

Choosing the Right Course

There are many training organisations in Australia, offering a wide range of courses. These may be advertised in newspapers, on various websites, and in a range of other places. When you enrol in a course, you are usually investing a lot of time and money, so it is important that you make the best decision.

Types of Courses

The first issue to consider is whether a course has any formal recognition. If a course has formal recognition it means it has been approved by government, and it will be recognised by government, training organisations and industry. Formal recognition is very important if you are completing a course in the hope of gaining employment in a particular industry. If you do a course which is not recognised it may not be accepted by employers.

There are three main types of course offered by training organisations:

COURSES BASED ON AN INDUSTRY TRAINING PACKAGE

Training packages are sets of nationally-endorsed standards and qualifications for recognising and assessing people's skills. They set a national industry standard for skills, and are now used as the basis for most of the programs delivered in the vocational education and training system, including New Apprenticeships, training courses, VET in schools programs, recognition of existing skills, and occupational licensing.

Courses based on a training package will normally lead to either:

- a Statement of Attainment: a formal statement that proves that you are competent in one or more skills, but do not meet the full requirements for a qualification. Short courses often lead to Statements of Attainment. Statements of Attainment can also be used as credit toward completion of a full qualification in the future.
- a Qualification such as a Certificate or Diploma. These are usually longer courses, and are designed to give you the skills to work in a particular occupation, or at a particular occupational level.

Both Qualifications and Statements of Attainment are nationally-recognised and verify that the student is competent in the skills listed.

Training package qualifications and statements of attainment can only be issued by registered training organisations (RTOs). To become an RTO, training providers need to go through a government registration process which includes some checks on the quality of their facilities, staff, financial management and services - this also gives you additional protection.

Courses based on training packages are generally the best option because these are recognised across Australia. These courses can be done through a number of different training organisations around Australia, and offer you the best chance of employment. Many training package qualifications can also be done through a new apprenticeship, which combines paid employment with formal training.

ACCREDITED COURSES

'Accredited courses' are courses that have been developed by a specific training provider and submitted for approval by a state/territory training authority. Generally, courses are accredited only where a training package does not exist to meet a specific need. Accredited courses are normally phased out once a relevant Training Package becomes available. **If there is no training package to cover the skills you need an accredited course is your next best option.**

COURSES WITHOUT FORMAL RECOGNITION

Some courses hold no formal recognition at all. In these cases, the student may receive a certificate from the training provider, but this certificate carries no formal status within the industry or the vocational education and training system.

These courses may be useful, but should be treated with caution if you are undertaking training in order to seek work in a particular industry. People completing these courses may find that they need to repeat their training under a formally recognised program before they can obtain employment. This usually involves paying fees again to a different organisation.

Checking on courses

Some courses are clearly promoted as being based on a training package, but others are not. To find out whether a course is based on a training package, you can:

- Contact the training provider and ask
- Obtain any written course information you can from the training provider. You could contact them to request an information pack, and/or check their website. Check this information to see if it makes it clear that the course will lead to a nationally-recognised Qualification or Statement of Attainment.
- Make sure that the organisation is a registered training organisation for the relevant qualifications or units of competency. You can do this by searching the National Training Information Service. We provide quick links to make this searching easier in the 'Find courses' pages under the menu for each industry area on the left side of this page.

If you're still not sure, please contact **Service Skills Australia** for advice.

How to choose a registered training organisation

Depending upon the course and where you wish to do the training, you may have a choice of many different registered training organisations. In that case, you may want to 'shop around' to find the one that best meets your needs. Some of the things you could consider include:

- **How will the course help you to develop practical skills?** Find out how the course will make sure you develop practical skills when you are not yet employed in the industry. Some RTOs may help you to find a work placement as part of the course, so that you can practise your skills in the industry. Others may run a 'model workplace' such as a store or restaurant, within the training organisation so that you can get practice there.
- **How will assessment be conducted?** Assessment under Training Packages is designed to ensure that an individual has attained workplace competence. This means that a formal assessment procedure is required, and this assessment should be designed to measure skills as well as knowledge. Written examinations, essays and tests are normally designed to measure knowledge rather than skill, and should not be the only method of assessment.

General considerations

- Shop around to see if the course represents value for money. As well as enrolment fees, check if there are any additional charges for materials and equipment.
- Find out about their policies for things like refunds, or appealing if you disagree with an assessment decision.
- You could ask for testimonials or referees - these could include past students, or employers of past students.
- You could see if the RTO is recommended by major industry associations.
- You can ask to view their facilities or attend an Open Day to get more information.

For more information on choosing an RTO for an industry area see 'Find an RTO' under the menu for each industry area on the left side of this page.

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