

Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: a journey, not a destination

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About the research

Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: a journey, not a destination

Mark Tyler and Darryl Dymock, Griffith University

There is general consensus that vocational education and training (VET) faces a number of workforce problems, including the ageing of VET teachers, the high level of casualisation, the need to increase the capacity of trainers, and the maintenance of industry currency. These issues, along with the need for the VET sector to respond to critical national workforce development requirements, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Industry experts, who are highly knowledgeable and experienced in their sector, are an underutilised resource as VET practitioners. Their knowledge and experience can provide rich information on up-to-date workplace skill needs, thus adding value and quality to the VET sector. The continuing debate associated with the minimum qualifications for VET practitioners and flexibility in entry points to the VET profession indicates that further input into innovative and practical solutions is required.

Through interviews and surveys with registered training organisations (RTOs) and VET practitioners, this project explores approaches to attracting industry experts to become and remain VET practitioners. Drawing on findings from the research, the authors provide strategies for consideration by government, industry, regulators, RTOs and VET practitioners that can help the journey from industry expert to VET practitioner be more rewarding and productive.

Key messages

- As described by participants, becoming a VET practitioner is an ongoing journey, not a destination, involving vocational and educational preparation; a transition to VET; and continuing practice and updating of skills to maintain the dual professionalism that is required to train, assess and respond to the changing needs of industry.
- Helping the next generation of workers to develop was a key motivator for industry experts to become VET practitioners. The provision of a supportive culture, structured mentoring, and RTO-supported professional development was the most effective strategy for retaining industry experts as VET practitioners once they were employed.
- The level of remuneration was a key consideration for industry experts in their decisions about transitioning to a VET practitioner role. The perceived lack of career pathways and the continual upgrading of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification – the qualification required for training and assessing learners – were, however, seen as deterrents to remaining in that role.
- A means for addressing both currency of skills and workforce development could be achieved by more flexible ‘boundary crossing’ opportunities, whereby VET practitioners move back and forth between the classroom and the workplace. Industry bodies would seem the best placed to assist with this.

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Executive summary

In countries with vocational education and training (VET) systems, their aim being to provide industry and sector skills to support productivity, there are significant shortages of the teachers, trainers and assessors who deliver the training required for the various trades, vocational skills and services (OECD 2021). Australia is no exception to the problem of attracting industry experts into a teaching/training role (Rasmussen 2016). The factors associated with a transition by industry experts to VET in order to become VET practitioners are at present anecdotal and require further interrogation to develop greater knowledge of what attracted them in the first place and what might be the barriers to making the transition. Equipped with this knowledge, an informed response to the VET practitioner-shortage problem can then be generated.

Central to this project was developing a deeper understanding of the factors encouraging a career move into the VET space, one that takes a person from their chosen initial vocation, where they developed industry expertise, commitment and identity as a competent professional, into a position where these characteristics are again considered as valuable commodities, but with a different purpose. In this new career the individual chooses to ‘reshape themselves into an educator’, who ‘gives back’ expertise and commitment to a new generation of workers, while maintaining current skills and pursuing new skills.

The important informants in this project’s aim for a clearer representation of the journey from industry expert to VET practitioner were registered training organisations (RTOs), which facilitate vocational training and employ teaching/training practitioners, and the VET practitioners themselves – the educators who deliver the VET training packages. This project reports on the collection, analysis and interpretation of these key players’ experiences and perspectives on attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners.

The research was conducted in three phases: firstly, discussions with selected Skills Service Organisations; followed by semi-structured interviews with RTOs representing a wide variety of industry sectors; and, finally, a survey to VET practitioners employed in the RTOs interviewed during the preceding phase.

The overall message from all participants was that becoming a VET practitioner is an ongoing journey, not a destination. Typically begun at some point during an earlier career, it involves: vocational and educational preparation; a transition to VET; and continuing practice and updating to maintain the dual professionalism that sets the VET practitioner role apart and enables them to respond to the changing needs of industry.

Reflecting on the three stages of this journey we provide recommendations by way of key strategies, these designed to assist in making the journey from industry expert to VET practitioner smoother and more rewarding, as well as more productive.

Recommendations

Each of the strategies suggested below relate to the three important stages of the journey undertaken by industry experts – recruitment, transition and retaining and updating – and encompass options for consideration by VET stakeholders; namely, governments, industry, RTOs, VET practitioners and VET regulators. Following each strategy we provide, in parenthesis, the stakeholder/s for whom this strategy is most relevant.

Recruiting from industry

- Continually promote the concept of VET practitioner and assist industry experts to realise that opportunities exist – now or in the future (government, industry, RTOs).
- Provide ‘bite size’ supervised opportunities to enable aspiring VET practitioners to experience the role before committing themselves and without first having to acquire the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Certificate IV TAE) or a TAE skills set (government, RTOs, regulators).
- Utilise targeted incentives to encourage industry experts to transition into VET (government, industry, RTO).
- Establish a national register of VET practitioners as a central enquiry point, which can potentially act as a resource for those seeking and offering work (government).

Enabling transition

- Ensure that the requirements and expectations for becoming a VET practitioner are clear from the outset (government, industry, RTO, regulators, VET practitioners).
- Provide a range of options for working towards a mandatory training/teaching qualification to cater for different circumstances and industry experts’ varying backgrounds (government, industry, RTO, regulators, VET practitioners).
- Provide systematic orientation and support when new VET practitioners commence employment (government, industry, RTOs, regulators, VET practitioners).

Retaining and sustaining the dual professional

- Maintain or build a supportive culture, one that respects visiting industry experts’ and full-time VET practitioners’ ongoing contribution, and continually develop their industry and pedagogical currency (RTOs).
- Develop and sustain VET practitioner commitment to collegial engagement through participation in ongoing development as a dual professional (VET practitioners).

Broader matters

Although not directly within the purview of this project, some broader issues were revealed through the voices of RTOs and VET practitioners. Also topics raised in past research (for example, Productivity Commission 2011; Smith & Yasukawa 2017; Tyler & Dymock 2021) and anecdotally as topics in casual conversation in VET workplaces, they include: the exploration of new models of industry and VET engagement; the suitability or otherwise of the Certificate IV TAE; the development of a fit-for-purpose educational qualification; and the establishment of a professional association for VET practitioners. These are worthy of informed, open and robust discussion, given the frequency with which they have been raised over an extended period.

A journey into VET

Integral to the provision of industry and sector skills that support Australia's productivity, VET trainers and assessors are 'a vital component of Australia's Vocational Education and Training sector' (Australian Government 2020, p.1). But VET trainer shortages are significant. Shortages are said to relate to the limited attractiveness of the role, reduced salaries and lack of career support, to name a few (OECD 2021). One aspect of this situation that has received little attention is the manner by which these VET trainers and assessors, commonly known as VET practitioners (Chappell & Johnston 2003; Orr 2019; Tyler & Dymock 2017), are recruited into the VET sector. In Australia, their motivations for making the transition to become a VET practitioner, and the most effective ways to support and retain them, remain at best opaque.

This lack of understanding of what encourages a move into what is essentially a second career is not experienced solely in Australia: other countries are also affected by the problem of attracting and retaining VET practitioners (OECD 2021; Rasmussen 2016). In Australia, several factors have converged to impact on the availability of industry experts and the manner by which they are recruited to the role of trainer and/or assessor. These include: the VET workforce is getting older, meaning that the supply of suitably qualified practitioners is diminishing (Guthrie & Loveder 2009); Australia is experiencing skills shortages and the VET sector is struggling to meet these demands (Bolton 2018); new and emerging industries are demanding a trained workforce; traditional industries are seeking to innovate with new knowledge and practice (AISC 2020); large new players are entering and competing in the skills-for-work arena, for example, universities (Knight, White & Granfield 2020); and the VET system itself has been criticised for its bureaucratic complexity (Joyce 2019).

This project sought to make sense of the factors that influence or interfere with the decisions by industry experts to move into the role of trainer and/or assessor in the Australian VET system, as well as those that influence their remaining in the sector. The project was guided by the following questions:

- What are the barriers and enablers for training organisations to recruit and retain industry experts to the VET teaching profession?
- What strategies are likely to be most effective in supporting industry experts to become and remain VET practitioners at registered training organisations?

Perspectives on the issue were explored through a literature review, interviews with registered training organisations and a survey of current VET practitioners. The literature review (see Support document) concluded that attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners was a complex issue worldwide. No 'one size fits all' approach was identified and no model of recruitment stood out, arguably because for most VET practitioners teaching is a second career (Tyler & Dymock 2017). It is therefore not surprising that there is no clear pathway into the profession. Reported in the literature were: incentive schemes adopted and abandoned; recruitment programs that reported the success of building and utilising strong links between educators and industries; and how the personal motivation to give back to the next generation of workers was central to practitioner 'boundary crossing' (Köpsén 2014) between industry and training. The literature also emphasised that, in Australia, the mandatory entry requirement for industry experts to deliver nationally recognised training (currently the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment) was a confounding factor, as both an enabler and a barrier to joining the VET industry.

Important participants in this journey from industry expert to VET practitioner are the RTOs that deliver VET training and employ trainers, and the VET practitioners themselves, who deliver the nationally recognised training. This paper reports on the collection, analysis and interpretation of these key players' experiences and perspectives on attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners.

Approach

The research was conducted in three phases, all of it underpinned by strict ethical practice and methodological rigour.

Phase 1: Skill Service Organisations

In the first phase, the six Skill Service Organisations (SSOs), which play a vital role in the development and reviewing of VET training packages in Australia, were approached. In discussions with the SSOs, the skills shortage landscape was scoped and enquiry focal points identified. The SSOs also recommended particular RTOs as potential participants, all of whom were included in the invitations to contribute.

Phase 2: Registered training organisations

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews (Rabionet 2011) were conducted with CEOs and managers from 27 RTOs. As shown in table 1, these RTOs serviced a wide variety of industry sectors, with all states and the ACT represented.

