TeachWise

RESEARCH FOR EDUCATORS

Research for educators: what the studies found, and what it means for practice

EDITION 5 · NOVEMBER 2026



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Strengthening Teaching Practice and Psychosocial Support

What VET Teachers Told NCVER

What Works in Teaching, the Evidence Reviews

Graduate Outcomes, VET Versus Higher Education

What the National Data Can and Cannot Tell Us

Skills Shortages and Training Supply

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International Students in VET

What the Research Says About Their Pathways and Outcomes

Edited by Sukh Sandhu | teachwisemag.com

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EDITORIAL

Edition 5: November 2026

By Sukh Sandhu, Editor-in-Chief

5 articles on what the research says, and what it means for the people who teach and train.

Welcome to Edition 5 of TeachWise. Each article in this edition reads a body of research on education and training, sets out what it found using the reports' own figures, notes its limits, and ends with what it might mean for practice, labelled as our interpretation.

In this edition

- Strengthening Teaching Practice and Psychosocial Support: What VET Teachers Told NCVER
- What Works in Teaching, the Evidence Reviews
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- Skills Shortages and Training Supply: What the 2026 Research Says About Why Gaps Persist
- International Students in VET: What the Research Says About Their Pathways and Outcomes

Research rarely gives simple answers, and evidence from one setting does not always transfer to another. Where that matters, we say so.

Thank you for reading. Tell us which research you would like us to read next.

Warm regards,
Sukh Sandhu
Editor-in-Chief, TeachWise

TEACHWISE

Strengthening Teaching Practice and Psychosocial Support: What VET Teachers Told NCVER

By Sukh Sandhu

NCVER's newest teaching study asked hundreds of VET teachers what makes their work hard, how often student behaviour linked to psychosocial needs disrupts a class, and whether the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment prepared them for any of it. The answers are blunt. Most teachers feel confident they can spot and respond to a struggling learner, yet around half feel overwhelmed by student support needs at least once a week, and about half have thought about leaving VET teaching in the past six months. This article sets out what the research asked, how it was done, the published figures, and where the evidence stops.

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
Strengthening teaching practice and psychosocial support (Griffin, Wibrow, Andrahannadi, Ackehurst, Waugh and Schueler)	NCVER, for the Australian Government and states and territories	Published 28 October 2026	Mixed methods: literature review, national survey, interviews, workshops	956 survey responses; 52 interviewees; 165 workshop participants

Why this study matters

Over the past decade the conversation about VET teaching has moved from "is the trainer qualified?" to "can the trainer actually teach the learners in front of them?" This report sits squarely in that shift. It was funded through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and is aligned with Action 3 of the VET Workforce Blueprint, which asks for a stronger evidence base on workforce issues. It is also one of the few Australian studies to put numbers on something many trainers describe in staffrooms but rarely see measured: how often learners' emotional, social and psychological circumstances get in the way of teaching.

The report is the centrepiece of a suite. Alongside it NCVER released a support document (with the full literature review), two research summaries, resources on the psychosocial needs of learners, and practice guides with quick reference guides on managing and

responding to psychosocial challenges, supporting novice teachers, the educator mindset and moving from professional learning to practice.

What the research asked

The project, titled *Strengthening Teaching Practice and Informing Psychosocial Teaching Methodology*, examined four areas (p. 11):

1. Effective teaching practices across diverse VET delivery settings and RTO types.
2. The nature of increasingly complex psychosocial challenges experienced by teachers and students, and their impacts on teaching and learning.
3. Initial teacher development, including how far the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment equips teachers for teaching and student support.
4. Ongoing teacher development: which capabilities contemporary VET teaching needs, and how they are identified, developed and embedded.

The report defines psychosocial factors as the emotional, social, psychological and environmental needs and challenges that shape a learner's wellbeing, sense of safety and ability to take part in and succeed at training (p. 12). It uses "teacher" to cover trainers, assessors, practitioners, educators and lecturers, and groups teachers by experience: novice (under five years), mid-career (five to nine years) and experienced (ten years or more).

How it was done

The study used four connected stages, with findings triangulated across them (Appendix A, pp. 96 to 109).

Literature review and desktop research. National and international studies, policy documents and capability frameworks were reviewed, with stakeholder consultations. This stage shaped the two research streams: building teacher capability through initial and ongoing development, and understanding psychosocial factors in VET delivery.

National survey of VET teaching experiences. Run on SurveyMonkey from 29 October 2025 to 5 January 2026 and promoted through training providers, peak bodies and professional associations, it received 956 responses. Not every respondent answered every question; 859 answered the demographic items. Open questions were coded by hand: 1,180 coded challenge responses from 746 teachers and 1,380 coded behaviour responses from 714 teachers, with up to four issues coded per response. Results were cross-tabulated by experience, delivery mode and four training packages (Business Services, Community Services, Construction Plumbing and Services, and Foundation Skills).

Semi-structured interviews. Fifty-two people were interviewed between November 2025 and January 2026: 7 novice teachers, 14 experienced teachers, 9 teachers of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and 22 teacher development staff and others (Table A5). Recruitment combined a stratified random sample of 288 RTOs drawn from *Total VET students and courses 2024*, purposive selection of 50 of those, 15 invitations to RTOs enrolling TAE students, and snowball sampling. Transcripts were analysed thematically in NVivo.

National research workshops. In-person workshops ran in every state and territory, with 165 participants in total. Participants tested a draft psychosocial support cycle and discussed how teaching skills are built and applied.

Who answered the survey

The survey sample leans experienced, older and TAFE-based (Table A2, pp. 99 to 100).

Characteristic (n=859 unless shown)	Group	Share of respondents
Teaching experience	10 or more years	53.8%
Teaching experience	0 to 4 years	26.0%
Age	40 to 59 years	55.1%
Age	60 and over	29.5%
Provider type (multiple allowed)	TAFE	52.5%
Provider type (multiple allowed)	Private provider	30.5%
Main delivery mode (n=763)	Face to face in classroom	72.4%
Main delivery mode (n=763)	Online	15.3%

Respondents were 54.6% female and 42.6% male; 12.0% reported a disability, 2.1% identified as First Nations and 20.1% as culturally and linguistically diverse. Most (88.3%) taught and assessed independently rather than under direction.

Finding 1: the challenges are many and they stack

Asked what they find most challenging about their job, teachers named problems in five broad groups (Table 2, p. 18). The most common specific challenges were disengaged or disinterested students (14% of the 746 respondents) and administration (14%), followed by compliance (12%), time (11%), management support and leadership (10%) and diverse learning levels (10%).

Challenge type	Most common specific challenges (share of 746 respondents)
Student engagement	Disengagement 14%; poor attendance 7%; lack of motivation 6%; lack of commitment 6%
Administration	Administration 14%; compliance 12%; time 11%; assessment 9%; workload 7%
Organisational support	Management support and leadership 10%; resources 7%; professional development 5%
Student diversity	Diverse learning levels 10%; LLND 9%; class size 3%
Psychosocial	Misbehaviour 8%; diverse learner needs 8%; mental health 5%; negative attitudes 5%

Source: NCVER 2026, Table 2, p. 18. Respondents could give several challenges.

The pattern shifts with career stage. Experienced teachers were more likely to name administrative and organisational demands, while early and mid-career teachers more often named engagement and psychosocial pressures (Figure 3, p. 19). Foundation Skills teachers reported more diversity, engagement and psychosocial challenges than teachers in the other three packages. Survey data did not show the gap between face-to-face and

online engagement that interviewees described: engagement challenges were reported by 27% of face-to-face teachers and 23% of online teachers.

The authors' core reading is that teacher strain comes from the cumulative effect of compliance, workload, learner complexity and support demands acting together, not from any single cause.

Finding 2: student behaviour has a weekly cost

When teachers described student behaviours, attitudes and circumstances that are hard to support (n=714), the most frequent were disengagement (22%), non-attendance and lateness (17%), motivation and apathy (16%), disruptive or immature behaviour (15%) and mental health (11%). Aggression, abuse or violence was named by 4% (Table 3, p. 20).

The survey then asked teachers how student behaviour affects them.

Statement (n=731)	Agree	Somewhat agree	Total agreeing
Student behaviour has become more challenging since I started teaching	44%	23%	67%
Student behaviour negatively impacts my ability to teach at least once a week	28%	29%	57%
I feel overwhelmed by student support needs at least once a week	20%	28%	48%
Student behaviour negatively impacts my enjoyment of teaching at least once a week	31%	27%	58%
I have thought about leaving VET teaching/training in the last six months	31%	18%	49%

Source: NCVER 2026, Table 4, p. 21. Totals are the sum of the published agree and somewhat agree figures.

> *About half of surveyed VET teachers had thought about leaving VET teaching in the previous six months, rising from 44% of novices to 52% of those with ten or more years' experience (Table B4).*

Two details matter. First, the sense that behaviour has worsened is not just nostalgia from long-serving staff: 59% of novice teachers agreed at least partly, against 72% of mid-career and 69% of experienced teachers, although about half of the agreeing novices only "somewhat" agreed (p. 22). Second, the survey did not ask why teachers had considered leaving. The authors note that interviews and workshops suggest the pile-up of pressures is at least partly responsible, but the survey itself cannot link the two.

Delivery mode changed some results. Face-to-face teachers were more likely than online teachers to say behaviour affects their ability to teach weekly (59% against 46%), as you might expect (Table B12).

Finding 3: confident, but stretched thin

The most useful result for leaders may be the gap between confidence and overwhelm.

Statement (n=752)	Agree	Somewhat agree	Total agreeing
I feel confident to identify student learning needs	68%	29%	97%
I feel confident to support students' identified needs	51%	40%	91%
When students aren't engaged in learning, I understand why	40%	46%	86%
Understanding why students may have trouble engaging helps me respond effectively	65%	31%	96%
Undeclared student learning needs impact my planned teaching schedule at least once a week	47%	32%	79%

Source: NCVER 2026, Table 5, p. 23.

