



Beyond the standard: motivators of high-performing RTOs



Joanne Waugh

National Centre for Vocational Education Research

HIGHLIGHTS

- Altruistic intentions and business security motivations were the key drivers of high performance among the RTOs in this study. These motivations reflect the challenges inherent in maintaining a financially viable business while providing the highest quality service.
- RTO leaders view strong relationships with students and employers as vital to high performance and prioritise resources to ensure open communication and create safe environments for students and staff.
- Leadership style appears to drive the way in which motivations are translated into action. Using a transformational leadership style, leaders prioritise inclusive and supportive practices for staff, students and employers alike. Targeted guidance and professional development support for RTO leaders may improve provider performance.
- Some RTOs may welcome resources and reliable guidance on ways to pursue high performance and to assess their efforts, but they see no requirement for further regulation in this area.
- RTOs' own definitions of high performance included not only measurable outcomes, such as completion rates, but just as often their aspirations for the organisation. RTOs considered that evidence of established responsive student support, along with mechanisms for ensuring industry knowledge; for developing excellent trainers; and for dedicating resources for engagement with industry, defines an RTO as high-performing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A great deal of work has been done in attempting to quantify and compare the performance of RTOs, with the aim of promoting improvement in the overall quality of training and delivery. Such endeavours have had limited utility due to the operational complexity of the VET sector and the variety of purposes served by RTOs. Also unclear is whether performance-ranking systems are likely to result in an overall quality boost since, until now, no examination of the motivations of RTOs that pursue high performance has been undertaken.

This research sought to understand both the motivations of high-performing RTOs and how they embed these into RTO operations. Several novel findings, with the potential to inform initiatives designed to boost performance, emerged from the research.

Participants' definitions of high performance included not only measurable outcomes, such as completion rates, but just as often referenced the intangible activities of RTOs, such as the effort put into building relationships with staff and employers. As long as RTO leaders hold views of high performance that include often personalised activities such as these – which are termed here 'intention-based' – it is unlikely that external assessments of RTO performance based on quantifiable measures will ever be viewed as satisfactory, comprehensive or fair.

In a similar vein, one important motivator of the participating RTOs was found to be altruism. A deeply personal and intrinsic motivator, altruism by its very nature presents a challenge to policymakers and other parties who might seek to boost performance. For the leaders who participated in this study, their RTO represented more than merely a business (although business viability still rated as a motivator). RTO leaders recognised their organisation's connection to the community and were keen to perform beyond a purely educational remit. One avenue for inspiring high performance in RTOs may lie in promoting awareness of the value of interconnectedness between the community and the RTO.

In adopting this 'bigger picture' view of their role, the participating RTOs tended to elevate student support, employer engagement and leadership efforts over the achievement of quantifiable measures such as completion rates. One tangible benefit of this approach was that RTOs reported that they had no need to advertise their organisation. Participants explained that word of mouth relating to their supportive practices amplified their already-good reputation, enabling them to fulfil enrolment quotas. This represents a major business sustainability benefit, one that could incentivise other RTOs to emulate the values and practices of high-performing RTOs.

When it came to embedding the motivations for high performance into RTO operations, it became clear that leadership style was viewed as a critical element to success. Teaching and learning values informed the prioritisation of student support, excellent staffing, quality assurance activities and collaboration with stakeholders, although it was evident that it was the leadership style that determined the ultimate success of those activities.

Participants discussed their approaches to leadership, with these strongly correlating with the tenets of transformational leadership, a style that prioritises relationships and encourages staff to identify their own motivations to align with company goals. High performance could be encouraged by providing VET leaders with resources, as well as guidance and support, to lead in the unique and complex environment of the RTO; however, the variety of operational environments in VET (size, location, field of education) means that enforcing more specific leadership requirements than already exist is unlikely to be productive.

This research adds a new perspective to discussions on RTO performance and highlights the varying ways in which providers self-assess performance. The insight into providers' altruistic motivations, as well as their beliefs about the role RTOs play in the community, provides an alternative conceptual base from which to support and promote RTO performance generally.

BACKGROUND

The range of RTOs' contextual factors, organisational foci and missions also means that a 'one size fits all' set of measures of delivery quality may not serve all purposes. (Guthrie & Waters, 2022)

The performance of RTOs has long been, and continues to be (see box 1), a subject of interest in discussions of quality in the VET sector (Agbola & Lambert 2010; Braithwaite 2018; Griffin 2017; Harris 2015). What seems the most obvious approach to an RTO's quality or performance enhancement, that of measuring or benchmarking their performance, is not straightforward.

Misko (2017) provided a summary of attempts to measure the performance of RTOs using different approaches and indicators, such as student satisfaction surveys, post-study employment rates and assessments of organisational and leadership capacity (for example, Carrington, Coelli & Rao 2005; Fieger, Karmel & Stanwick 2010; Misko & Halliday-Wynes 2009). Each measurement attempt reported that the context in which an RTO operated (for example, location, size, student mix) significantly affected the factors that were important to performance.

Guthrie and Waters (2021) further explored the challenges of measuring the quality of providers and noted that 'the range of RTOs' contextual factors, organisational foci and missions also means that a "one size fits all" set of measures of delivery quality may not serve all purposes' (p.6). In a subsequent, related study, Guthrie and Waters (2022) asked RTO leaders to define quality and reported that leaders spoke in aspirational terms, such as 'exceeding expectations', 'striving for excellence' and adding 'real' value for stakeholders (p.7). They linked these attitudes to two indicators outlined in Harvey's (2007) fitness-for-purpose view of quality: exceptional (excellence) and transformational.

RTO regulators assure quality and consistent vocational education and training through assessment of RTO performance against standards, but some RTOs deliver to a standard that exceeds those requirements. In the absence of a reliable instrument with which to compare RTO performance, understanding what motivates RTO leaders to pursue high performance may be valuable. The motivations of RTOs to go 'beyond the standard' in delivering outstanding outcomes for students and/or industry have not been previously studied.

Misko (2017) identified that interest in the motivators of RTO performance is driven by multiple users, who each hold different views on the value of such information:

- Governments want to protect the reputation of VET locally and internationally by ensuring that policies and regulatory frameworks are appropriately applied.
- Industry sectors seek confidence that VET-skilled workers will meet current and future skills needs.
- Students want assurances that the training they receive will provide them with necessary skills and knowledge for the career paths they choose.
- RTOs want to ensure market share and to benchmark their performance (p.6).

This study seeks to explore the quality indicators of 'exceptional' and 'transformational', as identified by Guthrie and Waters (2022) and associated with high-performing RTOs. It is hoped that understanding the views and attitudes of RTO leaders in their pursuit of high performance may aid governments, regulators and the RTOs themselves to facilitate conditions that enable the broader adoption of performance-promoting business practices and attitudes.

Box 1 Government interest in RTO performance

Stakeholder engagement undertaken by the Commonwealth revealed a need to improve the quality of training and assessment across the sector in order to lift VET outcomes and efficiency (Braithwaite 2018; mpconsulting 2020). To that end, in 2022–23 the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations undertook a revision of the *Standards for RTOs 2015*, with the aim of increasing the clarity of the standards and their outcomes focus; the department is also developing a *Blueprint for the VET workforce* to support, grow and retain a quality VET workforce.

The *Draft Standards for RTOs* proposed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations include two new clauses, which address the RTO connection to community and student wellbeing:

2.3 Wellbeing and equity clause: Learner wellbeing is supported through access to support services, and delivery of training and assessment in an inclusive, equitable, and safe environment.

4.2 Community: Community linkages facilitate pathways into, through and from training.

And one clause that outlines the responsibilities of RTO management:

5.1.1. Management is accountable for leading a culture:

- of quality training and assessment and continuous improvement,
- of integrity, transparency, and fairness,
- of inclusion, safety and wellbeing for staff and learners, and
- free from discrimination and harassment (Australian Government 2022)

Additionally, some states have established measures of high performance to inform recognition frameworks:

- Queensland Skills Assure supplier (SAS) system <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/providers/sas/framework>: the SAS system is based on a performance framework for the assessment, selection and monitoring of RTOs and is linked to the national standards and department-specific requirements in quality management. It aims to provide some assurance that an RTO delivers high-quality training (Queensland Department of Employment, Small Business and Training 2022).
- NSW Quality Framework underpins compliance requirements for Smart and Skilled Providers and encourages them to deliver better outcomes to students, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/vocational/funding/smart-skilled-quality-framework> (Training Services NSW 2022).

