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Careers in vocational education and training:
What are they really like?

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Research activity 2:
Understanding career pathways in vocational education and training

Supporting vocational education and training providers in building capability for the future

CONSORTIUM RESEARCH PROGRAM

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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER

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To find other material of interest, search VOCED (the UNESCO/NCVER international database <http://www.ncver.edu.au>) using the following keywords: career development; career planning; job mobility; job satisfaction; professional development; training provider.

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About the research

Careers in vocational education and training: What are they really like?

Michele Simons, Roger Harris, Val Pudney, University of South Australia and
Berwyn Clayton, Victoria University

Little is known about the vocational education and training (VET) workforce. In particular, little is known about the nature of careers and career pathways in VET. This is an issue, given the age of the current VET workforce.

This study examines the nature of career pathways for various groups of VET employees, including teachers, general staff and educational managers. It did this principally through a survey of nearly 1100 staff from 43 public and private providers.

While the project is a first step in reconceptualising careers and developing new and better employment arrangements, other work remains to be done. This includes developing useful typologies of those who work in the sector, as well as how their careers begin and develop, and how they work and want to work.

Key messages

- Careers in VET are characterised by high levels of mobility, with VET staff largely focused on two outcomes—job satisfaction and security of employment.
- Because staff strongly value job satisfaction and the esteem and support of their colleagues and managers, VET leaders and managers need to create working environments that meet the aspirations of staff. This will be a key determinant of successful workforce development strategies in the future.
- Current professional development in the sector is not even handed. Staff in management positions are best served by existing arrangements. Teachers and general staff are less well accommodated by the available mechanisms.

The study is part of a program of research examining the factors which affect and help build the capability of VET providers. Readers interested in other components of the research program on building VET provider capability, of which this report is a component, should visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au>. Reports of particular interest will be those by Callan et al. (2007) on leadership (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1802.html>), Smith and Hawke (2008) on human resource management (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2041.html>) and Hawke (2008) on workforce development (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2049.html>).

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Executive summary

Context and approach

The nature of career pathways available to the vocational education and training (VET) workforce is being influenced by the casualised and ageing character of the workforce, a broadening of the types of employees in VET, and changes to the nature of work in the sector.

The aim of this study was to explore the nature of career pathways for staff in the Australian VET workforce. It included a detailed literature review and a national survey which collected data from staff employed in 43 registered training organisations (22 public and 21 private). (See the support documents accompanying this report for the literature and the survey instrument.) Over one thousand people—including teachers, educational managers and support staff—responded to the survey. Thirty-one brief interviews were also conducted with self-nominated survey respondents to learn more about their experience of careers in the sector

Key findings

Careers in the VET sector are notable for their diversity. They are shaped by both individual and organisational concerns, as well as by the nature and structure of the different occupations that make up the sector's workforce.

From the survey responses, it is clear that VET staff also understand the concept of career in diverse ways. Just over 40% of respondents expressed views of careers as pathways which they follow and which lead to progression, promotion and opportunities for movement within the system. On the other hand, 24% held views of careers as working lives that provide learning, enjoyment, change and personal development. A further 35% of respondents described careers in ways that reflected a blending of these two perspectives.

Significantly, respondents reported that their decisions about their careers were more often driven by internal considerations such as job satisfaction, support from colleagues and their own self-esteem and confidence than workload issues and the availability of full-time work. Factors such as holding qualifications, personal ambition and family responsibilities also featured prominently for teaching staff, while, for general staff, support from managers, work–life balance and the availability of permanent, ongoing work and ensuring they could meet their financial responsibilities rated more highly.

The survey highlighted the casualised nature of entry positions in the teaching workforce compared with general staff or those entering management, who more frequently commence in permanent and full-time roles. Beginning teachers and trainers were older than the general staff entering VET and also often had working lives that included work outside the sector. Many considered this outside work to be their primary employment. For most teachers and trainers, the VET sector was usually not their first employment experience, with many having extensive experience before making a career change into VET. On the other hand, most of the entry positions for general staff were full-time and, for almost one-third of this group, employment in the sector was preceded by a period outside the paid workforce. For the vast majority of general staff, work in the sector was their only form of employment.

Entry into management roles from outside the sector were less common, particularly in public training providers, where the pathway seemed to be well defined for teachers, who usually took up these roles to advance their careers. Entry into job roles where teaching was combined with either management or general staff roles appeared to be more common among private training providers.

One of the generally accepted features of the working lives of VET staff participating in this study was their occupational mobility and their changeable work roles. Two-thirds of respondents reported that they had made between one and five moves during their employment in the sector. This is, perhaps, not remarkable for teachers and trainers, given that they had already made a significant career decision to leave their work in industry and opt to work in the VET sector. For general staff, it appears that this flexible orientation to working life depends on age, experience in the sector and the timing of their entry into the sector.

Staff mobility can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, VET organisations have been successful in managing their workforces to the extent that they have been able to create a type of intra-organisational mobility or career path. The adoption of self-directed career behaviour by staff is also a marker of the flexibility and agility now required of both themselves and the providers they work for, if both are to thrive in a competitive training market.

On the other hand, the high level of mobility of staff within an organisation (particularly teaching staff) may be viewed as a strategy to cope with working lives that no longer offer traditional career pathways. Rather than 'progression' being measured by promotion or changing modes of employment from hourly-paid to contract work, to permanent appointment, progression is made in less direct ways. It is achieved through a series of opportunities that prepare staff for a wider range of roles, making them increasingly valuable to the organisation and hence enabling them to have a more satisfying and permanent work life—especially as they have to maintain the currency of, and develop, both their vocational and teaching skills.

While those who have been employed the longest plan to move out of the sector in the next five years, so too do significant numbers of more recently employed staff. Of staff employed in the period 1997 to 2006, 41% were either unsure or did not believe they would be in the sector in five years time. This may be because people are not always young when they move into the sector. For younger staff, including general staff who may be working in roles that enable the development of transferable skills, the VET sector may be a stepping stone to their next work role outside the sector to use the skills they gained while working in it.

Given the reported mobility of staff within the sector, it is not surprising that respondents reported moderate-to-high levels of engagement with both structured and informal professional development over the preceding three years. While teaching staff undertook formal professional development more often than general staff, these experiences, along with other forms of professional development, did not seem to be making a contribution to their ability to change positions within the sector. On the other hand, VET staff holding educational management roles believed that the professional development they undertook equipped them well to maintain and change work roles in the sector.

Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this study point to the importance of understanding the differences that exist between different groups of VET staff on matters relating to their careers and why these differences occur. A better understanding of how careers work in different types of VET organisations, particularly different types of providers, is also needed.

Managing the movement of different groups of staff into the VET sector warrants more considered and systematic attention. Industry is by far the largest source of recruitment for teachers and trainers. Maintaining and supporting these transitions from industry into providers needs to be

more effectively planned and managed if the numbers of people moving into teaching and training roles are to be sustained or increased. This may be difficult in a tight labour market, where higher salaries can act to keep potential teachers and trainers in industry. Given the highly casualised nature of entry-level employment, teachers and trainers may also need better support to help them to juggle the demands of several employment roles, as well as family and other personal commitments, as they seek to establish themselves more permanently in the sector. General staff, on the other hand, may need different types of support as they attempt to establish themselves in the VET workforce. As already noted, more recent recruits seem to be less certain about their futures in the VET sector. Therefore more attention to their needs is required to ensure that valuable corporate skills and knowledge are not lost unnecessarily.

The provision of improved opportunities for continuous learning for all VET staff is an obvious implication of this study. However, these opportunities should not only be concerned with equipping staff with the capability to perform their current work role; they should also help staff to enhance their career(s) through attaining the type and quality of work and working life they want. Herein are two significant problems. On the one hand, job/role-specific training with immediate and direct benefit to the current employer is needed. However, this approach can be overly focused on 'gap training' and too concerned with maintaining the status quo at the cost of adopting more innovative and flexible approaches. However, providing professional development that focuses more directly on the development of generic capabilities may be better able to drive desired change. This type of professional development places greater emphasis on promoting mobility and flexibility for staff and ultimately helps organisations to deploy their workforces in ways that better match the demands—and changing demands—for their services.

The second problem relates to the ability of a registered training organisation to maintain its workforce in an increasingly competitive labour market environment. Enabling staff to develop capacities to allow them to take advantage of opportunities for changed work roles may also contribute to their becoming more attractive to other potential employers. Not providing learning and development opportunities, however, may lead to a perception of a disengaged organisation which believes that professional development (and hence career capability) is the sole responsibility of the individual. In a context where all staff strongly value job satisfaction and the support of colleagues and managers, this narrow approach is not ideal and may mean they look for alternative work anyway. VET leaders are therefore being challenged to think about the work environment they provide and how it impacts on the quality of relationships they have with their staff.

These findings have implications for the training and development of managers and team leaders. The capability of managers to forge high-quality working environments for staff and within structures and systems which enable them to foster and develop their skills and careers will be a key determinant of successful workforce development strategies in VET in the future. Get this wrong, and the VET sector will not be able to sustain its role in supporting the development of the Australian workforce at large.

Background

Purpose of the research

Occupations and enterprises have been transformed to enable them to compete effectively in a globalising economy, while relationships between employers and the employed are also changing to meet these new challenges. As a result, careers can no longer be defined through a single life-stage, vocational choice or lifetime employer/organisation. Rather, labour market conditions created by various factors (for example, impacts of globalisation, information technology growth and a diversification of the workforce, coupled with regulation or deregulation, privatisation, competition and a shift in traditional work from manufacturing to service/technology) have brought about changing understandings of career. The concept of a career is now understood in a diverse range of ways. This transformation challenges individuals, human resource managers and organisational leaders alike to consider how best to respond to these changes in the concept of a 'career'.

The vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia is playing a part in these changes through its work with enterprises and industries to support changing skills requirements and the long-term development of the workforce. At the same time, the sector itself is being challenged to address its own projected future workforce needs.

The nature and scope of reforms that have unfolded in the VET sector over the past 20 or so years have resulted in significant changes for those people employed in the sector. From staff in a previously well-defined group of occupations—mostly associated with technical and further education (TAFE) colleges and institutes—the VET workforce has grown to include staff working in a variety of other settings, including enterprises, industry associations, commercial training organisations, adult education organisations, schools, universities and various government departments. This expansion has also required VET providers to address significant challenges in attracting, developing and sustaining employees with the capabilities to respond to the demands they face from various levels of government, industries, and the students and other clients they serve.

Despite this expansion in the numbers of people involved in the delivery, administration and support of VET, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of this workforce. Some of these gaps are the product of limitations with existing statistical collections, including the lack of standardised measures for employment levels and a lack of consistency on terms such as 'teacher' (NCVER 2004a, p.6). Furthermore, little is known about the means by which staff enter the sector or the ways in which their working lives unfold as a result of processes such as promotion, secondment and job rotations. The roles that professional development and performance management play in these processes are similarly unclear. We also have little knowledge about how VET staff view their working lives or the factors that might affect their decisions about their working lives and careers. Knowledge of this kind assumes greater importance in a climate where there is increased competition for skilled workers. The average age of the VET workforce (and the TAFE teaching workforce in particular) is increasing and enterprises across the board seek to position themselves as 'employers of choice'.

