

## Employability skills and opportunities for accreditation of part-time work

*The passing of two decades since discussion started in Australia about recognition of part-time work for accreditation purposes highlights not an antipathy to proceeding but more the complexity of the mechanisms required to effect that accreditation in a meaningful manner.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

- 4.1 The previous chapter illustrated the range of skills that students develop through their part-time jobs. Yet for many students combining school and work, the learning that takes place in the workplace is not being formally recorded in any context. The following chapter explores opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part-time or casual work.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.2 This issue is particularly pertinent as the inquiry coincided with the Australian Government undertaking stakeholder consultations on the introduction of a *Job Ready Certificate* – a proposed national certificate

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1 Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 6.

2 Inquiry Terms of Reference.

which offers a 'simple, affordable and practical way to assess and report job readiness.'<sup>3</sup>

- 4.3 The proposed Job Ready Certificate seeks to target students participating in secondary school vocational education programs, at least initially. It was suggested that where part-time work is linked to a formal school-based training program, 'the recognition and accreditation of skills and competencies gained is reasonably straightforward.'<sup>4</sup> However, establishing mechanisms to recognise the full range of work undertaken by students outside the classroom presents a significantly greater challenge.

## Defining employability skills

- 4.4 There are a range of skills and personal attributes which can contribute to an individual's employability. There has been much work, both in Australia and internationally, on defining employability skills (also referred to as generic skills, capabilities or key competencies)<sup>5</sup> and a number of competing definitions still exist.<sup>6</sup> Employability skills refer to broad generic work-related competences and personal attributes which are valued by employers.<sup>7</sup>
- 4.5 Table 4.1 outlines some of the key developments in Australia in defining the generic skills which contribute to an individual's employability. One such development was the report of the Australian Education Council's Review Committee (the Mayer Committee) in 1992 which proposed a set of key competencies (the Mayer Key Competencies). The Mayer Committee defined these key competencies as:

...essential for effective participation in the emerging patterns of work and work organisation. They focus on the capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an integrated way in work situations. Key competencies are generic in that they apply to work generally rather than being specific to work in particular occupations or

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3 R. Sweet, *The Job Ready Certificate, A Discussion Paper for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*, December 2008, p. 1.

4 Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 5.

5 Department of Education, Science and Training (2002), *Employability Skills for the Future*, p. 3

6 E. Smith and P. Comyn, *The development of employability skills in novice workers*, NCVER, Adelaide, 2003, p. 12.

7 R. Sweet, *The Job Ready Certificate, A Discussion Paper for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*, December 2008, pp. 24-25.

industries. This characteristic means that the key competencies are not only essential for participation in work, but are also essential for effective participation in further education and in adult life more generally.<sup>8</sup>

- 4.6 The 2002 report, *Employability Skills for the Future*, prepared for the then Department of Education, Science and Training by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia, adopted the following definition of employability skills:

Employability skills are defined 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'.<sup>9</sup>

- 4.7 The report also devised an 'Employability Skills Framework' which built on the Mayer Key Competencies and identified a range of employability skills and personal attributes.<sup>10</sup> The framework identified eight employability skills:

- **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.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (The Mayer Committee), *Key Competencies: Report of the Committee to advise the Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training on employment-related Key Competencies for postcompulsory education and training*, Sands and McDougal Pty. Ltd., Australia, 1992, p. 7.