Methodology

The widely accepted difficulties of evaluating and ranking RTO performance meant that this research did not attempt to quantify high performance in order to rank-select high-performing RTOs for interview (Caspersen, Smeby & Olaf Aamodt 2017; Misko & Halliday-Wynes 2009). Rather, state and territory government training authorities were invited to nominate RTOs considered to be high performers, in terms of either student outcomes or industry satisfaction. In all, 69 RTOs, which represented a sample across regions, areas of delivery, provider types and sizes, were approached, with 21 of those subsequently participating in the research.

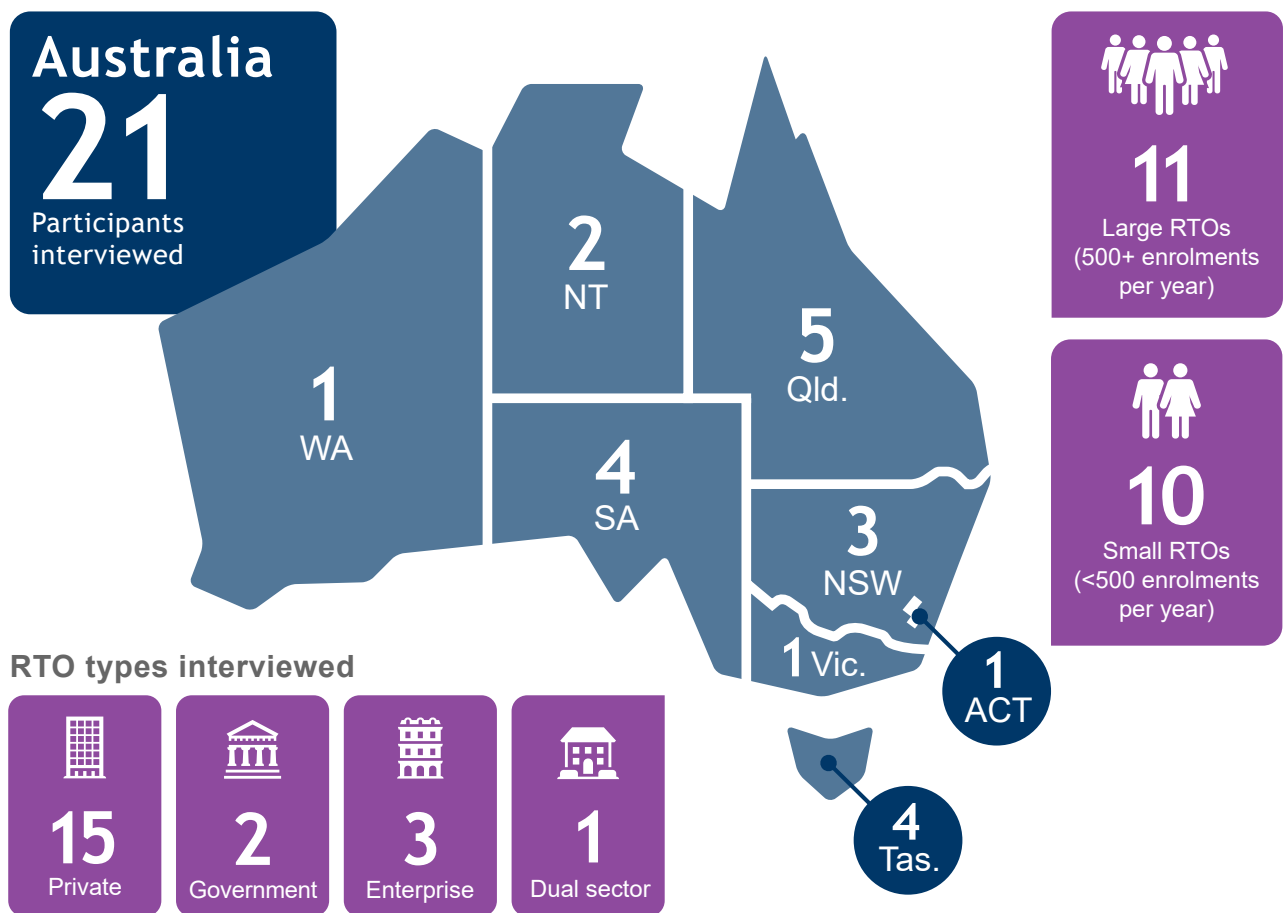
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the owner or most senior leader/s of the RTO. A thematic analysis of the interview data was undertaken, resulting in the generation of 126 codes. These were then collapsed into 25 themes across the five areas of enquiry relating to high performance:

- What is high performance?
- How do you embed high performance into RTO operations?
- How do you measure high performance?
- How do others know that your RTO is high-performing?
- What motivates your RTO to pursue high performance?

Figure 1 provides an overview of the region, size, and provider type of each of the 21 participating RTOs.¹ It is acknowledged that the participants in this research are not necessarily representative of all RTOs. Participation in this study was voluntary and therefore the findings may be skewed by the self-selection of RTO leaders with greater altruistic motivations. While there was broad representation of RTO participants from across Australia, the representation of states and territories was not equivalent to the distribution of RTOs. As indicated in the introduction, there is no fair or accurate way to quantify high performance, so the list of invited RTOs may have excluded those that fit the definition of providers that deliver outstanding outcomes for students and/or industry, or quite possibly have included some that did not.

Further detail about the methodology, participants and limitations of the research is provided in the Support Document.

Figure 1 De-identified participant characteristics.



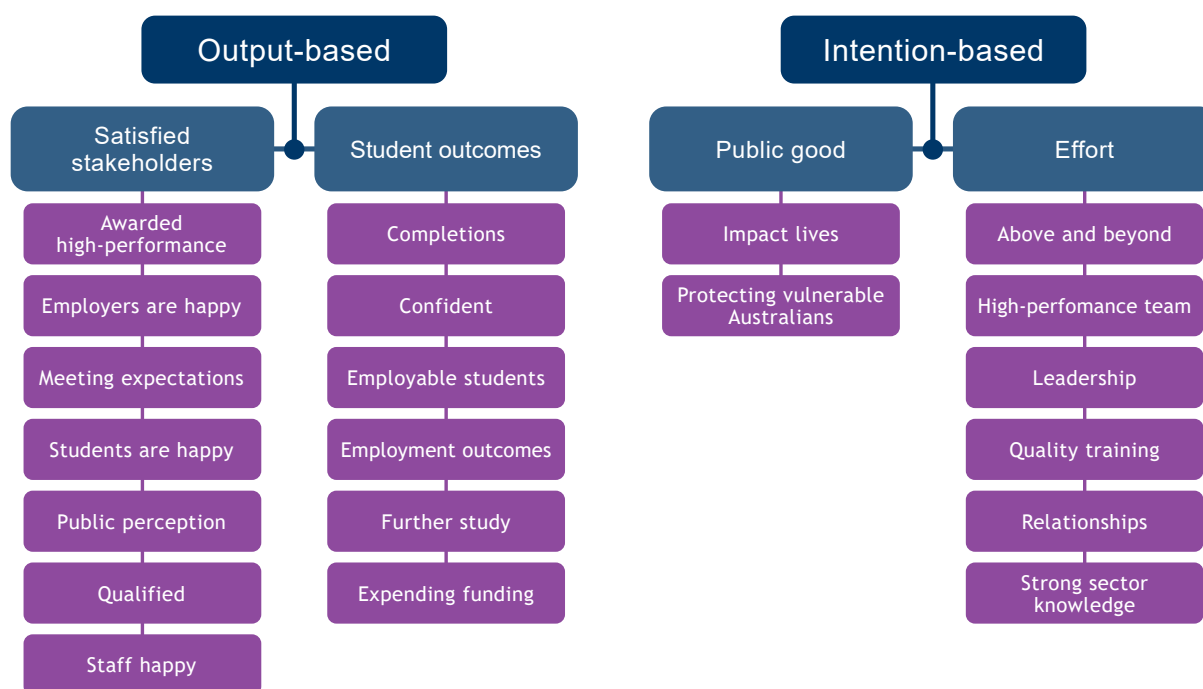
¹ It should be noted that at the time of undertaking these interviews, NCVET was also recruiting RTOs to participate in multiple projects. This limited the number of nominated high-performing large RTOs that could be contacted in order to reduce the risk of response fatigue.