This project, therefore, was designed to gather data from staff currently employed in the VET sector on how their employment has changed. It was also concerned with understanding how staff experience their working lives as careers. In this way, the study aimed to inform VET organisations about how they might utilise their organisational and human resource capabilities in order to respond to the emerging expectations of current and future staff in the sector, while also maintaining the type of workforce needed to deliver the outcomes desired by policy-makers and governments.

The following questions were used to guide the study:

- How and in what ways do VET staff understand the concept of 'career'?
- How do the careers of VET staff unfold over time?
- What role do human resource strategies such as professional development and performance management play in assisting VET staff in their working lives?
- How might these understandings of the experience of working and building careers shape future workforce development needs in the sector?

Issues in the literature

Understanding the nature of careers in the VET sector rests on developing a picture of how careers might be conceptualised and how they might be managed and supported in today's dynamic working environment. It is also important to acknowledge the historic development of the sector and the impact of the successive waves of reform on the nature of the VET sector workforce over time.

The full literature review for this project is presented in the support document accompanying this report and can be accessed from the NCVER website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2114.html>.

Understanding notions of career in changing times

As organisations have changed under pressures from local, national and international demands, workers have been challenged to alter their views about the nature of their working lives. Working lives are most usefully conceived as a series of positions, some of which are held at the same time. This series of positions may cross organisational, occupational and industrial boundaries and/or consist of a series of moves—both upwards and sideways. More often than not, these positions can be limited in their tenure.

This diversity of experiences effectively creates an environment where views of careers are changing. Within the literature, two views have become prevalent (Walton & Mallon 2004, p.76). One perspective views career as something that a person constructs—a *subjective* view of career (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom 2005, p.178). This is best captured by the notion of the boundaryless career—a term coined to emphasise that people do not see their working lives bound within one organisation or industry and they embrace the notion of change by adopting self-directed career behaviour (Briscoe 2006, p.1). An alternative view emphasises a more *objective* understanding of career, where a career is 'followed' by people, shaped by organisational structures and human resource management strategies and measured in terms of positions, titles and promotions (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom 2005, p.179).

What people think about careers is only one part of the story. Walton and Mallon have pointed out that careers are both constructed by individuals, as well as shaped by employing institutions, professional associations, family and other kin, and social networks (Walton & Mallon 2004, p.77). At the heart of debates about conceptual understandings of career lie differing views on the agency

of individuals and the ways in which they interact with structures such as workplaces. What people think about careers is important as it affects a number of issues, including:

- ✧ whether the responsibility for providing learning and career development opportunities rests with an organisation and/or an individual worker (Littleton, Arthur & Rousseau 2000)
- ✧ the role of learning in maintaining one's employability, both within specified work roles and at transition points between roles (Hall & Mirvis 1996)
- ✧ the role and importance of career guidance in shaping and guiding individual choice about work and how organisations might engage in this process where they are trading job security for flexibility (Hirsch & Jackson 2004; Patton 2001)
- ✧ how human resource development might be (re)-developed to meet both individual aspirations and organisational needs for a skilled and engaged workforce (Arnold 1997; Hirsch & Jackson 2004).

The VET workforce

Estimates of the size of the VET workforce are difficult to make. Current figures, dependent on the method by which they are estimated, vary from 17 400 to 71 300 for VET professionals (staff employed directly in training and assessment and those who provide leadership, support and management) and 39 000 to 94 000 for the VET workforce as a whole (VET professionals and those employed in 'generic roles' within the sector) (Dickie et al. 2004, p.16). What is not so much in question, however, is the growing influence of key trends that are set to play an important part in shaping the future workforce in the sector.

A casualised and ageing workforce

Recent estimates found that approximately three in every five TAFE teachers were employed on a casual basis and that this varied considerably across states/territories (NCVER 2004b). The number of teachers employed on a non-permanent basis in New South Wales was estimated to be as high as 78% of all teachers, while it was approximately 50% in four other jurisdictions—Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (Cully & Woods 2006, p.10). This trend for employing non-permanent staff is also apparent in private training organisations (Auscorp Marketing & Strahan Research 2000).

Again, like much of the Australian workforce, the VET sector—and TAFE institutes in particular—has a workforce profile that is ageing. As the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2004b) notes, the proportion of VET professionals (that is, people employed to provide 'direct' activities such as teaching and assessment and those involved in 'indirect' activities such as providing administrative support and management) aged 45 years or older is almost identical to that of all employed workers in Australia (NCVER 2004b, p.8). What is significant, however, is that teachers in TAFE institutes are older than the broader population of VET professionals.

One of the significant limitations of any analysis of the VET workforce is the almost non-existence of data relating to people employed in non-teaching/training roles in the sector as a whole. What data are available reveal that more non-teaching staff are employed in full-time than part-time positions and more males than females are filling these positions (NCVER 2004b, p.22). These staff are largely employed on a permanent basis and are younger than their teaching colleagues (NCVER 2004b, pp.23, 24). These characteristics stand in contrast to the profile of teachers in TAFE institutes who are mostly employed in part-time and non-permanent roles.

Broadening scope of people who contribute to VET

In addition to those employed in government departments, industry skills councils and other government instrumentalities supporting the VET system, there is a very diverse group of practitioners and managers whose roles can be directly linked to the function of service delivery. Across the VET workforce, several groups can be identified, including:

- *Practitioners*: whose work roles lie totally within the VET sector, including managers, teachers, trainers, support staff (for example, materials developers, IT specialists and the like).
- *Practitioners with a part-time role in VET*: or increasingly, several part-time roles across more than one provider (Dickie et al. 2004, p.75). They are found mainly in industry, schools and as part-time staff in both public and private providers.
- *Workers in industry*: who assist in a small way with VET in their organisation. They are involved primarily with the core business of their organisation, but help others learn in formalised programs such as apprenticeships and traineeships.
- *People who are full-time workers in the core business of their enterprise*: but who, in the course of their regular work, informally help others learn in the workplace. Their learners may be in formal programs such as apprenticeships and traineeships, but are often likely to be fellow workers who need assistance on the job.

This changing profile of VET teaching/training staff is also having flow-on effects for the work of non-teaching staff, who are increasingly engaged in the business of teaching and learning (NCVER 2004a, p.6).

A changing profile of knowledge, skills and work practices

In response to shifts in government policies and increased calls for responsiveness to industry needs, work roles have expanded and diversified and there has been a shift in the balance between the key functions of facilitating learning and assessment. There has also been an accompanying shift in the role of teachers and trainers as creators of curriculum to interpreters of industry needs (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.67). Managers and administrative staff roles have also shifted. Staff such as librarians are having greater interaction with learners (McNickle & Cameron 2003), and managers are now often also teachers who have dual responsibilities to their organisation—the staff with whom they work as well as the students and other clients they serve (Guthrie & Callan 2002; Mitchell & Young 2002). The scope and nature of these changes have not been simply a matter of substituting one set of work practices for another. These reforms have fundamentally challenged the habits, beliefs, values, skills and knowledge of those employed in the VET sector (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.10).

These changes to the work of VET professionals generally, and TAFE staff in particular, have not proceeded without challenge. The Australian Education Union has been particularly forthright in its criticism of the general acceptance of the rhetoric of the 'new VET professional'. They have challenged the perceived shift away from teaching as the core work for staff in TAFE institutes. The union asserts that questions related to the future workforce in TAFE institutes are further compromised when the 'new VET professional' is also used to justify the acceptance of industry knowledge and experience, rather than teaching qualifications as the basis for teachers' work. The uncritical acceptance of the need for a highly casualised workforce as the only possible way to attain a workforce that holds current industry skills has also been challenged (Forward 2004, p.17).

Public training organisations have responded to these challenges in part with moves to increase the number of ongoing teacher positions (usually as part of industrial agreements). Many of these debates and changes are perhaps not dealing with the substantive issue which centres on what might be the most appropriate discipline/skills base for an emerging group of work roles for VET staff. These sit at the intersection of the related fields of human resource management, workforce

development, education and training. How an individual might navigate a career pathway and what it might look like in this type of environment becomes a pressing issue for those people passionate about their work and committed to their role in helping others to learn and support the growth and development of their industry.

Careers in VET

Many teachers and trainers do not commence their working life in VET and for many it is not a lifelong career (Dickie et al. 2004, p.84). Traditionally, a career for teachers and trainers, particularly those in the TAFE sector, has followed a path where 'progression' in the VET sector can be determined by changing modes of employment from hourly paid and sessional or contract work, to permanent appointment (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005).

One of the significant challenges in recruiting staff to the sector (and particularly to public providers) is the salary gap between what people can earn as workers in industry and what they can earn as teachers in the VET sector. Large gaps in salaries, combined with other working conditions (such as expectations that teachers have to fund their own professional development) can affect the number and quality of people applying for positions. Moreover, salary scales are highly contracted (Dickie et al. 2004, p.87). By contrast, private training providers face a different challenge when recruiting staff, particularly when existing or previous TAFE staff are applicants, as they are often perceived to be ill equipped to cope with the demands of training and assessing in the workplace (Harris, Simons & Moore 2005, p.28).

Casualisation of the VET workforce has been particularly noted as having a significant impact on the potential for career pathways in the sector. The impact of casualisation is not confined to areas related to initial recruitment and the career pathway taken into the VET sector. Increased numbers of part-time staff have intensified the work of existing staff, who are required to manage and support new sessional staff and integrate them into the activities of the workplace (Office of Post-Compulsory Education, Training and Employment 2000, p.13).

Once within the sector, career pathways may also include movement into various management roles and positions that acknowledge an 'advanced' level of skills for teachers or 'opportunities' to take up acting positions. However, these positions are often short-term and can leave staff feeling 'displaced' when they return to their substantive positions (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.29). There is some evidence to suggest that it is a series of opportunities, rather than defined career pathways, that are increasingly being adopted by VET staff as a way of rationalising the ways in which different phases of their working life unfold in the sector (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.28)

It has been argued that career progression from teaching to management roles, particularly in TAFE institutes, has been disrupted by the rise of managerialism, which acts to separate teachers and managers (Black 2005; Rice 2003). This is particularly so for head teachers who are both teachers and frontline managers (Mulcahy 2003). In a small-scale study of head teachers, Black found that respondents saw a considerable divide between teaching and management. A rise to management positions was viewed as a step that often resulted in teachers 'forget[ing] who they were' and a cost that was almost universally shunned by participants in this study (Black 2005, p.7). While there may be a number of reasons for this observation, including the age of respondents, it is highly likely that the primary motivation that drives people into the VET sector in the first place is a passion for helping students learn (Black 2005, p.8; Chappell & Johnston 2003, p.22; Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p.66).

Current and future pathways within VET tend to be shaped by the various strategies adopted by organisations to deal with the issue of sustaining the skills base, particularly in TAFE institutes where the ageing of the workforce is most acute. Training and recruitment strategies selected to deal with this issue, such as recruiting people with recent industry experience to teaching roles and/or providing options for people to extend their working lives beyond retirement age, have the potential to both open up and close off potential career options.

