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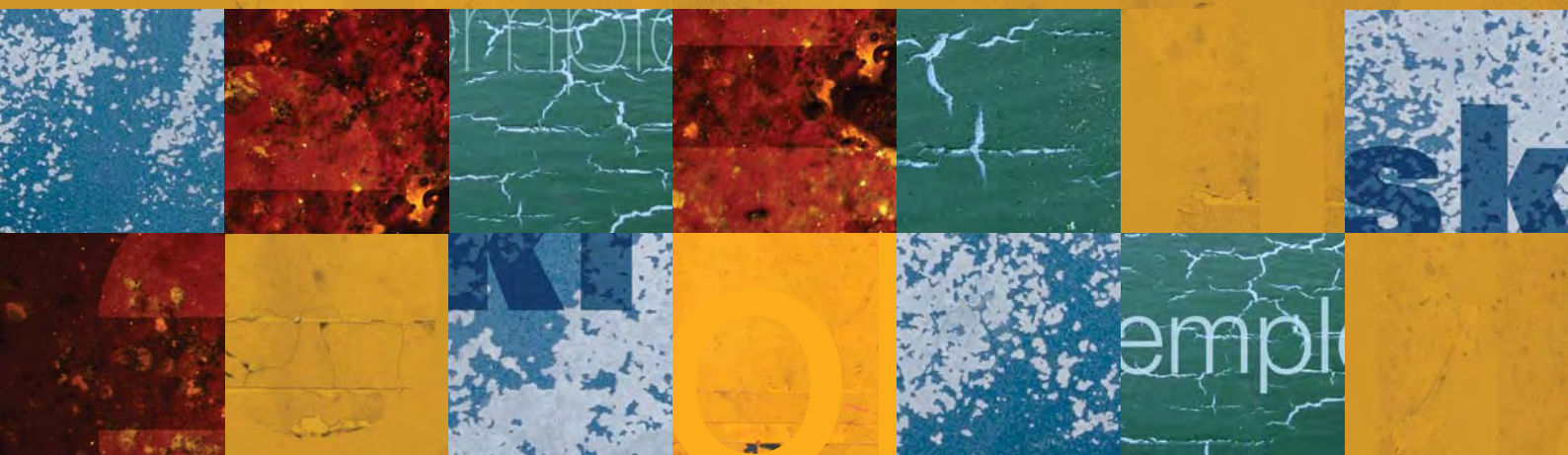
employability skills

Final Report:

Development of a Strategy to Support the
Universal Recognition and Recording of Employability Skills

A Skills Portfolio Approach

December 2004



AUSTRALIAN
NATIONAL TRAINING
AUTHORITY

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Allen Consulting Group, in conjunction with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), was contracted by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to undertake a project to develop an approach to support the universal recognition and recording of employability skills.

The background to this project follows:

- Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) funded a project conducted by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) to gather the views of industry on the critical skills required to facilitate employability in Australian workplaces. The project produced the report, *Employability Skills for the Future* (March 2002);
- Following the release of this report, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in July 2002 agreed to collaborative work on employability skills across the schools, VET and higher education sectors and requested that ANTA coordinate a collaborative cross-sectoral approach to assessing the feasibility of implementing the Employability Skills Framework. In August 2002 ANTA established a cross-sectoral Employability Skills Working Group to progress the recommendation from MCEETYA. In 2003, this Working Group developed the Project Brief for this project.
- DEST commenced the management of this project in September 2003 and conducted an open tender;
- The DEST funding contract with The Allen Consulting Group and NCVER commenced in March 2004 and the project was scheduled for completion in September 2004.

After considering research in the area and stakeholder views, the project was to develop models to recognise, value and utilise employability skills. The project provided an opportunity to progress practical approaches for the recognition and recording of employability skills that could be useful across sectors and consistent with life-long learning. The definition of employability skills and agreement to the eight groupings of the employability skills were taken as givens in this project.

The project brief required outcomes that are applicable across sectors; that is, relevant to schools, vocational education and training (VET), higher education and the broader community, including workplaces. Thus, the models were to be *universally applicable*, being underpinned by cross-sectoral *recognition* of the employability skills, and cross sectoral acceptance of a common approach for the *recording* of employability skills by individuals.

The project has identified three *critical features* of employability skills recognition and recording models that may make implementation easier and encourage broad uptake of the models. These features are:

- the adoption of the definition of 'employability skills' and the eight employability skill groupings developed from research with employers;¹
- a non-prescriptive approach to the elements in the models; and
- an approach that is clearly controlled by and the responsibility of individuals.

¹ Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & the Business Council of Australia March 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, DEST, Canberra (available at: www.dest.gov.au/ty/publications/employability_skills/index.htm).



Project methodology

This project was conducted in two phases. Stakeholder consultation was an important element of both phases. Stakeholders from a broad range of interest groups provided comments, both written and verbal, and informed the decisions of the project team. A Project Advisory Group (PAG) with representatives from Australian and State Government departments and agencies, industry associations, higher education, and community organisations was involved in overseeing the project. The PAG provided advice and guidance on the major project outputs, and assisted during stakeholder consultations.

The initial project phase involved desktop research, a literature review and a review of selected employability skills portfolio models in use in Australia and overseas. This review identified themes and critical issues for recognising and recording employability skills. Stakeholders' comments were invited through an Issues Paper.² During this phase, the essential elements of employability skills recognition and recording models were established (discussed further below). Different options for the individual features of the models were identified, along with their advantages and disadvantages. On the basis of further analysis and input from the PAG, a preferred approach was developed.

Phase two developed the employability skills recognition and recording models and next steps, drawing heavily on the input of stakeholders at a National Forum.³ At the National Forum stakeholders provided feedback on the appropriateness and feasibility of the preferred approach for employability skills recognition and reporting models, as set out in a Directions Paper.² The Forum had over 70 participants and included representatives from industry, schools, the VET sector, higher education institutions, employment and careers agencies and community groups. The Forum was important in identifying some key issues associated with a portfolio approach and building consensus on the best ways forward.

The outcomes from stakeholder consultation, research and analysis were used to establish and refine the elements of employability skills recognition and recording models and the next steps in the development and implementation of these models.

Employability skills

This project used the definition of employability skills and the associated *Employability Skills Framework* developed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) from research with Australian employers. The report *Employability Skills for the Future* sought the views of employers about the set of employability skills relevant to Australian industry for the future. Employability skills are defined as:⁴

... skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

The *Employability Skills Framework* specifies eight skill groupings to describe and define employability skills. The eight skill groupings are:

- *communication* skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
- *team work* skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
- *problem-solving* skills that contribute to productive outcomes;
- *initiative and enterprise* skills that contribute to innovative outcomes;
- *planning and organising* skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;

² The key consultation documents including the Issues Paper and Directions Paper are available on the project website; (<http://www.allenconsult.com.au/employabilityskills/>).

³ The National Forum took place on the 29 June 2004 in Melbourne. A list of attendees is included in appendix B.

⁴ Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & the Business Council of Australia March 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, DEST, Canberra p.2 and 3.



- *self-management* skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
- *learning* skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
- *technology* skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

Employability skills in context

The employability skills definition is useful and concise, however, the broader context for the development and relevance of employability skills needs to be recognised. Employability skills are developed over a life-time in all aspects of life experience including paid and unpaid employment, self-employment, formal education and community activities. Increasingly people are changing jobs and even occupations and industries over the course of their working life. Employability skills are not just relevant to success within one enterprise, but to development and success throughout one's working life. They are relevant for all who are employed, regardless of age or experience, and also to those who seek to be employed.

Essential elements of employability skills recognition and recording models

A key project outcome has been specifying of the essential elements of the employability skills recognition and recording models. This specification is necessary for the development of practical approaches. The four essential elements of employability skills recognition and recording models are:

- the definition and description of employability skills;
- how employability skills are developed and demonstrated;
- how information about an individual's employability skills is collected and recorded; and
- assessment or verification processes associated with employability skills.

For each of these elements, a continuum of options is available ranging from highly prescriptive to non-prescriptive, each with particular advantages, disadvantages and implementation issues.

The preferred approach is a skills portfolio model that adopts a non-prescriptive approach on each of the elements.

A non-prescriptive approach

The use of a non-prescriptive approach to the four essential elements in the employability skills recognition and recording model offers the following strengths: the ability to gain a high level of acceptance by stakeholders; relatively low barriers to implementation; and the greatest potential to be further developed. A further potential strength of the approach is that it does not preclude any institution, organisation or education system from implementing more prescriptive approaches.

The non-prescriptive approach for each element is:

- *Definition and description* – provide common definitions and descriptions of employability skills so that models are applicable across sectors and an individuals' experiences throughout their life. The definitions and descriptions of the eight employability skills groupings are as outlined in the *Employability Skills Framework*. The non-prescriptive approach allows stakeholders to find their own relevant examples for each of the eight groupings.
- *Development and demonstration* – provide guidance and support to portfolio owners to collect evidence on their employability skills.



- *Collecting and recording evidence* – use a portfolio approach as the tool to collect and record evidence of employability skills (the portfolio approach is discussed in detail below). There is a need to provide guidance and support materials for stakeholders in relation to the creation, maintenance and use of portfolios. Any portfolio model must have ‘usability’ appeal to potential portfolio owners and produce a report that appeals to employers. There was support for the development and trialling of an e-portfolio model.
- *Verification and assessment* – portfolios are likely to include information from a wide range of sources; some will be self-assessed and some will be externally verified and/or assessed. Guidance and support materials would be useful to explain to stakeholders the self-verified information that can be put into portfolios. There was consensus that assessment of the employability skills is not an essential part of the preferred non-prescriptive approach and that assessment processes should remain with the respective education, training and higher education sectors.

The portfolio approach

A review of the literature strongly supported the development of a portfolio approach for collecting and recording information about employability skills. At its most basic level, the portfolio approach provides a mechanism for individuals to store information they have collected, for the purpose of recognising and recording their employability skills.

The strengths of a portfolio approach include its capacity to operate across sectors, to incorporate formal and informal evidence from a wide range of sources and remain relevant over a life-time. There are a number of examples of Australian education and training institutions using portfolios to record information on employability skills. Stakeholders recognised that the process of creating and maintaining a portfolio itself develops and demonstrates some employability skills, such as planning and organising, communication and self-management. Thus, the process is itself a career development activity and could form part of a career development program.

At the National Forum, stakeholders identified that the portfolio is a tool to support two important outcomes:

- employment – getting a job, keeping and advancing in a job, and getting a better job; and
- self-development – understanding your own employability skills and the need for continued development of employability skills over a working life-time.

From an individual’s perspective, the portfolio needs to be a highly flexible tool. Employability skills are transferable across contexts, but are only relevant within a particular context. Information in portfolios will be recorded with reference to a particular context. Individuals will collect examples of employability skills based on their own unique engagement in education, workforce and life experiences. The challenge is to create a skills portfolio that is able to be effectively managed by the portfolio owner and easily understood by the end user.

Stakeholders recognised a need to develop guidance and support materials for portfolio owners, including how to create, maintain and use an employability skills portfolio. For example, to promote effective use of a portfolio when preparing a job application, guidance will be needed on selecting and presenting *relevant* information. The effective use of a portfolio means that a particular employer will in most cases see a selection of evidence from the portfolio, not the entire portfolio.

Support materials should also be developed to promote the effective use of the portfolio as a self-development tool. Types of support materials could include best practice examples, templates, principles, and guidelines.

Some stakeholders expressed concern about use of a report that was developed from the portfolio in ‘high stakes’ decisions, such as recruitment and entry into an education or training institution. There was general



agreement that with adequate supports employers, and others stakeholders, presented with information from portfolios, would understand how to appropriately interpret and use the information. The current use of due diligence by employers to check information presented by a prospective employee would remain the case for information presented from a portfolio.

Key portfolio design characteristics

The key design characteristics of effective portfolios were identified from the literature review conducted by NCVET and consultation. In summary, a portfolio must:

- use a common framework and use common language to describe the framework;
- be an individual responsibility, and be owned by the individual. The individuals, as the 'portfolio owners' need to be convinced that the effort to develop and maintain the portfolio will be worthwhile;
- be flexible and adaptable to allow a variety of uses and provide for different contexts throughout life;
- be easy to use by the 'portfolio owner' and include the minimum level of complexity;
- be seen as valuable and valued by individual users for a variety of purposes; for example, self awareness to guide self development, job selection and career planning;
- be supported by appropriate support materials such as guides, examples and case studies;
- be promoted by people and institutions in positions of influence, for example parents, teachers, employers etc.;
- be able to be adapted and developed as the individual develops to meet their emerging needs;
- be available for use in a variety of formats to account for different individual needs, resources and preferences; for example through the Internet, as a CD-ROM, in print in the form of a kit;
- be able to produce 'output' in a variety of formats for different purposes; for example, information to include with a resume in an application for a job, or a VET or university entrance process, or for an application for a volunteer role;
- be able to be stored on existing platforms and networks; and
- be able to incorporate and summarise evidence related to each of the employability skills documented from a range of information sources, including educational providers and their formal assessment and certification processes, workplaces and a range of other appropriate sources, for example voluntary work and community activities. This requires that it be compatible with existing systems and able to incorporate material from a variety of sources and formats.

These key design features provide a basis for evaluating existing approaches and developing a design brief for the trial of different portfolio models in Australia. It is likely that several models of skills portfolios will be required to accommodate the needs of potential portfolio owners.

Stakeholder roles

Stakeholder input identified that *all* stakeholder groups have a role in the development and uptake of employability skills recognition and recording models. For progress to occur in a co-ordinated way across Australia and across sectors, all stakeholders must play their part. For some, this means undertaking new tasks or expanding their activities in certain areas. There is a need for shared responsibility.



Individuals are the 'portfolio owners'. Individuals are primarily responsible for developing and demonstrating their employability skills, collecting and recording evidence of employability skills and deciding what information is included in the portfolio. Individuals will determine how much time and effort to invest in developing and customising their portfolio. This decision will be influenced by factors including: the level of guidance and support materials available, and the perceived benefit of using the portfolio to achieve employment and self-development goals.

Employers value employability skills when they are used in actual employment. Tangible employer support of the *Employability Skills Framework* through support of employability skills portfolios will be critical. Widespread use of employability skills portfolios will be associated with more explicit identification of employability skills by employers and prospective employees, in applications and interviews and use of a common language to describe and discuss employability skills.

Education and training providers are in a position to assist and support students in their role as portfolio owners. This will include valuing the eight employability skills groupings and supporting students to develop, maintain and use or customise their portfolios. There are many examples of this role already being undertaken across school systems, in the VET sector and higher education institutions.

Career practitioners will play an important role in raising awareness of the importance of the eight employability skills groupings. Like education and training providers, career practitioners can provide support to individuals to develop, maintain and use or customise their employability skills portfolios. Career advisory services are well positioned to help promote the use of a common language on employability skills, and to reinforce the notion that the development of employability skills is a life-long process.

Community sector organisations can assist in the development and use of employability skills portfolios. In particular, community sector organisations can highlight the benefits of an employability skills portfolio. Community sector organisations provide opportunities for self-development activities and so may be able to identify the links between those activities and the employability skills.

Governments' role, including Australian Government, States and Territories, is to support the development and uptake of employability skills recognition and recording models. This will involve support for activities that assist other stakeholder groups to fulfil their roles, as described above. Achieving cross-sectoral uptake will require active promotion and practical adoption of a skills portfolio approach by the Australian and all State and Territory Governments.

Next steps

The final part of the project was the identification of next steps in the development and implementation of the employability skill models. Stakeholders identified three areas of activity as the next steps:

- trialling a model of an employability skills portfolio;
- promoting the benefits of employability skills portfolios; and
- further consultation, particularly with industry and businesses.

Specific actions for each of these areas are described below.

Trialling of employability skills portfolios

It is likely that a number of employability skills portfolio models and associated guidance and support materials will be required to accommodate the diversity of need amongst potential portfolio owners. Pilot projects are a useful way to gain information about the effectiveness of various models and supports. Any projects will need to be designed so that they engage a broad range of stakeholders, including employers. Specific issues that could be tested in pilot projects include the following:



- *Flexibility within a model* – portfolios will be used by individuals in different circumstances, at different points in their life, for the purpose of achieving different outcomes. These differences mean that a high degree of flexibility is needed in a portfolio model. On-line or e-portfolio models were identified as having the potential to offer a very flexible, cross-sector approach. The *myfuture.edu.au* (*myfuture*) careers website offers a widely used existing tool that has links to other career development supports. Prior to the end of this project, the Australian Government announced funding for such a trial to proceed (see box E.1).
- *Stakeholder roles* – as identified above, various stakeholder groups will need to play specific roles to successfully implement employability skills recognition and recording models across sectors and as a feature of life-long learning. Pilot projects could consider the types of guidance and supports stakeholders will require to undertake these roles.
- *Lifelong learning* – portfolios must cater for lifelong learning. People move in and out of the education system and the workforce. As people become older the formal qualifications that were gained earlier in their life can become less relevant than their work and life experiences. This issue will become more prominent if the expected trend of Australians remaining in the workforce at older ages emerges. Pilot projects could explore the capacity of different portfolio approaches to accommodate lifelong learning; for example, the ability to incorporate evidence of employability skills that are gained over a long period in employment. There would also be merit in trialling models to assess the ways in which the skills portfolio can be used as a learning and planning tool for young people entering into employment.

Box E.1

INITIAL TRIAL OF E-PORTFOLIO

In July 2004, the Australian Government announced a grant of \$200,000 directed towards the development and trial of an 'e-portfolio' website for the recognition and recording of employability skills. The e-portfolio website will be located on the existing career exploration and information system myfuture (<http://www.myfuture.edu.au/>).

Source: Media Release, July 2004 (Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP)

Promoting the benefits of employability skills portfolios

The themes emerging from discussions at the National Forum suggest that two high priority issues in the next steps are:

- the active promotion and practical adoption of the eight *employability skills groupings* and the associated use of *common language* about the employability skills; and
- the development of *guidance and support materials* for stakeholders to effectively develop and use employability skills portfolios.

The active promotion and practical adoption of a portfolio approach using common language should help to increase the level of understanding of the eight skill groupings across stakeholder groups and encourage the explicit *valuing of employability skills*. There is a need for structured activities to promote the benefits and use of employability skills portfolios across all the relevant stakeholder groups. The activities could:

- focus on how to develop and use employability skills portfolios;
- use *common terminology* to describe the eight employability skill groupings;



- aim to strengthen stakeholder support in valuing employability skills; and
- include the development of exemplars and support materials suitable for individuals and employers and a wider group of involved stakeholders.

Given the diverse audience for employability skills models, these activities will need to be tailored for specific stakeholder groups. The involvement of governments, peak employer groups, unions and education bodies is essential to the success of these activities.

