not.

For those still in industry, VET appears to be a narrow role with limited scope. For new trainers and assessors in the early years, the range of what a career might contain is rarely explained. For experienced trainers and assessors, the absence of visible progression can reduce motivation, even when the work itself remains satisfying.

What we found

A career that is often invisible from the outside

- Most trainers and assessors enter VET through personal networks rather than deliberate career planning. Many describe finding out what a VET career could involve, its variety, depth and progression possibilities, only after they were already in it. For those still working in industry, the career remains largely invisible.
- This invisibility is felt most acutely in the first year or 2. New entrants arrive focused on the immediate demands of teaching, with little opportunity or encouragement to look further ahead.
- The roles that exist beyond classroom delivery, in curriculum, compliance, mentoring, industry liaison and leadership, are rarely explained during induction. Where organisations made career possibilities part of the early conversation, feedback indicated that new trainers developed a stronger sense of purpose and a clearer reason to stay.
- Two distinct dynamics are at work. Pathways that exist but are not visible and pathways that are not yet structurally available. The action required differs by context.

VET is seen as a late-career destination

- A persistent perception identified through consultation is that training is something people move into towards the end of a working life. When the body can no longer manage trade work or when fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) schedules no longer suit family circumstances.
- This creates a self-fulfilling problem. If VET is seen primarily as a late-career destination, the sector struggles to attract trainers and assessors with decades of contributions ahead of them, and existing trainers lose the sense that their careers have somewhere to go.
- This perception is shifting, particularly in automotive contexts where younger trainers

and assessors are entering and reframing what a VET career can look like.

- In mining, a related challenge was identified where the negative perceptions of the resources sector itself were described as a barrier to attracting potential trainers and assessors.

VET is a second profession

- Most trainers and assessors working in automotive and mining began their working lives in industry.
- The transition from industry expert to educator involves a genuine shift in professional identity, not simply a change of workplace.
- This transition can often be challenging, as it can be a period where individuals feel neither fully at home in industry nor fully established in education.
- Where this transition was well supported (through mentoring, structured induction and explicit acknowledgement of transferable expertise), trainers and assessors were more likely to develop a strong sense of themselves as VET professionals and remain in the sector long term.

Careers emerge through participation, not planning

- VET careers are not usually planned.
- Unlike professions with defined qualification pathways and clear role hierarchies, careers in VET tend to emerge in ways that trainers and assessors did not anticipate.
- What enables movement between roles is rarely a formal qualification alone. Reputation, relationships and visibility within an organisation were consistently described as the practical currency of progression.
- Trainers and assessors who took on small additional responsibilities, such as contributing to a validation process, supporting a new colleague and joining an Industry Advisory

Group, described those contributions as the moments that made them visible to decision-makers and positioned them for an opportunity when it arose.

- Where organisations, through regular career conversations or structured Expressions of Interest (EOI) processes, make the connection between contributions and career development explicit, the pathway becomes clearer for all.

Non-linear career patterns

- VET careers do not follow a single upward trajectory.
- Careers can move sideways, pause, shift focus and return to earlier forms of practice.
- The work itself is genuinely diverse as it can include teaching, assessment, compliance, mentoring, curriculum development, industry engagement and leadership.
- Healthy mobility patterns, including trainers who moved from teaching into industry roles and later returned to VET, should be considered as a workforce strength rather than a retention failure. These trainers and assessors can bring refreshed vocational currency and stronger industry relationships back into the training context.

Lateral pathways

- Lateral progression, deepening expertise and taking on responsibility without moving into formal management, represents a significant but often under-recognised form of development.
- Lateral pathways are positioned here as intentional development options organisations can design for, alongside patterns that emerge informally.
- Lateral pathways that emerged through consultation include:
 - contributing to professional development and capability building across teams
 - developing expertise in compliance, quality and validation
 - taking on formal or informal mentoring responsibilities

- specialising in curriculum and assessment design
 - participating in industry advisory and liaison roles
 - developing expertise in student support and pastoral care.
- Feedback indicated that job satisfaction in VET often comes from the work itself. Such as teaching, student relationships, and contribution to workforce capability, rather than advancement in a hierarchy. Many trainers and assessors described deep fulfilment in remaining close to delivery throughout their careers. Consultation recognised this as a valid and positive outcome, not a failure to progress.