9 Department of Education, Science and Training (2002), *Employability Skills for the Future*, p. 3.

10 Department of Education, Science and Training (2002), *Employability Skills for the Future*.

11 Department of Education, Science and Training (2002), *Employability Skills for the Future*, p. 7.

Table 4.1 Key Developments in Generic Skills in Australia

<b>Early initiatives</b>	
1985 Karmel Committee	The Committee chaired by Peter Karmel looks into the quality of education in Australia (Quality of Education Review Committee 1985). It highlights the importance of an internationally competitive labour force and stresses that outcomes of education should contribute to Australia's competitiveness. The Committee recommends that students in primary and secondary schooling be prepared for both education and employment through attaining skills such as accessing information, communication and working in groups.
1991 Finn Review	A review of young people's post-compulsory education and training in Australia by Finn (Australian Education Council Review Committee 1991) recognises the importance of young people developing key competencies. Due to changing technology and changing economic circumstances, the training system must emphasise both the acquisition of specific technical skills for the job and flexibility. This requires strong grounding in generic and transferable skills.
1992 Mayer Committee	At Finn's recommendation, the Mayer Committee (Australian Education Council, Mayer Committee 1992) develops a set of key competencies essential to preparing young people for employment. Seven competencies result from extensive consultation with the various education sectors and the business community.
<b>Industry-led initiatives</b>	
1999 Australian Industry Group	The Australian Industry Group commissions a report (Allen Consulting Group 1999) that draws attention to the importance of both 'hard' (notably information technology) skills and 'soft' skills (for example problem-solving, team skills, willingness to be adaptable) which need to be developed prior to recruitment.
2002 ACCI/BCA	The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) undertake a study of employers' views on generic skills. They produce an expanded list of skills as the basis for employability, which includes the various stages of working life. The report acknowledges that combinations of these skills lead to high job-related performance and their integration in real life should not be overlooked in how they are developed and assessed.
<b>Joint initiatives</b>	
2002- National Policy Development	The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) takes up the issue of employability skills development through the VET sector, including pilot testing various approaches to improving the identification of these skills in training packages. This is in response to consultations and research that indicate success in the teaching and learning of these skills depends on them being made more explicit. In July, ANTA begins to co-ordinate a collaborative cross-sectoral approach to employability skills as defined by Australian industry, to be appraised in 2004.

Source: NCVET, *Defining generic skills: At a glance*, Adelaide, NCVET, 2003.

4.8 The personal attributes that contribute to overall employability identified in the Employability Skills Framework are:

- Loyalty;
- Commitment;
- Honesty and integrity;
- Enthusiasm;
- Reliability;
- Personal presentation;
- Commonsense;
- Positive self-esteem;
- Sense of humour;
- Balanced attitude to work and home life;
- Ability to deal with pressure;
- Motivation; and
- Adaptability.<sup>12</sup>

4.9 Even where students are developing the types of skills identified in the Employability Skills Framework which enhance their appeal to future employers, it was evident that often employers and students themselves do not make this connection. This is especially the case where students' part-time jobs are not indicative of their future career aspirations. Mr Ian Palmer stated:

Some industries will argue that time in a retail shop has no credit off a construction trade, but I would argue that three months in retail gaining employability skills, is equal to 3 months in any trade gaining employability skills and should be recognised.<sup>13</sup>

4.10 Workplace Learning Illawarra highlighted the importance of students being able to identify their value to employers:

One of the things that my organisation recognises is that young people do not necessarily recognise the qualities and value they bring to the workplace. They do not necessarily understand what that value is and use that to their advantage so we need to get around that.<sup>14</sup>

4.11 A representative from DEEWR added:

...it is not just about being able to say a young person is job ready because they have ticked boxes; it is actually about getting them to

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12 Department of Education, Science and Training, *Employability Skills for the Future*, 2002, p. 46.

13 Mr Ian Palmer, *Submission no. 6*, p. 5.

14 Mr Greg McLean, *Workplace Learning Illawarra, Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 13.

recognise, 'My work at McDonalds actually might be useful and the skills I have gained are something an employer will want from me when I go to another workplace'. They do not see that link and that is a failure in a career development sense that they do not get the experience or the opportunity to do that.<sup>15</sup>

- 4.12 The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry described the value that employers place on students' ability to demonstrate employability skills developed through their part-time work:

We find that overwhelmingly most of the kids that have had part-time or casual jobs have developed employability skills, are able to demonstrate them and are eminently more employable after they finish school... We have found that when employers are looking to employ someone they look at their resume or CV, and first of all they will look at their educational achievement and how well they have done. However, they then turn to see if they have had a part-time or casual job, because that in itself tells a big story.<sup>16</sup>

## **The Job Ready Certificate**

- 4.13 The Australian Government has proposed to develop a Job Ready Certificate as a practical tool for recognising employability skills. The proposed Certificate has four key features which are outlined in a discussion paper commissioned by DEEWR. The Certificate will:

1. Assess the job readiness of **senior secondary students who are taking vocational education programmes and report on this at the end of Year 12, before they leave school and enter the workforce;**
2. Assess and report **personal attributes** that are important in work as well as agreed **key employability skills;**
3. Be assessed **in the workplace**, during work placements that are part of upper secondary vocational education programs; and
4. Be a **national stand alone certificate**, additional to existing upper secondary and vocational education qualifications.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Ms Renae Houston, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 May 2009, p. 13.

