



Consultation paper

Developing a blueprint for the

VET workforce

Introduction

The Australian Government, in collaboration with states and territories, is developing a VET Workforce Blueprint (the Blueprint) to support a high quality and sustainable workforce. The Blueprint will identify effective strategies for workforce issues such as attraction, retention, building capability, supporting career development, and succession planning.

A tripartite steering group, appointed by the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Skills and Training, is guiding the development of the Blueprint. The VET Workforce Blueprint Steering Group includes representation from the Commonwealth, states and territories, VET sector stakeholders, unions representing the VET workforce, and employer and union peak bodies.

The Steering Group has identified potential action areas and proposed solutions to address attraction and retention issues, as well as measures to strengthen and build the capability of the current workforce, for testing with key stakeholders.

The Blueprint will draw on available data and evidence from a Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) VET Workforce Study. This study will profile the VET workforce using existing and new datasets to estimate the size, composition, characteristics, and transitions of the current workforce; define the key job roles in the sector; and analyse the pathways in and out of these key roles and the sector as a whole. There are several limitations in current VET workforce data and estimates vary. Thus, in addition to these three core parts of the study, JSA will also recommend options for improving VET workforce data collection into the future using existing and new methods of collation, analysis and categorisation. For example, aligning occupational classifications with current industry practice across the very diverse and different parts of the sector. The study will also undertake a research paper on how to grow and develop the First Nations VET workforce.

It is important the Blueprint incorporates a range of actions to support the long-term- sustainability of the VET workforce. A key consideration for the delivery of an effective Blueprint will be ensuring responses support the diversity of registered training organisation (RTO) types and settings, and the different challenges experienced by some segments of the VET workforce.

Consultation with the sector will test current understanding of the challenges faced by the VET workforce, identify whether proposed actions will result in effective change, and garner additional potential actions. It is also an opportunity to gather and explore examples of current RTO based,

localised or specific responses that could be scaled up further or replicated in other contexts for inclusion in the Blueprint, for the consideration of Skills Ministers in the first half of 2024.

Context

In 2022, the VET workforce delivered nationally recognised training to 4.5 million learners.¹ This included 3.0 million learners undertaking subject-only training, such as responsible service of alcohol, first aid and construction induction training (white card), 2.1 million learners undertaking courses,² and 404,000 learners undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship.³

There is a broad range of RTO types including TAFEs, private and independent RTOs, dual sector providers, enterprise RTOs, RTOs with a volunteer workforce, adult and community education providers, Aboriginal community-controlled RTOs, and RTOs delivering VET to secondary students. In addition, there are a variety of contexts they deliver in, from metropolitan to remote, the size of the organisation and the range of qualifications offered. There are also several differing job roles that make up an RTO's workforce, including professional, specialists, leadership and administrative roles.

Like many industries across Australia, there is increasing pressure to attract and retain a skilled VET workforce, at the same time skills shortages are being experienced more widely across the economy. Increasingly, industry and employers are looking to the VET sector to address their own skills shortages, further exacerbating the pressure on the VET workforce. There also needs to be a continued focus on supporting and building the skills and capability of the existing VET workforce, particularly early career VET practitioners.

VET workforce estimates vary considerably but the most recent considered analysis of the workforce: the 2020 NCVER Research Report: Understanding the Australian vocational education and training workforce estimated a workforce of 246,000.⁴ This report demonstrated the challenges in profiling VET and how other estimates, for example, from ABS census data, underestimate the number and diversity of people working in VET. These discrepancies and other limitations with VET workforce data are why a workforce data profile has been commissioned by Government. There are well-known challenges with accurately identifying VET teachers, trainers, and assessors due to their dual professional status and broader structural issues with occupational and industry Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reporting codes not fully reflecting the modern Australian labour market. These have become even more apparent as the VET sector has diversified.

At the individual level, people engage in the VET workforce for a variety of reasons and from a broad range of backgrounds. Attracting more people to the sector, particularly as teachers, trainers and assessor, is essential to ensure succession planning and the viability of the workforce into the future. The estimated 71,000 teachers, trainers and assessors in the VET workforce have a collective median age of 50 years, much higher than the median of 40 years for all jobs.⁵ More recent census data also

¹ NCVER (2023) *Total VET students and courses 2022*, p.1

² Courses includes training package qualifications, accredited course qualifications and other accredited courses.

