

# **The Job Ready Certificate**

A Discussion Paper for the Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations

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**HOW TO LET US KNOW YOUR VIEWS ON  
THE ISSUES IN THIS DISCUSSION PAPER**

A copy of this discussion paper is on the web site of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Follow this link to find it:

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/jobreadycertificate>

You will find a form there that you can download and use for your response. It contains all of the questions that are included in this discussion paper. Please send your response to:

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Job Ready Certificate is an Australian government initiative to provide a practical way to assess and report on young people's job readiness<sup>1</sup>. It will report on key employability skills like teamwork and communication as well as personal qualities that contribute to job readiness like politeness, turning up on time and being reliable.

This discussion paper:

- Describes the key features of the Job Ready Certificate;
- Outlines the main issues that will need to be sorted out:
  - What should be assessed and how;
  - The certificate itself; and
  - How it should be developed and implemented;
- Suggests ways to address these issues; and
- Seeks your opinions on these options.

Annexes to the discussion paper set out the national employability skills framework, describe the context of the Job Ready Certificate, describe some of the ways that schools and vocational education and training institutions are dealing with employability skills at the moment, and provide practical examples of how job readiness might be assessed for the Job Ready Certificate.

## **2. WHY IS THE JOB READY CERTIFICATE NEEDED?**

In Australia we have well-developed ways to assess and report on young people's basic academic skills: their literacy and numeracy for example. We also have a well-developed set of national arrangements to assess skills and award vocational qualifications that young people need in specific jobs: hairdressing, office work, plumbing and so on. However despite agreement on their importance, practical ways of assessing and certifying employability skills and attributes have lagged behind. A simple, affordable and practical way to assess and report job readiness is needed.

This is particularly important to help young people who move directly from school to work, rather than from school to further full-time study. Each year around a third of all school leavers move directly to the labour market without doing further study. This is the group that needs the most help in the transition. The Job Ready Certificate will give young people who do work placements as part of school vocational education programs a reference that they can use in finding a job. It will give employers better signals about young people's readiness for work. This will make them more confident in hiring young people, knowing that they are capable. This will strengthen links between employers, schools and young people. Both young people and

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<sup>1</sup> The Job Ready Certificate was announced during the 2007 election campaign. Details of the government's proposal can be found in Australian Labor Party (2007) *New Directions for Education and Training: Labor's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School*, and in an associated media release: see <http://www.alp.org.au/media/0607/msedutloo070.php>.

employers will benefit. The Job Ready Certificate will also benefit schools: by improving the confidence that employers have in their programs, and by strengthening their links with local employers. The Certificate is one of a suite of measures proposed by the government to strengthen links between schools and businesses, including more work placements as part of schools' vocational education programs and new trade training centres in schools.

### **3. KEY FEATURES OF THE JOB READY CERTIFICATE**

The government's policy for the Job Ready Certificate is that it will have four key features. It will:

1. Assess the job readiness of **senior secondary students who are taking vocational education programmes and report on this at the end of Year 12, before they leave school and enter the workforce;**
2. Assess and report **personal attributes** that are important in work as well as agreed **key employability skills;**
3. Be assessed **in the workplace**, during work placements that are part of upper secondary vocational education programs; and
4. Be a **national stand alone certificate**, additional to existing upper secondary and vocational education qualifications.

These four key features of the Job Ready Certificate will ensure that it is a practical tool, one that is of value to employers and young people: it is not intended to be a universal approach that can serve all purposes.

#### *The advantages of this approach*

1. Assessing the job readiness of senior secondary students who are taking vocational education programmes and reporting on this at the end of Year 12, before they leave school and enter the workforce, will:
  - Keep the focus of the Job Ready Certificate clearly on competences required by young people at the beginning of their working lives;
  - Reduce the need, during the development process, to give detailed consideration to general workplace skills that are appropriate to and expected of experienced adult workers or tertiary graduates, but not necessarily of young people at the entry level<sup>2</sup>; and
  - Ensure that young people are not encouraged to leave school early by being issued with a certificate before they complete school.
2. Assessing and reporting personal attributes such as punctuality, politeness and personal presentation in addition to key employability skills will mean that the Job Ready Certificate:

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<sup>2</sup> Recent research carried out for the Conference Board in the United States has highlighted the ways in which requirements for generic workplace skills differ between high school graduates, two-year college graduates and those with a four-year college diploma. See Casner, J. (2006) *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* U.S. Workforce, Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

- Has a clear focus on the skills needed at the point of entry to working life; and
  - Recognises the importance of these personal qualities in young people, qualities that have previously been identified by employers, particularly in small and medium-sized firms<sup>3</sup>.
3. Assessment of employability skills and personal attributes as part of students' work placements will:
- Make sure that what is assessed really matters in the workplace (rather than in the classroom or the community for example) and that it is assessed on the basis of behaviour in the workplace itself (rather than in the classroom or the community for example);
  - Focus employers' attention upon developing these skills during work placements and young people's attention upon improving them. This is because they will be explicitly set out for employers and young people, so that both know what is expected;
  - Give employers a substantial role in and ownership over the assessment process and the reporting arrangements; and
  - Strengthen school-enterprise links and help to improve the quality of schools' vocational education programs.
4. Providing young people with a national stand alone certificate, additional to existing upper secondary and vocational education qualifications, will:
- Simplify assessment and reporting processes, particularly when compared to approaches that involve "embedding" within or "mapping" against existing school and vocational education curriculum content;
  - Help to ensure that it is easily transferable between the Australian states and territories; and
  - Avoid the need for decisions about how assessments of job readiness can be incorporated in a standard way within the many existing qualifications offered by separate state and territory authorities.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Do you agree with these key features of the Job Ready Certificate?
2. Are there other key features that you think the Job Ready Certificate should have?

## **4. ASSESSING JOB READINESS**

### **4.1 What principles should underpin the assessment of job readiness?**

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<sup>3</sup> See McLeish, A. (2002) *Employability Skills for Australian Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Report of the Focus Groups With Small and Medium Sized Enterprises*, Department of Education, Science and Training.

Assessment tools will need to be designed with a clear focus on the needs of two groups: young people moving directly from school to work; and employers. There are a number of principles that will need to be followed in the assessment process to make sure that the Job Ready Certificate is a practical tool that benefits both employers and young people.

#### *Principle 1*

The assessment process must be simple and affordable, able to be used easily by employers and workplace supervisors. It must be as easy to use for small and medium-sized firms as for larger firms with specialised training staff. It should not need a lot of specialised training to use. The assessment process must not be complex and time consuming: employers are busy people and schools already have many demands upon their time.

#### *Principle 2*

The assessment process will need to help employers to reinforce and encourage in young people the type of behaviour that demonstrates job readiness. It should also help young people to shape their own behaviour. And so it will need to be in plain English that reflects everyday use in the workplace and that is readily understandable by the target group of young people. Jargon will have to be avoided. For example “Gets along well with others” will probably work better than something like “Demonstrates communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations in the workplace”.

#### *Principle 3*

The assessment process will need to be quite explicit about what is expected of young people. An approach that does not make this clear but tries to “embed” job readiness skills, attitudes and behaviour in existing curriculum content or to “map” them against the content of other school or vocational education programs is unlikely to do this<sup>4</sup>.

#### *Principle 4*

If the Job Ready Certificate is to be national, both what is assessed and the assessment process will need to be consistent. Assessment content and assessment instruments that vary from state to state, that differ from school program to school program, or from workplace to workplace will not achieve this.

#### *Principle 5*

The Job Ready Certificate will need to be valued by both employers and young people. And so:

- It should not be awarded automatically - young people should have to earn it;
- It should be based upon sufficient time in the workplace to allow reliable and valid judgements to be made about young people’s job readiness;
- Its assessment processes should be fair and transparent; and
- There will need to be clear rules, agreed to by industry, on the criteria used to award it.

