Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance

AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework Guidance Manual

Industry

Industry engagement and vocational currency

Industry engagement and vocational currency

This section is part of theme 3: Industry

This section applies across all 4 career stages. The depth and purpose of industry engagement shift significantly at each stage. From maintaining existing connections at the new entrant stage through to sector-level influence at the expert stage. The career stages table in this document describes these shifts in detail.

> **How trainers and assessors maintain genuine connection to the industries they teach – and why it matters.**

What is it

Most trainers and assessors in automotive and mining Vocational Education and Training (VET) entered the sector from industry. Their background is considered foundational, and their credibility as educators rests on the authenticity of their vocational knowledge.

Industry engagement describes how trainers and assessors maintain, develop, and apply their connections to the industries they teach. It includes maintaining technical and vocational currency, sustaining employer relationships and contributing to advisory and curriculum processes. At more advanced career stages, industry engagement can influence how training responds to industry change.

Industry engagement is one of several mechanisms for maintaining vocational currency. The 2 terms are related but not interchangeable. Currency is the outcome; engagement is one means of sustaining it.

Industry engagement is the ongoing practice which is maintained and deepened across a career. It takes many forms, from structured placements and advisory group participation to employer embedded arrangements and peer networks. What these share is a genuine, sustained connection to current industry practice, rather than currency being maintained through documentation.

Why it matters

Maintaining strong industry currency is critical for both training quality and trainer and assessor engagement. Maintaining connections and currency in industry impacts both the trainer and assessors and the quality of teaching and learning for students (refer to Figure 1).

Students in these sectors quickly recognise whether trainers and assessors have current industry knowledge, and any gaps can lead to outdated examples, poor contextualisation and assessment decisions that do not reflect contemporary practice.

Rapid technological change, such as electric vehicles (EVs), autonomous systems and digital diagnostics, further increases the risk when trainers and assessors are disconnected from industry, particularly in safety-critical environments like mining.

Industry engagement supports retention. Helping trainers and assessors maintain vocational identity, credibility and a sense of purpose, while opportunities for industry placement are highly valued.

For training quality teaching and learning

- Students in automotive and mining contexts quickly notice whether their trainer and assessor genuinely knows the work. Any currency gaps affect engagement and outcomes.
- Where trainers and assessors are not current, assessment decisions may not reflect contemporary practice and contextualisation draws on outdated examples.
- In both sectors, rapid technological change, including EV technology, autonomous systems and digital diagnostics, increases the risk when trainers and assessors are not engaged.
- In safety critical mining contexts, out of date knowledge is a practical risk, not only an academic one.

For trainer and assessor retention

- Trainers and assessors who maintained active industry connections described their VET careers as more grounded and purposeful.
- Industry engagement was consistently identified as a career defining domain. The sense of remaining connected to the industry they teach was described as central to professional motivation and satisfaction.
- Opportunities for industry placement ranked as the second most wanted support among trainers and assessors, after reduced administrative workload.

Figure 1: Why industry currency matters

What we found

Forms of industry engagement – what works

- Industry engagement varies widely, and the ability of trainers and assessors to stay current depends on their employment and connection to industry.
- Barriers to maintaining industry currency differ based on how trainers and assessors are positioned relative to industry.
- Effective industry engagement is planned, supported by organisations and focused on specific capability goals.
- Approaches that rely on individual initiative or are ad hoc are less effective.
- Providing time, funding and recognising industry engagement as professional work improves currency and training quality.

Employer engagement and embedded delivery models

- The most effective industry engagement occurs when it is built into the role, not added on separately.
- Trainers and assessors working directly in industry environments maintain currency as part of their everyday practice.
- On-site training strengthens relevance, student engagement and trainer and assessor credibility.
- Some models embed trainers and assessors within employer workforces, with registered training organisations (RTOs) supporting industry staff to become trainers. In these models, current industry practice is naturally integrated into the delivery of training.
- Strong, ongoing partnerships between RTOs and employers create mutual benefits. Shared use of facilities and resources can lead to deeper collaboration and co-investment in workforce capability.

Return-to-industry placements and secondments

- Return to industry programs, where trainers and assessors spend time working in industry, are highly effective for maintaining current skills.
- These programs build both technical capability and stronger relationships with industry.
- Immersive experiences provide benefits that passive activities cannot replicate.
- Well-designed programs are timed to minimise disruption and focus on specific skill gaps (for example, new technology or regulations).
- Structured, organisation-supported programs are more effective than informal, individually arranged ones.
- Other effective models include split roles, reciprocal placements and short-term industry contracts.
- These approaches work best when they have clear goals, defined timeframes and include sharing of learning with colleagues.

Advisory group participation and curriculum influence

- Participation in Training Advisory Groups (TAGs), Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs) and curriculum development processes is a form of industry engagement that builds over a career and deepens with experience.
- Where organisations allocated time and supported this participation, rather than expecting trainers and assessors to absorb it into an already full workload, it was more sustained and more influential.
- Where this contribution sits outside formal recognition and workload structures, it represents a sustainability risk.