Relationships with industry

'Best practice' in industry, rather than professional standards, forms the benchmark for VET teachers' and trainers' work (Mulcahy & Jasman 2004). This privileging of industry experience over teaching skills requires that teachers and trainers maintain vocational competency as expressed in the Australian Quality Training Framework standards, under which registered training organisations must operate. Maintenance of vocational competency rests upon a continuing relationship within an industry through a variety of mechanisms such as formal partnerships, working with industry in the delivery of training and assessment in the workplace, networking (both formal and informal) and membership of professional associations (Clayton, Fisher & Hughes 2005, p.26). In other words, a career in teaching and learning partly requires maintaining credibility and linkages with an industry that the teacher or trainer is perceived to have 'left' in order to take up a new role. This is particularly the case for teachers and trainers who move into a position within an educational institution.

For others who remain within an industry and take up a training role as part of their broader work role, their careers may not lie in VET but rather in the industry of which they are a part. Affiliation with VET as a career pathway may not even be recognised or desired. The uptake of roles related to education and training may be a pathway to a career in another occupation.

Qualifications and professional development

Educational qualifications play a significant role in the working lives of VET teachers and trainers. While the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (and its predecessors) has established a baseline qualification for teachers and trainers in the sector, teaching and training staff hold a wide range of qualifications (Harris et al. 2001). These qualifications are more likely to be in their area of industry specialisation (Dickie et al. 2004, p.97). In the TAFE sector, staff involved in teaching and training are more likely than other groups of VET staff to hold post-school qualifications (NCVER 2004a, p.34). VET professionals working outside TAFE are more likely to hold bachelor or postgraduate qualifications (NCVER 2004, p.34). Most VET teaching staff, however, do not hold specific qualifications in the field of education or training (NCVER 2004b, p.34). For these staff, the acquisition of qualifications often occurs on the job and sometimes after securing employment in the sector (Mulcahy & Jasman 2003). This is particularly the case for staff commencing employment in public sector organisations such as TAFE institutes (Bierbaum & Karthigesu 2003). Maintenance of employment in the sector is often linked to the attainment of such qualifications, which have often been gained at an individual's own expense and outside their work commitments (Harris et al. 2001).

Workforce development or professional development has been a particular focus for the VET sector for a number of years, particularly through national initiatives such as Reframing the Future and the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Dickie et al. 2004, p.25). These programs have largely focused on meeting systemic and organisational demands for compliance rather than on the needs of individuals as professionals (Harris et al. 2001, pp.59–60). These levels of activity are not considered to be adequate (Schofield 2002, p.32) and have been largely directed to teaching staff—usually those in full-time roles—and leaders and managers. Staff from public providers have been more heavily involved in professional development activities than staff in the private VET sector (Henry, Smith & Ayre 2002, p.10; Young 2002, p.10). Reed and Reed (2003) in a study of non-teaching staff in Victorian TAFE institutes also noted that these staff have less access to professional development and that what was available was often difficult to access and not linked to obvious career pathways (unless staff desired to move into teaching)

From a career perspective, one of the significant issues for VET teaching/training staff is the lack of portability and transferability of VET-specific qualifications to other sectors of education—particularly schools. Given the ageing profile of staff within the sector and the likelihood of increased competition for staff, these qualification barriers may serve to limit career pathways for people within education (Dickie et al. 2004, p.100).

Conclusion

Understanding what a career means to an individual is complex and changing. This is particularly the case in a sector such as vocational education and training, which has undergone significant reforms in the past 18 years. Staff in this sector, no matter what their job role, are faced with the challenging task of navigating their careers in an environment where the organisations in which they work are being transformed. While there has been significant attention to the capacity of the sector (the numbers of staff needed in the future) and the capability of VET staff (the skill mix required), little attention has been paid to the quality of the working life of VET staff. Information on how individuals make sense of careers in this context can therefore be an important step in thinking through how the skill base of VET organisations might be sustained.

Research design and processes

Overview

In order to examine the questions that guided this study, a research process was devised which included three discrete parts. Firstly, a detailed examination of the literature was undertaken. This informed the design of a survey which was administered to a national sample of VET staff from public and private training providers. Teachers and trainers, general staff engaged in management and administrative roles and staff employed in roles that combine management and teaching were invited to participate in the survey. The data generated from the survey were analysed to extract information to address the key questions which framed the study. These data were supplemented by a brief telephone interview with 31 survey respondents.

Scope and coverage of the survey

The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of career pathways in the Australian VET workforce. The study was designed to collect quantitative data using a national survey of a selected sample of registered training organisations.

As noted previously, estimates of the size of the total VET workforce are difficult to make. For this reason, a purposive sampling process was used to select the organisations. The aim of this approach was to allow selection of 'information rich' sources that could directly support the objectives of the research (Barton et al. 1997). The national sample of registered training organisations was selected from the database held by the National Training Information Service and was designed to be as geographically diverse as possible (see tables 1 and 2). A total of 44 organisations (23 public and 21 private) accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

Table 1 Sample of public registered training organisations, by state and location

TAFE institutes	ACT	NSW	Qld	NT	WA	SA	Tas.	Vic.
Urban	1	4	3	1	1	1	1	3
Regional		1	2		2	1		2

Table 2 Sample of private registered training organisations, by state and organisational type

Private providers	ACT	NSW	Qld	NT	WA	SA	Tas.	Vic.
Community	1	1					1*	1
Enterprise		1	1*			1	1	
Industry	1		1		3	1		
Commercial	1	2		1*		1*		2*

Note: * Denotes regional/remote.

Design of the survey

Following a detailed analysis of the literature, a draft survey instrument was developed. The questionnaire was developed in several stages. Issues identified from the review of the national and international literature were used to inform the development of the open-ended questions to be used in five focus groups of VET workers. Participants in the focus groups were from a wide range of VET program areas and included educational managers, teachers/trainers/assessors and various classifications of general staff. Transcripts of the discussions from the groups were analysed and the results then used to inform the construction and content of an initial draft questionnaire. This draft was further developed and then refined during a workshop at a state training forum of VET staff. Following consideration of responses from this source, a revised draft was then tested with six VET staff, using cognitive interviewing techniques (Willis 2004). This final step served to assist in fine-tuning the content and constructing questions. (Full details of the development process and the final survey instrument can be found in appendices A and B of the support document, which can be accessed from the NCVER website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2114.html>.)

The final survey instrument consisted of 58 questions divided into nine sections. These sections included questions designed to collect:

- ✧ background demographic details (for example, age, gender, length of time in the workforce/the VET workforce)
- ✧ details of the first and current positions in the VET sector
- ✧ data on the number of changes in job role/functions experienced in the respondents' VET working lives
- ✧ details of engagement in performance management and professional development
- ✧ respondents' plans for their working lives in the VET sector over the next five years
- ✧ respondents' reflections on their understanding of the concept of career and how they viewed their working lives in the VET sector as careers
- ✧ details of the factors that have influenced career decision-making.

Data collection and analysis

Following ethics approval from the University of South Australia and TAFE NSW, invitations were extended to the selected TAFE institutes and private providers. The chief executive officer/general manager of each organisation was contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study. The phone call was followed by a written invitation explaining the study in detail. A critical component of the recruitment process was to request this senior manager to designate a liaison person who could assist the researchers in identifying program areas for the distribution of questionnaires and also encouraging completion of questionnaires within their organisations. An honorarium of $300 was offered to each organisation as a contribution towards the cost of the time of the liaison person.

Once identified, the liaison person worked with the researchers to scope the workforce of their organisation and to identify the program areas from which staff would be invited to participate in the study. Questionnaire packages were posted to the liaison person in each organisation; this person distributed the questionnaires to educational managers, teachers and general staff in the designated program areas. Data collection occurred over a five-month period, from August to December 2006. Using this process 1150 questionnaires were distributed to the 43 organisations. A total of 1095 responses were received (955 paper-based and 140 online).

Description of respondents

Participants in the study were working in a range of program areas within 44 (public and private) registered training organisations. Almost two-thirds were female and the majority (79%) were aged between 35 and 60 years (appendix C of the support document, tables 1 and 2).

The amount of time respondents had spent in the *VET* workforce ranged from less than one year to 43 years, with a mean of 11.25 years. Over half (55%) of the respondents had been in the VET workforce for ten years or less, and 71% had been employed in the sector for 15 years or less (appendix C, table 3).

By contrast, respondents had spent between one and 54 years in the *paid* workforce (the mean for the group was 25 years). While two-thirds (67%) of the respondents had been in the paid workforce for more than 20 years, only one-fifth (20%) had been in the VET workforce for more than 20 years. Approximately one-quarter (24%) had spent a fifth or less of their working lives in VET. These data underscore the well-established notion that, for many VET staff, employment in the sector can represent a significant career shift that may occur only after some years in another work role.

Equal proportions of respondents (37%) were currently employed as teachers/trainers or as general staff in VET providers. Twelve per cent of respondents were employed as educational managers. Eleven per cent of respondents were employed in positions that were a combination of either educational management and general staff roles, or teaching and general staff roles (appendix C, table 4).

At the time of the survey, 68% of respondents were employed in a permanent, ongoing role, although only 46% were employed full-time. Eighteen per cent were employed on a fixed-term contract and 3% on a sessional basis (appendix C, tables 5 and 6). Thirteen per cent reported that they were employed outside the sector as well as in their VET role.

The majority (77%) of respondents were currently employed in the TAFE sector; the other respondents were employed with a variety of providers, including community-based organisations (6%); industry (5%); enterprises (4%); commercial organisations (3%); and schools (1%). Four per cent of respondents were not sure of the type of registered training organisation or did not respond to the question (appendix C, table 7).

Respondents were drawn from a wide cross-section of program areas within their organisations (appendix C, table 8). The most frequented program areas were community services and health (14%), business and administration (14%), services to support teaching and learning (12%), information technology and communication services (8%) and student services (8%).

The qualifications held by respondents were concentrated at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels 6 and below (appendix C, table 9), with just over half (55%) holding certificates at levels I–IV.

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents (n = 639) had taken breaks from the paid workforce during their working lives. As would be anticipated, most of these respondents were female (79%). The most common reason for a break was parental leave (61%), with the next most common reasons being unemployment (23%) and study leave (23%) (appendix C, table 10).

Limitations

The findings of the study need to be interpreted in the light of difficulties in defining the scope of the VET workforce in the absence of any consolidated national data. Nevertheless, the survey was successful in capturing data from 1095 staff in 43 public and private VET organisations. And while

we have no data to confirm this, we can observe that the VET workforce is highly feminised. Thus the higher number of female respondents is not a surprise.

The results from the survey are also very dependent on the accuracy of information provided by respondents. For example, developing consistent descriptions of key terms and concepts in the instrument that would be understood across a range of organisations and jurisdictions was a challenge for the researchers. While every attempt was made to make the task of responding to the survey easier by extensive testing and piloting of the instrument and the provision of a glossary of key terms, the researchers acknowledge that this may still not have overcome variation in the way particular terms were understood and therefore reported by respondents.