Almost all teachers feel able to recognise a learner's needs, yet nearly half feel overwhelmed weekly. The authors conclude that the overwhelm "may stem less from a lack of knowledge or capability" than from the time and attention needed to support several students with different needs at once (p. 22). Confidence was strongest among experienced teachers: 73% of those with ten or more years fully agreed they could identify needs, compared with 55% of novices (Table B5).

Undeclared needs are a weekly disruption for about four in five teachers, and the rate is much the same for face-to-face (79%) and online teachers (78%) (Table B13). Workshop participants wanted pre-enrolment information passed on to them, but noted that it helps little when learners do not disclose, or when new needs emerge mid-course.

Finding 4: psychosocial disruption is frequent

Teachers were asked specifically about behaviour arising from psychosocial needs (Table 6, p. 25).

Weekly disruption from behaviour arising from psychosocial needs (n=752)	Agree	Somewhat agree	Total agreeing
Disrupts my planned teaching	38%	29%	67%
Disrupts the student's	50%	28%	78%

Weekly disruption from behaviour arising from psychosocial needs (n=752)	Agree	Somewhat agree	Total agreeing
own learning			
Disrupts other students' learning	44%	27%	71%

Source: NCVER 2026, Table 6, p. 25.

The effect on other learners was lower online (55%) than face to face (74%). The authors are careful here: the frequency of disruption is high, but its magnitude is unknown and likely varies (p. 24). Directly comparable figures from other education sectors are not available, though they point to OECD TALIS evidence that school teachers in disadvantaged settings also report lost teaching time.

Finding 5: system conditions shape what teachers can do

Interviews and workshops consistently located the problem in the system as much as in the classroom. Teachers described limited specialist services, waitlists for internal and external support, services that require a formal diagnosis, and support that is reactive rather than preventive. Pre-enrolment screening was criticised on three counts: it is often confined to LLND and disability, learners do not always disclose, and what is collected is not always passed to teaching staff (p. 32).

From this the report builds a model of three teacher characteristics that enable or block support:

- **Capability** to recognise and respond to learner needs.
- **Capacity**, meaning manageable workload, time and resources.
- **Clarity** about the teacher's role, authority and boundaries.

Participants raised the risk of teachers becoming "accidental counsellors". Teachers want to know where their responsibility ends and a specialist's begins, what authority they have when a learner's behaviour is unsafe or affects others, and what services exist for both students and themselves. Mental health first aid training was frequently cited as a useful model: specific enough to help, without asking teachers to become clinicians.

The proposed psychosocial support cycle

Teachers asked for practical guidance, so the researchers drafted a cycle, tested it in the workshops and refined it (Figure 7). It has five stages:

1. **Recognise**: notice signs that something may be affecting learning, such as missed classes or assessments, repeated extension requests, withdrawal, distress or changes in behaviour.
2. **Respond**: hold a safe, supportive conversation to understand the impact on learning and identify support needs, escalating to a formal discussion with support staff where matters look complex.

3. **Refer**: connect the learner with specialised internal or external support when teaching adjustments alone will not meet the need.
4. **Support**: keep adapting teaching, including inclusive design such as Universal Design for Learning and reasonable adjustment, alongside any specialist help.
5. **Review**: monitor progress, record observations and actions, and reflect on whether the response worked.

The principle underneath is that teachers are not expected to diagnose or treat. Their focus is the educational impact of a challenge. Workshop views on whether a formal framework would help were mixed: supporters wanted consistency, clear referral pathways and alignment with the 2025 Standards for RTOs, while sceptics warned of "tick and flick" compliance and frameworks that sit on shelves (Table 8, p. 42).

Initial teacher training: necessary, not sufficient

Interviewees and workshop participants had mixed views on the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, but the dominant theme was that it prepares people to meet the Standards rather than to teach. Gaps most often named included teaching and delivery skills, classroom and behaviour management, student engagement, supporting diverse learners (mental health, neurodivergence, learning difficulties), reasonable adjustment and managing psychosocial challenges (Table 14, p. 55).

Several points are worth noting:

- Many viewed the latest version as an improvement, especially its teaching stream, but reported that uptake of the practicum unit (TAEDEL415) appears low.
- Concerns about delivery included the qualification being completed too quickly and taught poorly.
- Some argued the opposite case: that assessment design, delivery planning and validation content is wasted on trainers who will never do those tasks. The authors read this as a sign of how different VET teaching roles are.

Novice teachers frequently described being "thrown in the deep end". Participants identified supports that help the move from competent industry worker to confident educator: contextualised initial training with early classroom exposure, structured and staged induction, reduced or delayed teaching loads, mentoring, buddying, shadowing and team teaching, growth-focused leadership, and needs-based professional development (Table 17, p. 68).

Ongoing development: the gap is implementation

The authors' sharpest conclusion is that effective practices for developing teachers are already well known. The persistent problem is applying them consistently across very different providers. Teachers identified their development needs through capability frameworks and self-assessment, reflective practice, performance reviews and observation, changes in learner cohorts, and professional conversations (Figure 9, p. 83). Many reported limited confidence in reflective practice itself.

Barriers to professional development included lack of time, activities pitched only at beginners, staff shortages that prevent release from classes, and topics chosen without

teacher input. Suggested fixes included tiered offerings (emerging, proficient, advanced), time for professional learning written into workload models, and publishing a twelve-month PD calendar before timetables are set (Table 18, p. 87). Action research was the least recognised form of development outside Victoria, and participants believed funding for formal action research had declined over the past decade.

What the authors recommend

It helps to separate the evidence from the authors' proposals. The report suggests:

- clarifying, ideally sector-wide, what can and cannot reasonably be expected of VET teachers in responding to psychosocial needs;
- stronger pre-enrolment processes, earlier intervention, clearer referral pathways and better coordination of services;
- strengthening psychosocial and classroom content in initial teacher training, or offering it as additional training;
- an updated sector-wide VET educator capability framework, kept online as a "living" resource, and a professional development framework;
- elevating teaching expertise through educator identity, professionalisation, guidance on teaching currency and recognition of excellence.

These are reasonable inferences from the data, but none has been trialled or evaluated in this study.

Limits of the evidence

The authors state their limits plainly (p. 109). Participation in all three data collections was voluntary, so the sample may over-represent people and providers with a strong interest in teacher capability and psychosocial issues. Not every delivery context is represented, and the authors state that the data should not be treated as representative of the whole VET teaching workforce. Other limits are worth adding:

- The sample is skewed towards experienced, TAFE-based, classroom teachers, and Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia dominate.
- All measures are self-reported perceptions. "Student learning needs" was not defined in the survey (Table 5 note), so teachers may have read it broadly.
- Weekly frequency is not the same as severity; the report does not measure how much time is lost.
- The survey did not explore reasons for considering leaving, so the link to behaviour and workload is inferred from qualitative data.
- The psychosocial support cycle was validated by workshop feedback, not by outcome data.

What this means for your practice

The points below are our interpretation of the findings, not recommendations made by NCVER.

1. **Treat overwhelm as a workload problem, not a skills deficit.** Since almost all teachers felt able to identify needs, the first lever for managers is capacity: class sizes, time allocation, in-class support and fewer duplicated administrative tasks.
2. **Close the pre-enrolment loop.** Review what your enrolment process asks, who sees the answers and how fast they reach the teacher. A short, consented handover note to the trainer before week one costs little.
3. **Write down where the teacher's role ends.** A one-page RTO procedure covering when to talk, when to refer, who to call and what authority trainers have when behaviour is unsafe answers the clarity problem directly. The five-stage cycle is a ready-made structure.
4. **Map your referral options before you need them.** List internal services and local external services, including those that do not require a diagnosis, and keep the list where trainers can find it in seconds.
5. **Use the cycle's "Review" step to build evidence.** Simple records of what was noticed, what was done and what happened give your RTO data on learner wellbeing needs, which the 2025 Standards ask providers to identify and address.
6. **Do not let the Certificate IV be the end of teacher preparation.** Plan staged induction, reduced first-term loads, a named mentor and observation for every new trainer, especially those entering under direction or straight from industry.
7. **Build professional learning into the timetable.** Publish next year's PD calendar before teaching schedules are locked, and offer it at more than one level so experienced staff are not sitting through beginner sessions.
8. **Ask your teachers whether they are thinking of leaving.** Half of this sample had considered it. A short anonymous pulse survey using the report's own Table 4 statements would give you a local benchmark.

Sources

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TEACHWISE

What Works in Teaching, the Evidence Reviews

By Sukh Sandhu

Three evidence syntheses shape much of the conversation about effective teaching in Australia: the Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit (and its Australian edition through Evidence for Learning), the Australian Education Research Organisation's work on explicit instruction and related practices, and the United States What Works Clearinghouse. They agree more than they disagree. Feedback, metacognition and explicit, well-structured teaching come out strongly; unstructured group work, learning styles and minimally guided discovery do not. But almost all of this evidence comes from school classrooms, and that matters for anyone teaching adults. This article explains how each synthesis works, what it says about the strategies educators ask about most, and how far its findings travel into VET.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
Teaching and Learning Toolkit	Education Endowment Foundation (UK)	Living resource; strands updated 2021 to 2025	Meta-synthesis of school-based studies with comparison groups	43 to 355 studies per strand discussed here
Teaching and Learning Toolkit (Australian edition)	Evidence for Learning	Living resource	EEF Toolkit plus Australasian evidence summaries	Same international base, some strands at earlier versions
The impact of context on evidence-based practices	AERO	2024	Rapid umbrella review of meta-analyses	12 meta-analyses for explicit instruction (at least 328 studies)
Use of evidence-based practices in schools: a national snapshot	AERO	2022	Survey plus analysis of PISA, PIRLS, TALIS, TIMSS data	Australian teachers, leaders and students
WWC practice guides	Institute of Education Sciences (US)	2007 and 2021 guides discussed	Expert panel recommendations graded against WWC evidence standards	Varies; 21 studies met standards in the career pathways guide

Why syntheses, and why these three

A synthesis pools many studies to estimate what usually happens and how confident we can be. The EEF converts pooled effect sizes into months of progress with cost and evidence ratings. AERO, Australia's national education evidence body, publishes practice guides and reviews, jointly funded by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reviews studies against design standards and grades panel recommendations as strong, moderate or minimal. Their ratings mean different things, so read the fine print before quoting a headline.

The EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit

How the ratings work

The Toolkit summarises studies that took place in schools, used a comparison group and met the definition of the topic. The EEF's guide to the Toolkit is explicit that studies are school-based rather than laboratory studies. Each strand reports three things.

Impact in months. The EEF translates effect sizes into months of additional progress over a year. The conversion table in its 2025 Toolkit guide (p. 6) runs as follows.

Months' progress	Effect size range	EEF description
0	up to 0.04	Very low or no impact
+2	0.10 to 0.18	Low impact
+4	0.27 to 0.35	Moderate impact
+6	0.45 to 0.52	High impact
+8	0.62 to 0.69	High impact
+10	0.79 to 0.87	Very high impact

Source: EEF, Teaching and Learning / Early Years Toolkit guide (2025), p. 6. Selected rows.

Evidence strength in padlocks. A strand starts with up to five padlocks depending on how many studies qualify: very limited (11 to 39 studies), limited (40 to 59), moderate (60 to 79), extensive (80 to 119) and very extensive (120 or more). Padlocks are then removed if few studies are recent, if a large share are not randomised controlled trials, if many were delivered by researchers rather than teachers, or if many were evaluated by organisations connected with the approach (guide, pp. 7 to 8).

Cost. An estimate of the average cost of delivery, from very low to very high.

What the Toolkit says about key strategies

Approach	Impact	Evidence strength	Studies	Last updated
Metacognition and self-regulation	+8 months	Extensive	355	May 2025
Reading comprehension strategies	+7 months	Moderate	184	October 2025
Feedback	+6 months	Extensive	155	June 2021
Peer tutoring	+6 months	Extensive	145	May 2025
Collaborative	+5 months	Limited	212	July 2021

Approach	Impact	Evidence strength	Studies	Last updated
learning approaches				
Mastery learning	+5 months	Limited	80	September 2021
One to one tuition	+5 months	Moderate	123	July 2021
Homework	+5 months	Very limited	43	August 2021
Individualised instruction	+4 months	Limited	198	July 2021
Small group tuition	+4 months	Moderate	62	July 2021
Setting and streaming	0 months	Very limited	58	July 2021

Source: EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit strand pages, at November 2026. All strands listed are rated very low cost except one to one tuition (moderate) and small group tuition (low).

Notice that the number of studies and the evidence rating do not move together. Collaborative learning has 212 studies but only two padlocks, because, in the EEF's words, it "lost three padlocks", partly because few of its studies are recent. A long reference list is not the same as strong evidence.

Feedback

The EEF defines feedback as information given to the learner about their performance relative to learning goals. Its key findings are that feedback is well evidenced and high impact, and that effective feedback "tends to focus on the task, subject and self-regulation strategies". It can work during, immediately after or some time after learning, which is why the EEF warns against policies that over-specify frequency. Studies of verbal feedback show slightly higher impacts (+7 months) than the average, digital feedback slightly lower (+4 months), and impacts are highest when feedback comes from teachers.

Two caveats from the strand itself are worth repeating. Feedback studies show a wide range of effects, and some show that feedback can make things worse. And the strand lost a padlock because a large percentage of its studies are not randomised controlled trials.

Metacognition and self-regulation

This is the highest-impact strand discussed here, at +8 months, and its May 2025 update increased the evidence base to 355 studies. The EEF's findings are practical: teach strategies for planning, monitoring and evaluating learning explicitly, apply them to the usual curriculum content rather than separate "thinking skills" lessons, and model your own thinking aloud. The EEF also notes that it "can be difficult to realise this impact in practice". The strand lost one padlock because a large share of studies were not independently evaluated; evaluations by organisations connected with an approach typically report larger effects.

Collaborative learning

Structured collaborative learning averages +5 months, but the EEF stresses that this is "distinct from unstructured group work". The most promising approaches use groups of three to five with a shared goal, and pupils need to be taught how to work together. Competition between groups can help but can also distract from learning. The evidence rating is limited, so this is a reasonable bet that depends heavily on task design.

The Australian edition

Evidence for Learning was established in 2015 by Social Ventures Australia and hosts an Australian edition of the Toolkit, supported by the EEF's international team. Its strand pages add Australasian research summaries. The collaborative learning page, for example, notes that there remain "a fairly limited number of published studies" on the topic in Australian and New Zealand contexts.

The Australian pages do not always carry the latest EEF figures. At November 2026, the Evidence for Learning metacognition page still reports +7 months from 246 studies (last updated July 2021), while the EEF page reports +8 months from 355 studies (May 2025). Readers quoting a figure should name the version.

AERO: explicit instruction and the question of context

What AERO means by explicit instruction

AERO's 2023 explainer, *Explicit instruction optimises learning*, describes explicit instruction as "a systematic, engaging and success-oriented teaching approach" that fully explains and demonstrates what students need to learn. In practice that means sequencing content in small steps, using worked examples, checking for understanding, and gradually releasing support (the familiar "I do, we do, you do"). AERO rejects the idea that this is "chalk and talk": explicit teaching includes questioning, thinking aloud, peer discussion and flexible grouping, and it treats teaching as successful when students retain what they learned, not when content has been delivered.

The explainer grounds this in cognitive science: working memory is limited, novices process information differently from experts, and minimal guidance can overload working memory. It also cites Kalyuga (2007), a review of the expertise reversal effect: the finding that guidance which helps novices can become redundant for more expert learners. That point matters for adult learners, and we return to it below.

Does context change the effect?

In September 2024 AERO published *The impact of context on evidence-based practices*, a rapid umbrella review of meta-analyses on formative assessment, explicit instruction and mastery learning. It asked whether effects vary by location, subject, year level and student characteristics.

Practice	Meta-analyses reviewed	Studies covered	Reported effect sizes
Formative assessment	6	138 unique studies	0.20 to 0.72 (overall)
Explicit instruction	12	At least 328 (up to 765)	0.40 to 1.22 (overall)

Practice	Meta-analyses reviewed	Studies covered	Reported effect sizes
Mastery learning	10	81 studies, 87 effect sizes	78% of effect sizes positive

Source: AERO (2024), pp. 8, 11 and 14.

The headline finding is that there is "little evidence" that these effects vary across contexts, and that all three practices worked for primary and secondary students and for students with and without additional learning needs (p. 5). Some details:

- In mathematics, five meta-analyses of explicit instruction reported effect sizes from 0.55 to 1.22 (p. 12).
- Stockard and colleagues' 2018 meta-analysis of Direct Instruction (a scripted program) found effect sizes of 0.55 for maths, 0.51 for reading and 0.66 for spelling, with subject not significantly predicting the effect (p. 12).
- For formative assessment, one meta-analysis found that planned instructional adjustments in response to assessment data predicted higher achievement, while unplanned adjustments or no adjustments did not produce significant effects (p. 8).
- Mastery learning was more effective for lower-aptitude students in six of the nine studies that examined this, though higher-aptitude students also benefited (p. 16).

AERO is candid about the limits. It reviewed meta-analyses, not individual studies; it excluded qualitative research, which it calls "a significant limitation"; many meta-analyses examined few contextual variables; and its mastery learning review found no studies conducted in Australia (pp. 7 and 15). Effect sizes also tend to be larger on teacher-developed tests than on standardised tests, which AERO notes in its methodology (p. 6).

What Australian teachers report doing

AERO's 2022 national snapshot combined its own survey with Australian data from PISA, PIRLS, TALIS and TIMSS. In AERO's survey, 91% of teachers said they interact with students as they work in most or every lesson, 78% clearly outline what students will learn and how they will know they have learned it, and 78% present worked examples when introducing new problems (p. 7). The snapshot also found that teachers report practices that are not supported by evidence, including designing lessons around learning styles (71%) and using unguided instruction or independent inquiry for students to discover answers (36%) (p. 6). These are self-reports, and AERO notes that teachers report using evidence-based practices more than students report experiencing them.

The What Works Clearinghouse

How it rates evidence

The WWC, part of the US Institute of Education Sciences, reviews individual studies against design standards and publishes practice guides in which an expert panel makes recommendations and grades the evidence behind each. In the 2021 career pathways guide the grades are defined as follows: **strong** means consistent evidence meeting WWC standards for a diverse population; **moderate** means some evidence meeting standards but with ambiguity about cause or generalisability; **minimal** means evidence may not

meet standards, but the panel included the recommendation because it rests on strong theory, is new, or is hard to study rigorously. A recommendation gets the lowest rating any of its criteria receives.

A classic guide on organising instruction

The 2007 guide *Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning* (Pashler and colleagues) remains widely cited for its cognitive-science recommendations.

Recommendation	Level of evidence
Space learning over time	Moderate
Interleave worked examples with problem-solving	Moderate
Combine graphics with verbal descriptions	Moderate
Connect abstract and concrete representations	Moderate
Use pre-questions to introduce a topic	Low
Use quizzes to re-expose students to key content	Strong
Teach delayed judgements of learning	Low
Use tests and quizzes to identify what needs study	Low
Ask deep explanatory questions	Strong

Source: IES/WWC (2007), Table 2, p. 2.

