

AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework Guidance Manual

VET Capability

Professional development
across the career stages



Professional development across the career stages



This section is part of the VET Capability theme.

This section applies across all 4 career stages. Professional development (PD) needs to shift significantly at each stage, from structured induction and Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) support at the new entrant stage, through to sector-facing contribution and knowledge transfer at the expert stage. The career stages section describes these shifts in detail.

PD across an entire career – what it looks like at each stage and what makes it work.

What is it

PD for trainers and assessors in Vocational Education and Training (VET) extends well beyond initial qualification requirements. It operates across an entire career, shifting in focus and depth as trainers and assessors move from early-stage delivery, through to advanced teaching practice. It includes additional requirements such as mentoring, leadership and, for some, formal study at a graduate or postgraduate level.



These development needs shift as careers progress.

- New entrants need orientation, structured support and time to establish before formal study begins.
- Establishing trainers and assessors are consolidating teaching practice and deepening assessment capability.
- Advanced trainers and assessors are mentoring others, leading quality processes and, for some, pursuing further qualifications.
- Expert trainers and assessors are shaping sector practice and often carrying significant informal responsibility without formal recognition.

Why it matters

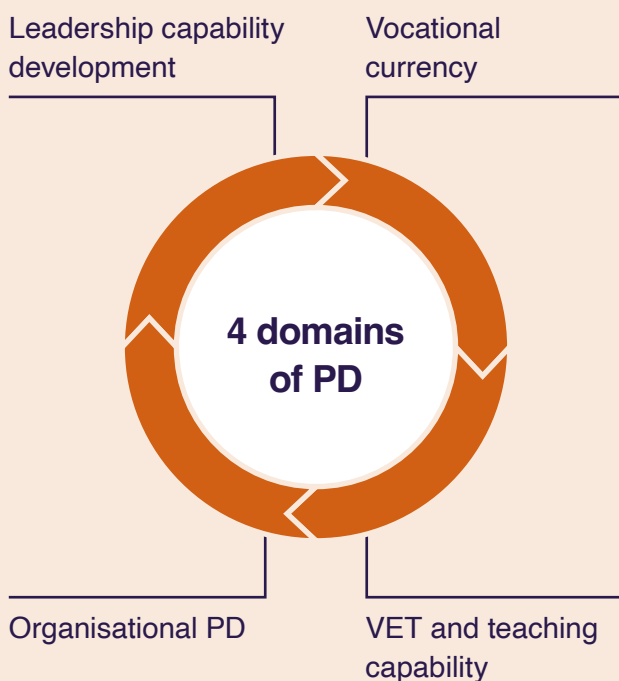
Training organisations build their purpose around the value of learning, yet PD for their own workforce is frequently experienced as a compliance exercise rather than a capability investment.

When PD is meaningful, connected to real practice, chosen with genuine input, and supported through to completion, it can be one of the most effective tools for retention and capability in the sector.

The stakes are particularly high in automotive and mining contexts, where rapid technological change in electric vehicles (EVs), autonomous systems, and digital operations means currency gaps directly affect the quality and relevance of what students are being trained to do.

What we found

4 domains of professional development



Consultation identified **4 broad domains** of PD.

1. **Vocational currency:** staying connected to current industry practice and emerging technologies.
2. **VET and teaching capability:** the educational, assessment and learner support skills of the role.
3. **Organisational PD:** employer-specific requirements including work health and safety (WHS) systems, information communication technology (ICT) and human resource (HR) processes.
4. **Leadership capability development:** developing the capacity to lead, manage, support others and contribute at a sector level.

Figure 1: 4 domains of PD

Domain 1: Vocational currency

Vocational currency is about connection and authenticity, not activity.