Further consultation

The third area of activity identified by stakeholders was further consultation. The objectives for the next consultation phase would be to engage with a wider audience and to gather further information on some aspects of employability skills portfolio models. Specifically, the issues requiring further consultation are:

- *Promoting the outcomes* to be achieved using the employability skills portfolio approach. As identified above, stakeholders identified that there are two broad outcomes associated with the use of a portfolio approach: employment and self-development. Further consultation would highlight the implications and benefits of these outcomes in practice.
- *Access and equity* considerations require the employability skills recognition and recording models be accessible to as many members of the community as possible. Further consultation will be required to establish which groups in the community will require specific supports to be able to use, develop and maintain employability skills portfolios. Of particular concern is to ensure maximum access to the models by:
 - those outside the education, training and work structures;
 - those with low English language skills or information and communication technology literacy; and
 - those with a physical and/or intellectual disability.
- *Data issues* need further consideration. The feasibility and appropriateness of a single central data storage point for individual portfolios, including in relation to an e-portfolio website model, needs exploration. Further consultation will need to take place to identify suitable approaches for individuals to store their skills portfolios.
- *Self-assessment processes and the development of associated templates* need further consideration. Self-assessment is the foundation of the recommended employability skills e-portfolio model. Best practice case studies and exemplars will assist portfolio owners understand the continuum of skill development and use this in their self-assessment processes.

Conclusion

Employability skills recognition and recording models that are practical, cross-sectoral and consistent with life-long learning have the potential to be useful to many within the community. Students will benefit as they transition through and from school to work or further education and training. People in employment will benefit as they transition between jobs and between employers as well as to progress within an enterprise. People outside formal education and training and workplaces who wish to enter or to re-enter these systems will also benefit.

This project has used existing research and stakeholder views to identify essential elements of employability skills recognition and recording models that have practical application potential for Australia. Stakeholder input has shaped the models and focused attention on issues that may need further consideration. It is clear that all stakeholder groups need to actively engage in supporting the active promotion and practical adoption of a portfolio approach to move the employability skills agenda forward. This project has found that the most productive next steps would be the implementation of activities to trial models of employability skills portfolios, based on the features identified in this project, as well as further consultation.



Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 This project

The Allen Consulting Group, in conjunction with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), was appointed by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to undertake a project to develop a feasible approach to support the universal recognition and recording of employability skills.

The background to this project follows:

- Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) funded a project conducted by the Business Council of Australia (BCA) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) to gather the views of industry on the critical skills required to facilitate employability in Australian workplaces. The project produced the report, *Employability Skills for the Future* (March 2002);
- Following the release of this report, MCEETYA in July 2002 agreed to collaborative work on employability skills across the schools, VET and higher education sectors and requested that ANTA coordinate a collaborative cross-sectoral approach to assessing the feasibility of implementing the Employability Skills Framework. In August 2002 ANTA established a cross-sectoral Employability Skills Working Group to progress the recommendation from MCEETYA. In 2003, this Working Group developed the Project Brief for this project;
- DEST commenced the management of this project in September 2003 and conducted an open tender; and
- The DEST funding contract with The Allen Consulting Group and NCVER commenced in March 2004 and the project was scheduled for completion in September 2004.

After considering research in the area and stakeholder views, the project was to develop models to recognise, value and utilise employability skills.

The project brief required outcomes that are applicable across sectors; that is, relevant to schools, vocational education and training (VET), higher education and the broader community, including workplaces. Thus, the models were to be *universally applicable*, being underpinned by cross-sectoral *recognition* of the employability skills, and cross sectoral acceptance of a common approach for the *recording* of employability skills by individuals.

The project took place during the first half of 2004. At this time a number of employability skills research projects and pilot studies had taken place, or were taking place.⁵ The project provided an opportunity to consolidate existing work on employability skills models and to progress practical approaches for the recognition and recording of employability skills that could be useful across sectors and consistent with life-long learning. The definition of employability skills and agreement to the eight groupings of the employability skills were taken as givens in this project.

⁵ These are discussed further in chapter 2 and appendix C.



1.2 Employability skills

This project used the definition of employability skills and the associated *Employability Skills Framework* developed from research with Australian employers. The report *Employability Skills for the Future* sought the views of employers about the set of employability skills relevant to Australian industry for the future. Employability skills are defined as:⁶

... skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

The eight groupings of employability skills from the Employability Skills Framework, and to which this report refers when using the term 'employability skills', are:

- *communication* skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
- *team work* skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
- *problem-solving* skills that contribute to productive outcomes;
- *initiative and enterprise* skills that contribute to innovative outcomes;
- *planning and organising* skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;
- *self-management* skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
- *learning* skills that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
- *technology* skills that contribute to effective execution of tasks.

Employability skills in context

The employability skills definition is useful and concise, however, the broader context for the development and relevance of employability skills needs to be recognised. Employability skills are developed over a life-time in all aspects of life experience including paid and unpaid employment, self-employment, formal education and community activities. Increasingly people are changing jobs and even occupations and industries over the course of their working life. Employability skills are not just relevant to success within one enterprise, but to development and success throughout one's working life. They are relevant for all who are employed, regardless of age or experience, and also to those who seek to be employed.

1.3 Project method

The project was conducted in two phases. Input from a Project Advisory Group (PAG) and stakeholders was a feature of both phases.

Input from the Project Advisory Group and stakeholders

A PAG with representatives from Australian and State Government departments and agencies, industry associations, higher education, and community organisations was involved in overseeing the project. The PAG provided advice and guidance on the major project outputs, and assisted during stakeholder consultations. The members of the PAG are listed in appendix A.

Stakeholders from a broad range of interest groups provided comments, both written and verbal, and informed the decisions of the project team. Participants in consultation processes are listed in appendix B.

⁶ Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & the Business Council of Australia March 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, DEST, Canberra p. 2 and 3.



Phase one

In the initial phase, desktop research and a literature review identified themes and critical issues for recognising and recording employability skills. Stakeholder's comments were invited through an Issues Paper that invited public comment about:⁷

- principles used to assess universal employability skills recognition and recording models;
- approaches used to demonstrate and record attainment of employability skills;
- potential applications of employability skills recognition and recording models; and
- stakeholder roles in relation to employability skills recognition and recording models.

The views and information provided in response to the Issues Paper were analysed along with feedback from targeted stakeholder consultation and desk based research, including a literature review that looked at existing information on employability skills, both theory and practice.⁸ The four essential elements of employability skills recognition and recording models were established as definition/description, development/demonstration, collection of evidence and recording of information, and assessment/verification. Different approaches for the individual elements of the models were identified, along with their advantages and disadvantages and implementation issues. On the basis of further analysis and input from the PAG, a preferred approach, including stakeholder roles was developed.

DEST and the PAG had input into the phase one report and used the report to help establish the direction for phase two of the project.

Phase two

Phase two of the project built on the information from phase one to develop elements of recognition and recording employability skills models. This involved a comprehensive assessment of approaches and identification of a preferred approach for consideration at a National Forum and ultimately the recommendations about the most appropriate next steps.⁹ There were three major elements in phase two of the project.

First, a Directions Paper was prepared to provide a platform for phase two consultation. The Directions Paper identified a preferred approach for the development of recognition and recording employability skills models and set out a series of implementation issues. The Directions Paper was placed on the project website to allow interested parties to provide comment and review the project progress.¹⁰

Second, a National Forum took place to provide feedback on the appropriateness and feasibility of the preferred approach as set out in the Directions Paper. The forum had over 70 participants and included representatives from industry, research organisations, schools, the VET sector, higher education institutions, employment and careers agencies and community groups. By bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, the National Forum allowed input from a broad range of stakeholder groups and provided an opportunity to build consensus on the best way forward.

This project report is the third element of phase two. This report brings together the learnings from all aspects of the project, including the critical characteristics of employability skills models, stakeholder roles and next steps in the development and implementation of those models.

⁷ The key consultation documents including the Issues Paper and Directions Paper are available on the project website: www.allenconsult.com.au/employabilityskills/.

⁸ See appendix B for a list of people who took part in consultation during the project.

⁹ The National Forum took place on the 29th June 2004 in Melbourne. A list of attendees is included in appendix B.

¹⁰ The project website is: www.allenconsult.com.au/employabilityskills/.



1.4 Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows:

- This chapter provides the project context and describes the approach to deliver the project;
- Chapter 2 provides project background and identifies a number of relevant Australian projects on employability skills;
- Chapter 3 presents a summary of findings from a literature review;
- Chapter 4 presents a summary of stakeholder views on portfolio approaches;
- Chapter 5 identifies the characteristics of a preferred recognition and recording employability skills model;
- Chapter 6 summarises views on the stakeholder roles with a non-prescriptive portfolio approach; and
- Chapter 7 sets out next steps that are consistent with the development and implementation of practical approaches for the recognition and recording employability skills models.



Chapter 2

Background to the project

This chapter provides background and contextual information for the project.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter draws upon a detailed literature review, prepared by NCVET presenting key messages from the literature in relation to practical approaches for the recognition and recording of employability skills. These include: the definition and descriptions of the employability skills, contexts for development and demonstration of the skills, information that needs to be collected and recorded and the verification or assessment processes. The chapter also identifies a number of Australian projects addressing employability skills issues that are underway or recently completed. The chapter considers the following:

- the need for universally recognised employability skills recognition and recording models;
- employability skills in the broader educational objectives;
- defining and describing employability skills; and
- building on existing research and experience.

2.2 Employability skills recognition and recording models

Australian workplaces are transforming to meet the intertwined challenges of the knowledge economy and globalisation. As one project stakeholder observed: there is a great deal of research and opinion now that supports the growing importance in employment (and in life) of a range of skills and abilities that were less critical in the past than in the present.¹¹ These include communication skills, knowledge creation skills, skills in self-organisation and the like. Most of these skills are reflected in the sorts of skills that are being taken up by most developed economies.

The goal of achieving high performing workplaces, with trained and flexible employees is familiar to the education and training sectors and these imperatives underpinned the Mayer Key Competencies. What is new is the rapidly increasing value to business of intangible assets. This subtle and yet profound transformation is placing greater weight on employee characteristics such as the capacity for innovation and creativity, team work and customer service. The profile of these skills and attributes is therefore becoming more important both in the substance and outcomes from all aspects of education and training, including workplaces.

Universal recognition and recording employability skills models are consistent with the need for individuals to embrace life long learning that traverses sectoral and community boundaries. Rigid boundaries in education and training sectors are not consistent with employment pathways where individuals change employers and possibly industries and experience various working arrangements from full-time to part-time to casual and so on. Employability skills models can provide a tool for the individual that can help to develop a life-long career pathway. It can assist individuals as they make transitions both between education and the workplace and when making transitions within education and work pathways.

¹¹ References were provided to Chappell C. et al. 2003 *Reconstructing the life-long learner: pedagogies of individual, social and organisational change*, Routledge, London and OECD 2000, *Is there a new economy? First report of the OECD Growth project*, OECD Paris.



Employers will benefit if there are known employability skills models that can assist in the task of describing the generic skills of potential employees. Explicit information about employability skills would be a useful addition to information already available on academic achievements and vocational competencies. The information is relevant to employers in recruitment processes and when developing training plans for existing employees.

Employability skills models also have the potential to assist groups who are marginal to the workforce and equity groups that are disadvantaged in the workplace. It is expected that employability skills recognition and recording models will provide practical tools that allow the recognition for skills gained outside conventional structures.

2.3 Employability skills and broader educational objectives

The successful development of employability skills recognition and recording models must recognise the place of generic employability skills in the context of the broader educational objectives of the specific education sectors. Generic skill development is implicit, and increasingly becoming explicit, in current education and training in all sectors. Generic skills are also developed outside formal education pathways. This project explored ways that the employability skills can be made explicit and useful to individuals and employers, without creating an undue burden on those providing education and training.

It is evident that differences exist across sectors and States and Territories in the approach to employability skills.

Within the higher education sector generic skill development underpins approaches to teaching and learning. The importance of generic skill development in the university sector could be seen as consistent with the development of a universal recognition and recording employability skills model. However, the autonomous nature of university operations presents a potential challenge to the development of prescriptive employability skills portfolios. Thus while some institutions are engaging with the concepts (eg constructing skills portfolios and a structure for graduate capabilities), many universities may prefer their own language and may resist a universal approach.

Much work has been undertaken in the VET sector to develop approaches that embed the employability skills into the Training Packages. In this way, employability skills would be treated comparably with all other skills and with multiple ways to assess and demonstrate levels of attainment.

In the schools sector generic skill development underpins approaches to teaching and learning. The schools sector presents some good examples of the use of approaches to identify employability skills, for example, skills portfolios and passports. However, there is concern with the compatibility of a skills portfolio approach with the rigour of senior secondary assessment and certification and how to ensure that employability skills 'fit' with the drive for generic skills coming from The National Goals for Schooling. Under the National Goals the development of generic skills in school settings is seen to be vital as we move towards a lifelong learning paradigm for work and for life generally.

Finally, employability skills will be developed both inside and outside formal education pathways. Informal pathways accessed in the community sector, such as the participation in youth development activities, contribute to the development of a wide range of generic skills. A skills portfolio approach should be able to recognise and record employability skills such as these developed outside the formal education sectors.

There is the expectation from business and individuals that the often rigid boundaries between education and training sectors need to be dissolved or, at least, blurred. While sectors do have distinct roles, many differences are historically determined but, to users of the systems, they appear arbitrary. The application of an employability skills recognition and recording model provides a practical way of finding cross-sectoral approaches that will allow individuals to develop, and value their employability skills and to effectively demonstrate their attainment of these skills to others.



2.4 Employability skills defined

Chapter one identified that from the outset the project adopted the definition of employability skills from the report *Employability Skills for the Future*, that defines employability skills as:¹²

... skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

This definition was used recognising the context that employability skills are developed over a life-time in all aspects of life experience including (but not limited to) paid employment and formal education.

The *Employability Skills for the Future* report identified eight groupings of generic employability skills that employers expect employees to have, along with job specific technical skills. These *employability* skills are also seen as prerequisites for self-employment and for success in other domains of life.

Employability skills are clusters of skills. Specific examples of the employability skills will vary depending upon the context in which they are developed and applied. Precise descriptions of these skills will therefore need to be tailored according to the particular context in which they are developed and applied.

Cross-sectoral recognition of these eight key employability skills is important for the development of skills portfolio approaches for the recognition and recording employability skills. It is acknowledged that some institutions or education systems may include a focus on some other generic skills in addition to the eight employability skills groupings.

The recent national endorsement by the Australian, State and Territory Education Ministers of these eight groupings of employability skills provides additional impetus for the implementation of employability skills recognition and recording models (see box 2.1).

Box 2.1

NATIONAL CONSIDERATION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FRAMEWORK

State and Australian Government Education Ministers have agreed to the following recommendations:

- agreeing that the eight skills groupings outlined in the report *Employability Skills for the Future* includes skills that young people require for successful transition from school to a range of destinations, including work;
- noting that the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training in consultation with the Transition from School Taskforce and other stakeholders is undertaking further work on possible strategies to implement the employability skills in the schooling sector, including possible assessment and reporting models. Progress will be reported to MCEETYA in 2004; and
- agreeing that the Employability Skills Framework be referred to the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee project on developing statements of learning that define and deliver common curriculum outcomes so that they may assist in identifying the "generic and trans-disciplinary capabilities and understandings" from the National Goals of Schooling that are to be integrated in this project.

Source: MCEETYA Out-of-Session Report from the Transition from School Taskforce, 2004

¹² Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & the Business Council of Australia March 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, DEST, Canberra p.3.



2.5 Building on existing research and experience

The work of this project has been designed to consolidate the existing work on employability skills and to contribute to the progress of that work through the development of the features of recognition and recording employability skills models and identification of the next steps in their development. This section identifies national research and decisions and presents examples of employability skills being explicitly identified in schools, the VET sector and higher education.

National research and decisions

Extensive national research has been undertaken on employability skills. This project has aimed to build on that research. Recent national projects and associated decisions in this area include:

- the National Training Quality Council undertaking work to scope implementation issues around employability skills in VET and develop strategies to support future implementation;
- Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and DEST funded a project conducted by the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to gather the views of industry on the critical skills required to facilitate employability in Australian workplaces. The project produced the report, *Employability Skills for the Future*;
- the (then) Enterprise and Career Education Foundation set aside funding to examine the acquisition of employment related skills by secondary school students and other projects in relation to the recognition of employability skills;
- MCEETYA, in July 2002, agreed to collaborative work on employability skills across the schools, VET and higher education sectors and requested that ANTA coordinate a collaborative cross-sectoral approach to assessing the feasibility of implementing the Employability Skills Framework. ANTA has convened a cross-sectoral Employability Skills Working Group to progress the recommendations from MCEETYA;
- the (then) Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, funded ANTA in 2002 to examine the potential to recognise the skills achieved by young people participating in youth development programs. Further activities with funding from the Department of Family and Community Services have followed to implement the *Due Credit* recommendations;
- the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training has recently tabled its report on vocational education in schools, *Learning to Work*. This report recommends that employability skills be made a higher priority and developed through a range of strategies across the curriculum; and
- Australian, State and Territory Education Ministers through MCEETYA processes have recently agreed that the eight skills groupings outlined in the report *Employability Skills for the Future* includes skills that young people require for successful transition from school to a range of destinations, including work.

State of play in the education and training sectors

There are some sectorial issues that need to be taken into account. In the schools sector two significant reports were delivered in 2003. The first concluded that the employability skills in the Employability Skills Framework have 'face validity' and that there was a need for the development of a broad work/life transition framework to integrate life skills and employment related skills.¹³

¹³ Erebus Consulting 2003, *The Acquisition of Employment Related skills by Secondary School Students*.



A second report¹⁴ considered the extent to which employability skills are already included in curriculum. The report found that as a result of embedding and developing the Key Competencies, there are strong alignments between curriculum frameworks, senior secondary curriculum documents and the generic skills found in the *Employability Skills Framework*. However, the alignment does not generally extend to assessment and reporting. This report concluded that there was a need for a more simplified framework with a clearer statement of intent and purpose.

In the VET sector work is proceeding on addressing the necessary refinements and enhancements to ensure that employability skills are well described in Training Packages. This work is intended to involve not only Training Package developers but also other stakeholders with a significant interest in the outcome.

In higher education, the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) has a view that the Employability Skills Framework is a useful broad template rather than a set of organisational principles required for every curriculum. The AVCC indicated its intention to use it as a helpful tool in developing academic courses in the future.

A related national initiative

A related national project is the prototype Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD Blueprint). The Blueprint¹⁵ provides guidelines for helping to integrate and strengthen career development learning in a wide variety of settings nationwide. It contains two main components:

- the career competencies that all Australians need to effectively manage life, learning and work; and
- processes for planning, implementing and evaluating career programs and resources.

The Blueprint is a comprehensive document with multiple uses. The framework of competencies provides a common language that will ultimately assist in the creation of comprehensive, effective and measurable career development programs that help people to better manage their lives, learning and work.

Some practical uses for the Blueprint might be to:

- develop/review a comprehensive career development system;
- review a stand-alone career development program or curriculum;
- create a short career development course or workshop;
- determine an individual's level of mastery of the career competencies so that an intervention strategy can be developed to address their needs;
- ensure that resources that are developed address specific needs; and
- review an organisation's career information resources to determine the career competencies are being covered.