The purpose of the interviews was to identify the issues faced by RTOs and the strategies they had adopted in recruiting and retaining VET practitioners.¹ Between them, the RTO respondents identified 37 different industry areas where recruitment was difficult, ranging from trades, logistics, cleaning and horticulture, to business, surveying, electrotechnology and industrial automation. The ‘difficult to recruit’ industry sectors were those on which these particular RTOs focused their training efforts, and the list is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, there was virtually unanimous agreement that there were continuing shortages of trainers and assessors across almost every industry.

There was virtually unanimous agreement that there were continuing shortages of trainers, and assessors across almost every industry.

Table 1 Location and type of RTO sample

Variable	Value	N	%
Location (n = 27)	ACT	1	3.7
	NSW	4	14.8
	Queensland	4	14.8
	South Australia	9	33.3
	Tasmania	1	3.7
	Victoria	4	14.8
	Western Australia	4	14.8
Type of organisation (n = 27)	Private RTO	14	51.9
	Public RTO	10	37.0
	Enterprise RTO	3	11.1

The small number of occupations where recruitment was regarded as less difficult were largely those where the salaries tended to be better than those paid in an industry job (such as in childcare, first aid, and workplace health and safety), or where working conditions offered a perceived improved work–life balance (as for restaurant chefs, and fly-in, fly-out [FIFO] workers, for instance).

In this report, quotes from RTOs are identified as either P (public), PR (private) or E (enterprise) and are attached to an allocated number between 1 and 27 (for example, P1, PR17, E2).

¹ The interview questions can be found in appendix A.

Phase 3: VET practitioners

In the third phase, a survey was distributed to employed VET practitioners via the 27 RTOs interviewed in phase 2, with 333 anonymous responses received to the survey directly from practitioners. As the RTOs facilitated the distribution of the survey, the actual number distributed is not known. The transcripts from the interviews with RTOs and the open-ended questions associated with the survey were analysed thematically (Vaismoradi et al. 2016), while the quantitative questions in the survey underwent univariate descriptive analysis (Lehman et al. 2013).

Respondents represented all states and territories except the Northern Territory, although an NT practitioner helped pilot-test the initial draft of the survey. See appendix B for a copy of the VET practitioner survey.

The respondents nominated 216 areas of industry expertise for teaching purposes. Some of these were variations of the same major area, for example, automotive, business, community services, early childhood, electrical, hairdressing, health (including nursing), hospitality (including cookery), literacy and numeracy, and information technology. Others were particular, for example, carpentry, electrotechnology, fire management, legal, meat processing, metal fabrication, molecular microbiology, community pharmacy, surveying, tourism, and veterinary nursing.

As seen in table 2, the majority of the respondents (86.2%) were aged 40 years or older, with their years of experience in industry reflecting this older cohort: almost 80% of respondents had 11 years or more experience in industry. Most respondents (92%) had a combined trainer and assessor role, with a small number identifying themselves as having only a training or tutoring role or were solely assessors. The majority of respondents (80%) held the current version of the Certificate IV TAE, with 4% in the process of acquiring or upgrading this qualification. Most respondents had permanent employment (70%).

Table 2 Characteristics of the VET practitioners who participated in the survey

Variable	Value	N	%
Age	20–29 years	5	1.5
	30–39 years	41	12.3
	40–49 years	81	24.4
	50–59 years	125	37.7
	60 years and over	80	24.1
Qualifications†	Certificate IV TAE	265	80.1
	Diploma TAE	33	10.0
	Alternative qualification	21	6.1
	Acquiring or upgrading Certificate IV TAE	12	3.6
Experience of industry	Less than 5 years	12	3.6
	5–10 years	58	17.4
	11 years or more	263	79.0
Years of experience as VET practitioner	Less than 1 year	11	3.3
	1–5 years	93	28.0
	6–10 years	74	22.3
	11+ years	154	46.4
Practitioner role	Trainer/assessor	307	92.5
	Trainer/tutor	21	6.3
	Assessor only	4	1.2

Employment status	Permanent full-time	200	60.1
	Permanent part-time	33	9.9
	Fixed-term contract full-time	48	14.4
	Fixed-term contract part-time	10	3.0
	Casual	36	10.8
	Volunteer	1	0.3

† Respondents could choose more than one response; see question 10, appendix A.

The overall message from all participants was that becoming a VET practitioner is an ongoing process, not an end in itself. As highlighted earlier, it is typically begun at some point within an earlier career and involves: vocational and educational preparation; a transition to VET; and continuing practice and updating to maintain the dual professionalism that sets the VET practitioner role apart and enables them to respond to the changing needs of industry. At each stage, key issues with the potential for making the journey smoother and more rewarding, as well as more productive, have been identified. In the remainder of this paper, each of the three stages – recruitment, transition, and retaining and updating – are described.



Recruitment

Summary points

- Even within industries with trainer shortages, the need for trainers was not always recognised, and some aspiring VET practitioners were unaware of the requirements to enter the field or how to go about making such a move.
- Generally, VET could not match the wages that could be earned in industry.
- When deciding to make the move, VET practitioners claimed that they were strongly attracted by the notion of developing the next generation of workers in their industry, but the level of remuneration and escaping the perceived drawbacks of their industry jobs and into better working conditions were also substantial considerations.
- RTOs generally still relied on traditional advertising approaches such as recruitment websites, but some were exploring social media and looking more to industry networks.
- VET practitioners in private RTOs reported that finding a position in VET resulted almost equally from recruitment advertisements or a direct approach to or from the RTO; VET practitioners in public RTOs on the other hand reported a wider spread of sources, with about one-third being recruited through a direct approach to or from the RTO.
- The VET practitioners mainly considered that industry-related outlets were the most appropriate way to promote the notion of a second career – to encourage industry experts to become ‘dual professionals’.
- There seemed value in trying to capture industry experts at a certain point in their career, possibly around their 40s.
- The use of incentives to encourage a move into VET was conditionally supported.
- The mandatory requirement for VET practitioners to hold a current Certificate IV in Training and Assessment prior to their employment tended to confound the recruitment process, as RTOs had to find ‘dual professionals’, and many potential VET practitioners seemed unaware of the requirement.
- Educationally, the Certificate IV TAE provided an insurmountable challenge to some and, conversely, represented almost an insult to highly trained and respected industry experts.
- There were pleas to present the reality of the VET practitioner role, to show the full range of responsibilities and expectations, rather than ‘whitewashing’ it.

An important outcome from this project was identifying the extent of the passion for training held by those within the VET industry. It is this passion that RTOs claim they want to see in potential VET practitioners, specifically those who make the transition. Indeed, even the VET practitioners themselves indicated that it is their passion for their industry and training that enables them to exercise persistence and resilience in meeting the challenges of the job. It is what sustains them throughout – not merely in the initial stages of the journey to becoming a VET practitioner. But in this recruitment stage it is important to pay attention to those industry experts who display a passion for training and to ensure they know where and how to begin the journey. As one respondent put it: ‘When you decide to attract people, it’s got to be a seamless, easy process, and you’ve got to show them what the end result is going to be’.

Recruitment considerations – RTO views

We first asked the RTOs about the employment status of their VET practitioners to enable us to better understand the contexts in which they operated. In this small sample, public RTOs tended to employ mainly full-time staff (mostly called teachers or lecturers). However, there was some employment of part-time or casual staff in these institutions to meet ‘specialist’ needs, such as in cyber security, and for delivering higher-level qualifications, including those requiring practicum supervision, as with nursing assistants. This finding differs from the data presented in Knight, White and Granfield (2020), which is based on a large-scale VET workforce survey, in which public RTOs reported a large casual workforce. In our study, it was noted that casual employment in public RTOs tended to ‘drift’ towards permanency, particularly in states with industrial agreements that limited the long-term employment of casuals. There were also signs that some of the more recently recruited trainers preferred part-time engagement to enable them to continue to work in their industry, while some older VET practitioners in public RTOs were seeking to reduce their workloads in transition to retirement.

Public RTOs tended to employ mainly full-time staff; private RTOs had a greater mix of full-time and contracted part-time and casual VET practitioners.

Private RTOs in this study had a greater mix of full-time and contracted part-time and casual VET practitioners, mostly because this gave them greater flexibility in what they saw as a volatile training market, while at the same time giving greater assurance of industry currency. For example, a private RTO in the finance sector noted: ‘The reason why most of them are contractors is because they have to be current in their industry vocationally, and so therefore a lot of them operate in the industry as industry mentors or finance brokers’ (PR7). Another mid-sized private RTO reported that all of its training staff were employed as sessionals because that was their business model.

Only a small number of private RTOs engaged permanent staff, and those with a reasonably stable full-time workforce tended to see this model as a means of having trainers available as required, rather than having to compete for them in a contracting environment. Some private RTOs reported that they provided permanent employment for trainers simply to keep them ‘on the books’, even if there was not always sufficient work for them, since they may not be available when needed if they were employed on contract: ‘I can’t afford to put them off because we’ll never get them back’ (PR5).

Some RTOs indicated that they favoured recruiting trainers who could teach across several qualifications (particularly in more ‘generic’ areas such as occupational health and safety, or communication) in order to maintain continuity of employment, as well as more readily meet demands for training courses as they emerged. Trainers who could teach broadly were more likely to be offered permanent or full-time work, while a specialist ‘expert’ tended to be offered casual or contract employment.

Overall, the variations in employment status were dependent upon the degree to which trainers were working in industry, their availability and preference for part-time or full-time status, RTO demand for their expertise, and the relevant training qualifications held by them. Enabling efficient responses to the ebb and flow of the training needs of industries, both traditional and new, meant that no one model of employment was considered best.

RTO perceptions of influences

We asked the RTOs for their perceptions of the extent to which specific factors featured in industry experts’ considerations of a move into VET, without specifying whether these were positive or negative. The RTOs commented on rates of pay, work conditions, the Certificate IV TAE and its suitability, and the motivation to ‘give back’ to the next generation of workers.

