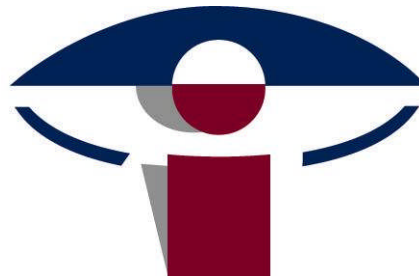


Victorian TAFE  
*Association*



***Response***

***The Job Ready Certificate  
Discussion Paper***

From the Victorian TAFE Association  
Level 3, 478 Albert Street  
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March, 2009

# VICTORIAN TAFE ASSOCIATION RESPONSE TO THE JOB READY CERTIFICATE – A DISCUSSION PAPER

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the discussion paper prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in December 2008 'The Job Ready Certificate'.

Membership of the VTA includes four multi-sector universities and fourteen stand-alone TAFE providers. All VTA members are engaged in partnerships with secondary schools (government and non-government) preparing young people for work. Victorian TAFE providers partner in the provision of VET-in-Schools programs, School Based Apprenticeship programs and offer senior secondary qualifications – the Victorian Certificate of Education and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), and pre-apprenticeships.

VTA members may respond individually to the discussion paper to highlight areas of particular interest to their organisations. The VTA in this response draws on written submissions provided directly to the VTA on this subject and on the views of Victorian TAFE providers attending a focus group convened in March 2009. The responses are made in the context of being highly familiar with the VCAL and the integration of employability skills into national VET qualifications.

VTA members support the development of skills, knowledge and attributes that will prepare young people for work including those entering the workforce for the first time. Innovative practices have been developed by Victorian TAFE providers to foster and recognise these competencies and behaviours. Victorian TAFE providers have participated in trials of tools to recognise job readiness and employability skills.

VTA is of the view that the Job Ready Certificate policy in the current form is flawed. The proposed Job Ready Certificate limits eligibility and therefore disadvantages certain groups of young Australians and learners in non-school settings. Secondly the paper ignores policy initiatives in the past two years that strengthen quality standards (AQTF 2007) and the delivery, assessment and reporting of employability skills in AQF VET qualifications. Duplication of effort must be avoided.

This response will comment specifically on the proposed key features of the Job Ready Certificate and the underpinning principles described in the discussion paper.

Six recommendations are offered:

**Recommendation 1:** Recognition of skills knowledge and attributes to enter the workforce should be available to all post-compulsory school aged students exiting or planning to exit education and training for employment.

**Recommendation 2:** Exclude personal attributes from any assessment relating to job readiness.

**Recommendation 3:** Research the employment outcomes for young people completing Australian Qualifications Framework VET qualifications using Training Packages imbedding employability skills.

**Recommendation 4:** Defer implementation of the Job Ready Certificate until consistent growth in GDP is evidenced.

**Recommendation 5:** Use simulated work places as well as real work places for the assessment of job readiness.

**Recommendation 6:** Rather than create a national stand alone Job Ready Certificate, review the currency of *New Directions for Education and Training: Labour's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School* in the context of contemporary educational research and the integration of employability skills into VET qualifications.

## THE FEATURES OF A JOB READY CERTIFICATE

The primary purpose of the proposed Job Ready Certificate is 'to help young people who move directly from school to work' (Discussion Paper p1).

Each of the four proposed key features of the Job Ready Certificate are considered in the light of these purposes.

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.***

The VTA supports any judgement of job readiness being underpinned by engagement in vocational education and training programs but this should not be a barrier to other students, actively engaged in the workforce also receiving this recognition.

The opportunity should be available to a broader cohort of students to access recognition for skills, knowledge and attributes to enter the workforce. The recent House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions (<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoolandwork>) included the following among the Terms of Reference:

- providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;
- identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;

Clearly the needs of students in part-time work that aspire to make a transition to full-time work, those in part-time work and full-time study as well as full-time students not currently employed, must be considered in the mix of planning and implementing any certification as proposed. Young people already in part-time work cannot assume to be 'job ready' in the context of full-time work or in other vocational fields.

