

The Importance of Cultural Competence in Hospitality – Complete Hospitality Training

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Details:

Cultural competence is a step beyond cultural awareness. Awareness is noticing that your assumptions about service are learned rather than universal. See understanding cultural awareness . Competence is being able to act on that consistently, and in a workplace it comes with actual obligations rather than only good intentions.

The obligations, which are the part usually left out

If you employ people. Discrimination on the basis of race, national origin and religion is unlawful in Australian workplaces. That covers hiring, rostering, promotion and the treatment staff receive from each other and from customers. A venue that tolerates a customer abusing a staff member on those grounds has a work health and safety problem as well as a discrimination one. Occupational violence is a foreseeable hospitality hazard and the business owes a primary duty of care.

If you train people. Registered training organisations operate under the 2025 Outcome Standards , where Standard 2.5, Diversity and inclusion , requires the learning environment to promote and support the diversity of the student cohort. That is a regulated obligation, not a values statement. Standard 2.4 separately requires reasonable adjustments for students with disability, and requires that students be supported to disclose if they wish to. The choice stays with the student.

If you teach overseas students. We are CRICOS-registered (04242E), so National Code 2018 Standard 6 applies: the provider must support the student in adjusting to study and life in Australia, including access to an age and culturally appropriate orientation program . The words "culturally appropriate" are in the standard itself.

Three other parts of Standard 6 bear directly on cultural competence in practice:

| Standard | What it requires | | --- | --- | | 6.1.9 | Information on, or access to, services for information on the student's employment rights and conditions and how to resolve workplace issues , such as through the Fair Work Ombudsman | | 6.2 | Relevant information or appropriate referrals at no additional cost where a student requests assistance on employment rights and related services | | 6.7 | Staff who interact directly with overseas students must understand the provider's ESOS obligations and the potential implications for students of the provider exercising them |

Standard 6.1.9 is the one that recognises the actual risk. An international student who does not know what an award is, or that a payslip is an entitlement, is more exposed than a local worker with the same job. Naming the Fair Work Ombudsman is the competent act, not reassurance.

See student support sessions and policies .

The three duties the training package makes explicit

The core unit SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity , core in both Certificate III in Hospitality qualifications, converts the general law into three stated duties. Its knowledge requirements include knowing the requirements under State, territory and Commonwealth anti-discrimination law to:

Treat customers and colleagues fairly and equitably

Not discriminate, show partiality or grant special favours based on social and cultural attributes

Not threaten, humiliate or intimidate people because of their social or cultural attributes

The second duty is the one that catches well-meaning operators. Partiality and special favours are named failures, on the same footing as withholding service. Favouring a group is not the opposite of discriminating against one; it is the same defect.

The unit also requires knowledge of different types of disability and their implications for the workplace, the key principles of fairness and equity, and the sources of assistance available.

What the unit actually requires you to know, and to do

The three duties above are the legal layer. The rest of SITXCOM007 is more concrete than most cultural competence training, and it is worth reading in full because it converts "be sensitive" into a checkable list.

The protocols it expects you to know

Two knowledge requirements name specific bodies of knowledge:

The cultural and religious protocols of the major social and cultural groups in Australian society, including Australian Indigenous peoples

The cultural and religious protocols of the main inbound tourist markets to Australia

Those are two different lists, and a venue that has only thought about one of them has done half the work. The first is about the community the venue sits in and the people who work in it; the second is about who walks through the door on a tour. A dietary observance, a greeting convention, a norm about eye contact or about who orders for a table sit in one list or the other, and the unit expects a competent worker to know both rather than to improvise.

The explicit inclusion of Australian Indigenous peoples in that first list is worth naming, because it is easy to read "cultural diversity" in hospitality as being about international visitors only. The unit does not allow that reading.

What the unit requires you to do about a language barrier

Rather than leaving this as goodwill, the unit names the techniques it expects:

| Technique | | --- | | Communicating through gestures and signs | | Using simple words in English, or in the other person's language | | Giving simple directions and instructions | | Accessing interpreter services | | Using assistive technology for customers with particular communication needs |

The useful thing about that list is that four of the five cost nothing and need no arrangement. Most language-barrier failures in hospitality are not failures of resource; they are a staff member freezing because nobody told them that gestures and simple words are an acceptable professional response rather than a sign of incompetence.