Remuneration

For full-time employment, there was general agreement that VET could not match the salaries that most trainers could earn in industry, except in such traditionally lower-paid fields as community services and childcare. In sectors such as mining, engineering and surveying, the differential was generally beyond the RTOs' capacity to pay, and training providers relied on other incentives and on creative packages for short-term engagements.

The majority of private RTOs preferred contracted trainers because financially that allowed them to cope better with the ebbs and flows of the training market, particularly where courses were not running end to end. It also gave them access to industry-current trainers and in some instances (such as in IT) allowed them to pay 'over the award' in order to recruit highly paid professionals for a fixed term. RTOs indicated they would negotiate on an individual basis for teaching in higher-level courses and in other professional areas, such as registered nursing, surveying and specialist agriculture. There also seemed to be some leeway for public RTOs in the hard-to-recruit trades and in regional areas to pay above the award in order to fill vacancies.

There was general agreement that VET could not match the salaries that most trainers could earn in industry.

Work conditions

RTOs believed that trainer working conditions were also a consideration in making the move from industry to VET. Sometimes this was associated with 'getting off the tools', particularly in industries that are physically taxing. However, some RTOs expressed reservations about taking on applicants seeking to escape from industry, especially if their motivation was mainly due to work injury. Some RTOs talked of prospective trainers who were also looking for an alternative lifestyle, such as FIFO workers tired of the travelling and hoping to spend more time with their families, and those in stressful jobs seeking what they perceived as a more comfortable existence, even though in both instances they would generally be paid considerably less. Again, this transition was often associated with a particular stage of their lives, usually related to family responsibilities or changing life needs.

Transition to a training role was often associated with a particular stage of life, usually related to family responsibilities or changing life needs.

For RTOs operating in rural areas, recruitment was a constant struggle, especially for the (mainly public) providers offering face-to-face teaching, even though they had tried to offer incentives beyond straight salary. Issues with meeting minimum student numbers, as well as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, saw a move towards mixed-mode delivery, but recruitment of trainers remained difficult, particularly in trades areas.

Although there were variations across states and territories, the public or TAFE (technical and further education) systems in this study seem to be able to offer conditions that were generally more attractive than those in the private sector, including sick leave and set times for annual leave, maximum hours for face-to-face teaching, non-teaching time, and usually higher salaries.

Certificate IV TAE requirements

Although level of remuneration and working conditions were issues in recruiting VET practitioners, a more pervasive and potentially more worrying concern for RTOs in the recruitment of trainers was the need to meet the mandatory requirements of the Certificate IV TAE which, along with references to the burden of 'paperwork', was almost universally referred to by the interviewees as a need for 'compliance'. One interviewee compared the demands of compliance with the TAE to 'climbing Mount Everest backwards' (PR3).

The complexity reported most frequently related to accessing industry-qualified people who had completed the TAE, or in some instances convincing them they should undertake it in order to be employed. An enterprise RTO (E2), claimed that ‘The TAE is a stumbling block that is a partner to losing potential VET practitioners ... and unfortunately, we lose a lot of potential trainers because of that’. In the trades, too, completing the TAE was seen as a challenge for experienced workers with no recent contact with formal education. A private RTO in civil construction talked of delivering the Certificate III in Concreting and having access to the ‘best people in the industry’ and wanting to use them: ‘but there is no way most of those guys are going to go and do their Certificate IV in TAE. It’s far too demanding’ (PR1). Similarly, an RTO noted that ‘experts’ in their agricultural industry sector did not always come from a strong educational background, and although they were happy enough to undertake a certificate III in their vocational area, the TAE was ‘beyond a lot of people’.

The most reported complexity was in accessing industry qualified people who had also completed the TAE.

RTOs reported that sometimes, for short-term specialist positions, potential VET practitioners were unconvinced that completing a TAE in order to take on the work was a good return on their time investment, let alone the cost. In some specialised areas, as well as among those who held a university qualification and/or were in senior industry positions, there was also occasional resistance to completing the TAE as a vocational certificate. As an example, one RTO highlighted that, by holding a degree and government licence, surveyors had the necessary competencies, industry experience and industry currency to train in the field: ‘And then, they’re told in order to teach, they have to go and do this stupid program so that they know how to teach adults’ (PR8).

So, paradoxically, the TAE was seen in some quarters as a low-level qualification for otherwise highly qualified and highly experienced industry experts, while for others it was an educational bridge too far.

As a factor in recruitment, some participants perceived a non-alignment between the training roles that VET practitioners perform and TAE competencies. One main complaint was that the TAE was too inflexible, not nuanced enough to cater for the range of employment situations and potential pathways in and out of VET. ‘The TAE does not teach anyone how to be a trainer. It teaches them how to be a pen pusher, a bureaucrat for evidence’, PR17 said.

One main complaint was that the TAE was too inflexible, not nuanced enough to cater for the range of employment situations and potential pathways in and out of VET.

Most RTOs required prospective VET practitioners to obtain the TAE at their own expense prior to employment, but some indicated that if they had an applicant with the necessary industry experience, they would support them to obtain the qualification. One public provider deliberately did not feature the TAE in its advertising, but introduced it at the time of the interview, and on appointment candidates were supported to undertake supervised practice to gain the qualification.

RTOs complained that some mandatory aspects of the TAE were irrelevant in their particular situations or that they could meet the requirements by accessing the range of expertise across their training staff. Some interviewees felt that selected skills sets would be sufficient grounding for being a trainer, with or without going on to complete the full TAE. One RTO paid for newcomers to undertake only the delivery skills component of the certificate, with reimbursement of the balance when the VET practitioner had completed the qualification and maintained their employment for a certain period. A private RTO who described the TAE as ‘a hideous beast’ argued that it should be undertaken as a traineeship to contextualise the learning, while another proposed an apprenticeship model, with options for mentoring and co-teaching. The use of recognition of prior learning (RPL) was hardly mentioned and appears to be underutilised.

Credentials and currency

According to the interviewees, compliance with the RTO standards² (Australian Government 2019; ASQA 2019, p.62), which expect would-be trainers and assessors to hold vocational competencies to the level being delivered and assessed, along with specific requirements relating to the relevance and currency of their competencies, effectively reduced the pool of suitable industry candidates to become trainers. Further, they reported complexity around what constitutes industry currency and what mix of training qualification is suitable for meeting highly specialised competencies. One RTO queried the need for currency in every industry, claiming it needed to be seen as a ‘fluid concept’.

Compliance standards around industry credential level and currency offered hurdles that reduced the pool of suitable industry candidates to become VET practitioners.

Nevertheless, recruiting industry experts who already hold the Certificate IV TAE is a key challenge for RTOs, as PR18, an RTO in a high-tech field, explained: ‘It is impossible for us to try and recruit trainers who’ve got that capability, who match all the requirements’. In such specialised areas, finding trainers who had both the relevant vocational qualification and a completed TAE was seen as a constant frustration, as one survey respondent, a RTO director, pointed out:

Recently we were recruiting for an Individual Support/Aged care/Disability VET facilitator. We really needed an RN [registered nurse] or EN [enrolled nurse] and it was almost impossible to find a person who wanted to transition (mainly because of the remuneration difference). We finally employed an EN and are providing the TAE40116 within the agreed working hours. This is a somewhat expensive activity, however. To find the right person with the industry expertise and ... with a TAE40116 is a big ask.

Finding someone with the necessary qualifications and experience was an ongoing campaign for most RTOs. Their consequential actions included recruiting trainers:

- casually: those who have casual employment in industry or own their own business in industry; ‘In our sector [arts], employment can be ... pretty fluid. And often you know, artists might be having their own private practice as well as another job at one of the national institutions’ (PR16)
- with qualifications and experience that can be utilised over several training packages: ‘So when we’re recruiting, we’re really looking at how wide we can recruit ... the people we need to attract in health, for example, are the registered nurses who have experiences with all ... so they can train down from diplomas to certificates’ (PR17)
- on a contractual basis, those trainers with specialised industry expertise, just for the duration of the training required for the specialised competency: ‘We bring someone in ... who’s basically working full time in industry but is prepared to come in and work with us for a small number of hours a week ... where they’re basically filling a skills gap for us with their industry skills’ (P7).

2 <https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/users_guide_to_the_standards_for_registered_training_organisations_rtos_2015_v2-2_0.pdf>, see page 62.

Encouraging a move into VET

In attempts to recruit trainers, recruitment websites and less formal means of contact, word of mouth and direct approaches were the most favoured. A number of RTOs also explained that professional networks were a favoured option. One public RTO said: 'Building positive relationships with industry ... it's part of work conditions/culture that drives a vibrant workplace' (PR16). An industry body offered an annual scholarship for two of its members to undertake the TAE and do teaching practice with a public RTO. They suggested that promoting the scholarship through industry networks also helped to alert members to the possibility of becoming a trainer later in their career.

'Building positive relationships with industry... drives a vibrant workplace.'

There was one outstanding example of industry involvement. In South Australia, the Construction Industry Training Board had developed its own recruiting and training program, *tradie2trainer*, as a direct response to the lack of trainers in that industry. Intended for 'mature' construction industry workers (typically those aged in their 30s to 60s) with industry currency, the program's key features included: a preliminary information session; selection by interview; completion of the Certificate IV TAE at no cost to the trainee; and work placement with an RTO (although post-course employment was not guaranteed). The program coordinator reported no dropouts from the first class of 20, and a high post-course employment rate.

Social media did not figure prominently in RTOs' recruiting strategies, although a large regional public provider competing against mining companies to recruit industry experts had success with a 'campaign style' recruitment program, which promoted lifestyle and accommodation benefits as the primary drawcard (P6). The interviewee said that the historical approach of using recruiting websites, such as *Seek* and a government jobs website, did not necessarily reach people with industry and trade backgrounds. They described their new strategy as 'a broad-scale media approach across multiple channels' and that the results were 'extraordinary in comparison to our previous recruitment attempts'.