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<sup>4</sup> In research carried out as part of previous work on employability skills concern was expressed that it may appear complex to employers unless there are very clear definitions and explanations to support it. See Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*.

### *Principle 6*

The Job Ready Certificate should be voluntary. In the same way that secondary students make their own decisions about whether or not to try to receive other types of certificates, the decision about whether to try to get the Job Ready Certificate should be a voluntary one. It should primarily be a matter for the student, but those who co-ordinate schools' vocational education work placement programs will also need to seek the agreement of employers to carry out the necessary assessments.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

3. Are any of these six principles more important than others?
4. Are there any other principles that should be followed?
5. Should any of the six principles be dropped from the list?

## **4.2 What should be assessed?**

In the last ten to fifteen years Australian employers, schools and vocational education authorities have worked hard to agree on what employability means. Australia is not the only country where this has happened. Annex 2 briefly sets out some of the context of this discussion. We have now got to the point where there is broad agreement on what should be included in the term employability. Briefly, there are eight agreed broad employability skills (see Annex 1). They are:

- Communication;
- Team work;
- Problem solving;
- Initiative and enterprise;
- Planning and organisation;
- Self-management;
- Learning; and
- Technology.

One of the very useful things that has happened in the process of agreeing on these employability skills is that direct consultations with actual employers have shown that in addition to these eight, employers give just as much importance, when they think about job readiness, to a set of personal qualities: things like turning up on time, being polite, meeting the dress code of the particular workplace, being enthusiastic, and being reliable. This was made very clear in the Australian government's original 2002 report on employability skills<sup>5</sup>. The employability skills framework, which can be found in Annex 1, includes both skills and personal attributes: eight of the former

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<sup>5</sup> The full employability skills framework, including both these personal attributes or work habits and the eight employability skills can be found in Department of Education, Science and Training (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*, pp. 46-47.

and 13 of the latter. And so for the Job Ready Certificate it will be essential that these personal qualities and work habits are assessed and reported on, as well as the eight key employability skills.

However up to now much more attention has been paid to the eight employability skills than to the personal attributes and qualities that make up job readiness. These personal qualities are elaborated in far less detail in the employability skills framework than are the eight employability skills. They are not accompanied by a list of elements or facets that can help to identify the behaviour that illustrates them. Some Australian work on employability fails to take them into account at all and they are not included in national training packages. As a result the detailed elaboration of these personal attributes will need to be part of the process of developing the Job Ready Certificate.

Of course how these skills and attributes are defined will vary from workplace to workplace. How important each one is will also vary with the level of a job and how complex it is. For example:

- Everyone works with other people, but some people work in large teams and others work mostly with one or two people;
- Oral communication skills matter more for customer service staff than for many other workers;
- Planning and organisational skills are needed by everyone, but senior managers need them more than other workers.

These differences will have to be accommodated when assessment tools for the Job Ready Certificate are developed. However despite these differences it is clear that general employability skills are important everywhere: in small firms just as much as in large ones; for young people at the entry level as well as for experienced workers; for young people moving directly from school to work as much as for tertiary graduates.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

6. Do you support the eight employability skills listed above?
7. Compared to them, how important are qualities like punctuality and politeness in judging young people's job readiness: just as important; more; or less?
8. Do you have any specific suggestions about the personal qualities and work habits that are important for young people's job readiness?
9. Do you agree that the process of developing the Job Ready Certificate should include a more detailed elaboration of these personal qualities?

### **4.3 Would existing school and vocational education arrangements do the job?**

There have been a number of recent initiatives in schools to assess and report on employability skills. And employability skills are progressively being included in the vocational education

sector's training packages<sup>6</sup>. Some of these initiatives in schools and vocational education are described in Annex 2. The question arises of whether we need something new, or whether these existing arrangements would do the job.

Some of these existing arrangements in schools and vocational education are impressive. However there are a number of reasons why separate arrangements need to be developed for the Job Ready Certificate:

- In some of the existing arrangements, employability skills are not stated directly and the behaviour that demonstrates them is not directly observed or assessed. Instead they are inferred indirectly, for example by being “mapped” against the content of other school subjects or “embedded” in them;
- Many of the existing arrangements do not meet the key features of the government's proposal for the Job Ready Certificate. For example some focus on the eight broad employability skills, but almost none on the personal qualities and work habits that Australian employers regard as being just as important for young people's job readiness. Others do not involve assessments in the workplace, but only assessments within the classroom or other settings;
- Some involve or require quite limited periods of work placement, or allow things other than work placement in which there is no direct employer involvement to be counted: for example voluntary work, parenting, or simulated work placements;
- There is a lot of variation between the states' and territories' school systems in these arrangements, and so there is no national consistency. In particular, assessment and reporting methods vary widely in their nature, quality and level of detail;
- There is a lot of variation in how employability skills are assessed and reported in the vocational education sector:
  - Although training packages need to include them, they are typically “embedded” within the units of competency contained within training packages' qualifications rather than explicitly stated. The success of this approach depends a lot on high quality curriculum material being developed and on innovative teaching methods being used.
  - When it comes to decisions about how to include the employability skills in teaching and learning and in assessment and reporting, a great deal of the detail is left to the discretion of particular training providers, program developers and teachers. Sometimes explicit guidelines are provided on how teaching practices can help to develop employability, but job readiness is not actually assessed or reported.
  - Commonly there is no specific requirement that employability skills be developed and assessed in the workplace: as in some approaches adopted by school systems, classroom delivery and assessment are not excluded.

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<sup>6</sup> Training packages describe the competency standards that have been agreed to in particular industry areas, the requirements for gaining vocational qualifications that are based on these standards, and broad guidelines on how assessment is to be carried out. These are then used to develop actual training programs and the specific ways in which the content is assessed.

- Training packages include the eight employability skills but not the equally important personal attributes such as personal presentation and commonsense.

For these sorts of reasons a new, simpler and more consistent set of national arrangements needs to be developed to assess young people's job readiness.

#### **QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION**

10. Do you agree that a new set of arrangements to assess and report on young people's job readiness is needed, or could the Job Ready Certificate use existing arrangements?

#### **4.4 Where should job readiness be assessed and who should do it?**

*Where?*

During the process of developing Australia's set of agreed employability skills, research was conducted with Australian enterprises to test what was being proposed and to seek their input. Significant numbers of employers said that how skills and competence are developed in the classroom and how they are developed at work are different<sup>7</sup>. They pointed out that classrooms would not find it easy to develop and assess employability skills, and that real workplace experience was very important. Recent Australian research has highlighted the fact that some teachers are worried that they are not equipped to assess job readiness without extra training, and that they have too many other things to do in any case<sup>8</sup>.

If real job readiness is to be assessed and reported, then real behaviour in real workplaces will need to be assessed. Assessments based only on classroom behaviour, community projects or the like would at best be indirect. And so the government's proposal for the Job Ready Certificate is that it should be based on assessments of school students during work placements that they undertake as part of school vocational education programs. This will make the assessments more valid. It should also increase the chance that programs will include work placements: this will help to improve their quality.

*Who?*

There are two ways that young people's job readiness could be assessed in the workplace. One would be for the employers who supervise them on a daily basis during their work placements to do the assessment. Another would be for school teachers or the people who are co-ordinating schools' work placements to visit workplaces and do the assessment. The proposal here is for employers to do the assessment, but with a role for both teachers and young people themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> See Department of Education, Science and Training (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*, and McLeish, A. (2002) *Employability Skills for Australian Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Report of the Focus Groups With Small and Medium Sized Enterprises*, Department of Education, Science and Training.