Getting started in VET

In order to examine pathways into the VET sector, respondents were asked a series of questions relating to their initial employment in the sector. In this section, these data are used to clarify the pathways into the sector for the various groups of staff (teachers/trainers/assessors, general staff, educational managers) and the nature of the employment arrangements for these initial positions in VET. Four 'eras', defining respondents' date of entry into the VET sector, were adopted.

The employment in VET of a small number of staff who responded to the survey pre-dated the Kangan Report (Committee on Technical and Further Education in Australia 1974) and the establishment of TAFE as a recognised sector of the overall education system in Australia in 1975. However, the majority of respondents date their employment in the sector from approximately the time of the first wave of training reforms in the mid-1980s, with almost half commencing their employment in the VET sector during the period 1996–2006 (table 3).

Table 3 Commencement of employment in VET

Era when employment in VET sector commenced (n = 1077)	n	%
1964–1974	32	3
1975–1985	163	15
1986–1996	358	33
1997–2006	524	48

In the total group of respondents, four distinct groups of staff can be identified and these have been used as the basis for analysis of data on employment pathways into the sector. These groups are teachers/trainers/assessors (hereafter for convenience called 'teachers'), general staff, educational managers, and people holding positions that combined functions from these three groups.

Teachers

Five hundred and eighty respondents commenced their working lives in VET as teachers. Fifty seven per cent of this group were female and the vast majority (91%) were over 35 years of age at the time of the survey, with half aged 50 years or more (appendix C, table 11).

As in the total sample, most teachers had commenced employment in VET in the last 20 years (table 4).

Table 4 Time of entry into VET: Teachers

Era when employment in VET sector commenced (n = 589)	n	%
1964–1974	22	4
1975–1985	116	20
1986–1996	207	35
1997–2006	238	40
Missing	6	1
Total	**589**	**100**

For 36% of these teachers, their start in VET was in a sessional or hourly-paid capacity; 32% commenced in permanent, ongoing positions and 21% in fixed-term, contract roles. Six per cent reported that they had commenced employment in non-fixed term, contract roles. Forty-three per cent of these positions were full-time, with a further one-third (32%) in casual and 17% in part-time roles. Most respondents (72%) in this teacher group commenced their employment in TAFE (appendix C, table 12).

For a significant number of commencing teachers, entry into the VET sector did not appear to be a seamless transition from one employment position to another. As was expected, most teachers (77%) were employed in some capacity prior to entering the sector. Interestingly, as many as four in ten (41%) continued in some form of employment outside VET after they had commenced their work in the sector. This pathway appears to be a growing phenomenon, with nearly half (n = 117; 48%) of the teachers commencing in the period 1997–2006 reporting that they held another job role concurrently with their commencing VET role (appendix C, table 13). Moreover, half of the respondents (n = 83, 50%) who reported their primary work role was located *outside* VET entered the section between 1997 and 2006.

Further, 13% (n = 78) of teachers reported that they held more than one job in the sector when they commenced employment. Again, most of these respondents (41%) had commenced employment in the sector in the previous ten years (appendix C, table 14).

At the time of their appointment, teachers were employed across a wide range of program areas (table 5). There has been a significant proportion of appointments to areas of growth within the sector in the past nine years, particularly in community services and health, business and administrative services, and tourism and hospitality. Conversely, the number of appointments of new staff to some of the more traditional trades areas such as manufacturing, building and construction and automotive appear considerably smaller. Proportions appointed to multi-field education have also fallen away.

Table 5 Time of entry into VET: Teachers, by program areas in which they were employed

	1964–74 %	1975–85 %	1986–96 %	1997–2006 %
Business and administrative services	14		17	11
Building and construction	18	10	3	7
Community services and health	9	10	16	25
Cultural and recreational services	9	9	3	1
IT and communication services	5	4	9	8
Manufacturing	9	8	4	3
Corporate services			1	2
Multi-field education	23	14	16	3
Services supporting teaching and learning		5	3	3
Automotive	9	9	1	6
Economics, law and legal studies	9	3		1
Agriculture, horticulture and related areas		7	10	8
Tourism and hospitality		9	8	10
Transport and distribution		<1	1	2
Wholesale, retail and personal services		3	1	3
Library services			<1	<1
Human resource services		2	3	2
Science, veterinary science	9	3	7	4
Student services	5	<1	1	<1
Metals and engineering	5	11	6	4
Across a range of programs in the organisation	18	10	15	6
Across all program areas in the organisation		<1	1	1

Teachers held a wide range of qualifications at the time of their appointment (appendix C, table 15). Only 2% held no post-school qualifications; 42% held certificate I–IV level qualifications, while over one-third (35%) held a bachelor's degree.

General staff

General staff fill a wide range of roles in administration, student services, corporate services, and teaching and learning support. They provide a range of services to other staff within registered training organisations as well as to external clients, working alongside teaching staff in a variety of settings.

A total of 398 people who commenced their working lives in VET in a general staff position completed the survey. Three-quarters (76%) of this particular group were female. The largest proportion (43%) of general staff were aged between 35 and 49 years, while nearly one-third was over 50 years. The remaining quarter were aged 34 years or under (appendix C, table 16).

Over half of the general staff respondents had commenced work in the VET sector during the period 1997–2006 (table 6). The large majority (88%) commenced their employment in the VET sector in the period 1986–2006. The majority (81%) of general staff commenced work in the TAFE sector.

Table 6 Time of entry into VET: General staff

Era when employment in VET sector commenced	n	%
1964–1974	9	2
1975–1985	34	8
1986–1996	124	31
1997–2006	227	57
Missing	4	1
Total	**398**	**100**

Despite working in a common context with teachers, data on their entry into the VET sector suggest that general staff tend to take quite different pathways from those of their teaching colleagues. Forty-four per cent of general staff in the survey reported that they entered the VET workforce in a permanent, ongoing position. Just over one-third (35%) of general staff commenced employment in a fixed-term contract position, while sessional/hourly-paid positions represented the starting point in VET for only 2% of general staff. Interestingly, 5% of general staff commenced employment in the sector by way of an employment agency, while there were no teachers entering the sector via this route. Two-thirds (66%) of general staff entered the sector in full-time positions, 15% were employed in part-time roles and 15% were employed on a casual basis.

The employment in VET of a significant number (34%) of general staff was preceded by a period of unemployment. The vast majority (85%) of general staff reported that they worked only in the VET sector at the time of their entry into VET. Similarly, only 5% of general staff reported they held more than one position within the VET sector when they commenced employment.

General staff commenced work in VET across a range of program areas (table 7). These data reveal a significant influx of staff into institution-wide areas such as corporate services and services to support teaching and learning during the time when the TAFE sector was in its early development in the immediate post-Kangan era. These areas do not appear to be significant areas for new general staff in the latter years. Also, these early years witnessed an influx into business and administrative services and student services, which again have lessened in latter years.

Table 7 Time of entry into VET: General staff, by program areas in which they were employed

	1964–74 %	1975–85 %	1986–96 %	1997–2006 %
Business and administrative services	11	25	16	19
Building and construction			3	7
Community services and health		6	2	7
Cultural and recreational services			3	1
IT and communication services	22	3	6	8
Manufacturing			3	2
Corporate services		32	12	13
Multi-field education		3	2	<1
Services supporting teaching and learning		21	7	10
Automotive		3	2	3
Economics, law and legal studies				1
Agriculture, horticulture and related areas			2	8
Tourism and hospitality			2	4
Transport and distribution			2	10
Wholesale, retail and personal services			1	2
Library services	11	12	19	8
Human resource services		9	9	7
Science, veterinary science		6	2	3
Student services	11	18	17	10
Metals and engineering	22	0	10	2
Across a range of programs in the organisation	11	12	8	10
Across all program areas in the organisation	11	6	5	6

Commensurate with the diverse work roles they undertook, general staff held a wide range of qualifications when they entered VET (appendix C, table 17). Five per cent of staff held no post-school qualifications, 19% held qualifications at or below Year 10, and nearly one-half (46%) had completed Years 11 and 12. Twenty-eight per cent of general staff held certificate I–IV qualifications and 22% had completed a bachelor's degree.

Educational managers and combined manager–teacher roles

Few respondents reported that they entered the VET sector to take up a role as an educational manager—either as a stand-alone position (n = 22) or as part of a role which combined teaching with some form of management (n = 32). It appears far more common for people to commence in management roles from within the VET sector. (Movement into these roles is discussed further in the next section.)

Just over one-third (36%) of those who entered as educational managers were female, while males filled more than half of these positions (59%). The situation was reversed in job roles which combined management with teaching, where the proportion of males was slightly more than one-third (38%) and females were over half (56%) (appendix C, table 18). As with the teacher group, most were aged over 35 years at the time of the survey (appendix C, table 19).

Over three-quarters (77%) of those who entered VET as educational managers did so during the decade 1997–2006. The largest proportion of persons commencing in educational manager–teacher roles (47%) entered VET between 1997 and 2006, with almost another third (31%) entering VET in the period between 1986 and 1996 (appendix C, table 20).

Managers were employed across a range of different registered training organisations. Four in ten (41%) were employed in TAFE institutes, almost one-quarter (23%) were located in enterprise

training organisations, and 14% in industry organisations (appendix C, table 21). Forty-one per cent of entry-level appointments to combined teacher–educational manager roles were made in private registered training organisations (appendix C, table 22).

As might be expected, most educational managers (73%) were employed in permanent, ongoing roles; however, the corresponding figure for people in combined educational manager–teacher roles was only 47%. Most of this latter group were employed on a fixed-term contract (31%), with a few reporting that they were initially employed on a sessional or hourly-paid basis. Fixed-term contract employment was reported by 18% of commencing educational managers. Interestingly, small proportions of educational managers were either self-employed or taken on in a consultancy role (9%) and a small proportion of business owners (2%) reported their commencing role in VET as a teacher–manager.

Those who entered VET as dedicated educational managers were concentrated in a more narrow range of program areas than their counterparts, who also fulfilled an additional teaching function (appendix C, table 23). Both groups were also highly qualified, with nearly one-fifth of both groups (18% of educational managers and 16% of educational managers–teachers) holding higher degrees and almost one-half (46% of educational managers and 41% of educational managers–teachers) holding a bachelor's degree (appendix C, table 24).

Combined general staff–teacher roles

The survey also revealed the presence of a small group of VET staff who entered the sector to fill roles that combined general staff and teacher functions (n = 39). Most of these staff were female (74%) and entered the sector between 1986 and 1996 (28%) or in the last ten years (59%). Forty-one per cent were aged between 25 and 49 years at the time of the survey, and 39% were between 50 and 60 years of age.

Nearly one-half (46%) of this group commenced work in permanent full-time positions, with a further 18% employed on a full-time, fixed-term contract. Interestingly, 44% of these appointments were in private registered training organisations. This mirrors the employment of 41% of entrants who commenced work in private providers in roles that combined both teaching and management functions (compared with 44% of these types of entry-level appointments in TAFE). These figures indicate the desire of (and need for) private registered training organisations to employ staff with greater scope for multi-tasking as a better fit for their organisations, which are generally much smaller in scale and scope than TAFE institutes.