The Blueprint is based on the Canadian and US Blueprints that have been developed over the last 15 years. It has been extensively workshopped across Australia and to date five State and Territory governments have agreed to a comprehensive pilot program.

The Blueprint provides a means of mapping, unifying and coordinating service provision of career development services in a developmental framework. The trialling of the Blueprint at a time in the future

¹⁴ Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) 2003, *The Employability Skills Framework Report of Mapping Task Undertaken by ACACA Agencies*.

¹⁵ See Miles Morgan Australia Pty Ltd 2003, Australian Blueprint for Career Development Draft Prototype, Not for Distribution, available at www.dest.gov.au/directory/publications/.



is expected to complement current initiatives, and support a portfolio approach to identifying employability skills. The Blueprint trialling will provide important information and insight on skills portfolio models and how they sit in career development programmes.

Putting employability skills into practice – some examples

There are many examples of employability skills recognition and recording models being put into practice in the school sector, the VET sector or universities, or in jurisdictions.

Both hard copy and electronic portfolios are in use. Many of those in the planning stages are in an electronic format. For example, Victoria University is trialling an e-portfolio based on the University of Minnesota OSPI initiative. Deakin University is trialling a Callista product. Torrens Valley TAFE provides a detailed model for the use of employability skills portfolios, with the electronics and IT faculty in particular having a long history in this area. Queensland secondary schools were also raised as an example of where portfolios are being used. The prototype Australian Blueprint for Career Development is focused on life-long learning so the trialling will be a cross-sectoral activity (described above).

A selection of employability skills initiatives are presented below to show the diversity of existing arrangements. Appendix C includes additional Australian examples, and international examples including information on templates in use.

School sector – NSW Employment Related Skills Logbook¹⁶

The NSW Department of Education has developed a formal approach for schools to assist students to understand and plan for the employment, education and training options available to them. A School to Work Plan is:

- a flexible, working document which summarises a current plan for the student's transition to employment or to further education and training;
- an ongoing record for the student which is regularly revised to ensure continuity and relevance; and
- a management tool which sets the direction for the student in terms of career goals and priorities.

School to work planning involves a coordinated and collaborative process, providing a framework for mutual communication and engagement between students, parents/caregivers, school and community. The process is intended to provide for the development of goal-setting and decision-making skills, to enable the student to continue the process independently.

Each student develops an Action Plan that details individual learning experiences that will assist the student to inform and clarify their career path and uses an Employment Related Skills Logbook to record the experiences and skills from their Action Plan. The Logbook can be used as:

- a 'rough copy' record of skills and experiences to be drawn on when the student is completing an application for work, further education or for community service;
- a display document to be shown as part of a student's portfolio; and
- an aid to better support young people completing applications for work, further education and training or for community service positions. Specific information can be drawn from the entries that relate to the position being applied for. The logbook can be presented at interview as evidence to support the application, if necessary.

¹⁶ http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/vetinschools/schooltowork/planning/index_pln.htm.



VET sector – Torrens Valley TAFE

Torrens Valley TAFE has developed a comprehensive implementation strategy for the assessment of employability skills, as the Mayer Key Competencies, which includes:

- organisational vision and strategic commitment to ensure that 'graduates have the employability sought by industry and are work ready, innovative and capable';
- valuing key competencies as core elements – not as simply 'add-ons';
- explicit self-assessment by learners, where assessment is used to force key competencies to be explicit, in order that they may be learned and the student empowered in their key competencies 'know-how';
- consultation and collaboration with students, employers and staff; and
- organisation-wide support for practical implementation by coordination, development of a framework, assessment tools and processes, and promotion of skills.

VET sector – Printing and graphic arts industry electronic skills passport¹⁷

The Electronic Skills Passport is a database driven website providing a searchable academic student record online. The development of the database was funded by ANTA and undertaken by NetSpot and the OnFX Consortium.

Students can create and amend an electronic profile of their skills, based on the nationally endorsed Printing and Graphic Arts Training Package. Once an electronic skills passport has been developed it can be endorsed, in part or full, by a Registered Training Organisation. A student can print or email a copy of their Skills Passport to prospective employers, and the site provides the option for employers to access a secure electronic version (password access is required), to confirm the skills.

Higher education sector – University of South Australia

The University of South Australia has developed a framework to assist students identify the knowledge, skills, ability and personal qualities developed through their university studies and other life experiences. The framework has seven graduate qualities and associated generic indicators. These qualities and generic indicators are adapted for each field of study and shape course teaching, learning and assessment.

The approach is implemented via the web.¹⁸ Students manage their own records of experience and achievement and to use these records to build profiles in response to specific employment opportunities. The website also includes resources that contain:

- information, advice and web links to assist students use records of achievement in resumes and job applications;
- career and employment information designed for potential employers of graduates; and
- a database that allows individual students to store, select and assemble information as they choose.

¹⁷ Sources: <http://www.skillspassport.net.au> and <http://www.netspot.com.au/NetSpot/netspot/clients/esp>.

¹⁸ For further information go to: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/etd/expbank.asp>.





Chapter 3

Key messages from research

This chapter presents key messages from a literature review on employability skills conducted by NCVET. The key messages relate to the definition, development, demonstration and assessment of employability skills and uses and design principles of portfolios.

3.1 Introduction

Employability and other generic skills are fostered through both formal and informal learning and in a variety of contexts, including educational institutions and in workplaces. They are fostered in other settings as well – the home, social settings in a range of sporting and leisure activities and through voluntary work. Within education in Australia, these skills, and others which underpin their development (for example, skills in literacy and numeracy), are fostered in schools, VET, adult and community education and higher education.

Because of this broad interest and the wide range of contexts in which these skills can be developed and supported, there is a substantial literature. Whilst a search of library and other databases elicits a large number of potential references, finding applicable articles and research reports is more difficult. However, despite this, a thorough search of a range of library databases, including both the ERIC and the VECED research databases, has provided useful background information to support the current project. While the review has not directly cited a large body of international work, it draws on a number of reviews that do (for example, Werner 1995, Kearns 2001, Turner 2002, Curtis 2004a).¹⁹

To address the range of issues raised within the literature, this summary of findings from the extensive literature review conducted by NCVET is arranged in five major sections, as follows:

- defining employability skills;
- development of employability skills;
- demonstration of employability skills;
- assessment of employability skills; and
- uses and design principles of portfolios.

3.2 Defining and describing employability skills

The current focus on employability skills

In 2001, DEST and ANTA commissioned a project that gathered the views of industry on the critical generic skills required to facilitate employability in Australian workplaces. The report from the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA), *Employability Skills for the Future* (2002) defines employability skills as:

... skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions. Employability skills are also sometimes referred to as generic skills, capabilities or key competencies.

(ACCI/BCA 2002, p.3)

¹⁹ The bibliography for this chapter is in appendix D.



The report was produced as a result of an increased interest in the development of these skills to meet industry's skill needs and because of the changing nature of work and their role in sustaining long-term economic growth in an increasingly 'knowledge-based' economy. Its authors identified a number of personal attributes, generic skills and elements of these skills which were the building blocks of the Employability Skills Framework. In doing so, they acknowledged that:

- these skills build on the key competencies (Mayer Committee 1992);
- employer recognition and integration of the key competencies within work, learning and recognition were strong;
- employers identified the importance of those personal attributes that contribute to employability;
- the same critical mix of skills had been identified by small and medium enterprises and large enterprises;
- the skills identified as critical were broadly consistent across industry sectors and all are important though the elements would depend on the industry and work contexts;
- the priority placed on these employability skills, and their various elements, varied from enterprise to enterprise;
- employability skills are as relevant as job specific or technical skills;
- employability skills are relevant to both entry level and established employees;
- there is strong recognition of the role of lifelong learning in skill development and response to change;
- the skills identified in the framework underpin the capacity for leadership;
- customer service is not an isolated skill but, rather, is the outcome of the integration of a range of different skills; and
- the employability skills are as important for effective participation in the community as they are in employment.

The Employability Skills Framework

The project report, *Employability Skills for the Future*, included an Employability Skills Framework of personal attributes, generic skills and examples ('elements') of these skills.

The eight key employability skills included in the Employability Skills Framework (listed in chapter two) are not very different from the key competencies identified more than a decade ago by the Finn Report (1991) and reformulated and enhanced by the Mayer Report, *Putting Education to Work* (1992).

Australia's list of employability skills stands out because it does not feature basic or fundamental skills, such as literacy and numeracy. Rather, these skills are implicit in the other major skills listed (NCVER 2003a).

The OECD and a range of countries, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Singapore, the Netherlands, France, Germany and the United States of America, have similar lists of generic skills. They consider these skills to be core to entry to and continued employment in their workforces (Curtis and McKenzie 2001, NCVER 2003a, Curtis 2004a).



Nature of employability skills

Put simply, generic skills are those that apply across a variety of jobs and life contexts. They are also known by several other names, including key skills, core skills, essential skills, key competencies, necessary skills, transferable skills and employability skills. Industry's preferred term is employability skills. They are a set of social skills which we use to facilitate socially-situated activities such as work, leisure and learning. They are acquired and developed throughout an individual's career and life and differ quite dramatically from technical or the 'doing' skills both in nature and the way they are developed. Employability skills are therefore a significant subset of a broader set of generic skills.

The educational literature provides us with a wealth of information about past and current understandings of how we 'learn about' (knowledge acquisition) and how we 'learn to do' (skill development/training). Until recently, there was little concentration in any of the education sectors in Australia on employability skills. The reason for this is that, in an educational context with a dominant focus on knowledge acquisition and a paradigm of decontextualised, generalisable outcomes, employability and other generic skills were seen to be equivalent to generalised knowledge and assumed to be learnt and developed in the same way. It is only as we move into a 'knowledge economy' that the focus has swung to a greater demand for the development of generic skills and a consequential closer examination of the nature of generic skills and the way they are developed.

The OECD sponsored DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) project (Haste 1999, cited in Curtis 2004a) has identified four major conceptual elements in generic competencies, namely that they:

- *are multi-functional* — they meet a range of different and important demands of daily life. They are needed to achieve different goals and to solve multiple problems in different contexts;
- *are relevant across many fields* — they are relevant for participation in school, the labour market, political processes, social networks, and interpersonal relationships, including family life and for developing a sense of social wellbeing;
- *refer to a high order of mental complexity* — they assume a mental autonomy which involves an active and reflective approach to life; and
- *are multi-dimensional* — they are composed of know-how, analytical, cultural and communication skills, and common sense.

There are other features about generic and employability skills which set them apart from the acquisition of knowledge and technical and/or manual skill. One is that generic skills are developed in association with these other skills because they have a mediating and transforming role and are the vehicle for their development. Secondly, Down (2000) identified that generic skills were rarely applied in isolation but are applied in association with other generic skills.

The development and usage of employability skills is context dependent. The purpose for developing employment skills is competent practice within a particular context or set of contexts at a particular complexity of performance. Therefore, unless the purpose(s) for which the development of employment skills is intended, then there will be a mis-match between what is expected and what occurs.

Secondary school education, VET, and higher education have differing perspectives on the identification of employability skills, the context(s) of their development, the purposes to which they will be put and the contexts in which they will be used. Employability skills will be developed in school and VET classrooms, in workplaces, in higher education settings and through general life experiences. They will be valued differently by different groups. For example, an employer may value employability skills as an indication of workplace-readiness while a higher education selection officer may see them as a guide to learner independence.

It follows that at different stages of learning and work, and in different contexts, different combinations of generic and employability skills will be valued – and they will be valued for different reasons too. This does



not preclude having a common set of employability skills as the names of the generic skills involved are likely to indicate levels of sophistication and complexity rather than real differences.

However, it does suggest that it may be impossible to adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and that variations will be needed in the processes and tools used for the introduction of employability skills. Flexibility is key. In addition, the development of employability and other generic skills by an individual is a life-long journey, not an outcome. Therefore, a simple but flexible system which is based on the developing needs of the individual, and controlled by them, is needed to record and report them. It needs to be able to incorporate both formal and informal information about employability and other generic skills from a variety of sources.

3.3 Employability skills development

Since employability skills are highly valued by employers, it is becoming increasingly important for school leavers and other jobseekers to be able to demonstrate development of these skills, as well as their understanding of the nature and role of these skills in the workplace. Accordingly, the development of employability skills is not only a matter of concern for employers, individual students and workers, but also for education providers, including:

- secondary schools;
- VET providers (both TAFE Institutes and private providers of education and training);
- higher education providers such as universities; and
- enterprises which have structured in-house training programs such as new graduate programs.

The development of groups of generic capabilities or skills such as the group of employability skills identified in the BCA/ACCI report is usually addressed with education and training institution in one of three distinct ways.

The first approach, a 'fully integrated' approach, which assumes that since these capabilities/skills are integral to the development of workplace or vocational knowledge and skill, then they will be part of the formal learning program which prepares people for employment or specific vocations. In an ideal world, this might be true. However, the struggle over the past twelve years, to fully implement the Mayer Key Competencies in Australia, has been very patchy. There are a few institutions or sites of learning where the integrated approach is used with considerable success. However, given an educational climate dominated by prescribed outcomes, quality frameworks and tight timelines, it is not really surprising that the integrated approach becomes in many cases the overlooked approach.

The second approach, a 'separate' approach, which involves the development of the generic skills separately from technical and other vocational skills. This separates the generic skills from the skills with which they will need to be applied and, thus, decontextualises them. With such an approach, many students (and teachers) see little value (in terms of work application) in these skills and tend to place a low value upon them – as in their common designation as 'soft skills' – whilst technical skills are highly valued as 'hard skills'. In addition, having been developed separately from other skills, there is no certainty that students will see the value or be able to recognise the mutual dependency of these two types of skills and thus reconstitute the relationship between generic skills, technical and vocational skills and the context of application.

The third approach, an 'informal portfolio' approach, involves the use of evidence portfolios to demonstrate the development of skill and understanding of the essential relationship between generic skills, technical and vocational skills and the context of application. The use of this developmental method has grown in usage in line with a global change from input-defined 'learning about' and outcome defined 'learning how' as educational institutions increasingly adopt a competency-based training approach. Such an approach necessarily demands a complementary evidence-based assessment approach and the use of portfolios



meets this need. Additionally, the use of portfolios is also in line with a student-centred approach to learning. It is the learner who keeps, organises and uses his/her portfolio for the purposes for which it has been designed and who contextualises the presentation of the portfolio for different purposes.

The effective use of portfolios centres the evidence on both evidence of holistic learning experiences and on the achievement of defined competencies to agreed standards. This evidence is collected over time and in multiple ways, thus assuring the validity of the evidence, its reliability and is inherently flexible. There has been a growing acceptance of the usefulness of portfolios across all major education sectors in Australia (Bowden et al 2000 Curtis and McKenzie 2001, Curtis 2004b). This also demonstrates the shift in the nature of skill development as educational and workplace communities become more experienced and mature in their use of a wider range of teaching and learning processes. It is also indicative of a shift from a teacher-centred to a more student focussed (or, more specifically, a student-activity focussed) approach to learning and skill development.

In the workplace, the development of generic skills tends to occur through a variety of means. This includes both formal activities, such as induction; buddy systems; training; workshops; and workbooks to use on the job; and informal techniques such as encouraging and giving praise, showing respect, concern and empathy; setting clear limits, and socialising to share experiences.

Action to date within the schools, VET and higher education sectors in the development of generic and employability skills is considered briefly below.

Generic and employability skills in the schools sector

In the schools sector efforts were made in all Australian States and Territories during the mid-1990s to implement the Mayer Key Competencies. These initiatives followed intensive work on the National Statements and Profiles and occurred at a time of upheaval in the sector. The reviews of curriculum development in the States and Territories indicated that a combination of too much change coupled with industrial action impeded the full implementation of key competencies on a national basis (Curtis and McKenzie 2001).

Of all the States and Territories, Comwyn (2002) has suggested that Tasmania appears to be the most advanced and has a framework for explicitly assessing and reporting the Mayer Key Competencies for implementation through the Tasmanian Certificate of Education. However, this is now on hold, awaiting the outcomes of the national collaborative work.

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1999) provides a renewed push for generic skills developments in schools. The National Goals provide a broad framework for curriculum development in Australia's schools. The National Goals seek to ensure the employability of those who pass through Australia's school systems, but they go beyond employment-specific skills. The preamble to the Adelaide Declaration notes the importance of schooling in providing a basis for students' participation in the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of Australian society and acknowledges the need for lifelong learning to enable continued participation.

Generic and employability skills in the VET sector

For the VET sector, the focus is very much on the implementation of the industry-identified employability skills. This is natural, given the employer-led nature of the system. However, most of the activity to date has been centred on the Mayer Key Competencies and their incorporation in national Training Packages. Training packages aim to describe the full range of work activities for each level of job within an industry and contain the endorsed national competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications at different levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework. The competency standards comprise units of competency, the range of variables statement and an evidence guide for assessment. They can be developed for industries or specifically for enterprises. Guidelines for Training Package developers require



the incorporation of the seven Mayer Key Competencies and their related performance levels for each unit of competence. Recent research has found that generally the key competencies are incorporated in Training Packages but not on a consistent basis, and the concept of levels of performance for each key competency is not well addressed (Dawe 2002; Clayton et al. 2003).

This research also found that communication skills are the generic skills represented most comprehensively in Training Packages. Other well-established skill areas include planning and organising, technology and teamwork.

However, there are some skill areas which are not being well addressed. These include variations on established skills such as creative problem-solving and communicating with empathy, and new skill areas such as learning and self-management. To date, most VET providers implicitly assess key competencies; the exception being Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE in South Australia, which has a full certification procedure in place (Denton 2004). This is also described on their LINKUp website at <http://www.tvtafe.sa.edu.au/linkup/index.html>.

Overall, while there have been good attempts at specifying, teaching and assessing these skills, there are gaps still to be filled which are presently under active investigation. Options for incorporating the employability skills in Training Packages in a way that facilitates the recognition and certification of these skills are being considered (Ratio Pty Ltd & Down 2002), particularly in the light of the soon-to-be-published report of the third phase of the higher level review of Training Packages.

Generic and employability skills in the higher education sector

In the higher education sector the terms 'generic skills' or 'generic capabilities' are widely used to refer to a range of qualities and capacities that are increasingly viewed as important in higher education. These include: thinking skills such as logical and analytical reasoning, problem solving and intellectual curiosity; effective communication skills, teamwork skills, and capacities to identify, access and manage knowledge and information; personal attributes such as imagination, creativity and intellectual rigour; and values such as ethical practice, persistence, integrity and tolerance. This diverse collection of qualities and capacities is distinguished from the discipline-specific knowledge and associated technical skills that traditionally are associated with higher education (Hager, Holland and Beckett 2002). Thus, while significantly overlapping with the ACCI/BCA employability skills, it also encompasses a number of other skills and personal attributes.

