

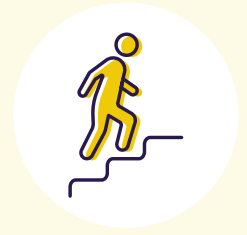
AUSMASA Trainer and Assessor VET Career Framework Guidance Manual

Career

Progression, leadership,
and contribution



Progression, leadership and contribution



This section is part of theme 4: Career pathways

This section applies across all 4 career stages. The dynamics of career conversations, networking, recognition and departure risk all shift significantly at each stage. The career stages table in this document describes these shifts in detail.

What is it

Not all career development involves progression to more senior roles. Many trainers and assessors build long, rewarding careers that are centred on excellent teaching and close engagement with students, and that they have no desire to move beyond.



The conditions that shape whether a trainer and assessor progress to a higher level is shaped by organisations, managers, colleagues and the systems within which people work.

The conditions described here apply as much to sustaining a career in teaching as to developing one toward leadership.

Why it matters

Progression, leadership and contribution in VET are influenced by the conditions, conversations and practices that sustain careers over the long term. This includes:

- how organisations make career development visible
- how they recognise and reward contribution at every level
- how they manage the transition and succession of experienced trainers and assessors
- what keeps people in the sector, or drives them out.

Where these conditions are well designed and deliberately maintained, careers are rewarding and durable. Where they are absent or inconsistent, capable people leave, often at the point when their contribution is most valuable. Understanding what sustains and what drives departure is as important as understanding attraction and entry.

What we found

Early career conversations and development planning

Career conversations happen too late or not at all

- Career conversations in VET typically happen too late, too rarely, or not at all.
- New trainers and assessors enter focused on immediate demands. The broader question of where their career might go is rarely raised until circumstances force it or opportunities occur.
- In many contexts, the structures that would make deliberate career conversations possible (e.g. regular one-to-one time, shared language for development and visible pathways) are not in place.
- Organisations that do not have regular development conversations are routinely surprised by departures they could have anticipated.

EOI processes identify hidden capability and aspiration

- Expression of interest (EOI) processes, when actively encouraged rather than undertaken only when a staff vacancy arises, create conditions in which career aspirations become visible to organisations.
- They identify staff seeking a change of direction. Not necessarily to a senior role, but to a different kind of contribution.
- They reveal attributes, experience and qualifications that may not be known to the current leadership team. Particularly where staff have been in the same role for many years or where leadership has changed.
- EOI participation treated as a marker of organisational health, rather than a staffing pressure, produces better outcomes than treating it as a bureaucratic necessity.

Networking as a career enabler

Networking shapes career trajectory

- Many opportunities in VET are filled through informal processes, direct invitation and word of mouth. Being known for good work shapes careers in ways formal qualifications alone do not.
- Internal networks matter most in early career phases. Engagement with external networks, industry advisory groups, validation panels and sector working groups becomes increasingly significant at advanced and expert stages.
- Organisations that create opportunities for involvement in projects, working groups and advisory roles invest in the long-term career development of their trainers and assessors, even when this is not the explicit intent.

Movement across contexts and mobility

Mobility is a workforce strength

- Movement across organisations, RTO types, industry and geographic contexts enriches careers and builds capability.
- Trainers and assessors who have moved between contexts describe a broader understanding of how the sector operates and a more flexible approach to delivery.
- Movement between VET and industry (e.g. returning to operational roles before re-entering training) produces trainers and assessors with refreshed vocational currency and stronger employer relationships.
- Treating mobility as a workforce strength rather than a retention failure produces more capable and credible training workforces over time.
- In regional and remote contexts, mobility takes the form of expanding scope within existing roles. In addition to connecting with sector networks beyond the immediate workplace.

Succession planning

Succession planning is informal and uneven

- Succession planning across automotive and mining is typically informal. Emerging through observation, acting arrangements and relationships rather than deliberate strategy.
- The consequences are most acute where specialist knowledge in safety-critical areas is concentrated in a small number of trainers and assessors. Departure carries immediate operational risk.
- The ageing VET workforce creates a sector-wide succession challenge. Significant organisational and sector knowledge is at risk of being lost without deliberate transfer arrangements.
- Knowledge that can be documented, through the development of contact lists, process guides and relationship notes, is distinct from the deeper judgement-based knowledge, which can only be transmitted through sustained relationships.
- Effective transfer requires deliberate mechanisms. Such as pairing, shared moderation, gradual handover and structured mentoring. Where it is left to goodwill or proximity, transfer is unreliable.

Recognition and reward

Recognition gaps affect identity and retention

- A persistent gap exists between the contributions VET trainers and assessors make and the recognition they receive in pay, title, access to development, and inclusion in decision-making.
- For advanced trainers and assessors, expanded contribution in mentoring, compliance, curriculum and industry liaison is frequently carried without commensurate title, pay or workload acknowledgement.
- Formal awards, including State and Territory and the national Australian Training Awards, provide sector-level recognition. They are, however, inconsistently available, particularly in private and enterprise contexts.