- Maintaining industry currency was consistently identified as a significant challenge for both individual trainers and assessors and their leaders.
- Currency is described as the ability to walk into a workshop, mine site or vehicle bay and be credible, not a statement for a compliance document.
- Some organisations introduced points-based systems, allowing activities such as attending industry forums, reading trade journals or completing online modules to count toward an annual target.
- The effectiveness of point-based systems is mixed. For some trainers and registered training organisations (RTOs), these systems promote flexibility and a clear sense of progress; for others, the same systems feel tokenistic, driven by meeting a number rather than a genuine industry connection.
- Whether a points-based approach supports meaningful currency depends on what activities it recognises and how it is used in practice.
- As trainers and assessors progress, industry engagement tends to shift toward active contributions. This includes participating in Training Advisory Groups and Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs), co-designing assessments with employers and representing VET in industry networks.
- This contribution was frequently informal, and its PD value was rarely recognised formally.
- In automotive training, the electric vehicle (EV) transition has placed currency under pressure. Trainers and assessors want hands-on access to high-voltage systems, but cost, access and geography create significant barriers.
- In mining, the shift to autonomous haulage, digital monitoring and high-voltage mobile plant has created equivalent pressures, particularly in regional areas where technology adoption lags major operations.

Domain 2: Vocational Education and Training and teaching capability

VET and teaching capability have significant gaps.

- Trainers and assessors entering from industry arrive with deep vocational expertise but limited familiarity with pedagogy, adult learning, and the complexity of diverse learner cohorts.
- The TAE was consistently described as insufficient preparation for complex teaching challenges.
- Assessment capability is a critical gap. For example, validation activities are often a critical knowledge gap, with participants not fully understanding the rules of evidence or the principles of assessment.
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessment is a specialist skill that the TAE has not adequately addressed. This results in a shortage of capable RPL assessors.
- Connecting assessment development to practical teaching experience, rather than framing it as a regulatory obligation, was identified as an important design consideration.
- Feedback described recommending that new trainers and assessors delay commencing the TAE for the first 6 months, allowing time to establish in the role before adding formal study.
- Trainers and assessors increasingly encounter students with diverse and complex needs, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, dyslexia, autism spectrum conditions, mental health challenges and language and literacy needs.
- Development in response to learner diversity was most effective when triggered by a real situation the trainer was facing and when the organisation responded quickly to an identified gap.

Domain 3: Organisational professional development

Organisational professional development is the most employer-driven domain.

- Organisational PD covers what any employer would expect of all staff regardless of role, including WHS, child safe standards, harassment prevention, cyber security, HR obligations, funding requirements and organisational systems. It may also include first aid, fire warden and similar workplace roles.
- Completing mandatory organisational training can add to overall time pressure, particularly alongside TAE study, training package updates or peak delivery periods.
- The domains most important for teaching quality, VET capability, vocational currency and leadership often receive the least structured support and protected time.

Domain 4: Leadership capability development

Leadership capability development is the most underprovided domain.

- Leadership capability development covers the preparation needed when trainers and assessors move beyond individual delivery into roles with responsibility for people, programs, quality and organisational performance.
- Consultation indicated that trainers transitioning into, or acting in, coordinator, lead or manager roles often received limited preparation for supervising staff, allocating workload, managing budgets, navigating compliance accountability, or leading change.
- Expert trainers and assessors frequently carry mentoring, advisory and advocacy responsibilities well beyond their teaching role without formal acknowledgement or career recognition, which is both a retention risk and a structural issue.
- Deliberate preparation for leadership responsibilities was found to strengthen both individual confidence and organisational stability.

Planning and evidencing professional development

What makes professional development work

- Development is most effective when trainers and assessors identify their own capability gaps.
- Mandating specific development approaches often reduces motivation.
- Development connected to a real problem currently being experienced was consistently described as more useful than comprehensive overviews of content that may not be needed for some time.
- Organisations providing genuine support, mentoring, check-ins, recognition of achievement, and adjusted workloads had significantly better completion and application outcomes than those that endorsed development without supporting it.
- Staff cannot take on additional development without corresponding reductions in other commitments.
- Where PD priorities were informed by validation outcomes, student feedback or audit findings, they aligned more closely to real performance issues rather than generic offerings.

