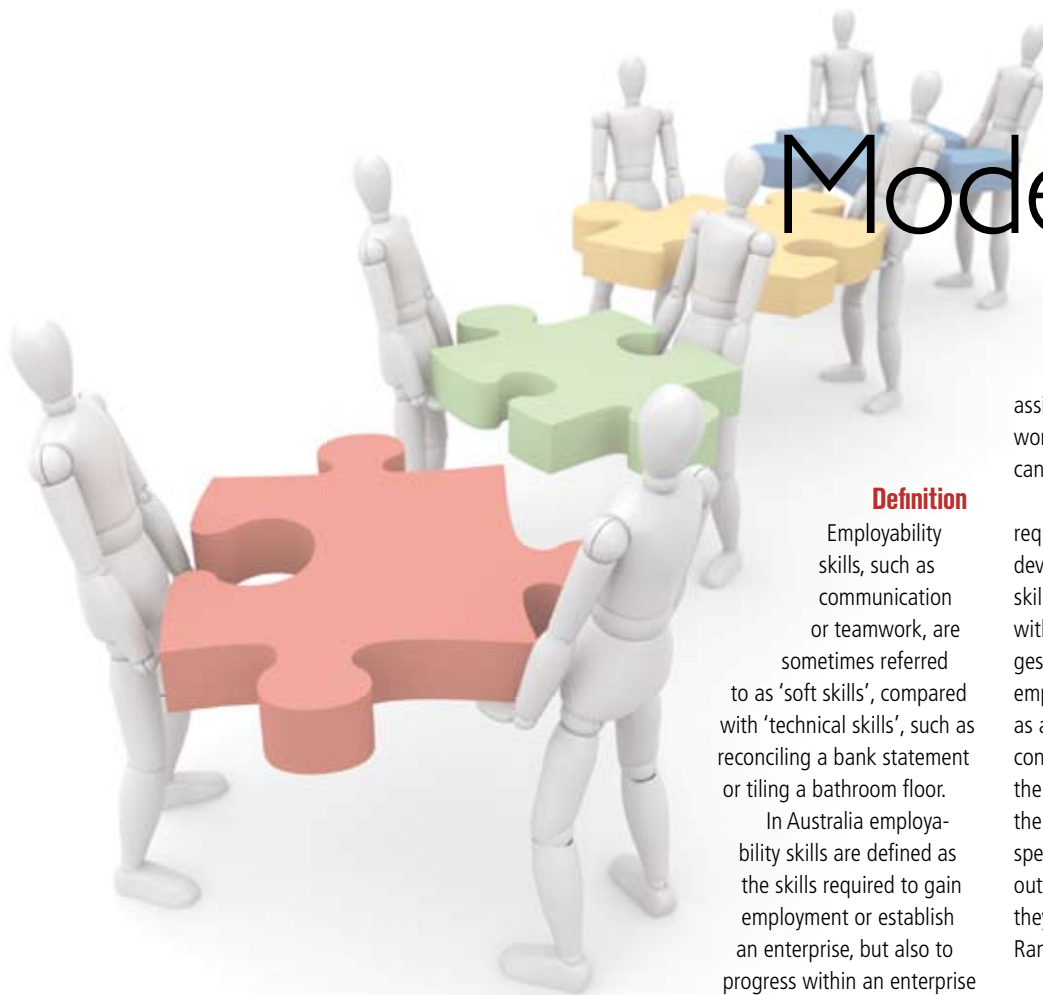


Modelling and



employers generally view employability skills, along with technical skills, as highly desirable for employees. Employability skills can assist employees gain jobs, perform effectively at work and win promotions. And employability skills can also lead to success in other domains of life.

One reason why professional judgement is required by VET practitioners in helping learners develop employability skills, is that employability skills are not described as discrete requirements within units of competency in Training Packages. While there are some stand-alone units of employability skills in some Training Packages, as a general approach employability skills are contained in the units of competency as part of the other performance requirements that make up the competency as a whole. Employability skills are specifically expressed in the context of the work outcomes described in units of competency, and they appear in Elements, Performance Criteria, Range Statements and Evidence Guides.

Definition

Employability skills, such as communication or teamwork, are sometimes referred to as 'soft skills', compared with 'technical skills', such as reconciling a bank statement or tiling a bathroom floor.

In Australia employability skills are defined as the skills required to gain employment or establish an enterprise, but also to progress within an enterprise or expand employment capability, so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to an enterprise's strategic directions.

The eight employability skills are initiative and enterprise, learning, self-management, communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organising and technology.

In relation to the reporting of employability skills, on completion of Training Package qualifications, learners can now download a report on the employability skills developed in the qualification from <http://employabilityskills.training.com.au>

Employability skills are important for a range of reasons. For example, research shows that

Driving and modelling

Leading TAFE practitioners are profiled in a set of articles that is now available to the sector, as one product of a National Quality Council project that concluded recently. The articles and a range of other free resources for awareness raising and professional development are available at www.employabilityskillsresources.com

The nine articles provide concrete exemplars of how trainers and assessors are effectively responding to the inclusion of employability skills in training packages. These practitioners are both driving good practice and, in the process, modelling employability skills themselves, such as initiative and enterprise.

TAFE practitioners around Australia are providing leadership on how to respond effectively to the inclusion of employability skills in Training Packages.

The embedding of employability skills in Training Packages was undertaken by industry skills councils over the last few years and the sector now needs leadership in the field about how to respond to these changes.