- Access to professional development is itself a form of recognition. Where it relies solely on individual initiative and personal cost, the signal is that the organisation does not regard the trainer's development as worth investing in.
- Awards and commendations do not protect against burnout where workload remains unmanaged. Recognised trainers and assessors who continue to carry unsustainable loads are at an elevated departure risk.

Why people stay

VET trainer and assessor retention is driven by meaningful work, work-life balance and supportive culture.

- Passion for teaching and making a difference, seeing students develop and knowing the training has real operational impact, was the strongest single retention factor.
- Work-life balance, particularly the shift from fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) rosters to regular hours and school-compatible schedules, was a primary motivator for remaining in VET, despite lower pay.
- Job satisfaction, doing work that is meaningful and well matched to individual strengths, sustains long-term engagement independent of pay and title.
- Continued connection to industry maintains a sense of professional relevance and currency.
- Team culture and workplace relationships, mutual respect, peer support, and supportive management were described as among the most powerful reasons to stay.

Why people leave

VET staff retention is hindered by compliance burden, low relative pay, limited progression, burnout and job insecurity

- Administrative and compliance burden was identified as the most significant barrier. Including training package updates, resource development, complex unit of competency structures and documentation that adds compliance value without student value.
- Pay relative to industry. Particularly acute for specialists in EV technology, diagnostics and high-risk mining training, where remuneration is set by industrial awards across VET, rather than by occupational market value.
- Limited career progression visibility, where the only apparent options are staying in the same role or moving into management. Some trainers and assessors conclude that VET does not offer a long-term career.
- Burnout occurs particularly at advanced and expert levels, where mentoring, compliance and curriculum responsibilities are carried alongside full teaching loads without acknowledgement or workload relief.
- Contract insecurity across provider types. Where contracts end without renewal. Returning trainers and assessors to industry when they would have preferred to stay.
- Unrecognised contribution. Including the cumulative erosion of commitment when sustained work in mentoring, compliance, curriculum or industry liaison goes unacknowledged.

What helps

Progression in VET is enabled by proactive career development, leadership pathways and recognition of contribution.

Make career conversations a standing practice

- Hold regular one-to-one conversations that address aspiration, capability development and longer-term options, not just performance.
- Use structured prompts that cover pay, vocational currency, teaching competency and leadership or specialist aspiration as standing agenda items.
- Do not wait for a problem or staff vacancy. Organisations that routinely have these conversations are less likely to be surprised by departures.

Design expression of interest processes to identify capability

- Encourage broad participation rather than limiting EOI to those who already appear ready.
- Offer development conversations to everyone who expresses interest. Not just those appointed.
- Use EOI outcomes to identify capability gaps and provide targeted support before vacancies arise.
- Treat the proportion of staff who participate as a signal of organisational health.

Formalise lateral contributions

- Name and resource mentoring, compliance leadership, curriculum development and industry liaison as career roles, with associated title, time and pay recognition.
- Include lateral contributions in role descriptions, workload calculations and career conversations.
- Do not treat these contributions as voluntary additions to a full teaching load.

Build deliberate succession awareness

- Identify who carries specialist and tacit knowledge. Both the documentable and the relationship-based kind.
- Design transition and handover arrangements before retirement or departure create urgency.
- Consider transition to retirement models that allow experienced trainers and assessors to shift toward mentoring and knowledge transfer rather than making a sharp exit.
- Maintain connections with trainers and assessors who move to industry, facilitating re-entry when circumstances allow.

Recognise contribution consistently

- Connect qualification attainment and demonstrated contribution visibly to pay classification and role progression.
- Use formal recognition programs. Including State and National Training Awards, to acknowledge sustained contribution at the sector level.
- Ensure that recognising outstanding work is accompanied by genuine workload analysis and relief. Recognition without support is not a retention strategy.
- Be transparent about pay relativities. Pair honesty about the pay differential with a clear account of what VET offers in return.

Industry impacts

Automotive contexts

Automotive industry impacts

- Private RTOs dominate automotive delivery and tend to have flatter structures with less consistent formal recognition practices.
- Pay differentials are particularly acute for EV, diagnostics and heavy vehicle specialists where industry demand is high.
- Succession planning is complicated by small RTO size. The departure of one or 2 experienced trainers and assessors can immediately affect delivery capability.

Progression, leadership and contribution strategies

- Introduce lateral career pathways, micro-leadership roles and formal recognition of contributions to enable progression without relying on management positions.
- Develop specialist career streams, blended industry roles and recognition based incentives to retain high demand expertise and support progression.
- Strengthen succession through early capability development, distributed leadership and structured knowledge transfer to reduce reliance on individuals.