The panel explained that "moderate" ratings usually reflected experimental evidence confined to laboratories, rather than weak findings (p. 3). It also asked "effective as compared to what?", placing most value on studies that compared an approach with ordinary practice. The guide was written for Years 3 to 12, though the panel judged the findings "probably as pertinent to college instruction".

A guide that is directly about vocational learners

The WWC's 2021 guide *Designing and Delivering Career Pathways at Community Colleges* is closer to Australian VET than any school synthesis. It draws on 21 studies that met WWC standards.

Recommendation	Level of evidence	Supporting studies
Intentionally design and structure career pathways	Moderate	12
Deliver contextualised or integrated basic skills instruction	Moderate	9
Offer flexible instructional schedules and delivery models	Minimal	6
Provide coordinated, comprehensive student supports	Moderate	15
Develop and leverage partnerships with employers	Moderate	11

Source: WWC 2021007, Table 1 and recommendation chapters.

None of the five recommendations reached "strong". The rating for flexible delivery is minimal, even though flexible delivery is often treated as a default in adult education. That does not mean flexibility fails; it means the rigorous evidence is thin.

The WWC's own situation

In February 2025 the US Department of Education cancelled a large number of Institute of Education Sciences contracts, and reporting at the time identified at least one contract supporting WWC work among them. In February 2026 an IES strategy report, *Reimagining the Institute of Education Sciences*, recommended narrowing the WWC to practice guides and tools and discontinuing its ad hoc reviews of individual studies and interventions. Existing practice guides remain available, but the pace of new reviews is uncertain at November 2026.

Where the reviews agree, and where they differ

Read together, the three bodies point in a similar direction.

- **Feedback and formative assessment** rate highly in the EEF Toolkit and in AERO's review. AERO's emphasis on *planned* adjustment is a useful refinement: gathering information is not enough unless teaching changes as a result.
- **Explicit, structured teaching** is supported by AERO's review and by the WWC's recommendations on worked examples, spacing and quizzing. The EEF's metacognition strand asks teachers to teach learning strategies explicitly too.
- **Structure beats loose arrangements.** The EEF separates structured collaboration from group work; AERO separates explicit instruction from minimally guided discovery.

The differences are mostly about measurement. A "moderate" WWC rating might reflect strong laboratory evidence with limited classroom testing, while "moderate" in the EEF refers to how many studies qualify and how many padlocks were lost. The words look alike; the scales are not.

Applying school research to adult and VET learners

This is the most important caveat for VET practitioners. The evidence base for these syntheses is overwhelmingly drawn from children and adolescents.

- The EEF Toolkit includes only studies that took place in schools. Its months-of-progress metric is defined in terms of children and young people.
- AERO's 2024 review deliberately excluded meta-analyses involving predominantly tertiary-aged students and restricted its analysis to school-aged samples where possible (pp. 6 and 11).
- AERO's mastery learning review found no Australian studies, and its explicit instruction evidence was mostly from the United States.

Where adult data exist, they suggest effects can be smaller. AERO reports that Alfieri and colleagues (2011) found explicit instruction was more effective than unassisted discovery for adolescents (effect size 0.53) than for adults (0.26), though the effect was positive and significant for both (p. 12). The expertise reversal effect points the same way: many

VET learners arrive with considerable workplace experience, and guidance that helps a novice may be redundant for them.

Other differences matter too. Adult learners often study part time and online around work and caring, and VET assessment is competency-based. The "months of progress" metric has no natural equivalent for a learner completing a unit of competency in six weeks.

None of this means the findings are irrelevant. The mechanisms behind feedback, retrieval practice, worked examples and explicit strategy teaching are about how memory and attention work, and there is no reason to think those mechanisms switch off at 18. It does mean that effect sizes from school studies should not be quoted as predictions for adult cohorts, and that VET providers have good reason to evaluate their own practice rather than assume transfer.

Limits of the evidence

- **Pooled averages hide variation.** The EEF describes its findings as "best bets", not guarantees.
- **Who ran the study matters.** Developer-led evaluations tend to report larger effects, which cost several EEF strands a padlock.
- **Outcome measures matter.** Effects on researcher or teacher-designed tests are usually larger than on standardised tests.
- **Age of evidence.** Several EEF strands were last updated in 2021, and much of the mastery learning base predates the 1990s.
- **Self-report.** AERO's snapshot relies on teacher and student surveys, which differ from each other.

It is also worth separating findings from recommendations. The EEF's findings are its effect estimates and ratings; its advice on how to implement is guidance. AERO's 2023 explainer includes "implications for policymakers" that go beyond its review findings. The WWC's recommendations are panel judgements graded against evidence. Our own interpretation follows.

What this means for your practice

Our interpretation, not the EEF's, AERO's or the WWC's.

1. **Treat feedback as a planning task.** The evidence favours specific, task-focused feedback that changes what learners do next, and AERO's review shows planned adjustment to teaching is what makes formative assessment work. Decide in advance what you will do differently if a check for understanding goes badly.
2. **Teach learning strategies inside the content.** For VET, that might mean modelling how you plan a workplace task, monitor quality and check against the standard, then asking learners to do the same aloud. Avoid standalone "study skills" sessions disconnected from the unit.
3. **Use explicit instruction for new content, then fade it.** Worked examples and guided practice help novices; experienced workers may need less. Check what learners already know before deciding how much scaffolding to provide.

4. **Build in spaced review and low-stakes quizzing.** These are among the most consistently supported recommendations and are cheap to implement in short courses and online delivery.
5. **Structure group work or skip it.** Groups of three to five with a shared goal and clear roles are the version with evidence behind it.
6. **Drop learning styles.** AERO's snapshot found 71% of teachers report designing lessons around them; none of the syntheses support the practice.
7. **Quote ratings with their source and version.** Say "+8 months, extensive evidence, EEF Toolkit May 2025" rather than "metacognition adds eight months", and note that the figure comes from school studies.
8. **Evaluate locally.** Where adult evidence is thin, track your own completion, assessment and learner feedback data before and after a change, with a comparison group if you can.

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TEACHWISE

Graduate Outcomes, VET Versus Higher Education: What the National Data Can and Cannot Tell Us

By Sukh Sandhu

Every year two large national surveys report what happens to people after they finish post-school study. NCVER's National Student Outcomes Survey covers vocational education and training; the Graduate Outcomes Survey, part of the QILT suite, covers higher education. Their headline numbers are often set side by side in marketing, careers advice and policy debate. This article reads the 2025 editions of both surveys, the final ABS Survey of Education and Work, and recent linked administrative data from Jobs and Skills Australia, and explains which comparisons hold up, which do not, and what a careful educator can say to a learner weighing up a certificate against a degree.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
VET student outcomes 2025	NCVER	Published 17 December 2025	National Student Outcomes Survey, June to August 2025	276,304 VET students who trained in 2024
2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey National Report	Social Research Centre for the Department of Education (QILT)	Released 26 June 2026	Online survey 4 to 6 months after completion	129,220 responses; 38.8% response rate; 136 institutions
Education and Work, Australia, May 2025	ABS	Released 19 November 2025	Supplement to the Labour Force Survey	People aged 15 to 74 (household sample)
Higher Education Outcomes, Exploring Administrative Data	Jobs and Skills Australia	7 November 2025	Linked tax and education records (PLIDA)	Graduates completing 2010 to 2017
Education and training divides (Gender Economic Equality Study Paper 2)	Jobs and Skills Australia	10 September 2025	Linked administrative data, top 100 VET qualifications	VET completers of 2019 to 2020
VET and higher education pathways: do outcomes differ for the same occupation?	NCVER	2022	HILDA analysis and employer interviews	Four occupations

Why the comparison is harder than it looks

Before looking at any figure, it is worth being clear about four differences between the two national surveys. Each of them can move a headline number by several percentage points.

Who is counted. The Student Outcomes Survey covers domestic students who undertook nationally recognised training in the previous calendar year, aged 15 or older. It reports four groups separately: qualification completers, qualification part-completers, short course students and subject only completers. International students are out of scope. The Graduate Outcomes Survey National Report covers domestic undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and postgraduate research graduates; international graduates are reported separately.

When they are asked. Higher education graduates are surveyed approximately four to six months after completing. VET students who trained during 2024 were surveyed between June and August 2025, so the gap since finishing ranges from a few months to well over a year.

What "employed" means. The GOS headline is a full-time employment rate: the share of graduates available for full-time work who are working 35 hours or more a week. NCVER's headline for completers is "improved employment status", a composite that counts a student who moved into work, gained at least one job-related benefit, or moved to a higher skill level job. These measures answer different questions. One asks "are you in a full-time job?"; the other asks "did the training improve your working situation?".

Who the learners are. A large share of VET completers were already employed before they started. NCVER's income data show that completers who were employed before training earned a median of $75,000 if working full time afterwards, against $54,800 for those not employed before training. Most bachelor graduates, by contrast, are young people entering the labour market for the first time. A raw comparison of the two medians partly compares older workers who upskilled with younger first-time job seekers.

> ***Key finding:*** *NCVER's "improved employment status" and the GOS full-time employment rate are not the same measure, and should never be placed in the same column as if they were.*

What the VET data show

The 2025 Student Outcomes Survey is based on the responses of 276,304 VET students. Response rates, from the technical notes, were 33.7% for qualification completers and 29.3% for potential part-completers. NCVER weights responses to the population and publishes margins of error for every estimate.

Among qualification completers in 2025:

- 86.7% achieved their main reason for training
- 89.3% were satisfied with the training overall
- 62.4% reported an improved employment status, down 2.0 percentage points on 2024

- 32.6% went on to further study

Part-completers reported weaker results on every measure: 75.4% were satisfied overall and 76.2% achieved their main reason for training. NCVER noted that the fall in improved employment status corresponded with a rise in unemployment over the period.