Limiting access to the Job Ready Certificate at the point of exiting Year 12 disadvantages any students choosing to leave school earlier to take up employment.

The paper is also silent on addressing the needs of young people unsuccessful in achieving the credential. The importance of teaching these skills has been overlooked. What mechanisms are proposed to assist the young person needing gap training/teaching and multiple opportunities to earn the credential?

The discussion paper does not state that the purpose of the policy initiative is to increase Year 12 completions. To achieve the purpose of enabling successful transitions from school to work, the eligibility must be broadened. Students must have the opportunity throughout their post-compulsory schooling to access this 'job ready' recognition; multiple entry and exit points should be built into policy guidelines.

Limiting access to senior secondary students has the potential to disadvantage young Victorian students enrolled in RTOs, in, for example, the VCAL and pre-apprenticeship programs, when they compete with exiting secondary school students in the labour market. This disadvantage may be enhanced if the current global financial crisis extends into the implementation period for this policy initiative.

The VTA acknowledges benefits in trialling such an initiative with a section of the total cohort and there may be value in targeting senior secondary vocational education and training students initially as there would be established industry, RTO and school partnerships and relationships to draw on. In the longer term, the net must be cast further.

It is unclear from the discussion paper if the Job Ready Certificate is voluntary from the school's point of view or just from the student's perspective. If the intention is that it is voluntary from the school's view, further disadvantage could ensue as not all secondary schools participate in vocational education and training programs in senior secondary years. Near universal participation would be required for the initiative to gain momentum, credibility and be valued by employers.

**Recommendation 1:** Recognition of skills knowledge and attributes to enter the workforce should be available to all post-compulsory school aged students exiting or planning to exit education and training for employment.

2. *Assess and report **personal attributes** that are important in work as well as agreed **key employability skills**.*

The VTA has contributed to raising awareness of the importance of integrating employability skills into VET Training Packages. Throughout this time there have been debates regarding consistently understood definitions of personal attributes that contribute to successful work engagement and work outcomes, as well as the objectivity of assessing and reporting these. Research supports that personal attributes do not form part of competency assessments.

While this debate continues, VTA maintains that judgements may be made about personal attributes but any attempt to use competency based assessment practices to assess and report these cannot be supported. Employers vary in their expectations of employees personal attributes and students demonstrated attributes may vary from one workplace to another. For example, a school student may be motivated to gain recognition for being 'job ready' and will agree to undertake a series of work placements. In reality not all placements will suit the student's

expectations and consequently they may not be highly motivated and may not display preferred personal attributes.

Employability skills are being explicitly included in the delivery and assessment of national VET Training Packages commencing in 2009. The implementation of a Job Ready Certificate as proposed is likely to coincide with these changes to Training Packages. In a relatively short period of transition, all senior secondary students undertaking vocational education and training under the Australian Qualifications Framework, will be assessed on employability skills. Processes to assess, record and issue a Job Ready Certificate will duplicate existing processes, cause employers to question the validity of the Training Package if a duplicate certificate is to be issued and add administrative burden to RTOs as the principle partners in schools' vocational (VET-in-Schools) programs.

**Recommendation 2:** Exclude personal attributes from any assessment relating to job readiness.

**Recommendation 3:** Research the employment outcomes for young people completing Australian Qualifications Framework VET qualifications using Training Packages imbedding employability skills.

3. *Be assessed **in the workplace**, during work placements that are part of upper secondary vocational education programs.*

VTA would be interested in modelling that identifies the likely number of additional work placements needed to meet the demands from students for this credential and the costs for administering these vocational placement programs. If the policy initiative is successful, thousands of additional placements will be required. The Discussion Paper notes around 40% of 220,000 secondary school students are involved in work placements – approximately 88,000 placements. These are likely to be shorter than the 20 days proposed. The demand on business to maintain and grow work placements, particularly in this period of economic uncertainty, is unreasonable. Industry involvement is critical. Increased involvement of industry in placements (proposed up to 20 days) puts added pressure on industry – particularly in regional areas where there are thinner employment options and increases competition with RTOs requiring quality industry placements to meet standards of Training Packages in VET.