Leadership, mentoring and peer contribution

Different professional development requirements are needed across the different career stages

- Structured mentoring was identified as central to effective development in the new entrant and in establishing the stages of the career framework. Mentoring is distinct from supervision and should be a formal approach to supporting staff, rather than an informal initiative used by some.
- Coaching is an effective development mechanism when applied to teaching practice. Particularly when offered as an invitation rather than a mandate to participate across all career stages.
- At the advanced career stage, peer contribution shifts from receiving support to providing it. This can include mentoring newer colleagues, leading validation, and contributing to curriculum and assessment design. These additional roles, however, are often not formally acknowledged or recognised.
- Communities of practice and peer networks where trainers and assessors can share knowledge, reflect on practice and support each other's development were described as effective tools to support PD for staff across all career stages.
- Sector-specific professional learning networks were identified as a significant PD tool used at the advanced career stage.

Further study and ongoing professional growth

Further qualifications bridge the pedagogical gap

- Many trainers and assessors pursue formal qualifications beyond the TAE to address a pedagogical gap. The TAE, however, does not explore teaching pedagogy, adult learning theory, or complex learner support in depth.
- Motivation was typically intrinsic. Professional pride and a genuine desire to become better educators, rather than career ambition alone, were important in motivating staff to participate in PD.
- Pathways include the Diploma of Vocational Education and Training, Graduate Certificates in Adult Education and Bachelor's and Master's of Education degrees.
- Where organisations actively encouraged further study and made it visible as a career development option, uptake was higher.
- Organisational support is the primary determinant of whether further study is completed.
- Endorsement without sustained support produces the same outcome as no support at all.

Access to professional development is unequal

- Regional and remote trainers face compounding barriers: geographic isolation, travel costs and limited availability of relevant programs locally.
- Feedback indicated that future-ready skills of trainers and assessors in regional areas could be substantially behind those of metropolitan counterparts, with emerging technology training often unavailable because local industry had not yet adopted the relevant technologies.
- Casual and sessional staff face distinct structural barriers to accessing and completing PD. These include limited or no access to funded PD, exclusion from planning processes and juggling commitments across multiple organisations.

What helps

Provide flexible, inclusive and industry connected PD that builds capability and supports ongoing learning.

How to increase successful professional development outcomes

Provide genuine choice and flexibility

- Jointly plan development with individual trainers and assessors rather than allocating it centrally.
- Offer flexibility in timing, format and delivery mode.
- Negotiate development plans that align individual and organisational priorities.
- Recognise that trainers and assessors are adult students. The same principles that should shape their own teaching apply here.

Support vocational currency through genuine industry connection

- Structured return to industry programs during non-delivery periods, designed around current practice and timed to fit operational schedules.
- Embed industry into the training environment through partnerships with industry subject matter experts who attend sessions alongside trainers and assessors and share current practices and emerging trends directly with staff and students.
- Design points-based systems that recognise substantive engagement with industry, not merely any activity that meets a threshold.
- Formally recognise the PD value of advisory group participation and industry contribution.

Develop leadership capability deliberately

- Provide preparation for the management capability of the coordinator and leadership roles before trainers and assessors step into them.
- Do not assume that teaching expertise automatically translates into leadership capability.

- Include people management, performance conversations, budget oversight, governance literacy and organisational strategy as distinct development areas.
- Formally acknowledge the contribution of advanced and expert trainers and assessors carrying mentoring, curriculum and advisory responsibilities beyond their teaching roles.
- Invest deliberately in mentoring capability.

Support further study through to completion

- Assign a mentor who has completed similar study before the trainer and assessor enrol.
- Schedule regular check-ins to connect the study to the current teaching practice throughout the enrolment period.
- Make workload adjustments during intensive study or assessment periods.
- Formally recognise achievement at completion, recognition reinforces that investment in learning is valued.

Address access and equity actively

- Include casual and sessional staff in PD planning and scheduling.
- Recognise that regional trainers and assessors may have substantially less access to emerging skills development, and design programs that do not assume metropolitan access.
- Ensure that advanced and expert trainers and assessors carrying heavy informal development responsibilities are not excluded from workload adjustment or formal recognition.

