

CHAPTER 13

The Student Journey – Who are your students really?

In this chapter we will take you back to the student journey and talk about how to personalise that journey for three different learner cohorts, demonstrating the very different needs of students. Keep in mind you must work towards achieving best practice in both training and assessment, regardless of the different needs. It is the model you develop for delivery and the approach you take for supporting each cohort that will help you to excel! We will now introduce you to three students with very different needs, take you through their student journey and demonstrate the different responses needed from an RTO to ensure that each student is provided with the opportunity for success.

Student 1

What are the needs of this student?

Student 1 is called Mae. She is planning to return to work after having time off while her children were young. She wishes to retrain as a childcare worker. Her initial thoughts are that it would be easier to study online than to go to a class. Mae has been talking to friends who told her that online study was actually easier than face to face learning because the assessment was so easy i.e. just a few questions to answer online. She really wants to ask the RTO about this because she can't imagine learning everything a childcare worker needs to know without having

exposure to a real workplace. If there is going to be work placement she needs to know so she can organise after school childcare for her own children.

She hopes to be able to study when the children are at school. However, she is a bit nervous about online study as all her previous study was completed in a classroom. She really likes being in a class to hear the ideas from other students and try out her own new ideas. She has always been a confident learner but is now doubting her abilities, for several reasons. Firstly, she is not sure about how to use the technology to do the online course. But also because childcare is a new field for her and she also feels out of touch with the workforce. She is hoping that the RTO may provide study skill assistance to help keep her motivated and on track. A friend has recommended an RTO (called ‘Online RTO’) that is well known as an online training college. Mae must do some research so she can decide about where and how to study. Mae was looking for information about:

- the mode of delivery of the course and time commitment to complete the course
- training and assessment requirements and in particular, work placement requirements
- study skill support
- the possibility of interaction with other students
- assistance with technology.

Customising the student journey for success!

Marketing, Recruitment and Enrolment

Mae first searched on 'Online RTO's' website and found that they delivered the Certificate III in Children's Services. The webpage about this course provided a list of units that had to be completed and a rough estimate of how long it would take for a part-time, online student to complete the qualification. Mae had a few questions about costs, time commitment, work placement, computers and the other technology she might need to complete the learning and assessment. She found all the answers to her questions on a Frequently Asked Questions Page and on a policies page where she could download the Student Handbook. So, she decided to go ahead and enrol. When she clicked on the Enrol Now button, she was surprised to be sent to a page that asked her for her name and contact details, so the RTO could arrange a time to talk about the course before she went through the enrolment process. 'Online RTO' has a policy that no student will enrol until they have had a discussion with a student support staff member. The purpose of the discussion is to:

- Question the student's interest in a training program, and ask about previous study, experience in the industry and career plans
- Provide detailed information about units to be completed, training approach and course requirements
- Explain that the student will be required to complete a pre-course assessment to ensure that they are suited to the course and equipped for online learning. This also helps the RTO plan the support that might be required for this student.

- Tell the student about a series of short videos to explain the way online courses are presented in this RTO and how assessments will be completed
- Inform the student about an upfront Foundation Skills assessment and an IT skills assessment to determine the skill needs of the student
- If possible, to discuss whether the student would like access a section of unit for them to try out before they commit to the whole course.

Once Mae watched the videos, she took up the offer of the sample unit. She downloaded the information for the unit and spent a few days working through the learning and assessment tasks. The unit was about legislation and safety and she found it a little dry, but she was able to access the online student forum and could see that there were questions posted to stimulate interest in the topic and encourage debate. After a few days Mae again expressed interest in enrolling in the course and was contacted by the course training coordinator. She guided Mae through the enrolment process and made an appointment to meet with Mae via Skype to conduct the pre- course assessment and set learning goals. A meeting schedule was also discussed and it was agreed that the coordinator would check in with Mae every two weeks for the first 3 months of the course to help her form good study habits. Mae completed her enrolment, acknowledging that she had been provided with adequate information about the course, had read policies and procedures and been provided with information about the costs associated with the enrolment.

Support and Progression

Mae was provided with the following information to help her progress through the course:

- Information about progress checking to help her keep on track with her learning goals
- Weekly reminders to engage with other students online to simulate a learning community
- Monthly reminders about synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities to facilitate both individual and group learning
- Information about additional support to help with technology-related problems e.g. uploading completed tasks, accessing websites, etc.
- Offers of additional tutorials and extra learning activities where required
- Extra help with assessments
- Help to find a workplace so she could complete the required number of hours of work placement.

