



The Job Ready Certificate

ACCI response to the DEEWR Discussion Paper

March 2009

LEADING AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS



ACCI – LEADING AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS

ACCI has been the peak council of Australian business associations for 105 years and traces its heritage back to Australia's first chamber of commerce in 1826.

Our motto is "Leading Australian Business."

We are also the ongoing amalgamation of the nation's leading federal business organisations - Australian Chamber of Commerce, the Associated Chamber of Manufactures of Australia, the Australian Council of Employers Federations and the Confederation of Australian Industry.

Membership of ACCI is made up of the State and Territory Chambers of Commerce and Industry together with the major national industry associations.

Through our membership, ACCI represents over 350,000 businesses nationwide, including over 280,000 enterprises employing less than 20 people, over 55,000 enterprises employing between 20-100 people and the top 100 companies.

Our employer network employs over 4 million people which makes ACCI the largest and most representative business organisation in Australia.

Our Activities

ACCI takes a leading role in representing the views of Australian business to Government.

Our objective is to ensure that the voice of Australian businesses is heard, whether they are one of the top 100 Australian companies or a small sole trader.

Our specific activities include:

- Representation and advocacy to Governments, parliaments, tribunals and policy makers both domestically and internationally.
- Business representation on a range of statutory and business boards, committees and other fora.
- Representing business in national and international fora including the Australian Fair Pay Commission, Australian Industrial Relations Commission, Australian Safety and Compensation Council, International Labour Organisation, International Organisation of Employers, International Chamber of Commerce, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Employers.
- Research and policy development on issues concerning Australian business.
- The publication of leading business surveys and other information products.
- Providing forums for collective discussion amongst businesses on matters of law and policy affecting commerce and industry.

Publications

A range of publications are available from ACCI, with details of our activities and policies including:

- The ACCI Policy Review; an analysis of major policy issues affecting the Australian economy and business.
- Issue papers commenting on business' views of contemporary policy issues.
- Policies of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry – the annual bound compendium of ACCI's policy platforms.
- The Westpac-ACCI Survey of Industrial Trends - the longest, continuous running private sector survey in Australia. A leading barometer of economic activity and the most important survey of manufacturing industry in Australia.
- The ACCI Survey of Investor Confidence – this gives an analysis of the direction of investment by business in Australia.
- The Commonwealth-ACCI Business Expectations Survey - this aggregates individual surveys by ACCI member organisations and covers firms of all sizes in all States and Territories.
- The ACCI Small Business Survey – which is a survey of small business derived from the Business Expectations Survey data.
- Workplace relations reports and discussion papers, including the ACCI Modern Workplace: Modern Future 2002-2010 Policy Blueprint and the Functioning Federalism and the Case for a National Workplace Relations System and The Economic Case for Workplace Relations Reform Position Papers.
- Occupational health and safety guides and updates, including the National OHS Strategy and the Modern Workplace: Safer Workplace Policy Blueprint.
- Trade reports and discussion papers including the Riding the Chinese Dragon: Opportunities and Challenges for Australia and the World Position Paper.
- Education and training reports and discussion papers.
- The ACCI Annual Report providing a summary of major activities and achievements for the previous year.
- The ACCI Taxation Reform Blueprint: A Strategy for the Australian Taxation System 2004–2014.
- The ACCI Manufacturing Sector Position Paper: The Future of Australia's Manufacturing Sector: A Blueprint for Success.

Most of this information, as well as ACCI media releases, parliamentary submissions and reports, is available on our website – www.acci.asn.au

