

# What makes people want to become VET teachers?

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# The context

- There is a lot of talk about VET teacher/trainer shortages. The National Skills Commission (now Jobs and Skills Australia) reported a 'tightening of the labour market' for the occupation in 2022, and is now investigating VET teachers as a special project, including analysis of the employment destinations of Cert IV graduates.
- Anecdotes circulate of employers in the rest of the economy being unable to find workers, because the local TAFE college can't recruit teachers to train people in their industry.
- It's said (e.g. Productivity Commission 2021) that the pay is much lower than can be earned in industry, although that has been disproved by Smith (2023); and that it's too much to expect people to undertake (any) training to do the job.
- It's very much a deficit view of the occupation of VET teacher – almost that people are doing us a favour by moving into the job.
- So, it's important to find out what attracts people to the job of VET teacher.
- **Why did you become a VET teacher? Or, if you are not, why did someone you know become one?**

# Background: The landscape of VET teaching



## Types of training provider, 2023

- 25 TAFE (Technical and Further Education) Institutes or State TAFE systems;
- 3107 private training providers;
- 188 Community colleges;
- 134 Enterprise Providers -training and awarding qualifications to their own workers.
- *364 secondary schools (These are not in scope for this presentation)*

# Background: VET teacher qualifications

- Prior to mid-1990s most full-time TAFE teachers undertook 'in-service' VET/adult education degrees.
- In 1998 a requirement was introduced for a Certificate IV level qualification in 1998 in line with the then AQTF.
- TAFE gradually stopped requiring degrees (Victoria was the first to cease this practice).
- A Diploma of VET, focused on teaching, was introduced into the Training and Education Training Package in 2010. The 2022 version has three streams, one of which is teaching-focused.
- Now, about 600 people a year undertake higher education quals in VET pedagogy voluntarily, at around six universities.
- In Victoria, since the new TAFE Teaching Staff Agreement 2018 provided access to a higher salary scale for teachers who undertake a pedagogical qualification at AQF level 5 or above, hundreds more Victorian TAFE teachers have gained university pedagogical qualifications (e.g. Fed Uni's Associate Degree of VET).
- Representatives of the VET teacher-training universities form the Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group (ACDEVEG).

# Background: Literature

- In Australia, VET relies for its VET teachers on people moving from ‘industry’ (or other fields) into teaching. In many other countries this is seen as the ‘side entrance’ (Vandeweyer, 2022)
- Moving from another job into VET teaching depends on push and pull factors (Tyler & Dymock, 2021)
  - **Pushed** by long working hours, mental /physical stress, lack of fulfilment.
  - **Pulled** by a new challenge, a wish to pass on skills & knowledge, working in a different field but still related to their former job.
- Virtually no other research on this topic in Australia
- In Sweden, a temporary shortage of VET teachers (albeit a different scenario, as Sweden delivers VET in secondary schools) led to a reduction in entry requirements from the existing degree qualification (Antera, 2023). But teachers reported feeling ill-prepared.

# This research project

- This paper reports on part of an unfunded 2023 research project which set out to address the lack of Australian data on the topic. The three authors of this paper were the researchers.
- The two questions for the project were:
  - 1. **What were motivations to entry into the VET teaching profession? (Topic for this paper)**
  - 2. What factors affects decisions to remain in the profession?
- Method: The data were collected via an on-line survey of all current students enrolled in VET teacher-training qualifications at two universities in 2023 and those who finished their studies in 2021 and 2022. The universities were federation University and Charles Sturt University.
- These students are already practising as VET teachers/trainers in TAFE and other registered training organisations.
- 146 valid responses were received, even though the survey had 47 questions (average completion time was 17 minutes). This paper reports on some of the data collected to answer the first research question.

# Motivations to enter the VET teacher occupation

## What did we ask them?

Teachers answered questions about:

- Why they wanted to become VET teachers
- What jobs they were doing before becoming VET teachers
- What assisted them and what hindered them in their tradition
- Whether they were paid more or less as a VET teacher than before switching careers.

The results were analysed by a number of variables including their industry/discipline area, age, gender, prior jobs, employment status as a VET teacher, and length of service.

## Who were the respondents?

- 52% were aged 50 or over;
- Length of service: split approx. 1/3 each between 0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10 years +;
- 63% female; 80% Australian born;
- 66% employed full-time;
- Distribution among industry areas in line with the norm: biggest groups were health, community services, construction, business.
- 66% in Victoria; 66 % metropolitan;
- 41.4% had a concurrent position outside VET.