Industry impacts

The industry context shapes what PD is required and what is practically accessible.

Automotive contexts

Automotive industry impacts

- The EV transition has placed vocational currency under particular pressure. Trainers and assessors want hands-on access to EV systems and high voltage equipment but cost, equipment availability and geography make this difficult for many.
- Supplier and manufacturer training programs are among the most valued currency mechanisms in automotive, providing direct access to current technology and technical knowledge.
- Original equipment manufacturer (OEM) training programs and dealer networks offer PD access that is not available to all providers equally. Smaller or regional RTOs may have limited access to these channels.

Professional development required

- PD needs to prioritise practical, accessible upskilling in EV systems and high voltage technology. Including alternative delivery models where direct equipment access is limited.
- PD should include strong engagement with supplier and manufacturer training to keep trainers and assessors current with emerging automotive technologies, systems and technical standards.
- PD arrangements need to address equity of access, so smaller and regional RTOs can participate in high-quality OEM and dealer network learning opportunities.

Mining contexts

Mining industry impacts

- The shift toward autonomous vehicles, digital monitoring and high voltage mobile plant has created significant currency pressures.
- Specialist licensing and competency requirements across mining operations create ongoing currency obligations that are more complex and more operationally constrained than in most other VET contexts.
- Enterprise RTOs within mining organisations can offer PD access and industry immersion that is not available to external providers. This includes access to current equipment, operational contexts and subject matter experts.
- Word of mouth and operational peer networks are particularly valuable. Experienced trainers and assessors who speak positively about development opportunities carry significant influence.

Professional development required

- PD must support ongoing upskilling in autonomous systems, digital monitoring and high voltage mobile plant to maintain vocational currency.
- PD needs to address evolving and highly regulated competency standards. Ensuring trainers and assessors remain compliant within complex and operationally constrained environments.
- PD should leverage partnerships or pathways that enable broader access to enterprise RTO environments. Including exposure to current equipment, real operations and industry experts.
- PD strategies should use peer networks and trainer and assessor advocacy to promote engagement, recognising the strong influence of trusted industry voices.

When it is working

- Trainers and assessors can describe what they are participating in and why it matters to their practice. Not just what activities they have completed.
- PD plans are built with staff rather than assigned to them and reflect genuine individual priorities.
- Validation outcomes, learner feedback and audit findings are used to inform development priorities, not only as compliance artefacts.
- Vocational currency activities involve real engagement with current industry practice. Not only attendance at events or accumulation of points.
- Trainers and assessors pursuing further qualifications have an assigned mentor, regular check-ins and workload accommodations. Not just organisational endorsement.
- New entrants receive structured induction and mentoring before taking on full independent teaching responsibilities.
- Trainers and assessors moving into coordinator or program manager roles receive deliberate preparation for the management dimensions of those roles.
- Expert and advanced trainers and assessors carrying disproportionate informal responsibilities are formally recognised and workload adjusted accordingly.
- Casual and sessional staff have access to PD proportionate to their contribution to delivery.
- Regional and remote trainers and assessors have equitable access to current activities and emerging skills development.

What this looks like across the career stages

1. New entrant – getting started and finding your feet

- The dominant need is VET and teaching capability. This includes learning to teach, manage a room, understand assessment requirements and navigate organisational systems.
- Vocational currency is typically not the immediate priority. New entrants generally arrive with current industry knowledge.
- Delaying TAE commencement for the first 6 months, allowing time to establish in the role before adding formal study was described as a valuable approach when applied.
- Organisational PD is most effective when delivered in small doses close to first use, not as a comprehensive induction block.
- Structured mentoring, a reduced delivery load in early weeks and explicit permission to focus on development rather than immediate performance were associated with stronger early confidence.