The five sources of assistance it names

The unit expects a worker to know where help comes from, and it lists five: government agencies, diplomatic services, disability advocacy groups, interpreter services and local cultural organisations. Diplomatic services is the one nobody expects, and it is there for a reason — a distressed international visitor with a lost passport or a family emergency is a situation a front desk will eventually meet. A venue that has never identified which of those five it would actually call has not finished the work.

What the unit requires you to do when something goes wrong

The second element is about cross-cultural misunderstanding, and its criteria are sequenced:

Identify social and cultural issues that may cause conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace

Address difficulties proactively and seek assistance from others where necessary

Consider social and cultural differences when difficulties or misunderstandings occur

Make efforts to resolve the misunderstanding, taking cultural considerations into account

Escalate problems to a supervisor or manager where they remain unresolved

The third of those is the one that changes behaviour on a floor: the requirement is to consider whether a cultural difference is in play before concluding that a person was being difficult. That is a diagnostic step, and skipping it is how a misunderstanding becomes an incident.

How much of it is assessed, and where

The performance evidence sets a volume, which is the part in-house cultural training almost never does. A candidate must demonstrate verbal and non-verbal communication with at least three different colleagues or customers, including representatives of different social groups and different cultural groups, must make attempts to overcome language barriers, must identify when assistance is required and seek it through appropriate channels, and must interact respectfully and sensitively throughout.

The assessment conditions are equally specific. Skills must be demonstrated in an operational business environment with diverse customers and colleagues, and assessment must give access to:

Current organisational anti-discrimination policies

Plain English documents from government regulators on anti-discrimination law

Customers and colleagues from diverse social and cultural groups for meaningful interaction

Role-play or simulated activities in an industry environment, where real interaction is not available

The first item is a quiet test of the employer rather than the learner. A venue that cannot produce a current anti-discrimination policy cannot host this assessment, and a manager who has never read one cannot brief a team against it.

The unit applies across all tourism, travel, hospitality and event sectors, to all personnel at all levels, using these skills during daily workplace activities. It is current on our scope as RTO 3722 at extent "Deliver and assess" to 30 June 2032.

The neighbouring unit for formal protocol

Where the requirement is formal rather than interpersonal — titles, forms of address, order of precedence at a function — the register has a separate unit, SITXCOM009 Address protocol requirements, also current on our scope to 30 June 2032. Its subject matter is not covered by SITXCOM007, so a venue doing civic, diplomatic or ceremonial functions is looking at two units rather than one. Ask us what is currently available, since it is not an advertised course.

Inclusion is a core unit in the business qualifications too

This is worth knowing if you are training a team rather than a floor. BSBTWK301 Use inclusive work practices is one of the six core units of BSB30120 Certificate III in Business, a 13-unit qualification we deliver. It sits alongside BSBPEF201 Support personal wellbeing in the workplace and the communication unit BSBXCM301.

So inclusion is not an elective bolt-on in that qualification. It is one of the six things everyone completing it is assessed on. See Certificate III in Business.

Our scope of registration carries 17 current qualifications and 81 current skill sets , built from 579 current units , every component at the extent "Deliver and assess", and it reaches well beyond hospitality into business and cyber, community services, health and infection control, retail, creative arts and horticulture. The community services and health qualifications on that scope, including CHC33021 Certificate III in Individual Support , CHC43015 Certificate IV in Ageing Support and CHC43415 Certificate IV in Leisure and Health , carry their own culturally-safe-practice expectations, which is worth knowing if your venue also delivers catering into aged care or disability settings.

At Diploma level the packaging rules of SIT50422 Diploma of Hospitality Management allow 4 of its 17 electives to be drawn from Group C, Group D, elsewhere in SIT, or any other currently endorsed training package or accredited course , which is the mechanism by which a business-package diversity and inclusion unit can be included in a hospitality diploma where the job outcome supports it. Elective choice has to be guided by the job outcome sought, local industry requirements and complexity appropriate to the AQF level, so it is a deliberate decision rather than a default. Ask us which specific units are currently available on scope.