Interviewees pointed out that the nature of some industries fostered a mentoring or teaching culture, which could be built on. In the four years of surveyors' training, for example, 'they've learned under somebody, then they become registered or licensed and then they teach the next one. And so, they're always teaching. We work in a team type profession'. Similarly, finance brokers were described as 'teachers to their clients' and that when they first come into the industry, they were mentored for two years, and that 'the mentors are generally the ones that also want to do training'. PR7 said that people in IT who have interpersonal skills are often 'natural trainers', who mentor colleagues.

The nature of some industries fosters a mentoring or teaching culture that could be built on.

An enterprise RTO in human services, E2, explored industry contacts through their TAE classes, on the lookout for 'industry champions'; that is, people who were 'passionate about their industry and passionate about changing the workforce development for their industry'. Another enterprise RTO linked to a company specialising in industrial automation and digitisation discovered that there were people in the company who were passionate about training from an industry perspective, 'but they often don't know where to start', and so needed advice about how to develop their talents (E3).

Timing of the transition from industry to VET was said to be a key element of recruiting. One trades-oriented public RTO commented:

It's hard to recruit people of a younger vintage. They complete their apprenticeship, [then] towards 30 years of age it's young family environments; normally they're at peak earning capacity. Hard to attract them away from that – we don't attract people until they're in their 40s (P8). Others were utilising retired professionals, including an enterprise RTO using its networks to identify potential older VET practitioners in other states who had 'come from industry and they've either been made redundant or decided to change what they want to do'. (E3)

Timing of the transition from industry to VET is a key element of recruiting.

There was a very positive response to the notion that, since being a VET professional was essentially a second career, the option of becoming a 'dual professional' should be promoted more broadly. One RTO, P2, said: 'I'd really like some kind of mechanism of being able to attract people in and say, your skills are valued, and you know, we'd really like to get you involved and be part of [VET]'. A private RTO, PR16, even talked of the need for a 'structured' career path from industry to VET. One interviewee from a public RTO argued for regarding training as 'much more of an integrated industry-led thing' (P9).

There were mixed responses from RTOs to the notion of a financial incentive to industry experts to encourage them to become VET practitioners (which in UK further education had been termed 'the golden hello'; CooperGibson Research 2018), or to subsidise training providers themselves for a part-time or short-term release from industry. Many of

Trainers need to have a passion for VET and not just be interested in the dollars.

the interviewees queried whether such a strategy was sustainable and suggested that trainers needed to have a passion for VET and not just be interested in the dollars: ultimately, it would be that passion and a supportive culture that would keep them there. 'I would want someone to do it because they want to do it', said PR1, and another commented: 'It's always worth trialling different things, but there's got to be something that really connects them and gives them reason for being there' (PR18). On the other hand, several RTOs thought the idea of a financial incentive might work, but only in certain industries, with one nominating community services, business and retail, and another noting that in well-paid industries money is not a driver for someone to become a trainer. Several others supported an incentive to transfer from industry but saw the TAE as an ever-present hurdle.

There were also those who supported the idea of an initial bonus but with conditions: make it dependent on the person staying for a longer period of time (possibly five years); not for people biding their time waiting for retirement, but for 40+ year-olds; a staggered bonus system, with an increasing amount for each year of initial service; and only if the RTO could guarantee ongoing full-time work (which in some industries is difficult). Overall, however, the notion of an initial financial incentive or a subsidy for secondments from industry was generally seen as problematic.

Recruiting considerations – views of VET practitioners

Trainer participants identified the various initial access points into employment, these being advertisements, RTO direct contact, direct contact and industry networking:

- Responding to advertisements placed in recruitment agencies and government websites, surprisingly, did not represent the highest percentage, with a combined percentage of 42% of trainers from private RTOs and 43% of trainers from public RTOs.
- RTOs making direct contact with prospective VET practitioners was reported as the next highest percentage: 25% private and 24% public RTOs.

- Of VET practitioners from private RTOs, 13% and 15% from public RTOs indicated that they initiated cold contact with the employing RTOs.
- Industry publicity and industry networks were reported as the least used initial points of contact.

What was shared in the additional comments to these VET practitioner ratings was that they were motivated by an event or an opinion on perceived suitability for the job. These related to, for example:

- an opportunity to give back: ‘I saw an opportunity to share my existing knowledge with others’
- self-belief in abilities: ‘I found I had a reasonably engaging personality, whereby I could both share my knowledge and experience in such a way as to keep students engaged and responsive’
- and others’ belief in their abilities: ‘I was approached as someone who worked in business for many years and thought I had skills to offer’.

VET practitioner perceptions of influences

We wanted to know specifically what influenced these trainers in their decisions to become a VET practitioner. In the interviews, the RTOs had noted remuneration, work conditions, less physically challenging work, and giving back to their industry as perceived considerations. These considerations were subsequently put to the trainers in the survey, with an opportunity for further comments. A summary of responses is presented in table 3.

By far the most important consideration for these trainers was giving back to industry by developing the next generation of workers.

Table 3 Levels of importance of particular considerations in becoming a VET practitioner

Considerations	n	Responses (%)				
		NI	SI	MI	VI	EI
1 Level of remuneration in VET	321	17.1	16.5	39.3	19.9	7.2
2 Better working conditions in VET	318	15.1	9.4	31.8	29.2	14.5
3 Getting ‘off the tools’/away from stress/away from physical challenges of job	320	28.4	17.5	22.8	23.1	8.1
4 Giving back to the industry by developing the next generation of workers	322	5.9	3.4	13.7	32.3	44.7

Note: NI = Not at all important; SI = Slightly important; MI = Moderately important; VI = Very important; EI = Extremely important.

By far the most important initial consideration for these trainers was *Giving back to the industry by developing the next generation of workers*, with around one-third identifying it as ‘Very important’ and almost half as ‘Extremely important’. The following quotes provide examples of the essence of the comments relating to this consideration: ‘Ever since working as a technician, I have always wanted to be able to provide others with the vast amounts of knowledge I had gained’, and ‘I wanted to be able to empower the future generations into an industry that I am so passionate about’.

‘Moderate importance’ was chosen by over one-third of respondents in relation to the *Level of remuneration* and *Better work conditions in VET*, respectively, with nearly the same number reporting ‘Very important’ for *Better work conditions in VET*. ‘I was looking for a better work life balance while still being able to practise what I was passionate about’ was one such comment.

Nearly one-third of participants nominated *Getting off the tools/away from stress/away from physical challenges of job* as the least important consideration, while the remaining two-thirds of responses for that option were spread relatively similarly over ‘Slightly’, ‘Moderate’, and ‘Very important’. A small

number rated this consideration as ‘Extremely important’. ‘I could no longer work on the tools due to a couple of spinal injuries. I needed to find a way to utilise my existing trade knowledge and skills in an easier working environment’ is an example of this consideration.

Influence of Certificate IV TAE

In the RTO interviews, the TAE was considered a stumbling block in attracting industry experts to VET practitioner positions. Looking back, trainers already employed by the RTOs indicated that the TAE was simply a factor involved in ‘getting the job’ and a bureaucratic requirement that had to be met: ‘Acquiring a TAE is simply part of having the job’. But that acceptance was clearly supported by their expressed motivation to become a trainer, with such comments as: ‘I became a VET practitioner because I strongly believe in the VET sector’. For those who held a higher teaching qualification (mostly found working in public RTOs), doing the TAE was ‘an annoying requirement’.

Almost twice as many private RTO trainers rated the TAE as an extremely high factor (24%) influencing their choice compared with the number of public trainers (14%). Nevertheless, their reasons were similar. Of those trainers who rated the TAE as an ‘extreme’ factor in their decision-making, their comments were mostly an acknowledgement of the mandatory requirement for holding the qualification. These were qualified by comments indicating the sense of worth achieved by completing or holding the TAE qualification: ‘It’s extremely important for your personal credibility working in the VET sector’. So, regardless of rating, for the majority of these trainers, the hurdle was there, and they were willing to jump it.

For most working trainers the TAE was a bureaucratic hurdle that just had to be jumped.

The degree to which the TAE was considered useful in helping these VET practitioners to do their job competently and continue in a training role was explored: 82% of teachers and trainers in private RTOs and 68% in public RTOs scored the TAE as a moderate to extreme factor, but with caveats in reference to helping them remain a competent, continuing VET practitioner. In the exploration of the reasons for an ‘extreme’ rating, when word searches were undertaken for ‘teaching’, ‘training’,

The TAE was regarded as valuable for understanding VET processes rather than for improving teaching and learning.

‘facilitating’ and ‘learning’, interestingly, only once was training referenced as a reason for a high rating in this category. The majority of the reasons given for ratings were associated with an increase in trainer understanding of the VET system – ‘its laws’. One trainer said: ‘It has helped me to interpret training documents better and to double check that assessments meet the standards outlined in the training documents’, an example of how the TAE was found to be helpful in understanding the VET system.

In terms of how helpful the TAE was considered, 18% of VET practitioners in private RTOs and 31% of those in public RTOs rated the TAE as ‘not at all’ and ‘somewhat’ helpful. Dissatisfaction was implied with comments from this group, ranging from ‘Learnt more on the job’ to ‘There seems little relationship between the TAE as it is taught and the skills actually required to teach effectively’. Suggestions such as ‘the TAE is convoluted and not practical’ and ‘my degree qualification is what gives me the knowledge and expertise and desire’, along with the numbers of participants who rated this aspect ‘low’, could be considered cause for concern and a potential indicator of the need for a review of the qualification. The updates to the TAE did not rate a particular mention as a factor in helping trainers remain competent.

Promoting the VET practitioner role

In relation to promoting the VET practitioner role, 258 responses provided a range of replies that once again revealed the diversity of opinion about the current state of VET in Australia. A small number suggested that VET was not worth promoting at this point; for example, 'You'd have to greatly improve working within VET where [this industry] is offered before I would even suggest it as a role to others', and 'In all honesty, I steer industry leaders away from being VET practitioners because of the shortcomings'. On the other hand, a similar number advocated promoting the positives: 'Highlight the satisfaction of teaching the next generation', and 'It's very rewarding when you see people reach their goals, and believe in themselves more'.