16 Ms Anne Griffiths, Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2009, p. 6.

17 R. Sweet, *The Job Ready Certificate, A Discussion Paper for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*, December 2008, p. 2.

- 4.14 DEEWR suggested that the Job Ready Certificate could potentially target the following student groups:
- students undertaking VET in Schools as a key part of the Trade Training Centre in Schools Program;
  - VET in Schools students from Year 9 to Year 12 undertaking on-the-job training;
  - secondary students who complete Year 12 but do not go on to post-school education or training; and
  - students undertaking community service as part of a gap year.<sup>18</sup>
- 4.15 The discussion paper acknowledged that through the Employability Skills Framework presented in *Employability Skills for the Future*, ‘broad agreement’ had been reached on what should be included in the term employability.
- 4.16 The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) supported the implementation of the Certificate ‘as part of a suite of measures’ to recognise the employability skills gained by VETiS students. The ACTU stated that it ‘looks forward to working with government to ensure that this certificate is robust, nationally recognised and portable.’<sup>19</sup>
- 4.17 The Australian Education Union noted that complex issues were involved in the consideration of the Job Ready Certificate or an equivalent:
- ...with respect to the job ready certificate or whatever it may manifest itself in terms of a title, while there is merit in obviously considering the further development of that, I make the point that it involves things that are not easy to deal with... Do you get a nine out of 10 for loyalty or an eight out of 10 for loyalty? What does that mean – loyalty to whom and under what terms? Do you get an A-E grade for team work? How do you define that? On punctuality, I thought ‘punctual’ was punctual. It is not a bit early; it is not a bit late. It is not being prepared to stay and work for nothing. These are very complex things...<sup>20</sup>
- 4.18 The introduction of a Job Ready Certificate presents some significant challenges. The Government has acknowledged that the reputation of the proposed Certificate’s assessment tool will depend upon employers being involved every step of the way. Submissions have emphasised the

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18 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, p. 58.

19 Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Submission no. 21*, p. 8.

20 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Australian Education Union, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, pp. 33-34.

need for the end product to be something that is going to be meaningful to both the student and employer. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, for example, expressed concern that the Certificate may be 'another thing that could be fraught with difficulty where the intention is very good'.<sup>21</sup>

- 4.19 DEEWR undertook a series of consultations on the Job Ready Certificate concurrent with the committee conducting this inquiry. DEEWR advised that a report on the consultations is being prepared, but had not been released as the committee's report was being prepared.

## Challenges in accrediting students' part-time work

- 4.20 Drawing on the Queensland experience, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) suggested that the shortcomings of previous attempts to accredit students' part-time work can be attributed to two dilemmas recognised worldwide in attempting to accredit skills acquired outside a formalised education and training setting. The dilemmas referred to by QCEC are:

1. on the one hand avoiding a mere paper chase to accumulate credits towards a qualification that is ultimately worthless because it has no substance, and
2. on the other hand forming a mechanism for accrediting that is ultimately fair, equitable, simple and achievable.<sup>22</sup>

- 4.21 While some employers might be capable of determining the skills a student displays in the workplace, the QCEC suggested that the impost of this task on employers and the difficulties in determining and reaching comparable standards 'adds to the complexity, the resourcing and the question of whether the outcome is worth the input'.<sup>23</sup> It was suggested that it would be difficult to achieve consistent judgments from employers as part of the accreditation process without training and understanding.<sup>24</sup> There are also instances where a student's direct supervisor or manager may be a student themselves. For example, Mr

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21 Ms Mary Hicks, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 32-33.

22 Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 2.

23 Ms Theresa Creagh, Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 6.

24 Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 3.