Entry-level employment for general staff–teachers appeared to be confined to a limited range of program areas in their organisations. While one-third (34%) of entrants were employed to work either across a range or in all programs in their organisation, most found employment in the areas of business and administrative services (15%), community services and health (26%), information technology and communication services (10%), services supporting learning and teaching (18%), tourism and hospitality (15%), library services (13%) and student services (13%) (appendix C, table 25). In keeping with these job roles, the qualifications held by these respondents at entry were diverse, covering the full range from Year 10 or less through to higher degrees (appendix C, table 26).

Moving around in VET and plans for the future

Having examined the pathways of the survey respondents into the VET sector, this section focuses on the experience of their employment as it unfolds over time.

Moves in the VET sector

Overall, employment in the VET sector appears to be characterised by a high level of movement between job roles by staff (table 8). Only 16% of all respondents reported that they had made no moves since gaining employment in the sector.

Table 8 Numbers of moves in the VET sector: All staff

Numbers of moves in VET	Frequency	%
No moves	177	16
1–2 moves	406	37
3–5 moves	341	31
6–10 moves	126	12
>10 moves	10	>1
No response	35	4
Total	**1095**	**100**

Most of the respondents who had made no moves were currently employed as teachers (n = 94) or general staff (n = 63) and had entered the sector in the period 1997–2006 (appendix C, table 27). A similar pattern was noted with other staff groups, suggesting that movement in the sector may, in part, be a product of time in the sector.

Staff employed in private training organisations recorded fewer moves during their employment (appendix C, table 28). Twenty-six per cent of staff reported they had made no moves (compared with 14% of staff employed in public organisations).

Once established in the sector, a number of respondents from all staff groups reported a tendency to move around within it (table 9). This movement within the sector had a number of outcomes for different groups of staff. For teachers, the most significant outcome covered changes to employment arrangements, as gauged from descriptions of their entry point and current modes of employment (table 10). This change in mode of employment from sessional and hourly-paid appointments to permanent, ongoing and full-time work was observed for respondents who had entered at almost any time since 1975, with the most significant 'conversion' to permanent positions occurring for the cohort of teachers who entered during the period 1985–96. Interestingly, the change to full-time positions for this cohort was not as significant as the change to a more permanent form of employment.

The one exception to this observed trend of shifts to permanent positions was the group of teachers who had been in the sector the longest (entering between 1964 and 1974). For this small group, the data suggest a shift, whereby current forms of employment are more part-time and, to a lesser extent, are more often fixed-term contracts, perhaps as a precursor to their leaving the paid workforce.

This movement also coincided with a reduction in the numbers of teachers who held concurrent work outside the sector. At entry, 41% of teachers and trainers held concurrent work; this had dropped to 21% at the time of the survey.

Table 9 Numbers of moves in the VET sector: Different groups of staff

	Teacher	Educational manager	General staff	Educational manager–teacher	General staff–teacher
0 moves	94	4	63	7	6
1 move	107	9	88	9	10
2 moves	77	15	62	14	8
3 moves	46	21	56	11	5
4 moves	32	22	48	10	6
5 moves	20	19	28	6	3
6 moves	13	12	23	3	0
7 moves	3	9	10	3	0
8 moves	6	2	8	2	0
9 moves	2	6	4	1	1
10 moves	1	9	3	2	0
11 moves	1	2	5	0	1
>12 moves	0	0	0	0	1
Not known	7	5	6	5	1
Total number of staff	**409**	**135**	**404**	**73**	**42**

The trend for general staff over time was not quite as clear, but the movement is generally in the direction of securing more permanent and ongoing work (table 11). Again the change to more permanent positions for general staff employed in the period 1986–96 is considerably higher than for staff entering at any other time. This mirrors the trend noted for teaching staff, with the attainment of permanent, ongoing roles being significantly higher for staff employed in the period 1986–1996.

For staff employed in combined roles, the trend appears to be similar, but the small numbers of respondents in this group mean that only tentative conclusions can he drawn (appendix C, table 29).

Changes to job roles was a further outcome of this movement around the sector (as gauged from the classification title for the position held on entry compared with that held for their current position). This type of outcome applied to only 28% of all respondents (n = 302), with the majority of these changes being experienced by those who commenced in teaching roles in the sector (table 12).

Table 10 Changes to modes of employment: Teachers, by era in which they were employed

	Teachers' entry position (%)	Teachers' current position (%)
Entered 1964–74		
Permanent ongoing	68	39
Fixed-term contract	5	8
Sessional/hourly-paid	18	8
Full-time	64	23
Part-time	5	31
Casual	23	8
Entered 1975–85		
Permanent ongoing	50	69
Fixed-term contract	12	14
Sessional/hourly-paid	28	4
Full-time	60	44
Part-time	18	6
Casual	17	4
Entered 1986–96		
Permanent ongoing	27	75
Fixed-term contract	21	11
Sessional/hourly-paid	42	4
Full-time	41	42
Part-time	15	16
Casual	41	6
Entered 1997–2006		
Permanent ongoing	23	48
Fixed-term contract	27	27
Sessional/hourly-paid	35	8
Full-time	35	31
Part-time	20	11
Casual	32	12

Table 11 Changes to modes of employment: General staff, by era in which they were employed

	General staff: Entry position (%)	General staff: Current position (%)
Entered 1964–74		
Permanent ongoing	89	75
Fixed-term contract	11	13
Sessional/hourly-paid	0	0
Full-time	89	38
Part-time	0	0
Casual	0	0
Entered 1975–85		
Permanent ongoing	74	85
Fixed-term contract	21	6
Sessional/hourly-paid	0	0
Full-time	74	87
Part-time	12	12
Casual	3	3
Entered 1986–96		
Permanent ongoing	44	91
Fixed-term contract	32	7
Sessional/hourly-paid	2	0
Full-time	62	46
Part-time	19	13
Casual	15	1
Entered 1997–2006		
Permanent ongoing	37	63
Fixed-term contract	40	28
Sessional/hourly-paid	1	1
Full-time	67	56
Part-time	15	10
Casual	16	3

Table 12 Changes from entry positions to current positions: Different groups of staff

	Numbers of staff (n = 302)	%
Teacher/trainer/assessor to …		
Educational manager	83	27
Combined educational manager–teacher	53	18
General staff	45	15
Combined general staff–teacher	15	5
Educational manager to …		
Combined educational manager–teacher	1	-
General staff	4	1
General staff to …		
Teacher	17	6
Combined general staff–teacher	14	5
Educational manager	15	5
Combined educational manager–teacher	6	2
Combined educational manager–teacher to …		
Teacher	6	2
Educational manager	11	4
Combined general staff–teacher	2	1
General staff	1	-
Combined general staff–teacher to …		
Teacher	10	3
General staff	8	3
Educational manager	8	3
Combined educational manager–teacher	3	1

Overall, only 13% (n = 52) of general staff reported different job titles. In 6% of cases, general staff moved into teaching, while a further 5% moved into roles that combined teaching and general staff functions. Another 7% of general staff reported moving into roles that were either educational management or a combination of educational management and teaching. These data suggest that an additional pathway into teaching in the VET sector lies through initial employment as a general staff member. Of the general staff who changed classifications, two-thirds (67%) were female and the majority (81%) had entered VET in the two decades from 1986 to 2006.

The patterns of moves of general staff in public and private registered training organisations showed some differences (although these differences must be treated with caution due to the low numbers of respondents from the private sector). Forty-nine per cent of general staff in public providers reported experiencing zero, one or two moves, while 84% of staff in private organisations reported these numbers of moves (appendix C, table 30). However, similar proportions of staff in both categories of organisations reported having made five to seven moves (16% in public and 13% in private organisations). The explanation for this observation is likely to be the small size of many private registered training organisations and the limited scope that exists in these organisations for moving in a work structure that is already considerably 'flat' and often characterised by different work structures.

For the teachers, most moves related to the attainment of a position that held some management function or to a general staff role, but only one-third of all respondents who entered the VET sector made these moves.

This movement around the sector was a feature of the interviews conducted to supplement the survey findings. Respondents repeatedly referred to the notion of the 'opportunities' that existed in the sector. Access to these opportunities appeared to rely on two factors—support from managers

and colleagues, and individuals being well connected to networks where information about these opportunities were often found:

> … Get into VET whatever way you can and there are opportunities available once you are in [and] part of the communication strategies … employment opportunities and professional development all happen inside … full-time, part-time—whatever level—and then from that point keep your eyes about the fence and not get buried down in the area you happen to work in. (Manager, female)

> It's about talking to people about your interests and what skills you have or need to develop. Looking for opportunities. (Senior training consultant, female)

> The nature of bosses (both positive and negative). They can help shape where you go and what they do with the support that they give you. (Teacher, female)

There was a sense that these opportunities were in some cases a product of circumstance, but also a product of deliberate actions, where respondents could point to ways associated with building a career in VET based on these opportunities, albeit that some of the information arising from the networks is 'informal' and 'happens underneath':

> Make opportunities; join committees, join groups, be in things and definitely look outside your own area wherever it might be but be a part of the broader networks both locally as well as statewide and nationally and to that in a very explicit and positive way … you are often amazed where the opportunities come from … from talking to someone … foster relationships as all different levels … there is a lot of stuff that happens underneath … a huge amount of informal stuff … it is the people you know and the people they know and it is really important to be a part of all that and to make the effort. (Manager, female)

> [You] need to actively look for opportunities because they are not going to float on past … take every opportunity [you] get even if it doesn't look like something [you] want. (Casual general staff, female)

While these very positive and excited comments reveal the potential that these opportunities may hold for some, for other respondents the landscape did not hold such potential; rather it was seen as a place where sideways movement was more possible that advancement—a situation that was also reflected strongly in the survey results:

> VET can provide very satisfactory work but may be limited in terms of advancement. I think there are opportunities for rotation and moving sideways … I have seen a lot of movement around the traps really. (Team leader, female)

Plans to leave the VET sector

In the total sample, 22% indicated that they were not planning to be in the VET workforce in five years time, and a further 19% were unsure of their plans at the time of the survey (appendix C, table 31). While one would expect those who have been employed the longest to be the most likely to be planning their exit from the sector in the next five years, this intention was also common for significant numbers of more recently employed staff (table 13). There was only a small difference between the proportion of staff in public and private training providers (57% and 50%, respectively) who reported they would be in VET in five years time (appendix C, table 32).

Table 13 Plans to be in the VET sector in five years time, by era of entry

	1964–74 % (n = 32)	1975–85 % (n = 164)	1986–96 % (n = 357)	1997–2006 % (n = 524)
Yes, I plan to be in VET in five years time	44	48	60	55
No, I am not planning to be in VET in five years time	41	37	20	18
I am unsure	13	12	17	23

Of staff employed in the period 1997–2006, 41% were either unsure or were planning not to be in the sector in five years time. This may be a product of the fact that people are not always young when they move into the sector. For many people, work in the VET sector represents a second career and they are therefore older when they commence this part of their working lives. However, analysis of data by age of respondents suggests that younger staff are also keeping their options open and planning to move on at some time in the future (table 14).

