

Customising professional development for employability skills

To assist VET practitioners to become more proficient with using Training Packages that include employability skills, a model for assessing and reporting employability skills was developed by a project undertaken by the National Quality Council from 2006-2008.

The model 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

The appendix to the above resource sets out a professional development strategy for implementing the model. Training providers are encouraged to either use or modify that professional development strategy for their local context.

Two levels of PD

The professional development (PD) strategy includes the recommendation that activities be conducted at two levels:

- Professional Development, level one: focused on building skills and knowledge required for implementing the model for assessing and reporting employability skills
- Professional Development, level two: focused on building skills and knowledge for improving industry specific applications of the model for assessing and reporting employability skills.

The PD strategy also recommends that level one PD be preceded by an information dissemination campaign focused on awareness raising about the employability skills, highlighting their importance within jobs and their essential place within vocational education and training.

Set out below are examples from two training providers, TAFE Tasmania and Sarina Russo Schools in Brisbane, about how they have developed PD workshops at level one and are looking towards level two.

TAFE Tasmania PD strategies

The Learning and Innovation team at TAFE Tasmania has initiated a professional development program for staff to enhance understanding and ensure the embedding of employability skills in teaching and assessment practices, says Learning Manager **Laurie Miller** (pictured), who is working on the initiative in collaboration with his colleague Learning Manager Graeme Kirkwood.



Two workshop programs have been developed, building on the PD strategy promulgated by the NQC project in train-the-trainer workshops around Australia in November 2007. Miller attended the Hobart workshop in that series.

Workshop No.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.

Participants in the workshop explore how employability skills are embedded in specific units of competency that they teach. Participants then determine appropriate assessment methods. The workshop concludes, says Miller, with an examination of current employability skills resources now available through a link on the TAFE Tasmania intranet site.

Workshop No.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.

Sarina Russo Schools PD strategies

Bernadette Dunnett, Head of Schools at Sarina Russo Schools Australia in Brisbane, participated in a statewide Reframing the Future project in 2007 which looked at ways to prepare RTOs for the task of unpacking qualifications and units of competency to reveal the embedded employability skills. From this external project she took away ideas for her own organisation:

Taking some of the great ideas from this project we held a professional development day at Sarina Russo Schools Australia where we briefly touched on employability skills and their inception but more importantly looked at each skill and developed 'trigger' words for each one to help identify the employability skills within units.

This initial professional development was effective immediately, because the trainers related to the issues:

Most of our trainers have current or recent industry work experience and were able to put themselves in the 'shoes of the employer' to match what they believe are important 'job-ready' skills and attributes that employers are looking for.

Other information dissemination strategies assisted staff: “We have put posters around the staff room and encourage staff to add to the trigger words.” The next step, says Dunnett, will be “to involve industry and discuss employability skills and our list of 'trigger' words with them”.

In this way we believe that we will have a broad picture of what is expected from industry when our students finish their qualification and enter the workforce. We hope in this way to truly make them 'job-ready' in every sense of the word.

Levels of PD

The model for assessing and reporting employability skills sets out a professional development strategy for implementing the model. Training providers are encouraged to either use or modify the professional development strategy for their local context.

TAFE Tasmania has modified the model and developed two customised workshop programs to assist staff to develop skills and knowledge. Sarina Russo Schools in Brisbane has also developed PD strategies which suit its staff and the contexts within which they work.

The next step for both RTOs, as noted by Bernadette Dunnett from Sarina Russo Schools, is to involve industry. This step is called level two PD in the model for assessing and reporting employability skills.

This work has been produced on behalf of the National Quality Council with funding provided through the Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations and state and territory governments. Disclaimer: the views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or state and territory governments.