Vertical pathways

- Alongside lateral progression, consultation identified vertical pathways as movement into roles with greater scope, authority and organisational responsibility.
- Vertical pathway moves include:
 - advanced and senior trainer designations
 - team leader and coordinator positions
 - head of programs and training lead roles
 - portfolio and department training manager roles
 - registered training organisation (RTO) leadership and executive positions.
- Vertical progression in VET often occurs more slowly and less visibly than trainers and assessors expect when they enter the sector. Many described discovering senior roles only after an extended time in the field. Alternatively, stepping into management through acting arrangements that were not initially framed as career development opportunities.
- The pathways available depend significantly on context.
 - Larger public RTOs tend to have more formalised structures with defined role levels and salary scales.

- Private RTOs, which dominate automotive training, often have flatter structures where advancement involves expanding portfolio responsibilities.
- Enterprise RTOs, more prevalent in mining and heavy automotive, offer pathways that remain closely tied to the host organisation's operational context.
- In regional and remote contexts, vertical progression may be constrained by organisational size, with career development more often taking the form of expanding scope within existing roles.

Networking drives career opportunities more than formal processes

- Many roles and opportunities in VET are filled through internal processes, secondments and direct invitations rather than public advertisement.
- Internal networks matter in the early and establishing phases of a career.
- External networks, through validation, industry engagement and working groups, become increasingly important as careers develop.
- Professional standing and influence are built slowly and often invisibly. Once established, they open doors that formal qualifications alone do not.
- Organisations that create opportunities for involvement in projects, working groups and advisory roles are investing in their trainers and assessors' long-term career visibility.

Career conversations happen too late or not at all

- For most new trainers and assessors, entry is focused on immediate delivery, completing the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) and proving credibility.
- Many form their understanding of VET careers based only on what they can immediately see, missing the broader range of opportunities the sector contains.
- Where effective early career conversations occurred, they were low-key and relational rather than formal. They often involved experienced colleagues sharing their career stories, acknowledging the difficulty of the transition, and making other roles visible through exposure.
- Acting arrangements and EOI processes are practical mechanisms for making future roles visible earlier. These allow people to understand what progression might look like before a more permanent vacancy arises.

What helps

Creating clear and sustainable career pathways that support progression and retention



How to support staff progression and retention

Helping people see what a VET career looks like

What helps

- Showing people the range of jobs that exist in VET, not just teaching.
- Talking openly about VET as a second career and the adjustment it involves.
- Challenging the idea that training is only a late career option.
- Sharing real career stories from people already working in the sector.

Why this matters

- Most people don't plan a VET career; they stumble into it.
- If people can't see a future, they're less likely to stay.
- Knowing what's possible helps people enter the sector earlier and with clearer expectations.
- Pathway visibility requires action across supervisors and program leaders, organisational leadership and system-level design, rather than defaulting to individual initiative.

Accepting that careers do not follow straight lines

What helps

- Treating sideways moves, pauses and returns as normal.
- Valuing impact and satisfaction, not just promotion.
- Supporting flexible work, mixed roles and changes in hours.

Why this matters

- Many good trainers and assessors leave when non-linear careers are treated as a failure.
- Flexibility helps people stay connected through different life stages.
- People stay longer when the work itself is recognised as meaningful.

Recognising growth without needing a management title

What helps

- Naming and recognising specialist and leadership-type work that isn't management.
- Giving time and workload allowance for these roles.
- Talking about this kind of growth in career conversations.

Why this matters

- People already do this work, but it often goes unnoticed.
- When extra responsibility isn't recognised, people burn out.
- Visibility turns doing more into real career progress.

Different workplaces need different career paths

What helps

- Clear role levels where organisations are large enough to accommodate them.
- Broader role scope and portfolio growth in flatter organisations.
- Using acting and relieving roles to let people try leadership safely.

Why this matters

- There isn't one right career path in VET.
- People disengage when pathways don't fit their needs or requirements.
- Trying roles before committing builds confidence and capability.

Using connections and reputation to open doors

What helps

- Creating opportunities to be involved in projects, working groups and secondments.
- Supporting participation in industry, validation and advisory work.
- Recognising the value of being known for good work.

Why this matters

- Most opportunities come through networks, not job ads.
- Reputation grows slowly but shapes long-term career options.
- Strong networks make careers feel possible, not closed off.

Talking about careers early, not just when someone wants a promotion

What helps

- Early conversations that go beyond 'getting through the TAE'.
- Informal chats with experienced colleagues about what comes next.
- Letting people see other roles through acting jobs and EOIs.

Why this matters

- People can't aim for roles they don't know exist.
- Early visibility builds motivation and confidence.
- Practical exposure works better than formal plans.