VTA members working on a daily basis with local employers in regional Victoria maintain that such levels of work placements cannot be achieved.

While work placements are the ideal setting, a more realistic alternative, unless specifically excluded in the relevant Training Package, is to use simulated work places for assessment of employability skills.

**Recommendation 4:** Defer implementation of the Job Ready Certificate until consistent growth in GDP is evidenced

**Recommendation 5:** Use simulated work places as well as real work places for the assessment of job readiness.

4. *Be a **national stand alone certificate**, additional to existing upper secondary and vocational education qualifications.*

Quality outcomes are fundamental to this initiative and the notion of a national approach to job readiness is supported. Strength of Australia's VET sector is national qualifications underpinned by a national quality system - the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF). Mutual recognition and transferability are key features of VET sector qualifications.

The implication is that such a Job Ready certificate will be accredited in some manner. A national stand alone certificate will require rigorous quality systems to build and maintain employer and community confidence to use and value the credential. The VTA proposes that the AQTF should be adopted if such a certificate is to be introduced. RTOs that have satisfactorily met AQTF standards are best placed to enable assessments of job readiness as they have vocationally qualified staff, existing networks, industry relationships and VET teaching, learning and validated assessment practices. RTOs as assessors should have clear quality assessment systems that demonstrate links to industry.

VTA questions the need for an additional national stand alone certificate. Establishing and maintaining systems and processes for a national stand alone certificate in addition to existing upper secondary and VET qualifications is resource intensive and cannot be justified. AQF VET qualifications, the basis of schools' vocational programs will progressively imbed employability skills into Training Packages. In Victoria, the VCAL expressly includes teaching and learning in employability skills. An agreed national framework that can be contextualised to local industry needs and learner experiences is preferred to a separate stand alone national certificate.

It is two years since *New Directions for Education and Training: Labour's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School* was announced and much has changed in the education and employment arenas. In 2009 the National Quality Council has introduced reporting of Employability Skills on students' testamurs. Over time, all secondary students completing a VET qualification will have employability skills referenced on the testamur.

**Recommendation 6:** Rather than create a national stand alone Job Ready Certificate, review the currency of *New Directions for Education and Training: Labour's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School* in the context of contemporary educational research and the integration of employability skills into VET qualifications.

## **PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING JOB READINESS**

**Principle 1:** VTA endorses the sentiment that any assessment of job readiness must be simple and affordable, meeting the needs of assessors whether in educational settings, small, medium or large enterprises. Assessment must be an outcome of education and training – a matter the Discussion Paper is largely silent on.

The delivery of education and training to develop job readiness/employability skills must occur before assessment and state secondary schools' curricula may need to be modified to ensure nationally consistent outcomes. This is a complex and resource intensive task. Quality processes will need to be agreed, assessors' skills established, professional development and marketing for the initiative.

The VET sector has already established Training Packages including employability skills and the AQTF standards. The Victorian TAFE sector has sophisticated recording and reporting mechanisms, skilled staff and a culture of professional development.

Simplicity and affordability will be achieved by using existing VET sector qualifications, quality systems and processes.

**Principle 2:** Assessment follows learning/skills development. It is not useful to describe the assessment process without acknowledging that teaching and learning occurs first. Assessment of job readiness cannot be a ‘once-off’ event but rather occurs over time with learners having multiple opportunities, if required to develop and demonstrate job readiness. For an assessment process to help behavioural development, it must be accessible over time.

VTA supports the use of plain English and avoidance of jargon in any communications. The example provided in the Discussion Paper does not give confidence that educational jargon can be interpreted into plainer, yet universally understandable language. ‘Gets along well with others’ does not mean the same as ‘demonstrates communication skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations in the workplace.’ Hand in hand with using plain English is the need to ensure that the assessment can be contextualised to the needs of the employer and the learner. The assessment process cannot be limited to the completion of a check sheet; scope must be provided to enable a variety of tools, including portfolios, to be used to judge job readiness. Guidelines linked to quality outcomes may be provided with individuals able to contextualise the processes to meet local network/industry needs.