The growing emphasis on generic skills in higher education has several sources. One is the increasing evidence of demand from business and employer organisations for graduates to possess generic skills. Secondly, Hager, Holland and Beckett (2002) suggest there is increased awareness that well-founded sets of generic and employability skills have the potential to deliver several educational advantages, whether courses are vocational and/or educational in emphasis. This is because they provide a basis for a consistent terminology for describing course outcomes.

The common lack of such consistency, particularly in the higher education sector, means there is no agreed reference point when, for example, staff attempt to develop, teach and assess trans-disciplinary courses.

One approach to the explicit development of 'broader critical and generic skills' is provided by the five universities which make up the Australian Technology Network (RMIT University, QUT, UTS, UNISA, CUT) (Bowden et al. 2000). Other best practice examples for developing generic skills among university students have recently been published in the April 2003 edition of the B-Hert News (B-HERT 2003). These articles cover the different approaches used in various universities to meet employer demand by focussing on the development and assessment of generic skills. Although the articles are very positive, there is also some discussion about assessment. Many of the projects discussed use the generic skills testing instrument developed by ACER through the Graduate Skills Assessment Project (ACER 2001) whilst others have adopted a portfolio approach to assessment.



3.4 Employability skills demonstration

The use of a portfolio by which to demonstrate the achievement of employability is gaining support, with systems wanting to formally recognise the development of employability skills. There are three germane reasons for this:

- The nature of employability skills means that their development is a lifelong process. Employability skills are developed through usage and are, thus, best demonstrated through usage. A portfolio which demonstrated an increasing complexity of the application of employability skills and a greater flexibility of usage makes more sense than an arbitrary cut off point at which the employability skills are considered to have been attained.
- The difficulties of the assessment of employability and other generic skills, and the different purposes for which they are assessed, means that a flexible portfolio, through which the evidence can be rearranged and presented to meet specific purposes, is a practical way of overcoming these difficulties.
- The development of a portfolio is a learning experience. Thus, the use of a portfolio, for both development and demonstration purposes, ensures congruence between the two activities. It is also a learner-centred (or learner activity-centred) process, in which the learner is the active agent in the preparation of the portfolio.

The literature suggests that the nature of the portfolio is linked with its purpose and that different groups would develop portfolios differently. For example, the portfolios of young people and adults seeking to enter the labour market would highlight their generic skill development and usage against their career goals; the portfolios of those seeking to enter university or tertiary education would be focused on displaying to advantage the development and usage of independent learning skills whilst at tertiary graduate level the focus would be again on employability skills but with much greater complexity and applied to a wider set of contexts (see box 3.1).

A survey in the VET sector found considerable support among both students and teachers for the use of portfolios to demonstrate employability skills. The use of portfolios has grown as educational institutions increasingly adopt a competency-based approach to training. A competency-based approach demands an evidence-based approach to assessment, and the use of portfolios meets this need.



CAREER PASSPORTS AND PORTFOLIOS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, secondary educators are using ways other than the traditional high school diploma and transcript to communicate students' new and different sets of knowledge and skills to employers.

A 'career passport' may be characterized as a formal product or document in which students present the many marketable skills they have developed through their life experiences. One example is the Ohio Individual Career Plan and Career Passport.

A 'career portfolio' is a similar product with a different focus; it is a working tool that organizes information and documents for career planning and self-assessment. One example is the South Dakota Career and Life Planning Portfolio.

The value of both passports and portfolios is twofold:

- students come to an awareness of their own skills and experience; and
- employers have richer, more detailed information for hiring decisions than is provided in transcripts and diplomas.

Source: Wonacott, Michael E. (2002). 'Career passports, portfolios and certificates', *Eric Digest* no. ED467241

Recognition of employability skills

As recognition of skill is often dependent on some sort of assessment process, the difficulties inherent in the assessment of employability skills are also inherent in their recognition. In addition, the ongoing development of employability skills, which occurs as a result of their usage in different contexts and at different levels of complexity, means that their recognition at a single point of time cannot be assumed to hold significance at other times.

For this reason, recognition is best achieved through an appraisal of a demonstration of their usage over time and in different contexts. A portfolio is able to do this and the learner becomes responsible for ensuring that their portfolio presents the evidence effectively.

This means that recognition of a person's employability skills becomes purpose specific and is a 'conversation' between the owner of the portfolio and its appraiser with the portfolio acting as the mediating artefact. For example, an employer interviewing a candidate for a job can use the portfolio to make an appraisal of the candidate's learning and employability skills. Similarly, a university selection team may wish to view the portfolios of marginal candidates to determine who should be offered a place.

3.5 Employability skills assessment

Assessment is rightly one of the very strongly contested areas of educational theory and practice. Assessment has a range of purposes, many different methods are employed, and each has a particular set of characteristics. It forms a basis for reporting individual achievement and can be used to evaluate system-level performance. Assessment is about risk management and is often a 'high-stakes' activity with very significant consequences for individuals. It is also important for other stakeholders. When an education provider asserts that an individual has attained a specified level of achievement, it is reasonable for employers and the community to expect that judgement of performance to be dependable. In order to meet these expectations, education providers themselves must be assured that their practices and processes meet acceptable standards. Assessment has three broad purposes:



- to assist learning and monitor progress;
- to measure individual achievement and to provide a means by which individuals can illustrate, in whatever detail they choose, the path they have taken in this achievement; and
- to evaluate programs and for quality assurance processes.

Assessment also reveals individuals' achievements and this may be useful information to both individuals and potential employers, indicating areas of strength and weakness (Curtis 2004b).

The appropriateness of assessment may be judged on its validity, and its technical quality judged on its reliability. Validity refers to 'the adequacy, appropriateness, and usefulness of inferences that can be made on the basis of test scores'. In addition to validity, other traditional pillars of a quality assessment approach are:

- *reliability*, which refers to the stability, consistency and accuracy of assessment outcomes;
- *flexibility*, which refers to using a range of approaches which are appropriate to the sites and modes of delivery, and to learner needs; and
- *fairness*, which means that the assessment approach should not disadvantage particular learners. It should be equitable, accessible, transparent, participatory and open to reasoned questioning.

Other elements of good assessment include:

- *sufficiency*, which relates to whether the full range of performance is identified and which is assessed over a period of time and in a range of contexts;
- *currency*, which relates to whether the evidence of the competencies held is recent or current; and
- *authenticity*, which relates whether the assessment activities completed are, in fact, the candidate's own work, or that the documentation and other information presented to support the assessment of competence (qualifications, references etc.) are, themselves, actually authentic.

Curtis (2004b) summarises four approaches that have been taken to assessing generic skills. These approaches are holistic judgements, portfolio assessment, workplace assessment and standardised instrumental assessment. The strengths and limitations of each approach, are summarised in table 3.1. As the table shows, there is no universal process that meets all the criteria for quality assessment and can be effectively implemented across schools, vocational education and training, higher education and workplaces. Rather, the method used to assess employability skills should reflect the manner in which the skills are developed. Assessment is more likely to be considered valid and reliable by users when it is compatible with the learning process.



Table 3.1

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF ASSESSMENT MODELS

Assessment model	Strengths	Limitations
Holistic judgements	<p>Authentic, provided relevant situations are chosen for observation</p> <p>Multiple performance levels appear to be discernible</p>	<p>Reliable within context, e.g. in a school, where several raters may be used, but lacks comparability across sites</p> <p>Summative, rather than formative — limited learning potential</p>
Portfolio assessment	<p>Provides a rich data source</p> <p>Compiling portfolio may be a valuable learning experience for the learner</p>	<p>Influenced by other factors, e.g. written fluency of author, which may limit content validity</p> <p>Lack of comparability among individuals (low reliability)</p> <p>Time-consuming to extract information from portfolio</p>
Workplace assessment	<p>High validity</p> <p>High learning potential if judgements are accompanied by informative feedback</p>	<p>Low reliability: influenced by training of assessors and by opportunities presented by the work context</p>
Standardised instrumental assessment	<p>Efficient</p> <p>High reliability</p> <p>Produces a score comparable across individuals and occasions. Known precision can lead to identification of a number of discernible performance levels</p>	<p>Limited authenticity</p> <p>Summative rather than formative — limited learning potential</p>

Source: Curtis, David D. (2004). 'The assessment of generic skills' in Jennifer Gibb (ed.) *Generic skills in vocational education and training: research readings*, Adelaide, SA: NCVET, p. 147.

There are three common approaches to the development of employability skills: the 'fully integrated' approach, the 'separate' approach, and the 'informal portfolio' approach.

- Under the fully integrated approach, assessment should be based on evidence (which relates to the level of development of employability skills) derived from the holistic learning experiences of the learner.
- If a separate approach is in place, then the assessment must reflect this. It would not be reasonable to expect students who have undertaken a program of learning that is abstracted from context to undertake assessment that demands a contextual approach.
- If an informal approach to skill development is used, then development and assessment are intrinsically linked. Assessment should involve an appraisal of the contents of the portfolio prepared by a student against pre-determined criteria.



The literature reveals that there are certain critical success factors in the assessment of employability and other generic skills by educational institutions. These include:

- a clear definition of the employability and other generic skills that lead to explicit performance criteria and guides about the sources and nature of evidence. These are needed in curricula, Training Packages and learning materials;
- explicit information for students about what is required in order to achieve a successful assessment of them;
- acknowledgement that students have a significant role in assessment of employability and other generic skills so that assessment is done with them not to them;
- good guidelines for assessors so that they are aware of the opportunities to assess various employability and other generic skills;
- the provision of feedback to learners on their acquisition of employability and other generic skills, including a framework for their further improvement; and
- approaches to assessment that are integrated, comprehensive, cost effective and quality assured, but not onerous (Clayton et al 2003, Curtis 2004b).

Appropriate assessors and organisational support are needed, including adequate time and resources for assessment and professional development for the assessors themselves.

Portfolios may be quite effective for making students aware of their developing skills and for providing a rich data source for detailed scrutiny by prospective employers. However, one of the disadvantages of this form of assessment is that, while it provides a very detailed account of a learner's achievements, it is not in a form that is readily digestible nor readily comparable. This means that the portfolio needs to be the basis from which specific and more targeted evidence is prepared to meet particular information needs.

If a portfolio approach is used then the development and assessment of employability and other generic skills are intrinsically linked and need to be learner-focussed. In this approach, the learner collects the evidence of development and application of employability skills across a wide range of activities. The learner also collates, edits and presents this evidence for assessment. However, it also requires that educators in all sectors, and workplaces, support this approach and provide evidence to contribute to portfolios.

The assessment of generic skills and capabilities is regarded by most authors as problematic with no currently used process being free of limitations or issues. A variety of approaches have been tested such as teacher-scored measures, computer simulations, standardised objective tests, portfolios of work and performance-based assessments. There is no universal assessment process which meets all the criteria for quality assessment and can be effectively implemented across schools, VET, higher education and work places. However a broadly conceived portfolio represents a place where this diverse information can be gathered, stored and summarised by individuals throughout their learning and life.

3.6 Uses and design principles of portfolios

From the literature there seems to be only one model which has a chance of working across sectors in Australia, plus be able to incorporate both formal and informal evidence from a wide range of sources throughout an individual's life and career. This is the portfolio model. There are a number of clear purposes and design principles for portfolios which have emerged from the literature.

In summary, portfolios can be used:

- as a universal repository to hold documentation and other evidence relating both to their employability skills and the range of other skills they possess and develop in the course of their life and career:



- provide detailed information in a variety of forms and formats about an individual's skills;
- assist in storing and accessing evidence held in a variety of forms, formats and locations, for example resumes, references, academic transcripts and work samples;
- summarise, and help to rearrange and present information about an individual's particular set of attributes and skills to meet a range of specific purposes, for example the preparation of curricula vitae and specific job applications;
- for self knowledge, personal development and career planning:
 - help to increase self-awareness and knowledge of employability, generic and other skills throughout work and life. An example of this is the range of resources available through the Conference Board of Canada which has resources designed for use at particular career and life phases;
 - help to plan skill development. Again, this is a feature of the Conference Board of Canada and a range of other resources;
 - assist personal reflection and planning;
- as a tool to help them describe and demonstrate the skills they have to others:
 - help demonstrate an individual's application of employability and a range of other skills; and
 - documenting and marketing skills to the advantage of the individual.

The review of the literature and a selection of portfolio models in practice has also yielded a summary of the key design features of portfolios. A portfolio must:

- be the responsibility of an individual and be owned by them. They need to be convinced that the effort to develop and maintain the portfolio will be worthwhile;
- be flexible and adaptable to allow a variety of uses throughout life (uses highlighted in the literature are outlined above);
- be easy to use;
- be seen as valuable and valued by users for a variety of purposes, for example, self awareness, job selection and career planning;
- (possibly) be supported by appropriate 'help' resources, examples and case studies;
- be promoted by people and institutions in positions of influence over the individual, for example parents, teachers, employers etc.;
- develop as the individual develops to meet their emerging needs;
- be available for use in a variety of formats to account for different user needs, resources and preferences, for example through the Internet, as a CD-ROM, in print in the form of a kit;
- be able to act as an access point to information as well as being able to help incorporate and summarise material related to each of the employability and other skills and attributes documented from a range of information sources, including educational providers and their formal assessment and certification processes, workplaces and a range of other appropriate sources, for example voluntary work. This requires that they be compatible with existing systems and able to incorporate material from a variety of sources and formats; and
- be able to produce 'output' in a variety of formats for different purposes, for example to produce a resume.



The above features can be used as a basis for evaluating alternative approaches in use overseas and in Australia, and developing a design brief for a universal portfolio model for development and trial in the Australian context. However, choices need to be made as to how far a portfolio and its supporting resources will go in addressing the range of uses to which it could potentially be put. In addition the set of design features proposed here need to be further developed and refined based not only on the literature reviewed and the processes and outcomes of this project, but also on a more extensive evaluation of available portfolio approaches already in use both here and overseas.





Chapter 4

Summary of stakeholder views on portfolio approaches

This chapter presents a summary of the stakeholder views on portfolio approaches provided in the course of the project.

4.1 Introduction

As described in chapter one, both phases of the project invited comment from stakeholders on the project issues. Stakeholders from a broad range of interest groups provided comments, both written and verbal, over the course of the project (see appendix B). The stakeholder views were important in informing the decisions of the project team and played a significant role in determining the critical characteristics of recognition and recording employability skills models. A summary of the stakeholder views on roles and the next steps are presented in the final chapters of this report.

This chapter provides a summary of stakeholder views under the headings of:

- views on the portfolio approaches;
- how portfolio approaches can interact with formal assessment processes;
- application of a non-prescriptive portfolio approach;
- roles of different stakeholders; and
- issue of 'universal'.

A major part of the project was the National Forum of stakeholders that took place to provide feedback on the appropriateness and feasibility of the preferred approach to employability skills models as outlined in the Directions Paper. The Forum had over 70 participants and included representatives from industry, schools, the VET sector, higher education and research institutions, employment and careers agencies and community groups. The chapter concludes with a summary of outcomes from the Forum.

4.2 Views on portfolio approaches

The strong overall message received from stakeholders was that a skills portfolio approach would be the most viable approach for the recording of employability skills. However, a range of views were put forward regarding portfolio format issues. Also, there was little agreement regarding how issues surrounding assessment and validation should be addressed within the portfolio approach. Several examples of the use of portfolios in different education and training contexts were provided by stakeholders, indicating that portfolios are already being used across the educational sectors.

In early consultations, it was not clear to some whether portfolios will be used as a process of reflection, through which students can record skills, or if they represent purposeful development of a product for employer benefit. However, at the National Forum, a view emerged that the portfolio is a *tool* to achieve outcomes, it is not an outcome itself. The outcomes are two-fold:

- employment – getting a job, keeping a job and getting a better job; and
- self-development – understanding your employability skills, and understanding the need for continued development of your employability skills over a working life-time.



Employer willingness to use portfolios was seen to need further investigation. It is essential therefore that the purposes for which portfolios will be used and the expectations of the receivers of portfolios are clear.

There was a suggestion that while the portfolio approach has certain advantages (dynamic, can be built upon over time, a rich source of information) it has limitations as a tool for formal assessment of skills. Concerns and limitations that can arise if using a portfolio as a formal assessment tool include:

- Issues of fairness and validity when using portfolios to measure individual achievement as they are constructed in complex social environments and 'with highly variable support from teachers, peers and parents'.
- Learners often require clear guidance and direction. A lack of support can lead to portfolios losing validity as they may reflect limited aspects of the learner rather than the wide range of learner skills of interest to the end user.
- There is considerable evidence that portfolios do not provide a reliable basis for formal assessment. In particular, inter-assessor variability has been consistently found to be poor and this increases as the variety of portfolio content increases (e.g., Novak et al. 1996).
- Portfolios constructed of 'best pieces' do not provide an accurate indication of typical performance, especially of sustained performance under typical conditions.
- US and other international experience of the use of portfolios in large-scale systems consistently highlight their resource-intensity and, indeed, this is frequently cited as a dominant, if not the dominant, cause of their declining use in many systems (Koretz 1998).
- The time demands on learners in compiling portfolios can be considerable and, while they may be valuable learning tools, in circumstances where competing assessment regimes are operating, especially high-stake regimes such as senior secondary certification, this is seen by learners as a time pressure they can ill afford.
- A common expectation of any large-scale assessment and recording system is that will be usable as a means of providing system-wide performance monitoring and/or of providing comparative information on school performance. US experience has found portfolios cannot provide that level or kind of comparative information.
- Portfolio assessment systems typically fail where any of the following operate:
 - The purpose and outcomes expected are not clear to all stakeholders – especially learners and teachers.
 - Guidelines for what and how much to include are absent, leading to portfolio bloat and loss of selectivity.
 - Procedures for judging the appropriateness of portfolio content are not clearly specified.
 - Administrative procedures do not clearly identify the responsibilities of the participating parties, and/or do not ensure that portfolios are securely maintained and/or become complex and unmanageable.
- While there is no great debate around their value in formative assessment, there is not wide-spread acceptance of portfolios as summative assessment procedures.

These concerns need to be given careful consideration in the design of any portfolio approach.

It would be very hard to get wide agreement on what are appropriate processes for the external formal assessment of employability skills. Without broad acceptance of formal assessment protocols, self-assessment via portfolios was seen by some as the only viable approach.



University careers advisory services responded that a standard portfolio format with purpose-specific templates was unlikely to be used, particularly if the current employability skills formed the basis of that portfolio approach. A standardised format may be convenient but it does not allow for differentiation between individuals and universities. There were also concerns raised that multiple formats for different purposes would complicate the process for students, and therefore student engagement may suffer. Some universities are building student portfolios into the assessment process – current trends indicate that many students are less likely to participate in career development activities that do not include a formal assessment component.

Many universities have already expended resources in the development of lists of graduate attributes and portfolio approaches. It does not seem likely that a common template would be universally adopted, but a mechanism that could be customised would be of wide interest. Careers Advisory Services in the higher education sector suggested they have expertise in the identification, development, recording and demonstration of skills and are well placed to contribute to the development of models for the recognition and recording of employability skills. Consultation with Careers Advisory Services was recommended as a means of developing a shared understanding of the issues related to the higher education sector.