WHAT IS HIGH PERFORMANCE?

We are very much student-centric, ensuring that they have a really good journey. (P #55)

Participants shared their definitions of high performance in the context of representing an RTO, with the analysis of their responses identifying four themes: satisfied stakeholders and measurable outcomes, two definitions that can be regarded as output-based; and public good and effort, these two being ‘intention-based’ definitions. Although all participants could articulate a definition, few mentioned the *Standards for RTOs 2015* in their discussion of a definition.

Figure 2 Concept map: What is high performance?



Output-based definitions

In their definitions of high performance, some participants proposed output-based definitions, these included measurement of completion rates; post-completion employment or further study rates; the approval of students; or even having expended their allocated budget.

Another output-based measure cited was the satisfaction of stakeholders, which encompassed reference to the perceived and measured satisfaction of students, the public, employers and governments.

We are very much student-centric, ensuring that they have a really good journey. But also ensuring that they have the skills and the confidence to succeed. (P#55)

Intention-based definitions

RTO participants also offered definitions of high performance that reflected the effort put into pursuing quality. Contrasting with the more measurable, outcome-based, definitions, the factors encompassed by the intention-based definitions tended to be intangible and relate to personal aspirations for the RTO and were rated highly as indicators of high performance.

One of those factors was the ‘public good’ that RTOs aim to deliver. Participants believed an RTO was high-performing if it aimed to have a positive impact on students and communities and play an important role in protecting vulnerable Australians by producing competent and safe workers.

Another element of an intention-based definition of high performance was the motivation underpinning an RTO’s business activities. Rather than looking to outcomes, some participants considered that evidence of responsive student support, along with mechanisms for ensuring industry knowledge, for developing excellent trainers, and for dedicating resources to engagement with industry, defines an RTO as high-performing: ‘If an RTO doesn’t have good trainers, then it’s not a high-performing RTO, I don’t care what measure you use’ (P#60).

What do definitions of high performance tell us?

The findings of this research revealed that RTO leaders define high performance in RTOs in terms similar to those applied to high-quality training and delivery. Guthrie and Waters (2022) found that a single definition of quality remains elusive in VET due to the variable purposes and contexts in which it is delivered. Nevertheless, their attempt to summarise the factors comprising quality encapsulates the themes identified by participants in this research. For Guthrie and Waters (2022), these were: ‘overall, high-quality delivery is highly engaging for students, closely tied to work, lays a foundation for life and leads to employment or another desired outcome’ (p.14). (The Guthrie and Waters report provides a more in-depth view of how definitions can vary by RTO type, another finding supported by this research.)

That said, the participants in this research provided novelty in their definitions of high performance, in that in many instances they referenced indicators of effort rather than outcomes. This may, as noted previously, reflect findings from past research: that it is difficult to quantify RTO performance. In addition to a lack of RTO-level data for many aspects of performance (Karmel 2009), the extent of the contribution of RTO activity to outcomes has been difficult to measure, entwined as it is with student characteristics and environmental and financial factors (Caspersen, Smeby & Olaf Aamodt 2017; Misko & Halliday-Wynes 2009).

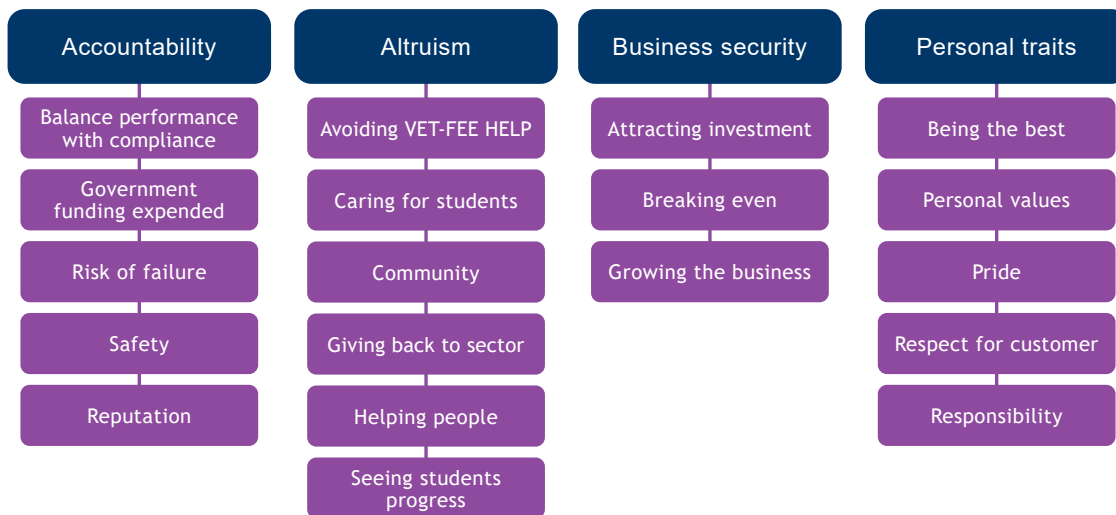
Confronted by the complexities of performance measurement, RTOs may include their effort and intentions to augment feedback received in the form of quantified outcome measures, such as program completion rates. If this is the case, it is unlikely that external assessments of RTO performance will ever be viewed as comprehensive or even fair. Indeed, participants whose performance has been assessed by a government program expressed concern that the criteria did not adequately capture the aspects of their RTO’s high performance they viewed as most important: ‘Just the statistics themselves are not that helpful. I think there’s a whole lot of qualitative stuff that comes around it as well’ (P#4).

WHAT MOTIVATES HIGH PERFORMANCE?

You see the direct outcome of what you’re trying to do and then you see it through the different stages of their careers as well and that’s really rewarding ... so that’s one thing that really does motivate us.
(P#27)

Participants reported that they were motivated by a range of factors, many of which were intrinsic to the participants as individuals. The aspects relating to motivation identified in the data included accountability, altruism, business security and personal traits. While business security was cited as a motivator, it was not as prevalent in participants’ responses as the motivators that fell under the altruism, accountability and personal traits themes.

Figure 3 Concept map: What motivates you to pursue high performance?



Accountability and altruism

The two themes of accountability and altruism were identified as being related, in that altruistic motivations often informed the need to be accountable for the RTO’s activities, prompting the RTO leaders who participated in this research to foster strong relationships with students and employers.

Large RTO participants claimed that ensuring their RTO delivered on its promises and obligations was a key motivating factor. One participant talked about their concern with ensuring that any government funds received were acquitted appropriately. Other participants, especially those delivering qualifications in high-risk trades or care sectors, talked about their awareness of their RTO’s role in delivering the core or essential skills that industry relied upon for productivity and safety.

Participants felt an obligation to maintain the reputation of their RTO and this acted as a catalyst for establishing and strengthening their relationships with stakeholders, which they considered vital to high performance: ‘I think it’s about relationships at the end of the day. For us, the relationships are a key part of what makes us a high-performing provider’ (P#7).

The care demonstrated to students by all types of RTOs revealed providers’ altruistic motivations. Other aspects of an altruistic impulse were highlighted by those who wanted to ensure that their industry had appropriately qualified workers, a factor that had motivated their transfer from industry to training. In this research, a general trend observable under the theme of altruism was higher representation of RTOs delivering in personal care, for example, in health, or in high-risk sectors such as electrical apprenticeships. These RTOs seemed more cognisant of the links between their work and the real-world application of the training and the possible consequences of inadequate training, for example: ‘I see a vulnerable person [receiving care] at the end of every training session they deliver. So they’re [trainers are] very conscious and they don’t want to let their students go if they feel as though they’re not going to provide at least safe support’ (P#62).

Personal traits

For a quarter of the participants, it was their own personality or characteristics that made them want to pursue high performance, a factor that did not vary by RTO type. Personally valuing high performance and wanting to ‘be the best’ as an individual motivated participants to channel these characteristics into their RTO, for example: ‘We’re a bit competitive. We’re pretty feisty, and we like to punch above our weight’ (P#44).

