

Encouraging learners to develop a portfolio of employability skills

Encouraging learners to view employability skills as desirable, including for self-employment and for success in other domains of life, is part of the rationale for the model for assessing and reporting employability skills.

This model of good practice 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', available at www.employabilityskillsresources.com

The excerpt from the model in Figure 1 below provides a list of good practice strategies for assisting learners to value and develop employability skills. The list contains reminders for teachers and trainers of the practical steps they can take to assist learners.

Figure 1: Good practice learning strategies, from the model for assessing and reporting employability skills

Learners can be encouraged to:

- understand the meaning and application of employability skills
- acknowledge the value of employability skills to their work and life
- understand that employability skills are embedded in Training Packages
- take responsibility for acquiring the employability skills, with support from trainers and employers
- develop and record examples of employability skills they acquire
- use reflection and self assessment in the development and recognition of employability skills.

These good practice strategies were developed during 2007-2008 through extensive national consultations, including interviews, focus groups and workshops.

Portfolios of evidence

One of the strategies listed in Figure 1 above, “develop and record examples of employability skills they acquire”, can be achieved by learners voluntarily developing their own portfolios of employability skills. In their 2006 report, *Assessment and Reporting of employability skills in Training Packages* (DEST), the Allen Consulting Group described how learners could collect and organise evidence of the employability skills that they have developed through VET, other study, or in other areas of life. RTOs can play a role in the process:

Learners could continue to update their portfolio throughout their working lives, as they continue to develop different facets of employability skills in new contexts. There are a number of existing resources available to students who wish to develop such a portfolio. RTOs may play a role in encouraging students to develop their portfolios, but would not be required to assess or verify the portfolios. (p.7)

Allen Consulting observed that student portfolios would provide further information to employers that desire it, but more importantly “would involve students actively gathering evidence about their skills, thereby increasing their awareness and understanding of the skills that employers desire” (p.7). A strong feature of this approach, said Allen Consulting, is that the preparation of a portfolio “would itself demonstrate certain employability skills” (p.7).

E-portfolios

One form of student portfolios is the “e-portfolio” which Allen Consulting defined as a personalised website that provides a record of an individual’s employability skills (p.23). Skills contained in the e-portfolios are not assessed or validated. They allow individuals to personalise part of a website to promote their employability skills including:

- performance on the job or in the classroom
- professional development
- achievement of certificates and awards
- development of new skills (p.23).

Teresa Schmidt (pictured), a teacher at Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE, 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.

Although it will be necessary to limit the capacity of the total file size, students will be able to load ‘artefacts’ into the product as well, which will be highly beneficial to those studying in design-based programs such as Photography, Fashion and Interior Design.

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

Representing achievements

Whether it is an e-portfolio or paper-based portfolio, Allen Consulting encourage the use of portfolios as “a purposeful collection of work and information that represents an individual’s efforts, progress and achievements over time” (p.26). Ideally, such a collection of work will also assist graduates seeking to demonstrate their employability skills to employers.

The development of a portfolio is a compelling way for learners to “develop and record examples of employability skills they acquire”, as advocated 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.