Barriers to industry engagement

- Time is the biggest barrier to industry engagement. With teaching, administration, compliance and training requirements competing for attention.
- Trainers and assessors value industry engagement but struggle to prioritise it alongside heavy workloads.
- Private RTOs face added financial pressure, as releasing trainers and assessors for industry activities can reduce income and disrupt delivery.
- Where organisations do not actively support or resource industry engagement, it relies on personal effort and is less effective.
- Assuming trainers and assessors remain current from past industry experience leads to gaps. As skills and knowledge become outdated over time.
- Trainers and assessors in regional and remote areas may face additional challenges, including travel costs, limited access to sites and fewer opportunities to engage with new technologies.
- In mining, strict site access, safety and logistical requirements make industry engagement particularly difficult for external trainers and assessors.
- New trainers and assessors are especially at risk of losing industry connection as they focus on learning to teach and adjusting to VET roles.
- Without support, industry engagement can decline gradually and go unnoticed until gaps in relevance appear.
- Where access is structurally constrained, the response sits with organisational and system design rather than individual initiative.

What helps

Effective industry engagement requires deliberate planning, organisational support and strong partnerships to ensure trainers and assessors remain current and connected to industry.

Treat industry engagement as a planned professional activity

- Allocate dedicated time in workloads. Do not leave engagement to personal initiative outside working hours.
- Design currency activities around specific, identified capability gaps, rather than general industry exposure.
- Recognise industry engagement formally in performance frameworks and workload planning.
- Build currency expectations into induction for new trainers and assessors rather than assuming it will be managed independently.

Support return-to-industry arrangements deliberately

- Provide backfill for trainers and assessors undertaking industry placements. This is the most commonly cited practical barrier to placements proceeding.
- Design placements around specific skill gaps. Self-identified need produces more targeted outcomes than general exposure.
- Build in an expectation of knowledge sharing on return. Converting individual currency experiences into collective professional learning.

Build employer relationships as ongoing partnerships

- Approach employer relationships as mutual rather than transactional. Where both parties have something to offer and something to gain, partnerships are more sustained and more beneficial.
- Create reciprocal arrangements. RTO access to facilities, in exchange for employer access to sites and expertise, was described as producing genuine ongoing benefit.
- Consider employer-embedded trainer and assessor models where appropriate. Where industry employs the trainer and assessor or the trainer and assessor is delivering in an employment context, currency is structural rather than supplementary.

Recognise and resource the advisory group contribution

- Allocate time for TAG and IAG participation rather than expecting trainers and assessors to absorb it into an already full workload.
- Acknowledge advisory participation formally as professional development and workload contribution.
- At the advanced and expert stages, not only drawing industry knowledge into training but also contributing VET knowledge to industry conversations is a distinct and valuable form of engagement. This requires formalised organisational support to be sustained.

Address geographic and access constraints actively

- Bring currency activities to regional trainers and assessors. Mobile programs, peer-led development and supported travel reduce the compounding disadvantage created by geographic isolation.
- In mining contexts, work with industry partners to navigate site access requirements. Travel and accommodation, induction and security processes require lead time and relationship investment.
- Peer-led development, where trainers and assessors with current knowledge deliver structured development to regional colleagues, is practical and effective where resourced.

Industry impacts

Automotive contexts

Automotive industry impacts

- The EV transition has created an acute currency challenge. A substantial body of new knowledge in diagnostic systems, high voltage safety and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) platforms that many experienced trainers and assessors have not yet accessed in structured ways.
- Feedback indicated that the currency of trainers and assessors in regional areas was reported as significantly behind that of metropolitan counterparts. With EV training delayed in areas where local industry had not yet adopted it at scale.
- OEM relationships and dealership networks are significant currency sources given the proprietary nature of manufacturer diagnostic platforms.
- Private RTOs, which dominate automotive delivery, face particular pressure in funding trainer and assessor release for industry placements without a backfill mechanism.

Strategies to increase industry engagement and vocational currency

- Develop structured training in emerging areas such as EV technology, including high voltage systems, diagnostics and OEM platforms.
- Strengthen partnerships with OEMs and dealership networks to access current, specialised industry knowledge.
- Provide targeted support to regional trainers and assessors, such as improved access to training, travel opportunities or remote delivery.
- Introduce funding or backfill mechanisms to enable trainers and assessors to participate in industry placements without disrupting delivery.

Mining contexts

Mining industry impacts

- Enterprise RTOs offer structural proximity to operations. This does not automatically translate into broader sector engagement through advisory groups and training package consultation.
- Autonomous systems, remote operations and digital safety monitoring represent rapidly evolving currency demands in safety critical contexts.
- Site access barriers, induction requirements, security, rosters and transport to remote locations, create barriers that prevents RTO trainers and assessors from undertaking currency activities on mine sites, even where employer relationships exist.
- Geographic spread creates inequitable access to currency activities. Site visits, industry events and placements require costly travel for regional and remote trainers and assessors.