Growing the next leaders and passing on critical knowledge

What helps

- Treating acting roles as learning, not testing.
- Pairing people to share specialist knowledge over time.
- Planning handover for safety-critical or hard-to-replace expertise.

Why this matters

- Too much knowledge is held by too few people.
- When people leave suddenly, the impact is immediate.
- Shared knowledge builds confidence and continuity.

Making people feel valued so they stay

What helps

- Matching pay, title, workload and responsibility.
- Making advanced contributions visible through job titles.
- Providing access to development as a sign of trust and investment.

Why this matters

- People leave when effort and responsibility go unnoticed.
- Recognition helps people see a future in the sector.
- Feeling valued is one of the strongest reasons people stay.

Industry impacts

Automotive contexts

Automotive industry impacts

- The perception of VET as a late career destination is particularly strong in automotive contexts. Where trades culture has historically framed training as something entered when physical work becomes harder.
- Career structures in automotive tend to be flatter than in public provider environments. With fewer defined role levels and less consistent application of advanced or senior designations.
- Pay differentials are especially acute for specialists in diagnostic work, emerging EV technology or heavy vehicle systems. Where industry wages can significantly exceed VET salaries. Maintaining these trainers and assessors in VET over the long term becomes increasingly difficult without clear pay progression and meaningful recognition of specialised expertise.

Career progression and retention strategies

- Shift perceptions of VET by promoting it as a viable mid-career pathway. Supported by early entry points, clear progression opportunities and recognition of training as a valued professional role.
- Develop clearer and more consistent career structures with defined role levels and progression pathways to support advancement within automotive VET.
- Strengthen retention of specialist trainers and assessors by offering competitive progression, targeted incentives and meaningful recognition of high demand technical expertise.

Industry impacts

Mining contexts

Mining industry impacts

- The transition from FIFO operational roles into training is a distinct career pathway in mining VET, with its own adjustment challenges.
- Enterprise RTOs shape vertical career structures in ways that differ from both public and private providers. With progression remaining closely tied to the operational context of the host organisation.
- Where specialist expertise in safety critical training areas sits with a small number of individuals, the departure of an experienced trainer and assessor can have immediate operational implications.
- The dual role model, where trainers and assessors maintain concurrent involvement in operational activities, supports vocational currency but can constrain consistent career progression.
- Geographic spread across regional and remote locations further limits career visibility and access to development opportunities for many mining VET trainers and assessors.

Career progression and retention strategies

- Develop structured transition pathways with mentoring, recognition of prior experience and flexible support to help FIFO workers move into and remain in training roles.
- Create transparent, organisation aligned career pathways that enable movement between operational and training roles while recognising and retaining training expertise.
- Implement succession planning, knowledge transfer and targeted incentives to build capability and retain trainers and assessors in critical safety roles.
- Support flexible career pathways that recognise dual role experience, enable progression into dedicated training roles and manage workload to sustain retention.
- Expand access to development through digital delivery, communities of practice and targeted incentives to support progression and retention in remote locations.

What this looks like across the career stages

Industry engagement evolves in form, depth, and purpose as trainers and assessors progress in their careers, and it should be tailored to their career stage rather than applied uniformly.

Career stage	Support requirements
New entrant – getting started and finding your feet	• Career pathways are almost entirely invisible at this stage; the immediate focus is on managing delivery, completing the TAE and navigating a new professional environment. • New entrants typically understand the role only as they have encountered it, usually classroom delivery, without exposure to the broader range of contributions VET contains. • Where induction does not explicitly describe what a VET career can involve, new entrants form their understanding from what they can immediately see. • Relationship is the primary source of career visibility at this stage. New entrants connected to experienced colleagues through mentoring or buddy arrangements encounter a broader picture of what is possible. • This stage carries elevated departure risk. The conditions that reduce it – mentoring, realistic workload and early glimpses of what a VET career can become – are also the conditions that make pathways visible for the first time.
Establishing – building confidence and consistency	• Teaching practice is developing, the TAE is typically complete or near completion, and the immediate pressures of entry are easing. Trainers and assessors are in a position to look beyond daily delivery for the first time. • Lateral pathways often become available for the first time. Contributing to validation, supporting a colleague, taking on a small project or beginning to mentor a newer entrant. • Where organisations made these opportunities explicit and connected them to career conversations, trainers developed a stronger sense of direction. Where they were left to individual initiative, many were unaware that the opportunities existed. • External networks begin to develop at this stage through industry engagement, professional development and peer connection. Foundations that become increasingly important as careers develop.