Table 1: Improved employment status after training, NCVER, 2021 to 2025 (%)

Year	Qualification completers	Part-completers	Short course students	Subject only completers
2021	60.6	56.1	62.9	64.4
2022	65.0	58.7	61.1	62.2
2023	67.6	58.9	66.8	66.7
2024	64.4	56.0	67.7	67.3
2025	62.4	53.1	66.4	64.9

Source: NCVER, *VET student outcomes 2025*, Figure 3.

Outcomes differed by training package. Among the 10 largest training packages, completers of Electrotechnology (76.7%), Construction, Plumbing and Services (73.9%) and Automotive (72.6%) qualifications were the most likely to improve their employment status, against 59.4% in Tourism, Travel and Hospitality and 56.3% in Sport, Fitness and Recreation (Figure 5).

NCVER also publishes median annual income for certificate II and above completers employed full time after training. In 2025 the overall median was $70,400, and $53,800 for those whose first full-time job began after training. By level, the median was $81,500 for diploma or higher, $80,900 for certificate IV, $65,000 for certificate III and $52,200 for certificate II (data table 2). Males employed full time reported a median of $78,300 against $62,400 for females.

What the higher education data show

The 2025 GOS heard from 129,220 graduates, a response rate of 38.8%. Its headline results for domestic graduates were:

- full-time employment of 75.4% for undergraduates, 88.3% for postgraduate coursework and 84.0% for postgraduate research graduates
- overall employment (any hours) of 89.2% for undergraduates
- median full-time salaries of $77,000, $104,700 and $109,100 respectively
- undergraduate course satisfaction of 74.9%, the lowest since the survey began in 2016

There is an important break in the series. In 2025 the survey stopped counting graduates who were only passively looking for work as part of the labour force, to align with ABS definitions. The Department of Education estimates this lifted the undergraduate full-time employment rate by around 3.5 to 4.5 percentage points. The report states that the rise in undergraduate full-time employment is likely due to the method change, not a stronger labour market.

Table 2: Full-time employment rate by study level, GOS, selected years 2016 to 2025 (%)

Year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate coursework	Postgraduate research
2016	70.9	85.1	80.1
2019	72.2	86.8	81.1
2021	68.9	84.9	77.7
2023	79.0	90.3	85.3
2024	74.0	88.1	82.8
2025	75.4 (series break)	88.3	84.0

Source: *2025 GOS National Report*, Executive summary, Figure ii.

Two further GOS findings matter for anyone comparing pathways. First, the share of undergraduates employed full time in managerial or professional jobs has drifted down, from 72.3% in 2016 to 67.3% in 2025. Second, 29.4% of undergraduates employed full time considered themselves overqualified for their job. The media release also noted that 10.0% of undergraduates who went on to full-time study had moved into a certificate or advanced diploma course, a share that has doubled since 2021. The traffic between sectors runs both ways.

Satisfaction and underemployment: a useful contrast

Satisfaction is one of the few measures both surveys collect in broadly similar terms, and here the sectors diverge. Among VET qualification completers, 89.3% were satisfied with their training overall in 2025. Among domestic undergraduates, overall course satisfaction was 74.9%, down from a peak of 80.6% in 2020. The questions and scales differ, so the gap should not be read as precise, but the direction is consistent across years.

The GOS also measures underemployment: graduates working part time who would prefer more hours. For undergraduates it rose for the third consecutive year, to 19.4% of those employed in 2025, though it remained below the 2020 peak of 21.8%. NCVER's headline VET report does not include an equivalent measure, which is another reason to be cautious with direct comparisons.

The ABS view: qualifications and work across the population

The ABS Survey of Education and Work takes a different angle. It does not follow recent completers by sector; it asks a population sample about their highest qualification and their labour force status. The May 2025 release, which the ABS says is the last from this annual survey, found that 84% of people who had finished a non-school qualification in 2024 were employed in 2025, and 5% were unemployed. People aged 15 to 74 with a non-school qualification were more likely to be employed (80%) than those without one (58%).

Table 3: Labour force status by highest non-school qualification and sex, people aged 15 to 74, May 2025 (%)

Group	Employed full time	Employed part time	Not in labour force
Men, bachelor degree	71.1	13.0	13.5
Men, certificate III/IV	69.6	10.8	17.8

Group	Employed full time	Employed part time	Not in labour force
Men, no non-school qualification	42.8	19.8	32.6
Women, bachelor degree	53.1	27.9	17.0
Women, certificate III/IV	39.1	33.0	24.2
Women, no non-school qualification	23.0	29.8	43.6

Source: ABS, *Education and Work, Australia, May 2025*, Table 22.

For men, a certificate III or IV and a bachelor degree are associated with almost identical full-time employment rates. For women the gap is much wider, which reflects the fields women and men study and the part-time work patterns in those fields as much as the level of qualification. Like all cross-sectional data, this table shows association across the whole adult population, not the effect of any course.

Linked administrative data: following people for years, not months

Surveys capture a snapshot a few months after completion. Linked tax and education records follow people for longer and do not depend on who chooses to respond.

Jobs and Skills Australia's November 2025 report linked higher education completions from 2010 to 2017 to tax records. It found graduates' average real employment income rose 35% over their first five years, from $63,500 to $85,500 (indexed to the Wage Price Index). Evidence of wage or salary work was found for 92% of graduates one year after completion. It also found 72% of Education graduates became teachers and 60% of Engineering graduates entered professional engineering roles.

For VET, JSA's Gender Economic Equality Study (Paper 2, Table 13) reports national outcomes for people who completed VET in 2019 to 2020, one year after training (based on the top 500 VET qualifications): a median income of $48,500, a median income gain of $11,800, and an employment rate of 84%. The 2026 Jobs and Skills Report adds that VET completers in 2022 to 23 who were First Nations people had a median income uplift of $20,600.

These two administrative sources use different cohorts, years and income definitions, so their dollar figures should not be subtracted from one another. What they show together is that both pathways are associated with strong earnings, and that earnings keep rising for years after completion. NCVER's same-occupation study, below, suggests any higher education pay advantage tends to build over time rather than appear on day one.

Same job, different pathway

NCVER's 2022 study asked a sharper question: what happens to VET and higher education qualified people working in the same occupation? Using HILDA data and employer interviews across childcare workers, surveyors, graphic designers and medical laboratory technicians, it found that VET graduates were more job ready, while higher education graduates tended over time to have higher pay, more autonomy and more opportunity for

progression. Workers from both pathways were equally satisfied with their jobs. Employers said experience, skills and fit with the company often mattered more than the qualification.

The study covers only four occupations, so its findings are a prompt for local inquiry rather than a general law.

Field of study matters more than sector

Both surveys show more variation within each sector than between them. Table 4 sets selected median full-time incomes side by side, with a warning about comparability below it.

Table 4: Median annual full-time income, selected fields, 2025 ($)

Field	VET completers employed full time (cert II and above)	Undergraduates employed full time
Engineering and related technologies	80,000	82,500
Management and commerce / Business	76,000	74,000
Health / Health services and support	69,900	77,400
Education / Teacher education	67,800	82,100
Creative arts	52,000	63,200
All fields	70,400	77,000

Sources: NCVER, *VET student outcomes 2025: qualification completers' median income after training*, Table 2; *2025 GOS National Report*, Table 5. VET figures include workers employed before training and are classified by ASCED field; GOS figures cover domestic undergraduates 4 to 6 months after completion, by QILT study area. The two classifications do not match exactly.

Even with those warnings, the pattern is consistent: a VET engineering completer and a business graduate can report similar median incomes, while creative arts sits at the bottom in both sectors. Within higher education, undergraduate full-time employment ranged from 53.0% in creative arts to 96.4% in pharmacy (GOS Table 5), a far wider spread than the national average gap between any two sectors.

Limits of the evidence

- **Response bias.** Both surveys depend on people choosing to answer: about one in three VET completers and about two in five higher education graduates. Weighting corrects for known characteristics, not for unmeasured differences between responders and non-responders.
- **Selection.** People who choose VET and people who choose university differ in age, prior attainment, prior employment and aspirations. None of the sources cited here is designed to estimate the causal effect of choosing one sector over the other.

- **Short time horizons.** Survey outcomes are measured within months of completion. JSA's linked data show earnings still rising five years after completion, a horizon these surveys cannot see.
- **Series breaks.** The 2025 GOS change to labour force definitions means 2025 employment rates are not directly comparable with earlier years. The ABS Survey of Education and Work has now ceased, so this population series will not be updated in its current form.
- **Different populations.** The national VET survey excludes international students, while the GOS publishes them separately. Comparisons of "all graduates" across sectors therefore need care.

What this means for your practice

The following points are our interpretation of the evidence, not recommendations made by NCVER, QILT, the ABS or JSA.

1. **Quote like with like.** When you use outcome data in course advice or marketing, name the measure. "62.4% of qualification completers reported an improved employment status" is accurate; "62% got a job" is not.
2. **Talk about field and occupation first.** For a learner choosing a pathway, the field of study and target occupation explain more of the variation in outcomes than the sector does. Use the field tables in both surveys, not the national averages.
3. **Account for the learner's starting point.** Many of your learners are already working. Help them see outcomes for people like them, for example the income data for those employed or not employed before training, rather than the overall median.
4. **Make completion the goal.** On every NCVER measure, part-completers fare worse than completers. Retention and completion support is one of the most direct ways a provider can affect graduate outcomes.
5. **Present pathways, not rivals.** One in ten undergraduates moving into further full-time study went into a certificate or advanced diploma, and many VET completers go on to higher education. Advice that maps both directions serves learners better than a contest between sectors.
6. **Use the long view where it exists.** When learners ask about lifetime earnings, explain that short-term surveys do not answer that question, and point to linked administrative studies with their caveats.
7. **Check your own data against the national picture.** Your provider's survey results and the NCVER RTO-level data can show where your graduates sit relative to national figures in the same training package, which is a fairer benchmark than a university average.