We need to 'highlight the satisfaction of teaching the next generation'.

In a more direct response to the question, 90 current trainers suggested promoting VET opportunities through industry-related outlets – newsletters, trade journals, conferences, expos, networking events and unions. Several of these proposed personal approaches to potential industry 'experts'; for example, 'Perhaps targeting those who have experience in industry and would like an opportunity to influence a new generation. I was starting to experience "burn out" in my industry and the move to VET educator was a perfect next level'. A couple mentioned targeting tradies 'who want to get off the tools', although there was also an argument against it being regarded as an 'escape' from the workplace. Many others advocated social and mass media to promote VET opportunities, including radio because it's often available in trades workshops, and videos of trainers at work, along with 'inspirational quotes'. Several of these warned against presenting a sanitised version of the role.

'I was starting to experience "burn-out" in my industry and the move to VET educator was a perfect next level.'

Key recruitment influences restated

The final open-ended question in the VET practitioner survey gave respondents an opportunity to add anything that might not have been covered in the previous 20 questions. It is perhaps an indication of the depth of feeling these current VET practitioners had that, even after the high response rate to the other open-ended questions, 168 of them still had something to say on the topic of attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners and then retaining them. Inevitably, there was some overlap with earlier survey responses.

The following topics were restated:

- remuneration
- aspects of teaching
- industry–VET links
- pay differential
- working conditions.

The most mentioned topic of concern (23%) was the level of remuneration in VET, with most respondents pointing out, yet again, the pay differential with industry. One said: 'I know many people who like the idea of the job but in my industry are foremen, supervisors, inspectors etc. so are already off the tools, but the wage is the determining factor in most cases'. Next in order of importance (19%) were aspects of teaching, most of which focused on the need for more flexibility of the Certificate IV TAE or whether a full TAE for all trainers was necessary, particularly if encouraging tradespeople to move into VET. Several referred to poor personal experiences with the TAE online and the need for more practical training, as well as better mentoring when appointed.

A further 15% of respondents to this question commented on industry–VET links, in addition to the pay differential, with a few noting that industry experts sometimes did not know what was required to make the transition or had not considered VET teaching as an option. One trainer wrote: ‘I have spoken to many aged care workers about getting their TAE to teach; many had no idea they could do this. We are crying out for trainers in that space and especially ones with years of experience’. The final grouping of responses (11%) centred around working conditions, including the need for more supportive management, job security (‘People at the top of their industry do not leave for a temporary contract’), reducing compliance and paperwork, and appropriate up-to-date resources.

Considerations for recruiting from industry

- Continually promote the concept of VET practitioner and assist industry experts to realise that opportunities exist – now or in the future (government, industry, RTOs):
 - Maximise promotion through industry networks, events, publications etc. of the VET practitioner option, as well as through more traditional advertising channels.
 - Identify likely career points in each industry, those at which potential VET practitioners might be most open to making a move into VET (government, industry).
 - Highlight the reasons why industry experts might consider it, for example, giving back to industry/preparing next generation, creating a different work–life balance, transfer of existing teaching/mentoring skills and the possibility of salary negotiation (government, industry, RTOs).
 - Give industry experts a realistic picture of what it means to be a VET practitioner, including holding appropriate mandatory training qualifications and industry currency (government, industry RTOs).
- Provide ‘bite size’ supervised opportunities to enable aspiring VET practitioners to experience the role before committing themselves and without first having to acquire the Certificate IV TAE or a TAE skills set (government, RTOs, regulators):
 - Identify industry experts with a passion for training and provide them with a fully informed picture of the pathway to VET practitioner, including the destination.
 - Build robust relationships with RTOs, whereby industry experts can: trial a VET practitioner training role; work part-time in training while maintaining their industry role and/or enable full transition to a VET practitioner role at a stage that benefits their career and the enterprise's workforce needs.
 - Enable both VET practitioners and industry experts to access periods of secondment in each other's ‘workplaces’.
- Utilise targeted incentives to encourage industry experts to transition into VET (government, industry, RTOs):
 - Initiate industry-led programs that facilitate the entry of selected industry experts into VET by providing appropriate training and RTO placement.
 - Trial a program of financial incentives to attract experts in selected industries into the training role, with a ‘bond’ period.
 - Set rigorous selection criteria for such initiatives, such as expressing a passion for VET and specifying an age range that allows for an extended period in a ‘second career’ as a VET practitioner.
- Establish a national register of VET practitioners as a central enquiry point, which can act as a resource for practitioners seeking work and RTOs seeking practitioners (government).

Summary points

- Casual and contracted employment options are possible deterrents for encouraging potential VET practitioners, who are seeking full-time jobs.
- The Certificate IV TAE credential was considered by some RTO and VET practitioner participants as not fit for purpose, with too high an emphasis on the processes and procedures in VET, and not enough emphasis on teaching and learning.
- Training package ‘skills sets’ could be used more effectively as an acknowledged and sufficient requirement and would be suitable for delivering competencies.
- The main challenges the respondents identified for industry experts considering the transition to VET to be aware of were:
 - They needed a passion for teaching and to be practically prepared for that task.
 - They were likely to encounter a range of student abilities and motivations.
 - They needed to be aware of the demands of a heavy workload overall, including meeting administration and compliance requirements and working unpaid out of hours.
- According to the experienced VET practitioners surveyed, easing the transition from industry to VET came down to three main issues:
 - Proactive management and peer support and mentoring
 - A more ‘hands on’ and extended experience of the Certificate IV TAE, with supervised practice
 - Careful introduction and reinforcement of the necessary administration to meet ASQA compliance requirements.
- Having been through the process, these practitioners generally did not regard the Certificate IV TAE so much as a ‘stumbling block’ as an imposed requirement, which had to be met in order to move into VET.
- Just over half of the respondents considered that the TAE qualification was helpful in developing and maintaining their role, but overwhelmingly this related to understanding VET systems rather than teaching and learning; about a quarter said it had limited or no value for their educational practice.

One of the concerning findings from the research was that a number of VET practitioners reported being given virtually no support or guidance, or inadequate resources, on their first day in their new RTO, and subsequently, as their employment continued, only haphazard support and resources. Responses also suggest that some RTOs may have an unrealistically rosy view of the extent of the support they provide.

It is clear that the transition from industry to VET is a vital stage of the journey, because it is at this point that the prospective practitioner encounters the reality of their new role. This is particularly true for those with little previous experience as a trainer in their trade or industry – apart from what might have been covered, possibly somewhat inadequately, during the process of acquiring the Certificate IV TAE. The nature and extent of the support they receive at this stage may therefore determine not only their effectiveness as a VET practitioner in the first instance, but also whether they remain in VET.

Views of RTOs and VET practitioners

We learned from the interviews with RTOs that the transition phase was an important part of becoming a VET practitioner, of taking on the dual practitioner role, so the survey included an open-ended question about their transition experiences. Of the 232 written responses from current trainers, 22% said they had experienced a smooth transition, some noting that the lack of problems in moving across was associated with having had previous teaching or training experience, but mostly having had a mentor or peer or supervisor support on arrival.

Lack of problems in moving across into VET was mostly due to having had a mentor or peer or supervisor support on arrival.

These responses contrasted with those from the 26% of trainers who identified the lack of initial support and mentoring as a key factor in more difficult transitions; 36 of these specifically mentioned the need for a mentor: 'As with all new roles, need good mentorship and appropriate staffing to support this process'. The other 25 nominated an orientation or induction program or other initial support as something they considered would have meant a smoother transition experience: 'Day one I was given a USB with PowerPoint presentations on it and told to go into the classroom and deliver it'.

Others referred to the need to be introduced to VET administration and compliance requirements, or to be advised that they would be required to spend extra unpaid hours developing resources or following up students who had missed a class. One noted: 'VET training and assessment can be quite complicated and confusing for new practitioners. It can be hard to take off your industry qualification hat and put on your teaching hat – they are very different in terms of rules and expectations'.

Almost one in five (17%) of those seeking to put on that 'teaching hat', that is, making the transition, specifically mentioned the inadequacy of the Certificate IV TAE or called for improvement in the way it had to be undertaken. There were a number of suggestions for a staged process, with arguments for supervised practice and mentoring during the initial employment period instead of an upfront qualification. 'They want teachers to have 10 years of industry experience, that way they know the subject well', one trade teacher said, 'but expect a six-day course to be sufficient enough to be a good teacher'. Many in this group made reference to the lack of practical teaching in their TAE. Another VET practitioner claimed that the initial training 'was filled with a lot of relatively meaningless activities. More emphasis on teaching technique would be better than many of the dry and time-consuming tick and flick activities we were required to complete'. 'Try before you buy', said another. 'The ability (as a guest lecturer) to have a number of opportunities to see if this is the industry I want to make a career of instead of having to get my Cert IV TAE first'. Other suggestions for making the transition to VET easier included the RTO making teaching resources available from the outset instead of the newcomer having to start from scratch; better remuneration; more information about undertaking professional work outside VET; and better recognition of university qualifications.

'They want teachers to have 10 years of industry experience...but expect a six-day course to be sufficient enough to be a good teacher.'

Preparing for transition

In response to another open-ended question (question 19, appendix B), 295 of the survey respondents provided advice to aspiring VET practitioners in industry about moving into VET. A handful were very strongly against making the transition from industry at all, reflected in such comments as: 'It's all a facade', and 'Don't do it'. Several also struggled with their working conditions, what they saw as lack of management support and not being valued as trainers. On the other hand, others wrote: 'It is an

exhilarating experience’, ‘Great job for teaching the future’, and ‘It is incredible and I believe in VET with a passion’. Of the remainder, many wanted particularly to draw attention to elements of the job that industry experts may not be prepared for, while others offered a balanced view, acknowledging the demands, but also highlighting the rewards.