The meeting schedule established with the training coordinator at the time of enrolment was honoured by both student and training coordinator and as she progressed, Mae came into contact with several other specialist trainers.

Training and Assessment

Remember, Mae is a learner who wants to interact with others during the learning process. The 'Online RTO' provided many opportunities for group learning through a range of webinars, online classes and the learning and assessment on the job. They also ensured that Mae was provided with:

- Enough resources to enable her to complete the learning. This included learning material that was engaging and self-explanatory so that she could feel confident to access all required reading and activities.
- Activities that required her to share ideas and questions and feel supported
- Realistic case studies and role plays (completed during online group classes) that helped the learning process
- Formative tasks to provide feedback to the trainer and student so she could progress to the summative tasks
- Summative tasks that were sufficiently robust to enable the assessor to make the final assessment decision, and that were to be completed in the workplace
- A range of options for Mae to document her progress whilst she was on work placement. For example, Mae could complete a task and provide video or photographic evidence of what she did. She could supplement her evidence with a third party report from the workplace supervisor and submit all evidence for assessment via an online dropbox.

Completion

The 'Online RTO' must ensure that record keeping practices are quality assured to minimise mistakes when issuing certificates. They must also adhere to the requirements of Standards for RTOs 2015 in terms of retention of information and time frames for issuing qualifications. In Mae's situation, where there was no physical cohort to celebrate the end of a course, the 'Online RTO' conducted a final online class for students who wished to talk about their learning experiences. A final exit interview was also conducted with the training coordinator to gather feedback and provide career advice and congratulations to the student. Mae was offered employment while she was still studying and took up the offer on a part-time basis once her studies were completed. She decided to work 2 days/ week. During the exit interview with the training coordinator Mae decided to enrol in the Diploma course and start her studies during the next month. However, because she would now be juggling a new job, her family and more study, it was decided that she would take a slower pace and that the progress would be monitored to determine whether or not additional support was required. The successful online learner became an advocate for the college and for lifelong learning! So, success for both student and RTO!

Student 2

What are the needs of this student?

Student 2 is a school leaver called Ibrahim whose family came to Australia as refugees approximately 5 years ago. Ibrahim is still struggling with the English language. He wants to study something in

the VET sector and was told by the school careers advisor about a college near his home called the 'Information Technology (IT) RTO'. This RTO has developed a good reputation in the community and has extensive partnerships with local businesses. Graduates of the college often find employment in these organisations on completion of their studies. The RTO can provide full time study and help him to find funding that will cover the cost of the course. There are a few problems, because Ibrahim is not interested in IT, nor is he interested in looking for employment. He has had a troubled school history and finds it difficult to concentrate in class. Ibrahim's family owns one computer that is several years old. It is used by his parents and his 3 siblings, so he may find it difficult to complete assessments outside class time. Ibrahim was given an ultimatum by his family: either enrol in the course or find a job. He chose the study path to prolong having to enter the workforce. Consequently, he called the 'IT RTO' to find out how to enrol and how to find financial support. Ibrahim was looking for information about:

- The cost of a course
- How to find financial support to pay for the course
- When he could start a course
- Ibrahim did not care about the content, the length or the outcomes of the course!

Customising the student journey for success!

Marketing, Recruitment and Enrolment

Ibrahim and his parents attended a meeting with the careers advisors at the 'IT RTO'. Ibrahim was not yet 18 years old and the policy at the RTO is to involve parents in initial meetings. During the meeting the following topics were discussed:

- VET Student Loans, information, eligibility criteria and processes to follow to seek a loan
- LLN testing and other pre-course assessment processes
- Ibrahim's interests, past academic record
- Support options available within the RTO and additional support that could be accessed to assist with language development
- The RTOs disciplinary policy, dress code and attendance requirements.

At the end of the meeting, a student support case manager was assigned to Ibrahim, and a meeting was organised with the IT training coordinator. A date was also set for pre-course assessments. Once the VET Student Loan was organised and enrolment was completed, Ibrahim was asked to attend an orientation program to help him with his written English and to set goals to motivate him to study. Ibrahim was told to check in with the careers advisor during the course too and the advisor made notes in his calendar to check in with Ibrahim every week to monitor his motivation and attitude.