# What jobs were they doing immediately before becoming a VET teacher? (in their own words)(n=144)

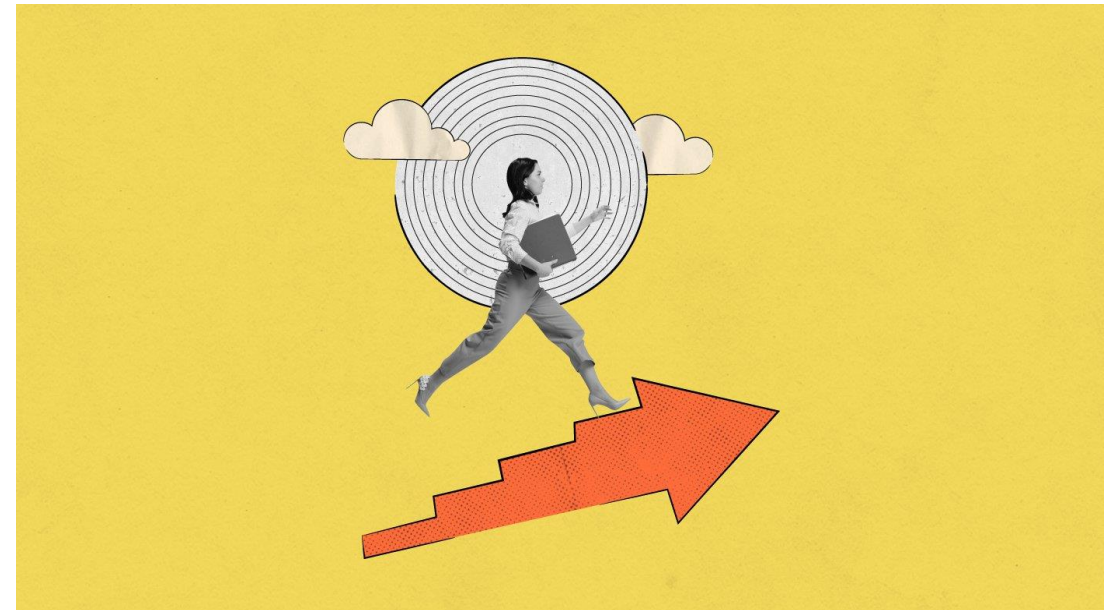
There was a huge range of responses. They were difficult to categorise!

- 16 were from elsewhere in education, 3 were from within VET, 30 were managers (sometimes the sector was specified and sometimes not);
- 9 were owner operators;
- 2 mentioned that they had to leave their jobs – one due to injury and one (in hospitality) due to COVID.
- Other responses as diverse as: winemaking, network engineer, youth service manager, carpenter, nurse and midwife, swim teacher, design engineer, beauty therapist, croupier, motor mechanic, defence employee, government economist, owned a pizza shop.



# Job level immediately before becoming a VET teacher

Level of job	%
Employee (non-professional)	9.8%
Employee (professional)	40.6%
Supervisor	9.1%
Manager	25.9%
Small business owner	14.7%
Total	100.0



# Route to get into VET teaching

- Only 28% had gone directly into full-time VET teaching. 20% started as part-timers, and 52% started as casuals
- 80% had not thought seriously about VET teaching until 1-2 years before they started.
- Less than 10% had even vague thoughts more than 5 years prior.



# Factors in the decision to move into VET teaching

We provided a list and they ticked 'yes', 'to some extent' or 'no' for each.

In order of 'yes' responses:

- Thought I would enjoy teaching (81.6%)
- Giving back to the industry/society by developing next generation (64.1%)
- Better work/life balance (55.3%)
- Better employment conditions in VET teaching (37.1%)
- Getting off the tools/away from stress/physical challenges (36.9%)
- More security in employment in VET teaching (29.3%)

*Not all are easy to divide into 'push' and 'pull' factors*

*31% (in another question) said that others had told them it was not a good career choice.*

# Examples of qualitative comments about anything that prompted them to enter VET teaching (n=117)

- 'Better pay and only way to move up from what I was doing.'
- 'I had motivation to teach, so I gained a bachelor's in teaching (Primary), and the prompting by my VET teacher when I was completing the Cert IV in Aged Care and Disability, who said that I could teach that course.'
- 'I felt that my time in industry as an early childhood director to look at something that I could do to influence quality education in long day care. VET teaching was a perfect avenue for me to pass on my 27 years' experience and knowledge.'
- 'My role in industry included training new employees and supervising apprentices and VET students on work placement. I enjoyed this part of my role immensely which led to my decision to move into teaching.'
- 'Initially to supplement income and develop new skills/ capabilities and build networks, so that longer term, it provides a pathway to semi-retirement from full time corporate work; TAFE teaching can be more flexible, casual/ part time etc.'

# Satisfaction with the decision

- 63% were very happy with their decision to move into VET teaching. 34% were 'quite happy' and only 4 people (3%) were 'not happy'.
- Was it what they expected? 39.7% said it was better than they expected, 43.3% said it was about the same; 17% said it was worse.
- Had the Cert IV TAE qualification prepared them well? Only 12.7% said 'very well'. 40.7% said 'quite well' and 46.5% said 'not well'.
- Given four areas of teachers' work, the Cert IV had prepared them least well for classroom management. It prepared them best for session planning, with 55.6% saying 'quite well' for that task.