A quarter of the respondents mentioned the heavy administration, paperwork and compliance workload, variously described as ‘intense’, ‘daunting’, ‘oppressive’ and ‘overwhelming’. One respondent added: ‘This can be a shock to someone coming from industry’, and another claimed ‘50% is teaching and 50% administration, compliance and reporting’. A number of respondents also mentioned the need for computer skills to cope with the administration and with learning management systems, with one respondent cautioning: ‘If you come from an industry sector that had a low use of technology, you need to be prepared to upskill rapidly’. Others warned about the long hours required, indicating that it was not a ‘9–5’ job and that work needed to be done outside paid hours, including at home.

Other respondents also commented on the rewards of teaching in VET, but there were cautions too. Among the 295 VET practitioners responding to question 19, 65 made some comment specifically about the training role. Some emphasised the need for passion: ‘Do not become a teacher because you think it will be easier than industry’, one wrote, ‘do it because you have a passion for your industry and you want to pass on your knowledge and experience’. Other qualities suggested for potential VET teachers included ‘a lot of mental agility’, ‘patience with the students’, and ‘able to teach large classes’. Others warned about being prepared for teaching both adolescents (with their issues) and adult students, perhaps all summed up as knowing ‘how to teach and facilitate learning to a wide range of students of different ages, knowledge, experience, motivations and intellectual abilities’.

For the possible range of students they might encounter, respondents advocated good teaching preparation and skills. ‘You may be an expert in your trade’, one wrote, ‘but you need to be a VET expert too – it’s a massive learning curve’, which was echoed by the comment that ‘Teaching is different to giving guidance on the job site’. Other advice included: ‘Know HOW TO teach – practical learning on what is expected in the classroom’, and a caution from another respondent: ‘You will not be prepared for the first day of teaching. The C4 [Certificate IV TAE] does not do that. Pay it the attention it needs!’ Another of these experienced practitioners wrote: ‘Like any teaching role, it is hard work, particularly when starting out – you need to put in a lot of time to prepare your lessons and assess’.

‘You may be an expert in your trade, but you need to be a VET expert too.’

For some, the outcomes were worth the effort: ‘The pay is not great but the job satisfaction is really high’; ‘I love when the students get excited about learning something new, or they email you to let you know that they got their dream job’; and ‘You need to be humble and you will struggle for some time, but the rewards are great’, an opinion echoed in this response: ‘It is very rewarding having helped shape someone’s life and future ... and witnessing change and progression of the learner. That is the best and only part that I rate as the real reason I continue to be a VET teacher’.

In summary, the main challenges the respondents identified for industry experts considering the transition to VET were: needing a passion for teaching and to be practically prepared for that task; the likelihood of encountering a range of student abilities and motivations; and the demands of a heavy workload overall, including meeting administration and compliance requirements and working unpaid out of hours. On the other hand, despite considerable cynicism in the responses about the nature of VET and of the practices of some RTOs, many of these respondents were

VET practitioners were prepared to balance the demands on them with the intense satisfaction they derived from seeing students succeed.

prepared to balance the apparently ‘daunting’, ‘oppressive’, and ‘overwhelming’ demands on them with the intense satisfaction they derived from witnessing students succeed and develop the skills and talents of the next generation.

Considerations for enabling transition

- Ensure that the requirements and expectations for becoming a VET practitioner are clear from the outset (government, industry, RTOs, regulators, VET practitioners):
 - Develop a flow chart that defines VET practitioner requirements and expectations, as well as possible pathways both ways between industry and VET.
 - Develop promotional materials, including through social and other visual media, which realistically demonstrate how VET practitioners work in the variety of roles required of them.
- Provide a range of options for working towards a mandatory training/teaching qualification to cater for different circumstances and industry experts’ varying backgrounds (government, industry, RTO, regulators, VET practitioners):
 - Allow VET practitioners to acquire the mandatory training qualification while performing the role, but with effective supervision practices embedded.
 - Acknowledge industry experts who hold a presenter skills set as appropriate for unsupervised delivery within specified limits, but not assessment roles.
 - Provide more opportunities for classroom and online teaching practice prior to, or in conjunction with, employment.
 - Develop a clear RPL process for industry experts already in a training or mentoring role.
- Provide systematic orientation and support when new VET practitioners commence employment (government, industry, RTOs, regulators, VET practitioners):
 - Provide an orientation program that covers the RTO’s expectations and required government standards in teaching and administration.
 - Provide peer support for teaching and administration during the early months, for example, through mentoring and co-delivery, and monitor and provide feedback on initial progress.

Retaining and updating

Summary points

- A supportive culture, structured mentoring and RTO-supported professional development were among the most effective strategies in retaining VET practitioners once employed.
- Some VET practitioners found the demands on them overwhelming and very different from their expectations. However, many were prepared to overlook these because of the satisfaction achieved from their teaching role.
- In some parts of VET, especially in private RTOs, the lack of a career pathway was a disincentive to remaining in the VET practitioner role.
- The continual upgrading of the TAE imposed a burden on practitioners and RTOs and reportedly resulted in some practitioners leaving VET.

Once industry experts have joined the VET practitioner workforce, the challenge is to keep them there, given that generally they are moving into a quite different environment from their previous workplace, particularly in relation to organisational structure. One RTO interviewee gave their version of the initial journey:

Everyone joins, really enthusiastic, love it to start with and then ... they start to see the cracks and then after about three months, [perhaps] after about six months, the cracks seem to get very broad for them. And after about nine months, it becomes a pivotal point where they sort of become very upset, throw the dummy out of the pram ... They either accept where they are ... or they say, 'Stuff this' and they go back to industry or go and do something completely different. (PR6)

In the responses from 19 RTOs to the pre-interview question about their success in retaining VET practitioners, slightly more than half rated their success at 4 or 5 (high) on a five-point scale, while just over 40% reported their success at the midpoint. Among the reasons given for the latter, modest, rating was that they perceived that some VET practitioners, motivated to move into VET by the prospect of giving back to their industry, became disillusioned when they discovered that instead of one or two junior colleagues to mentor – as in the workplace – they were facing a class of 30. Also, as P7 observed: 'Some of our younger students might be rolling up to class not with the aspirations of ever getting through the qualification'. There were also suggestions that some VET practitioners had returned full-time to industry rather than go through another TAE upgrade, for which one RTO coined the term 'Update fatigue': 'Look, I've had enough. I've done my TAE. I've now done it twice and I've upgraded twice. Now I've got to upgrade again. Forget it' (PR15).

Retaining VET practitioners – RTO views

Provided with a list of possible strategies for retaining VET practitioners, RTOs indicated that the most prominent ones were: intentionally providing a supportive culture, offering structured mentoring, and providing and/or supporting professional development, all of which might overlap. Where no systematic support was provided, the outcome was predictable, according to one public RTO (P5):

You're chucked into a classroom or a workshop, you're on your own, no one to ask questions to, so it makes it that much more difficult. That's why I reckon we've lost people who have been here for a couple of weeks, who think 'gee, it's just too hard. I have no idea what I'm doing, I'll go back to what I was doing before'.

Another public RTO (P1) suggested that the key to retention is good induction, and another RTO's (P11) strategy was to team up newcomers with experienced trainers, put them on six-months probation on a base rate of pay and then step them up to a higher-than-the-award rate once they had proved themselves. P7 also provided a buddy or subject matter expert for initial support but pointed out there were no guarantees: 'Invariably their expectations of the role and the actuality of the role and the amount of hours that they are doing in order to be well prepared may or may not meet their expectations'.

In public or larger RTOs, there are more likely to be established career pathways, which can encourage trainers to stay. For example, P7 utilised an 'educator capability framework' to help new trainers in particular to identify the skills and improvements needed to progress through different levels in the system, which they claimed contributed to their 'very, very low' staff turnover. On the other hand, a private RTO (PR10) commented, 'You're a VET practitioner whether you start today or you've been here 15 years. There's no career progression'. One enterprise RTO interviewed did, however, offer progression from 'educator' to 'senior educator' based on a trainer's industry currency, years of experience and completion of the full TAE.

In public RTOs, there are more likely to be career pathways, which can encourage VET practitioners to stay.

P4 suggested that progression 'bars', based on educational qualifications and which most state systems had traditionally adopted, can be a discouragement to industry experts with strong trade or professional qualifications and experience but who are 'starting at scratch in getting their Certificate IV and working up that kind of education side'. A TAFE system had overcome that barrier by abolishing the educational requirement and based 'automatic progression' on accumulated skills and knowledge, which P6 said was helpful in attracting industry experts who otherwise might have to be employed at a low level 'for infinity'.

A number of those interviewed referred to intentional efforts to develop an attractive working and support culture: 'It's not just about how much I get paid and how many hours I'm doing this week. Culture is number one and then everything flows from there' (P9). Several private RTOs suggested that the size of their organisations meant that they felt 'like a big family' (PR10). But even larger public RTOs used terms such as an 'engaging and supportive environment' (P9), and 'making people from industry feel really included, and really welcome and really supported' (P6).

'It's not just about how much I get paid and how many hours I'm doing this week. Culture is number one and then everything flows from there.'

In developing a supportive culture, several RTOs mentioned respecting their trainers. One private RTO (PR7) said:

We try to be fair. Our wages aren't the highest in the market but we're not bad payers. And we definitely try to make their PD easy [and] we create a lot of their stuff for the TAE side of things ... We try to cut down their costs, and we are just there supporting them the whole way.

Another private RTO said that, although their small workforce of full-time permanent VET practitioners could earn more in industry, they appreciated the work-life balance the training environment gave them: 'It gives them other benefits which isn't all about money' (PR5).

The RTOs interviewed were generally supportive of the requirement to maintain industry currency, but it was suggested that many RTOs transferred this responsibility to their VET practitioners. On the other hand, one private RTO said that it proactively supported its practitioners to maintain currency, which helped keep its attrition rate low, while another in IT paid the fees for membership of a professional association for all of its VET practitioners and for them to attend networking events.