What competence looks like in practice

Awareness tells you people differ. Competence is the operational habit:

Systems rather than instincts. Allergen and dietary handling should not depend on which staff member is on. Write it down.

Asking as standard practice , not as an exception made for particular guests.

Interpreting behaviour generously. Silence is not satisfaction; directness is not rudeness. SITXCOM007 criterion 2.3 requires social and cultural differences to be considered when difficulties or misunderstandings occur , before anyone concludes a person was being difficult.

Backing staff. A team that knows the venue will support them when a customer crosses a line behaves very differently from one that does not.

Recruiting and rostering fairly , and noticing if the same people always get the worst shifts.

Knowing the five sources of assistance by name and having the numbers somewhere findable, rather than discovering the need mid-shift.

That rostering point has a competency attached. SITXHRM008 Roster staff , core in the Certificate IV in Hospitality and the Diploma of Hospitality Management, requires rosters to take account of social and cultural considerations and of broader organisational policies including family-friendly initiatives and leave for carers, compassion, illness, study, maternity and paternity, and long service. It also requires the rosterer to consult colleagues to obtain their input and to monitor roster effectiveness in consultation with colleagues . A roster that quietly allocates the unpopular shifts to the same group is a rostering competency failure before it is anything else.

On hiring and induction, see common mistakes employers make when hiring and creating a successful onboarding program .

Backing staff: the WHS obligation, and it differs by state

If a customer abuses a staff member on racial, national or religious grounds, that is a work health and safety matter with a documented procedure behind it, not a service judgement.

The relevant unit is SIRXCEG008 Manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers , an elective in SIT30722. Element 3 requires the worker to identify customers who should be refused service or ejected and action that professionally, to act promptly on situations posing a threat to the safety of self, others or property , and to terminate the conversation or encounter if resolution is not possible . Element 5 then requires de-briefing with a supervisor after the incident and recognising signs of mental

and emotional impact that require professional counselling , with support sought accordingly. Backing staff is not a gesture; it is two assessed elements.

There is also a conflict unit that names cultural misunderstanding directly. SITXCOM010 Manage conflict , core in the Certificate IV and the Diploma, requires a candidate to resolve escalated complaints or disputes with customers in relation to at least three of eight named matters , and the first of those eight is cultural misunderstanding . The others are incorrect pricing, delays or errors, misunderstanding of a customer request or a communication barrier, a person who appears violent or threatening, a product or service fault, refused entry or ejection, and a situation where someone has been or may be hurt. Two of the eight are therefore communication or cultural matters, which is a reasonable indication of how often they arrive.

The supervisory WHS unit, SITXWHS007 Implement and monitor work health and safety practices , core in the Certificate IV and the Diploma, requires coordinating scheduled hazard identification activities, reacting to hazards reported by other workers, coordinating and participating in risk assessments, monitoring the effectiveness of controls and promptly identifying inadequacies , coordinating the resulting training, and maintaining records accurately and legibly. Its floor-level counterpart, SITXWHS005 Participate in safe work practices , core in both Certificate III qualifications and applying to all personnel at all levels , requires prompt reporting of unsafe work practices, issues and breaches and accurate completion of emergency incident reports.

There is a jurisdictional wrinkle that multi-state operators should know about, because it is not symmetrical:

| | Victoria | New South Wales | | --- | --- | --- | | Statute | Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 | Work Health and Safety Act 2011 | | Coordination duty | s 35A , inserted in 2021, requires each person with a duty in relation to the same worker to consult, co-operate and co-ordinate. Confined to labour hire arrangements , with a labour hire provider deemed an employer under s 5A | s 46 , a general duty to consult, co-operate and co-ordinate whenever more than one person has a duty in relation to the same matter , so far as is reasonably practicable | | Breadth | Labour-hire specific. Victoria has no general coordination duty between all duty holders | Universal across all shared-duty scenarios |

The practical consequence: if a placement or engagement does not qualify as labour hire under s 5A, no statutory duty compels the parties to coordinate in Victoria , although coordination remains the practical means of discharging their other duties. New South Wales imposes it either way. The sensible approach for anyone operating across both is to build coordination procedures to the New South Wales standard nationally , because a protocol satisfying s 46 will also satisfy Victoria's s 35A where labour hire is involved.