Support and Progression

The student support case manager, careers advisor and trainer met on a weekly basis over the first 3 months after Ibrahim had started his study. They monitored his progress against his initial assessments, LLN test outcomes and learning goals. It was decided that he would need some additional 1:1 support to encourage him to complete his homework. A discussion with Ibrahim uncovered the problem of computer access at home. A plan was devised to enable Ibrahim to use the RTO's computers to complete his homework after class. The trainer was on site teaching another class and so could vouch for Ibrahim's safety. There were some additional issues around attendance over the first month but as Ibrahim became interested in the course and formed a strong relationship with the trainer, attendance and attitude improved.

Training and Assessment

Students such as Ibrahim have little or no real workplace experience and so require a range of theoretical and practical learning activities. The learning must be engaging, realistic to the workplace and must motivate the student to want to continue with their learning. Establishing a simulated workplace in the classroom with policies, rules and responsibilities will assist the student with their understanding of the expectations of working with other people and following directions etc. These simulated experiences will be required to ensure that the student is ready for assessment. The RTO must ensure that the assessment meets the Principles of Assessment and Rules of Evidence, meets the needs of the industry and the student and adheres to Training Package

requirements. The formative tasks must provide sufficient feedback to the trainer and student so that the student can progress to the summative tasks. The summative tasks must then be sufficiently robust to enable the assessor to make the final assessment decision i.e. is this student ready to perform this role in the workplace? The 'IT RTO' used a realistic company situation to teach their course, assigning job titles to individual students and simulating real workplace problems. Ibrahim found that he was very good at problem solving, thinking creatively and leading others. This was the first time in Ibrahim's education that he had used these skills! He completed his course and was offered a job in one of the 'IT RTO's' partner organisations.

Completion

The 'IT RTO' must ensure that record keeping practices are quality assured to minimise any mistakes when issuing certificates. They must also adhere to the requirements of Standards for RTOs 2015 in terms of retention of information and time frames for issuing qualifications. In a situation such as Ibrahim's it is vital that the RTO celebrate the success with an event such as graduation ceremony or party. Such transformation of attitude and achievement deserves recognition. The families, trainers and support network also deserve the celebration to acknowledge the role they play in this change and the success of the student. Ibrahim and his family were so pleased with his success that one of his brothers was enrolled in a training course for the following year. The RTO's association with this family would continue!

Student 3

What are the needs of this student?

Student 3 is an early career student called Alex who is employed and wishes to complete a qualification while she works. She is working in a full-time administration role in a local council. She wants to complete a qualification that will help her with current and future work roles. She is ambitious and is planning her career, looking forward to leadership roles within the next 10 years. Her supervisor has informed her that she is eligible to study as a trainee. A local college called 'Admin RTO' will conduct the training. Alex contacts the RTO to find out her options. Alex was looking for information about:

- Suitable courses to help her achieve her career goals and meet the workplace needs
- Range of topics
- Flexibility of the training model
- Length of course and options for fast track
- Costs for her and the workplace
- Benefits of traineeships
- How to organise a traineeship

Customising the student journey for success!

Marketing, Recruitment and Enrolment

When Alex contacted the RTO to ask about the traineeship and options for study, the Traineeship team leader provided her with some general information about traineeships including website links to gather further information. Once Alex had investigated the traineeship model of study,

she arranged a meeting with the 'Admin RTO' to discuss study options. She chose an administration based qualification. The meeting provided an opportunity for RTO staff to:

- Ask Alex about her interest in the training program, and ask about previous study, experience in the industry and career plans,
- Provide detailed information about units to be completed, course requirements and resources,
- Explain that Alex will be required to complete a pre-course assessment to ensure that they are suited to the course and equipped for on the job learning and assessment. This also helps the RTO plan the support that might be required for this student. The role of the work place supervisor is also discussed.
- Inform the student about an upfront Foundation Skills assessment and an IT skills assessment to determine the skill needs of the student,
- Explain the traineeship sign-up process, including agreement on the training plan.