Business security

Ensuring that their RTO could continue to operate into the future was a motivating factor for a minority of RTOs and was a response coming predominantly from enterprise or large RTOs. Attracting investment, building the business and breaking even were cited as reasons to pursue high performance, for example: 'It [high performance] then gives the business confidence to invest in us. So when we seek funding for additional resources, or we need to uplift in any way, that business is happy to invest in our growth' (P#27).

Box 2 Do motivations and practices vary by RTO size?

RTOs of all sizes raised similar motivating factors and the associated implementation strategies. However, some differences emerged in approaches between small and large RTOs.

Small RTOs more often reported:

- using more informal methods of collecting feedback
- cultivating a flat management structure and consulting staff.

Large RTOs more often reported:

- defining high performance by satisfaction of stakeholders
- being motivated by accountability
- using internal key performance indicators (KPIs), targets and data reports to measure performance.

WHAT DO REPORTED MOTIVATIONS TELL US ABOUT RTO PERFORMANCE?

The line between [RTO name] and the rest of the world does, you know, there's no, just one student makes a difference and everybody in the RTO carries that around with them ... we are the community, we're all the same. (P#44)

The first question this research sought to answer was what motivates high-performing RTOs. Understanding motivations may inform the development of alternative approaches to promoting quality in the VET sector. That altruistic intentions and the traits of RTO leaders as individuals were commonly cited as motivators presents a challenge to policymakers who seek to boost performance. This begs the question of how can such intrinsic qualities be encouraged more broadly?

The prevalence of altruistic themes in the participants' answers indicates that these leaders recognise RTOs' connections to the community and that they are driven by a purpose that extends beyond a purely educational remit. Promoting the interconnectedness between the RTO and the community, as recognised by the participants, may present an appropriate avenue for encouraging high performance in RTOs. For the leaders who participated in this study, the RTO is more than just a business – although business viability still rates as a motivator. Rather, VET study and the RTO's role in it were viewed as a component of the interrelated services that an individual experiences in their journey to finding their place in the community and to economic security through employment. Importantly, they considered themselves to be a key support to their industry through the provision of skilled and enthusiastic workers who will ultimately help to strengthen that industry.

In taking this bigger picture view, the participating RTOs tended to elevate student support, employer engagement and leadership efforts over the achievement of quantifiable measures such as completion rates in self-assessments of performance. A connection to note here is that evidence indicates that focusing on the student experience can indirectly lead to a boost in measurable outcomes, such as completion rates (Cedefop 2015).

Student-centred² education practices promote greater student inclusion, as all students are better able to access and complete study (Bowman & Callan 2012; Cedefop 2015), while other research has revealed a positive correlation between student wellbeing generally and academic success (Orygen 2017). Universities have long recognised the benefits of holistic support for students to promote study success (Vernon, Modecki & Austin 2022), and the same has been argued for VET; for example, Pogrmilovic et al. (2021) recommended that the *Standards for RTOs 2015* be updated to include requirements to develop a student mental health and wellbeing strategy.

Additionally, economists have claimed that inclusion is ‘a precondition for a robust economy’ (Chalmers 2023, p.8), and as such, social inclusion has long been an aim of government VET and education policies and programs (Bowman & Callan 2012). All of this research confirms what the participant RTOs highlighted: the importance of recognising and responding to the link between their training activity and a broader social impact.

Importantly, the pursuit of high performance in RTOs through the provision of student support and engagement in employer collaboration seemed not only to serve altruistic impulses. Also noteworthy was that participants reported that these practices identified their RTO as high-performing, meaning they did not need to advertise: for participating RTOs, it was word of mouth and reputation that filled enrolment quotas (see Reputation aspect on p. 15). The business sustainability benefits alone stand as a strong incentive for other RTOs to emulate the values and practices of high-performing RTOs. It could be argued that, by promoting the benefits to RTOs of engaging with and embedding in local communities, a form of reciprocal altruism might be fostered. That said, some RTOs will legitimately struggle to find and connect with ‘community’, for example, those that deliver predominantly online, regulatory or short-form training.

Box 3 What isn't motivating?

Funding: participants did not mention government funding when outlining their motivations for pursuing high performance. However, some participants expressed frustration about pursuing high performance when constrained by the rules associated with funding payments or the inadequacy of funded amounts to work with a student cohort who need extra support: ‘Our funding is half of what a public provider [receives], which makes it ... really difficult to achieve what you want to achieve’ (P#55).

Regulation: most participants did not mention the VET regulators when discussing high performance. However, when prompted, the majority of RTOs asked said the regulators served a valuable purpose in prescribing minimum standards. Some would welcome the VET regulators taking a greater role in supporting high performance; others would prefer support in the form of reduced oversight in order to free RTOs up to innovate: ‘If you create an environment of high-risk averseness because of high penalties, you tend to get very low innovation’ (P#60).

This is the most essential relationship in VET: the employer organisation and the training provider. If they understand and can support each other, then successful skills development is a natural outcome. What has happened in my humble view over the 25 years is government (political) priorities, policy, regulation and a monolith ‘VET Industry’ has served to disrupt this key relationship to a point where it is incredibly challenging as an RTO to sustainably focus your resources on this most important relationship and purpose for vocational training.
(P#62)

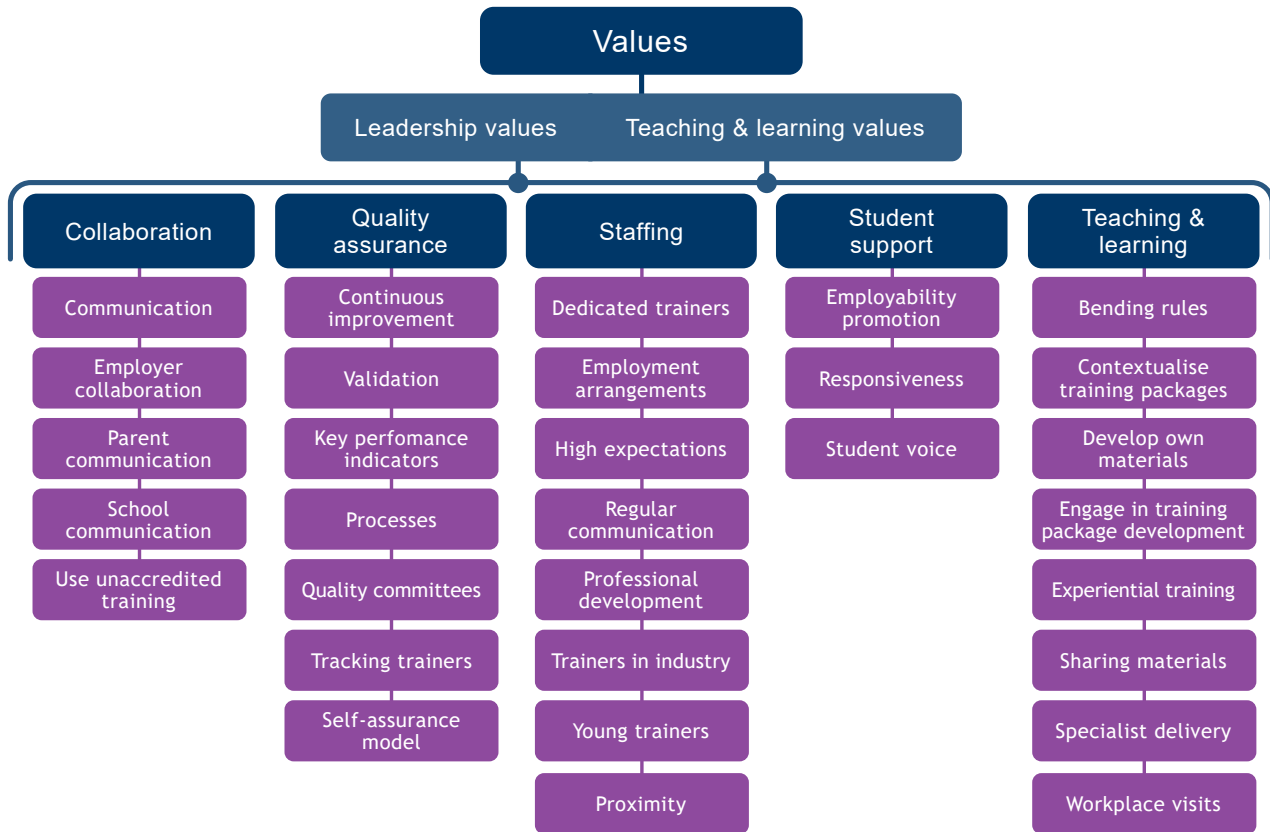
2 We use Cedefop’s (2015) description of learner-centred as meaning responsive to learner interests and needs and slowly increasing their ability to be independent learners, less reliant on teacher-led pedagogies.