³ Learners may undertake more than one type of training in any given year.

⁴ Knight, G., White, I. and Granfield, P. (2020) *Understanding the Australian Vocational Education and Training Workforce*, NCVER, Adelaide, SA

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indicates a mature teaching workforce: 24% who are 60 and over, 16% who are 55-59 years, 28% who are 45-54 years, 21% who are 35-44 years and 11% who are 34 years old or younger.⁶

Most VET teachers, trainers and assessors are considered 'dual professionals', bringing extensive industry careers, as well as holding teaching credentials to deliver and assess in VET, and are required to maintain both their industry and teaching currency.

Additionally, the NCVET report found that the teaching, training and assessing VET workforce is represented by a more casualised and part-time workforce than the wider labour market.⁷ More recent ABS data indicates that this continues, 31% of Vocational Education Teachers are in casual employment compared to 24% in the whole of the Australian Labour Force. In comparison 35% of University Lecturers and Tutors and 9% Secondary School Teachers work in casual employment.⁸

These challenges place significant demands on the VET workforce, whilst it continues to ensure the delivery of high-quality training and assessment to students.

There are a range of roles in addition to teachers, trainer and assessors working in the VET sector. These include roles such as:

- Curriculum designers
- Instructional designers
- Content developers
- Quality education specialists and managers
- Quality assurance and compliance officers and managers
- Training coordinators, RTO managers and academic managers
- Executive and leadership roles
- Education ancillary staff, for example librarians and career counsellors
- Education support staff, for example enrolment officers, education aides and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers, and
- other administrative and professional roles that are key in many organisations such as HR and IT roles.

The JSA VET Workforce Study will profile the increasing diversity of job roles in VET using a taxonomy that identifies more up-to-date and fit-for-purpose segments of the workforce that align with current industry practice and diversity. These differing roles contribute to the success of the sector, and provide pathways in and out of the more prominent teaching, training and assessing roles.

⁶ ABS, 2021, Census of Population and Housing for Vocational Education Teachers in the TVET sector

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Employee Earnings and Hours, 2021, TableBuilder; Labour Force, Australia, Detailed

Developing a VET Workforce Blueprint

The Blueprint will identify practical actions at the national, State and Territory and local level to grow and support a sustainable, high-quality VET workforce. It will include actions to:

- attract people to the workforce through strategies which support sustained growth
- retain and develop the current workforce to address retention barriers, support career development and build capability
- improve VET workforce data to inform future workforce and succession planning.

Growing the workforce

There are a range of complex and interconnected barriers and challenges which impact the VET workforce. Some of the **key barriers** for the attraction of teachers, trainers and assessors are outlined below.

Perceptions of working in the VET sector

There appears to be a lack of public understanding of the job and career opportunities in the VET sector, and the value of being a part of the VET workforce. In addition, there is minimal information readily available on entry pathways and the skills, experience and credentials individuals may have to move into the VET workforce. Recognition of existing skills and experience is also an important enabler to entry. A lack of a professional profile and clear pathways for progression may also be a barrier to attracting people into the VET workforce.

Credential and currency requirements for teachers, trainers and assessors

It is important that relevant qualifications and the Training and Education (TAE) Training Package prepares teachers, trainers and assessors to deliver in a variety of VET settings, and to all types of students, including those with specific or more complex needs. The time and cost involved with completing qualifications can often act as a disincentive to entry into the profession. The pathway for industry experts to become teachers, trainers and assessors can also impact attraction. Strong partnerships between industry and RTOs is important for attracting industry professionals to the VET sector and ensuring training meets industry needs.

Employment conditions and wages

Competition for staff between the VET sector and industry can make it difficult to attract and retain individuals in the VET workforce. For some sectors, such as mining and construction, industry provides higher wages than employment in the VET sector can offer. Conversely, people in aged care and early childhood education and care sectors may improve their wages when transitioning to be part of the VET workforce.

Employment conditions in the VET sector can also act as a disincentive, especially for people moving from industries with more secure and higher paid employment. There can also be competition for staff between different RTO types, and providers in other education sectors which may result in challenges relating to pay and conditions for some RTOs when competing with other providers.