A common view was that individuals should have a choice between developing portfolios in hard or soft copy. Electronic versions would appear to offer more flexibility/useability as they can be searched by end users and can be edited easily for presentation to diverse user groups. However, data management and privacy issues were a concern for some. At the National Forum, a theme that emerged from discussions was that information that supports the development and use of portfolios (by individuals and employers) should be readily accessible. One approach is to provide electronic access via existing websites such as *myfuture* (other approaches will also need to be considered to meet access and equity objectives). However, it was not considered appropriate or practical to have a single central data storage point for the individual portfolios.

4.3 How portfolio approach can interact with formal assessment processes

The portfolio approach was seen by stakeholders as being complementary to other more formal assessment processes.

It was generally agreed that the quality of evidence of skills attainment within portfolios will be very important to their usefulness and credibility. Defining the form that this evidence takes however was not universally agreed upon. There was an expectation that this evidential aspect would include both reflection as well as more concrete artefacts. Some models draw upon material assessed as part of the curriculum.

Portfolios were seen as a medium through which students could present information from any formal assessment of employability skills that they have undergone. For instance, results achieved on the Graduate Skills Assessment test could be reported in an individual's portfolio.

At the National Forum, different models of assessment were discussed, including self-assessment, guided/assisted self-assessment and formal assessment. A portfolio is likely to include a combination of information including some that is self-assessed, some that is independently verified and perhaps some that is formally assessed.

A particular question discussed by forum participants was the value of self-assessed information in portfolios. The general view to emerge was that self-assessment undertaken by individuals is valid and there are approaches that can strengthen the self-assessment process. These approaches include providing guidance through case studies and exemplars to portfolio owners about the different types of employability skills and to demonstrate the continuum of skill development.



Applications of employability skills portfolios

One view was that while it is realistic for education institutions to incorporate employability skills into their assessment of applicants (the US College admissions process is pointed to as an example of a richer approach to student selection than simply final year exam results) it would require institutions to commit substantially more resources to student selection. While some institutions may be willing to do this in order to differentiate themselves it is unlikely that this will voluntarily occur across the board.

There was very little enthusiasm for using portfolios or any other measures of employability skills within student selection criteria for higher education. In this situation, stakeholders were concerned about how a portfolio approach to employability skills would be relevant to the group of senior school students whose primary ambition is to gain university entrance. However, some stakeholders observed that already some entrance to education is determined by such measures as in the case of adult entry to further education.

If employability skills portfolios are to be used in selection of applicants for either study or work there will need to be clear and unambiguous delineation between portfolio information that has been self-assessed and information that has been externally validated. Externally assessed / certified achievements (such as scores on the Graduate Skills Assessment test) could be included as evidence within a portfolio and it should be clear that this is different evidence to self-assessment based claims of skills.

An even stronger viewpoint put forward was that unless there is formal assessment and certification of employability skills, which would require a lot of work to be done on developing appropriate protocols, employability skills will not be taken seriously within the education and training sector. Unless what is reported and recorded has been validated, formally assessed and certified, the view was that it was pointless to record and report them.

There was a suggestion that in the absence of detailed models for the development, demonstration and assessment of employability skills any attempt to embed these skills in education and training would have the same limited success as that witnessed in relation to the Mayer Key Competencies.

4.4 Applications of a non-prescriptive skills portfolio approach

In relation to a common understanding of the eight employability skills groupings across sectors, a number of issues were raised. It was generally agreed that a common understanding of skill elements was desirable but it was noted that gaining agreement to a common set of skills elements was likely to be problematic. It is likely that the different stakeholders will have different views on what these skills should be. Much of the current debate was seen to be stimulated from an employer perspective and it was suggested that it may be useful to broaden that perspective in order to facilitate buy-in from other stakeholders.

Diverse views are also apparent in relation to the potential uses for employability skills portfolios. In particular, concern was raised in relation to using portfolios, if formal assessment and validation processes are not in place for 'high stakes' decisions such as selection of applicants for professional/managerial employment and entry to higher education courses.

In the later stages of the project, stakeholder attention focused more on *how* a skills portfolio approach could be implemented. At the National Forum, there was a strong view put forward that the portfolio must cater for lifelong learning. People move in and out of the education system and the workforce. As people gain more work and life experience the formal qualifications that were gained early in their life can become less relevant. This issue will become more prominent if the expected trend of Australians remaining in the workforce at older ages emerges.

Stakeholders identified the portfolio approach as having a role in fostering the continuum of learning across a lifetime. This was associated with the recognition that a portfolio is not static, but will continue to evolve with an individual's education, employment and life experience.



Flexibility in an employability skills portfolio approach was also identified as being important by stakeholders at the National Forum. Portfolios will be used by individuals in different circumstances, at different points in their life, for the purpose of achieving different outcomes. Such differences mean that there will be a high degree of flexibility required in the portfolio approach. To meet the need for a flexible approach, it was suggested that some form of online or e-portfolio would be a desirable option; the myfuture website (www.myfuture.edu.au) offers a widely used existing tool with links to other career education support.

Access and equity issues were noted as important elements to consider in the implementation of a portfolio approach. Specific supports may be needed for some groups. This would be especially true for those outside the education and work structure, those with low English language or information and communication technology literacy, and those with a physical and/or intellectual disability.

Views on acceptance of common terminology

A majority of respondents suggested that acceptance of a common terminology for the eight groupings of employability skills will provide real benefits, namely it would;

- assist in raising the profile of employability skills across sectors;
- encourage cross sectoral dialogue; and
- make it easier to provide support materials to individuals and institutions.

Another take on the importance of gaining a common understanding of the eight groupings of employability skills is that if different views proliferate, then the value of reporting is limited as achievement would be being reported against different criteria.

At the National Forum, there was a degree of consensus that common terminology will assist to promote understanding of the employability skills portfolio in the community, which should in turn encourage the use of the approach. The common terminology must encompass the eight employability skills, but could also extend to a common understanding around the various exemplars of employability skills.

Some suggested that reluctance to accept a common terminology in some quarters (especially higher education) is a result of institutional pride rather than any substantive objections to the validity of the terms suggested in the *Employability Skills Framework*.

The suggestion has been made that institutions should be able to add other abilities to the eight groupings of employability skills.

The autonomous nature of higher education institutions may preclude the adoption of a prescriptive employability skills portfolio. Claims of social engineering or 'the McDonaldisation' of graduate skills are at the most negative end of the spectrum of criticism. A more flexible approach to the eight groupings of employability skills, which could cover a diversity of graduate attributes, is recommended by some.

Within the Australian higher education sector, many universities were seen to currently have a set of 'graduate attributes' which they develop in students during their university experience. However, the approach currently taken to embedding graduate attributes in both the curricular and extra-curricular frameworks is variable – some institutions having a formalised incremental structure, others an informal approach. While graduate attributes are similar to employability skills, they are perceived to differ in their levels of complexity. There is one view that the eight employability skills are at a 'lower' skill level than 'graduate attributes'. Some institutions have included additional skills such as global perspective, discipline specific skills, information management skills and lifelong-learning.

Identification of only eight groupings of 'employability skills' is viewed by some as not consistent with the diversity of skills and attributes developed by higher education graduates and an indication of minimum capacity only. Some universities perceive graduate attributes as different to employability skills and put



forward the perspective that the university experience is preparing students to take their place in a social environment as well as a career environment. Universities also seek to differentiate their educational experiences and outcomes and any portfolio model should seek to capture these differences. The model needs to encompass both graduate attributes and employability skills to gain acceptance.

A common view is that if recognition and recording employability skills models are simple enough to be universally adopted, they are likely to lead to simplistic outcomes of little value. Conversely, if they are complex enough to reflect the diversity between institutions and sectors they are unlikely to gain widespread acceptance and use.

One solution suggested for this issue was that the recognition and recording employability skills models should provide a useable framework to the achievement and demonstration of skills but in no way be prescriptive for how individuals or institutions should implement them.

4.5 Roles for different stakeholders

There appears to be general agreement on the central role for individuals in employability skills recognition and recording models. However, there are diverging views regarding the extent of formal process that different stakeholders should introduce to support this.

A commonly expressed view was that there is need for consensus on the elements of the employability skills and their importance before it is possible to provide comprehensive support for individuals. It was suggested that governments and the education and training sectors will need to play an active role to develop the necessary understanding of the eight groupings of employability skills.

Some feedback received regarding the role for specific stakeholders is considered below.

Role for individuals

Given that employability skills are relevant across life stages, having individuals take primary responsibility for their ongoing development/recording was seen as most appropriate. This view was presented by stakeholders during both phases of the project.

The general consensus at the National Forum was that individuals are the 'portfolios owners'. They are responsible for, and control, the information in a portfolio, how information is presented and who it is presented to.

However, for this approach to work, individuals need to be given the support to enable them to reflect upon and understand the skills, the process for developing them and the process for recording them.

Role for employers

Employers value employability skills when they are used in actual employment. Tangible employer support of the *Employability Skills Framework* is critical to its successful implementation and uptake. It must be clear to portfolio owners that employers understand and value explicit presentation and discussion of employability skills in recruitment and promotion practices. This will be evident when employers use the employability skills terminology in job advertisements, in interviews and in on-going staff development.

A particular issue raised in relation to the role of employers was how they would use information from portfolios that would likely include both self-assessed information and independently verified information, in employment decisions. At the National Forum, there was discussion around the current use of due diligence by employers to check information presented by a prospective employee. This will remain the case for information presented from a portfolio.



Roles for education and training providers

It was suggested that employability skills should be embedded into the curriculum at all levels of education. The common view from stakeholders is that this is not currently occurring on a widespread basis. One view was that there are currently few useful models for how this can be done and that best practice models will need to be developed before more education and training providers will take an active role in supporting the development of employability skills.

Another view was that it is unrealistic to incorporate all eight groupings of the employability skills into the curriculum for all courses.

While it was generally acknowledged that the responsibility for the gathering, organising and presenting of material to demonstrate employability skills reside with the individual, this approach was seen to require training, support and guidance opportunities for students and the explicit inclusion of employability skills in the curriculum. There were concerns raised about whether teaching staff members were in a position to absorb additional responsibilities, or to re-order priorities. Some may see an emphasis on 'vocationalism' as a reduction in focus from their traditional roles.

The validation of portfolio evidence was seen as an issue by some. The level to which evidence is relied upon for employment or study placements will raise questions. Agreed standards for formal assessment of skills was also seen to be an issue that was likely to create additional burdens for educators.

The implications for teaching staff, if they are to explicitly teach and formally assess employability skills, were seen to be considerable in terms of time and professional development requirements. Another view was that a good teacher would be able to undertake a process of co-assessment incorporating employability skills.

Roles for careers practitioners

Careers practitioners were seen as having an important role to play in raising awareness of the importance of employability skills and in providing support to individuals in reflecting upon and demonstrating them.

Careers Advisory Services in universities currently support students' efforts to reflect upon and demonstrate their graduate attributes and employability skills. Careers staff in universities currently undertake a full range of activities that assist in the development of career management skills with students. Portfolio development is consistent with these. It was generally agreed that Careers Services were well placed to co-ordinate or have a major role in these activities but they would need high level support from governments and related agencies to drive implementation.

Role for community service providers and organisations

Community service providers were seen as having the potential to play a key role in assisting to develop employability skills models that are useful for their clients and in subsequently informing clients about and supporting them to use the models. Employability skills portfolios were viewed as potentially being of significant use to people outside education/training and formal employment structures. Community service providers are potentially well positioned to promote the use of employability skills portfolios as a tool that will benefit their clients.

Some community organisations provide structured opportunities for self-development activities. The activities promoted by these organisations are generally focussed on developing generic and employability skills. Community organisations are in a position to identify the links between their activities and employability skills and to encourage participants in their activities to reflect upon these links when developing and maintaining employability skills portfolios.



Role for governments

The first task for governments was seen to be building consensus amongst stakeholders regarding the importance of employability skills and promoting common terminology for the eight groupings of employability skills.

The next key role for governments was seen to be in raising awareness of employability skills across all stakeholder groups. Preparation and distribution of best practice support materials was also seen as a function for governments.

4.6 Concerns about aiming for a 'universal' approach

The universal recognition and recording of employability skills entails cross-sectoral *recognition* of the eight groupings of employability skills and cross-sectoral acceptance of a common approach for the *recording* of attainment by individuals of these specified employability skills.

A universal recognition and recording approach in its simplest conception is about developing a common approach to be adopted by individuals to gather and present material that demonstrates their employability skills attainment to interested parties – be they prospective employers or education institutions.

Throughout the project stakeholders have grappled with the issue of 'universality', as presented in the project title 'Development of a strategy to support the universal recognition and recording of employability skills'. There was concern that striving for a 'universal' approach for employability skills meant a cross-sectoral universal formal assessment and certification process for employability skills.

At the National Forum, stakeholder discussion moved to a point where there was a degree of consensus. The consensus that arose was that the focus should be on universal valuing of an agreed approach to promote understanding and use of the concept of employability skills.

4.7 Summary of National Forum discussions

On 29 June 2004, a National Forum was convened in Melbourne as part of the project. Over 70 participants attended the Forum representing industry, research organisations, schools, the VET sector, higher education institutions, employment and careers agencies, community groups and government.

At the National Forum, stakeholders identified that the portfolio is a tool to support two important outcomes:

- employment – getting a job, keeping and advancing in a job, and getting a better job; and
- self-development – understanding your own employability skills and the need for continued development of employability skills over a working life-time.

On the basis of the forum discussions, the recognition and recording employability skills models should include:

- the use of a common terminology for the employability skills from the *Employability Skills Framework*, including the eight skills groupings identified;
- the provision of support for individual portfolio owners, including mentoring, portfolio templates, and advice on evidence required and self-assessment; and
- the promotion of employability skills to all stakeholders.



It was further recognised that there was a need for a mechanism to 'house' the portfolios and some suggested the *myfuture* site (www.myfuture.edu.au) would be an appropriate site. Such a mechanism could also be used to promote best practice in other areas, such as methods of skills development, verification and assessment. However, it was recognised that the details of these two elements would take longer to resolve or to reach a satisfactory level of agreement among stakeholders. Further work would be necessary over the medium term.





Chapter 5

Identifying the characteristics of employability skills portfolio models

This chapter considers the preferred characteristics of employability skills portfolio models and concludes that the preferred approach is a skills portfolio model that adopts a non-prescriptive approach.

5.1 Introduction

The project has identified four elements that are essential in any employability skills recognition and recording model:

- *Definition and description* – defining and describing the employability skills. The definition of 'employability skills' is taken as that in the *Employability Skills for the Future* report.
- *Development and demonstration* – developing and demonstrating the eight groupings of employability skills.
- *Collecting and recording evidence* – collecting and recording evidence of employability skills.
- *Verification and assessment* – information from a wide range of sources is to be included; some will be self-assessed and some will be externally verified and perhaps formally assessed.

This chapter describes the preferred characteristics amongst the options for portfolio models. The chapter concludes by identifying that the preferred approach is a skills portfolio model that adopts a non-prescriptive approach.

5.2 The continuum of approaches to specification of the elements of portfolio models

For each of the four elements of employability skills portfolio models, a continuum of options is available ranging from highly prescriptive to non-prescriptive, each with particular advantages, disadvantages and implementation issues.

At one end of the continuum is the totally non-prescriptive approach. Under this approach, employability skills recognition and recording models could simply contain a quite general statement of what the eight groupings of employability skill are and endorse the use of employability skills portfolios as the appropriate medium for individuals to record their skills development. This would fill the base requirement for employability skills models as it would include evidence on employability skills, thereby providing universal recognition, and how they should be universally recorded (through skills portfolios). However, to support the broad implementation of employability skills recognition and recording models in Australia, the common view was that employability skills portfolio models require more detailed specification.

At the other end of the continuum is the highly prescriptive approach involving a number of detailed requirements associated with detailed prescription of the four elements. For example, the portfolio models could contain tightly defined employability skills, a prescribed approach to skill recording, and how validation or formal assessment must occur. This approach provides the highest level of structure and therefore the most detailed guidance on the four elements of employability skills models. However, the highly prescriptive approach is likely to limit the uses of the employability skills models as it provides limited scope for accommodating differences across sectors and the different needs of individuals and businesses.



Developing and implementing the highly prescriptive approach would present very substantial challenges in gaining agreement.

In addition there are intermediate approaches that exist that sit between the two ends of the continuum described above. For example, employability skills portfolio models could provide some detail regarding how portfolios could be structured, provide guidance on how the skills are demonstrated in context, address issues surrounding the validation of claims in portfolios, and even develop protocols for the formal assessment of employability skills.

A non-prescriptive approach is the preferred approach for employability skills portfolio models.

5.3 Developing a non-prescriptive portfolio approach

A non-prescriptive approach, as initially presented in the project Directions Paper (June 2004), has the greatest potential to be further developed into an effective approach. On the basis of the consultation and literature review, this approach has the potential to achieve a high level of acceptance by stakeholders and does not appear to have high barriers to implementation. The less prescriptive approach does not preclude any institution, organisation or education system from implementing more prescriptive approaches.

In contrast, a highly prescriptive approach does not appear to have the same potential to be developed further into an effective model. The development and implementation of a highly prescriptive approach would require cross-sectoral agreement on complex and contentious issues - both practical and conceptual. This would require a substantial investment of time and resources by all stakeholders with no guarantees that all necessary issues could be resolved. No evidence emerged in the course of the project to suggest that the benefits of adopting a highly prescriptive approach are such that it should be pursued over the non-prescriptive approach.

The non-prescriptive approach for each element in the employability skills models is described below.

Describing employability skills

The non-prescriptive approach to *definition and description* in portfolio models will provide for multiple examples of the employability skills so that models are applicable across sectors and an individual's experiences throughout their life.

As outlined in chapter one, this project has adopted the definition of employability skills from the report *Employability Skills for the Future*. The *Employability Skills for the Future* report defines employability skills as:²⁰

... skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

While different sectors or groups within sectors would be free to add other abilities to the eight groupings of employability skills, all stakeholders should adopt the eight skills as the set of employability skills.

The Australian, State and Territory Education Ministers have recently agreed that the eight employability skills groupings include skills that young people require for successful transition from school to a range of destinations, including work. This agreement strengthens the case for the general adoption of portfolios for the recognition and recording of employability skills.

²⁰ Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & the Business Council of Australia March 2002, *Employability Skills for the Future*, DEST, Canberra p.2 and 3.



Taking a non-prescriptive approach, it is not considered appropriate to prescribe more detailed descriptions of these skills or levels of attainment within each skills grouping. Rather, the short descriptions are considered to be adequate for individuals, employers and institutions interpreting the skills definition in a way that is appropriate to their particular context.

The development and demonstration of employability skills

The non-prescriptive approach for *development and demonstration* in employability skills models means that guidance and supports will need to be developed for portfolio owners to collect evidence on their employability skills. A non-prescriptive approach is preferred as individuals come with a range of skills that have been developed and demonstrated in multiple contexts.