HOW IS HIGH PERFORMANCE EMBEDDED IN BUSINESS PRACTICES?

We've had trainers come from bigger RTOs and they're like, 'So what's the number of units I need to get completed this week?' It's not about the number of units that they need to do, it's about making sure that knowledge transfers there. (P#26)

The interviews highlighted participants' approaches to embedding the pursuit of high performance in their RTOs, with a number of themes emerging, all of which were located under the overarching theme of 'values'.

Figure 4 Concept map: How is high-performance embedded in RTO practices?



Values

The theme of values was itself further divided into leadership values and teaching and learning values.

Leadership values

Leadership values were reported by participants to exert a strong influence over the ultimate impact of an RTO, given that the approach to staff management framed 'the mission' and encouraged or reduced motivation. The leadership values that participants believed promoted high performance included trusting staff, involving staff in decisions, and giving them autonomy in the training and assessment duties: 'It's probably giving them a little bit of autonomy on what they do and trusting them to make the right decision when they're delivering their training' (P#26).

Leaders reported that establishing close working relationships with operational staff was integral to building trust with this group and they worked to ensure they were kept up to date with both positive and negative issues relating to the organisation: 'So organisations, they're really connected, we're not separating them off saying you just do this function, we tie them into the different parts of how we operate and how the business operates' (P#27).

Establishing a personal relationship with staff was also seen as important: ‘Not exactly every morning, but most mornings I do a little walk-around ... first thing in the morning and just say hello to everyone. But we’re a very close-knit unit, that helps as well for sure’ (P#2).

Teaching and learning values

Some participants also believed that an RTO’s teaching and learning values contribute to how it performs. The most common educational values that participants raised were flexibility and an investment mindset. Flexibility meant having staff and systems that were prepared and able to provide students and employers with what they needed when they needed it: ‘We constantly look at ways to ... customise, to meet ... students come to us with all kinds of different situations. So we often have to look at things in an individual way and say right, what does this particular person need because the box may not, they may not fit in the box’ (P#42).

For these high-performing RTOs an investment mindset was concerned with investing more in building relationships with students and employers, for example, through higher staff ratios, as opposed to having the latest equipment or infrastructure.

Collaboration

Participants discussed the importance of embedding collaboration with stakeholders in their operations, highlighting this as a driver of high performance. This most often related to fostering and maintaining relationships with employers of apprentices and trainees, but also with schools and parents. The use of unaccredited training was seen as a way to meet clients’ needs by complementing the provision of accredited training.

We have an Industry Day ... once a quarter where employers and also other industry stakeholders like regulatory bodies, volunteer organisations and even labour market labour hire organisations come to present themselves to promote themselves ... That’s one of the critical things because that’s where we get a lot of information about something that might be changing an industry that’s not yet reflected in the training package that we can sort of be on the front foot with. (P#42)

Quality assurance

Large RTOs discussed quality processes as integral to the pursuit of high performance. These processes involved: maintaining a record of activities such as trainer performance; establishing quality committees and feedback pipelines; and ensuring structured validation of delivery and assessment materials: ‘We’ve got a very set process. So in a way, it took us a while to actually build that process, but now that it’s there, everyone knows they just have to follow it and you know it kind of becomes a machine in a way’ (P#3).

Small RTOs also used learning or student management systems to keep track of students but, unlike the large RTOs, made only passing reference to the implementation of formalised processes. Where small RTOs did discuss processes, they tended to be those designed to gather student feedback:

At the end of each block, we have a student feedback afternoon. So we have one-on-ones with all of the students just to see is there anything we can change. Is there anything that we can do differently; is something not working? And of course if there’s any, any flags that have been raised along the way we don’t wait till that meeting, we pick it up a little bit earlier. (P#62)

Some RTOs discussed the need to monitor staff to ensure that training and delivery occurred in accordance with the organisation’s values: ‘we’ve had to monitor them very closely to ensure that the quality standard that we require was delivered because there was definitely a feeling on their part that the sooner they got people signed off, the sooner they’d get paid’ (P#51).

Staffing

All RTOs rated engaging a capable VET workforce as integral to the pursuit of high performance: ‘We put the money into the staff primarily. I’d rather have, you know, really good staff and no equipment than really good equipment’ (P#2).

Small RTOs discussed the importance of having high expectations for trainers. For example, one RTO leader from a small RTO said, ‘We do have high expectations, but our high expectations are realistic within our sector’ (P#55). Another commented:

But it is just putting in those extra hours, extra time, being there for them when they’re ... not just in a class sense as well, like an emotional sense, because everyone’s going through a lot with COVID, as you know, that puts a big, big stepping-stone on our classes, but also the trainers as well, organising them to stay back to assist with students that may need that extra hand with learning ... and everybody’s willing to put in and we are working as a great team. (P#17)

Large RTOs more frequently than small RTOs raised the importance of offering relevant professional development to staff: ‘I think that probably one of the most valuable things about a trainer is when they’re doing further study themselves, because they both understand ... students, but also because they’re continuing to develop themselves in really comprehensive sort of steps’ (P#42).

Maintaining regular communication with training staff was seen as vital, and many RTOs who spoke about this mentioned the personal relationships they, as leaders in the RTO, had developed with training staff.

Student support

The area of student support involves employability support, students as stakeholders and responsiveness. Employability support included approaches such as helping students write resumes and hosting job boards for graduates. A minority of RTOs adopted the ‘students as stakeholders’ approach, whereby student representatives were involved in the RTO’s business quality assurance activities as members of quality committees. The RTO saw this as a way to ensure student satisfaction by communicating directly with them, and by giving them the opportunity to steer their own experience.

Finally, most RTOs indicated that they believed student-centric responsive teaching was most effective approach, dedicating resources to this approach above other activities: ‘We got a bit of a reputation as being a quality provider and we do a lot of face-to-face training. So we also think that [the face-to-face training] really connects us with our students and the students connect as a class’ (P#17).

Teaching and learning

Large RTO participants in particular claimed that they embed high performance by focusing on teaching and learning processes and materials. They often achieved this by carefully contextualising the training package on scope based on consultation with or feedback from employers, or by developing their own training and assessment materials:

We always have what we call a review day at the end of a unit for the trainers. And that review day is not only used for marking of the assessments, but it’s also used for the trainer to conduct a review of the materials and make notes of any changes ... and tweaks that are required to improve the course. (P#27)

One participant discussed being involved in the training package development process as useful to their own RTO’s high performance by having some input to the standards. Several participants, from both large and small RTOs, talked about the challenge of ‘bending the rules’ to deliver training that met the qualification rules but was also useful to students and industry: ‘We constantly look at ways to bend the rules, you know, to customise, to meet what students come to us with all kinds of different situations’ (P#42).

It may be enlightening for a future study to explore which rules are ‘bent’ and how such activity fits within the expectation under the *Standards for RTOs to customise qualifications for delivery*. Such a study would require high levels of trust from participating RTOs and assurances for anonymity in reporting.

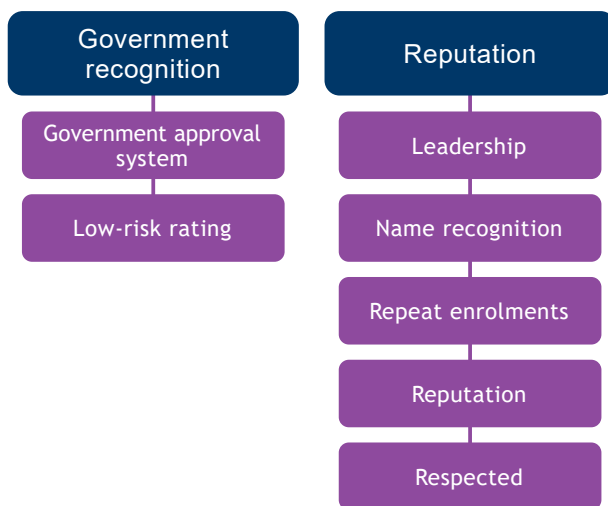
HOW DO STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS KNOW AN RTO IS HIGH-PERFORMING?