Supporting and retaining a skilled teacher, trainer and assessor workforce

The sector is under increasing pressure to retain skilled and experienced professionals, particularly with a mature workforce. The 2023 JSA Skills Priority List identified Vocational Education Teachers as

in shortage. There appear to be critical shortages in some industry areas, such as in the building and engineering trades, in some specialist roles, such as Language Literacy and Numeracy Practitioners and in some settings, such as in regional, rural and remote locations. Given this, strategies in the Blueprint will focus on the attraction and retention of teacher, trainer and assessor workforce, whilst also acknowledging the other important roles within RTOs that support providing quality teaching, training and assessment.

Retention strategies for teachers, trainers and assessors need to consider valuing, supporting and developing the VET workforce across a broad range of areas. There should also be a focus on career progression into leadership roles. The diversity of RTOs and students impacts the type and scale of retention strategies for teachers, trainers and assessors, which will have the most benefit. Some of the **key barriers** for supporting and retaining a high-quality and capable workforce are outlined below.

Currency and professional development challenges

Professional support and career progression is crucial to the development and retention of the VET workforce.

Most VET teachers, trainers assessors are considered ‘dual professionals’, requiring experience as both an industry professional and as a VET teacher, trainer and assessor. It can be difficult for professionals to maintain industry currency as well as complete professional development requirements due to time and financial constraints.

The regulatory requirements for VET teachers, trainers and assessors are set out in the Standards for RTOs and include the undertaking of regular professional development to ensure currency in teaching methodology to adult learners. It can be challenging for some staff to access high-quality relevant professional development, particularly those who are not employed on a permanent basis. These challenges are further exacerbated for workers in regional and remote areas.

Challenges related to digital capability

There has been a rapid rise in the focus on digital skills in recent years, including the increased prevalence of digital and online training delivery and the rise of AI and its application in VET. This upward trend may be putting pressure on the digital capability and literacy of the VET workforce.

Supporting a diverse cohort of students

Inclusivity is a key strength of the VET sector. The VET workforce supports students from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of prior educational experience. Students can present with non-vocational barriers including:

- complex language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills needs
- complex employability skills needs including communication skills, planning and problem solving, teamwork and collaboration
- histories of educational disadvantage
- personal and other challenges, such as difficulty accessing support (e.g., mental ill-health and wellbeing).

Workload burden associated with administrative and compliance activities

The burden of administration and compliance activities are often cited as a barrier to retention in the VET workforce. This can include assessment and reporting loads, course and program

administration requirements and on-going regulatory compliance. These workloads impact the ability of organisations, and particularly VET teachers, trainers and assessors, to deliver high quality training and can undermine work satisfaction, having implications for retention.

Lack of role clarity and clear career progression pathways

The lack of clear career progression pathways and incentives for people to move into more senior roles presents as a limiting factor in the development and the retention of high-quality staff, including for leadership roles. A lack of role clarity and the variation in focus on staff capability building opportunities across different RTOs could also be contributing to these challenges.

What we'd like to hear

The consultation process, which includes public submissions, will explore a range of areas and issues to assist in the development of the Blueprint. For example, we would like to hear:

- Do the barriers and challenges identified in this paper reflect your understanding of the issues in your organisation and/or in your experience? If not, what are the barriers and challenges you or your organisation are facing?
- Which barriers are most significant in your context?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the VET workforce now and into the future?

Ensuring informed workforce planning

There is currently no regular fit-for-purpose VET workforce data collection at the national level, with VET workforce estimates varying in recent years. There are also well-known challenges with accurately identifying VET teachers, trainers and assessors in some data collections due to their 'dual professional' status. Those operating across multiple RTOs, as well as volunteer trainers and secondary school teachers delivering VET in a school setting, also add complexity.

The JSA VET Workforce Study is considering what a regular and targeted data collection for the VET workforce could look like, including potential sources, methods and barriers for collection.

Implementing a national, consistent and regular VET workforce data collection will support effective sector wide workforce planning in the future, so is key for the Blueprint. Some potential solutions could include a regular VET workforce census or a survey approach, that ensures valid and robust workforce estimates across the diversity of the VET sector.

What we'd like to hear

The consultation process will explore a range of areas and issues to assist in the development of the Blueprint. For example, we would like to hear:

- What mechanisms could be suitable for the regular collection of VET workforce data?
- Which mechanisms would work best for your organisation's context?
- What existing workforce data do you routinely collect and could even share with JSA?

How should the Blueprint respond to barriers and challenges?