See dealing with difficult guests and health and safety best practice in hospitality .

Why hospitality specifically

Australian hospitality is among the most culturally mixed sectors in the country on both sides of the counter. A venue's staff and its customers frequently do not share a first language, a dining convention or an assumption about service.

That is an operating condition rather than a problem to be solved, and it is why cultural competence sits closer to core skill than to soft skill in this industry. The training package agrees: SITXCOM007 is core, not elective, and it applies to all personnel at all levels .

Where it sits in training

| Qualification | Where cultural and inclusion content sits | | --- | --- | | SIT30622 Certificate III in Hospitality | SITXCOM007 core , with SITXCCS014 and SITXWHS005 also core | | SIT30722 Certificate III in Hospitality (Restaurant Front of House) | SITXCOM007 core ; SIRXCEG008 available as an elective | | SIT40422 Certificate IV in Hospitality | SITXCOM010 Manage conflict , SITXHRM008

Roster staff , SITXHRM009 Lead and manage people and SITXWHS007 all core. Three of the nine core units are HR units | | BSB30120 Certificate III in Business | BSBTWK301 Use inclusive work practices is core , one of six core units in 13 | | SIT50422 Diploma of Hospitality Management | SITXCCS016, SITXCOM010, SITXGLC002 Identify and manage legal risks and comply with law, SITXHRM008 and SITXHRM009 all core |

Short of a full qualification, our scope also carries skill sets directly relevant here, and it is worth seeing what is inside them:

| Skill set | Units it contains | | --- | --- | | SITSS00078 Customer Service | SITXCCS014 Provide service to customers; SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity | | SITSS00091 Service for International Visitors | SITXCCS014 ; SITXCOM007 ; plus SITXLAN007 Conduct basic oral communication in a language other than English | | SITSS00077 Customer Service Management | SITXCCS015 ; SITXCCS016 ; SITXCOM010 Manage conflict | | SITSS00087 Mentoring and Supervision | Aimed at the supervisory layer |

That comparison is the useful part. SITSS00091 is SITSS00078 plus a language unit , and it is aimed specifically at frontline personnel dealing with visitors from international markets daily. If inbound visitors are a real share of your trade, the third unit is the difference between the two, and SITXLAN007 is current on our scope at extent "Deliver and assess". SITSS00077 shares no units with the other two, because it is the supervisory layer rather than a bigger version of the frontline one.

For team training rather than individual enrolment, see work with us , and confirm current fees and intakes with us directly.

About us

We are Complete Hospitality Training , RTO 3722, CRICOS 04242E. Level 3, 28 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne VIC 3000, and 410 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010. Contact melbourne@cht.edu.au or +61 3 9654 1554 .

We link to the relevant course and regulatory sources in this guide. Check those sources for current requirements, and confirm course availability, delivery, fees and entry requirements with us before enrolling.

Source records and further guidance

We link the unit records and regulator guidance relevant to this page below. Check the current source before making an enrolment, licensing or employment decision.

SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity

SITXCOM010 Manage conflict

SITXHRM008 Roster staff

SIRXCEG008 Manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers

BSB30120 Certificate III in Business

National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 — Standards 1 to 11

Outcome Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2025 (full text)

Is this a legal requirement or a nice-to-have?

Both. Discrimination law and WHS duties are legal. Standards 2.4 and 2.5 of the 2025 Outcome Standards and National Code Standard 6 are regulatory obligations on training providers.

How is this different from cultural awareness?

Awareness is noticing. Competence is acting on it systematically, with obligations attached.

Is there a core unit, or is it all elective?

Core. SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity is core in both Certificate III in Hospitality qualifications, and BSBTWK301 Use inclusive work practices is core in BSB30120 Certificate III in Business.

What protocols does the unit expect staff to know?