‘It’s word of mouth’.

(P#1)

Participants reported that they did not tend to use formal processes to track whether or how students and employers knew they were a high-performing RTO, with participants reporting that government recognition or their RTO’s reputation enabled students and employers to find them. The answers to this question overlapped with the responses to how RTOs knew that they were high-performing (See page 16).

Figure 5 Concept map: How do students/employers know your RTO is high-performance?



Government recognition

A small number of participants mentioned that having their RTO recognised through either a government award for high performance, such as the Australian Training Awards, or receiving a low-risk rating from a VET regulator was how they thought potential students or employers identified that they were high-performing.

Reputation

The phrase ‘word of mouth’ was used by the majority of participants when explaining how people knew they were high-performing. The RTO’s reported reputation was considered highly valuable to both their self-perception of high performance and business security.

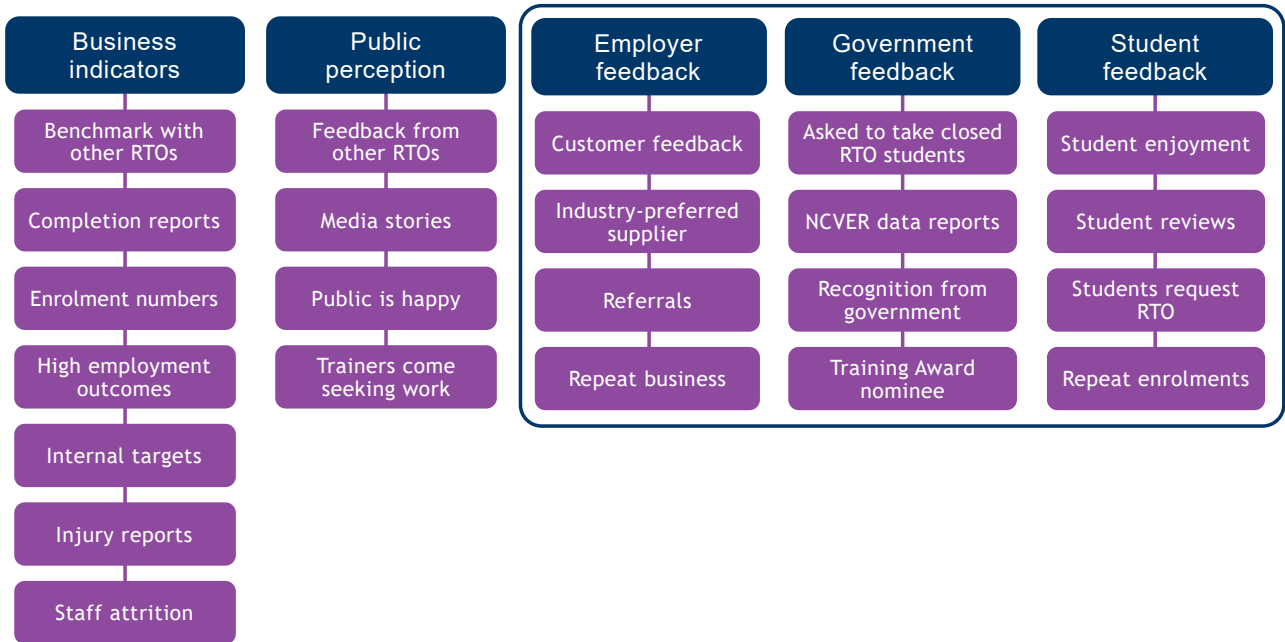
As noted earlier, many participants highlighted that they do not need to advertise because their reputation speaks for them, which attracts new students and employers. Indeed, the participants who raised the subject of advertising did so in the context of not needing to market their RTO, being able to rely totally upon the natural influx of students, a consequence of their reputation, promoted by employers and past students alike: ‘We don’t spend money on advertising’ (P#42) and from another: ‘It’s all word of mouth. [We] spend zero on advertising’ (P#60).

HOW DO YOU MEASURE RTO PERFORMANCE?

I think also the workplaces ... are actually knocking at our door and wanting their learners to be trained by us. (P#55)

Participants used a variety of approaches to assess their own performance, with these categorised into three themes: business indicators, feedback from employers, governments and students; and public perception.

Figure 6 Concept map: How do you measure high performance.



Note: RTO=Registered training organisation.

Business indicators

Participants reported that they use business indicators such as data and reports on their business health and performance to determine how they are performing, with program-completion-rate reports being the most commonly cited form of data tracking. Some RTOs mentioned that reporting their data was a requirement of operating as an RTO and that this offered an easy option: ‘Obviously we use completion data’ (P#60).

Enterprise RTOs talked about liaising with business managers to monitor indicators such as business performance and injury rates to measure RTO performance. Due to their proximity to their students’ employer, enterprise RTOs reported that they relied upon more formalised employment-side indicators of performance than other RTO types: ‘From the safety, performance-wise and to organisationally [sic], we measure on our safety and report on safety and enable the system we use for that, and down [to] the training centre, we report all of our safety, any safety things, through that’ (P#27).

Enrolment numbers and post-study employment rates were also used to track performance by RTOs of all sizes, locations and scope. Large and enterprise RTOs tended to use internal targets related to their own definition of high performance, which were often associated with requirements of the *Standards for RTOs (2015)*.

Feedback

Participants overwhelmingly stated that they relied heavily upon feedback from employers, government sources and students to measure their performance. Many RTOs mentioned that the mandated student and employer feedback surveys were inadequate for enabling them to understand how they were really performing and consequently had designed their own feedback forms or processes to complement that effort.

Feedback from employers was a popular method of self-assessment. This feedback tended not to be gathered formally, but was made apparent by the volume of employers that had sought out their RTO for their worker training

and had referred other business to them: ‘I think also the workplaces that are actually knocking at our door and wanting their learners to be trained by us’ (P#55).

Student feedback was deliberately sought more often than employer feedback, and was undertaken in more formalised ways. Student feedback collection varied greatly across RTOs and was always developed to suit the training environment and type of students; for example, one small RTO sat down for a conversation with each student towards the end of their study, while a larger RTO sent short surveys to students’ phones by text.

Feedback from government sources was mentioned in the form of being nominated for a training award or being recognised by the regulator or a government high-performance framework. Some scepticism was expressed about the reliability of external assessments of RTO performance due to the value the participants placed on indicators that cannot be measured, for example, student comfort in the learning environment.

Public perception

This issue relates to Reputation’, mentioned earlier (p.15), in that some RTOs’ self-assessment of performance relied in some part upon the reputation they had built with its customer base. RTOs measured their reputation through indicators such as repeat enrolment activity and being sought out as an employer of choice for subject-matter experts in their field/s of delivery.

RTOs also measured their performance by examining feedback from media stories focusing on their RTO or students: ‘When you get in good news stories, even in the media outlets, the papers, all that type of stuff that’s ... reassurance for us especially as the RTO that, yes, we are doing a good job and people [are] coming home safe’ (P#18).

How do RTOs know they are high-performing?

High-performing RTOs reported they did collect and refer to business data for signs they were performing well but also reported being diligent about collecting feedback from their various stakeholders. The RTOs differed widely in how they collected this feedback, but most commonly they actively sought feedback using methods that went beyond the mandated student and employer surveys, after which they used the feedback to inform continuous improvement activities.

Large RTOs were more likely to report having developed and implemented formal feedback methods, while small RTOs reported relying more upon a general sense of performance, acquired through their personal interactions with the student body and staff. Importantly, the participants expressed no desire for an expansion of the current mandated feedback obligations, preferring to have the flexibility to do what works for their context.