During our research, we also encountered organisations working with RTOs to provide support for VET practitioners. One of these was an independent professional development ‘agency’, where a former RTO executive had initiated a program of events and activities in their areas of expertise to ensure VET teachers in schools could meet their industry currency requirements. Another model was also identified: it was used by an industry professional association, which did not run professional development activities itself but acted more like a professional development broker and, for a fee, offered endorsement of continuing professional development activities, which the organisation considered were targeted to members’ needs, met a professional standard and provided value for money.

So, from an RTO point of view, recruiting and retaining VET practitioners included RTOs making important decisions relating to: finding and attracting practitioners; matching available funding with the various ways trainers are employed; meeting RTO compliance requirements; finding a ‘goldilocks zone’ by balancing VET practitioner supply and demand with once-off and/or ongoing training demands; making judgments about practitioners with greater or less capability, and once found and deemed to be worthy of a continuing relationship, keeping them ‘on the books’. Nevertheless, one RTO noted that prospective practitioners ‘probably don’t value what it is you’re offering, what they’re getting themselves in for, they treat it as a fill-in job. It’s not a fill-in job if you do it properly’ (PR3).

In the next section we report data from a national survey of targeted VET practitioners, which gives insider perspectives on the experience of moving into the VET sector and acting as a dual professional. These findings show that becoming and being a VET practitioner is more than ‘a fill-in job’.

Staying in the role – VET practitioner views

The survey provided a list of seven possible reasons to explain why current VET practitioners remained working in VET. These related to teaching satisfaction, workforce development, peer culture, working conditions, remuneration, professional development and work–life balance. Table 4 summarises the VET practitioners’ responses.

Table 4 Influences on staying in the job as a VET practitioner

	Influences	n	% of responses				
			NI	SI	MI	VI	EI
1	Level of remuneration	312	11.2	18.3	36.9	22.4	11.2
2	Working conditions in VET	314	10.8	11.1	26.1	36.0	15.9
3	Supportive peer work culture	314	9.6	12.4	25.5	35.0	17.5
4	Professional development provided or paid for by the RTO	313	24.6	13.1	31.6	20.1	10.5
5	Being ‘off the tools’/away from stress/ away from physical challenges of job	313	27.5	19.2	23.6	19.8	9.9
6	Giving back to industry by developing the next generation of workers	315	5.1	4.1	14.0	34.6	42.2
7	Finding satisfaction in the teaching/training role	316	0.3	3.8	7.3	37.7	50.9

Note: NI = Not at all influential; SI = Slightly influential; MI = Moderately influential; VI = Very influential; EI = Extremely influential.

Grouping the 'Very influential' (VI) and 'Extremely influential' (EI) responses showed that:

- The main reason VET practitioners gave for continuing to work in VET was the satisfaction they found in the teaching/training role (89%).
- Only slightly behind was the opportunity to give back to industry by developing the next generation of workers (77%).
- Just over half rated a *Supportive peer work culture* as Very or Extremely influential, with almost the same proportion assigning one of those ratings to the *Working conditions they found in VET*.
- One-third of the VET practitioners gave the same ratings to the *Level of remuneration*.
- Around 30% ranked equally the high level of influence of the other two criteria: *Professional development provided or paid for by the RTO* and *Being 'off the tools' or otherwise away from the stress or physical challenges of their former industry occupations*.

Overwhelmingly the main reason VET practitioners gave for continuing in VET was the satisfaction they found in the teaching/training role.

Those coming direct from industry may also feel the pull of a previous workplace and the feeling of 'belonging' they had there as part of a trade or professional 'community of practice'. Being prepared for what to expect before they take up their new posts is part of the answer, but, once in their new role, ongoing support is essential if VET practitioners are not going to feel alone and unsupported.

Four main issues emerged from the research affecting VET practitioners' decisions to remain (or not) with an RTO once employed. The first of these was a lack of management and peer support, including poor orientation on arrival, limited resources provided, and no provision for mentoring or co-teaching while the newcomer became accustomed to their new role. Secondly, some new practitioners found their expectations of the role, sometimes painted in rosy terms, were not fulfilled. Some of them apparently regarded the gap between what they were expecting and the reality too great, sometimes even after persisting for several months. In the main, the challenges that lead to departure revolve around the amount of paperwork required versus the time spent teaching; the amount of out-of-hours work required marking tests and responding to students; teaching students with a variety of abilities and/or a reluctance to learn, especially in larger groups; and, particularly for full-time VET practitioners, the difficulty of maintaining industry currency.

The third element, particularly for private RTOs, is the lack of a career pathway for long-term employees, although a couple of the RTOs interviewed had managed to find creative ways to provide at least limited professional trajectories. Fourthly, once the TAE qualification and employment had been achieved, there was some opposition to the need to upgrade the TAE by adding units of competency, especially where RTOs and/or VET practitioners considered such additions irrelevant to their needs. A grey area in the retention of practitioners concerned the maintenance of industry currency: some RTOs viewed this as their responsibility and as a way of supporting their staff, while others apparently saw it as an obligation of the individual VET practitioner.

Some RTOs saw maintaining industry currency as their responsibility and as a way of supporting their staff, while others apparently saw it as an individual VET practitioner obligation.

Considerations for retaining and sustaining the dual professional

- Maintain or build a supportive culture, one that respects visiting industry experts' and full-time VET practitioners' ongoing contribution, and continually develop their industry and pedagogical currency (RTOs):

- Continue to support ongoing VET practitioners through, for example, mentoring, professional supervision and communities of practice.
- Take professional development seriously, through actions which ensure joint industry, RTO and VET practitioner responsibility for maintaining industry currency and the integrity of VET.
- Identify ways of providing career progression for VET practitioners where these currently do not exist.
- Regularly review VET practitioner employment conditions, for example, workload and out-of-pocket expenses.
- Develop and sustain industry experts' and VET practitioners' commitment to collegial engagement through participation in continuing development as a dual professional (VET practitioners).

The strategies proposed in this report for recruiting from industry, enabling transition, and retaining and updating are consistent with recent policy recommendations from the OECD (2021), based on research in Denmark, England, Germany, Japan and the United States. Those recommendations included:

- Increasing the attractiveness of teaching careers in VET by providing targeted incentives and offering career development support.
- Providing flexible pathways into VET teaching by relaxing entry qualification requirements, if needed, for industry professionals and at the same time providing flexible means for obtaining necessary teaching qualifications.
- Attracting more industry professionals to teach in VET by facilitating flexible work arrangements in VET teaching and increasing collaboration between VET providers and industry (p.29).



Broader matters

Three broader matters emerged from the research, which cannot be directly addressed through the research questions but which are both highly relevant to the recruitment and retention of VET practitioners and significant for the development of VET in Australia: improving industry–VET engagement; an appropriate vocational educational qualification for VET practitioners; and the notion of a professional association for VET practitioners.

New models of industry–VET engagement

The research highlights that the ways by which VET practitioners continue to engage with their respective industries vary considerably. Consequently, there would seem to be a need for a rethink at industry level about the way that training for each industry takes place. While training packages link with industry through the respective Skills Service Organisations and Industry Reference Committees, in general the integration of VET and industry for the purposes of entry-level training and continuing professional development seems inconsistent, a situation that may affect the recruitment and retention of VET practitioners.

Certainly, in its present form VET in some instances seems to have lost its close links with industry, and research has found that some VET practitioners pay only lip service to maintaining industry currency (Tyler & Dymock 2017). One way by which the issue of both currency and workforce development might be addressed is through more flexible ‘boundary crossing’ opportunities; that is, where VET teachers move back and forth between the classroom and the workplace, ‘figuratively bringing the practice of work into the practice of education’ (Berner 2010, p.208). Industry bodies would seem to be best placed to take the initiative in this regard.

A ‘fit for purpose’ educational qualification

Several of the strategies proposed above advocate flexibility with the Certificate IV TAE to allow one-off, occasional and short-term secondments from industry, as well as the application of recognition of prior learning for experienced industry people already holding a mentoring or training role. Nevertheless, in order to have credibility as professionals, VET practitioners should have a solid educational foundation and possess a strong appreciation of its pedagogical underpinnings. The criticism and reservations expressed by some participants – and from other VET commentators – have highlighted that the current mandatory educational qualification is not sufficient for that purpose. While there have been a number of iterations of the TAE in the past two decades, it is clear there is a need for a qualification that is a robust, meaningful and useful acquisition for any VET teacher/trainer, rather than an obligation to be fulfilled.

Furthermore, any such qualification should be capable of providing a substantial foundation for helping VET practitioners understand and adopt innovative pedagogical approaches, particularly to meet emerging needs such as those that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many institutions converted to online teaching. In addition, those practitioners who wish to explore the complexities of teaching and learning in VET, should be given the opportunity and be supported to proceed to higher-level educational studies.

There are encouraging indications that the limitations of the current Certificate IV TAE and the potential for more robust and stackable vocational qualifications are being addressed and that more credible and substantive options might emerge.

A professional VET practitioner association

One of the recruitment strategies above proposed establishing a national register of practitioners. The idea of extending this into a professional association or ‘registration’ body is reinforced by the strength of the responses to a single question in the VET practitioner survey: *How valuable would a professional association be to you?* Despite no detail being attached to the question, 40% of the practitioners participating in the survey believed that a professional association would be ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ valuable, and when those who thought it ‘moderately’ valuable are added to this figure, more than two-thirds were in favour.

In Sweden, Köpsén (2014) found vocational teachers emphasised their dual roles – trade and teaching – and that a feature of this dual identity included the development of skills and knowledge for ‘life and work’ – not only training in skills but preparing for a future workplace. The extent to which VET practitioners in Australia are willing to consider themselves as ‘professionals’ may depend on the extent to which they embrace the concept of a dual identity.

The extent to which VET practitioners in Australia are willing to consider themselves as ‘professionals’ may depend on the extent to which they embrace the concept of a dual identity.