Jeffrey Beddows, a careers adviser at the Tasmanian Academy's Hellyer campus, stated:

It is amazing how many of our year 12 students, particularly in supermarkets, are now supervisors, particularly on the weekend.<sup>25</sup>

- 4.22 Some witnesses expressed concern about the additional reporting responsibilities and administrative tasks associated with a formal accreditation process. The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry acknowledged that these additional responsibilities 'would not be practicable or acceptable to industry or schools, particularly in times of general staff specific skills shortages and teacher shortages.'<sup>26</sup> Mrs Deanne Reynolds, a careers adviser at Canberra Girls' Grammar School, stated:

I would be loath to over-administer a lot of this and loath to see legislation come in that put too much emphasis and too much onus on students, schools and business owners. But it would be nice if there was a level playing field and some recognition of the wonderful work that these young people do.<sup>27</sup>

- 4.23 Inquiry participants were concerned about whether a certificate around employability skills would have sufficient credibility to hold weight within the employment market.<sup>28</sup> The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian expressed reservations about the possibility of a legislative requirement for employers to formally record the skills learnt by young people in the workplace. Ms Julie Harcourt stated:

...it does not immediately strike me as enormously beneficial to go down that legislative path to require employers to tick boxes to give accreditation or to recognise the skills, because I think you could have that devaluing... I am not sure that any employer would look at two people and go, 'You have got your boxes ticked and you haven't'.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Mr Jeffrey Beddows, Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer Campus), *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 32.

26 Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA, *Submission no. 30*, p. 6.

27 Mrs Deanne Reynolds, Canberra Girls' Grammar, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 August 2009, p. 28.

28 See, for example, Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network/ Peninsula Local Community Partnership, *Submission no. 43*. (insert more)

29 Ms Julie Harcourt, Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 April 2009, p. 13.

- 4.24 A representative of the Burnie Chamber of Commerce who also operates a newsagency, stated:

I find when I am recruiting that a good reference is far better than an institutional certificate saying that they have worked X amount of hours part time or regularly. If you get a reference that says that they have worked at McDonalds or KFC and they have lasted 12 months, it is always a very positive sign.<sup>30</sup>

- 4.25 Mr Ian Palmer, who chairs the NSW Local Community Partnership Network but submitted in a private capacity, stated that:

Logging employability skills is not as important as teaching them. Whatever system is developed it must not steal teaching time; promote cynicism in students that they are doing some sort of Mickey Mouse course; or disenfranchise employers from the skills training agenda.<sup>31</sup>

## Examples of efforts to recognise learning outcomes from part-time work

- 4.26 Across state and territory jurisdictions a range of processes for accreditation of skills acquired by young people in the workplace are already in place or have been tested.
- 4.27 Efforts to date to recognise learning outcomes from part-time work were described by VETnetwork Australia as having achieved only limited success.<sup>32</sup>
- 4.28 The Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network (FMP LLEN) and Peninsula Local Community Partnership acknowledged that school programs with processes for accrediting skills can 'vary from school to school both in quality and in the frequency/regularity with which they are used.'<sup>33</sup>
- 4.29 Some examples of tested approaches to recognising learning outcomes from part-time work include:
- encouraging employers to place students on school-based traineeships;

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30 Mr Alan Berechree, Burnie Chamber of Commerce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 April 2009, p. 6.

31 Mr Ian Palmer, *Submission no. 6*, p. 2.

32 VETnetwork Australia, *Submission no. 34*, p. 5.

33 Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network/Peninsula Local Community Partnership, *Submission no. 43*, p. 2.

