

Understanding Cultural Awareness in Hospitality - Complete Hospitality Training

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Details:

Cultural awareness is the first step: noticing that your own assumptions about service are cultural rather than universal. Acting on that is a further step. See the importance of cultural competence, which covers the capability and the obligations. This page is about the noticing.

It is worth saying at the outset that this is not a soft topic in Australian hospitality training. It is a core unit. SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity is core in both Certificate III in Hospitality qualifications, which means nobody completes either without being assessed on it. The unit applies to all tourism, travel, hospitality and event sectors, and to all personnel at all levels during their daily activities. It is current on our scope as RTO 3722 at extent Deliver and assess to 30 June 2032.

What the core unit actually requires

The unit has two elements and ten performance criteria between them. They are worth reading in full, because they are more specific than most workplace guidance on the subject.

Element 1: Communicate with customers and colleagues from diverse backgrounds

| Criterion | Requirement | | --- | --- | | 1.1 | Treat customers and colleagues from different social and cultural groups with respect and sensitivity | | 1.2 | Respond to social and cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication | | 1.3 | Respond to others in a non-discriminatory way | | 1.4 | Make attempts to overcome language barriers | | 1.5 | Seek help with communication when necessary |

Criteria 1.4 and 1.5 are the pair that matters operationally. The unit does not require you to speak another language. It requires you to try, and to ask for help rather than give up or guess.

Element 2: Address cross-cultural misunderstandings

| Criterion | Requirement | | --- | --- | | 2.1 | Identify social and cultural issues that may cause conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace | | 2.2 | Address difficulties and seek assistance from others when necessary | | 2.3 | Consider social and cultural differences when difficulties or misunderstandings occur | | 2.4 | Make efforts to resolve misunderstandings, taking account of social and cultural considerations | | 2.5 | Escalate problems and unresolved issues to the appropriate supervisor or manager for follow-up |

Criterion 2.3 is the heart of it. When something goes wrong, the unit requires you to consider cultural difference as a possible cause before concluding the person was rude, difficult or indifferent. That is a genuinely different default from the one most people bring to a bad interaction.

How much of it is assessed, and in what setting

The elements say what the skill is. The performance evidence says how much of it you have to actually do, and this is the number most cultural awareness training never puts a figure on.

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 . Alongside that they must make attempts to overcome language barriers , communicate in line with appropriate social and cultural conventions, identify when assistance is required and seek it through appropriate channels , and interact respectfully and sensitively throughout.

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

Current organisational anti-discrimination policies

Plain English documents issued by 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-world interaction is not available

The first item is a quiet test of the workplace rather than the learner. A venue that cannot produce a current anti-discrimination policy cannot host this assessment, and it is a fair question to ask an employer whether one exists.

Where it actually shows up in service

Most of the time cultural difference in hospitality is not dramatic. It is small, practical, and easy to misread as rudeness or indifference.

Communication style. Directness varies. A guest who says a meal was "fine" may be signalling something quite different depending on where they are from, and a guest who does not complain is not necessarily satisfied.

Eye contact and personal space. What reads as attentive in one culture reads as intrusive in another. The core service unit, SITXCCS014, lists culturally specific customs in its own knowledge requirements on non-verbal communication, alongside body language, dress and accessories, gestures and voice tonality.

Tipping. Australia is not a tipping culture in the way the United States is. Guests arrive with different assumptions and staff should not read the absence of a tip as a verdict on service.

Dining pace. The expectation that a table turns, or that a meal lasts an evening, differs. Clearing plates early is polite in some contexts and rushing in others.

Dietary and religious requirements. Halal, kosher, vegetarian and fasting practices are not preferences to be accommodated grudgingly, and getting them wrong is a service failure with real weight for the guest.

Names and address. Getting a name approximately right, and asking rather than guessing, is a small thing that guests notice.

What the unit expects you to know

The knowledge requirements are the part that surprises people, because they name specific bodies of content rather than a general attitude:

| Knowledge area | What the unit names | | --- | --- | | Fairness | Key principles of fairness and equity in interaction with colleagues and customers | | Australian society | Cultural and religious protocols of the main social and cultural groups in Australian society, including Australian Indigenous people | | Visitors | Cultural and religious protocols of the main inbound tourist markets to Australia | | Disability | Different types of disability and their implications for the workplace | | Policy | Anti-discrimination policies for the industry and for the specific organisation | | Law | State, territory and Commonwealth anti-discrimination

law | | Help | Sources of assistance : government agencies, diplomatic services , disability advocacy groups, interpreter services and local cultural organisations | | Language | Approaches to overcoming language barriers |

Two of those rows have fuller lists than they are usually given credit for.