Strategies to increase industry engagement and vocational currency

- Strengthen participation in advisory groups and training package consultation to ensure broader sector engagement beyond enterprise settings.
- Develop targeted strategies to keep pace with emerging technologies, such as autonomous systems, remote operations and digital safety monitoring.
- Work with industry to reduce site access barriers by planning for induction, security and logistical requirements in advance.
- Provide funding and logistical support to enable regional and remote trainers and assessors to access site visits, industry events and placements.

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	Focus	What this looks like
New entrant – getting started and finding your feet	Maintaining existing connection	• Priority is retaining the industry connection that existed before VET entry. • Stay current through existing contacts, networks and employer connections facilitated by the organisation. • Most vulnerable period for industry connection. Daily informal contact with industry can disappear at entry. • Induction should explicitly address what vocational currency means in the VET context.
Establishing – building confidence and consistency	Building active participation	• Industry engagement shifts from passive maintenance toward more structured activity • Accessing OEM training in automotive contexts. Structured skills development in mining • Building external networks and professional credibility beyond the immediate organisation. • Beginning to identify where training approaches may be becoming outdated. • Maintaining awareness of regulatory changes and emerging industry developments.
Advanced – contributing to industry improvement	Helping drive industry change	• Industry engagement becomes a more deliberate and influential dimension of practice. • Taking on industry liaison roles; active participation in TAGs and IAGs. • Contributing to curriculum and assessment co-design with employers. • Facilitating knowledge transfer from industry into the training environment in structured ways. • Identifying and nurturing future trainer talent within industry contacts.
Expert – sector-level influence	Contributing to industry-wide activities and discussions	• Industry engagement reaches its fullest at the sector level. • Representing VET to industry. High-level contribution to committees and roundtables. • Driving emerging industry initiatives. Contributing to training package development. • Co-designing training with major employers. Operating as a trusted broker between VET and industry. • Where formally recognised and supported, this contribution creates lasting value for organisations and the broader system.

When it is working

- Trainers and assessors can describe what they gained from a currency activity and how it changed their practice, not just that they completed an activity.
- Industry placement and currency activities are planned, with workload consideration and clear development goals.
- New trainers and assessors receive explicit guidance about what vocational currency means in the VET context during induction.
- Return to industry placements have a clear purpose, backfill support and an expectation that learning will be shared with the broader team.
- Industry subject matter experts are embedded in delivery alongside qualified trainers and assessors. Sharing current practices and validating the training in students' eyes.
- Employer relationships are reciprocal and ongoing, not sought only when a specific need arises.
- Advisory group participation and curriculum contribution are formally recognised and allocated time in workload planning.
- Regional and remote trainers and assessors have access to structured currency activities that do not require metropolitan travel.

Success stories

Employer-embedded trainer model

Targeted interview feedback described a private RTO that did not directly employ any trainers and assessors. Instead, it worked with large employers to identify the most suitable person from their workforce and supported that individual to become the trainer and assessor for their organisation's students.

The model directly embedded employer practice, policy and processes into training delivery.

As a result, students benefited from training that was immediately contextualised to their actual working environment. While the employer retained confidence that the training reflected current operational standards.

Success stories

Structured industry placement with backfill

Targeted interview feedback described a program that supported trainers and assessors in identifying specific areas where they felt they required more current experience, and in undertaking a structured workplace placement to address those gaps. A key feature was that funding was provided to backfill the staff member during their absence, relieving the staffing pressure that often prevents placements from proceeding. Trainers and assessors completed a report on return and were expected to share what they had learnt with peers.

The combination of self-identified need funded backfill and knowledge-sharing expectation made the program more targeted and more valuable to the organisation than generic industry exposure.

Bringing EV currency to regional trainers

Targeted interview feedback described a national program through which experienced automotive trainers and assessors with current EV knowledge. The program delivered structured development to colleagues in EV diagnostic systems, high-voltage safety and OEM-specific platforms.

The initiative included a regional roadshow component. Taking training directly to areas where local industry demand had not yet generated the conditions for trainers and assessors to maintain currency through industry engagement alone. The program was described as bringing current EV capability directly to trainers and assessors in areas where access to industry-based currency activities was limited.

Helpful resources

The following resources are provided as optional references for those seeking practical tools or further reading aligned with the information in this section.

- **ASQA practice guide – trainer and assessor competencies**.
- **Training Accreditation Council fact sheet – Industry, Employer and Community Engagement**.
- **Training Accreditation Council fact sheet – Current Industry Skills and Knowledge**.
- NCVER Industry Currency and Professional Obsolescence: What can industry tell us? **www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/file/0024/20868/industry-currency-and-professional-obsolescence-2622.pdf**.
- **www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/delivering-high-quality-vet-what-matters-to-rtos**.

Continue Exploring

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

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