Support and Progression

The 'Admin RTO' will provide information about communication, and progress checking throughout the traineeship. The order for completion of learning and assessment should have been provided to the student up front in the training plan. Trainers should be clear with students about assessment deadlines. Individual meetings with the trainer/assessor, whether they be face to face in the workplace or online (e.g. using Skype) should take place throughout the traineeship to check in with progress of the trainee. Extra help can be provided as required such as extra reading and additional instructions for assessment. The RTO may also be required to interact with the workplace supervisor to verify student progress and to determine whether any additional support is required for the student.

Training and Assessment

Throughout the traineeship the RTO must ensure that the learner is provided with sufficient resources to enable them to complete the learning. Because this learner is isolated i.e. in the workplace, the learning material must be engaging and provide enough direction so that the learner makes progress and feels comfortable to access all required reading and activities. The learning must be relevant to the workplace and contextualised for on the job learning. The trainer/assessor should also encourage the student to become part of the distance or online learning community to share their ideas and questions and feel supported, using Skype or an online platform where possible. The RTO must provide a suitable platform and learning material to stimulate this

interaction. Virtual student lounges and discussion forums can be helpful for these learners.

The RTO must ensure that the assessment meets the Principles of Assessment and Rules of Evidence, meets the needs of the industry and the student and adheres to Training Package requirements. The formative tasks must provide sufficient feedback to the trainer and student so that the student can progress to the summative tasks. The summative tasks must then be sufficiently robust to enable the assessor to make the final assessment decision i.e. is this student ready to perform this role in the workplace?

Alex managed to complete her traineeship in record time, shaving at least 6 months of the original training plan timetable. She worked with her workplace assessor to customise the assessment tasks to suit her workplace. Because she was so engaged in the learning process, she could involve members of her work team to take part in the practical assessment tasks enabling her to implement real improvements in policy and process on the job. It is not possible for the assessor to be present to witness the student completing all practical tasks in the workplace. So the RTO must provide a range of options for the student to document their progress on the job. For example, the student could use a logbook to record their practice on the job and provide evidence in the form of photographs, video and third party reports.

Completion

The 'Admin RTO' must ensure that record keeping practices are quality assured to minimise any mistakes when issuing certificates. They must

also adhere to the requirements of Standards for RTOs 2015 in terms of retention of information and time frames for issuing qualifications. In the case of a trainee like Alex, the trainer should meet the trainee in the workplace for a final exit interview to ask the student for feedback and to provide career advice and congratulations. Alex is a goal-oriented learner who has set her sights on leadership. Alex's workplace assessor gave her encouraging feedback on her initiative and problem-solving skills and recommended that she continue study in business administration. Alex opted to enrol in a Diploma and study part time online. The 'Admin RTO' were pleased to welcome her back for her ongoing learning journey.

Time to reflect

What were your thoughts as you considered the 3 different students described in this Chapter? Perhaps you are thinking, well we don't do traineeships or online learning, so these examples don't apply to us! Or training school leavers is a challenge that we would rather not take on thanks!! If your response is like this, then you missed the point of the stories! We are very aware that RTOs operate with very different business models and these student stories we worked through may be nothing like your student cohort. However, you should have been able to discern that there was an individual, customised learning journey designed for each of the students. Every student presents with their own unique story, their own learning needs and their own learning goals. What are you doing to meet the needs of your students? Do you adjust your communications, support and training and assessment processes to suit the needs of different student groups? To close this

chapter and encourage deeper reflection we would like you to consider the following few questions:

- What are the unique characteristics of your various student cohorts?
- Are your RTO practices at each stage of the student journey adequate for each of your student cohorts?
- What evidence would you need to demonstrate your approach at audit?
- What needs to change?
- A sample Critical Incident Reflection Framework Tool is included in Supplement 11 of The Workbook: Companion to ‘The Essential Guide to Building a Successful RTO’.

Stay student focused and stay competitive

Preparing for the student-centred audit approach should not just be about compliance, a student centric view is essential if you wish to provide a quality student learning experience and stay competitive. We hope that this section of the book has helped you reflect on your current practices and identify areas for improvement. You may also be asking ‘Do I have the right team for my RTO?’ Finding the right people for your RTO should be a high priority for management. We find that when RTOs go through change, whether it be as a result of regulator intervention or internal triggers, it is a good time to review the team and identify potential weaknesses or gaps. Section 3 of this book looks at how to recruit staff and how to build and lead your RTO team to stay student

focused and competitive.

Sample Chapter Only