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Introduction

1. Australian industry needs a skilled, flexible and motivated workforce that further contributes to economic growth. Successful transitions from school to the world of work and beyond are of critical importance for Australia's youth and society in general. An understanding of the rigours of the workplace and the expectations of employers developed through meaningful interactions with the work environment whilst at school will actively contribute towards achieving successful school to work transitions for many young people.
2. The workplace learning a student undertakes may or may not be related to their future career aspirations or their courses of study, but nonetheless, this interaction with the workplace plays a valuable role in providing the student with skills and knowledge that will assist in transitions into full time work upon the completion of their studies.
3. Some valuable lessons learned from the Australian Technical Colleges and Australian School Based Apprenticeships show that employment participation plays an important role in providing opportunities for students to apply their learning in a work environment providing real life validation of acquired skills, knowledge and attitudes in their workplace.
4. Successful transitions from school to the world of work and beyond are of critical importance for Australia's youth and society in general. NCVER research shows that part time and casual employment have a particularly positive effect on the transition to successful post-school activities for school leavers. There are very few people in Australia who will not participate in paid or unpaid work at some point in their lives, an understanding of the world of work and access to quality education that recognises the contribution that employment can make to an educational outcome contributes strongly towards achieving successful transitions. Beyond the development of employability skills, the wider value to the student participation in a structured social environment is very real. Similarly there are positive benefits to society from a school to work transition based on learning through employment participation.
5. The ACCI *Skills for a Nation – A Blueprint for Improving Education and Training 2007 – 2017* proposes that all students should have access to a statement of their employability skills on completion of their schooling. The Blueprint states that the eight key employability skills areas need to be made explicit to students through pedagogy, assessment, recording and reporting and Students should be encouraged to record their progress in developing employability skills in different contexts.
6. During the 2007 election, the Australian Government announced the introduction of a Job Ready Certificate for implementation in 2010, as part

of its commitment to make education and training more responsive to the needs of industry.

7. All nationally recognised Training Packages are required to have embedded Employability Skills by 1 July 2007. Employability Skills Summaries for all Training Package Qualifications have been developed by the Industry Skills Councils in consultations with industry. The Employability Skills Summaries provide a synopsis of the required employability skills that industry deem as necessary to fulfil the job role of the associated qualification.
8. Under the current arrangements to embed Employability Skills into Training Packages, students, whether undertaking a VET in Schools qualification, an Australian School-based Apprenticeship or a VET qualification through TAFE or a private RTO would be issued with an Employability Skills Statement upon completion of the qualification. There is no need to replicate this statement.
9. ACCI regards the development of Employability Skills as an essential component for all students. ACCI considers that an employment readiness portfolio should be established that tracks the development of employability skills throughout the educational life of the student. This would be a valuable tool for the student and their parents and for employers and would better reflect the connection to lifelong learning that underpins the meta-cognitive nature of employability skills.
10. There is a very real danger that a static Job Ready Certificate could become lost in the mire of reports and certificates that a student receives upon completing secondary education. At a time when the student is more greatly concerned with tertiary entrance scores, Certificates of Education, Statements of Attainments and Employability Skills Summaries from VET in Schools subjects, there is a real danger that the true value of a Job Readiness Certificate could be overlooked.
11. This is particularly so if employers are given “toolkits” with “tick and flick” lists as a simplistic approach to job readiness. While important employability skills are developed in the workplace, of equal significance is the development of employability skills at home, in the community, on sporting teams and in other pursuits and interests.
12. ACCI believes that in many cases, a school leaver's attitude and work readiness attributes are already reflected in current school reporting mechanisms. A student's attendance record, general attitude towards school work and their ability to work well in teams and with their peers are in most cases recorded as part of their school report cards and exit statements. Most students request references from teachers and work experience/placement employers. Possibly employers simply need some direction or support to assist them identify and access this type of

information in order for meaningful feedback for students about their strengths and weaknesses at a particular point in time. The developmental nature of a portfolio approach takes away the possible negative interpretation that a person has “failed” employability skills. It recognises the developmental nature of employability skills and assists individuals to collect, synthesise and utilise personal information about themselves in a constructive manner.

13. A developmental portfolio that tracks the development of employability skills would be of great benefit to the student than the issuance of a single static certificate upon the completion of secondary school. Explicit teaching of Employability Skills related subjects, greater emphasis placed on the development and validation of skills during structured workplace learning activities would serve to instil upon the individual student the importance of these skills in their working life and a developmental portfolio would give the student a sense of ownership over the learning outcome.