The participating RTOs generally did not report seeking resources to guide their pursuit of high performance; the minority who did were unable to identify them:

I do remember a scenario where we had a couple of different consultants on different occasions come to us and they give us their feedback, but it wasn't the kind of feedback that I wanted ... I guess as far as resources are concerned, it's always great if it comes from the horse's mouth rather than through various consultants out there. So I would much ... prefer that ASQA works one-on-one with high-performing RTOs, ... because we want to do the right thing.
(P#3)

External benchmarking was highlighted as an ideal but difficult method for improving RTO performance due to what was described as the VET culture of keeping ‘trade secrets’. One participant was involved in a local community of practice network, which facilitated inter-RTO benchmarking and resource-sharing. However, they stressed that the establishment of the network was made possible by the provision of government funding.

Providing consistent support for RTOs to connect with others may benefit those seeking to pursue high performance, allowing them to gather ideas or validate their approaches. Recognising that some RTOs feel they lack the benchmarking information to inform the pursuit of high performance, NCVET may be able to improve the information available to RTOs to address knowledge gaps. However, RTOs believe their operational context determines the nature of high performance, making benchmarking using only quantitative measures of limited value.

HOW DO RTOs EMBED MOTIVATIONS INTO OPERATIONS?

The second research question asked how motivations are operationalised into RTO processes and functions. The themes identified in participant responses reflected the quality practices reported in Guthrie and Waters (2022), and this research was able to shed greater light on the role of leadership.

RTOs generally reported that high performance was embedded through prioritisation of student support and quality teaching and learning; staffing excellence; collaboration with stakeholders; and the implementation of internal quality assurance activities. Each of these aspects of performance was guided by the leadership and training and delivery values of the RTO leaders. For example, quality assurance activities served an important function in ensuring adherence to standards, but they also provided the participating RTO leaders with a mechanism through which to hear from staff at all levels – a demonstration of their collaborative leadership values. Establishing close relationships with employers and other stakeholders allowed RTO leaders to deliver on their values relating to training and delivery, that is, that it should be flexible and was worth the expense to get right.

The participants highlighted their approaches to leadership as central to the overall effectiveness of all other RTO activities. This view supports a key finding of Guthrie and Waters (2021), that quality leadership is a central facet of the quality of VET delivery generally. For many of the participating RTO leaders, it wasn't sufficient to appoint qualified staff; it was important to engage with them, invite their participation in business decisions and empower them to make decisions in their roles working with students. Along with more formal methods for sharing the RTO's 'mission statement', participants believed that their open and collaborative approach to leadership overtly and tacitly communicated their expectations and fostered a workplace culture that intrinsically pursued excellence.

There is strong evidence that high-quality leadership correlates with more positive educational outcomes in VET (Callan et al. 2007; McNally, Schmidt & Valero 2022; OECD 2021; Ofsted 2014; Ruiz-Valenzuela, Terrier & Van Effenterre 2017), while transformational leadership has been found to correlate with positive education outcomes when applied in learning institutions (Komariah 2015). Transformational leadership is said to enhance any organisation by 'raising the values of members, motivating them to go beyond self-interest to embrace organizational goals, and redefining their needs to align with organizational preferences' (Razak & Hamidon 2015, p.57). The foundation principles of transformation leadership are the four I's, which offer neat categorisations for the leadership examples shared by participants:

- *Idealised influence*: 'Our people come with a very strong growth mindset engaged in, you know, of course we're not perfect – there [are] mistakes that can happen – but it's very much around learning from those mistakes and people feeling confident that if they make a mistake [then] that mistake can be fixed and they learn from it' (P#55).
- *Inspirational motivation*: 'There's the company mission, the company value statement that gets the CEO [talking] to everyone during induction about this is what we stand for' (P#26).
- *Individualised consideration*: 'It's probably giving them a little bit of autonomy on what they do and trusting them to make the right decision when they're delivering their training' (P#27).
- *Intellectual stimulation*: 'We involved key trainers in ... the whole rewrite [of training content] so they know how the curriculum is developed' (P#27).

In acknowledgement of the importance of VET leadership to quality, some international vocational education systems do prescribe leadership qualifications for VET leaders. For example, in Israel, VET institution leaders are required to have at least five years of teaching experience and hold a master's degree. Furthermore, some educational providers require leaders to undergo an external professional screening process. In Spain, VET leaders need five years teaching experience and must undertake a VET leaders' training course, offered by governments, and undertake a refresher every eight years. The 120 hours of training comprise six modules of practical and theoretical leadership training (OECD 2021).

One approach to strengthening VET leadership in Australia could be to adopt a similar leadership training requirement. However, the recommendations of a UK study of further education leadership do align with the comments made by the RTO leaders in this study relating to regulatory oversight generally: that any leadership framework should not be prescriptive, and instead represent a set of aspirations ‘detailing the qualities, characteristics, traits, skills, attitudes, practices and experiences of excellent leaders’ that RTOs can apply to their own operational circumstances (Crowther 2013, p.23).

The emergence of leadership qualities as strongly connected to the pursuit of high performance suggests that formalised support for RTO leaders represents an opportunity for regulators and industry bodies interested in promoting VET excellence. A similar recommendation was previously made by an Australian & NZ Association for Tertiary Education Management study, including to provide ‘more direct training for all new and existing leaders on the key findings about effective approaches to leadership’ (Scott & McKellar 2012, p.43). However, any resources or training provided must be customised to suit the operational environment of the RTO, where leaders are wearing many hats and each operate in unique contexts (Harris & Simons 2013).

It is possible that resources or professional development opportunities for RTO leaders, based on the principles of transformational leadership, may facilitate increased RTO performance across the sector. Such resources could also be an opportunity to highlight to RTO leaders the links between the role of RTOs and broader society, which may inspire the altruistic motivations that, for the RTOs in this study, seem to drive high performance.

Box 4 Shared features of high-performing RTOs

- Value and pursue strong relationships with employers, schools and students
- Driven by a community mandate
- Implement student-centred approaches
- Prioritise staff support, inclusion and wellbeing
- Use a transformational leadership style
- Leadership displays strong personal values and commitment to a mission
- Seldom need to prioritise marketing themselves to attract business.

CHALLENGES TO PURSUING HIGH PERFORMANCE

In addition to considering the factors that may inspire high performance in RTOs, it is worth identifying the potential barriers to the pursuit of high performance. While participants were overwhelmingly positive about their role and effectiveness in the VET sector, some expressed frustration over factors that inhibited their ability to pursue high performance as an RTO:

- *Balancing educational aspirations with the demands of regulation and funding:* RTOs reported struggling to balance their desire to leave a lasting impact on students and their industry versus the need to ensure their RTO is sustainable as a business.

‘I would say again it is a balance of being able to achieve our goals of a quality compliant RTO with the support that we actually give our students’ (P#55).

- *A lack of support and resources for RTOs to extend themselves beyond meeting the standards of regulators:* this included observations that VET is different from the higher education sector, in that VET is less willing to share resources or benchmark.

‘RTOs tend to be quite secretive. It’s actually difficult, in my experience, to talk with another RTO and I’m at a strategic level, so I don’t know why we tend to be quite [secretive] and I think in some ways the regulatory framework has made it that way’ (P#60).

'I think that there is generally a reluctance to exchange information and to be supportive of each other in a deeper way within the VET sector'
(P#42).

- *The role of the regulators in RTO performance:* participants who spoke about this reported that the burden of perceived inconsistency in regulatory oversight was demotivating in terms of pursuing high performance. RTO uncertainty about how innovation in training and delivery practices may be received at audit was reported to diminish RTOs' willingness to go above and beyond.