Table 14 Plans to be in the VET sector in five years time, by age group

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)
Less that 20 years of age	46	0	55
21–34 years	54	13	30
35–49 years	63	14	20
50–60 years of age	52	29	14
More than 60 years of age	25	59	16

The potential attrition across the various groups of staff is illustrated in table 15. The data indicate that between one-quarter and one-fifth of all staff across each of the different groups are planning to leave the sector in the next five years (with between 15% and 24% of the others expressing uncertainty).

Table 15 Plans to be in the VET sector in five years time, by current primary role in VET

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)
Teacher	59	22	16
Educational manager	55	23	19
General staff	53	21	24
Combined educational manager–teacher role	56	25	15
Combined general staff–teacher role	50	31	19

The loss of expertise from the sector was raised in some interviews, where people were asked to predict what might happen in the sector in the next three to five years. Issues raised included the importance of succession planning and knowledge management through this period of loss of experienced staff and creating the right conditions (including attractive working conditions and appropriate levels of remuneration) to attract people from industry. There is also a sense that potential recruits into the sector may need to be supported to develop different sets of expectations about the sorts of careers that will realistically be available in the future:

> There is no succession planning in place. That is vital if we are to keep on going ahead and training people … there is not a cohort of young people to come through as teachers in VET. I think we should be doing more to encourage that transition. (Teacher, male)

> The key issues for us are going to be really thinking about how we encourage younger people into teaching. I think we have to think about the conditions that we can offer them that suit their lifestyles and stages of life … flexible working conditions for families, which are all in now, but I think we are going to have to really think about who we can use … to attract people into our workforce. When we have got them here I don't know that we are necessarily going to have the opportunities for people to take steps up … So [we] need to think about how we can get people a whole range of experiences through sideways moves and so forth to eventually feel like they have had a good career in this organisation … I feel that despite the fact that there might not be as many promotional positions, they can still feel they can have a career and be able to move around and learn and experience new things. (Director, female)

Professional development and performance management in the working lives of VET staff

Professional development and performance management can serve as important tools to assist staff further their career aspirations. This section reports on the respondents' experiences and perceptions of these two tools.

Professional development

Professional development can take many forms, including training programs which lead to recognised credentials (formal professional development), training which does not lead to recognised qualifications (structured professional development) and learning opportunities which occur as part of work (informal professional development). Respondents were asked if they had undertaken these types of professional development in the past three years. Overall engagement with professional development was significant, although fewer staff had undertaken formal professional development. Sixty-four per cent reported having undertaken formal, 74% structured and 73% informal professional development.

Across the various groups of staff, there were differences in the percentages who had undertaken formal professional development in the past three years, particularly for general staff (table 16).

Table 16 Access to professional development: Different groups of staff (current classification)

Types of professional development	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Formal	68	55	73	73	69
Structured	74	74	82	73	74
Informal	72	70	84	82	69

These differences in taking up formal professional development were confirmed in the responses to a question about their actions in personally seeking out different types of professional development in the past three years. Only 49% of respondents currently employed in general staff positions had sought formal professional development in the past three years. This figure compares with 59% of teachers, 70% of educational managers, 63% of people in combined teacher–educational manager roles and 55% of people in combined general staff–teacher roles. Structured and informal professional development was personally sought by a higher percentage of educational managers (83%) than by any other group of staff; approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of teachers, general staff and those in combined roles had actively sought these opportunities in the past three years (appendix C, table 33).

This lack of attention to seeking out different forms of professional development can be partially explained by respondents' ratings of their opportunity to attend various forms of professional development in the past three years (table 17). Again, educational managers report greater opportunities to attend all forms of professional development than any other groups of staff. From

these data, participating in all forms of professional development, particularly more formal and informal opportunities, seemed to be most problematic for teachers (with the exception of those staff in roles which combined teaching and general staff roles) and is reflective of impediments to ongoing learning, a consequence of the way teachers' work might be organised.

Table 17 Opportunity to attend professional development: Different groups of staff

Types of professional development	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Formal					
Little or no opportunity	19	13	10	15	12
Some opportunity	34	33	33	45	19
Great deal of opportunity	31	27	42	23	52
Structured					
Little or no opportunity	11	8	3	15	100
Some opportunity	36	35	39	34	41
Great deal of opportunity	33	37	47	32	38
Informal					
Little or no opportunity	9	7	4	12	12
Some opportunity	35	29	27	26	24
Great deal of opportunity	34	40	56	47	43

Where staff accessed the various forms of professional development, all were deemed generally useful (appendix C, table 34). However, the helpfulness of professional development in assisting mobility within the VET sector was not as highly rated by all groups of staff (table 18). Teachers suggested that, while professional development helped them to maintain their positions in the VET sector, it seemed to be less helpful in assisting them to obtain or change positions. A similar trend is apparent in data for general staff. Staff in combined general staff–teacher roles reported that professional development had been helpful in assisting them to obtain and maintain positions, but less helpful in assisting change in their employment. By contrast, educational managers (most of whom had obtained their positions because of moves within the sector rather than entering into management positions) contended that professional development provided considerable help in maintaining and changing positions.

Table 18 Helpfulness of professional development in obtaining, maintaining and changing positions in VET: Different groups of staff

	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Helpfulness of professional development in *obtaining* positions in VET in past three years					
Very helpful	20	16	31	19	38
Helpful	22	27	23	20	17
Somewhat helpful	22	23	19	30	24
Not helpful	29	28	18	22	14
Helpfulness of professional development in *maintaining* positions in VET in past three years					
Very helpful	29	24	36	29	36
Helpful	31	34	30	29	26
Somewhat helpful	23	26	20	18	24
Not helpful	13	13	8	21	10
Helpfulness of professional development in *changing* positions in VET in past three years					
Very helpful	14	14	28	18	14
Helpful	19	22	21	15	24
Somewhat helpful	15	21	18	26	26
Not helpful	40	34	24	32	17

These different experiences with professional development in their working lives were also evident in respondents' ratings of their levels of satisfaction with access and quality of the professional development they had undertaken (table 19). Again, respondents occupying educational management positions expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with their experiences of professional development. Professional development appears to be somewhat problematic for people in teaching roles and roles that combined teaching and management. Larger proportions of both of these groups expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the encouragement they had received and the access they had to professional development. Levels of satisfaction with the quality of professional development they attended were also lower.

Table 19 Satisfaction with access, quality and encouragement to attend professional development undertaken in the past three years: Different groups of staff

	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Level of satisfaction with *access* to professional development					
Very satisfied	20	29	40	25	41
Satisfied	33	33	27	23	33
Somewhat satisfied	20	14	11	21	7
Not satisfied	11	9	6	14	10
Level of satisfaction with *quality* of professional development					
Very satisfied	17	21	24	11	24
Satisfied	39	41	50	49	43
Somewhat satisfied	27	25	17	25	21
Not satisfied	13	9	5	12	2
Level of satisfaction with *encouragement* to attend professional development					
Very satisfied	17	30	39	19	31
Satisfied	32	33	28	40	31
Somewhat satisfied	23	17	15	18	12
Not satisfied	13	9	7	16	7

Despite the high level of activity associated with professional development across all groups of staff in the sector, significant proportions of staff reported that they did not have a current professional development plan established with their line manager (table 20). Significantly, the proportion of staff employed in public registered training organisations who had a professional development plan with their manager (54%) was considerably higher than for their counterparts employed in private training organisations (39%) (appendix C, table 35).

Table 20 Current professional development plan in place with their manager: Different groups of staff

	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	48	51	58	53	55
No	44	42	38	41	36
Unsure	4	5	<1	3	5

Interview respondents reiterated the importance of professional development as one of the most useful strategies that helped them with their career development. Professional development was seen as away of 'trying to stay at the forefront of want is happening'. While most comments suggested that any form of professional development was useful, a small number of respondents emphasised the attainment of formal qualifications as being particularly important. However, the most significant feature of the strategies that supported career development was their experiential nature.

Networking was an important strategy that helped with career development—particularly for those respondents who had attained management roles. This networking was conducted both within and outside respondents' current employer and sometimes included affiliation with professional

associations (for example, the Australian Institute of Management). Networking with industry and maintaining industry contacts were emphasised by teachers and trainers, particularly those employed in casual positions, where it was thought that these contacts could advantage staff seeking continuing work.

Job rotation and the opportunity to act in higher positions were also mentioned as making a useful contribution to career development. These types of opportunities were considered valuable because they enabled staff to 'demonstrate [their] worthiness for a permanent position'. However, opportunities to participate in these strategies was often viewed as problematic. Managers played a strong 'gate keeping role', with one respondent observing that 'every one I have applied for has been initially denied because they did not want to lose me'.

Performance appraisal

The data from the study indicate that, in contrast to professional development, performance appraisal was a more problematic process for staff across the VET sector. While almost three-quarters of all staff in the sector reported that they had participated in performance appraisal at some time during their employment, different groups of staff had varying levels of exposure to this process (table 21). These data suggest that respondents employed in management roles are more likely to have been exposed to performance appraisal processes than other groups of staff.

Table 21 Performance appraisal during employment in VET: Different groups of staff

	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	69	71	83	82	69
No	26	26	11	12	31
Unsure	2	1	2	3	0

Where staff had been engaged in performance appraisal, this mostly occurred on a six-monthly or annual basis (appendix C, table 36) and was usually conducted by their manager. However, levels of satisfaction with the quality of performance appraisal over the past three years were only moderate, and this was consistent across the different groups of staff (table 22). Marked differences in levels of satisfaction with the quality of performance appraisal were noted between respondents from public and private registered training organisations. Over half (58%) of respondents currently employed in private registered training organisations reported being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the quality of their performance appraisal, compared with just over one-third (38%) of respondents employed in public registered training organisations (appendix C, table 37).

Table 22 Levels of satisfaction with quality of performance appraisal: Different groups of staff

	Teachers (n = 409)	General staff (n = 404)	Educational managers (n = 135)	Combined teacher–educational manager role (n = 73)	Combined teacher–general staff role (n = 42)
	%	%	%	%	%
Very satisfied	10	13	12	11	21
Satisfied	29	29	33	30	29
Somewhat satisfied	19	19	23	29	12
Not satisfied	14	12	17	16	7

Thinking about careers in VET

This section of the report focuses on how VET staff think about the concept of 'career' and their views of their working lives in the sector as careers. In the first instance, respondents were asked to reflect on the meaning of the term 'career'. This perspective represents their 'theoretical' or 'ideal' view of the concept. They were then asked to consider if they believed their working lives in VET could be considered a career and their satisfaction with this assessment of their working lives. Further questions sought to elicit descriptions of their careers in VET and the factors that have affected their decisions about their careers.