Underpinning Principles for the Development of a Job Ready Certificate

14. Whilst ACCI broadly supports the development and implementation of a Job Ready Certificate concept, there are a number of principles that ACCI believes must be followed to ensure that the concept meets the needs of students, parents and employers.
15. A Job Ready Certificate must:
 - I. Value add to current school leaving certificates;
 - II. Not duplicate existing reports or assessment processes;
 - III. Be supported by the strengthened teaching of Employability Skills and related subject areas;
 - IV. Assess the attitudinal development of students beyond the scope of existing reports and assessment processes;
 - V. Be supported by increased access to on the job training and structured workplace learning activities that provide validation for employability skills;
 - VI. Take into account the part time work, community activities and sporting activities of the student;
 - VII. Be a developmental tool that tracks a student’s development rather than a static report upon leaving school;
 - VIII. Be presented in a way that ensures that the student, parents, teachers and employers can easily understand; and
 - IX. Provide a continuum of development for the educational life of the student;
 - X. Be applied to all senior secondary students.

Key Features of the Job Ready Certificate

16. Australian business and industry needs school leavers to demonstrate and apply workforce ready skills and attitudes which will enable them to transition seamlessly into the workplace and engage in further education and training. ACCI believes that the Job Ready Certificate must incorporate and deliver better teaching mechanisms and training in the development of job ready skills and attitudes, and not become simply another assessment and reporting tool.
17. ACCI believes that the Job Ready Certificate should assess the job readiness of senior secondary students as they progress through their senior years and transition into the workplace or onto further study and or training. The Job Ready Certificate, instead of being a static tool for reporting on job ready skills, should be a developmental portfolio that will assist the student in developing a suite of practical skills and attitudes validated through employer endorsed workplace learning.
18. A developmental portfolio that includes self assessment and reflection, peer assessment, school based teaching and assessment and assessment in the workplace will ensure that the Job Ready Certificate is a robust and valued tool. The Job Ready Certificate needs to enable teachers, students and parents to identify areas of further development and provides businesses with a tool that demonstrates the potential employability of the candidate.
19. The Job Ready Certificate has the potential to be applied across a far broader spectrum of students than just those participating in VET in Schools or Australian School based Apprenticeships. A developmental portfolio of skills and attitudes can allow the student to attribute a wider range of skills and attitudes developed over a greater period of time and in many differing settings. There is also the possibility of the Job Ready Certificate following the student through to tertiary education and contributing to the recording and reporting of key Employability Skills gained in VET or at university.
20. Australian employers have, in many cases, developed an understanding of Employability Skills and how they apply to their business through the work of ACCI and other business and industry organisations and their interactions with the VET sector. Employers understand the key employability skills and the associated facets. The Job Ready Certificate needs to retain Employability Skills as its central focus in order to ensure that business and industry in Australia can readily relate to the information it contains.
21. In 2002, ACCI and BCA produced the *Employability Skills for the Future* paper for the Department of Education, Science and Training. The papers

outlined the required skills and knowledge that Australian industry regarded as an essential foundation for all employees. The skills represent the transportable “soft skills’ that underpin the technical skills that enable an employee to perform effectively in the workplace. The paper outlined eight key employability skills:

- Communication;
- Teamwork;
- Problem Solving;
- Initiative and Enterprise;
- Problem Solving;
- Self Management;
- Learning; and
- Technology.

22. The ACCI / BCA employability Skills framework provides an excellent foundation of skills and attributes for the Job Ready Certificate. The facets attached to each employability skill provide an expansion of the tacit skills and personal attitudes and are an ideal framework for plotting the development of soft skills.
23. Australian business and industry has a vested interest in the development of soft skills amongst students. ACCI believes that Australian industry, if appropriately resourced, could work in partnership with the Commonwealth and State / Territory Governments to educate parents, teachers and students in the importance of Employability Skills and to produce and award point in time Employment Readiness Certificates for students.
24. Schools are both microcosms and hubs of local communities and the springboard for educating the future workforce. At a local level, schools’ engaging with business is an immediate and effective way for businesses to contribute to take a proactive role in building skills for the future, as well as gaining community legitimacy. Partnerships provide an ideal mechanism for the transfer of employability Skills, enabling businesses to have direct input into the learning processes and outcomes.
25. Business and industry have successfully developed such partnerships with schools and training providers at a local level. Considerable success is often achieved in mentoring programs and Local Community Partnerships that target socially and educationally disadvantaged students and partnering them with business or community leaders to develop skills and attitudes that prepare them for the world of work.