A threshold issue in relation to employability skills is where responsibility lies for their development. Stakeholders were strongly of the view that the development of employability skills is a process that happens over a life-time and in many contexts: employment, formal education, in the home and community.

Inherent in the non-prescriptive approach is that primary responsibility for the development of a portfolio rests with the individual. It is clear that portfolio owners will require support to commence and continue the process of developing and maintaining their portfolio.

A wide range of supports will be needed to support individuals reflect upon their skills and develop a portfolio. The types of support to be provided are not prescribed. It is expected that governments, education and training providers, business and community groups will play a role in developing and utilising those supports.

The collection of evidence and recording of the employability skills

The non-prescriptive approach for collecting and recording evidence is as follows:

- *the responsibility for the collection of evidence about employability skills rests with the individual as the portfolio owner.* Portfolios owners are responsible for determining what information should be presented and how it should be presented, when making claims about their employability skills, and reflecting on the employability skills themselves.
- *a range of flexible portfolio templates will need to be developed for use across all sectors and contexts.* As portfolios are the mechanism for collecting evidence and recording the development of employability skills the provision of examples and flexible templates will be important.
- *the dissemination of guidance and supports for portfolios owners will be important.* One approach could be to develop best practice examples of portfolio approaches (electronic and hard copy) to be supported by governments and disseminated across sectors. Support could also be provided for the storage of e-portfolios. Where templates are developed as a guide they should address:
 - what skills have been developed;
 - when they were demonstrated;
 - how, and in what context, they were demonstrated;
 - evidence of skills exhibited; and
 - an opportunity for validation of evidence by a third party.
- *supporting employers to explicitly adopt the terminology of the eight groupings of employability skills into employment related decisions will be important.* Employers will likely be asked by their employees to provide evidence that could be incorporated into a portfolio. It will be important that supports and guidance are available for employers to assist them in this role.



- *supporting education and training institutions to assist students develop and use portfolios to collect information and use portfolios to demonstrate their employability skills.*

The verification and assessment of employability skills

The non-prescriptive approach for *verification and assessment* of employability skills models recognises that portfolios are likely to include information from a wide range of sources. Some information will be self-assessed, some will be externally verified and some may be formally assessed. Portfolios can include any evidence that a portfolio owner considers will assist in demonstrating their employability skills. Portfolio owners should be encouraged to collect evidence from a broad range of sources. Various types of information contribute to an individual's own understanding of their own employability skills, and assist in the making of claims about their own employability skills to others.

There was consensus that formal assessment of employability skills would not occur as a necessary part of any recognition and recording model. Formal assessment processes should remain with the respective education, training and higher education sectors. The non-prescriptive approach does not require stakeholders to take on new roles to verify or assess information in employability skills portfolios.

The issue of verification and assessment of the evidence within portfolios is seen by some stakeholders as having important implications for the portfolio uses. The ability of employers to make judgements based on information contained in a portfolio was a specific issue raised at the National Forum. There was discussion around the current use of due diligence by employers to check information presented by a prospective employee. This will remain the case for information presented from a portfolio for the purpose of recruitment.

The non-prescriptive approach allows for the development of guidance and support materials for stakeholders in relation to the collection of different types of information, including:

- examples and information about self assessment in action;
- examples of verification and assessment approaches;
- guidance to portfolio users about the quality and quantity of information likely to be included in a portfolio; and
- support for the development of verification and assessment tools appropriate within a range of specific learning contexts if there is to be some agreement on formal recognition processes progressed (for example, within the AQF framework).

The non-prescriptive approach for the employability skills portfolio approach described above does not preclude any institution, organisation or indeed educational system from implementing more prescriptive approaches, including verification and assessment processes that are appropriate in a particular context.

5.4 Adopting a portfolio approach

The project has concluded that a non-prescriptive portfolio approach should be adopted.

The strengths of a portfolio approach include its capacity to operate across sectors, to incorporate formal and informal evidence from a wide range of sources and remain relevant over a life-time. There are a number of examples of Australian education and training institutions using portfolios to record information on employability skills.

Stakeholders recognised that the process of creating and maintaining a portfolio itself develops and demonstrates some employability skills, such as planning and organising, communication, self-management and learning.



At the National Forum, stakeholders identified that the portfolio is a tool to achieve two important outcomes:

- employment – getting a job, keeping and advancing in a job, and getting a better job; and
- self-development – understanding your own employability skills and the need for continued development of employability skills over a working life-time.

From an individual's perspective, the portfolio needs to be a highly flexible tool. The information in a portfolio is owned by the individual and maintained by the individual. The individual decides what they will record in their portfolio and what information will be presented from their portfolio to others. Information in the portfolio will come from a wide range of sources, including education qualifications and other formal sources, as well as informal sources related to life experience.

Information in the portfolio will likely be a mix of self-assessment and externally verified evidence.

Employability skills are transferable across contexts, but are only relevant within a particular context so information in portfolios will be recorded with reference to a particular context. Individuals will collect examples of employability skills based on their own unique combination of education, workforce and life experience. The challenge is to create a skills portfolio that is able to be effectively managed by the portfolio owner and easily understood by the end user.

Stakeholders recognised a need to develop supports for portfolio owners including how to create, maintain and use an employability skills portfolio. For example, to promote effective use of a portfolio when preparing a job application, guidance material should be developed on selecting and presenting *relevant* information. The effective use of a portfolio means that an employer will see a selection of evidence from the collection, not the entire portfolio collection. Supports should also be developed to promote the effective use of the portfolio as a self-development tool. Types of supports could include best practice examples, templates, principles, and guidelines.

Some stakeholders expressed concern about use of a portfolio in 'high stakes' decisions, such as recruitment into professional/managerial positions and entry into university. There was general agreement that with adequate supports portfolio users would understand how to appropriately use information from a portfolio. The current due diligence by employers to check information presented by a prospective employee would remain the case for information presented from a portfolio.

Key portfolio design features

The key design features of effective portfolios were identified from the literature review conducted by NCVET and consultation. In summary, a portfolio must:

- use a common framework and use common language to describe the framework;
- be an individual responsibility, and be owned by the individual. The individuals, as the 'portfolio owners' need to be convinced that the effort to develop and maintain the portfolio will be worthwhile;
- be flexible and adaptable to allow a variety of uses and provide for different contexts throughout life;
- be easy to use by the 'portfolio owner' and include the minimum level of complexity;
- be seen as valuable and valued by individual users for a variety of purposes; for example, self awareness to guide self-development, job selection and career planning;



- be supported by appropriate support materials such as guides, examples and case studies;
- be promoted by people and institutions in positions of influence, for example parents, teachers, employers etc.;
- be able to be adapted and developed as the individual develops to meet their emerging needs;
- be available for use in a variety of formats to account for different individual needs, resources and preferences; for example through the Internet, as a CD-ROM, in print in the form of a kit;
- be able to produce 'output' in a variety of formats for different purposes; for example, information to include with a resume in an application for a job, or a VET or university entrance process, or for an application for a volunteer role;
- be able to be stored on existing platforms and networks; and
- be able to incorporate and summarise evidence related to each of the employability skills documented from a range of information sources, including educational providers and their formal assessment and certification processes, workplaces and a range of other appropriate sources, for example voluntary work and community activities. This requires that it be compatible with existing systems and able to incorporate material from a variety of sources and formats.

These key design features provide a basis for evaluating existing approaches and for the trial of a flexible portfolio model in Australia.

5.5 Conclusion

The preferred approach is a skills portfolio model that adopts a non-prescriptive approach for each of the four elements²¹. Stakeholder views were strong on the need for a non-prescriptive portfolio approach. The approach was selected giving consideration to its particular strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of the approach include:

- It is a practical approach that provides for universal recognition (eight groupings of skills) and recording (portfolios) of employability skills across sectors.
- By taking a non-prescriptive, flexible approach it has a relatively high prospect of securing cross-sectoral endorsement, as it acknowledges that the specific sector constraints can preclude a more prescriptive cross-sectoral approach at this stage (for example, around issues of development pedagogies, validation and assessment).
- The approach does not preclude any institution or organisation from implementing more formal approaches, including verification and formal assessment processes which are appropriate in a particular context.
- The introduction of a common approach provides the foundation for promoting greater understanding of the importance of employability skills for individuals and sectors.
- Using common terminology about the eight groupings of employability skills would allow for greater cross-sectoral dialogue and co-operation to take place.
- Acceptance of a non-prescriptive portfolio approach allows for greater flexibility and templates and other support materials can be developed to assist individuals, organisations and businesses.

²¹ The project identified four elements, definition and description, development and demonstration, collecting and recording evidence and verification and assessment for the employability recognition and recording models. These are listed in chapter 5.1 of this report.



- There are particular roles for stakeholders in implementing a non-prescriptive portfolio approach, and scope for stakeholders to build upon the approach if they wish to (described in the following chapter).
- Portfolios will be useful to individuals in all contexts for self-development and for demonstration of skills.

It is important to recognise that no approach is perfect. What is required is to acknowledge the particular weaknesses of the non-prescriptive portfolio approach and to be satisfied that given these weaknesses, the objective can still be achieved. The preferred approach for employability skills recognition and recording models purposefully adopts a lack of prescription about validation and assessment processes.

This may limit the range of uses for skills portfolios and hinder acceptance of their importance within the education and training sector. Further, the lack of specification of skill levels within the eight skills groupings is likely to lead to some variability in employability skills descriptions.

However, it was clear from the stakeholder consultations that reaching agreement on more prescriptive approaches to these issues would be very difficult and time-consuming.

In summary, a non-prescriptive approach for employability skills portfolio models has potential to be strongly supported across sectors. This support is necessary for employability skills portfolio models to be further developed and implemented.





Chapter 6

Stakeholder roles

This chapter describes the roles proposed for stakeholders in taking the portfolio approach forward. It does this by considering the stakeholder roles in relation to the four elements of recognition and recording models as described in chapter five.

6.1 Introduction

For a non-prescribed portfolio approach to be progressed in a co-ordinated way across Australia and across sectors, all stakeholders must play their part. For some, this means undertaking new tasks or expanding their activities in certain areas. There is a need for shared responsibility. Gaining the on-going commitment of stakeholders across Australia and across sectors to fulfil these roles is in itself a challenging task.

This chapter identifies and articulates the roles of stakeholders in the development and implementation of employability skills portfolio models as identified through the consultations. The stakeholder groups include individuals as portfolio owners, employers, education and training institutions, career practitioners, community service providers and organisations and governments.

6.2 Role of individuals

Individuals are the portfolio owners and each individual will determine how much time and effort to invest in developing and maintaining their portfolio. This decision will be influenced by factors including: the level of guidance and support available, and the perceived benefit of using the portfolio to achieve employment and self-development goals. As the portfolio *owners*, individuals are primarily responsible for:

- Development and demonstration of employability skills – this involves taking the time to reflect on existing employability skills, determining how to progress their employability skills and undertaking activities and tasks that develop employability skills;
- Collecting and recording evidence of employability skills – this involves establishing and maintaining an employability skills portfolio. Various formats can be adopted and a broad range of information is likely to be incorporated into the portfolio;
- Determining what types of information is included in the employability skills portfolio – this will include some self-assessed information where the individual will work through a process of assessing their employment skills. Individuals will also be responsible for seeking verification of their skills from third parties. This could also include seeking a reference from an employer or from people they engage with in non-work activities. Evidence on employability skills that is formally assessed could also be collected and included by the portfolio owner; and
- Reflecting upon and utilising employability skills portfolios to assist with employment and self-development outcomes.

The portfolio owner is responsible for adopting the terminology of the eight groupings of employability skills and any form of validation they consider to be appropriate. This is more likely to occur when individuals are working in an environment where there is broad agreement, acceptance and understanding of the employability skills, for example when job ads include employability skills terminology.

Portfolio owners will require practical supports to create, maintain and use their employability skills portfolio. For example, supports could include best practice examples of a portfolio, access to a 'how to' guide, a location that offers secure storage of e-portfolios and tools to develop and maintain those portfolios. At the National Forum seven scenarios were considered of individuals who might develop an employability skills



portfolio (see box 6.1). Forum participants recognised the diversity of need means that a diverse range of supports will be required. Governments will have a substantial role in leading the work to determining what supports are required and how they are most effectively provided.

Box 6.1

POTENTIAL PORTFOLIO OWNERS - SCENARIOS

At the National Forum, seven scenarios were considered. Discussion was around how individuals in these different situations would develop and use an employability skills portfolio. The seven scenarios illustrate the diversity of circumstances in which employability skills portfolios will potentially be used. The characteristics of the individuals considered in the scenarios were:

Scenario 1 – a university graduate looking to enter the workforce full-time

Scenario 2 – a person returning to the workforce after a period out of the workforce for child raising

Scenario 3 – an older person in employment who wants to develop their employment skills

Scenario 4 – a 14 year old at risk of leaving school early

Scenario 5 – a young unemployed person with low literacy skills

Scenario 6 – a person with a lot of community sector voluntary work and participation who wants to know how to keep track of experience for future education and employment reasons

Scenario 7 – a student finishing high school and planning to transition to the VET sector

6.3 Role for employers

Employers value employability skills when they are used in actual employment. Tangible employer support of the employability skills portfolios will be critical. Widespread use of employability skills portfolios will be associated with more explicit identification of employability skills by employers and prospective employees, in applications and interviews, use of common terminology to describe and discuss the eight groupings of employability skills.

The use of common terminology when discussing the eight groupings of employability skills is critical. At the National Forum, an example was provided of an employability skills model being put into practice in the Australian Capital Territory. It was reported that a key factor in the uptake of this model was the development and use of common terminology.

It is not necessary or even likely that an employer will see an individual's entire portfolio. Rather, an employer will see the parts of a portfolio that an individual has chosen to present. Employers may see parts of a portfolio presented in a job application, which they will use to form a judgement about the next step in a recruitment process. This is likely to include an interview with a prospective employee where further discussion about employability skills, among other things, will take place. An employer will assess all the information before them, perhaps including verification of claims made prior to offering a person a job. An employer may continue to monitor the application of employability skills in the workplace including in their promotion practices.



Employers have a role in being able to identify the employability skills of their employees. Employers may be asked to contribute information for inclusion in an employee's portfolios, for example a letter to validate a particular employability skill. Employers may also use their judgements about the employability skills that could be incorporated into training for their employees.

An employer's focus is on having an individual demonstrate their employability skills in practice. So an employer will value portfolios when they see a link between the information on employability skills that is presented from a portfolio and the skills that the same individual actually demonstrates when employed.

To fulfil this role employers could benefit from having practical supports available that describe the employability skills and employability skills portfolios.

6.4 Role for education and training providers

Education and training providers are in a position to assist and where possible support students in their role as portfolio owners. This will include valuing the eight employability skills groupings and supporting students to develop, maintain and use or customise their portfolios. There are many examples of this role already being undertaken across school systems, in the VET sector, and higher education institutions.

Activities consistent with this role include:

- providing professional development for teaching and careers staff so that there is a broad and consistent understanding of employability skills portfolios;
- teaching and providing assistance with recording the demonstration of the employability skills, including the development of supports such as best practice examples of portfolios and their use;
- providing guidance to students about preparing and maintaining an employability skills portfolio; and
- providing information and guidance to students about the self-development aspect of maintaining a portfolio.

Where employability skills are embedded in courses, students will require assistance in the identification of these skills. Some education and training institutions may choose to explicitly include employability skills in their course material. This would potentially require new teaching and learning approaches that allow for the inclusion of these skills into the curriculum and through explicit teaching and learning strategies, verification/assessment and reporting of the eight employability skills.

To fulfil this role, it is likely that education and training institutions will need to provide support and professional development opportunities for their teaching staff.

6.5 Role for careers practitioners

Career practitioners will play an important role in raising awareness of the importance of the eight employability skills groupings. Like education and training providers, career practitioners can provide support to individuals to develop, maintain and use or customise their employability skills portfolios. Career practitioners' role in the promotion of employability skills models could also be developed to reinforce the notion that the development of employability skills is a life-long process.

Career practitioners are well positioned to help promote the use of common terminology for the eight groupings of employability skills, and to reinforce the notion that the development of employability skills is a life-long process. Careers practitioners seem well placed to assist in the uptake of employability skills portfolio models.



6.6 Role for community sector organisations

Community sector organisations can assist in the development and use of employability skills portfolios. In particular, community sector organisations can highlight the benefits of an employability skills portfolio.

Employability skills portfolios are viewed as potentially being of significant use to people outside education/training and formal employment structures. Community service providers are seen as having the potential to play a key role in assisting to develop employability skills models that are useful for their clients, particularly those that are in some way disadvantaged. Community sector organisations may also have a role in informing clients about employability skills models, and encouraging their clients to use portfolios. This role could develop so that some community service providers are directly providing these services or it could be through a system of referrals.

Community sector organisations providing opportunities for self-development activities may be able to identify the links between their activities and employability skills. The activities promoted by these organisations are generally focussed on developing generic and employability skills. Community organisations could be to encourage participants to recognise the links to the eight groupings of employability skills. Community organisations could support the use of portfolios by being able to provide information, either directly or through referrals, on the use, development, and maintenance of portfolios.

6.7 Role for governments

Australian, State and Territory Governments could support the development and uptake of employability skills recognition and recording models by identifying and promoting efficient means to implement a portfolio approach. These activities need to target individuals as portfolio owners, industry and businesses community sector organisations and education and training institutions. Activities that could be undertaken by governments include:

- trialling a flexible portfolio approach;
- identifying the supports necessary for portfolio owners and users. This may include identification of best practice approaches, and developing guides for portfolio owners such as 'getting started', 'building a CV from your portfolio' etc.;
- investigating issues for e-portfolios, and perhaps providing access to a website where e-portfolios can be stored securely;
- developing support structures and materials needed by employers and education and training providers, career practitioners and community organisations; and
- distributing the support materials and resources.

Governments are in a position to assess how existing support structures could be accessed to assist with the uptake of employability skills portfolios. A number of existing organisations could play an important part in this including those that are Australian Government funded (for instance Job Network and the DEST Local Community Partnerships) and State and Territory Government funded (for instance the Victorian and South Australian regional networks).

Governments will have an on-going role to review the effectiveness of non-prescriptive portfolio models. There is a considerable body of work that has been completed, and is on-going, on the issue of skills portfolios. Governments should review information as it becomes available and consider how it could be reflected in practice.

Achieving cross-sectoral uptake will require active promotion and practical adoption of a skills portfolio approach by the Australian and all State and Territory Governments.



Conclusion

Employability skills recognition and recording models that are practical, cross-sectoral and consistent with life-long learning have the potential to be useful to many within the community – for students as they transition through and from school to work or further education and training; people in employment as they transition between jobs and between employers as well as to progress within an enterprise; and people outside formal education and training and workplaces who wish to enter or to re-enter these systems.





Next steps

This chapter identifies a series of next steps in the development and implementation of employability skills models recognition and recording models.