The five sources of assistance are government agencies, diplomatic services , disability advocacy groups, interpreter services and local cultural organisations. Diplomatic services is the one nobody anticipates, and it is there because a distressed international visitor with a lost passport or a family emergency is a situation a front desk will eventually meet. Knowing which of the five your venue would actually call, before you need one, is the whole point of the requirement.

The five language-barrier techniques the unit names are:

| 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 |

Four of those five cost nothing and require no arrangement. Most language-barrier failures on a floor are not resource failures; they are a staff member freezing because nobody told them that gestures and simple words are a professional response rather than an admission of incompetence.

The anti-discrimination requirements are stated as three specific duties. The unit requires knowledge of the requirements to treat customers and colleagues fairly and equitably ; not to discriminate, show partiality or grant special favours based on social and cultural attributes ; and not to threaten, humiliate or intimidate people because of their social or cultural attributes .

Note the middle one. Granting special favours on the basis of a social or cultural attribute is named as a failure, not just withholding them. Favouritism and discrimination are the same problem seen from two sides.

Where it overlaps with something more serious

Dietary requests are the place where cultural awareness meets a legal obligation. Allergen management is a food safety matter , not a preference, and an uncertain answer to "does this contain nuts" is a safety failure rather than a service one.

Standard 3.2.2A of the Food Standards Code, which commenced 8 December 2023 , requires anyone engaging in a prescribed activity involving unpackaged potentially hazardous food to have completed training covering four topics, safe handling of food, food contamination, cleaning and sanitising of premises and equipment, and personal hygiene , or to possess skills and knowledge commensurate with the activity . That training does not have to be nationally accredited, mandates no refresher period, and does not have to be recorded, though the accredited unit SITXFSA005 gives you portable proof of it. See food handling .

The safe practice is the same in every case: if you do not know, say you do not know and find out. Guessing to appear helpful is the failure mode, and the unit's criterion 1.5 explicitly permits you to seek help instead.

Awareness inside the team

Australian hospitality kitchens and floors are among the most culturally mixed workplaces in the country. The same points apply internally: directness, humour, hierarchy and how feedback is given all vary, and a lot of friction between staff is a mismatch in expectation rather than a personality problem.

This is exactly what element 2 of the unit is for. Criterion 2.1 requires identifying social and cultural issues that may cause conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace , which is internal by definition. And the core service unit counts internal customers , meaning colleagues in other departments, among

its five customer types. The pass is a customer of the floor, and vice versa.

The assessment volume reinforces that reading: the performance evidence counts colleagues or customers , not customers alone, so a candidate can satisfy part of it through how they work with the kitchen.

For international students working while they study, there is an additional layer: the workplace rules themselves may be unfamiliar. Workplace rights in Australia do not depend on visa status, and that is worth someone saying out loud. See working hours, rosters and public holidays and student support . Something as ordinary as coffee carries this in both directions, as brewed together sets out.

Cultural safety in the training room is a regulated obligation

Here is the part that is usually left out of articles on this subject. Cultural awareness is not only something hospitality qualifications teach . It is also something the standards governing Australian registered training organisations require of the provider , and since 2025 they say so in specific terms. If you are choosing where to study, these are the obligations your provider is held to.

Outcome Standard 2.5 — a safe and inclusive environment, culturally safe for First Nations people. The standard requires a safe and inclusive training environment, and names cultural safety for First Nations people explicitly. The regulator's stated expectation is genuine engagement with local First Nations communities rather than a statement of intent on a website. That is a meaningful test, because it cannot be satisfied by a paragraph in a handbook.

Outcome Standard 2.6 — wellbeing identified by reference to the content being taught. Wellbeing needs must be identified by reference to the training product content , which is a sharper obligation than a general welfare policy. An RTO teaching responsible service of alcohol and licensed-venue content has a different wellbeing profile from one teaching business administration, and the standard expects the provider to notice the difference. The failure modes the regulator names are instructive: assessing wellbeing only at enrolment ; wellbeing strategies that staff have never been told about; not assessing third-party environments such as work placements ; and failing to prevent and address abuse, harassment or violence among students .