Objective and subjective views on career

In order to determine the 'theoretical' views of respondents on career, a coding frame was derived from the career theory literature. Using this as a guide, responses from the open-ended statement, 'What does the term 'career' mean to you?', were categorised as representing objective and subjective understandings of the term.

Examples of objective understandings of career reflected 'traditional' views of career, where respondents referred to objective conditions that constitute a career. For example, careers are viewed as 'pathways' or 'routes' which exist within organisational or occupational hierarchies. These pathways are perceived to exist outside the person, and following them would lead to a range of outcomes, including progression and promotion. Examples of such understandings of career from respondents included:

> Career means to me vocational progression through different vocational types of employment/organisations or increased levels. (Educational manager, female)
>
> A full-time position with the opportunity of movement through the system. (Teacher, male)
>
> An opportunity for advancement and to enable me to financially support my wife and family. (General staff, male)
>
> Working in an area that you are professionally qualified in and with opportunities for advancement. (General staff, female)

Subjective understandings of career reflect an internal focus and show a strong emphasis on concepts such as 'learning', 'enjoyment', 'change' and 'personal development'. Statements that reflect this understanding of career included:

> A job which I both enjoy and retain and feel is worthwhile to others—a long-term commitment. (Teacher, female)
>
> A role that is challenging enough to encourage continual lifelong learning. Growth. (General staff, male)
>
> It means a lifelong learning experience in an area that I love to work. (General staff, female)
>
> Meaningful work—where I get to make a difference—work that challenges my intellect and becomes part of who I am in a positive and uplifting way. (Educational manager, female)

As predicted in the literature, some respondents provided understandings of career that reflected a combination of subjective and objective understandings, such as the following:

> Progression within the organisation … that allows individual growth and satisfaction. (Combined teacher–general staff, male)

> To be employed in a job that gives job satisfaction and to work in an industry that allows you to move through the organisation or stay in the position you enjoy. (General staff, female)

> Lifelong learning, fulfilment, advancement. (Teacher, female)

Of the 774 responses, 41% were classified as expressing 'objective' understandings of career, 24% were coded as 'subjective' and the remaining 35% labelled as a combination of subjective and objective understandings. Larger proportions of general staff and those respondents in a combined general staff–teacher role expressed ideas about careers that were more objective in orientation. There was, however, no statistically significant relationship between perceptions of career and current job role. There was a relationship between gender and conceptions of career, with more female respondents expressing subjective notions of career (table 23). There was also no significant relationship between the notions of career held by VET staff and the time they entered the VET sector and whether they commenced their careers in a public or private registered training organisation (appendix C, tables 38 and 39).

Table 23 Perception of career, by gender

	Female %	Male %
Objective	27	33
Subjective	19	12
Objective/subjective	27	21
Not able to classify	11	19
No response	16	15
Total	**100**	**100**

Descriptions of careers in VET

Respondents were asked to select five words or phrases from a list (appendix C, table 40) that best describe their experience of their work history/career in VET. Unlike the question on their personal understandings of the concept of career, this question focused on a judgement about their experiences in the VET workforce.

The response most selected was 'rewarding' (42% of all respondents), followed by enjoyment (41%), interesting (36%), development (32%), multifaceted (30%), frustrating (29%), satisfying (28%), stimulating (27%), diverse (24%), changeable (20%) and change of direction (18%). The top ten most frequently used descriptive words/phrases contained words related to three of the major themes identified by Walton and Mallon (2002): enjoyment, development and changeable. Significantly, the concept of 'moving upwards' was selected by only a small percentage of respondents (5%). Even smaller numbers of respondents (less than 2%) selected words which embodied problematic notions of careers (for example, impossible, unimportant); however, notions that careers in the VET sector were straightforward and easy to manage were supported only by small proportions of respondents (3% and 7%, respectively).

It is interesting to note that most words/phrases were used consistently across the different groups of staff (table 24). However, one-third of the teachers described their careers as frustrating, whereas only just over a quarter of general staff (27%) gave this response. In addition, the term 'advancement' was used by more respondents in general staff roles (21%) than those in teaching roles (13%).

Table 24 Perception of career by current job role: Different groups of staff, by top five responses

Rank	Teacher	General staff	Educational manager	Combined educational manager–teacher	Combined general staff–teacher
1	Enjoyment	Enjoyment	Rewarding	Multifaceted, Frustrating*	Enjoyment
2	Rewarding	Interesting	Stimulating	Rewarding	Rewarding, Interesting*
3	Interesting	Rewarding	Multifaceted	Development	Diverse
4	Frustrating	Development	Enjoyment	Complex, Diverse, Changeable*	Development, Multifaceted*
5	Development	Satisfying	Interesting		

Note: * These responses were ranked equally

Interview respondents were able to provide a richer picture of the most fulfilling aspects and distinguishing features of careers in VET. Some of the strongest themes from these comments related to the opportunity to work with students, to engage in an occupation where it is possible to make a difference, to be of service to the industry and to be a part of change:

> This does not feel like a job … I would do this job even if I was not paid … I am grateful to be part of something that is actually changing things. I am really someone that is driven by the activity, the need, by the feedback and also by the evidence of the changes that are happening, I am feeling I am part of that. (Manager, female)

> I love my job and that's why I am here. I can make a difference to people's lives. (Head, student services, public training provider, female)

> [The most fulfilling aspects are] seeing students succeed. Mentoring them and helping them with their businesses. (Part-time teacher, female)

> The challenges: the VET sector is full of change and I love change. I cope well with change and when the change goes through and people start to implement and it starts to get comfortable I get bored and that is when I move on. (Teacher, female)

Dedication and commitment to the occupation of teaching (in contrast to other career options) was also a fulfilling aspect of a career in the sector:

> I want to teach. I don't want to do all the other rubbish; I enjoy the teaching and find it rewarding. (Teacher, female)

Another key feature of careers in VET is its 'stepping stone' nature, where it is possible to focus on 'building a portfolio of experience'. Here again the notion of a working life that has the potential to offer 'opportunities' was a strong theme:

> The opportunity to do lots of different things … There always have been lots of opportunities presented to me and I have been able to grab them and really enjoyed it. So it's about the opportunity to move around and try different things and get lots of different experiences. (College director, female)

Some respondents also valued their working lives in VET as careers for the quality of working life that it offered them:

> [The distinguishing features that define my working life in VET as a career are] the challenge, satisfaction and celebration of working with a team … working towards goals and actually achieving them, by having fun along the way, meeting people along the way, enhancing your life. (Senior consultant, female)

Perceptions of career in the VET workforce

Respondents generally believed that they had had a career in VET, with two-thirds agreeing with the assertion that they could identify their work history in VET as a career (appendix C, table 41). There was a significant relationship between views about whether staff saw themselves as having a career in the VET sector and the era in which they entered the VET workforce ($\chi 2$ (6) = 36.74, $\rho < 0.001$) and the age of respondents ($\chi 2$ (8) =16.35, $\rho < 0.05$) (appendix C, tables 42 and 43). Respondents who had been in the sector the longest and those who were older expressed greater agreement with the idea of viewing their working lives in VET as careers. These relationships are consistent with the notion that longevity may be an important factor in assessment of a career. They may also reflect changes in institutional cultures, as well as the impact of different employment practices (as reflected in the modes of employment offered to staff) that might have been more or less prevalent at different points in time.

Across the different groups of staff, more staff in management positions agreed with the assertion that their working lives in VET could be viewed as careers (table 25). This is not surprising, given that most of the respondents employed in management roles had achieved these positions because of their movements within the sector, perhaps combined with access to and the support of significant professional development and performance appraisal opportunities.

Table 25 Identification of working life in VET as a career, by current job role

	Teacher	General staff	Educational manager	Combined educational manager–teacher	Combined general staff–teacher
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes, I can identify working life in VET as a career	64	63	84	78	50
No, I cannot identify working life in VET as a career	24	21	7	8	38
I am unsure	9	11	4	8	10

Ratings of satisfaction with work history/career in the VET workforce

Respondents generally expressed high levels of satisfaction with their working history/career in the VET workforce (table 26).

Table 26 Satisfaction with career in VET

	Frequency	%
Very satisfied	315	30
Satisfied	460	44
Somewhat satisfied	213	21
Not satisfied	51	5
Total	**1039**	**100**

There was no significant relationship found between levels of satisfaction and gender, age group or the era in which respondents entered the VET sector. There was, however, a relationship between level of satisfaction and the type of position currently held in the VET sector ($\chi 2$ (12) = 23.64, $\rho < 0.05$), with educational managers reporting higher levels of satisfaction and teachers lower levels (table 27).

Table 27 Satisfaction with career in VET, by current job role

Type of position	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Somewhat satisfied		Not satisfied	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Teacher	103	25	180	44	86	21	24	6
Educational manager	58	43	44	33	23	17	4	3
General staff	114	28	173	43	82	20	16	4
Educational manager–teacher	17	23	37	51	9	12	5	7
General staff–teacher	13	31	18	43	10	24	1	2

Factors affecting decision-making about careers

The choices that individuals make about their working lives are complex and can be shaped by a range of factors. Some of these relate to the nature of the occupation (for example, the need for certain qualifications as a prerequisite for advancement); others relate to the work environment or more personal attributes such as ambition or the desire to achieve a balance between work and family life. In order to gain insight into the factors that are important to VET staff when making decisions about their working lives, respondents were presented with a list of factors and asked to rank these in order of most importance to them. Table 28 provides lists of the top 15 factors (in order of importance) for the various groups of staff (The full list of factors and their rankings can be found in appendix C, table 44 in the support document.)

These lists are notable for two reasons. There are some remarkably similar drivers across all groups of staff, the most important being job satisfaction and confidence/self-esteem. Support from colleagues and managers as drivers affecting decision-making vary widely across the four groups of staff, with the influence of these two groups reported to be more important for teachers and general staff than for the other groups.

Qualifications appear to act as an influencing factor differently across the four groups, with these being a far stronger driver for teachers than any other group. This is in keeping with the requirements for particular qualifications embedded in training packages and the desirability of university-level qualifications.

There are differences in rankings for people in educational manager and combined roles compared with the single work roles of teachers and general staff. Those in combined roles ranked their desire for permanent and ongoing work and the availability of promotional positions higher than did the other groups. This suggests that these combined roles are being viewed as a necessary part of the planned career trajectory for these staff. Similarly, for staff who have attained roles as managers, the desire to cement their work role via permanent, ongoing and full-time work is indicative of a career trajectory that has grown out of movement from teaching roles within the organisation.

The lists are remarkable for the apparently low influence of factors such as the availability of career guidance and government policies and priorities on the decisions made by VET staff about their careers. They indicate that decisions about career are driven primarily by personal factors and secondarily by factors that relate to the quality of working life (such as availability of support, type of work available and need for work–life balance). Factors such as those external to the organisation or the availability of any defined strategies which might promote career mobility (such as opportunities to retrain, undertake project work, job rotations) or organisational restructuring do not appear to feature highly in respondents' decision-making about their careers.