7.1 Introduction

The final part of the project was the identification of the next steps in the development and implementation of a non-prescriptive portfolio approach. Stakeholders identified three areas of activity as the next steps:

- trialling a model of an employability skills portfolio;
- promoting the benefits of employability skills portfolios; and
- further consultation, particularly with industry and businesses.

Specific actions for each of these areas are described below.

7.2 Trialling of employability skills portfolios

It is likely that a number of employability skills portfolio models and associated guidance and support materials will be required to accommodate the diversity of need amongst potential portfolio owners. Pilot projects are a useful way to gain information about the effectiveness of various models and supports. Any projects will need to be designed so that they engage a broad range of stakeholders, including employers. Specific issues that could be tested in pilot projects include the following:

- *Developing flexible approaches* - portfolios will be used by individuals in different circumstances, at different points in their life, for the purpose of achieving different outcomes. These differences mean that a high degree of flexibility is needed in a portfolio approach. On-line or e-portfolio models were identified as having the potential to offer a very flexible, cross-sector approach. It has been suggested that the *myfuture.edu.au* (*myfuture*) careers website offers a widely used existing tool that has links to other career development supports. Prior to the end of this project, the Australian Government announced funding for such a trial to proceed (see box 7.1).
- *Stakeholder roles* – as identified above, various stakeholder groups will need to play specific roles to successfully implement employability skills portfolio models across sectors and as a feature of life-long learning. Pilot projects could consider the types of guidance and supports stakeholders will require to undertake these roles.
- *Lifelong learning* – portfolios must cater for lifelong learning. People move in and out of the education system and the workforce. As people become older the formal qualifications that were gained earlier in their life can become less relevant than their work and life experiences. This issue will become more prominent if the expected trend of Australians remaining in the workforce at older ages emerges. Pilot projects could explore the capacity of different portfolio approaches to accommodate lifelong learning; for example, the ability to incorporate evidence of employability skills that are gained over a long period in employment. There would also be merit in trialling models to assess the ways in which the skills portfolio can be used as a learning and planning tool during employment.



INITIAL TRIAL OF E-PORTFOLIO

At the National Forum, there was emerging consensus that there would be benefit in developing and trialling models of portfolios.

In July 2004, the Australian Government announced a grant of \$200,000 directed towards the development and trial of an 'e-portfolio' website for the recognition and recording of the employability skills. The e-portfolio website will be located on the existing career information and exploration service myfuture (<http://www.myfuture.edu.au/>).

Source: Media Release, July 2004 (Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP)

7.3 Promoting the benefits of employability skills portfolios

Stakeholders identified a need for structured activities that promote the understanding of the eight skill groupings across stakeholder groups and encourage the explicit *valuing of employability skills*. The activities could:

- focus on how to develop and use employability skills portfolios;
- use common terminology for the eight employability skill groupings;
- aim to strengthen stakeholder support in valuing employability skills; and
- include the development of exemplars and support materials suitable for individuals and employers and a wider group of involved stakeholders.

Given the diverse audience for employability skills models, these activities will need to be tailored for specific stakeholder groups. The involvement of governments, peak employer groups, unions and education bodies is essential to the success of these activities.

7.4 Further consultation

The third area of activity identified by stakeholders was further consultation to engage with a wider audience and to gather information on some aspects of employability skills portfolio models. Specifically, the issues requiring further consultation are:

- *Clarifying the outcomes* to be achieved using the employability skills portfolio approach. As identified above, stakeholders identified that there are two broad outcomes associated with the use of a portfolio approach: employment and self-development.
- *Access and equity* considerations, as raised by stakeholders, require the employability skills recognition and recording models to be accessible to as many members of the community as possible. Further consultation will be required to establish which groups in the community will require specific supports to be able to use, develop and maintain employability skills portfolios. A particular concern is to ensure maximum access to the models by:
 - those outside the education, training and work structures;
 - those with low English language skills or information and communication technology literacy; and
 - those with a physical and/or intellectual disability.



- *Data issues* need further consideration. The feasibility and appropriateness of a single central data storage point for individual portfolios, including in relation to an e-portfolio website model, needs exploration.
- *Acceptability of self-assessment processes and the development of associated templates* need further consideration. Self-assessment is the foundation of the preferred portfolio approach. Best practice case studies and exemplars will assist portfolio owners understand the continuum of skill development for use in their self-assessment processes.

7.5 Conclusion

Employability skills portfolio models that are practical, cross-sectoral and consistent with life-long learning have the potential to be useful to many within the community – students as they transition through and from school to work or further education and training; people in employment in transition between jobs and between employers as well as to progress within an enterprise; and people outside formal education and training and workplaces who wish to enter or to re-enter these systems.

This project has used existing research and stakeholder views to identify essential elements of employability skills recognition and recording models that have practical application potential for Australia. Stakeholder input has shaped the models and focused attention on what the next steps should be. Activities to trial models of employability skills portfolios, promote the features that are agreed as well as further consultation are the next steps. It is clear that all stakeholder groups must actively engage in supporting the approach to move it forward.





Appendix A

Project Advisory Group Members

A.1 Project Advisory Group members

Mr Tony Greer, Group Manager, Department of Education, Science and Training (Chair)

Mr Steve Balzary, Director, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Dr Anne Byrne, Director, Department of Education, Science and Training

Ms Sharon Coates, Director, Australian National Training Authority

Mr Chris Cunliffe-Jones, General Manager, The Duke Of Edinburgh's Award²²

Mr Matt Davies, Branch Manager, Department of Education, Science and Training

Professor John Dearn, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra

Mr John Firth, General Manager, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Mr Murray Judd, Director, Department of Education, Science and Training

Ms Pam Moss, Director, Department of Education and Training, Western Australia

Ms Mary O'Toole, Director, Pathways Training and Placements Pty Ltd²³

Mr Jim Syrmay, Consultant to Department of Education, Science and Training

Ms Maria Tarrant, Policy Director, Business Council of Australia

²² Joined the Project Advisory Group in June 2004.

²³ Joined the Project Advisory Group in June 2004.





Appendix B

Project consultations

B.1 Phase one

Respondents to Issues Paper

Organisations providing written responses to the Issues Paper are listed below:

- Seymour Maddison, Careers Consultant, UNSW Careers & Employment Service
- Rob Denton, Electronics & IT, Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE
- David Curtis, School of Education, Flinders University
- Tim Campbell, Principal Lecturer – Accounting, Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE
- Inta Heimanis, University of Sydney
- National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
- Education Queensland
- Martin Smith, Manager, Careers Service, University of Wollongong
- John Rosenberg, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Deakin University
- Rees Barrett, Accreditation & Moderation, Curriculum Council
- Margaret Fanning, Executive Director, TAFE Directors Australia
- Allan Sanderson, Director, Gilles Plains Campus, Torrens Valley Institute
- Steve McDonald, Director, Education and Training, IT Skills Hub
- Phil Candy, NHSU, United Kingdom

Stakeholder interviewees

Stakeholders that provided verbal feedback on project issues are listed below:

- Judith Leeson, President, Australian Association of Careers Counsellors
- Jim Barron, Managing Director, Group Training Australia
- Gillian Shadwick, Chair, TAFE Directors Australia
- Rob Denton, Electronics and IT, Torrens Valley TAFE
- Megan Lilly, Australian Industry Group
- Rees Barrett, Accreditation & Moderation, Curriculum Council
- Barbara Hammond, Careers and Employment, University of Melbourne



B.2 Phase two

National Forum Attendees

Dr John Ainley, Australian Council for Educational Research
Ms Jeanette Allen, Service Industries Skills Council Limited
Mr Steve Balzary, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Mr Rees Barrett, Curriculum Council of Western Australia
Mr Jim Barron, Group Training Australia
Mr Alan Beven, education.au limited
Mr Ian Blandthorn, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association
Mr John Braddy, Automotive Training Australia
Mr Roger Bryett, NT Department of Education, Employment and Training
Mr Duncan Buckeridge, The Allen Consulting Group
Mr Ian Burrage, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria
Dr Anne Byrne, Department of Education, Science and Training
Mr Stuart Cardell, Department of Education Science and Training
Ms Janice Chee, Queensland Studies Authority
Mr Daniel Clarke, Enterprise Network of Young Australians
Mr Kym Clayton, MCEETYA Transition from School Taskforce
Ms Berwyn Clayton, Centre Undertaking Research in Vocational Education, Canberra Institute of Technology
Ms Sharon Coates, ANTA
Mr Chris Cunliffe-Jones, The Duke Of Edinburgh's Award
Ms Suzanne Curyer, education.au limited
Mr Peter Cuzner, ACT Department of Education & Community Services
Mr Matt Davies, Department of Education, Science and Training
Ms Hazel Day, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Ms Cathy Down, RMIT
Mr Nick Evans, Department of Education, Tasmania
Mr Ian Falk, Charles Darwin University
Ms Sue Finnigan, Department of Family and Community Services
Mr John Firth, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Ms Kathleen Forrester, The Allen Consulting Group
Ms Raelene Fysh, VETnetwork Australia
Ms Kate Gemmell, National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
Dr Rosalie Grant, Department of Education, Science and Training
Ms Mary Grech, Australian Association of Careers Counsellors
Prof Patrick Griffin, University of Melbourne
Dr Dennis Gunning, Victorian Qualifications Authority



Mr Hugh Guthrie, NCVET
Mr Peter Hannigan, ANTA
Mr Michael Hyam, NSW Department of Education and Training
Ms Karen Jack, Restaurant and Catering Australia
Mr Niel Jacobsen, Rural Skills Australia
Mr Joe Jambor, Department of Education, Science and Training
Ms Trish Jelbart, Australian Council of State School Organisations
Mr Murray Judd, Department of Education, Science and Training
Dr Margaret Kiley, University of Canberra
Ms Robbie Lawson, Queensland Department of Employment and Training
Ms Di Lawson, Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council
Dr Marie Leech, Mission Australia
Ms Judith Leeson, Australian Association of Careers Counsellors
Ms Megan Lilly, Australian Industry Group
Ms Kate Linton, education.au limited
Mrs Jo Lonergan AM, Australian Parents Council Inc
Mr Joras Luiyke, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Ms Patricia Marsland, WorldSkills Australia
Dr Margaret Mazzolini, Swinburne University
Ms Dianne McEwan, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Ms Brenda Micale, TAFE Directors Australia
Mr Adrian Morgan, Australian Institute of Training and Development
Ms Pam Moss, Department of Education and Training, Western Australia
Ms Mary Nicolson, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Mr Ted Nunan, University of South Australia
Ms Mary Ann O'Loughlin, The Allen Consulting Group
Ms Mary O'Toole, Pathways Training and Placements Pty Ltd
Mr John Pardy, ANTA
Mr Andrew Perry, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria Inc
Ms Roseanne Polvere, NCVET
Mr Nello Raciti, Education Queensland
Ms Ros Rangott, Department of Education Science and Training
Mr John Ravenhall AM, Scouts Australia
Ms Tanya Rogers, SA Department of Education and Children's Services
Ms Caron Rooks, Smith Family
Ms Julie Ryan, Career Education Association of Victoria
Ms Michelle Sainsbery, Salvation Army Employment Plus



Mr Peter Shackleford, SA Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology

Mr Tim Smith, Australian Council for Private Education and Training

Dr Erica Smith, Charles Sturt University

Mr Martin Smith, University of Wollongong

Mr Carl Stevens, National Catholic Education Commission

Mr Jim Syrmes, consultant to the Department of Education, Science and Training

Ms Maria Tarrant, Business Council of Australia

Mr Drew Thomas, Australian Association of Careers Counsellors

Mr Dennis Wilson, Master Builders Association

Written responses to the Directions Paper

Mr Geof Hawke, Senior Research Fellow, Australian Centre for Organisational, Vocational and Adult Learning, University of Technology, Sydney

Ms Judith Leeson, National President, Australian Association of Career Counsellors

Mr Martin Smith, Manager, Careers Service, University of Wollongong, Steering Committee Chair, Higher Education Workplace Skills Olympiad

Mr Steve McDonald, Director, Education and Training, IT Skills Hub



Appendix C

Current examples of employability skills portfolios in action

This Appendix, prepared by the NCVET, provides a number of examples of employability skills portfolio templates currently being used in Australia and other countries. They are provided to illustrate the range of portfolios currently in action in Australia and overseas.

C.1 Introduction

This compendium of examples of portfolios and portfolio sites has been put together to assist readers consider:

- what the attributes of a model portfolio of employability and other generic skills might be;
- how a universal portfolio system could operate; and
- what such a portfolio might look like.

The literature review for this project has suggested that the features of a suitable portfolio are that it:

- is flexible and can be adapted to a variety of uses;
- is easy to use;
- is educationally sound, incorporating valid and reliable information, together with rich detail;
- could be used within courses or programs as part of the assessment process, as well as for other 'external' purposes;
- is available in a variety of media (web-based, CD, hard copy, etc);
- empowers learners and enables them to use the process and information throughout life;
- draw on material from educational providers, workplaces and a range of other appropriate sources;
- is compatible with existing systems and can incorporate material from a variety of sources and formats;
- is capable of output in a variety of formats and for a variety of purposes (e.g. to produce a CV);
- cost-effective (in time and money); and
- useful in job selection and career planning.

The examples below have been collected based on a search of relevant literature and web sites. While not comprehensive, this selection was initially developed to enable those participating in the National Forum to consider portfolios from a variety of countries and which are focused on the needs of particular education sectors, as well as being more universal.

Examples are provided from Australia, the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, Europe and China (Hong Kong).



C.2 Australia

Higher education

Flinders University Transferable Skills Portfolio Project

This project is intended to help the user to:

- identify 'transferable skills';
- recognise on- and off- campus experiences that enable them to develop transferable skills;
- 'map' their skills development through the course of their degree and their extracurricular activities;
- monitor their skills development so that they are able to identify their strengths and areas requiring development; and
- produce evidence to record their skills development and attainment and this could be used when seeking employment or references.

There are three blank templates associated with the Skills Portfolio project: a Transferable Skills Diary; a Transferable Skills Index; and a Record of Extracurricular activities. The templates for the Transferable Skills Diary and Transferable Skills Index are reproduced below. The template for the Record of Extracurricular activities can be found at: <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/skills/record.rtf>.



Transferable Skills Diary

Instructions:

Space has been left for you to enter your personal notes, perhaps in dot form, on the skills you have developed as you work through your topic. These notes can then be developed into a final summary statement of your skills development across the four theme areas identified in the skills menu. Keep each topic diary you produce - together with the record of your extracurricular activities, they will form a portfolio of your skills development.

Name _____

Student Number _____

Name of Topic: [Enter Topic Name]

Topic Code: [Enter Topic Code]

Semester [1, 2 or full year] **Year** [Year topic undertaken]

COMMUNICATION AND PRESENTATION SKILLS

[Enter your notes here, taking special care to provide examples of ways you have changed your practices or developed as a result of your learning.]

How can I improve my Communication and Presentation Skills?

TEAMWORK OR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

[Enter your notes here, taking special care to provide examples of

Source: Flinders University - <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/skills/diary.rtf> (accessed June 10th, 2004)

Transferable Skills Index

NAME: _____ / #

YEAR: _____

Instructions:

1. Enter the topic codes for the topics you have undertaken this year
2. Tick off those skills you believe you have developed in each topic studied after your topic diary is completed

COMMUNICATION AND PRESENTATION SKILLS	TOPIC [enter code]	TOPIC [code]	TOPIC [code]	TOPIC [code]	TOPIC [code]
Communication/presentation					
Writing/report writing					
Word processing					
Other computer					

TEAMWORK OR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	TOPIC	TOPIC	TOPIC	TOPIC	TOPIC [code]
Capacity for cooperation and teamwork					
Management and supervisory					
Capacity to appreciate different viewpoints and cultural perspectives					

Source: Flinders University - <http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/skills/skills.rtf> (accessed June 10th, 2004)



Edith Cowan University ePortfolio

<http://www.ecu.edu.au/SSC/Careers/students/eportfolio/>

A career development tool that provides students with opportunities to:

- collect and collate evidence that demonstrate their development of a range of competencies; learn about skills that employers value;
- identify gaps in their skills and competencies and then develop strategies to achieve them; and
- discover opportunities both on and off campus that will enable the development of these skills.

Secondary education/Transition from school to work

Recording student achievement of generic skills at Flora Hill Secondary College, Bendigo VIC

Flora Hill implemented a whole school approach to developing and recording students' attainment of generic skills. The project involved activities around active citizenship, learning styles, improving students desire to learn and employability skills. A student portfolio was developed for all students across the year to record their achievements and attainment of generic skills.

http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/voced/ented/qtpttrain/downloads/casestud/flora_link%20.doc

http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/voced/ented/qtpttrain/downloads/casestud/flora_cs%20.doc

Career and Transition Services Framework

The Career and Transition Services Framework, developed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce on Transition from School, proposes several options which could be undertaken to assist young people to make successful transitions through school and between school and post-school destinations. One of its 10 support services is a Transition Plan and Portfolio, which gives young people the opportunity to develop a skills portfolio, enables early intervention support where needed, and facilitates partnerships between the school and community agencies aimed at developing the skills of young people.

<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/public/career.htm#down>

Commercial products

Aspire Training & Consulting

'Developing generic skills' is a booklet and CD-ROM that guides the use in developing essential generic skills and preparing a personal portfolio of their achievements.

<http://www.aspiretraining.com.au/employability-skills/developing-generic-skills/>

C.3 USA

Secondary education

Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/stw/mwblp.html>



The school to career program run by the Massachusetts Department of Education is reported as the only school program in the US where students' employability skills are assessed in the work place. The program was developed for use by employers providing work experience for high school students, and involves teachers and workplace supervisors working collaboratively to creating opportunities that enhance a student's skill development.

Wisconsin Employability Skills Certificate Program Portfolio

<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsis/let/pdf/esportfolio.pdf>

This record is used by employers who have agreed to mentor a school student on work experience so that they can become a more effective workplace employee. It is to be reviewed with the student so that they understand what is to be assessed. The assessment is undertaken in consultation between the school and the employer. The results are recorded by the employer in an online database on the Wisconsin Dept of Public Instruction web site. The template is reproduced below.

