

Assisting learners to develop employability skills

In 2005 the decision was taken nationally to incorporate employability skills within Training Package qualifications and units of competency.

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 enterprise strategic directions.

Ways to assist learners

Training providers around Australia are now developing strategies which will assist learners develop these employability skills. One such provider is First Impressions Resources, a private training organisation which specialises in retail industry training and caters for over 2,000 trainees per year, as well as for certificate and diploma-level students.

First Impressions operates nationally. With its headquarters in Brisbane, its trainers are located in Queensland regional centres, and in Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. Staff regularly fly to Hobart and Darwin and collaborate with a local college in WA.

First Impression's Assessment Co-ordinator, **Gwen Moroney** (pictured), explains that First Impressions focuses on encouraging learners to consider employability skills as an integral part of their learning experience:



We aim to assist learners to consider employability skills as part of their overall learning experience and as an integrated requirement of workplace behaviour and performance.

To assist learners, First Impressions ensures that details about employability skills are included in enrolment information, learning resources and assessment tools. Learners are also provided with an explanation of how these employability skills are incorporated into the vocational outcomes of the unit or course.

This information includes provision of the relevant Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level Employability Skills Summary. An Employability Skills Summary exists for each qualification. These summaries provide a lens through which to view employability skills at the qualification level and capture the key aspects or facets of the employability skills that are important to the job roles covered by the qualification.

Learning materials used by First Impressions' learners are now being modified, says Moroney:

Information specific to employability skills is being identified with an icon throughout the

students' learning materials to assist learners to focus on this aspect of the competencies required.

Holistic approach

As the assessment co-ordinator within First Impressions, Moroney is determined to provide trainers with “a seamless transition to revised assessment tools, not a separate set of assessment tools”. The new tools acknowledge the relevant facets of employability skills. Facets are aspects of the employability skill that employers identify as important and the nature and application of these facets will vary depending on industry and job type.

Moroney explains why she is focused on not developing a separate set of assessment tools:

Assessment tools need to enable the holistic assessment of abilities including specific unit knowledge and skill outcomes as well as the relevant employability facets. Separating the assessment of employability skills fragments the assessment process and evidence.

This integrated approach was developed, says Moroney, to encourage learners to have “an holistic approach towards the development of both their technical abilities and employability skills”.

Links to model

Encouraging learners to take this holistic view about the development of their technical and employability skills is consistent with the approach taken in the model for assessing and reporting employability skills – a model developed by a project undertaken by the National Quality Council.

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 model encourages trainers and assessors “to create a holistic image of the competent individual”.

Training providers such as First Impressions are assisting learners to develop employability skills through strategies such as modifying their learning materials and providing important information to learners. Providers such as First Impressions are also encouraging learners to have an holistic approach to the development of their technical and employability skills, particularly as employability skills are embedded in units of competency, and not listed separately.

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.