Table 28 Ranking of the top 15 factors affecting decision-making about careers: Different groups of staff

Rank	Teacher	General staff	Educational manager	Combined educational manager–teacher	Combined general staff–teacher
1	Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction
2	Confidence/ self-esteem	Support from colleagues	Confidence/ self-esteem	Confidence/ self-esteem	Confidence/ self-esteem
3	Support from colleagues	Confidence/ self-esteem	Availability of permanent ongoing work	Family responsibilities, Availability of permanent ongoing work*	Availability of permanent ongoing work
4	Qualifications required	Support from managers	Personal ambition, Support from family/kin, Availability of full-time work*	Availability of full-time work, Support from family/kin*	Support from family/kin
5	Personal ambition	Work–life balance	Support from colleagues	Work–life balance	Support from managers
6	Family responsibilities	Availability of permanent ongoing work	Job security	Life stage/age, Availability of promotional positions*	Availability of promotional positions
7	Support from managers	Financial responsibilities	Family responsibilities	Qualifications required	Job security
8	Work–life balance	Personal ambition	Support from managers	Personal ambition, Financial responsibilities, Job security*	Support from colleagues
9	Support from family/kin group	Support from family/kin group	Work–life balance, Financial responsibilities, Opportunity to experience project work*	Opportunity to experience project work	Work–life balance
10	Life stage	Job security	Availability of promotional positions	Work load issues	Personal ambition, Availability of full-time work, Geographic location/relocation*
11	Availability of permanent/ ongoing work	Life stage	Qualifications required	Support from colleagues	Family responsibilities
12	Financial responsibilities	Family responsibilities	Life stage/age	Geographic location/relocation	Qualifications required
13	Workload issues	Qualifications required	Organisational restructuring	Changing career/life goals	Life stage/age
14	Job security	Workload issues	Work load issues	Recognition of potential career pathways	Work load issues, Opportunity to experience project work*
15	Changing career/life goals	Availability of full-time work	Changing career/life goals	Support from managers	Financial responsibilities, Changing career/life goals*

Note: * These factors were ranked equally.

Conclusions

The VET sector provides an interesting context for the study of careers and career pathways. The picture painted from this survey of VET staff is one of a sector that offers a diversity of career pathways that are characterised by both individual and institutional considerations. These institutional influences include not only employers but also colleagues, as well as family and kin networks. While organisational characteristics, perhaps best exemplified by the public–private divide, are significant, data from this research illustrate that career pathways in both these components of the VET sector do unfold in similar (although not identical) ways. What is more significant is the illustration of the ways in which different career pathways unfold for staff employed in various occupations across the sector. This suggests that the occupational roles embedded in particular organisational contexts play a key role in shaping potential career pathways for VET staff.

Pathways into and mobility in the sector

Industry and/or previous experience in the workforce provide the foundation for a career as a teacher in the VET sector. For many teachers, their 'departure' from industry into a VET organisation is at a later stage in life and more gradual, with many retaining a foothold in their occupation at the time of entry to VET. This is necessary, as their pathway into the VET sector is heavily weighted in favour of commencing positions that are either part-time or casual in nature. In contrast, general staff commencing in the sector are often younger and beginning in the paid workforce, and the starting point for these staff is usually through a permanent full-time appointment.

Based on data from respondents in the survey, a career pathway into management roles is a more recent phenomenon. Most of the commencements in these roles occurred with the advent of the first wave of training reforms in the late 1980s, arguably arising out of the emerging need for institutional responses to the accountability frameworks that are now significant features of the VET sector. However, entry into management roles from outside the sector does not appear to be common, particularly in public registered training organisations. In this case, there is a preference for staff who have developed knowledge and skills from within the organisation.

Most of the direct appointments to management roles occurred in private training organisations, including appointments to combined manager–teacher roles. Similarly, appointments to combined general staff–teacher roles appeared to be more frequent in private training organisations. These observations suggest the development of alternative career pathways within these organisations that are often smaller in scale and scope than their public counterparts and where there is great potential for combining roles in ways that best fit with the business of the organisation.

Once established in the sector, staff showed a strong propensity for moving between job roles, although staff in private training organisations appeared to have less opportunity to do so. This movement had two outcomes—the securing of more permanent/ongoing work and, to a much lesser extent, the changing of job roles. This movement was particularly notable for teachers and resulted in a number obtaining more permanent and/or ongoing employment in the sector. For a small number of respondents, beginning in the sector in a general staff role provided the foundation for movement into a teaching role. Significantly, the survey data also revealed the

movement of longer-serving teachers into part-time and contract roles. This is indicative of an emerging career pathway and reflects the desire of older workers for gradual disengagement from the full-time workforce.

Movement into management positions was largely the domain of people who had commenced work in the sector in a teaching role, but the number of respondents who reported changes to job roles (as gauged from the classification title for the position held on entry compared with the position held at the time of the survey) was relatively small. This suggests that career pathways more traditionally associated with movement into new job roles (such as those from teaching into management) are less common than movement into job roles that reflect expanded ideas of the work that a teacher or person in a general staff role might be expected to undertake in a contemporary VET organisation.

Two explanations can be offered for these observed patterns of mobility. On the one hand, the apparent willingness to move amongst various job roles may indicate an orientation to a working life that is not limited by ideas about what the work of a particular role entails. In other words, staff in VET have developed, or absorbed, the requirement for a 'protean' orientation to their work, where job roles are seen as stepping stones rather than as bounded entities (Arthur 1994). For those in teaching roles in particular, this is not remarkable, since most have made a significant career change as part of their decision to leave employment in industry and move into the VET sector. What is notable, however, is that this orientation seems to have pervaded all parts of the VET sector and resulted in significant self-directed career behaviour (Briscoe 2006), which gives rise to a fluid labour force, where the development of 'career capital' is largely the responsibility of the individual employee (Inkson & Arthur, cited in Pringle & Mallon 2003, p.487). This capital is manifest in mobility, which becomes a key mechanism for securing the job satisfaction that was considered such an important part of career decision-making for so many staff in the sector.

On the other hand, the high level of mobility of VET staff (particularly teaching staff) can be viewed as a strategy to cope with working lives that no longer offer the desired job security and career pathways. Progression is measured by the uptake of 'opportunities' for moving around the organisation, not to attain promotions to other job roles, but rather to secure employment that is less precarious. In this scenario, the institutional contexts developed by employers have required VET staff to improvise and find ways to achieve the types of working lives that deliver the job satisfaction and quality work they are seeking. Traditional career pathways in the form of promotions have been largely replaced by different forms of pathways that rely heavily on individual self-confidence and drive, as well as on the overt support of managers and colleagues, and this enables the secondments and the back-filling of job roles that allow staff to take up opportunities afforded to them.

Details of plans for leaving the sector reveal that significant numbers of staff (particularly those employed during the past ten years) are expecting to leave the sector within five years. While this is naturally reflective of the relatively older age profile of the VET workforce, it is also characteristic of younger groups of staff and may reflect the reportedly different expectations and desires of younger generations of workers who are more ready to move around to find the type of employment they desire.

Professional development and performance appraisal

In a workforce characterised by high mobility and self-directed career behaviour, utilisation of activities such as professional development and performance appraisal could be expected to be high. The study illustrates that large numbers of VET staff participated in formal, structured and informal professional development in the preceding three years, although teachers and general staff reported less access to formal professional development than did their managers. While these experiences were considered useful, they did not appear to provide great assistance to staff wishing to change their employment within the sector. This is particularly the case for teachers. This finding

provides support for previous studies that emphasised the mandated and organisational focus of much professional development activity in the sector at the expense of experiences that might support teacher career development (Harris et al. 2001). In addition, teachers seemed to receive less access to professional development or encouragement to take up opportunities offered to them than other groups of staff. This suggests that management expects greater self-directed behaviour on the part of teachers to develop their own careers, an assumption that also supports a tendency for organisations—particularly public training providers—to mandate lower levels of qualifications for their teachers than they might have in the past.

One of the outstanding features of the study can be found in the circumstances of staff who had obtained management positions in the VET sector. For this small group of staff who had moved into management roles from other job roles within their organisations, the system of professional development seemed to have served them well. More managers personally sought professional development and a significant proportion had undertaken formal professional development in the previous three years. This group also reported that they had greater opportunity to attend all forms of professional development than other groups of staff and this professional development appeared to have helped them to change and maintain their positions in the workforce.

These circumstances stand in stark contrast to the reports of teachers who indicated that they had less opportunity to attend both formal and informal types of professional development, relative to their managerial counterparts. This may be due to the nature of work undertaken by teachers as not being as learning-conducive (Chappell & Hawke 2008) as that of their management colleagues. Also significant is the finding that general staff found professional development less helpful in assisting them to change positions in the VET sector. This finding assumes greater importance when considered in the light of the younger age of this group of staff and their higher levels of expressed intentions to leave the VET sector within five years.

In this study, performance appraisal stood out as a problematic process for many staff, except for those in management roles. Levels of satisfaction with the process were low for teaching and general staff. Significantly, staff employed in public providers expressed lower levels of satisfaction with their performance appraisal than did their colleagues employed in private training organisations. These circumstances point to the potentially lost opportunities to work with staff to support them in their career aspirations.

Careers in the VET sector

Like respondents from the study conducted by Walton and Mallon in New Zealand (2004), VET staff understand the notion of 'career' in a number of different ways. Despite considerable changes to the work of VET staff, many still hold objective views of career that reflect ideas of careers progression, pathways and hierarchies within organisations. There is also evidence that people understand careers in ways that are more subjective. Career also means learning, personal development, growth and participation in work for satisfaction and enjoyment. However, these data also suggest that, for some respondents, these subjective factors are not seen as valuable in their own right. There were a number of instances where comments about career were linked to notions of particular types of work and employment arrangements, progression and promotion, as well as to ideas of lifelong learning, personal development and growth.

While many respondents hold 'traditional' views on careers, these co-exist with their experiences of working in contemporary settings that provide a satisfying career for most of the respondents. The survey data suggest that VET staff, instead of viewing their careers as being 'boundaryless', are seeking to *redefine* their understanding of career, where concepts such as 'satisfaction' , 'permanent' and 'ongoing employment' and the potential for work–life balance are the *new* boundaries—rather than 'progression' and 'promotion' within an organisational hierarchy. Respondents' decisions about their careers were more often driven by internal considerations such as job satisfaction,

support from colleagues and their own self-esteem and confidence, than workload issues and availability of full-time work.

Implications

While it is not possible to generalise the findings of this study to all VET staff, the study does point to two key implications worthy of consideration. First, this study offers support for the caution issued by Walton and Mallon (2004) about the dangers of the wholesale adoption of the rhetoric attached to 'new careers'. While it might be enticing for VET organisations to ascribe to concepts like the boundaryless career as a justification for adopting (or discarding) particular human resource strategies, they need also to bear in mind that the evidence from this study does not entirely support this direction. Second, the study highlights the potential for career development to be shaped to meet both organisational and personal needs, so that staff are able to build working lives that best meet their ideals and aspirations for their careers.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in the two support documents listed below. They can be accessed from NCVER's website <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2114.html>.

- *Careers in vocational education and training: Literature review*
- *Careers in vocational education and training: Appendices*



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