SKILLSIQ

CAPABLE PEOPLE MAKE CLEVER BUSINESS

Managing Aggressive or Abusive Customers

Consultation Guide

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Introduction

SkillsIQ is a not-for-profit Skills Service Organisation (SSO) supporting industry in developing standards to equip the people-facing workforce with the right skills for jobs now and into the future. SkillsIQ is funded by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to support the Industry Reference Committees (IRCs) responsible for the development and maintenance of training packages in the following sectors:

- Community Services
- Health
- Local Government
- Public Sector
- Floristry
- Hairdressing and Beauty Services
- Funeral Services
- Retail Services
- Sport, Fitness and Recreation
- Tourism, Travel and Hospitality.

IRCs drive the process of training package development and are made up of people with experience, skills and knowledge of their particular industry sector. IRCs are responsible for the provision of strategic input and advice that represents the needs of their workforce and ensuring training package products reflect these needs.

Project Background

AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee

In April 2020, the AISC formed an Emergency Response Sub-Committee (the AISC Sub-Committee) to enable fast tracked adjustments and training package products specifically to respond to areas of critical workforce and skills needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scope of the sub-committee was extended by Skills Ministers on 15 May 2020 to enable it to continue its role in fast tracking national training products to meet longer term critical skills needs beyond the COVID-19 health crisis period to support economic recovery.

The sub-committee agreed at its meeting on 2 July 2020 to focus its efforts on supporting achievement of the following objectives:

- supporting displaced workers and those at risk of displacement to urgently obtain the necessary skills to take advantage of opportunities that exist in the labour market, either through existing training products or the rapid creation of new products where required
- supporting urgent and unmet skills needs of businesses as they seek to adjust to the significantly altered economic environment and transition to new opportunities, particularly in industries undergoing significant structural change as a result of COVID-19.

The sub-committee also agreed these objectives should be achieved through the creation of short courses or skill sets wherever possible.

In July 2020 the Wholesale and Retail IRC put forward a proposal to develop a new Unit of Competency to equip customer-facing workers, particularly in the retail sector, with the skills and knowledge to manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers. This proposal was approved by the AISC Sub-Committee to be developed as a cross-sectoral Unit and Skill Set and is now being progressed by the IRC.

Managing disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many consumers have engaged in 'panic buying' creating sudden and unexpected demand for a number of products in supermarkets, pharmacies and other retail outlets. This demand has made it difficult for retailers to maintain stock levels in stores, and has led to increased instances of inappropriate and potentially aggressive behaviour from customers.[1]

As recently as April 2020, the Public Health Act 2010 was amended to include penalties for people who intentionally spit at or cough on a worker in a way that would be likely to cause fear about the spread of COVID-19. The fact that this measure has been required is an indication of the severity of the risk to customer-facing workers.

Icare has recently released an evaluation of the pilot they conducted of their *Respect and Resilience Program*, which sought to address the issue of customer misbehaviour in the retail and fast food sectors. They defined customer misbehaviour as encompassing the spectrum of negative acts perpetrated by customers and directed at service employees, ranging from incivility, to verbal abuse, and escalation through to physical aggression and violence. It can be defined as unacceptable, often hostile, behaviour exhibited by customers of an organisation towards an employee or employees that creates an offensive, intimidating, or frightening situation. It can affect a worker's physical, psychological and social health and can have severe consequences for the business – poor workplace morale, higher levels of absenteeism, sick leave and staff turnover, and escalating workers compensation and other insurance claims. The pilot saw positive outcomes with a reported 47.75% reduction in the incidence of customer misbehaviour. [2]

While there exists a range of units of competency that cover areas such as communication and conflict management skills, there is not currently any national training package product that covers the issue of aggressive customers and the mental health and wellbeing of customer-facing frontline workers.