The notion of a professional association has been regularly floated in Australia in recent years (Tyler & Dymock 2017), and some attempts made in various forms, but no consensus about the shape and purpose of such an organisation has been reached. Its strongest relevance to recruitment and retention lies in the potential status such an initiative could bring to the VET profession, while, as part of its role, it would foster continuing professional development, hence making a second career as a VET practitioner a more attractive proposition to those in industry. It is an initiative worthy of further exploration.

In conclusion, when we were collecting the data for this research, we were struck by the *passion* shown for VET in Australia. There was overwhelming support among the interviewees and survey respondents for the *value* of VET, and even those most critical of current approaches and procedures revealed a deep concern about the state of VET in Australia. They *want* it to be better. They want it to succeed.

One of the limitations of the research reported here is that it includes no direct input from industry, employers or from prospective VET practitioners. Nevertheless, we were able to draw rich data from the interviews with highly informed RTO personnel and the responses of over 300 well-experienced VET practitioners to the survey.

It is clear that RTOs operating in almost every industry are struggling to maintain a consistent VET practitioner workforce. In addressing such challenges, industry bodies can provide a leadership role: not only is it in their interest to ensure that there are enough well-qualified and well-equipped VET practitioners to sustain their industry into the future, but they are also well placed to promote such a role.

The responsible government authorities can also bring influence to bear in smoothing the pathway from industry to VET by overseeing the establishment of more flexible arrangements for a vocational qualification, one that is also fit for purpose. Governments also have the capacity to support financial incentives to encourage transition from industry to VET and to foster creative promotion of VET as a second career. The present competitive nature of the vocational training market militates against substantial cooperation among RTOs, but individually they can make a significant contribution – by means of their approaches to recruiting and supporting practitioners – to ensuring that VET is seen as an attractive destination.

Some of the issues that contribute to the shortage of industry experts in VET teaching are systemic, some are industry-specific and some derive from the circumstances of particular RTOs. Unless there is a concerted and collaborative effort from all parties involved to address the shortage, little is likely to change. The initial thrust of such collaborative effort might be on the VET practitioner role as ‘a journey, not a destination’, along with a focus on the notion of recruiting and developing ‘dual professionals’ as a unique strength of VET.



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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview questions for RTOs

FOLLOW UP ON PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE ANSWERS [indicated with 'P']:

Q1P. *Please tell us a bit more about your organisation*

Q2P. *Please tell us a bit more about the 'models' of employment you use [refer to respondent's answers] and why you use them.*

Q3P. *Please talk a bit more about the industry sectors you've identified that are harder or easier to recruit into. What do you think are the reasons?*

- Have you ever dropped a course from your scope mainly because you couldn't recruit a trainer/assessor for it?
- Are there any particular circumstances, e.g. location or mode of delivery, that affect your RTO's recruitment of practitioners?
- Is recruiting more of an issue for teaching higher level qualifications, e.g. Certificate IV or Diploma, rather than for Certificates I/II/III?

Q4P. *Please expand on the responses you have given about the factors that influence recruitment of prospective practitioners:*

- Rate of pay
- Working conditions
- Certificate IV
- [Follow up Certificate IV dot point above only if needed]:
 - How do you ensure that your trainers and assessors complete the Certificate IV TAE?
 - Is RPL (recognition of prior learning) a consideration here?
 - Are there better ways of providing/doing the Certificate IV TAE?
- 'Giving back'; making a contribution to the industry and its future.
- Any other factors?

Q5P. *In relation to recruiting strategies, you've indicated that the most successful one/s for you are []. Why do those work best for you?*

Q6P. *In relation to retaining VET practitioners, you've rated your success as [] on a scale of 1 to 5. What's your reason for that rating?*

In Q7P, you've indicated which deliberate strategies you use to retain VET practitioners. Can you please tell me how you provide that support.

- [Supplementary Q if needed]: Do the same arrangements apply to everyone, or do you have individualised work agreements (pay, conditions, etc), based on seniority, area of expertise, etc.
- In our research, we've come across various strategies here and overseas for attracting and retaining VET practitioners, some of them with government funding. We'd be interested in your opinion of them for your RTO:
 - 'Golden Hello' - an initial government payment for RTOs to attract someone from industry to become a VET practitioner

- Part-time release of industry experts to VET, subsidised by government or by arrangement with employer
- Government subsidy to RTOs to pay for 'hard to get' VET practitioners
- Government subsidy to RTOs for retaining older VET practitioners
- Co-delivery: Employing teaching/training expert to convene and teach into general elements of competencies and to utilise industry experts in a consultant role to support more specialised elements of practice.
- Establish a central point of professional recognition for VET practitioners', for example, a centralised data base where they register their qualifications, experience and expertise. Might help raise the status of VET teaching and training, but also a possible recruitment & publicity point. Could be a professional association. Funded by a small registration fee?
- One of the unique aspects of VET teaching is that for most people it's a second career - the idea of the dual professional. We've seen it suggested that some people "fall into" becoming VET practitioners and have often not considered it.
- How and where can we better promote VET teaching/training as a career that people with the right industry qualifications might move into?
- Do you have any other suggestions or comments about attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners?

Finally: In the next phase of the research, we'd like to make contact with VET practitioners to understand the paths they've taken, whether they're casual, part-time or full-time. What's motivated them to become teachers, trainers and assessors in the first place and what's kept them there.

We're going to do this through an online survey. Would you be willing to help facilitate the distribution of a survey to VET practitioners in your organisation. It would be anonymous and confidential and the response would be submitted direct to Griffith University. We expect to send this out in February. Would it be okay if we contacted you then to help disseminate this?

Appendix B: Survey questions for the VET practitioners

For the purpose of this survey, the term 'VET practitioner' covers VET lecturer, teacher, trainer, assessor, and tutor.

1 Is the RTO where you are mainly employed

- Private RTO
- Government RTO
- Enterprise RTO

2 In which State or Territory do you live?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Australian Capital Territory | <input type="radio"/> South Australia |
| <input type="radio"/> New South Wales | <input type="radio"/> Tasmania |
| <input type="radio"/> Northern Territory | <input type="radio"/> Victoria |
| <input type="radio"/> Queensland | <input type="radio"/> Western Australia |

3 In VET, are you employed as

- Teacher/Trainer and Assessor
- Teacher/Trainer only
- Tutor only
- Assessor only

4 In total, how long have you been employed as a VET practitioner?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11+ years

5 What is the main way you are currently employed in VET?

- Full-time permanent
- Full-time fixed term/contract
- Part-time permanent
- Part-time fixed term/contract
- Casual
- Volunteer

6 Please indicate your age

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

7 What is your main area of expertise for teaching purposes (trade/industry/profession)?

8 How many years' experience have you had in that trade/industry/profession?

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11+ years

9 Please rank in order of importance (1 = most to 6 = least) the ways you maintain industry currency. Ranking (1-6)

Working concurrently in industry and VET	_____
Undertaking annual or other regular release to industry	_____
Undertake industry site visits with students	_____
Undertake industry site visits with students	_____
Active involvement in industry networks and their professional development events	_____
Engaging in independent learning, and critically engaging with relevant industry publications and journals, etc.	_____
Regular teaching of industry-related courses as a VET practitioner	_____

10 With regard to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Cert IV TAE), which one of the following applies to you?

- I have completed TAE, including latest required updates
- I have completed TAE, latest updates pending
- I am currently enrolled in TAE
- I have completed an earlier version (e.g. Cert IV TAA), but not yet updated
- I have completed Diploma TAE
- I have completed a recognised alternative educational qualification (e.g. education degree, overseas qualification)
- No formal educational qualification

11 Was the requirement to complete the Cert IV TAE a factor in your decision to become a VET practitioner?

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Moderately
- Very
- Extremely

Please give reason for your rating: _____

12 To what extent has the Cert IV TAE helped you be a competent and continuing VET practitioner?

- Not at all
- Slightly
- Moderately
- Very
- Extremely

Please give reason for your rating: _____

13 How do you identify professionally?

- Mostly as a tradesperson/professional/industry expert
- Mostly as a VET teacher/trainer/assessor
- As a dual professional: almost equally as a tradesperson/professional/industry expert and VET teacher/trainer/assessor
- Don't know.

14 Which of the following best indicates how you came to be a VET practitioner at your current RTO?

- I responded to an advert on a recruitment agency website (e.g. Seek)
- I responded to an advert on State/Territory government jobs website (e.g. iworkfor.nsw.gov.au)
- I responded to industry publicity from industry networks
- I responded to word of mouth from a colleague
- I was approached by the RTO
- I personally approached the RTO
- I transitioned from occasional/guest lecturer to more regular employment with the RTO

Other comments on Q14: _____

15 How *important* was each of the following, a consideration in your decision to become a VET practitioner (full-time, part-time or casual)?

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
Level of remuneration in VET	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better working conditions in VET	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting 'off the tools' /away from stress/ away from physical challenges of job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving back to the industry by developing next generation of workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments on Q15: _____

16 To what extent does each of the following <i>influence you to stay in the job</i> as a VET practitioner (full-time, part-time or casual)?	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely
Level of remuneration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working conditions in VET	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supportive peer work culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development provided or paid for by the RTO	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being 'off the tools'/away from stress/ away from physical challenges of job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving back to the industry by developing next generation of workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding satisfaction in the teaching/training role	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- 17 How valuable would membership of a professional VET practitioner association be for you?
- Not at all
 - Slightly
 - Moderately
 - Very
 - Extremely

Additional comments on Q17: _____

- 18 What would have helped make your transition to being a VET practitioner easier?

- 19 From your experience, what is one thing that someone who is considering moving from industry to become a VET teacher/trainer needs to know about the reality of being a VET practitioner?

- 20 Where and how might we best promote the idea of being a VET practitioner, particularly as a second career to those in your industry who may not have yet considered it?

- 21 Any other comments or suggestions about attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners?

Thank you very much for completing this survey. In due course, we will send a summary of the results to your RTO for dissemination to all those who contributed.

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