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TEACHWISE

Skills Shortages and Training Supply: What the 2026 Research Says About Why Gaps Persist

By Sukh Sandhu

Skills shortages are usually discussed as if they had one cause and one cure: train more people. The research released by Jobs and Skills Australia in October 2026 tells a more complicated story. Its new Occupation Shortage List shows shortages easing for the third year in a row, yet 127 occupations have been in shortage every year since 2021. Its companion Occupation Shortage Drivers report finds that, for many occupations, the training pipeline is not the main problem at all. Read alongside NCVER's 2025 enrolment and apprenticeship data, these reports give trainers and VET leaders a clearer view of where more training will help, and where it will not.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
2026 Occupation Shortage List: Key Findings Report	Jobs and Skills Australia	October 2026	Employer surveys, vacancy data, machine learning model, stakeholder survey	1,021 occupations (OSCA basis)
2026 Occupation Shortage Drivers Report	Jobs and Skills Australia	October 2026	Fuzzy C-Means clustering on supply, retention and suitability indicators	100 unit groups in shortage, of 311 in scope
Pathways to success: Jobs and Skills Report 2026	Jobs and Skills Australia	12 October 2026	Synthesis of JSA labour market and skills analysis	National
Total VET students and courses 2025	NCVER	22 July 2026	National VET Provider and VET in Schools collections	5.1 million students
Apprentices and trainees 2026: March quarter	NCVER	15 September 2026	National Apprentice and Trainee Collection	All training contracts to 31 March 2026
What is a skill shortage? (Richardson)	NCVER	2007	Conceptual review	Not applicable

What counts as a shortage

The word "shortage" is used loosely in public debate. Jobs and Skills Australia applies a specific test. An occupation is rated as in shortage when employers cannot readily fill vacancies at prevailing pay and conditions, judged from a mix of evidence: the Survey of Employers who have Recently Advertised (SERA), the Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey, the Internet Vacancy Index, a stakeholder survey and a machine learning model that predicts fill rates. In its machine learning results, the OSL uses a predicted fill rate of 67% as the threshold indicating likely shortage.

The OSL is a point-in-time assessment. The 2026 OSL is published on the new Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), with most analysis first carried out on the older ANZSCO basis and then mapped across. JSA describes that mapping as experimental.

The conceptual roots go back to Sue Richardson's 2007 NCVER paper, which JSA explicitly builds on. Richardson distinguished between shortages where few people hold the skills and training takes a long time, shortages where training is short, skills mismatches where qualified people exist but will not apply under current conditions, and quality gaps where applicants lack qualities employers value. That distinction is the key to reading the 2026 results.

The headline: easing, but not evenly

In the 2026 OSL, 279 of 1,021 assessed occupations (27%) were in national shortage, two percentage points lower than 2025 and nine below the 2023 peak.

Table 1: Share of assessed occupations in shortage, 2022 to 2026

OSL year	Occupations in shortage (%)
2022	31
2023	36
2024	33
2025	29
2026	27

Source: JSA, *2026 OSL Key Findings Report*, Figure 1.

JSA links the easing to a gradually softening labour market over the 12 months to July 2026: the unemployment rate rose 0.2 percentage points and underemployment 0.5 points. Movement between ratings was modest. Of the 1,021 occupations, 251 stayed in shortage, 28 moved into shortage and 42 moved out (Table 1 of the report).

Shortages are concentrated in two parts of the workforce. In 2026, 48% of Technicians and Trades Workers occupations were in shortage, the highest of any major group, followed by Professionals at 37%. Machinery Operators and Drivers stood at 17% after an 11 point fall, the remaining groups at 16% or less, and no Sales Workers occupation was in shortage. By skill level, 42% of skill level 3 occupations and 30% of skill level 1 occupations were in shortage. JSA notes that skill levels 2 and 3 together account for more than 60% of shortage occupations, and that these occupations commonly require at

least a Certificate III or IV, often through an apprenticeship. In other words, the shortage list is substantially a VET list.

Persistent shortages

The more troubling finding concerns persistence. JSA identifies 127 occupations that have been in shortage in every OSL from 2021 to 2026.

Table 2: Occupations in persistent shortage by major group, 2021 to 2026 OSLs

Major group	Occupations	Share
Technicians and Trades Workers	69	54%
Professionals	46	36%
Community and Personal Service Workers	6	5%
Machinery Operators and Drivers	4	3%
Managers	2	2%
All	127	100%

Source: JSA, *2026 OSL Key Findings Report*, Table 2.

Many of the persistent trade shortages are in construction, engineering trades, and electrotechnology and telecommunications. A further 66 occupations have been in shortage every year since 2022, 31 of them Health Professionals.

What shortage looks like to an employer

The OSL report compares labour market indicators for occupations in shortage and not in shortage. The contrast is stark.

Table 3: Selected indicators, shortage versus non-shortage occupations, 2025 to 26

Indicator	In shortage	Not in shortage	All occupations
Vacancy fill rate	57%	78%	72%
Recruitment difficulty rate	54%	36%	44%
Average vacancy duration (weeks)	10.6	7.8	8.5
Qualified applicants per vacancy	6.3	12.8	11.0
Suitable applicants per vacancy	3.3	6.3	5.4
Replacement rate (3-year average, 2023 to 25)	14%	17%	17%

Source: JSA, *2026 OSL Key Findings Report*, Figures 4, 5, 6, 8 and 11.

Two details deserve attention from training providers. First, even in shortage occupations, employers judge only about half of qualified applicants to be suitable (3.3 of 6.3). Holding the qualification is not the same as being hireable. Second, internet vacancies for shortage

occupations rose 4% between 2022 and 2026 while those for other occupations fell 4%, so demand is still growing in exactly the places where supply is tight.

Three different causes

The 2026 Occupation Shortage Drivers report is the most useful new piece of evidence for VET. It assigns each of the 100 unit groups in shortage a membership share across three drivers, adapted from Richardson:

- **Education and training gap (ETG):** not enough commencements, completions and qualified applicants; the pipeline is not delivering enough workers.
- **Retention gap (RG):** employers cannot keep workers, for reasons including pay, conditions or movement to higher skilled roles.
- **Suitability gap (SG):** there are enough qualified applicants, but employers do not consider them suitable, often citing employability skills or work experience.

Across the labour market, the suitability gap was the most common main driver (43 unit groups), followed by the education and training gap (36) and the retention gap (21). Shortages among Managers and Professionals were mainly suitability gaps. Shortages among Technicians and Trades Workers, Community and Personal Service Workers and Machinery Operators and Drivers were mainly education and training gaps. For Labourers, retention and training were equally prominent.

Table 4: Selected large unit groups by main shortage driver, 2026 (membership shares)

Unit group	Training gap	Retention gap	Suitability gap
Chefs	0.83	0.04	0.13
Hairdressers	0.81	0.13	0.07
Aged and Disabled Carers	0.80	0.09	0.11
Plumbers	0.79	0.06	0.15
Meat Boners and Slicers, and Slaughterers	0.07	0.90	0.03
Floor Finishers	0.17	0.76	0.06
Electricians	0.29	0.08	0.64
Registered Nurses	0.27	0.10	0.63

Source: JSA, *2026 Occupation Shortage Drivers Report*, Tables 3, 4 and 5. Shares sum to 1.

The implications differ sharply by row. For Chefs, Plumbers and Aged and Disabled Carers, more people entering and completing training is the obvious lever. For Floor Finishers and Meat Boners, training more people into the occupation will not help much if they leave; JSA points instead to pay, conditions and culture. For Electricians and Registered Nurses, the data suggest qualified applicants exist but employers find them unsuitable, which points to work experience, job readiness and the match between what training produces and what employers expect.

JSA's two case studies illustrate the mix. For Motor Mechanics, training was the main driver and suitability a strong secondary one; apprentice commencements fell between

2022 and 2024 and recovered slightly in 2025, and employers increasingly cited lack of experience. For Aged and Disabled Carers, employment grew around 58% over five years to February 2026, yet the occupation remained in shortage, and qualified applicants per vacancy stayed below the all-group average from 2020 to 21 to 2025 to 26.

JSA itself describes the method as a proof of concept. Membership shares depend on which indicators are available, and some unit groups changed main driver between the 2025 and 2026 methods.

The supply side: what VET is producing

NCVER's *Total VET students and courses 2025* shows the training system moving in mixed directions relative to the shortage list.

- In 2025 there were 2.5 million qualification enrolments, down 5.9% on 2024, with the fall driven mainly by Certificate III and IV enrolments in government-funded training.
- Students in qualifications fell 5.2% to 1,982,745, while students in stand-alone subjects rose to 3,656,585.
- Architecture and Building was the only field of education with an overall increase in qualification enrolments (up 13,975).
- Among the largest training packages, Construction, Plumbing and Services rose by 12,945 enrolments (7.0%) and Electrotechnology by 6,610 (7.8%), while Community Services, still the largest package at 403,875 enrolments, fell across all funding types.
- Qualification completions fell 4.8% to 845,165, but Electrotechnology completions rose 18.6% and Construction and Plumbing 15.0%.

Table 5: Apprentice and trainee contracts in training, 31 March 2026

Measure	Number	Change on March 2025
All contracts in training	289,090	down 9.0%
Trade contracts	216,000	down 5.6%
Non-trade contracts	73,060	down 17.6%
Trade commencements, March quarter	31,735	up 2.0%
Non-trade commencements, March quarter	16,840	down 11.7%

Source: NCVER, *Apprentices and trainees 2026: March quarter*.