<sup>8</sup> Matters, G. and Curtis, D. (2008) *A Study into the Assessment and Reporting of Employability Skills of Senior Secondary Students*, Australian Council for Educational Research.

### *i. A role for employers*

The case for employers doing the assessments rather than visiting school personnel is a strong one<sup>9</sup>. There are basic technical reasons for this:

- Judgements that are based on observing behaviour over a fairly long period - for example several full working days and several work placements - are more reliable than those based only on a brief period of observation such as a short visit; and
- Workplace supervisors who see how young people are behaving in the workplace over a long period are more informed about their workplace behaviour than somebody who visits the workplace for only a short period. Their judgements are more reliable and valid.

Similar arguments in favour of employers having a central role in assessing employability have been used in recent Australian work on graduates' employability skills. Both universities and employers said that it would be hard for universities to provide detailed reports on graduates' employability skills, and that in any case employers would still want to conduct their own assessment. The report pointed out that people who supervise students during periods of workplace learning that is part of their study programs are ideally placed to assess a student's employability skills<sup>10</sup>.

### *ii. A role for teachers*

Even though workplace supervisors should have the main role in assessing young people's job readiness, the co-ordinators of schools' work placement programs will need to be involved. For example teachers will need to have an important role in ensuring that students are prepared for their work placements, that they are familiar with what will be assessed and how it will be assessed, and that they respond positively to their assessment. A record will need to be kept of the assessment results. There will need to be somebody who can act as an arbiter or moderator if there are quite significant differences in assessment results across different work placements. Somebody to act as an arbiter and to ensure fairness will also be important if disagreements arise between young people and workplace supervisors about assessment results. Strong partnerships between schools and firms will be needed to make sure that the assessment process is effective.

### *iii. A role for young people*

In addition to having their job readiness assessed by somebody else, it seems sensible to give young people the chance to assess themselves before a final judgement is made about their work readiness. Self assessments will help them to see how realistic they are about their job readiness, when compared to employer assessments, and this should be a way for them to help shape and improve their job readiness. But if assessments are to be trusted by employers, this should not be the only type of assessment.

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<sup>9</sup> And having assessments carried out by visiting teachers or other school staff would make the assessment process more time consuming, and therefore costly, for schools

<sup>10</sup> Precision Consultancy (2008) *Graduate Employability Skills: Prepared for the Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council*, Melbourne.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

11. Do you support the suggestion that the people who supervise young people during their work placements should be responsible for doing assessments for the Job Ready Certificate, or should school teachers do this?

12. If workplace supervisors play the main role, do you agree that schools' work placement coordinators should have a role in preparing students for their workplace assessments, in record keeping and as arbiters and moderators of assessments?

13. Do you think that it is important for young people themselves to have a voice in the assessment process? If you do, how could this be done?

14. What are the resource implications of this type of assessment process and how could they be taken into account?

### 4.5 How should job readiness be assessed?

A number of ways to assess employability skills have been proposed. Paper and pencil tests, such as the Graduate Skills Assessment that was developed for tertiary students in Australia, are one method<sup>11</sup>. A major problem with these is that skills such as teamwork cannot be observed through a paper and pencil test. They need to be observed in real life if they are to be assessed validly. This is also a problem with computerised assessment methods such as the Employability Skills Profiler that has been developed in Australia by Chandler and McLeod<sup>12</sup>.

Another way that has been proposed is for a group of teachers to meet as a panel and consider individual students' employability skills as they have observed them in the classroom or elsewhere. A variation on this method is to suggest that individual teachers make up a range of assessment tasks for their students that demonstrate employability skills, and then for these several assessment tasks to be combined into a single report<sup>13</sup>. Methods like these can take up a lot of teachers' time, it would be very hard to make them nationally consistent, and they put the focus of assessments on the classroom, not the workplace.

One method that has received quite a lot of attention is to have students construct portfolios. This would involve lots of different types of evidence being gathered together and presented by students to demonstrate that they have achieved job readiness. Someone would then need to consider all of the evidence gathered by students and decide whether or not they are job ready. Templates can be developed to make portfolios more consistent. However assessing portfolios is time consuming, whether the assessment is done by teachers or by employers, and they take up

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2001) *Graduate Skills Assessment. Summary Report*.

<sup>12</sup> Donaldson, C. (2007) "Review of the Employability Skills Profiler (ESP)", *Human Resources*, 10 November.

<sup>13</sup> Matters, G. and Curtis, D. (2008) *A Study into the Assessment and Reporting of Employability Skills of Senior Secondary Students*, Australian Council for Educational Research.

quite a lot of space, either physical space or digital space, to store. And if portfolios are to be useful for students as well as for employers they need to be assessed repeatedly, with feedback given to students so that they can improve their behaviour. This makes them even more time consuming. The time and resources involved in the portfolio approach would be even greater if it was used on a large scale. Perhaps for this reason little seems to have happened as the result of a proposal in a national report four years ago that portfolios should be the major method used to assess employability skills<sup>14</sup>.

Self-assessment by students themselves is a way that has been used or suggested to assess job readiness. The major plus with self-assessment is that it can help students to improve their performance. However it is generally agreed that it is neither an independent nor credible way to assess job readiness<sup>15</sup>.

A number of ways to assess employability and job readiness are typically used by enterprises when they select staff or are considering employees for promotion. For example employers use interview panels, they call for several references and then check them, they use assessment centres, or they use exercises that simulate real work situations and see how candidates perform. Like some of the methods that have been proposed within schools, these can be time consuming. If a long-term permanent employee is being considered, and if the job is at a senior level, the investment of this time can be justified. However it would be difficult to justify for each young person on a one week work placement.

Currently around 220,000 students a year take part in vocational education programs in schools. Even though it has been estimated that only around 40 per cent are involved in work placements, the government aims to increase this number<sup>16</sup>. And so the scale of the task is quite a large one, and it will grow. This means that simpler, less time consuming assessment arrangements will need to be put in place if the Job Ready Certificate is to have a wide take up.

An alternative to the options discussed above would be to use a standard rating scale, with employers rating the behaviour of young people in the workplace while they are on work placements. The same rating scale, used in all states and territories, would provide consistency and be simpler and cheaper to use than methods that are based upon using several different types of assessments such as portfolios or teacher panels. Recent consultations with Australian employers have suggested that they prefer standardised testing of the sort represented by rating scales but are concerned that the assessment process should be a valid one: in other words that it should really assess job readiness<sup>17</sup>.

There are already a number of examples of rating scales that are used to assess employability skills and job readiness that could be used as models:

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training (2004) *Employability Skills: Development of a Strategy to Support the Universal Recognition and Reporting of Employability Skills*.

<sup>15</sup> Matters, G. and Curtis, D. (2008) *A Study into the Assessment and Reporting of Employability Skills of Senior Secondary Students*, Australian Council for Educational Research.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Labor Party (2007) *New Directions for Education and Training: Labor's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School*.

<sup>17</sup> Matters, G. and Curtis, D. (2008) *A Study into the Assessment and Reporting of Employability Skills of Senior Secondary Students*, Australian Council for Educational Research.

- Rating scales are commonly used in vocational rehabilitation programs to assess the job readiness of people with disabilities<sup>18</sup>;
- The Michigan Employability Skills Survey<sup>19</sup> used a rating scale to assess the key employability skills needed by employers;
- In the United Kingdom a rating scale was developed to assess the employability skills that tertiary students felt were required during work placements<sup>20</sup>;
- In Australia the Dusseldorp Skills Forum developed the Key Work Skills scale to assess and monitor the development of job readiness skills of employees of a labour hire company, and is currently using it to assess the employability skills of young people taking part in a sustainable skills program<sup>21</sup>;
- The Queensland Studies Authority has developed simple check lists that can be used by employers to rate the employability skills of students on work placements. These include the eight agreed employability skills but not personal attributes or work habits. Performance is indicated by a simple Yes/No or tick;
- In Ontario check lists for students and employers have been developed to assess employability skills and work habits for the award of the Ontario Skills Passport<sup>22</sup>.

