



## **Partnering to build employability skills and communicative competence in a Master of Engineering subject**

### **Key Words**

Communicative competence, employability skills, project reports, engineering curricula,

### **Abstract**

Internationally, the literature suggests that 'soft skills' need to be embedded into engineering curricula. 'Soft' or professional skills that include professional communication, employability skills, and the ability to work in groups have been identified in the emerging literature on engineering education as some of the competencies required for engineers in the 21st century workplace. In response to this need identified by industry, engineering courses in Australian universities now include communication as a competency that requires explicit development over the course of a degree to ensure graduates are ready for the workplace. The proposed paper reports on a subject designed to develop these professional skills within the Master of Engineering curriculum. From student evaluations undertaken in the past, it appears that the subject is challenging for the entirely international cohort who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and may not have any prior workplace experience. The paper will present an overview of the subject and discuss the evolving partnership between two ALL practitioners, our colleagues in Engineering and the Graduate Career Development Employability unit to deliver a workplace communication subject to postgraduate engineering students. We invite our AALL colleagues to a reflection on this partnership. Here are some preliminary details: The subject is a core requirement for engineering students within the Electrical, Computer and Information Technology disciplines with varying degrees of English language proficiency. It aims at developing students' cultural and linguistic competence and confidence in participating in formal, global workplaces. To this end, in terms of teaching, the subject is organised into two streams: the first, facilitated by ALL staff, focusses on the development of report writing, presentation, and team communication and team writing skills. The second, facilitated by careers teaching staff, focuses on career development and learning, and the development of graduate employability and work ready skills. The Engineering faculty also plays a vital role. Thirty percent of the assessment loading is a response to an authentic engineering workplace scenario and involves reporting on a scoping project undertaken in teams. Familiarising students with this scenario forms the basis of the report writing sessions, oral presentation skills development, and research and argumentation ability. In order to produce the scoping report, the teams present their research to the class in groups and finally submit a written report. This is a steep learning curve for many students as it entails working in groups, team writing and a group presentation. As the language and communication experts in the partnership, the ALL practitioners play a key role across the subject by scaffolding the students' communication skills development in their Engineering tasks as well as their Career Development tasks. Formative assessment practices and detailed individual linguistic feedback that feeds forward into the students' communication practices in both streams is the crucial contribution of ALL practitioners. We also play a vital role in instigating a review of components in the subject.