Outcome Standard 2.3 — disclosure, and the honest limit on adjustment. The standard requires channels to disclose a disability at enrolment and throughout the course , not once at the start, and an environment in which asking for a reasonable adjustment is comfortable rather than awkward. It then states the boundary plainly: an adjustment must not jeopardise the integrity of the training product or the industry standard . That is worth understanding rather than resenting. The SITXCOM007 knowledge requirement about types of disability and their workplace implications sits on the same logic — the point is to remove barriers that are not part of the job, while being straight about the requirements that are.

Provider governance carries a related duty: training delivered to people under 18 must be managed under the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations , and third parties involved in delivery are held to the same standards as the RTO itself. We publish our own policies, including complaints and appeals, under policies .

Language is the most common barrier, and there is a process for it

Criterion 1.4 asks you to make attempts to overcome language barriers on the floor. Inside the training system, the same issue is handled formally, and knowing how it works removes a lot of anxiety for people whose first language is not English.

Every prospective student goes through a pre-training review , required under Standard 2.2 of the Outcome Standards for RTOs . That review must consider language, literacy and numeracy , digital literacy , and individual requirements including physical skills, prior experience and any prerequisites or entry requirements, and it must inform whether the person is appropriately placed in the training

product they are considering. It is a suitability conversation, not a test to pass or fail.

(One caution when citing that number, because it trips people up: the National Code 2018 also has a Standard 2.2, and it deals with assessing an overseas student's English, qualifications or work experience for course entry. Different instrument, different cohort. Name the instrument when you cite the number.)

In our case the review includes an LLN assessment completed during application and enrolment, which determines the learner's level against the Australian Core Skills Framework, identifies the support they may need, and informs the training strategy. Across multiple qualifications we offer, including Certificate III and Certificate IV level in hospitality, business and leadership and management, learners are expected to have LLN skills at around ACSF Level 3 — broadly senior secondary school level. The same review is where recognition of prior learning under Standard 1.6 and credit transfer under Standard 1.7 are raised, which matters for people who have worked in hospitality overseas and arrive with skills that no Australian certificate yet describes.

The skill set built for the language problem

If language is the barrier in your particular venue rather than culture in general, there is a coded option, and the comparison between the two relevant skill sets is the informative part:

| Skill set | Units it contains | Target group | | --- | --- | --- | | SITSS00078 Customer Service | SITXCCS014 Provide service to customers; SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity | Frontline personnel dealing directly with customers daily | | SITSS00091 Service for International Visitors | SITXCCS014 ; SITXCOM007 ; plus SITXLAN007 Conduct basic oral communication in a language other than English | Frontline personnel dealing with visitors from international markets daily |

So SITSS00091 is SITSS00078 plus one language unit. Both are on our scope, as is SITXLAN007 itself, at extent Deliver and assess. If your trade includes a significant inbound market, the only question between them is whether basic oral communication in another language is worth the third unit — and SITXCOM007, the cultural unit, is in both, which is the register's way of saying that language competence without cultural competence is not the goal.

Studying from overseas: what you are entitled to see in writing

If you are coming to Australia to study, cultural awareness cuts the other way too — the rules of the system here may be unfamiliar, and several of them exist specifically to protect you.

We hold CRICOS 04242E, but CRICOS registration is per course, not per provider, and only three of our courses are CRICOS-registered: SIT40422 Certificate IV in Hospitality (CRICOS 116358F), SIT50322 Diploma of Event Management (118427D) and SIT50422 Diploma of Hospitality Management (115534C). Neither dedicated cookery qualification is CRICOS-registered. Both diplomas are on our scope in Victoria only.

For those courses, the ESOS framework and the National Code 2018 require a written agreement, entered into concurrently with or before any payment is accepted. It must set out all tuition fees and the periods they relate to, the payment options, whether you may pay more than 50% of tuition before the course starts, and all non-tuition fees — reassessment, deferral, late payment and any others. It must state what is and is not repayable, how to claim a refund and who may receive one, and must explain in plain English what happens if the course is not delivered, including the Tuition Protection Service. It must carry the Australian Consumer Law statement, and it must be in plain English, with links only supplementing rather than replacing the terms. Agreements and receipts are kept for two years after you cease to be an accepted student.

One more thing worth knowing: your workplace rights do not depend on your visa. Which set of pay and conditions applies to a hospitality job is decided by the premises, not the job title, and four modern awards divide the industry — MA000009 (hotels, pubs, taverns, motels, resorts, casinos, caterers),

MA000058 (not-for-profit registered clubs), MA000119 (standalone restaurants, cafes, night clubs, reception centres, roadhouses) and MA000003 (takeaway and food courts). Two counter-intuitive points: registered clubs are not covered by MA000009, which excludes them by name at clause 4.4(d)(i), and night clubs are not in the clubs award because a night club is commercial. No pay rates appear on this page, because award rates re-set every 1 July and a stale rate is worse than none — the Fair Work Ombudsman's Pay and Conditions Tool is the authority.