'You know they want an RTO that's willing to go that extra mile, but there's risk in doing that'
(P#60).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- RTO pursuit of high performance is primarily driven by altruistic intentions and business security motivations.
 - Increasing awareness of the connection between RTOs and communities and inspiring leaders to consider the role of VET in society more broadly may improve outcomes for students and industry.
 - Leadership style is perceived to be positively correlated with high performance. Targeted guidance and professional development support for RTO leaders may improve provider performance.
 - Strong relationships with students and employers are seen as vital to high performance and are both directly informed by the altruistic and business sustainability motivations of RTO leaders.
 - A further benefit of investing in strong relationships with stakeholders is a reduced need for RTOs to market themselves since students and employers seek them out based on word-of-mouth recommendations.
 - RTOs may welcome resources and reliable guidance on how to pursue and assess their own high performance but see no need for further regulation in that area.
 - Over-regulation is viewed as a barrier to high performance due to the administrative burden involved and a fear that innovative, context-informed practices may not meet standards.
-

REFERENCES

- Agbola, FW & Lambert, DK 2010, 'Skilling Australia for the future? A study of quality assurance in Australia's vocational education and training', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, vol.62, no.3, pp.327–49, viewed 3 May 2023, <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2010.509805>>.
- Australian Government 2022, *Reforms to improve the quality of training delivery: draft revised Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)*, Canberra, viewed 3 November 2022, <<https://www.skillsreform.gov.au/images/documents/quality/ConsultationPaper-DraftRevisedStandardsforRTOs.pdf>>.
- Bowman, K & Callan, V 2012, *A pedagogic framework for socially inclusive VET: principles, strategies and capabilities*, Melbourne, viewed 1 March 2023, <<https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A58255>>.
- Braithwaite, V 2018, *All eyes on quality: review of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 report, the Braithwaite review*, Canberra, viewed 23 September 2021, <<https://www.dese.gov.au/review-national-vocational-education-and-training-regulator-act-2011/resources/all-eyes-quality-review-national-vocational-education-and-training-regulator-act-2011-report>>.
- Callan, V, Mitchell, J, Clayton, B & Smith, L 2007, *Approaches for sustaining and building management and leadership capability in VET providers*, NCVET, Adelaide.
- Carrington, R, Coelli, T & Rao, DSP 2005, 'The performance of Australian universities: conceptual issues and preliminary results', *Economic Papers: A Journal of Applied Economics and Policy*, vol.24, no.2, pp.145–63, viewed 7 September 2021, <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-3441.2005.tb01001.x>>.
- Caspersen, J, Smeby, J-C & Olaf Aamodt, P 2017, 'Measuring learning outcomes', *European Journal of Education*, vol.52, no.1, pp.20–30, viewed 21 September 2021, <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12205>>.
- Cedefop 2015, *Vocational pedagogies and benefits for learners: practices and challenges in Europe*, Cedefop, Luxembourg, viewed 12 January 2023, <<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/5547>>.
- Chalmers, J 2023, 'Capitalism after the crises', *The Monthly*, February, viewed 3 May 2023, <<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2023/february/jim-chalmers/capitalism-after-crises#mtr>>.
- Crowther, C 2013, *Leading learning organisations: an analysis of leadership in the further education and skills sector*, Coventry, Eng., viewed 8 December 2022, <<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130802100617/http://lsis.org.uk/publication-content/leading-learning-organisations-analysis-leadership-further-education-and-skills>>.
- Fieger, P, Karmel, T & Stanwick, J 2010, *An investigation of TAFE efficiency*, NCVET, Adelaide, viewed 18 January 2022, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/an-investigation-of-tafe-efficiency>>.
- Griffin, T 2017, *Are we all speaking the same language? Understanding 'quality' in the VET sector*, NCVET, Adelaide, viewed 7 December 2021, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/are-we-all-speaking-the-same-language-understanding-quality-in-the-vet-sector>>.
- Guthrie, H & Waters, M 2021, *Unpacking the quality of VET delivery*, NCVET, Adelaide, viewed 7 December 2022, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/unpacking-the-quality-of-vet-delivery>>.
- 2022, *Delivering high-quality VET: what matters to RTOs?*, NCVET, Adelaide, viewed 3 December 2022, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/delivering-high-quality-vet-what-matters-to-rtos>>.
- Harris, R 2015, 'Quality in the Australian VET sector: what has been happening?', *International Journal of Training Research*, vol.13, no.1, pp.16–34, viewed 3 May 2023, <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2015.1051348>>.
- Harris, R & Simons, M 2013, 'Chameleon leaders? The influence of context on leadership in Australian private providers', paper presented at the 21st National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference 'No Frills': refereed papers, viewed 8 December 2022, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/21st-national-vocational-education-and-training-research-conference-no-frills-refereed-papers>>.
- Karmel, T 2009, *Measuring educational outcomes: vocational education and training*, NCVET, Adelaide, viewed 7 September 2021, <<https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A2183>>.
- Komariah, A 2015, 'Transformational leadership for school productivity in vocational education', in *1st International Conference on Sociology Education*, Proceedings, Atlantis Press, viewed 3 May 2023, <<https://dx.doi.org/10.2991/icse-15.2016.51>>.
- McNally, S, Schmidt, L & Valero, A 2022, *Do management practices matter in further education?*, London, viewed 8 December 2022, <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/_NEW/publications/abstract.asp?index=9145>.

- Misko, J 2017, *Factors that drive RTO performance: an overview*, NCVER, Adelaide, viewed 7 December 2021, <<https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A78396>>.
- Misko, J & Halliday-Wynes, S 2009, *Tracking our success: how TAFE institutes evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- mpconsulting 2020, *Rapid review of the Australian Skills Quality Authority's regulatory practices and processes*, Canberra, viewed 23 September 2021, <<https://www.dese.gov.au/australian-education-act-2013/resources/asqa-rapid-review-final-report>>.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) 2021, *Teachers and leaders in vocational education and training*, OECD Reviews of vocational education and training, OECD Publishing, Paris, viewed 10 December 2022, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/59d4fbb1-en>>.
- Ofsted 2014, *Teaching, learning and assessment in further education and skills – what works and why*, Office for Standards in Education, CsSaS, UK, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-learning-and-assessment-in-further-education-and-skills-what-works-and-why>>.
- Orygen 2017, *Vocational Education and Training (VET) Student Mental Health*, Health, TNCoeiYM, Melbourne, viewed 10 December 2022, <<https://www.orygen.org.au/Orygen-Institute/Policy-Areas/Employment-and-education/Education/VET-student-mental-health>>.
- Pogrmilovic, K, Craike, M, Pascoe, M, Dash, S, Parker, A & Calder, R 2021, *Improving the mental health of young people in tertiary education settings*, Policy evidence brief 2021-01 Mitchell Institute, VU, Melbourne, viewed 5 December 2022, <<https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/improving-the-mental-health-of-young-people-in-tertiary-education-mitchell-institute.pdf>>.
- Queensland Department of Employment Small Business and Training 2022, *Skills Assure Supplier Framework*, viewed 9 December 2022, <<https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/providers/sas/framework>>.
- Razak, N & Hamidon, N 2015, 'Effects of Leadership Styles in Technical and Vocational Students', *Journal of Education and Practice*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 57–59, viewed 8 February 2023, <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1083785.pdf>>.
- Ruiz-Valenzuela, J, Terrier, C & Van Effenterre, C 2017, *Effectiveness of CEOs in the public sector: evidence from further education institutions*, CfVE, London, viewed 15 December 2022, <<https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverbrf005.pdf>>.
- Scott, G & McKellar, L 2012, *Leading professionals in Australian and New Zealand tertiary education*, Carlton, Vic., viewed 8 December 2022, <https://www.atem.org.au/eknowledge-repository/command/download_file/id/17/filename/Leading_Professionals_scott_mckellar_report.pdf>.
- Training Services NSW 2022, 'NSW Quality Framework – Smart and Skilled', viewed 9 December 2022, <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/vocational/funding/smart-skilled-quality-framework>>.
- Vernon, L, Modecki, K & Austin, K 2022, *Understanding wellbeing challenges for university students during crisis disruption*, Education, NCfSEiH, Perth, viewed 2 December 2022, <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Vernon_ECU_FormattedFinal.pdf>.

© Commonwealth of Australia, 2023



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, the Department's logo, any material protected by a trade mark and where otherwise noted all material presented in this document is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au>> licence.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the CC BY 3.0 AU licence <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/legalcode>>.

The Creative Commons licence conditions do not apply to all logos, graphic design, artwork and photographs. Requests and enquiries concerning other reproduction and rights should be directed to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

This document should be attributed as Waugh J 2022, *Beyond the standard: motivators of high-performing RTOs*, NCVER, Adelaide.

This work has been produced by NCVER on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with funding provided through the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES

ISBN 978-1-922801-13-5

TD/TNC 152.01



Published by NCVER ABN 87 007 967 311

Level 5, 60 Light Square, Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 8288, Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

P +61 8 8230 8400

E ncver@ncver.edu.au

W www.ncver.edu.au

twitter.com/ncver

[linkedin.com/company/ncver](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ncver)

[facebook.com/ncver.au](https://www.facebook.com/ncver.au)