Career stage	Support requirements
Advanced – handling complexity and informal responsibility	• Confident teaching and assessment practice is established, and contribution has typically broadened to include mentoring, curriculum development, compliance leadership or industry liaison. • The gap between contribution and recognition is most acutely felt at this stage. Advanced trainers and assessors frequently carry responsibilities of significant organisational value without commensurate title, pay, or acknowledgement of workload. • Career conversations are most important here. Without deliberate discussion of aspirations and options, advanced trainers and assessors may have no clear picture of where their career might lead beyond their current role. • Expressions of interest processes and acting arrangements are particularly valuable at this stage. They identify capability and aspiration that would otherwise remain invisible to the organisation. • Organisations that name and resource advanced contribution formally, through role titles, allocated time and pay recognition, produce stronger retention outcomes than those relying on informal acknowledgement.
Expert – drawing on deep experience and perspective	• Expert trainers and assessors have built knowledge, relationships and professional standing that cannot quickly be replaced. Their career contributions span teaching, mentoring, compliance, curriculum, industry engagement, and often leadership. • Professional identity at this stage is typically shaped by contribution to the sector rather than to a single role. Mentoring, advisory work, training package development and sustained delivery excellence are all legitimate expressions of an expert career. • The primary risk is disengagement rather than departure. The quiet withdrawal of effort occurs when sustained contribution goes unrecognised or when conditions that made the career rewarding are eroded. • Where expert trainers and assessors feel seen and valued, through formal recognition and meaningful contribution opportunities, they remain deeply engaged and represent an extraordinary resource for the sector. • Succession planning is a career pathway consideration at this stage. Trainers and assessors approaching retirement carry knowledge and relationships that require deliberate transfer arrangements to preserve.

When it is working

- Trainers and assessors can describe where their career might go. Even if they cannot fully predict it.
- New trainers and assessors are introduced to the range of career possibilities early. Not as pressure to advance, but as information about what the profession contains.
- Lateral contributions, in mentoring, compliance, curriculum, pastoral care and industry liaison, are named, resourced and recognised as career roles rather than voluntary additions to a teaching load.
- Acting arrangements and EOI processes are framed explicitly as development opportunities, not administrative solutions.
- Career conversations happen early and are revisited periodically, addressing aspiration and longer-term options, not just immediate performance.
- Opportunities for involvement in projects, working groups, industry engagement and advisory roles are actively created and offered.
- Mobility between industry and training is treated as a workforce strength. Trainers and assessors who move between environments return with refreshed currency and stronger relationships with employers.
- Satisfaction in a current role is recognised as a valid and positive outcome, not a failure to progress.
- Pay progression is linked visibly to qualification attainment and demonstrated contribution.

Success stories

Making career possibilities visible

Targeted interview feedback described an organisation that used structured 6-monthly performance conversations as a mechanism for making career possibilities visible.

Pay, capability development, vocational currency, teaching competency, and leadership aspiration were standing agenda items.

Expressions of interest for team leader and head teacher positions were actively encouraged. The proportion of staff who submitted an EOI was described as a marker of organisational health. In several cases, development conversations had identified capability gaps and led to targeted support well before a formal vacancy arose.

Success stories

Treating mobility as a strength

Targeted interview feedback described a private RTO where trainer and assessor mobility between the training environment and industry was treated as a deliberate feature rather than a problem to be managed.

Trainers and assessors who stepped away to return to operational roles were able to re-enter delivery when circumstances allowed.

Several trainers and assessors had moved between the two environments more than once. Each time returning to VET with renewed credibility in the training room and stronger employer relationships.

Linking pay and professional development

Targeted interview feedback described an automotive training provider in which remuneration progression was explicitly linked to attainment of qualifications, including the TAE, the Diploma of Vocational Education and Training, and other higher-level qualifications. Each created a visible step in pay classification.

Progression to program leader roles was available across multiple program areas, and EOIs were actively encouraged.

Making the connection between professional development and pay recognition visible was described as an effective way to demonstrate that the organisation valued career investment.

Continue exploring

You'll find additional tools, resources and related guidance in the **Career** section of the AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework, including practical self-assessment tools, supporting guidance and links to related topics.





**Mining and
Automotive**
Skills Alliance

The Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance (AUSMASA) is a Jobs and Skills Council funded by the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

© Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance (AUSMASA)