- acknowledging part-time work on local certification and school references;
  - allowing part-time work to count as structured workplace learning (SWL); and
  - allowing part-time work to count as work experience for school certification purposes.<sup>34</sup>
- 4.30 An accreditation mechanism in Victoria exists through the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) which is an alternative option to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) for students interested in undertaking a vocationally oriented senior secondary education. While enrolled in VCAL Year 11 and 12 students can gain recognition and credit for their part-time work.<sup>35</sup>
- 4.31 VCAL has a compulsory work-related strand and schools are allocated resources to provide support to students.<sup>36</sup> The flexibility offered through VCAL also means that it is able to accommodate students' work into their daily timetable rather than as an additional obligation.<sup>37</sup> However, there is no arrangement for recognising the part-time work for those VCE students not undertaking VET-related subjects. The FMP LLEN and Peninsula Local Community Partnership explained:
- Credit is given almost exclusively against vocational education and training subjects in VCAL and to some extent, VET programs in the VCE. There is no evidence of a similar process being used with "academic" subjects in VCE nor of regular time allowances being made for young people who work part-time to sustain their participation in education.<sup>38</sup>
- 4.32 The discussion paper on the Job Ready Certificate points out that there are a number of school courses in other states and territories that make direct reference to employability skills, but 'in some cases relatively few students seem to enrol in them.'<sup>39</sup>
- 4.33 In Queensland, students can undertake a workplace or community learning project which is separate from any established school, training

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34 VETnetwork Australia, *Submission no. 34*, p. 5.

35 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission no. 53*, pp. 62-63.

36 Ms Jennifer Marks, Sandringham College, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 April 2009, p. 9.

37 Career Education Association of Victoria, *Submission no. 52*, p. 1.

38 Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network/Peninsula Local Community Partnership, *Submission no. 43*, p. 2.

39 R. Sweet, *The Job Ready Certificate, A Discussion Paper for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*, December 2008, p. 25.

or other educational program. Successful completion of the project contributes one credit towards the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). Despite this initiative, the QCEC stated that:

The reality is however that the process of applying for recognition of the learning project and fulfilling the paper work requirements is probably not within the capacities of many individual students. Neither are the incentives great.<sup>40</sup>

4.34 The Western Australian Department of Education and Training identified three existing workplace learning programs which provide opportunities for students to develop skills in the workplace and obtain credit towards their senior secondary certificate:

- Work Skills is a program endorsed by the WA Curriculum Council which enables students to demonstrate achievement of employability skills through paid or unpaid work.
- Workplace learning on-the-job training involves training and assessment in a real or simulated workplace, providing supervised learning activities contributing to the assessment of one or more units of competency from a national training package.
- Workplace learning employability skills provides opportunities for students to demonstrate at least 20 skills relevant to entry-level training, in a real workplace.<sup>41</sup>

4.35 Ms Valerie Gould from the Independent Schools Council of Australia commented on a previous process established by the WA Curriculum Council to recognise part-time work as part of structured workplace learning which contributed to secondary qualifications. She suggested the program was unsuccessful due to the demands placed on those involved and the lack of resources:

The main reason the first one fell over...is that for these students to be in part-time work, be it in retail or hospitality and fast food, the employer had to be willing to give up time to assess the skills and also to give them experience in a range of things. You could not just have them flipping hamburgers the entire year and hope they would pick up a range of skills. Often these students did not have the wherewithal to talk to their employer about doing an

40 Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission no. 18*, p. 2.

41 Curriculum Council of Western Australia, *Western Australian Certificate of Education Manual 2009*, <[http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/files/pdf/WACE\\_Manual\\_2009\\_Section5.pdf](http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/files/pdf/WACE_Manual_2009_Section5.pdf)>, accessed 21 September 2009.

assessment. Teachers were willing to support them but they got absolutely no time allocation to do that. If it is going to work it really comes down to this: just because they are doing part-time work and therefore are not in front of a classroom, they still need that support. That would be the same across all schools and all states. It is hugely time consuming, but I think we have to remember, particularly as to those students that might be the ones who do not graduate and do not have successful transitions, that students are going to cost us an awful lot more in the future if we do not get it right when they are in their early years. I hate to say it, but it still comes down to resourcing, as so many good things in schools do.<sup>42</sup>

- 4.36 The Tasmanian Government advised that some Tasmanian schools have adopted a “skills passport” or a “work placement diary” which allows a student and their employer to communicate those skills gained in the workplace to their school. However the program is not consistent, nor is it recognised state wide.<sup>43</sup>
- 4.37 The Tasmanian Government also drew attention to its *Guaranteeing Futures* initiative, through which schools are encouraged to recognise employability skills and to record and document these in a student’s pathway plan.<sup>44</sup>
- 4.38 The NSW Catholic Education Commission advised of funding obtained by the NSW Department of Education and Training through COAG to develop resources for schools to facilitate assessment based on recognition of student’s experiences in retail and hospitality workplaces (including voluntary work placement).<sup>45</sup>