Mining contexts

Mining industry impacts

- Enterprise RTOs shape career progression around the operational structure of the host organisation. Pathways are less visible from the outside
- Succession risk is acute in safety critical training domains where specialist expertise is concentrated in few individuals.
- The cyclical nature of the industry means downturns can remove experienced contract trainers and assessors from the sector. Organisations that maintain connections are better positioned to recover when conditions improve.

Wellbeing and support strategies

- Increase visibility of career pathways by aligning progression frameworks with organisational structures and clearly communicating opportunities internally and externally.
- Mitigate succession risk in safety critical areas through deliberate capability development, knowledge sharing and reducing reliance on individual experts.
- Maintain ongoing engagement with contract trainers and assessors to preserve capability and enable rapid re-entry during industry recovery cycles.

What this looks like across the career stages

How progression, recognition, and contribution occur and what they typically look like differ at each career stage.

Career stage	Focus	What this looks like
New entrant – getting started and finding your feet	Becoming visible	• Career conversations are rare or absent. Focus is on surviving immediate delivery demands. • Aspiration and capability are largely invisible to the organisation. • Internal networks are the primary source of support, information and opportunity. • Recognition is basic. Being included, acknowledged and supported matters most at this stage. • Participation in EOIs is unlikely without active encouragement and clear framing of what it involves.
Establishing – building confidence and consistency	Building contribution and visibility	• Career direction begins to clarify. Trainers develop a clearer sense of what they want from VET. • Contributions in mentoring, curriculum or compliance may begin but often go unacknowledged. • External networks start to develop through industry engagement, validation and peer connection. • Pay and title recognition become more significant as responsibility expands. • EOI and development conversations can identify aspirations that have not previously been visible.
Advanced – handling complexity and informal responsibility	Contribution beyond delivery	• Significant lateral contribution, in mentoring, compliance, curriculum, and industry liaison, often carried without formal recognition. • Professional standing increasingly shaped by networks and reputation within and beyond the organisation. • Risk of burnout where expanded responsibility is not matched by workload adjustment or acknowledgement. • Career conversations matter most here. Advanced trainers and assessors without visible pathways are at elevated departure risk. • Strong candidate for formal recognition through awards, title and inclusion in strategic decisions.

Career stage	Focus	What this looks like
Expert – drawing on deep experience and perspective	Sector contribution and knowledge stewardship	• Networking operates at the sector level. Training package development, advisory work, policy influence. • Tacit and organisational knowledge is at greatest risk of loss without deliberate transfer arrangements. • Satisfaction in current role is a common and valid orientation. Progression to leadership is not always desired. • Transition to retirement arrangements offer a model for sustained contribution as delivery load reduces.

When it is working

Signs that progression, leadership and contribution are well supported

- Career conversations happen regularly and cover aspiration and development, not just performance.
- EOI processes are used to identify capability and aspiration, not just fill vacancies.
- Contributions, including mentoring, compliance, curriculum and industry liaison functions, are named, resourced and recognised as career roles. Not treated as voluntary additions to a full teaching load.
- Acting arrangements are created as development opportunities. Not just as a solution to an organisational requirement.
- Succession discussions, pathways and strategies are built into management practice before they become urgent.
- Mobility between VET and industry is treated as a workforce strength. Connections are maintained, and re-entry is facilitated.
- Pay progression is visibly connected to qualification attainment and demonstrated contribution.
- Formal recognition programs, including organisation, state and national awards, are actively used and promoted within the organisation.
- Satisfaction in a current role is recognised as a valid and positive outcome. Not a failure to progress.
- Trainers and assessors can describe clearly what VET offers them in return for lower pay.

Success stories

Transition to retirement as a succession opportunity

Targeted interview feedback described a public provider that had worked collaboratively with an experienced trainer approaching retirement to design a transition arrangement that suited both the individual and the organisation.

Rather than a sharp exit, the arrangement involved a progressive reduction in teaching hours and teaching load, allowing the trainer to shift their contribution toward mentoring. This enabled them to support new staff, pass on accumulated knowledge, and help create pathways for those coming after them.

The arrangement created deliberate space for knowledge transfer that would not have occurred had the trainer moved directly to full retirement.

The individual remained connected to work they valued on terms that suited their circumstances. At the same time, the organisation retained knowledge and mentoring capacity that would otherwise have been lost.

Treating industry mobility as a deliberate workforce strategy

Interview feedback described a private RTO delivering automotive and mining qualifications, in which mobility between the training environment and industry was treated as a deliberate feature of the workforce model rather than a problem to be managed.

Trainers who stepped away to return to operational roles were able to re-enter delivery when circumstances allowed, and several had moved between the 2 environments more than once.

The organisation described this flexibility as producing a workforce with consistently current industry knowledge and stronger employer relationships.

Each return to VET brought refreshed credibility in the training room and a more current understanding of the industry context in which students would work.

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.



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