Some of these scales have been used to discover what sorts of skills are important for employers rather than to assess young people's skills directly, or they have been developed for research purposes, but the principle is the same. Two examples of these sorts of rating scales are given in Annex 3.

Rating scales need to be constructed carefully and used properly to make sure that they are valid and reliable. There are a number of things that can be done to make sure that this happens:

- Having employers rate young people's behaviour and having the ratings based upon actual workplace behaviour will help to ensure that the assessments are valid: in other words that job readiness is actually what is being assessed.
- Assessments will always be more reliable if they are done by informed observers rather than uninformed observers. And so having the people who actually supervise young people during their work placements do the assessments will improve the quality of the assessments.
- Assessments will be more reliable if they are based on behaviour that has been observed over a fairly long period rather than only a brief period. And so the work placements that are used for the award of the Job Ready Certificate should be required to be a minimum

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<sup>18</sup> Severson, S and Enderle, J. Transition Assessment & Planning: Using the Enderle-Severson Transition Rating Scale, [www.mnstate.edu/severson/WST11.ppt](http://www.mnstate.edu/severson/WST11.ppt); Lo, K. and Li, E. (2005) "Content validation on the Work Performance Rating Scale for sheltered workshop workers", *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation*, Vol. 25 (4), 341-346.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, W. and Stemmer, P. (1990) "Michigan's strategy for assessing employment skills", Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States and Colorado Department of Education, ED322192.

<sup>20</sup> Silver, J. (2003) "An Evaluation of the Employability Skills Acquired by Industrial Placement Students", [www.ece.salford.ac.uk/proceedings/papers/js\\_03.rtf](http://www.ece.salford.ac.uk/proceedings/papers/js_03.rtf).

<sup>21</sup> The scale can be found at <http://www.dsf.org.au/tools/13.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/en/login.jsp>

length: for example five days. This could be either five continuous working days, or one day a week in the same firm over a five-week period.

- Assessments will be more reliable if they are based upon several ratings rather than just one rating. For this reason it would be a good idea to require several assessments to be the basis of the award of the Job Ready Certificate, not just a single assessment. This will also be fairer to young people, as it will let them improve their work behaviour over time. An additional benefit will be that building several work placements into schools' vocational education programs will increase their quality.
- Taken together the two previous points suggest that a minimum number of assessments and a minimum period of work placement will be needed for the award of the Job Ready Certificate: four assessments and twenty days are suggested. This could be achieved in several ways: for example four work placements in separate firms each of five days; or four placements of five days, each with the same firm. Flexibility to accommodate local needs will be important. The body or bodies that award the Job Ready Certificate should be responsible for monitoring this.
- Assessments will be fairer if there is an opportunity for moderation of differences between ratings: for example through self-assessments by students and the involvement of schools' work placement co-ordinators if there are disputes.
- Having behaviour rated along a scale with a number of points on it – for example a five-point scale for each item – will improve ratings compared to a simple Yes-No check list.
- Ratings will be improved if each element of behaviour is clearly defined in plain English, and if each point on a five-point scale is independently defined. Scales like this are called behaviourally-anchored rating scales, and they are widely used in industry for employee performance appraisal<sup>23</sup>. The Key Work Skills scale described in Annex 3 is an example of a scale like this.

A well constructed and clearly worded rating scale should not require formal training in assessment by workplace supervisors. And so it should not be necessary to have a requirement for formal assessment training as part of the introduction of the Job Ready Certificate. In fact such a formal requirement would probably limit its attractiveness to employers, particularly in small and medium-sized firms, and limit its take up. What will be more important is giving help and advice to firms through regular contact with teachers and work placement co-ordinators. Strong partnerships between schools and firms will strengthen both the quality of schools' vocational education work placement programs and the quality of the Job Ready Certificate.

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<sup>23</sup> Nankervis, A. and Lease, P. (1997) Performance appraisal: Two steps forward, one step back?" *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 35 (2), 80-92; Spangenberg, H. et al. (1989) "Validation of an assessment centre against BARS: An experience with performance related criteria", *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, Vol. 15 (2), 1-10; Schwab, D. et al. (1975) "Behaviorally anchored rating scales: A review of the literature", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 28 (4), 549-562.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

15. Do you agree with the proposal to use a rating scale to assess job readiness, or would you prefer another method such as portfolios to be used?

16. Can you suggest examples of rating scales that could be used as a model?

17. Do you have any comments on the examples of employability rating scales that are shown in Annex 3?

## 5. THE CERTIFICATE

### 5.1 Who should award the Job Ready Certificate?

The government has indicated that the Job Ready Certificate is to be a national stand alone certificate, additional to existing upper secondary and vocational education qualifications<sup>24</sup>. This means that a decision will need to be made about who awards it. There are already some national certificates that are independent of existing state and territory school and vocational education qualifications and that are valued in the labour market: for example Cisco certificates in the IT industry and ISO 9000 certification awarded by the International Organisation for Standards.

There seem to be two broad options available, with each one having options within it.

#### *Option 1: State and territory school or vocational education authorities*

Even though the Job Ready Certificate is to be additional to existing upper secondary and vocational education qualifications, state and territory authorities do have a lot of experience in assessment and in awarding qualifications, and so one option would be to have the Job Ready Certificate awarded by them, as an addition to the qualifications that they already award. If this option was chosen, a decision would need to be made about which authorities (school or vocational education) should award the certificate.

For it to be a truly national certificate the same arrangements would need to be in place in each state and territory: the states and territories would need to agree within and among themselves about these arrangements. Agreement on this would need to be negotiated with the states and territories. Of course such negotiations would be simpler than if the proposal was to include the Job Ready Certificate within existing awards (for example upper secondary certificates or nationally recognised vocational education qualifications), but negotiations with all the states and territories would still need to take place.

#### *Option 2: A national employer or industry body*

Another option would be for a national industry or employer body to award the Job Ready Certificate. This would have the advantage of giving employers a strong ownership of the Job

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<sup>24</sup> Australian Labor Party (2007) *New Directions for Education and Training: Labor's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School*.

Ready Certificate and of strengthening the role of industry in our vocational education and training system.

One possibility might be a national employer body associated with a particular industry sector: hospitality, construction and so on. This would require quite a lot of negotiation: for the Job Ready Certificate to be truly national there would need to be an assurance that all of the relevant industry associations were willing to take part.

Rather than being awarded by individual national industry associations, another possibility might be for the Job Ready Certificate to be awarded by a peak national employer body. If an appropriate body were to agree, this might have the advantage of simplifying arrangements. However as there is more than one national employer body, a way of deciding between them would need to be found.

Another possibility would be for the Job Ready Certificate to be awarded by more than one national industry or employer body, with the government in effect licensing them to act as the awarding bodies. With this option there would also need to be an assurance that there was wide national coverage to make sure that all young people eligible for the Job Ready Certificate were able to receive it. And practical arrangements for linking schools to the awarding bodies would need to be worked out.

A fourth possibility would be for the Job Ready Certificate to be awarded by national Industry Skills Councils. Funded by the Australian government, the 11 national Industry Skills Councils are run by industry-based boards of directors, cover most sectors of Australian industry and are expected to have close links both with employers in their industry sector and vocational education and training providers. Their activities include support for quality improvement and the development of national training products.

#### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

18. Which of the two broad options for awarding the Job Ready Certificate do you support: state and territory school or vocational education authorities; or national employer or industry bodies?

19. If you support the first option, do you think that it should be awarded by: i) school authorities; or ii) vocational education authorities?