## Recognising work outside formal VET arrangements

- 4.39 The range of examples described above illustrate that the success of programs to accredit part-time work is heavily dependent on the relationship between employer and school, and a strong commitment from school staff. Despite the difficulties in recognising work undertaken outside a formal school-based VET program, there was support for

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42 Ms Valerie Gould, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 February 2009, p. 18.

43 Tasmanian Government, *Submission no. 35*, p. 2.

44 Tasmanian Government, *Submission no. 35*, p. 2.

45 Catholic Education Commission NSW, *Submission no. 5*, p. 2.

investigating opportunities to record the full range of students' experiences. Mr Greg Mclean from Workplace Learning Illawarra stated:

I think there is probably an opportunity outside the school based apprenticeship and traineeship system, with recognition occurring to create some pathways in those industries that are likely to provide the career opportunities further down the track.<sup>46</sup>

- 4.40 If an accreditation process were to be introduced to recognise informal work as well as formal training, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) stated that it would not be feasible to expect that this process could be wholly managed by the small number of workplace trainers and assessors and/or schools.<sup>47</sup> This view was supported by the Australian College of Educators which highlighted the existing pressure on staff resources within schools:

There is some evidence that school managed VET completion rates are as low as 20 percent in some areas which does not augur well for work experiences that young people organise for themselves outside of school hours. It is the norm for VET teachers and careers advisers to say that there is insufficient time to do the task well and as early as possible to guide young people in the career and thus subject choices they are required to make.<sup>48</sup>

- 4.41 Mr Ian Palmer outlined some of the difficulties he has observed from previous efforts to recognise students' employability skills:

...attempts to have employers consistently and objectively comment on a student's employability skills have met with patchy success to date. In many cases the employer does not have the time, training and assessment skills, or inclination to do much more than a simple tick and flick check list. Over the past decade I have witnessed many well intentioned attempts to improve this without much success. Once a young worker has established a working relationship with the employer, the supervisors often struggle to offer a detached, objective view of the student's skills due to the fear of de-motivating the "worker". Perhaps this is just human nature, but either way it makes it very hard to get effective feedback from employers who seem to default to brief glib statements, or politely neutral statements. It's a brave employer indeed who offers constructive feedback that risks hurting a

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46 Mr Greg McLean, Workplace Learning Illawarra, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 April 2009, p. 13.

47 Australian Council for Private Education and Training, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

48 Australian College of Educators, *Submission no. 49*, p. 3.

students feelings or creating public relations problem for the business. These real world factors must be taken into account when designing any system or it will fail.<sup>49</sup>

- 4.42 There was a broad range of suggestions from submitters about what the process for recognising and accrediting students' acquired employability should entail. ACPET acknowledged that it is the evidence gathering process which is the most time consuming, and therefore suggested:

...an approach where teams of people from workplaces and schools can be trained in the required skills so that they can be part of a team approach to gathering evidence and determining competency of the individual.<sup>50</sup>

- 4.43 The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry advocated a process whereby the onus for maintaining paperwork and recording tasks undertaken while at work was placed on the students themselves, who would be required to accurately present this information on their resumes.<sup>51</sup> It was acknowledged that the issue with any form of self-assessment process would be encouraging student participation in the exercise.<sup>52</sup>

- 4.44 The Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council (GRVEC) suggested that schools should maintain an electronic record of students' work (both paid and unpaid) for students who elect to provide this information.<sup>53</sup> GRVEC supported the development of a national method of recording skills and attributes based on the Employability Skills Framework whereby employers would record attainment of skills in a generic logbook available to all students and schools would record this information.<sup>54</sup>

- 4.45 Gundagai High School suggested a system whereby a student's employability skills would be recorded as a supplement to their formal certificate on completing high school:

Where school students have been in regular part-time employment for, say, one year, their employers should sign off on an agreed (or system-devised) list of employability skills. This list could be added to the formal certification of student achievement at the

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49 Mr Ian Palmer, *Submission no. 6*, p. 1.