The practical version

Ask rather than assume , particularly about dietary requirements and names

Do not read silence as satisfaction , or directness as rudeness

Say when you do not know , especially about allergens, and seek help rather than guess

Consider cultural difference as a cause when something goes wrong, before concluding someone was difficult

Try the simple techniques on a language barrier: gestures, simple words, simple directions. They are in the unit

Know who you would call from the five named sources of assistance, before you need one

Escalate what you cannot resolve, rather than leaving it

Notice your own defaults , because your idea of good service is learned, not neutral

Ask for the adjustment or the help you need , in a workplace or a classroom. Both systems assume you will

Where it sits in training

| Qualification | How cultural content appears | | --- | --- | | SIT30622 Certificate III in Hospitality | SITXCOM007 is core , alongside SITXCCS014 Provide service to customers | | SIT30722 Certificate III in Hospitality (Restaurant Front of House) | SITXCOM007 is core here too, among nine core units | | SIT40422 Certificate IV in Hospitality | SITXCOM010 Manage conflict becomes core, and its named techniques include responding sensitively and respectfully with cultural awareness |

That progression is the useful part. At Certificate III you are assessed on sensitivity and on addressing misunderstandings. At Certificate IV you are assessed on managing the conflict that results when nobody did — and the conflict unit makes the link explicit, because cultural misunderstanding is the first of the eight named matters from which a candidate must resolve at least three. A communication barrier is another of the eight. SIT30722 also offers SIRXCEG008 Manage disrespectful, aggressive or abusive customers as an elective, which is where a misunderstanding stops being a misunderstanding. Confirm current fees and intakes with us directly.

For the measurement side of all this — whether your service is actually landing with the people in front of you — see how to measure and improve your customer service and the skills hospitality employees should have .

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 .

The legal entity on the Australian Business Register is COMPLETE HOSPITALITY TRAINING (VIC.) PTY. LTD. , ABN 27 006 947 262 , ACN 006 947 262 , an Australian private company. We have held RTO code 3722 since 1 June 1994 , moved from the Victorian regulator to the national regulator, ASQA

, on 8 September 2017 , and holds a current registration period running to 30 June 2032 . Its scope carries 17 current qualifications, 81 current skill sets and 579 current units , spanning hospitality, business, community services, health and infection control, retail, creative arts and horticulture.

Two registers hold name information and they do not say the same thing, which is worth knowing if you are having an Australian qualification verified from overseas. The training.gov.au organisation record lists six trading names, five current; the sixth, Complete Healthcare Training , ran from 24 October 2023 to 19 April 2025, so a certificate in that name is still an RTO 3722 credential. The Australian Business Register separately records seven current registered business names for the same legal entity: Complete Hospitality Training, THE COFFEE SCHOOL, Coffee School by CHT, Melbourne Barista, Victorian Bar School, Ready Serve Achieve Melbourne and Alchemy Institute of Australia. Either way, the code to verify is 3722 . See about us .

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

SITXCCS014 Provide service to customers

SITXCOM010 Manage conflict

SIT30722 Certificate III in Hospitality (Restaurant Front of House)

SIT40422 Certificate IV in Hospitality

Food Standards Code — Standards 3.2.2 and 3.2.2A (food safety practices and food safety management tools)

Hospitality Industry (General) Award 2020 (MA000009)

Restaurant Industry Award 2020 (MA000119)

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 cultural awareness the same as cultural competence?

No. Awareness is noticing. Competence is being able to act on it consistently, and carries workplace obligations.

Is there actually a unit for this, or is it just good practice?

There is a unit, and it is core. SITXCOM007 Show social and cultural sensitivity is a core unit in both Certificate III in Hospitality qualifications, with two elements and ten performance criteria.

How much is actually assessed?

Verbal and non-verbal 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 it be assessed in a classroom?

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

Do I need to speak another language?

No. Criterion 1.4 requires you to make attempts to overcome language barriers. 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. Criterion 1.5 lets you seek help with communication when necessary.

Is there a skill set if language is the main issue?

Yes. SITSS00091 Service for International Visitors is SITXCCS014 plus SITXCOM007 plus SITXLAN007 Conduct basic oral communication in a language other than English. SITSS00078 Customer Service is the same set without the language unit.