26. Skills and attitudinal development does not occur solely within the classroom or the workplace; there are many activities that contribute to the development of Employability Skills and interpersonal skills. Many students are engaged in part time work, the NCVER reports approximately 50% of senior secondary students work part time and 70% of those students who work are employed in the hospitality or retail industries¹.
27. Students employed within these industries would be expected to develop a suite of employability skills that are focussed on customer service, for example, a student employed in the retail sector in a large department store would essentially develop strong communication skills from dealing with staff' management and customers; strong teamwork skills from working with other staff members; self management skills in organising their rosters around their school and other commitments; technology skills from using store inventory management systems or checkout equipment as well as some problem solving skills, learning and initiative and enterprise skills. These skills will often be developed informally over an extended period of time but can be easily tracked and recorded by both the school and the student's workplace.

Principles for Assessing Job Readiness

28. The assessment of skills and attitudes for a Job Ready Certificate must be simple and easily applied. The assessment process must be able to be used easily by teachers and employers and workplace supervisors. It must be as easy to use for small and medium-sized firms as for larger firms with specialised training staff. It should not need a lot of specialised training to use. The assessment process must not be complex and time consuming: employers are busy people and schools already have many demands upon their time.
29. The assessment process will need to help employers to reinforce and encourage in young people the type of behaviour that demonstrates job readiness. It should also help young people to shape their own behaviour. And so it will need to be in plain English that reflects everyday use in the workplace and that is readily understandable by the target group of young people. The detailed facets underpinning the eight Employability Skills from an ideal base for the tracking and reporting of skills and attitudes developed.
30. A Job Ready Certificate must be a nationally consistent applied to all school students; both what is assessed and the assessment process will need to be consistent across educational jurisdictions and between educational sectors.

¹ Green & Smith, NCVER 2001

31. Assessment processes must be rigorous and ensure that all skills are effectively demonstrated at both school and in the workplace setting; a simple point in time tick and flick tool box approach will have little credibility with employers or parents and will lead to little or no confidence in the reported learning outcomes.
32. The Job Ready Certificate will need to be valued by both employers and young people. And so:
 - It should not be awarded automatically - young people should have to earn it through a developmental learning process;
 - For the employer component of the student developmental portfolio, it should be based upon sufficient time in a workplace setting to allow reliable and valid judgements to be made about young people's attitudes in the workplace;
 - the assessment processes should be fair and transparent and combine multiple assessment types and stages including self reflection by the student, peer assessment, teacher assessment and employer or workplace supervisor assessment and other types of third party endorsement; and
 - There will need to be clear rules, agreed to by industry, on the criteria used to award it.

ACCI Considerations for an Employment Readiness Portfolio

33. ACCI considers that the most appropriate vehicle for ensuring the development and effective reporting of key Employability Skills is through a developmental portfolio.
34. The portfolio approach allows the student to record learning outcomes from a range of differing settings at different times throughout their educational life.
35. An Employment Readiness Portfolio could be supported by an electronic database that allows the student and the school to access their files and record activities and observations that lead to the development of Employability Skills. Access to input information could also be given to employers and coaches / community group leaders to enable them to provide feedback and observations on the student's portfolio.
36. Also, a simple paper based skills passport could be issued to students that explains the concept to employers and community group leaders / coaches and provides the mechanism for written observations from the employers or coach.
37. The Employment readiness Portfolio would have input from four main areas:

- a. **Student self reflection** – opportunity for the student to record and reflect on skills developed through:
 - Work undertaken,
 - Learning activities,
 - Community Activities
 - b. **School assessment** - formal Employability Skills development through teaching ES subjects and general observations on ES skills and attitudes at school.
 - c. **Community group and sporting coaches / leaders** – The opportunity for coaches and community group leaders (e.g. Cadets, Scouts, youth groups) to record observations on skills development achieved through community activities.
 - d. **Workplace assessment** – The opportunity for employers to record observations on ES skills and attitudes development in the workplace and record "soft skills" training.
38. The use of a credit matrix to track and map technical skills gained through employment and community activities could be used to transfer technical skills and knowledge as well as employability skills development across to applicable subject areas of the student; e.g. if a student works in retail and is doing subject that include assessment of communication skills or IT use, the skills obtained in the workplace could be applied to a credit matrix that gives a weighting to the developed skills and contributes to the overall outcome.
39. ACCI believes that whilst an Employment Readiness Portfolio will be supported by employers, in many cases employers may need to develop mentoring and training skills to assist in the recognition and development of Employability Skills and to ensure the most effective transfer of skills from employer to student is achieved.
40. ACCI believes that employers or supervisors responsible for overseeing students should be offered training in Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification and be given the skills and knowledge needed to effectively mentor students throughout time in the workplace.
41. Initially a tradesperson or existing worker could complete the mentoring and assessment competencies of the TAA package to make them immediately useful in the workplace for supervising students and for building a structure within the enterprise for ensuring that training can take place. They could then complete their TAA qualification while bringing immediate benefits to the workplace. Funding for this could be provided through the Productivity Places Program.

42. ACCI also sees strong benefits to the Vocational Education and training Workforce in the upskilling of tradespeople with the TAA qualification. To secure the future VET workforce, the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments should offer wage subsidies to encourage job sharing arrangements between TAA qualified mentors and Registered Training Organisations.
43. ACCI feels that if an Employment Readiness Portfolio is to be credible and valuable to businesses and employers it certainly must be developed in consultation with businesses and, provided the administrative requirements were limited and simple, assessed and awarded by business/industry associations. This may also provide opportunities for organisations to deliver relevant and practical training courses in workplace ready skills and better engage in the schools.
44. To increase the credibility and employer / educational sector support of the initiative, the Employment Readiness Portfolio should follow the student into further study at university or in VET course. The ERP should encompass the Employability Skills summaries gained in VET qualifications undertaken or the Graduate Skills Assessment outcomes as well as following them into employment. This would enable the student to have one mechanism that plots the development of employability skills and attitudes throughout their educational life.

Conclusion

45. ACCI believes that serious consideration needs to be given to the design and structure of a Job Ready Certificate initiative. A static certificate issued upon completion of secondary schooling would have little value and relevance to employers. An initiative that tracks the development of employability skills of the student through secondary school and into tertiary or VET study that includes direct input from employers would carry considerably more weight within the business community.
46. ACCI recommends that before the government fully commits to the implementation of the Job Ready Certificate initiative, that a trial be conducted to assess its value and use to employers and students. This trial could be coordinated by ACCI and its member organisations, selecting a single school/sample group of students from each state or territory and then coordinating the analysis and follow-up with key stakeholders as to its use and value. This should be completed before any nation-wide roll-out of a Job ready Certificate concept.

The Employment Readiness Portfolio

Self Reflection

- Opportunity for the student to reflect on skills developed through:
- Work undertaken,
- Learning activities,
- Community Activities.

School Assessment

- Formal Employability Skills development,
- General observations on ES skills and attitudes at school.

Community Engagement

- Opportunity for coaches and community group leaders(eg. Cadets, Scouts, youth groups) to record observations on skills development achieved through community activities.

Workplace Assessment

- Opportunity for employers to record observations on ES skills and attitudes development in the workplace,
- Record "soft skills" training

ACCI Members

ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Business SA
Chamber of Commerce & Industry Western Australia (Inc)
Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory
Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland
Employers First™
New South Wales Business Chamber
Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ltd
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Agribusiness Employers' Federation
Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors' Association
Association of Consulting Engineers Australia (The)
Australian Beverages Council Ltd
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Australian International Airlines Operations Group
Australian Made Campaign Limited
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Australian Paint Manufacturers' Federation Inc
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Bus Industry Confederation
Live Performance Australia
Master Builders Australia Inc.
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