The proposed unit of competency, while having cross-sectoral applicability, will be of particular relevance for workers in the retail sector, particularly young people and female workers, as these cohorts are heavily represented in the frontline retail sector. For example, 68% of sales assistants are female and the average age is 26 years. 75% of checkout operators and office cashiers are female and the average age is 21 years. 90% of pharmacy sales assistants are female and the average age is 26 years.[3]

Reports from retail employers have consistently described a significant escalation in customer aggression and abuse particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with one large retailer citing an increase of 577% in aggressive incidents against staff over this period. There are also increased reports of crime against retailers and this is anticipated to continue if not increase should subsequent waves of the pandemic hit and also once the current government support payments reduce or cease in the coming months.

The proposed unit is able to be contextualised for a range of other customer-facing sectors and job roles. These front-line workers are often responsible for assisting in the implementation of COVID-19 safety measures and can face hostility and aggression from customers frustrated with the new requirements for things such as social distancing, purchase limits on products, limits on number of

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[1] ***Source:*** https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/safe-workplaces/employers/managing-violence-and-aggression - accessed 13 July 2020

[2] Bradley, G., Davis, M., Ferguson, S., Buys, N., & Ellery, A. (2019). *Respect & Resilience: Development, Implementation and Program Evaluation.* Southport, Queensland: Griffith University.

[3] ***Source:*** *Department of Education, Skills and Employment – Job Outlook,* various ANZSCO job codes, accessed June 2020

people in customer service spaces and delays encountered when cleaning or sanitising premises between customers.

The IRC notes that it is critical that no frontline customer service worker puts their health (physical or mental/emotional) at risk while providing services to other members of the community. The safety of these workers is a priority and it is critical that they are supported with the appropriate skills to deal with customer abuse and aggression and its impacts on their own health and wellbeing.

The proposed Unit of Competency will contain information on strategies to deal with the customer, along with mental health and wellbeing of the worker and environmental means to prevent or assist in dealing with volatile customer situations.

The proposed unit of competency looks to cover key topic areas including:

- Recognising disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customer behaviour and its impact
- Identifying when customer behaviour is escalating to abuse or aggression
- Causes of customer abuse and aggression and the triggers
- Strategies for defusing and de-escalating abusive and aggressive customer behaviour
- Resilience and coping strategies for workers who encounter customer abuse and aggression

The resulting training should be able to be delivered online to existing and new workers, both as a standalone Skill Set or short course and within relevant qualifications.

Proposed Training Package Products

New Unit of Competency

Unit Code	Unit Title	Prerequisite(s)
SIRXCEG008	Manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers	Nil

New Skill Set

SIRSS00022 – Manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers		
Unit Code	**Unit Name**	**Prerequisites**
SIRXCEG008	Manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers	Nil

Contextualisation Guides

Contextualisation guides which are to be made available on the AISC website are proposed for the following sectors:

- Retail
- Community Pharmacy
- Hair & Beauty
- Hospitality
- Aged Care
- Local Government
- Public Transport
- Transport & Logistics

A template is available on the SkillsIQ Online Feedback Forum for stakeholders in the above industry sectors to provide additional information that will assist Registered Training Providers in contextualising the Unit of Competency for delivery in those sectors.

We encourage stakeholders to download the template and complete and email to feedback@skillsiq.com.au so that it can be considered for inclusion in the contextualisation guides.

Questions for consideration

The following series of questions have been developed to guide feedback for the Consultation Draft of the draft Unit of Competency and Skill Set.

Unit of Competency

- Does the Title reflect the skill being described? Could any be changed to better indicate what the Unit covers?
- Does the Application Statement provide a clear and accurate description of the skill being described?
- Are there any essential prerequisites that should be nominated?

Elements and Performance Criteria

- Do the Elements and Performance Criteria accurately describe the skills required to manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers? If not, what could be added?
- Do the Performance Criteria adequately describe the required proficiency?
- Can the Performance Criteria readily be contextualised for cross-sectoral use?

Performance Evidence

- Would the types of evidence prove that a person is competent in all the Unit outcomes, including Performance Criteria, Foundation Skills and Knowledge?
- Is the suggested volume (sufficiency) of evidence appropriate? Too little, too much?
- Are the statements clear? Would assessors understand exactly what they must do?