Who can I call for help?

The unit names five sources: government agencies, diplomatic services, disability advocacy groups, interpreter services and local cultural organisations. Work out which apply to your venue before the situation arrives.

What should I do when a cross-cultural misunderstanding happens?

Work through element 2: identify what may be causing it, seek assistance if you need it, consider social and cultural differences as a possible cause, make efforts to resolve it with those considerations in mind, and escalate what you cannot resolve to a supervisor for follow-up.

Is going out of your way for a guest from a particular background a good thing?

Not if it is because of their background. The unit's knowledge requirements name the duty not to discriminate, show partiality or grant special favours based on social and cultural attributes. Favouritism and discrimination are the same failure from opposite directions.

Does the unit cover disability?

Yes. Different types of disability and their implications for the workplace is a named knowledge requirement, disability advocacy groups are named among the sources of assistance, and assistive technology is one of the five language and communication techniques.

Is cultural misunderstanding treated as a conflict matter at higher levels?

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

What can I expect from a training provider on cultural safety?

Outcome Standard 2.5 requires a safe and inclusive environment that is culturally safe for First Nations people, with the regulator expecting genuine engagement with local First Nations communities rather than a policy statement. Standard 2.6 requires wellbeing needs to be identified by reference to the content being taught, and includes preventing and addressing abuse, harassment or violence among students.

Can I ask for an adjustment if I have a disability?

Yes, and the provider must give you channels to disclose at enrolment and throughout the course, in an environment where asking is comfortable. The one limit stated in the standard is that an adjustment must not jeopardise the integrity of the training product or the industry standard.

What if English is not my first language and I want to enrol?

Every prospective student goes through a pre-training review under Standard 2.2 of the Outcome Standards for RTOs, which considers language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, and identifies the support you need. CHT completes an LLN assessment during application and enrolment against the Australian Core Skills Framework; the expectation across multiple qualifications is around ACSF Level 3. It is a suitability conversation, not a pass-or-fail exam.

I worked in hospitality overseas. Does any of that count?

Possibly. Recognition of prior learning under Standard 1.6 assesses skills gained without formal Australian training against the same evidence requirements — a genuine assessment, not a waiver. Credit transfer under Standard 1.7 is the separate route if you hold a recognised unit already. Both are raised at the pre-training review.

Which CHT courses can an overseas student enrol in?

Three: SIT40422 Certificate IV in Hospitality (CRICOS 116358F), SIT50322 Diploma of Event Management (118427D) and SIT50422 Diploma of Hospitality Management (115534C). Neither dedicated cookery qualification is CRICOS-registered.

How do I ask about dietary requirements without causing offence?

Ask plainly and early. Guests generally prefer being asked to being assumed about. If the answer touches an allergen, treat it as a food safety matter rather than a preference.

What if I am not sure whether a dish contains an allergen?

Say so and find out. Guessing to appear helpful is the failure mode. Under Standard 3.2.2A the person handling the food needs training covering food contamination among its four topics, or skills and knowledge commensurate with the activity.

What if I get someone's name wrong?

Apologise briefly, ask how they say it, and use it. Do not avoid using it.

Does any of this apply to how staff treat each other?

Yes, explicitly. The unit's criteria refer to customers and colleagues throughout, criterion 2.1 is about issues that may cause conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace, and the performance evidence counts colleagues as well as customers. The core service unit also counts colleagues in other departments as internal customers.

Do Indigenous protocols form part of the unit?

Yes. The cultural and religious protocols of the main social and cultural groups in Australian society, including Australian Indigenous people, are a named knowledge requirement, listed separately from the protocols of inbound tourist markets. They are two distinct bodies of knowledge and the unit requires both.

Do my workplace rights depend on my visa?

No. Which pay and conditions apply is decided by the premises you work in rather than your job title or your visa, and four modern awards cover the industry between them. Use the Fair Work Ombudsman's Pay and Conditions Tool for current rates, since they re-set every 1 July.

Do I need special training for this?

It is embedded as a core unit in the hospitality qualifications rather than sold separately, and available as part of two skill sets if you want it on its own. See [how to deliver exceptional customer service \(/news/how-to-deliver-exceptional-customer-service-in-hospitality/\)](#) for how it sits alongside the service unit, and [dealing with difficult guests \(/news/dealing-with-difficult-guests-strategies-for-hospitality-professionals/\)](#) for where misunderstanding tips into something else.