

# Reviewing training and assessment strategies for employability skills

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To assist the VET sector with the implementation of Training Packages that include employability skills, a model for assessing and reporting employability skills is now available. The model advocates the use of a range of different training and assessment good practice strategies. It also provides some tips to trainers and assessors, for getting started.

The model 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](http://www.employabilityskillsresources.com)

## Initial checklist of steps

To assist trainers and assessors to get started with implementing good practice strategies in teaching, learning and assessment, the model sets out the following actions as an initial checklist. At each step below, trainers and assessors are asked to consider which of your current learning and assessment tools and strategies are usable either without changes or with modification. The model also notes that the sequence of steps may change for different contexts.

The steps are as follows:

- read through the newly edited or recently released Training Package relevant to your work and familiarise yourself with new references to employability skills and the revised wording of units of competency
- examine how employability skills are incorporated in Elements, Performance Criteria, Range Statements and Evidence Guides
- in examining the wording of the units of competency, also look for relationships between different employability skills, then take into account these relationships before designing learning and assessment strategies
- analyse the relevant Employability Skills Summaries and ensure the learning and assessment approaches contain the appropriate mix and importance of employability skills in the general context of the industry or industries covered by the qualification
- use the four skill areas known as dimensions of competency (task skills; task management skills; contingency management skills; job/role environment skills) to create a holistic image of the competent individual and to identify which employability skills could be unpacked into learning and assessment activities
- when developing assessment approaches and tools, ensure that they are valid and reliable, authentic and current, and documented in the Learning and Assessment Strategies.

## **Ten tips for trainers**

The good practice steps set out above are the product of interviews, focus groups and other consultations, but these steps were not designed to be the last word on the topic of good practice in relation to employability skills. An RTO that has investigated employability skills thoroughly and developed checklists and tools is the University of Ballarat. 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](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”.

The ten tips from the University of Ballarat for trainers are:

- use action learning strategies that link the learner to the ‘real work’ including problem-based learning
- apply learning methods that increase the explicitness of employability skills, such as including case studies that highlight employability skills
- develop a range of learning strategies to engage learners, such as drawing connections between employability skills and learners’ interests and life experiences
- help learners reflect on their own learning, for instance by using checklists of employability skills to assist learners to think about the skills they have developed
- use group work thoughtfully to help learners develop the skills to work in a team
- use the learning program to foster self-directed learning, for example by providing opportunities for learners to negotiate assessment activities
- build relationships of respect and trust with your learners
- give regular feedback on the learners’ development of employability skills
- continue to develop your own skills
- ‘be the change that you want to see in the world’ (M. Gandhi).

Other providers could develop their own checklists of good practice, using the University of Ballarat list as a cue or starting point.

## **Revising existing tools and resources**

Another training provider that has examined good practice regarding the assessment of employability skills is First Impressions Resources, a retail training specialist RTO which has its headquarters in Brisbane.

First Impressions' Assessment Co-ordinator Gwen Moroney reports how her company is reviewing processes and practices in relation to the Retail Services Training Package (SIR07) following the embedding of employability skills:



“Embedding has meant that employability skills are not treated separately from the competencies within the Training Package units,” says Moroney, “but are appropriately interwoven with the unit skills and knowledge outcomes”.

As a result, says Moroney, there are no separate assessment tools or student resource materials for employability skills – “the existing resources are being progressively revised to seamlessly incorporate them”.

Professional development within First Impressions has included encouraging trainers and assessors to look more holistically at job roles:

Through professional development, trainers and assessors have been encouraged to see the embedding of employability skills as an enhancement of what they have already been doing; as a way of looking more holistically at job roles and skill-sets and as a part of continuous improvement.

The initial work at First Impressions has included the following actions:

- identifying which specific employability skills are present in each unit of competency in the Training Package
- focusing on the facets of the relevant employability skills at the appropriate AQF level to identify the outcomes required
- revising training materials and assessment tools to accurately include the appropriate employability skills and facets.
- providing professional development opportunities to trainers and assessors so they understand the value and importance of employability skills, are able to identify them at a unit level, and can seamlessly include them in their training delivery and assessment evidence collection.

### **Validating existing assessment practices**

For some training providers, the inclusion of employability skills within Training Packages has validated their previous approaches to on-the-job assessment.

This is the view of **Chris Butler** (pictured), Accreditation Manager, People and Culture, Australian Shared Services, Insurance Australia Group (IAG):



As an Enterprise RTO, now that employability skills are embedded in performance criteria and other aspects of Training Packages, we believe our assessment strategies - which are completed

on the job in real time - are validated.

Butler believes that “the incorporation of employability skills strengthens the competency standards”:

This is the opinion of IAG RTO, where the new standards remove the previous ambiguity of ensuring learning and assessments cover the performance criteria and key competencies.

Butler also believes that the inclusion of employability skills in Training Packages “allows the VET practitioner a clearer picture of what a competent person looks like when collecting evidence”.

### **Reviewing strategies**

To assist the VET sector with the implementation of Training Packages that include employability skills, the model for assessing and reporting employability skills advocates the use of a range of different good practice strategies. These strategies are generic ones and ultimately each training provider needs to refine the generic strategies and develop their own.

Training organisations such as the University of Ballarat, First Impressions Resources and IAG are reviewing their existing strategies in a range of ways that suit their context, including their learners and workplaces. In each case the training provider is developing good practice principles and practices to ensure the quality of training and assessment.

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