Two sets: the cultural and religious protocols of the major social and cultural groups in Australian society, including Australian Indigenous peoples, and those of the main inbound tourist markets to Australia. They are different lists and the unit expects both.

How much is assessed?

Communication with at least three different colleagues or customers, including representatives of different social groups and different cultural groups, plus attempts to overcome language barriers and identifying when to seek assistance.

Can the unit be assessed in a classroom?

It requires an operational business environment with diverse customers and colleagues, though role-play or simulated activities in an industry environment are permitted where real interaction is not available. The assessor must also have access to current organisational anti-discrimination policies and plain English regulator documents on anti-discrimination law.

What am I supposed to do when I cannot understand a customer?

The unit names five techniques: gestures and signs, simple words in English or the other person's language, simple directions and instructions, interpreter services, and assistive technology. Four of those five need no arrangement and cost nothing.

Who can we call for help?

The unit names five sources: government agencies, diplomatic services, disability advocacy groups, interpreter services and local cultural organisations. Identify which ones apply to your venue before you need them.

Can I go out of my way for guests from a particular community?

Not on that basis. SITXCOM007's knowledge requirements name the duty not to discriminate, show partiality or grant special favours based on social and cultural attributes. Partiality is a named failure, not a virtue.

Is cultural misunderstanding treated as a conflict matter?

Yes, and it is first on the list. SITXCOM010 Manage conflict requires resolution of at least three of eight named customer matters, and cultural misunderstanding is the first, with communication barrier also among the eight.

What if a customer is abusive to my staff?

That is a WHS matter. The business owes a duty of care; the customer's rights do not extend that far. SIRXCEG008 element 3 requires identifying customers who should be refused service or ejected, acting on threats to safety, and terminating the encounter where resolution is not possible.

Does anyone have to follow up with the staff member afterwards?

Under SIRXCEG008 element 5, yes: de-briefing with a supervisor after the incident, and recognising signs of mental and emotional impact that require professional counselling, with support sought.

We operate in both Victoria and New South Wales. Are the safety duties the same?

Not quite. New South Wales s 46 imposes a general duty to consult, co-operate and co-ordinate wherever more than one person has a duty in relation to the same matter. Victoria's s 35A is confined to labour hire arrangements. Build your procedures to the New South Wales standard nationally and both are covered.

Does rostering count as a cultural competence issue?

Yes. SITXHRM008 requires rosters to take account of social and cultural considerations and organisational policies including carers, compassion, illness, study, maternity and paternity, and long service leave, and requires colleagues to be consulted for input.

What must a CRICOS provider actually give an overseas student?

Among other things, an age and culturally appropriate orientation program under Standard 6, information on or access to services about employment rights and how to resolve workplace issues under Standard 6.1.9, and relevant information or referrals at no additional cost on request under Standard 6.2.

Do students with disability have to disclose?

No. Standard 2.4 requires reasonable adjustments and requires that students be supported to disclose if they wish to. The choice stays with the student.

Is there a unit for formal protocol, like titles and precedence at a function?

Yes, a separate one: SITXCOM009 Address protocol requirements, current on our scope. SITXCOM007 does not cover it, so a venue running civic or ceremonial functions needs both.

Is there a short skill set rather than a whole qualification?

Three. SITSS00078 Customer Service is SITXCCS014 plus SITXCOM007. SITSS00091 Service for International Visitors adds SITXLAN007 Conduct basic oral communication in a language other than English. SITSS00077 Customer Service Management is the supervisory set: SITXCCS015, SITXCCS016 and SITXCOM010.

Do we need a separate course?

It is embedded in the qualifications. If a team needs an explicit diversity and inclusion unit at diploma level, the SIT50422 packaging rules allow four electives to be drawn from any other currently endorsed training package or accredited course, provided the choice is justified by the job outcome. Ask us which units are currently on scope.

Who should hold the supervisory version of this?

Whoever rosters, leads and handles escalation. In the Certificate IV in Hospitality that means SITXHRM008 Roster staff, SITXHRM009 Lead and manage people, SITXCOM010 Manage conflict and SITXWHS007, all of which are core units.