TAFE SA strategy

One of the articles describes the work of **Rob Denton**, Advanced Skills Lecturer, Electronics and Computer Systems Engineering program, TAFE SA. Rob designed, promotes and uses *LINKup Employability Skills*, a specially designed developmental strategy for employability skills suitable for all training contexts and workplaces says its developer. Denton calls LINKup a "comprehensive value-added' developmental strategy."

The origins of LINKup date back to 1991 when action research was conducted at the then Tea Tree Gully TAFE in Adelaide, strongly influenced by the acclaimed model of generic skills development from the Alverno College, USA.

Denton says that LINKup was founded on the

educational principles of the Alverno model, with an emphasis on practical implementation. LinkUp was also developed through stakeholder involvement and trials in VET, university, workplace and school contexts.

Denton explains that LINKup pioneered the Validated Self Assessment (VSA) process, ... as a learner-centred system designed to ensure students develop a sound knowledge of and competence in the employability skills performed in authentic activities, integral with technical competencies.

All self assessments are validated by an appropriate assessor — lecturer or workplace supervisor — ensuring credibility, says Denton.

VSA tools, both print and enhanced online interactive formats, are specifically designed to

provide a systematic developmental learning experience for students rather than merely an assessment checklist.

The comprehensive LINKup website provides total support including student induction, professional development, self assessment tools, educational philosophies, research papers, interactive multimedia resources and more, as set out on <http://linkup.tafesa.edu.au>



driving employability skills

Ballarat tips

Another of the free articles on good practice focuses on the TAFE staff within the University of Ballarat and their development of checklists and tools for employability skills. Over the period 2003-2006, and funded in part by Reframing the Future, a project team at the University focused on employability skills, and produced a range of booklets, templates and guides that are publicly available at the following site:

http://www.ballarat.edu.au/vfed/learning_and_teaching/educational_projects/2006/employability_skills/employability_skills_2006.shtml#Resources

Irene Warfe, a teacher in the Department of Humanities and Further Education, University of Ballarat, played a lead role in the project and reports that one of the very useful checklists to result from the project is called 'Ten Tips for Developing Employability Skills'. Other providers could develop their own checklists of good practice, using the University of Ballarat list as a cue or starting point.



Sunshine Coast portfolios

The third article profiles the work of Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE with student portfolios. **Teressa Schmidt** a teacher at the Institute, recently led her colleagues in a Reframing the Future project on the development of an e-portfolio to support the development and assessment of employability skills. The e-portfolio concept was developed by her teaching and learning network in 2007. The network included educational delivery staff from a variety of vocational training areas as well as Institute managers and IT staff, as all of these staff have a role to play in fostering and supporting e-portfolios.

The e-portfolio approach was identified as offering a number of benefits for students, teachers and employers, says Schmidt:

It will be particularly useful in the development and assessment of a range of employability skills including technology, communication, self-management, learning, and planning and organising. Students will benefit not just from the development of these skills, but also by the production of a transportable and comprehensive e-portfolio which will assist when seeking employment.

The teachers involved in the project focused on developing a platform which would provide the benefit of a 'trackable' assessment resource and offer the opportunity for innovative and engaging practice in the development and assessment of employability skills.

As a result of the project, says Schmidt, students will be able to use a variety of methods to present their e-portfolio to prospective employers: they can download the content onto a USB device, or email an invitation to view the e-portfolio to the targeted employer.

Teachers involved in this project propose to pilot the e-portfolio approach in 2008 before enabling the use of e-portfolios throughout the Institute.



Models and modelling

The inclusion of employability skills represents a significant modification of Training Packages. Leading TAFE practitioners such as those discussed above are ensuring that these changes to Training Packages are embraced by their colleagues and bring about concrete improvements in learners' performance at work. These leading practitioners are not just providing tips, techniques, tools and

workshops, they are also modelling employability skills.

Their efforts have assisted with the development of a model for assessing and reporting employability skills which is set out as handout No.11 of the resource: 'Level 1 workshop for implementing the model for assessing and reporting employability skills', and which is available at www.employabilityskillsresources.com

The model is a generic framework for good

Tasmanian support

A fourth article available at www.employabilityskillsresources.com

highlights the work of the Learning and Innovation team at TAFE Tasmania which initiated a professional development program for staff to enhance understanding and ensure the embedding of employability skills

in teaching and assessment practices. Learning Manager **Laurie Miller** (pictured) is working on the initiative in collaboration with his colleague Learning Manager Graeme Kirkwood.

Two workshop programs have been developed. Workshop 1 is customised for specific delivery teams at TAFE Tasmania and guides teachers through understanding the Employability Skills Framework in their Training Package and provides a closer examination of the Employability Skills Summaries for qualifications they are delivering.

Workshop 2 explores teaching strategies to assist the development of employability skills and encourages sharing of experiences and creative teaching methods. Participants undertake a more detailed review of assessment activities and evidence gathering to support judgements about employability skills.

Integral to this workshop, says Miller, is the preparation of "planning strategies to help students develop portfolios and articulate their own employability skills". Encouragement of these portfolios links to current TAFE Tasmania projects on e-assessment and e-portfolios.

By the start of 2008, 250 TAFE Tasmania teachers had either participated in or registered for these two workshops. Miller and Kirkwood are also staying connected with their peers on the mainland:

We see linking with other RTOs to share experiences and resources as a vital part of our Employability Skills PD strategy. We aim to continue the strong links with the Victorian TAFE Employability Skills network and also establish a similar network among Tasmanian RTOs and industry groups during 2008.



practice which can stimulate and guide professional development and ongoing professional practice.

Dr John Mitchell, consultant to the National Training Council project on employability skills.