2. Establishing – building confidence and consistency

- Assessment capability, particularly around RPL, validation and rules of evidence, often remains underdeveloped at this stage and benefits from targeted attention.
- This is the phase where trainers and assessors begin to encounter the full complexity of their learner cohort and realise that initial preparation did not fully equip them.
- Development works best with greater trainer and assessor agency, genuine choice, peer observation, coaching and PD anchored in real delivery challenges.
- Further study is often commenced at this stage. Where organisations make pathways visible and support is genuine, completion rates can be higher.

3. Advanced – handling complexity and informal responsibility

- Vocational currency becomes more pressing. The risk of capable, experienced trainers and assessors finding their industry knowledge outdated while their teaching practice develops is real.
- Return to industry programs, supplier and manufacturer training and active participation in industry networks are important currency mechanisms at this stage.
- Leadership capability development becomes relevant for those moving into or being considered for coordinator or program leader roles. This transition is consistently the least well supported.
- The contribution of advanced trainers and assessors to mentoring, curriculum design and validation is frequently informal and unrecognised. This is a retention risk that organisations can address through workload adjustment and formal acknowledgement.

4. Expert – drawing on deep experience and perspective

- Development needs at the expert stage are often sector-facing rather than organisation-facing. Contributing to IAGs, training package review and knowledge transfer.
- Expert trainers and assessors are the most likely to receive the least structured PD. Often overlooked by programs designed for earlier career stages.
- Peer contribution, such as mentoring, coaching, and leading communities of practice, is itself a form of PD at this stage. Where PD is resourced and recognised, trainers and assessors describe renewed professional purpose.
- The 2025 Standards for RTOs require that trainers and assessors maintain currency in both their vocational area and in training and assessment practice throughout their career. This obligation does not diminish at the expert stage.

Success stories

Return to industry program – maintaining currency through structured placements

A structured industry placement program allows trainers and assessors to self-identify areas where their vocational currency is lacking and undertake a return to industry placement of up to 10 days.

The employing organisation assists in finding a suitable placement where needed, removing a practical barrier that often prevents self-directed currency activity.

Critically, funding is provided to backfill the teaching commitment for the duration of the placement. Directly addressing the scheduling problem that causes most currency initiatives to stall in practice.

Participants maintain a reflective log recording what they observed, what they learned and how they intend to apply it in their training context. Findings are then shared with the broader trainer cohort, converting an individual currency experience into collective professional learning.

Supporting further study through to completion – the difference support makes

Consultation feedback described 2 contrasting experiences. In the first experience, a trainer pursuing a Graduate Certificate received structured support, including a mentor, monthly meetings connecting learning to practice, study leave for assessment completion, and formal recognition through a salary review upon completion. The trainer described feeling valued throughout and became an advocate for PD among colleagues.

In the second experience, a trainer was encouraged to pursue an advanced qualification with promises of mentoring and workload adjustment. Due to staff changes, the promised support was never consistently provided. The trainer juggled full teaching responsibilities alongside study and ultimately withdrew, despite initial enthusiasm.

The difference was not capability or motivation; it was the consistency of support.

Success stories

Jointly planned professional development – ownership and outcomes

Targeted interview feedback described an organisation where PD was jointly planned between the organisation and each trainer, with agreed outcomes, applied learning components and regular check-in points.

Trainers described having genuine ownership over their development pathway. This contrasted with organisations where PD was allocated centrally and experienced as something done to them rather than with them.

Embedding industry expertise into the training environment

One targeted interview described an approach in which industry subject-matter experts attended training sessions alongside qualified trainers. Sharing current practices, emerging trends and technical knowledge directly with both staff and students.

The arrangement was described as embedding industry into the training environment rather than requiring trainers to seek currency externally and as validating the training in the eyes of students.

The partnership had developed over several years, growing from an initial upskilling arrangement into an ongoing collaborative model.

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.

- National Centre for Vocational Education and Research on PD, Continuing Professional Development for a Diverse VET Practitioner Workforce, www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/continuing-professional-development-for-a-diverse-vet-practitioner-workforce



Continue Exploring

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



**Mining and
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Skills Alliance

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