20. If you support the second option, do you think that it should be awarded by: i) national employer bodies associated with particular industry sectors; ii) a single national employer body; iii) more than one national employer body, with each being licensed to award the Job Ready Certificate or iv) the national Industry Skills Councils?

21. Are there any other options that you can suggest for who should award the Job Ready Certificate?

22. Whichever of these options you support, do you have any views on the process that should be adopted in making a decision about who awards the certificate?

23. What responsibilities should the awarding body or bodies have – for example responsibility for monitoring the features and quality of programs that lead to the award of a Job Ready Certificate?

## 5.2 Who should be eligible to receive the Job Ready Certificate?

The government has proposed that the Job Ready Certificate be awarded to students who are doing work placements as part of a secondary school vocational education program. In other words the proposal is that it should be linked to those school vocational education courses that lead to credit towards a recognised national vocational qualification as well as including work placements<sup>25</sup>. And in order to ensure that the award of the Job Ready Certificate does not encourage young people to leave school early it has proposed that the Job Ready Certificate be awarded at the end of Year 12.

After an initial period in which the Job Ready Certificate has been tested and evaluated, the option of it being available to other groups of young people could be considered. There seem to be three options:

- In a number of states and territories work placements can be part of upper secondary school courses that do not necessarily lead to credit in recognised vocational qualifications. These are courses that aim to provide the student with a general understanding of the world of work rather than specific vocational skills, and in some cases the gaining of employability skills is an explicit aim. Details of some of these courses can be found in Annex 2. Sometimes the amount of work placement required in these courses is quite brief. In others guidelines suggest that generic workplace competences could be demonstrated in community projects, work simulation, part-time jobs and the like, instead of or in addition to direct participation in work placements. And the assessment methods suggested for these courses differ a lot, with some using self-assessment by students rather than independent verification of job readiness by employers.
- Many young people leave school and enrol directly in full-time TAFE or private vocational education institutions' courses and undertake work placements as part of their course.
- Large numbers of students gain real workplace experience before they leave school through part-time jobs. If this group of young people were to be considered for the Job Ready Certificate, practical issues in establishing partnerships between schools and firms after normal school hours would need to be worked out. Sometimes young people who are working part-time are supervised by other part-time or casual staff and so the quality of the supervision and assessment would need to be assured.

Before options like these were considered it would be very important to be confident of the quality of the Job Ready Certificate and of its support from industry. It would be just as important to make sure that its essential features and the conditions and requirements for awarding it are not compromised in any widening of eligibility. Provided that these essential features were not compromised, perhaps consideration could be given to later widening the group eligible for the Job Ready Certificate. If this could be done it would extend the benefits of the Job Ready Certificate to a larger number of young people.

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<sup>25</sup> This would include both programs funded by the Commonwealth government under the VET in Schools program and other programs funded in other ways.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

24. Do you support the option of eligibility for the Job Ready Certificate eventually being broadened beyond students doing schools' vocational education programs, subject to assurances that its quality was not compromised and that the essential features required for eligibility were not compromised?

25. Of the three possibilities for wider eligibility suggested above, are there any that you would not support?

### **5.3 What rules should govern the award of the Job Ready Certificate?**

The Job Ready Certificate should not be awarded automatically, and young people should have to earn it. And so rules will need to be agreed about the standards that have to be met before it is awarded. Three of these were suggested in Section 4.5 in order to increase the reliability and validity of assessments, and it was suggested above that awarding bodies should be responsible for monitoring these requirements. The requirements that were suggested are that:

- Each work placement should last for a minimum of five days;
- A minimum of 20 days of work placement should be required; and
- A minimum of four assessments should be conducted.

There are other matters that will need to be decided about the criteria for an award. It is hard to be precise about some of these until the assessment process has been agreed to and the assessment tool(s) constructed. However some basic questions can be asked now. For example:

- Should a minimum performance standard be required before the certificate is awarded?
- Who should decide what this standard is (employers, teachers, both)?
- How might a minimum standard be set?

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

26. Do you agree that for the Job Ready Certificate to be awarded: each work placement should last a minimum of five days; students should be required to undertake a minimum period of twenty days of work placement; and students should be assessed on a minimum of four occasions?

27. How can the quality of programs that lead to the Job Ready Certificate be monitored?

28. Should the award of the Job Ready Certificate require a minimum standard of performance?

29. If you believe that it should, do you have any views on what this should be, and on how it could be decided?

#### **5.4 What should appear on the Job Ready Certificate?**

It is hard to be precise about exactly what should appear on the Job Ready Certificate until the assessment process has been agreed to and the assessment instrument(s) developed. Some options can be discussed at this stage. One would be to issue the Job Ready Certificate in the form of a statement that the person has achieved an agreed or minimum level of performance. Another would be to list in detail the achievement of a number of dimensions of job readiness, either by specifying the level achieved in each, or by specifying that minimum or acceptable performance has been achieved in each. There will need to be an agreed process for making these decisions.

##### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

30. Do you have an opinion on what should appear on the Job Ready Certificate (for example details of performance on a number of separate skills and attributes, or a simple statement of overall achievement)?

31. What are your views on how this should be decided?

#### **5.5 How could the Job Ready Certificate fit in with existing arrangements in upper secondary education and vocational education?**

Annex 2 shows that there are a number of interesting ways in which Australia's school systems and its vocational education system have responded to the challenge of developing and reporting employability and job readiness. However, as indicated in Section 4.3, many of these do not meet the key features proposed for the Job Ready Certificate: for example they do not take important work habits into account; they involve limited work placements; and their assessment and reporting of job readiness is limited. And so it would seem that many existing programs would need to be supplemented if they were to be the basis of the award of the Job Ready Certificate. In many other cases this would not be necessary, as programs would meet the essential requirements. This would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. This will be one of the responsibilities of the body or bodies that award the Job Ready Certificate. A mechanism for this will need to be decided.

Many existing school and vocational education programs require students to demonstrate that they have achieved employability skills. Examples are given in Annex 2. This suggests that another possibility that could be considered, in thinking about the relationship between the Job Ready Certificate and existing certificates, is that assessments carried out for the Job Ready Certificate could be the basis for satisfying the requirements of these programs. Again, this would need to be decided on a case-by-case basis, in this case by the authorities that award school or vocational education qualifications.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

32. Do you think that young people should be able to get credit in existing upper secondary or vocational qualifications if they meet the requirement for the Job Ready Certificate?
33. Which existing upper secondary and vocational qualifications do you think this is an issue for?
34. How do you suggest that such credit could be granted?

## 6. THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

A broad framework for thinking about job readiness exists in Australia, including employability skills as well as work habits and personal attributes that need to be assessed. But the task remains of translating this into concrete indicators of the types of behaviour that business values and that young people should demonstrate in the workplace. These indicators will then need to be built into a practical and affordable assessment method that is simple for employers to use. Part of the task will be making sure that these indicators reflect the employability skills and work habits of young people that matter in *all* types of businesses and workplaces.

Many past approaches to the definition and assessment of job readiness and employability have taken place with little or no direct involvement of actual employers. The reputation and validity of the Job Ready Certificate's assessment tool(s) will depend upon actual employers being involved every step of the way. This will be essential for a number of reasons:

- So that what is assessed is what matters to employers - real job readiness;
- To make sure that it is practical and easy to use;
- To make sure that it is in clear, plain English; and
- So that employers feel real ownership of the Job Ready Certificate.

Expertise in assessment is not limited to education. Australian business has a long and deep expertise in assessing employee performance. This needs to be used and built on in developing the Job Ready Certificate and its assessment tool(s).

There are a number of examples of assessment tools that have worked elsewhere. Two of these are shown in Annex 3. Building on tools like these as a starting point will speed up the job of introducing the Job Ready Certificate.