The Jobs and Skills Report 2026 adds detail on trades in persistent shortage. Since 2021, commencements have fallen for Carpenters and Joiners (by 33%), Bricklayers and Stonemasons (43%) and Plumbers (9%), while electrical pathways held up better. Electrician apprenticeships remain the largest single pathway at more than a third (34.3%) of commencements, although electrician commencements were down 11% on their 2022 peak. Completions grew strongly in 2025 as the large cohorts who started during the pandemic-era subsidy period finished.

The picture for shortage occupations driven by the training gap is therefore uneven. Electrotechnology and construction enrolments are rising, while Community Services, the main pathway into care occupations that JSA rates as training-gap shortages, is shrinking.

Completion, part-completion and the short course boom

More enrolments only ease a shortage if learners reach the labour market with usable skills. The Jobs and Skills Report 2026, drawing on NCVER's 2025 Student Outcomes Survey, notes that about 62% of qualification completers reported an improved employment status, against 53% of part-completers. The gap was widest in health and community services qualifications: in Community Services, the share reporting an improvement was almost 19 percentage points higher for completers. Those are the qualifications that feed the care occupations JSA rates as training-gap shortages, where a formal qualification is often required to enter the job.

The gap was smaller in electrotechnology, construction and automotive qualifications. JSA suggests this may partly reflect the structure of apprenticeships: many learners in these fields are employed while they train, giving them a strong attachment to the labour market. JSA's research on partial completion also found that 48% of part-completers who were not employed before enrolling gained employment within a year. Part-completion is not worthless, but in shortage trades the system needs fully qualified workers, so completion still matters.

At the same time, training activity has been shifting away from full qualifications. In 2025, 3.66 million students took stand-alone subjects, mostly compliance units such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, first aid and basic emergency life support, which together made up 51.9% of all stand-alone subject enrolments. Short course enrolments grew 1.1% to 264,905. These programs meet real workplace requirements, but they do not add tradespeople, nurses or early childhood educators to the pipeline. When reading headline growth in "VET activity", it is worth separating qualifications from short courses and subjects.

Retention gaps can reflect a working labour market

JSA adds a caution about the retention driver. High turnover is not always a failure. Cooks, for example, may be a stepping stone to the higher skilled role of Chef, so a short stay in the occupation partly reflects upward mobility. Some occupations not in shortage, such as waiters and sales workers, have high replacement rates because they are filled by students, new graduates and people seeking casual work. For training providers, the lesson is that a retention gap needs to be understood occupation by occupation before deciding whether it is a problem training can or should address.

A mismatch between student demand and labour demand

The Jobs and Skills Report 2026 models a scenario in which labour market demand, rather than current student choices, shaped graduate supply. Under that scenario there would be around 106,000 more VET trained workers in skill level 3 and 4 occupations over the next decade, offset by around 139,000 fewer higher education trained workers in skill level 1 occupations. This is a modelled projection, not a forecast, and it depends on JSA's assumptions about future demand. It does, however, quantify a tension many VET practitioners already see.

The same report flags a constraint inside the system: JSA's VET Workforce Study found teacher numbers declined by 11% to 18%, around 3,800 additional teachers are projected

to be needed, and 46.5% of the VET workforce was aged 50 or over. Expanding supply in priority occupations depends on having people to teach them.

Limits of the evidence

- **Point-in-time ratings.** The OSL is an annual snapshot built from surveys of employers who recently advertised. Occupations with few vacancies or small samples carry more uncertainty, and JSA publishes confidence labels for this reason.
- **Classification change.** The move to OSCA, with experimental mapping from ANZSCO, means small year-on-year changes for some occupations may reflect classification rather than the labour market.
- **Driver analysis is new.** The OSD clustering method is described by JSA as proof of concept, uses unit groups rather than detailed occupations, and excludes sector-specific drivers.
- **Enrolments are not workers.** A rise in enrolments does not mean more qualified people entering the occupation. Completion rates, the share who work in the field after training, and retention all intervene.
- **Projections depend on assumptions.** JSA's 106,000 figure is a modelled scenario and should be quoted as such.

What this means for your practice

The following points are our interpretation of the research, not JSA's or NCVER's recommendations.

1. **Find out which kind of shortage your industry has.** Look up the OSD membership shares for the occupations your qualifications lead to. A training-gap shortage calls for more places and better completion; a suitability gap calls for different training; a retention gap may be beyond what training can fix.
2. **Treat suitability as a teaching problem.** Where employers reject qualified applicants, the usual complaints are experience and employability skills. Work placements, realistic simulated work, and assessment that reflects actual job tasks are levers a trainer controls.
3. **Protect completion in shortage pathways.** Enrolment growth in construction and electrotechnology only reaches the labour market if learners finish. Early warning systems and employer contact during apprenticeships matter most where the training gap is the main driver.
4. **Be honest with learners about retention-driven occupations.** Where people leave an occupation because of pay or conditions, tell prospective learners about career progression routes, not only entry jobs.
5. **Use employer relationships as data.** The OSL shows that only about half of qualified applicants are judged suitable. Ask your employer partners why they reject candidates and feed the answers into training and assessment design.
6. **Plan your own workforce.** If your provider delivers in shortage areas, the VET teacher pipeline is part of your capacity. Succession planning for trainers aged over 50 is a supply issue, not just an HR issue.

7. **Quote shortage data precisely.** "27% of assessed occupations are in national shortage" is accurate; "Australia has a skills crisis in every trade" is not.

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TEACHWISE

International Students in VET: What the Research Says About Their Pathways and Outcomes

By Sukh Sandhu

International students are a large and changing part of Australian vocational education. In 2025 Australian RTOs delivered training to 282,785 international students on student visas, and their qualification enrolments have doubled over a decade. Yet the public conversation about them is dominated by visa policy and integrity concerns, with much less attention to what happens to the students themselves. This article brings together Department of Education enrolment data, NCVER's national VET statistics, the Jobs and Skills Australia International Students Pathways and Outcomes Study, and the 2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey International Report to set out what is known about international VET students' choices, work, migration and earnings, and where the evidence runs out.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
International student monthly summary (December 2025 and August 2026 year to date)	Department of Education	2026	PRISMS administrative enrolment data	All student visa enrolments
Total VET students and courses 2025	NCVER	22 July 2026	National VET Provider Collection	5.1 million students, incl. 282,785 international
International Students Pathways and Outcomes Study	Jobs and Skills Australia	25 September 2025	Linked data (PLIDA, ACTEID), visa records, interviews, focus groups, consultation	Student visa cohorts from 2010 to 11 onwards
2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey International Report	Social Research Centre for the Department of Education (QILT)	2026	Online survey 4 to 6 months after completion	More than 39,000 international higher education graduates
National Student Outcomes Survey 2025: technical notes	NCVER	2025	Survey documentation	Not applicable

How many, and what they study

Two sources count international VET activity, and they count different things. The Department of Education's PRISMS data record enrolments by student visa holders, including those who package several courses. NCVER's Total VET Activity counts students and program enrolments reported by RTOs.

Table 1: International student enrolments in VET, PRISMS, calendar years

Year	VET enrolments	Higher education enrolments
2019	281,386	440,869
2021	281,695	365,647
2022	270,969	359,926
2023	324,841	434,656
2024	391,556	497,187
2025	363,542	545,259

Source: Department of Education, *International student monthly summary*, year to date December 2025.

The decline has continued into 2026. Year to date August figures show 254,136 VET enrolments in 2026, against 315,055 at the same point of 2025, a fall of about 19%. Higher education enrolments over the same period were close to steady (507,543 against 509,849).

NCVER's data tell a consistent story. International fee-for-service students fell 4.6% in 2025 to 282,785, and international qualification enrolments fell 5.6% to 361,015. A decade earlier, in 2015, there were 175,475 international qualification enrolments. One field grew strongly against the trend: international enrolments in the Construction, Plumbing and Services training package rose 64.7% (12,590 enrolments) in 2025.

What do international VET students study? JSA, using Department of Education PRISMS data for 2024, reports that VET enrolments were concentrated in management (20%), business (18%), cooking (15%), marketing (6%) and mechanic or automotive courses (4%). The JSA study also highlights course packaging: between 2018 and 2021 around 66% of VET student visas covered a package of courses, with a median package length of just over 26 months, long enough to meet the two-year study requirement for post-study work rights.

What the JSA study did

Jobs and Skills Australia was commissioned in late 2023 to examine how education, migration and employment systems interact for international students. Its study, published in September 2025, follows cohorts who began studying from 2010 to 11, with a focus on those who started more than ten years ago, under the settings in place to the end of 2023. It combines:

- the Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), linking visa, tax and other records

- the Australian Census and Temporary Entrants Integrated Dataset (ACTEID) for 2021
- Department of Home Affairs visa grant data and Department of Education PRISMS data
- interviews and focus groups with graduates and employers, and stakeholder consultation

A crucial limit follows from the design. PLIDA can only follow students who appear in tax records, which mostly means those who worked while studying. JSA estimates that around 70% to 80% of student visa grants in the early 2010s later appeared in PLIDA, and that the share fell in the late 2010s, mainly because fewer Chinese higher education students worked while studying. Findings about "students who stay" therefore describe a particular, work-attached group.

Finding 1: many more stay than previously thought

A 2018 Treasury and Home Affairs analysis, widely cited, found that 16% of international students eventually transitioned to permanent residence. JSA's linked data suggest a much higher figure. Among students identifiable in PLIDA who commenced between 2010 to 11 and 2014 to 15, 56% of VET students and 55% of higher education students had gained permanent residency within ten years (or by 2022 to 23 for the later cohorts).