Knowledge Evidence

- Is the Knowledge Evidence specific enough to provide the individual with the knowledge to perform the tasks described in the Performance Criteria?
- Is there anything which should be added or deleted?
- What is the breadth and depth of knowledge required? Is this described well enough to assist assessors in understanding the scope?

Assessment Conditions

- Are the nominated environments appropriate?
- Are the statements clear? Would assessors understand what they must provide for assessment?

Skill Set

- Does the title reflect the set of skills being described? Could it be changed to better indicate what the Skill Set covers?
- Does the description provide a clear and accurate description of the aim of the Skill Set?
- Is the target group clearly described?

Consultation Timelines

National consultation for the proposed new Unit of Competency and Skill Set is open from **27 August – 4 September 2020**. During this period input will be sought on the draft Unit and Skill Set and their appropriateness in enabling the target group to achieve the stated aims, as outlined above.

SkillsIQ will be distributing the draft Training Package Products to key industry stakeholders and VET professionals, in order to ensure the opportunity for broad national feedback. State and Territory Training Authorities will also be provided with the opportunity to make comment during this period.

Further details of the project are posted on the SkillsIQ website here:

https://www.skillsiq.com.au/CurrentProjectsandCaseStudies/Managingaggressivecustomers

Feedback can be provided **online** via the SkillsIQ Feedback Forum, accessed at:

https://www.skillsiq.com.au/FeedbackForum/TrainingPackages1/SIRRetailServices/Managingaggressivecustomersfeedback

When accessing the Feedback Forum, please first refer to the "How To" guide located on the page. It will provide directions for leaving and submitting comments.

Feedback on the Unit and Skill Set can also be emailed directly to feedback@skillsiq.com.au

If you are providing feedback on the Contextualisation Guide template, please download the template and email to feedback@skillsiq.com.au

Following the close of the consultation period, all feedback received will be collated and evaluated by the IRC to develop the final draft for submission and consideration by the AISC Emergency Response Sub-Committee.

Contact details

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Appendix A: Training Package Unit of Competency Terminology Guide

Units of Competency specify the skills and knowledge a learner needs in order to complete a work task. Each Unit of Competency has associated Assessment Requirements, which detail what a learner must demonstrate and know in order to be deemed competent, along with any special conditions which apply to the assessment of competency.

UNIT CODE	Unique code which identifies the Unit of Competency
UNIT TITLE	The Unit Title is a brief statement of the outcome of the Unit of Competency, i.e. what is the task that learners will be able to complete once they are deemed competent
APPLICATION	The application summarises: • the content of the Unit of Competency and the skill area it addresses • any relationship with other Units of Competency • any licensing requirements or relevant legislation • the Unit of Competency's scope, purpose and operation in different contexts - for example, by showing how it applies in the workplace.
PREREQUISITE UNIT	Prerequisites are other Units of Competency or in some cases licences, etc. that a learner must complete before undertaking this Unit of Competency. This may be in order to provide underpinning skills or knowledge that is essential for a learner to undertake this Unit.
ELEMENTS	The Elements are the basic themes of the Unit of Competency. They describe the significant functions that form part of the work task that the Unit of Competency covers.
PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	The Performance Criteria specify the required steps that enable the learner to undertake the work task.
Assessment Requirements	
PERFORMANCE EVIDENCE	Identifies what a learner must demonstrate in order to be deemed competent at the work task.
KNOWLEDGE EVIDENCE	Identifies what a learner needs to know to perform the work task effectively.

ASSESSMENT CONDITIONS	Assessment Conditions provide the context for the Unit of Competency, describing essential operating conditions that must be present for assessment, depending on the work situation, needs of the candidate, accessibility of the items required, and local industry and regional contexts. They may specify any of the following: • The conditions under which competency must be assessed including variables such as the assessment environment or necessary equipment or tools • Whether or not the Unit must be assessed in the workplace or may also be assessed via simulation • Resource implications, for example access to particular equipment, infrastructure or situations • Any required characteristics of the assessor, e.g. whether the assessor must hold a higher qualification in that field, etc.