We are interested in hearing your views on effective actions and strategies to support attraction, retention, building capability, enabling career development and succession planning.

Below are some of the key themes emerging and potential action areas for feedback which have been identified by the Steering Group and various research into the sector which considers the attraction and retention of the teacher, trainer and assessor workforce. We are interested in hearing your views on these and other potential action areas which would address barriers and challenges faced by the VET workforce, what the impact would be, and what success would look like in practice.

Key emerging themes	Potential action areas
<p>Enable and promote entry pathways into the VET workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives to attract new entrants, including for enrolments and completions into Training and Education (TAE) Training Package qualifications, leading to VET workforce employment • Stepped approach to allow industry experts to complete TAE qualifications where appropriate, noting some high-risk sectors may not lend themselves to this approach <p><i>Completions of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment often doesn't result in employment within the profession. Initiatives such as incentives and other support could assist in growing the VET workforce.</i></p>
<p>Stronger partnerships between industry and RTOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting industry release, flexible pathways and joint RTO/industry appointments • Support for early and effective engagement between RTOs and industry • Support for teaching skills gap for industry engagements <p><i>Given the nature of some roles, transitioning from industry is a common pathway into the sector. Supporting movement between RTO and industry roles could be improved. Examples of this may include programs which are mutually beneficial to both employers through block release or incentives.</i></p>
<p>Promote the image and status of the VET workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a national focus on the profession which includes promoting the value of working in VET, and increasing awareness and understanding of entry pathways and available roles <p><i>This could be achieved through leveraging known motivations for entering the VET workforce, and through, for example a national promotion and recruitment campaign.</i></p>
<p>Facilitate continuing professional support, development and progression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for industry currency, communities of practice and time off to undertake qualifications • Professional development in areas of high need

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated national capability framework and/or professional standards to build a professional profile • Support career progression, build leadership capability and encourage higher-level qualifications <p><i>Supports such as programs and incentives would be beneficial to assist practitioners at all stages of their career to build capability, including pathways into leadership roles.</i></p>
<p>Improve VET workforce data to support more effective workforce planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a national, regular, systematic data collection which captures provider diversity • Research to support the long term development of the workforce including in response to changing context, such as technology and student preferences <p><i>A robust VET workforce data collection will provide a strong evidence base for more effective workforce planning and insights.</i></p>

What we'd like to hear

The consultation process will explore a range of areas and issues to assist in the development of the Blueprint. For example, we would like to hear:

- What could be done to attract and retain more VET teachers, trainers and assessors?
- What could be done to attract and retain other key workforce roles such as complementary education professionals (e.g. educational designers, librarians or counsellors) or support VET professionals to enter leadership positions?
- In your view, what strategies or actions would have the best impact for building capability and supporting career development and progression?
- Are there actions that should be specifically taken at the national level, and at the local level?
- Are there examples of attraction and retention strategies, actions or initiatives that have worked well? What were the critical factors that made them successful?
- How can industry assist with building the teacher, trainer and assessor workforce?
- What collaborative mechanisms could be implemented to assist transition between industry and the VET workforce? Where the employer is the RTO, what would assist in transitioning staff into teacher, trainer and assessor roles?
- If there was one immediate goal that could be worked towards to relieve the current pressures on the VET workforce, what would that be?
- What does success look like in practice for the actions you have proposed?

Next steps

Following consultations, a draft of the Blueprint will be developed for the consideration of Skills Ministers in the first half of 2024. Skills Ministers will also consider and agree areas of national action to support the VET workforce.

The Australian Government is investing up to \$100 million over five years through the National Skills Agreement to strengthen the VET workforce. This includes:

- \$70 million over five years for State and Territory initiatives, including local action to respond to the VET Workforce Blueprint; and
- \$30 million to support agreed areas of national action.

Commonwealth financial contributions to States and Territories will be matched by the relevant State or Territory.

Contact us

We appreciate your contribution to the development of VET Workforce Blueprint. If you have any questions or would like to send information to support this work, please contact us at VETWorkforce@dewr.gov.au.

If you have information to support the VET Workforce Study, being undertaken by JSA, including job descriptions and/or information pertaining to job roles and pathways, please contact JSA at VETWorkforceStudy@jobsandskills.gov.au.

You can also keep up to date with what's happening through our website at www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/quality-reforms#toc-blueprint-for-the-vet-workforce.