Table 2: Share of student visa cohorts who gained permanent residency, by time since commencing, 2010 to 11 to 2014 to 15 cohorts (average)

Sector	Less than 3 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	Total by year 10
VET	9%	16%	31%	56%
Higher education	8%	19%	28%	55%

Source: JSA, *International Students Pathways and Outcomes Study*, Table 2. Students identifiable in PLIDA only; later cohorts observed for fewer than 10 years.

Allowing for students not found in tax records, JSA estimates that around 35% to 40% of all international students who began in the early 2010s achieved permanent residency within ten years, falling to an estimated 25% to 30% for those who began in the late 2010s. JSA calls the 35% to 40% figure a lower bound.

The study also documents the motive. In 2022, nearly 70% of international higher education students said the possibility of migrating was a reason for choosing Australia. JSA notes that comparable data are not collected for international VET students, a gap in itself.

Finding 2: VET graduates' jobs match their training more closely

The study's most important finding for VET is about alignment. JSA concludes that international VET graduates are more likely than their higher education counterparts to work in occupations and earn incomes that match their qualifications.

Census data for 2021 show that nearly 60% of VET graduates on Temporary Graduate visas worked in Accommodation and Food Services, matching the cookery and hospitality

courses many had studied, with Construction the next most common industry. Among higher education graduates on the same visa, Health Care and Social Assistance and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services were the most common industries, but Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services were also relatively common. The 2023 Employment White Paper, cited by JSA, noted that over half of international graduates qualified at skill level 1 were employed at skill levels 4 and 5.

JSA also tracked incomes from the highest-paying job for cohorts first granted student visas in 2010 to 11 to 2012 to 13. At year 5, mean incomes for VET and higher education pathways were similar, with gaps consistently under 10%. By year 10 they had diverged by more than 20%. For the 2012 to 13 cohort, the gap was around 5% (under $2,000) at year 5 and 21% (almost $17,000) at year 10. Mean incomes grew by at least 8.3% a year from year 5 to year 10 for the VET pathway and at least 11.6% for higher education.

Read together, these results suggest VET produces faster alignment between training and work, while higher education produces slower but steeper income growth for those who stay. Both are averages over students who stayed and filed tax returns.

A narrow band of successful pathways

JSA found that, despite Australia's broad skills needs, international graduates transition most successfully into a narrow band of occupations, such as Registered Nurses and Chefs. It identifies four conditions these occupations share: courses that students can readily access and complete; visa pathways through skills lists; education settings that prioritise work readiness; and employer appetite for international graduates. Where any of these is missing, outcomes are weaker.

The study also observes that visa settings, including skills lists and the points test, may "funnel" students into courses and occupations outside their genuine interest, and in which they may not stay once permanent residency is achieved. JSA's occupational retention analysis nonetheless found that international graduates follow occupational pathways with at least as much persistence as the domestic workforce in some occupations, despite the extra hurdles.

Finding 3: the gap with domestic graduates

International graduates in Australia earn less than domestic graduates with the same qualification. JSA cites research reporting median earnings of $53,300 for Temporary Graduate visa holders, against $64,400 for domestic people aged 20 to 29 holding a bachelor degree or higher.

The 2025 GOS International Report gives the most recent survey picture for higher education. It is a useful comparison point, even though there is no equivalent national survey for international VET graduates.

Table 3: Domestic and international higher education graduates, 2025 GOS

Measure	Domestic undergraduate	International undergraduate	Domestic postgraduate coursework	International postgraduate coursework
Full-time	75.4%	50.8%	88.3%	52.2%

Measure	Domestic undergraduate	International undergraduate	Domestic postgraduate coursework	International postgraduate coursework
employment rate				
Labour force participation	88.0%	74.9%	93.0%	87.1%
Median full-time salary	$77,000	$70,000	$104,700	$69,400
Employed full time in managerial or professional jobs	67.3%	65.0%	86.0%	55.5%

Source: *2025 GOS International Report*, Executive summary, Figures ii, iii, v and vii.

The report cautions that international graduates are younger (93.1% of international undergraduates were aged 30 or under, against 77.5% of domestic undergraduates) and more likely to go on to further study, which partly explains the gap. It also notes that the domestic full-time employment rate received a larger lift than the international rate from the 2025 change in labour force definitions, so part of the widening gap reflects method.

The gap varies by field. Medicine and Rehabilitation graduates had high full-time employment rates in both domestic and international cohorts, while the gaps were large in Psychology, Business and management, and Agriculture and environmental studies. The report suggests jobs in these areas may be seen as requiring deeper cultural and environmental knowledge of Australia. Underemployment among international undergraduates rose to 30.8% of those employed in 2025, up from 24.6% in 2023, and between 14.9% and 26.2% of international graduates across study levels who wanted more hours said no suitable jobs were available. In our reading, the fields with the smallest gaps are those with clear occupational destinations and mandatory placements, which is consistent with JSA's finding that vocationally oriented pathways produce better aligned outcomes.

What students experience

The JSA study's qualitative work and literature review describe the conditions that shape outcomes.

- **Work during study is central.** According to the QILT 2022 international student survey cited by JSA, just over 78% of international higher education students said the ability to work part time was a reason for choosing Australia. Students told JSA they chose courses and timetables that let them work.
- **Work is often unrelated to the course.** Census-linked data for 2021, a period when work-hour limits were lifted, show student visa holders concentrated in a small set of industries (Table 4). JSA concludes that many jobs that fit around study are unlikely to provide relevant work experience.

Table 4: Largest industries of employment for student visa holders, 2021

Industry	Student visa holders
Food and Beverage Services	48,615
Building Cleaning, Pest Control and Other	17,061

Industry	Student visa holders
Support Services	
Residential Care Services	14,853
Food Retailing	13,060
Postal and Courier Pick-up and Delivery Services	9,606
Social Assistance Services	8,516

Source: JSA, *International Students Pathways and Outcomes Study*, Table 3 (ABS ACTEID 2021).

- **Patterns differ by origin.** JSA cites Australian National University research reporting that in May 2023, 80% of students from South and Central Asia, including India and Nepal, were working during study, against 24% of students from North East Asia, including China. Over 90% of Indian and nearly 96% of Nepali higher education students cited the ability to work as a reason for choosing Australia, against 63% of Chinese students.
- **Financial pressure.** Students told JSA that cost of living pressures were strong, and stakeholders reported that many students send money home. JSA notes that students prioritise jobs that maximise earnings around study, rather than jobs that prepare them for their industry.
- **Exploitation is a risk.** JSA cites Fair Work Ombudsman-commissioned research finding students often did not report underpayment, through limited knowledge of their rights and fear of consequences.
- **Work-readiness and English.** Graduates and employers described limited exposure to relevant work and variable English proficiency. One nursing graduate told JSA that their provider trained them as a nurse but not in how to search for a job.
- **Employer hesitation.** Employers expressed concerns about whether graduates were sufficiently skilled and whether they would stay, given uncertainty about visa status.

JSA also reports a pattern providers will recognise: some course choices reflect occupation lists for migration rather than genuine interest. Cooks and Chefs were among the top two VET-qualified occupations of former students gaining permanent residence between 2013 and 2023.

A shrinking evidence base on VET outcomes

The quality of the outcome evidence for international VET students is uneven. NCVER's National Student Outcomes Survey included international onshore VET qualification completers as an additional component from 2017. The 2025 technical notes record that from 2024 the international student component was not conducted, and international students are now out of scope. This means there is currently no national survey of international VET completers' employment and satisfaction, while QILT continues to survey international higher education graduates every year.

JSA's eleven recommendations partly address this. They include developing and publishing sector and provider level performance data on international education, including graduate labour market outcomes (Recommendation 2); adding PRISMS data to PLIDA (Recommendation 8); strengthening independent English language assessment at study

entry and exit (Recommendation 9); and increasing incentives for work-integrated learning (Recommendation 10). These are JSA's recommendations to government, not findings.

Limits of the evidence

- **Historic settings.** The JSA study describes cohorts who studied under settings to the end of 2023. Since then visa, integrity and enrolment policies have changed substantially, so the pathways it describes may not apply to current students.
- **Who can be seen.** Linked tax data cover only students who worked and lodged returns. Students who left Australia, or never worked, are largely invisible.
- **Survey gaps.** There is no current national outcomes survey for international VET graduates, so direct comparison with the 2025 GOS international results is not possible.
- **Enrolments versus students.** PRISMS enrolments count each course in a package, so they run higher than NCVER student counts and should not be compared one for one.
- **Averages hide providers.** JSA notes that ASQA has high confidence in TAFE's international delivery; the national averages above mix providers of very different quality.

What this means for your practice

These points are our interpretation of the research, not JSA's, NCVER's or QILT's recommendations.

1. **Build the job search into the course.** Students told JSA they were trained for an occupation but not for finding work in it. Résumé writing, interview practice and local industry contact belong in delivery, not just in a support brochure.
2. **Make work-integrated learning real.** Where a qualification has no placement, find structured ways for students to work on authentic tasks with employers. JSA identifies relevant experience as one of the main barriers to skilled employment.
3. **Teach workplace rights.** International students may not report underpayment. A short, practical session on pay, conditions and where to get help is low cost and well supported by the evidence.
4. **Assess English for work, not just for entry.** If graduates' English holds them back at interview, it is a training outcome problem. Embed occupational language in assessment tasks.
5. **Have honest conversations about course choice.** Where a learner's goal is migration rather than the occupation, advice about the real job, its conditions and progression is both ethical and protective.
6. **Track your own graduates.** With no national survey of international VET completers conducted since 2024, providers who follow up their own graduates hold evidence nobody else has.
7. **Avoid outdated statistics.** The often-quoted figure that 16% of international students stay permanently predates linked-data analysis; quote JSA's estimates with their caveats.

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