The questions raised so far in this paper about how the Job Ready Certificate could be put in place indicate that employer representatives and the states and territories will need an ongoing involvement in the implementation process. This will be in addition to the prominent role that actual employers and teachers will need to play. And steps will need to be taken to make sure that young people themselves have a chance to have a say.

After the Job Ready Certificate has been introduced, it will need to be evaluated. The key parties that need to be involved in the development process (actual employers, work placement co-

ordinators, young people, employer representatives, the states and territories) will need to play a part in the evaluation. This evaluation should look at how the Job Ready Certificate is being accepted and used by employers and young people, and at how it is fitting into existing arrangements in schools and vocational education. It should also review the technical properties of its assessment process such as its reliability and validity.

**QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION**

35. Do you agree with the development and evaluation processes for the Job Ready Certificate having the strong involvement of actual employers and work placement co-ordinators, as well as employer representatives and the states and territories?

36. Do you agree that it makes sense to build assessment tool(s) from examples of instruments for assessing job readiness that have worked in the past?

## ANNEX 1

### The employability skills framework<sup>26</sup>

Personal attributes that contribute to overall employability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loyalty</li> <li>▪ Commitment</li> <li>▪ Honesty and integrity</li> <li>▪ Enthusiasm</li> <li>▪ Reliability</li> <li>▪ Personal presentation</li> <li>▪ Commonsense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Positive self-esteem</li> <li>▪ Sense of humour</li> <li>▪ Balanced attitude to work and home life</li> <li>▪ Ability to deal with pressure</li> <li>▪ Motivation</li> <li>▪ Adaptability</li> </ul>
<b>Skill</b>	<b>Element – (facets of the skill that employers identified as important, noting that the mix and priority of these facets would vary from job to job)</b>	
Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listening and understanding</li> <li>▪ Speaking clearly and directly</li> <li>▪ Writing to the needs of the audience</li> <li>▪ Negotiating responsively</li> <li>▪ Reading independently</li> <li>▪ Empathising</li> <li>▪ Using numeracy effectively</li> <li>▪ Understanding the needs of internal and external customers</li> <li>▪ Persuading effectively</li> <li>▪ Establishing and using networks</li> <li>▪ Being assertive</li> <li>▪ Sharing information</li> <li>▪ Speaking and writing in languages other than English</li> </ul>	
Teamwork that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Working with people of different ages, gender, race, religion or political persuasion</li> <li>▪ Working as an individual and as a member of a team</li> <li>▪ Knowing how to define a role as a member of a team</li> <li>▪ Applying teamwork skills to a range of situations, e.g. futures planning, crisis problem solving</li> <li>▪ Identifying the strengths of team members</li> <li>▪ Coaching, mentoring and giving feedback</li> </ul>	

<sup>26</sup> Source: Department of Education, Science and Training (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*, pp. 46-47.

<p>Problem solving that contributes to productive outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developing creative, innovative solutions</li> <li>▪ Developing practical solutions</li> <li>▪ Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems</li> <li>▪ Solving problems in teams</li> <li>▪ Applying a range of strategies to problem solving</li> <li>▪ Using mathematics including budget and financial management to solve problems</li> <li>▪ Applying problem solving strategies across a range of areas</li> <li>▪ Testing assumptions taking the context of data and circumstances into account</li> <li>▪ Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex project issues</li> </ul>
<p>Initiative and enterprise that contribute to innovative outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adapting to new situations</li> <li>▪ Developing a strategic, creative, long-term vision</li> <li>▪ Being creative</li> <li>▪ Identifying opportunities not obvious to others</li> <li>▪ Generating a range of options</li> <li>▪ Initiating innovative solutions</li> </ul>
<p>Planning and organising that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Managing time and priorities – setting timelines, coordinating tasks for self and with others</li> <li>▪ Being resourceful</li> <li>▪ Taking initiative and making decisions</li> <li>▪ Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies</li> <li>▪ Establishing clear project goals and deliverables</li> <li>▪ Allocating people and other resources to tasks</li> <li>▪ Planning the use of resources including time management</li> <li>▪ Participating in continuous improvement and planning processes</li> <li>▪ Developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it</li> <li>▪ Predicting – weighing up risk, evaluating alternatives and applying evaluation criteria</li> <li>▪ Collecting, analysing and organising information</li> </ul>
<p>Self-management that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Having personal vision and goals</li> <li>▪ Evaluating and monitoring performance</li> <li>▪ Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and vision</li> <li>▪ Articulating own ideas and vision</li> <li>▪ Taking responsibility</li> </ul>

<p>Learning that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employees and company operations and procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Managing own learning</li> <li>▪ Contributing to the learning community at the workplace</li> <li>▪ Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support, networking, information technology (IT), courses</li> <li>▪ Applying learning to ‘technical’ issues (e.g. learning about products) and ‘people’ issues (e.g. interpersonal and cultural aspects of work)</li> <li>▪ Having enthusiasm for ongoing learning</li> <li>▪ Being willing to learn in any setting – on and off the job</li> <li>▪ Being open to new ideas and techniques</li> <li>▪ Being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills</li> <li>▪ Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change</li> </ul>
<p>Technology that contributes to effective execution of tasks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Having a range of basic IT skills</li> <li>▪ Applying IT as a management tool</li> <li>▪ Using IT to organise data</li> <li>▪ Being willing to learn new IT skills</li> <li>▪ Having the occupational health and safety knowledge to apply technology</li> <li>▪ Having appropriate physical capacity</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 2

### **The context of employability skills and job readiness and examples of programs that take them into account**

#### *The context*

In Australia, as in other OECD countries, it is widely recognised that young people's preparation for work requires not only a solid grounding in basic academic skills such as literacy and numeracy and the competences and qualifications required in particular occupations and industries, but also a number of more general personal and social attributes. These have been referred to in a number of ways in a number of countries: key skills; core skills; key competences; and essential skills are among them<sup>27</sup>. However they are referred to, it has been widely argued that they should be part of all young people's education. In Australia, they have been variously referred to as: generic skills, capabilities and understandings; employment-related key competences; generic cross-curricular competences; and capabilities needed to live enriched lives and to participate actively in democratic life.

There is no one definitive list of these generic skills. One reason for this is that empirical research has often played a minor role in the creation of lists or frameworks. Collectively the various lists have six common elements: basic or fundamental skills; people-related skills; thinking or conceptual skills; personal skills and attributes; skills needed in the workplace; and skills related to community life<sup>28</sup>. Whatever the terminology, the central notion is that there are skills or competences that are important in a wide variety of workplaces and in life generally. Some of the terms used to describe them place more emphasis upon skills for life and citizenship, some place more emphasis upon work. In practice there is very little difference between these. While they are important for citizenship as well as for work, Australian discussion has, in recent years, reached a consensus that the term "employability skills" can be used to describe them.

For young people at the beginning of their working lives, the notion of being "work ready" or "job ready" is separate from specialist vocational qualifications, and reflects both the essential personal attributes or work habits and the key employability skills that are particularly important at the entry level. Australian industry has argued forcefully that the ways in which young Australians are prepared for work should include a focus upon their employability and job readiness<sup>29</sup>. Australian research has identified the importance of employability skills and job readiness attributes: across industry sectors; for small, medium and large enterprises; and at the entry level as well as for established employees<sup>30</sup>.

Australian research has also indicated that employers equally value both broad generic work-related competences such as communication and team work, and a range of personal attributes or

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<sup>27</sup> A detailed discussion of the several ways in which they have been defined in Australia and other countries can be found in Curtis, D. and McKenzie, P. (2001) *Employability Skills for Australian Industry: Literature Review and Framework Development*, Melbourne, Australian Council for Educational Research. See also National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2003) *At a Glance: Defining Generic Skills*.

<sup>28</sup> See NCVET (2003) *Defining Generic Skills: At a Glance*.