Youth Employability Skills Record					
<p>3 = Proficient—able to perform entry-level skills independently. 2 = Intermediate—has performed tasks, may need additional training or supervision. 1 = Introductory—is familiar with process but is unable, or hasn't had the opportunity, to perform task; additional training is required. 0 = No exposure or knowledge of the task/skill. SB = School Based (Supervising Teacher) or Service Agency Based WB = Work Based (Workplace Mentor)</p>					
Description of Skills	Preliminary Evaluation	Final Evaluation	SB	WB	
Basic SCANS Skills					
1. Reading—locates, understands, and interprets written information in prose and in documents such as manuals, graphs, and schedules.					
2. Writing—communicates thoughts, ideas, information, messages in writing; creates documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, graphs and flow charts.					
3. Mathematics—Performs basic computations and approaches practical problems by choosing appropriately from a variety of mathematical techniques.					
4. Listening—receives, attends to, interprets, responds to verbal messages & cues.					
5. Speaking—organizes ideas and communicates orally.					
6. Career Development—does activities that may include a self-assessment, researching the labor market, creating a career & education plan, identifying references, completing a job application, resume and cover letter, and demonstrates job-interviewing skills.					
SUBTOTAL (Possible Pts = 18; Required for state certificate = 12)					
Personal/Interpersonal Skills – Displays responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, and honesty and extends these skills to facilitating working well with others.					
7. Demonstrates integrity/honesty and chooses ethical courses of action.					
8. Serves clients/customers, working to satisfy customer's expectations.					
9. Participates as a member of a team, contributing to group efforts.					
10. Demonstrates leadership skills, setting a positive example and teaching others.					
11. Works well with women and men from diverse backgrounds.					
SUBTOTAL (Possible Pts = 15; Required for state certificate = 10)					
Thinking/Information Processing Skills – can learn, reason, acquire, and use information to aid thinking.					
12. Organizes, maintains, interprets, and communicates information, using computers to aid this task where necessary.					
13. Recognizes problems; devises and implements plans of action.					
14. Generates new ideas to help solve problems.					
15. Makes decisions by specifying goals and constraints, defining alternatives, considering risks, and evaluating and picking the best choice.					
16. Uses efficient learning techniques and materials to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills.					
SUBTOTAL (Possible Pts = 15; Required pts for state certificate = 10)					
Systems/Technology Skills: Understands complex interrelationships of systems and works with technologies.					
17. Understands the employer's organization and his/her role in it.					
18. Understands technological systems. Able to find errors and corrects problems in technological operations used in his/her job duties.					
19. Selects the appropriate tools or equipment for a task, including computers and related technologies.					
20. Understands the function and proper procedures for technologies related to a task, including computer operating systems, word processing, and spreadsheets.					
21. Understands and can do routine preventative maintenance on equipment and knows when to get additional help.					
22. Understands workplace safety precautions and workplace rules and takes measures to implement them.					
SUBTOTAL (Possible Pts = 18; Required pts for state certificate = 12)					
GRAND TOTAL (Possible Pts = 66; Required for state certificate = 44)					
OPTIONAL: (The following items are not part of the rating, yet are important employee traits.)					
Attendance and punctuality: Reports on scheduled days and begins work on time.					
Appearance: Is dressed and groomed appropriately for the job.					

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) - <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsis/let/pdf/esportfolio.pdf> (accessed 10th June, 2004)



Ohio Career Passport

<http://www.ohiocareerdev.org/pdfs/Guidelines.pdf>

The Career Passport is an educational initiative, based in legislation, for high school juniors and seniors. It represents part of the career development process and also provides employers and higher education personnel with clearer information about the student.

Workplace/Community

Career Transcript System (CTS) (log-in/information pages)

<http://www.scans2000.com/CareerTranscript/CTS/LoginPages/CTSLoginPage.jsp>

<http://www.scans.jhu.edu/NS/HTML/CTS.htm> (information page)

The CTS was developed by the US Dept of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). One component of the system, the Career Transcript, provides a way to record diverse learning outcomes within a single, comprehensive, and recognised document. The system comprises the following five components:

- the Career Transcript, which documents skills mastery and reflects learning in the classroom and on the job. It is designed to be a portable credential that will develop with the individual;
- the Career Transcript Curricula comprising CD-ROMs for the classroom that take learners into a virtual workplace and challenge them to develop creative solutions to real-world problems, and for the workplace, providing training for workplace supervisors and employees that help them to develop the skills they need to be successful leaders and team players;
- the Career Transcript Professional Development, comprising training for professionals in developing and coaching the SCANS skills in their learners and workers in the classroom and at the workplace;
- the Career Transcript Assessment, to enable assessment using diagnostic and task-based assessments to track, develop, and coach the SCANS skills; and
- the Career Transcript Server, providing assessment information, certifications, qualifications, and transcripts in an online environment for users and institutions to document and manage career development and training.

The components of the CTS provide a system of relevant education and workforce development that begins in high school and extends to the workplace, recorded in an online Career Transcript of each participant's SCANS skills.

Washington State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (SOICC)

<http://www.wa.gov/esd/lmea/soicc/prtfolio.htm>

The Washington SOICC provides support for career development portfolios. Portfolios help individuals relate their education to career interest and aptitudes as they progress through school and life.

Currently there are three different portfolios available through the SOICC:

- Get-A-Life Career Portfolio is designed to assist middle school and high school students;
- School-to-Work Transition Planner is a portfolio designed to assist students move from high school into community college, university, apprenticeship or directly into the workforce;



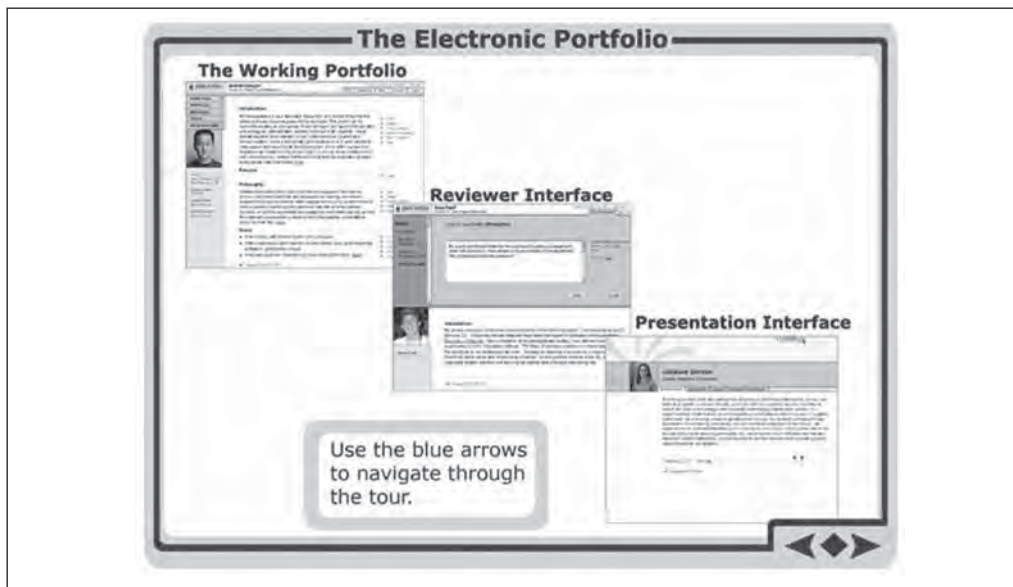
- Work/Life Planner is an adult career portfolio designed to assist adults in transition. When a person needs to make a career transition because of dislocation, dissatisfaction with current career or because of re-entry the Work/Life Planner will assist in making that transition.

Higher education

John Hopkins University Electronic Portfolio

<http://cte.jhu.edu/epweb/>

The Electronic Portfolio, developed by the John Hopkins University Centre for Technology in Education (CTE), is a Web-based assessment and presentation application that allows teachers, both pre-service and in-service, to demonstrate their capabilities and achievements in relation to a set of professional principles or standards.



Source: John Hopkins University Center for Technology in Education - <http://www.cte.jhu.edu/EPWEB/tourstart.htm> (accessed 10th June, 2004) Contact details: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Technology in Education, 6740 Alexander Bell Drive, Suite 302, Columbia, MD 21046, USA. Ph: +1 410-312-3800; Fax: +1 410-312-3868.

Florida State University Career Portfolio

<http://www.career-recruit.fsu.edu/careerportfolio/enter/login.html> (using 'enter' to login enables the user to 'look around' the portfolio tool)

The FSU Career Portfolio is an interactive tool that enables students to record, reflect upon, and evaluate their experiences, both in and out of school, while at the university. The Portfolio enables the student to:

- build a detailed portfolio of their skills, experiences and achievements;
- include an online resume, references, transcripts and even samples of work;
- use the skill matrix to learn about skills that employers value; and
- find out about opportunities available both on and off campus that will enable them to develop these skills.



CAREER PORTFOLIO
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Student's Main Menu

This menu allows you to build, manage and learn how to use your Career Portfolio.

Build

Skills Matrix | Profile | Resume | References | Artifacts & Examples

Manage

1. Verify Email Address
2. Select Portfolio:
My Career Portfolio
Technical Portfolio
Graduate School
Add Portfolio Edit

3. Manage selected portfolio:

- Personalize Portfolio
- Create Access Keys
- View Portfolio
- Send Portfolio
- View Access Details

Learn

- Career/Life Skills Tour
- Experiences Tour
- View a list of all Tours
- Opportunities for Experience
- View Sample Portfolios
- How to use the Main Menu
- Career Center Workshops
- Adding new portfolios
- More Help information

Source: Florida State University - <http://www.career-recruit.fsu.edu/careerportfolio/enter/main.html?pass=enter> (accessed 10th June 2004)

CAREER PORTFOLIO
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Skills Development Matrix

This page is designed to give you a quick overview of the skills/experiences you've recorded and what areas might still need more documentation. If you've already entered information for a given skill/experience combination, an icon (or number) appears in the appropriate cell. Select any hyperlinked skill or experience name (the column and row headings) if you'd like to learn more about it before continuing. [Want to edit your Skills List?](#) **Recommended next step:** [Build your Profile](#).

Skills	Experiences				
	Courses	Jobs / Internships	Service / Volunteer Work	Memberships / Activities	Interests / Life Experiences
Communication	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (1)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)
Creativity	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (4)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (1)
Critical Thinking	Add/Edit (2)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (2)
Leadership	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)
Life Management	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (2)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)
Research / Project Development	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (1)	Add/Edit (0)
Social Responsibility	Add/Edit (1)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (2)
Teamwork	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (3)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)
Technical / Scientific	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)	Add/Edit (0)

[Add your own Skill](#)

Source: Florida State University - <http://www.career-recruit.fsu.edu/careerportfolio/enter/matrix/matrix.asp> (accessed June 10th, 2004) Contact details: The Career Center, Suite A4100, University Center, FSU, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2490, USA. Ph: +1 850 644 6431; Jeff Garis (Director) +1 850 644 6431

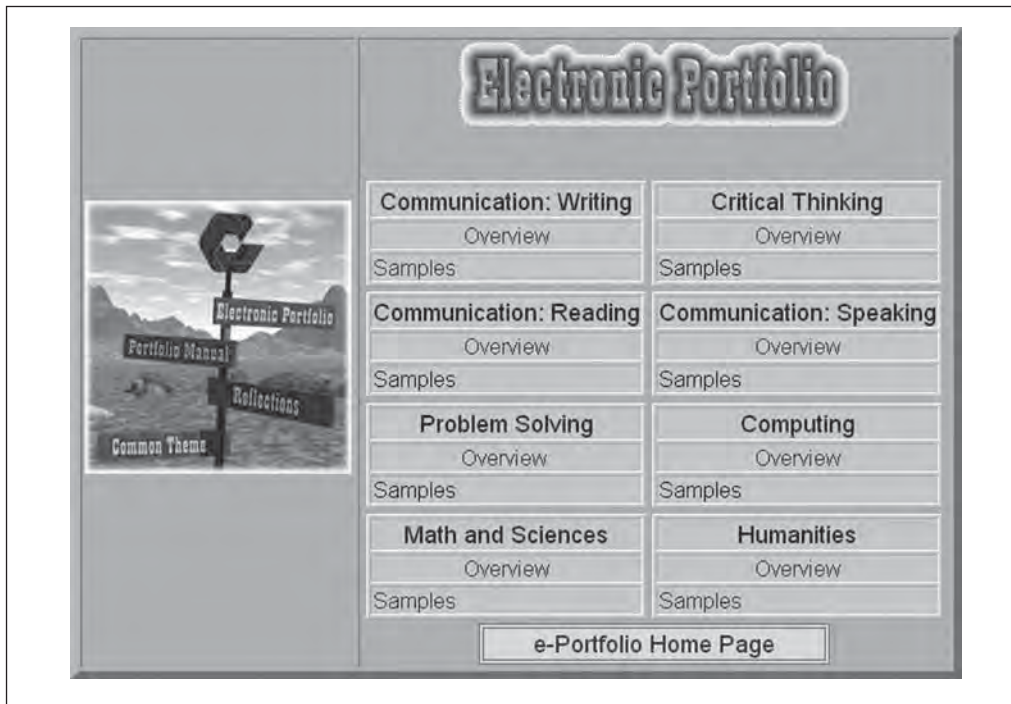
Indiana University e-Portfolio

<http://eport.iupui.edu/index.htm>

This portfolio will enable students to store collections of their work electronically. This gives them a tool by which they can record their development throughout their higher education and beyond. The portfolio can be shown to prospective employers or other educational institutions. The portfolio will be a national model as part of the Open Source Portfolio Initiative (OSPI), a group of individuals and organisations working towards the development of the best possible free, open source electronic portfolio code.

Gateway Community College

<http://www.gwc.maricopa.edu/class/e-portfolio/portman.html>



Source: Gateway Community College - <http://www.gwc.maricopa.edu/class/e-portfolio/eport.html> (accessed June 11th, 2004)

C.4 United Kingdom

Workplace/Community

York Region's Virtual Community Resource Centre

The Employability Skills Portfolio provides samples of work-related achievements and a record of skills to show what kind of worker you are and how you meet employment criteria. It allows you: prove that you have certain employability skills; identify what skills you should work on to better prepare yourself for employment; help you develop an effective resume; speak positively and show proof of skills at future job interviews and help you get a job; and provide evidence of focused experiences and learning for further education.



PORTFOLIO - SKILLS DISCOVERY SHEET						
<p>A portfolio provides an opportunity for you to shine, to share what matters to you, and to demonstrate what it is that makes you so unique.</p> <p>In order to help you build your portfolio, complete the sections below listing all the activities that you have been involved in throughout your life including your co-op experience, the skills that you have learned from these activities, and the evidence that you could use to demonstrate these skills. Also, make sure to put a check mark to indicate which Employability Skills category (or categories) your skills fall under.</p> <p>Note: F = Fundamental, PM = Personal Management, TW = Teamwork, and O = Other.</p>						
Activities I have been involved in	Skills I have learned and demonstrated from these activities Refer to the skills listed on the Employability Skills 2000+ page	Portfolio - Documents/Evidence I have or could get to prove I have these skills	F	PM	TW	O
School Activities (academic)						
School Activities (extra-curricular)						

Source: York Region Virtual Community Resource Centre - http://www.yorkregion-vcrc.com/employability/portfolio_assignment.htm (accessed June 10th, 2004)

Higher education

Faculty Reflective Portfolios, School of Geography, University of Leeds

<http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/publications/portfolio/generic/portfoliog.doc>

The Reflective Portfolios are short booklets in which students can record and monitor their academic and personal development progress as they pass through University, and help feedback between students and their tutors.

Liverpool Universal Student Interactive Database or LUSID

http://lusid.liv.ac.uk/public/final_report/ElectronicRecording.html

The project aims were to prepare students to be effective employees and also to enhance the accessibility and relevance to employers of higher education provision, and address the achievement of key skills by students.



C.5 Canada

Workplace

Canada - Employability Skills Toolkit (not available online)

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/toolkit.htm>

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/pdfs/esp2000.pdf>

(Employability Skills Profile)

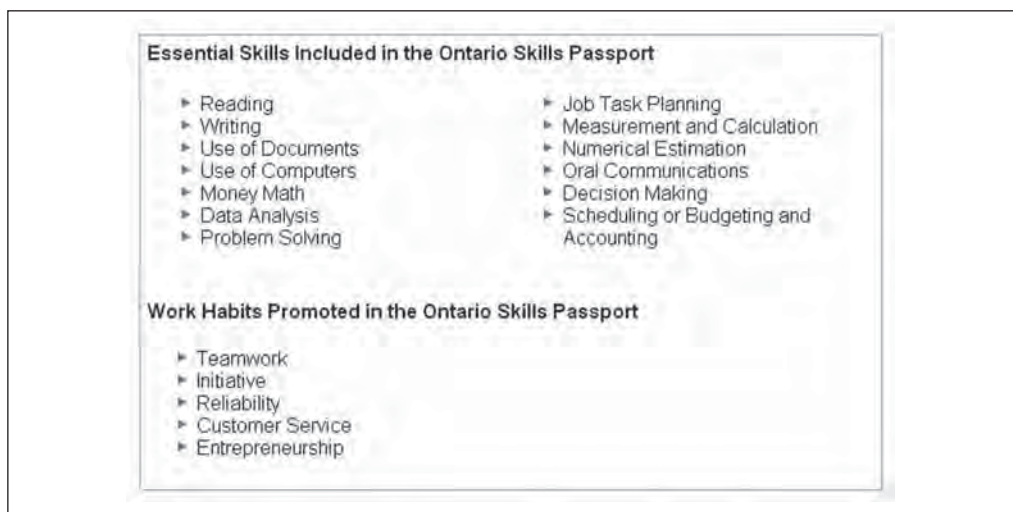
The Toolkit offers practical support for managing lifelong learning for personal growth and workplace success, and provides Canadians with much-needed information about what employability skills look like and examples of ways they can develop and demonstrate their skills at home, school, work and in the community. Specifically, the Toolkit is designed to help the user to: identify and reflect on their skills; plan skills development activities; implement their development plans and practise their skills; and document and market their skills to their advantage.

Secondary education/Transition from school to work

Ontario Individual Career Plan and Passport

<http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/>

The Ontario Skills Passport (OSP) is part of Canada's Essential Skills program and is a document that provides clear descriptions of skill requirements for entry-level work in today's labour market and of work habits deemed by employers to be important in the workplace. It was pilot-tested in 19 school boards and seven Job Connect agencies between November 2001 and June 2002. The pilot aimed to provide students, job seekers, employers, cooperative education teachers and job developers with practical experience in using the OSP so that its value and useability could be evaluated. The results of the pilot have been used in the further development of the OSP, including the piloting of an electronic version between January-June 2004. The Ontario Skills Passport website has been redeveloped and for more information, contact Chantal Locatelli, Secondary School Policy and Programs Branch, Ministry of Education. Ph: +1 416-325-7886; Email: skills@edu.gov.on.ca.



Source: Ontario Skills Passport - <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/> (accessed 11 June 2004)



C.6 Hong Kong

Higher education

PEAKS: Portfolio of Essential Attributes, Knowledge and Skills

<http://peaks.ust.hk/portfolio/>

An online personal development planner. The project was funded by the Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Aims to enhance the quality of the higher education experience through the process of personal development planning, encourage lifelong learning and reflection, and enable the learner to make appropriate life and career choices. The portfolio enables students to showcase to potential employers the key attributes, knowledge and skills needed for employability.

C.7 Europe

European CV

The European curriculum vitae give a comprehensive standardised overview of education attainments and work experience of an individual. It is complementary to the certificate supplement.

http://cedefop.eu.int/download/transparency/cv_example_en.pdf

The certificate supplement contains a detailed description of the qualification acquired by the holder of a vocational certificate. It is issued by the awarding authorities.

http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/download/transparency/supplement_en.doc



Appendix D

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