**Principle 3:** VTA disagrees that an assessment process that ‘tried to ‘embed’ job readiness skills, attitudes and behaviour in existing curriculum content or to ‘map’ them’ is unlikely to make the assessment process explicit. VTA notes the research cited in the Discussion Paper (p4) is from 2002 and is dated.

VTA draws attention to:

- the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning,
- the programs offered by Victorian Technical Education Centres (TECs) and vocational colleges in Victoria, The Ballarat TEC for example, partners with the Central Highlands Local Learning and Employment Network <sup>1</sup> (<http://www.llen.vic.gov.au/>) to attest to young learners’ job readiness, with the LLEN issuing credentials.
- The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority project ‘Assessment and Reporting of Student Achievement of Employability Skills in the post compulsory years of schooling’.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Learning & Employment Networks exist in Victoria to help improve education, training and employment options for 15–19 year olds, particularly those at risk of making poor transitions from compulsory schooling to the next stage of their lives and careers. There are 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs).

Embedding skills across the spectrum of the delivery and assessment is consistent with the Australian and State Governments policies including skills recognition (Recognition of Prior Learning)

This principle is not supported by VTA.

**Principle 4:** VTA agrees that ‘what is assessed’ and the ‘assessment process’ needs to be consistent nationally to achieve national recognition. The Australian Qualifications Framework is a standard for comparison – national qualifications with VET Training Packages endorsed by industry, providing the framework for assessment yet with flexibility to contextualise the assessment content and assessment tools to meet the diverse needs of industry and learners.

Flexibility at the local level occurs in the context of the national quality system and national guidelines. VTA remains unconvinced that uniform assessment content and assessment instruments should be applied to job readiness.

**Principle 5:** VTA agrees that any such credential must be valued by the users if it is to have credibility in the labour market. Employer incentives may need to be offered to encourage uptake. VTA advises exercising caution in applying rating scales to any assessment tasks. A variety of tools should be available for this purpose.

In addition to the points listed in the discussion paper, VTA considers that additional features to create ‘value’ include:

- Being based on sufficient time in the workplace to develop the skills (an educative/training role) with the outcome to allow reliable and valid judgements to be made about young people’s job readiness.
- Delivery and assessment processes that are fair, transparent and valid.
- Assessment meeting the industry agreed principles of: fairness, validity, reliability and flexibility.
- Assessment is valid, consistent, current and authentic.
- Building on work done in the Australian VET sector regarding the integration of employability skills and industry engagement in processes.
- Building on a solid quality foundation such as the AQTF.

**Principle 6:** VTA members expressed a variety of views on the voluntary nature of the proposed policy initiative. VTA reserves comment on this aspect until further guidelines are developed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Any assessment of job readiness will have as a foundation the principles of access and equity and ideally be linked to work placements that will occur in tandem with vocational education and training.

The proposed job ready certificate may achieve the purpose of helping a proportion of young people who move directly from school to work but significant numbers of young people are ineligible to access the credential if assessment cannot occur



before the end of Year 12. Young people in non-school education settings and those choosing to exit school before the end of Year 12 should be equally entitled to have their job readiness assessed. VTA cannot support the restricted eligibility criteria described in the discussion paper.

Further, VTA is not convinced that the implementation of a Job Ready Certificate policy is simple and affordable. A stand alone national certificate as proposed will require rigorous quality systems and administration functions to ensure consistency of outcomes. VTA cannot see the benefit of creating a separate qualification in addition to industry endorsed VET Training Packages integrating employability skills into competency assessments.

COAG's national reform agenda in Education and Training is unfolding in schools, vocational education and training and higher education and clearly the proposed Job Ready Certificate aligns to increasing the proportion of young people making a successful transition from school to work. However, at the same time Australia faces an increasingly unpredictable economic climate that may put pressures on small, medium and large businesses to provide quality work placements to the volumes proposed.

VTA recommends that the policy *New Directions for Education and Training: Labor's Job Ready Certificate for Young Australians Completing Secondary School* is evaluated to affirm relevance and currency.

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