50 Australian Council for Private Education and Training, *Submission no. 16*, p. 4.

51 Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA, *Submission no. 30*, p. 7.

52 Mr Ian Palmer, *Submission no. 6*, p. 3.

53 Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council, *Submission no. 10*, p. 3.

54 Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council, *Submission no. 10*, p. 4.

completion of their secondary education. Recognition of regular part-time work over a period of two years would compliment a student's school based studies.<sup>55</sup>

## Committee comment

- 4.46 Although they may not recognise it, students develop generic skills through their life experiences outside school which contribute to their employability, regardless of whether those experiences are directly related to their future career aspirations. Recognising and accrediting these employability and career development skills continues to present a significant challenge.
- 4.47 There are a range of examples of existing programs or potential programs in place across jurisdictions, predominantly catering to vocationally oriented students, some of which have been identified in this chapter. However, often schools report that they are not adequately resourced to deliver programs effectively. The success of these programs has thus been highly variable.
- 4.48 The proposed Job Ready Certificate seeks to assess the job readiness of students participating in secondary school vocational education programs.<sup>56</sup> However, there are a large number of students acquiring a range of employability skills through their experiences beyond the classroom which are not linked to a formal vocational education program. These experiences may include students' paid part-time jobs, primarily in the retail or fast-food and hospitality sectors, or it may be through community activities or volunteer work, including sporting and recreational activities. It is imperative that these students also have an opportunity to have formal recognition of the employability skills they develop in these settings.
- 4.49 Therefore, in addition to the development of the Job Ready Certificate, the Government is encouraged to examine opportunities to recognise the generic skills developed by students through the full gamut of activities they may undertake outside school. Such an undertaking will present complexities in documenting and evaluating the employability skills acquired by students in the workplace equitably as work is not linked to

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55 Gundagai High School, *Submission no. 56*, p. 6.

56 R. Sweet, *The Job Ready Certificate, A Discussion Paper for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*, December 2008, p. 16.



a formal VET qualification. However, evidence received throughout consultations with students suggests that they would like to have this information recorded. Such an initiative would provide opportunities for students to reflect on the skills they are developing through their various activities, and to identify skills that complement their classroom learning and are valued by employers.

- 4.50 Extending opportunities to document employability skills more broadly will also allow those who cannot access paid part-time for various reasons, such as remoteness, the chance to record evidence of where they are acquiring these same skills through other means.
- 4.51 If students were presented with the option to voluntarily register their work arrangements with their school, as per the suggestion from the Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council, this would contribute an awareness of students' work-related activities to teachers. A common message conveyed during the inquiry was that teachers lack knowledge about the part-time work arrangements of their students.
- 4.52 Any initiative to recognise the employability skills acquired through part-time work or extracurricular activity should not create an administrative burden for employers. Given the large proportion of students to whom a skills passport may be desirable, it is not feasible to expect that employers would manage this process without most of the responsibility resting with students to document their activities.
- 4.53 The committee envisages a national generic skills passport which is easily accessible to students both online and through their schools. This passport would consist of a template which contains a series of skill recognition proformas based around the Employability Skills Framework, where students can identify where they have demonstrated having acquired a particular skill. Responsibility for developing and maintaining the record would rest with the student, and the passport would be validated by employers, supervisors or team leaders.
- 4.54 There is likely to be scepticism as to how much weight a generic skills passport will hold with employers if it is not validated through accredited assessors. However, the proposed device offers a mechanism which would be advantageous to students and employers without creating an administrative burden or an onerous assessment and reporting process.

**Recommendation 2**

- 4.55 That the Australian Government develop and implement a national generic skills passport for secondary students to document the employability skills they develop through activities undertaken outside school. These activities should encompass paid and unpaid work (including community/volunteer activities and work for the family business), sporting and recreational activities and other life experiences.

**Recommendation 3**

- 4.56 That the Australian Government, in consultation with stakeholders, develop a Code of Practice for employers, supervisors, and workplace mentors to outline their responsibilities in assisting students to document their acquired employability skills.