<sup>29</sup> See Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2007) *School to Work – Making Secondary Students Work Ready* and *Skills for a Nation – A Blueprint for Improving Education and Training 2007 – 2017*.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*.

work habits such as punctuality and politeness. Overseas work has also found that these types of personal work habits are an essential part of job readiness. For example they are part of the essential skills and work habits that are assessed for the Ontario Skills Passport<sup>31</sup> and they were identified in early research on basic workplace skills carried out in the United States<sup>32</sup>. However they are often ignored in many Australian documents and research projects on employability, and suggestions about how they should be assessed and reported are rarely made<sup>33</sup>.

### ***Some examples of school programs that take employability skills and job readiness into account***

Australian school systems have responded in a variety of ways to the case for employability and job readiness to form part of young people's education. One response has been to demonstrate that these competences are already included in an existing subject or course, but without an explicit statement of them or any direct requirements that they be assessed and reported. This type of response requires very little change on the part of educators. For example a Queensland biology curriculum document indicated in 2004 that "The subject provides opportunities for the development of key competences in contexts that arise naturally from the subject matter". Innovative teaching methods, committed teachers and well-developed curriculum support materials are needed if this approach is to be effective in developing employability skills<sup>34</sup>.

A related response which does have some implications for teaching behaviour has been to embed these competences in existing curriculum, making them explicit as something that can be developed through teaching and learning, but not requiring that they be directly assessed and reported. As an example, a 2002 NSW biology curriculum document indicated that "Key competences are embedded in the...syllabus to enhance student learning and are explicit in the objectives and outcomes of the syllabus..."<sup>35</sup>.

A less common approach has been to make them a main feature of a course, not just an incidental or indirect ingredient, to provide teachers with guidelines on how they can be developed, and to build requirement and guidelines for their assessment and reporting into course outlines. A notable example of this approach is the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) in which generic workplace competences form not just a central feature of one course, but an essential requirement for the award of an upper secondary certificate<sup>36</sup>. There are a number of school courses in other states and territories that make a direct reference to employability skills or try to develop them, although in some cases relatively few students seem to enrol in them.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/en/login.jsp>.

<sup>32</sup> Carnevale, A., Gainer, L. and Meltzer, A. (1990) *Workplace Basics: The Essential Skills that Employers Want*, Jossey-Bass.

<sup>33</sup> See as an example Precision Consultancy (2008) *Graduate Employability Skills: Prepared for the Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council*, Melbourne.

<sup>34</sup> For the importance of good support materials when these skills are embedded see Tariq, V. et al. (2004) "Auditing and mapping key skills within university curricula", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 12 (2), pp. 70-81.

<sup>35</sup> Both this example and the previous one are taken from Mercurio, A. (2005) "The discourse of alignment: curriculum and assessment disjunctions at upper secondary level" in Harris, C. and Marsh C. *Curriculum Development in Australia: Promising Initiatives, Impasses and Dead-ends*, Australian Curriculum Studies association.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcal/index.html>

### *VCAL (Victoria)*

VCAL students must study in four strands: literacy and numeracy skills; industry specific skills (for example modules from a recognised VET certificate); work related skills that includes work placement, a part-time apprenticeship or part-time work as well as units or modules to help work preparation such as job interview skills; and personal development skills, which can include projects in the community or school to develop teamwork and confidence. Applied learning in the community or workplaces is a central part of the VCAL strategy. The development of key work-related competences is an explicit aim of units in the Work Related Skills strand. Detailed guides are available to help teachers put in place appropriate teaching methods to develop these skills. Detailed assessment criteria are provided for each of the units' learning outcomes, and a range of assessment methods is suggested for each. These could include, for example:

- A portfolio of accumulated evidence;
- Teacher observation and/or checklists;
- Evidence accumulated through project or program participation;
- Awards from recognised programs;
- Self-assessment inventories; and
- Oral or written reports

### *Work Studies (South Australia)*

A subject called Work Studies is available for students studying for the South Australian Certificate of Education<sup>37</sup>. Workplace learning is described as an important and integral part of the subject, enabling students to develop vocational skills, including employability skills. Students plan and organise their own activities for the workplace learning part of the course. In addition to structured work placements and part-time apprenticeships, these activities can include:

- Part-time jobs;
- Simulated work placements;
- Student businesses created as a school project;
- Worksite visits;
- Community voluntary work; and
- Parenting or caring.

Although criteria are suggested for judging students' performance during these activities, the methods of assessment can be quite varied, including self assessment, teacher assessment and employer reports and judgements. How employability skills and job readiness are assessed and reported can be indirect rather than explicit.

### *Workplace Learning (Western Australia)*

Workplace Learning is a senior secondary course accredited by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia in December 2007<sup>38</sup>. Development of the eight agreed employability skills, as well as occupational health and safety skills, is a central aim of the course. While personal

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/sace.htm>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/>

attributes that are important in work are referred to they are not outlined explicitly. Participation in structured workplace learning is intended to develop employability skills. Students are assessed while in the workplace and the assessment process is verified by the workplace supervisor. Evidence that can be used to assess the achievement of workplace skills includes observation, checklists, diaries, written reports, self evaluation forms and workplace supervisor evaluation forms. Performance is reported in five grades from A to E. For employability skills these are:

- A Consistently demonstrates the employability skills in the workplace as well as a range of other contexts.
- B Consistently demonstrates the employability skills in the workplace and at least one other context.
- C Demonstrates the employability skills in the workplace and usually one other context.
- D Demonstrates the employability skills in the workplace but provides limited demonstration of these in other contexts.
- E Provides limited demonstration of the employability skills in the workplace and other contexts.

#### *Work Studies (New South Wales)*

Work Studies has been an approved Content Endorsed subject for the NSW Higher School Certificate since 1993<sup>39</sup>. Its broad aims include developing knowledge and skills for the transition from school to work, and developing an understanding of what work is about, how it is changing, and how it influences lifestyle. Work placement is a core part of the course, but there is a lot of flexibility in deciding how much time it should take, from quite brief to extended, and what the nature of the experience should be. A wide range of assessment methods is suggested, and these are not standardised. They can include diaries, projects, debates, written tests, teacher observation, video analysis and research assignments.

#### *Work Education (Australian Capital Territory)*

Work Education is a subject accredited by the ACT Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. Improving the transition to work, including through the development of employability skills, is a central aim of the course. A Certificate I in Workplace Skills (a nationally recognised VET qualification) is incorporated into the course. It is recommended that students undertake a minimum of 100 hours of structured workplace training. A wide variety of assessment methods is used including diaries, student portfolios, student presentations, role play and structured interviews. Assessment criteria include the application of employability skills. Assessment can take place in the workplace or in a simulated environment. Performance in each unit in the course is reported in five grades from A to E. For problem solving, as an example, these grades are defined as follows:

- A Identifies, clarifies and solves problems, making good use of information and resources
- B Identifies problems and develops strategies to help solve them, using information and resources effectively
- C Develops strategies to help solve problems, making use of relevant information and resources
- D Develops some problem-solving strategies, making limited use of relevant information and resources

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>

- E Develops some problem-solving strategies, making very limited use of relevant information and resources

***Employability skills in vocational education and training***

Employability skills are progressively being included in the vocational education and training sector’s national training packages. Training packages describe the competency standards that have been agreed to in particular industry areas, the requirements for gaining vocational qualifications that are based on these standards, and broad guidelines on how assessment is to be carried out. The requirements for gaining the qualifications listed in the training package indicate the units of competency that must be gained in order for the qualification to be awarded. Individual training providers then develop training programs and specific assessment procedures using this information<sup>40</sup>. How this is done can vary from training provider to training provider.