# Respondents' views on factors which might be a barrier for people in industry wishing to become VET teachers?

In descending order, using weighted averages

- Prospect of lower pay: 2.38
- Having to achieve a Cert IV qualification: 2.38
- Lack of digital skills: 2.20
- Apprehension of entering a new field: 2.20
- Not knowing how to find out about VET teaching jobs: 2.19
- Lack of full-time jobs: 2.07
- Negative experiences as a VET learner: 2.01



*Respondents had three choices: Yes, a barrier; to some extent; No, not a barrier  
So, a weighted average of 2.00 means the average was 'to some extent'.*

# 'Other' responses to the previous question about barriers (n=25)

- 'The compliance paperwork attached to teaching, the lack of time to prepare especially when you are new and learn the systems.'
- 'The two biggest barriers I have heard are the pay change between experienced in industry verses new to teaching.'
- 'Too much red tape - there is so much pressure on teachers to make sure the students don't fail and if they do fail, it is a lot of extra work. The onus should be on the students, not the teachers.'
- 'The perception of TAFE teaching quality and the workload during semester.'
- 'The 'starting as a casual' route [that] many of us took to secure our current roles does not suit most adults with financial responsibilities.'
- 'A lack of understanding around conducting learning sessions, and how to support a range of learners from various backgrounds and experiences.'



## Barrier #1: Pay. ‘When you started VET teaching, how did the remuneration compare with what you earned before?’

VET teaching remuneration compared with previous job	%
Much less than I was previously paid	26.6%
Somewhat less than I was previously paid	13.3%
About the same as I was previously paid	22.4%
Somewhat more than I was previously paid	19.6%
Much more than I was previously paid	18.2%

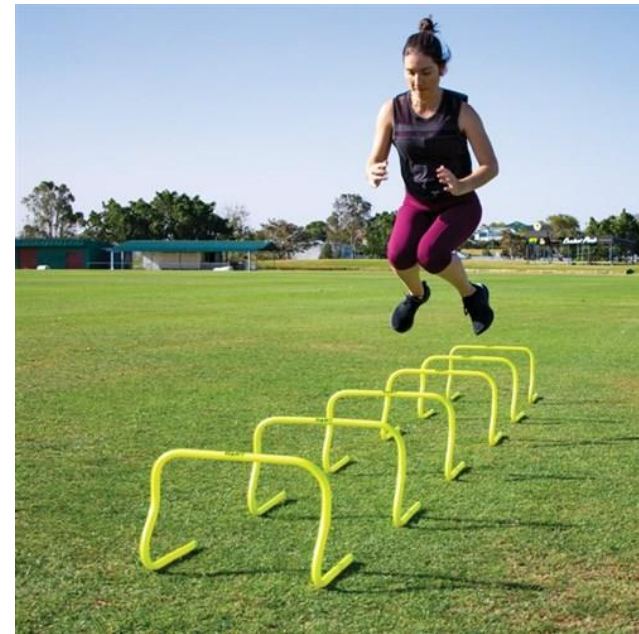




# Barrier #2: Having to do a Cert IV qualification

- People can enter the occupation with a 'skill set' of two or three units of competency.
- Plus of course the relevant industry qualification.
- A full Certificate IV TAE is a 300-hour qualification, and skill-set people can finish it after entry.
- VET teaching qualifications above Cert IV are almost always undertaken post-entry.

**Is it a tiny hurdle?**



# Analysis by gender (other analyses have also been done)

- **Route for getting into VET teaching:** More females (64%) entered via casual teaching than males (45.1%). (Average was 51.7%). Nearly twice the proportion of men than women went straight into full-time VET teaching
- **Remuneration in VET teaching compared with prior job:** Women were much more likely (at 44.1%) than the average (37.8%) to be paid more as a VET teacher than they were before. Over half of man (53.0%) were paid less when they entered VET teaching (the average was 39.9%). There wasn't a significant difference for 'about the same'.
- **Happiness with decision to become a VET teacher:** Women (64.8%) were more likely than males (60.8%) to be 'very happy'. (the average was 63.0%)

# Some conclusions from the data

- The most important reason for becoming a VET teacher was the fact that they thought they would enjoy it! And they did! (97% were 'very happy' or 'quite happy'.) And 'giving back' was also a major factor. So, a **blend of interest and altruism** – could this be a feature for recruitment campaigns?
- 'Push' factors were less important.
- Over half said a **better work-life balance** was a motivation – this could be viewed as a pull or a push factor
- The **Certificate IV TAE was seen as problematic** – it was not seen as good preparation, and it was one of the biggest perceived barriers (although the survey did not explore reasons for responses). It will be interesting to see how the 2022 version of Certificate IV is viewed. A research topic for somebody!
- The **gender analysis on pay** probably reflects the fact that feminised 'occupations-of-origin' generally pay less than masculinised 'occupations-of-origin'. Considering that women predominate in VET teaching, this is an interesting case and deserves research.
- **Your thoughts?**

# For more information

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Project web site is at <https://federation.edu.au/institutes-and-schools/ieac/research/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education/current-research>

The survey questions are posted there, and anyone can use them.

Contact Erica if you'd like to see the quantitative results.

**Erica's paper on the VET workforce shortage:** Smith, E. (2023) The narrative of a VET workforce shortage in Australia: Reality, myth or opportunity? *Education + Training*. (published online Sept.) <http://doi.org/10.1108/ET-03-2023-0078>

Pre-publication version available free of charge on ResearchGate:

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373602721> The narrative of a VET workforce shortage in Australia reality myth or opportunity