

Partnering industry to ensure job-ready graduates

The Australian definition of employability skills emphasises the link between the individual's skills and the needs of the enterprise. The definition is:

...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 enterprise strategic directions. (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra.)

Well-rounded graduates

The goal of the individual worker achieving his or her potential and also contributing successfully to the enterprise is assisted by the preparation of graduates who have employability skills. Part of that preparation can be through work experience, arranged by the training provider in collaboration with an enterprise.

Mark Holtom (pictured), Director of Studies, MEGT Institute in Sydney, says that his organisation recognises “the link between education, work experience and employability skills in producing a well-rounded graduate”.



The job-ready graduate is a key outcome of MEGT training:

It has been a long held belief by both VET and industry professionals that students graduating from VET courses should be job-ready and the MEGT Institute in Sydney has begun industry partnerships for its Hospitality and Children's Services courses to ensure this is a key outcome.

MEGT interviews employers “for their input about the employability skills they see as suitable for their enterprises”, said Holtom, and found that:

...they look for students to demonstrate all eight employability skills – communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology.

MEGT Institute is re-working its program delivery to emphasise each of these critical employability skills and, as part of this program, has started building partnerships with industry for student workplace experience:

This includes negotiations with a local accommodation hotel to provide training for their staff, in

exchange for tours of their facilities and work experience for our students. The workplace training also ensures MEGT's trainers retain industry currency.

Holtom says that his organisation "welcomes the inclusion of employability skills in the Training Packages" and he believes "this will lay the platform for closer ties between industry and VET providers resulting in a better quality graduate".

Engaging with industry

Developing partnerships with industry, such as those developed by MEGT, is one of the good practice strategies advocated by the model for assessing and reporting employability skills. The model for assessing and reporting employability skills was developed by a project undertaken by the National Quality Council from 2006-2008 and is set out as handout No.11 of the resource: 'Level 1 workshop for implementing the model for assessing and reporting employability skills', which is available at www.employabilityskillsresources.com

A component of the model is the provision of guidelines for professional development in developing closer relations with industry around employability skills. One of the professional development resources available on the website, entitled 'Strategies to promote industry engagement with Level 2 professional development involving employability skills', provides suggested strategies for initially engaging with industry.

Training providers like MEGT ideally obtain industry input at the front-end of teaching and assessment activities, for example for industry to validate any new tools developed, so that industry supports approaches and then views the intended outcomes as relevant.

Four sets of strategies

The PD resource at www.employabilityskillsresources.com on strategies available to training providers to obtain engagement from industry, identifies four sets of strategies as follows:

1. Consulting with employers – from individual employers, to groups of employers, to employer representative bodies – on the design of appropriate learning, training and assessment approaches that take into account employability skills.

Advice can be sought on topics such as which employability skills are particularly significant in various aspects of different jobs in the one industry.

2. Sharing good practice examples with employers of how, in the past, training providers have collaborated with industry in designing appropriate learning, training and assessment approaches.

Good practice might involve training providers working closely with enterprises to contextualise assessment strategies for that particular enterprise.

3. Highlighting perspectives of individual employers obtained from interviews recorded and documented by the training providers.

Employers can be prompted in interviews to articulate which employability skills are especially significant in different jobs and what might be the focus of assessment.

The recording of these interviews could be in note form or by audiotape or videotape. Sometimes informal interviews as conversations generate more useful data than highly structured interviews.

4. Developing principles for engaging with industry, with input from industry about those principles. Some principles might include:

- ensuring that employers are clear about the critical value attached to employability skills

within Training Packages

- ensuring that the views of a range of employers are obtained, to reflect a range of jobs and enterprises where employability skills are required in any one industry. (pp.3-4)

Modelling engagement strategies

Training providers such as MEGT are modelling the use of strategies such as interviewing or consulting with industry, seeking advice on topics such as which employability skills are particularly significant in various aspects of different jobs in an enterprise, and ensuring that employers are clear about the critical value attached to employability skills within Training Packages.

The PD resource on ‘Strategies to promote industry engagement’ emphasises that, in an industry-led national training system, industry performs a pivotal partnership role with training providers in developing assessment and training strategies that incorporate employability skills.

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