Typically, an endorsed national training package will contain a statement about employability skills, which can be accessed on the first page of the package’s web site. These statements vary little from training package to training package, and they typically reproduce in full the description of the eight employability skills and of the facets or elements of each skill that help to describe it that were contained in the government’s original 2002 report on employability skills<sup>41</sup>. They generally do not contain the personal attributes such as loyalty, reliability and personal presentation that are part of the framework. Each qualification listed in the training package will then contain an Employability Skills Summary. This will describe, for each of the eight employability skills, the types of behaviour that typically illustrates it in the particular industry, while at the same time indicating that this is not definitive. For example in the Certificate III in Retail, the Communication employability skill is described as follows:

Use questioning and active listening to ascertain and respond to customer needs to ensure customers enjoy a positive experience that reflects business values. Regularly carry out verbal instructions from other team members and supervisors. Read and interpreting simple workplace documents, complete simple written workplace forms and share work related information with other team members.

Generally the same Summary applies to many of the qualifications listed in the training package but it can vary according to the nature of the job roles associated with the qualification. Each Summary will indicate that it should be interpreted in conjunction with the detailed requirements of each unit of competency in the qualification.

Each of the units of competency contained in a qualification will normally contain a reference to employability skills immediately after the description of the unit. Typically this will be something like the following examples, one taken from the retail industry and the other from the construction industry:

<b>Unit of competency</b>	<b>Employability skills</b>
SIRXCCS002A: Interact with customers	This unit contains employability skills
PRDSIS07A: Capture new data	The required outcomes described in this Unit of Competency contain applicable facets of employability skills. The employability Skills Qualification Summary for the qualification in which this Unit of Competency is packaged will assist in identifying employability skill requirements

<sup>40</sup> National training packages can be found at <http://www.ntis.gov.au/?/trainingpackage/all>

<sup>41</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training (2002) *Employability Skills for the Future*, pp. 46-47.

Within the units of competency themselves, there is typically no separate identification of the content that represents employability skills or its facets. In the second example above it is clearly indicated that the job of identifying employability skills is left to the individual: whether training provider, program developer or assessor. As in the case of the Queensland biology curriculum document referred to above, they are regarded as being “embedded” within the content rather than being explicitly stated. This means that typically they are not assessed and reported separately from the assessment and reporting of the achievement of the unit of competency as a whole.

Generally training packages give program developers and training providers and assessors a great deal of discretion about the types of assessment methods that are used, including for individual units of competency. And so there can be little consistency in how the units of competency within which employability skills are said to be embedded are assessed. This means that how employability skills themselves are assessed could vary widely.

## ANNEX 3

### Rating scales that have been used to assess employability and job readiness

#### 1. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum's Key Work Skills Scale

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum developed the Key Work Skills scale in the late 1990s to assess and monitor the development of job readiness skills of employees of a labour hire company, and is currently using it to assess the employability skills of young people taking part in a sustainable skills program. It is a behaviourally-anchored rating scale that assesses 15 generic skills and attributes that are important indicators of employability in most work settings. Each of the points on each of the 15 scales is independently defined to give raters a clear guide to the type of behaviour that is expected for each score. Key Work Skills has a particular application with young people who are in their early years in the work force, but it is not intended to be limited to this group. The 15 skills and attributes are:

- Attendance and punctuality
- Appearance and presentation
- Use of English
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Safety and equipment use
- Working with others
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Supervision/reliability
- Time management
- Attitude to the job
- Following directions and instructions
- Initiative
- Ability to learn
- Positive self attitude
- Quality of work

The 15 skills attributes are generally rated on a five point scale, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.

Key Work Skills was developed from the ground up using focus groups of young people in casual jobs and employers. Groups were asked to generate a list of the personal qualities or attributes that are important indicators of employability. They then selected the most important attributes and generated indicators of high, average and low performance on them.

The first draft of the scale was cross-referenced against Australian and international sources on key work skills such as the Mayer Key Competences and the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills as well as against a number of practical tools for assessing employability skills.

Examples of how three of the attributes in the scale are assessed are shown below<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> The complete scale can be found at <http://www.dsf.org.au/tools/13.htm>.

- 1. Attendance and punctuality:** The extent to which the person meets the site’s requirements for attendance at work and punctuality

1	2	3	4	5
Comes late and leaves early; Late from breaks; Absent without reason	Punctuality and attendance are below average	Punctuality and attendance are satisfactory	Always punctual and rarely absent; Will put in extra time occasionally if asked	Always punctual; Excellent attendance; Will arrive early and stay late to get a task done

- 2. Appearance and presentation:** The extent to which the person meets the standards of dress and appearance that are expected at the work site

1	2	3	4	5
Poor personal hygiene and grooming; Does not follow dress standards required at the site	Appearance, personal presentation and dress standards could be improved	Dress standard, personal presentation and appearance are acceptable for the site	Above average appearance and presentation; Prepared to change appearance to suit workplace	Takes pride in appearance; Sets an example for others

- 3. Use of English:** The person’s skills in speaking, reading and writing English at work

(a) Understanding of spoken English; (b) Ability to write English; (c) Ability to read workplace documents.

1	2	3	4	5
Not adequate for the work site	Barely adequate for the work site	Basically adequate for the work site	Good	Excellent
(a)				
(b)				
(c)				

## 2. The Michigan Employee Skills Survey

The Michigan Employee Skills Survey<sup>43</sup> was developed in the late 1980s in response to a decision by the Michigan Legislature to develop methods of assessing employability skills in high school graduates. A survey of employers to identify the generic employability skills that they needed was the first step. Written in plain English, the Survey consists of 86 items, each describing a basic skill, behaviour or attitude employers might seek in people they hire for jobs at any level. Each item is rated on a four-point scale: Critical; Highly needed; Somewhat needed; and Not needed. The 86 items fall into three broad areas, each of which consists of a number of sub-scales, resulting in a total of 13 areas or domains being assessed. Each item is preceded by the statement “In my business I need employees who can...”. The 13 areas assessed in the Survey are:

### SECTION I: ACADEMIC SKILLS

*In my business I need employees who can:*

<sup>43</sup> Brown, W. and Stemmer, P. (1990) “Michigan’s strategy for assessing employment skills”, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States and Colorado Department of Education, ED322192.

- Understand spoken language and speak in the language in which business is conducted
- Read written materials
- Write in the language in which business is conducted
- Understand and solve problems involving basic arithmetic and use the results
- Access and use specialised knowledge when necessary to get the job done
- Use tools and equipment necessary to get a job done
- Think and act logically to solve problems

## **SECTION II: PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

### ***In my business I need employees who can:***

- Identify personal job-related interests, strengths, opinions and opportunities
- Demonstrate personal values and ethics in the workplace (e.g. honesty, fairness, and respect for others)
- Exercise a sense of responsibility
- Learn new skills and new ways of doing things

## **SECTION III: TEAMWORK SKILLS**

### ***In my business I need employees who can:***

- Identify with the goals, norms, values, customs and culture of the group
- Function in changing work settings and in changing work teams

Examples of the items included in two of these 13 areas are given below.

### **Demonstrate personal values and ethics in the workplace (e.g. honesty, fairness, and respect for others)**

54. Show respect for others
55. Show pride in one's work
56. Show enthusiasm for the work to be done
57. Demonstrate honesty and integrity

### **Exercise a sense of responsibility**

58. Meet requirements for punctuality and attendance
59. Plan and organise to complete tasks
60. Show initiative; be a 'self starter'
61. Meet or exceed requirements for work quality
62. Complete tasks in the face of job pressure or stress
63. Follow safety rules and practices (e.g. hazardous materials)
64. Demonstrate self-control
65. Demonstrate appropriate grooming and dress, and practice good personal hygiene
66. Be free from substance abuse (i.e. dependence on alcohol or drugs)
67. Work productively with minimum supervision