

ABSOLUTE EDUCATION

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Version 1.0

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Introduction

Welcome to ABSOLUTE Education! We hope you enjoy your studies with us, and that the education and training we provide not only meets your expectations, but exceeds them.

This handbook is designed to help you understand how everything works at ABSOLUTE Education. Think of it as your key to knowing how to do things. Keep it as a reference, and if you have any questions, looking in here may be the quickest way to find the answers.

College policies and procedures are summarised here in a short, easy-to-use way. However, if you would like to see the detailed versions, you are welcome to. Just ask one of our helpful staff.

We wish you every success in your studies, and remember: it is your achievement on the course and in your future career that makes it exciting for us to work at ABSOLUTE Education.

Peter Berginc
Chief Executive Officer

Section 1. About ABSOLUTE Education

Absolute Education is a company that has established itself as a market leader in online education. It has been around for over 5 years and grown in strength over that time. It has gone through many transitions and updates to lead it where it is now.

ABSOLUTE Education, prides itself in being the industry leaders in owner-builder education. We offer a full comprehensive online service with sample material to students, as well as online submission of assessment and automatic responses. Our same day turnaround policy ensures students receive their certificate the same day they successfully complete their assessment.

Mission statement and organisational philosophy

To provide the most reliable and convenient form of online education for prospective owner builders throughout Australia.

Company background and services

ABSOLUTE Education offers educational services in the areas of owner building to local students. Courses include programs leading to the following qualifications:

- 39219QLD Course in Preparation for Owner Builder Permit
- 91498NSW Course in owner Builder Compliance

With more course/qualifications to be added at future dates.

These courses are purely offered via correspondence or online except for NSW students sitting the CPCCOHS1001A unit of competency.

Is ABSOLUTE Education accredited?

ABSOLUTE Education is officially a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). To achieve this status, colleges have to meet some very strict national requirements. These include:

- Systems and procedures to ensure quality training outcomes, and also systems to continuously improve our operations. The rules for this are given in the Australian Quality Training Framework, AQTF.
- Trainers having the correct qualifications, as well as experience working in the areas in which they teach.
- Resources that are adequate to teach and assess for the qualifications we offer.

- Qualifications that meet the requirements for Nationally Recognised Training (see below)

The organisation that grants us RTO status is VETAB, part of the New South Wales state government. They inspect (audit) us every five years, and also when we want to add extra courses, or update to newer versions of the qualifications.

Who is who at ABSOLUTE Education?

The CEO also acts as the Principal, Director of studies and Registrar. Below are the heads of department:

- Director of Studies (in charge of academic matters) **Peter Berginc**
- Registrar (in charge of student services, enrolment and administration) **Peter Berginc**
- Marketing Manager (responsible for promoting the college and developing links with schools and future employers). **Peter Berginc**

Employees:

Peter Berginc (CEO, Industry Expert, Trainer & Assessor)

Angela Castillon (Secretary)

Peter McCabe (Industry Expert, Trainer & Assessor)

Section 2: Nationally Recognised Training

The qualifications issued by ABSOLUTE Education are recognised across Australia. They are a mainstream part of Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, which is explained below.

'Relevant Commonwealth, state or territory legislation and regulatory requirements' could include requirements about:

- i. Occupational health and safety
- ii. Workplace harassment, victimisation and bullying
- iii. Anti-discrimination, including equal opportunity, racial vilification and disability discrimination
- iv. Privacy
- v. VET
- vi. Copyright.

What is vocational education and training (VET)?

Vocation education and training is training for work, usually for specific industries or jobs. It includes technical education, but also involves skills that you need on the job including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, using your initiative, planning and organising, self-management, learning skills

and technology skills. These are called Employability Skills¹—despite their name, they are not just aimed at people who haven't worked before, but are useful right up to the highest levels.

Note that vocational qualifications can only be issued by RTOs (and we are an RTO—see above under “Is ABSOLUTE Education accredited?”).

How is VET different from other forms of education?

This is an important point! VET is very different from most school or university education. Vocational education has more focus on how you would actually carry out tasks on the job. Theory is only given where it helps you to develop skills.

Much of your learning will be actually by the undertaking of your project, etc

What level are ABSOLUTE Education qualifications?

First, let's see what qualifications exist. Our qualifications fit into the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The AQF covers qualifications from high school certificates to university doctorates—in fact, most official qualifications issued in Australia. Vocational qualifications range from Certificate I through to Certificate IV, then Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Vocational Graduate Certificate and Vocational Graduate Diploma.

The course(s) ABSOLUTE Education offer are Statements of Attainment which allow you to apply for your owner builder licence from your relevant state department (Fair Trading in NSW & Building Services Authority in QLD).

What are ABSOLUTE Education qualifications based on?

An important principle is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This means that skills and education picked up through life experience, previous work experience, etc can be used as evidence of competency in a unit. See later in this handbook for more information.

What do the codes at the beginning of the qualification mean?

They are national codes, specified by the training package. The code for each qualification is unique, making it easy to see whether another qualification from another RTO is the same or different.

Let's take *BSB40207 Certificate IV in Business* as an example.

¹ Not all training packages (see later) use employability skills. Older ones use a previous version of these called ‘key competencies’. However, when these training packages are updated, employability skills will replace key competencies.

The letters (BSB) come from the name of the training package. In this case, it is BSB07 Business Services Training Package. The “07” in the name of the training package is the year it was introduced, ie 2007 in this case.

4 is the level of the qualification, that is, Certificate IV in this case. 5 is Diploma, 6 is Advanced Diploma, etc.

The next two digits, 02, are just a number. The first qualification in the training package at the level is 01, the second is 02 etc.

The final two digits, 07, are the year the qualification was first available. Usually this is the same as the year in the training package name, but not always because training packages can be updated with new qualifications.

Individual units of competency have a similar system of codes, but this system is slightly different in different training packages. The most important thing is that units with the same code are basically the same.

What do I have to do to get the qualification?

We mentioned above that you take the right units to get the qualification, and that the study and assessment is more practical than in other levels of education. Here, we'll talk more about assessment.

The Australian VET system uses something called Competency Based Training. In this, there can only be two results of assessment: “competent” or “not yet competent”. There are no grades, and we don't talk about “passing” or “failing”. To be competent, you must “perform particular tasks and duties to the standard required in the workplace”². Once you are deemed competent in all the units required for a qualification, you are entitled to the qualification.

How will the assessor assess me?

Assessment is through evidence. In other words, the assessor has to see evidence that you meet all the requirements. Assessment in VET can be very flexible, as any combination of evidence can be used by the assessor to work out whether you are “competent”, as long as it meets the requirements shown below. This evidence can take many forms, for example:

- Documents and reports you have written.
- Questions asked and answered in writing (preferably submitted electronically).

There are several things that the assessor must check before he or she can say that you are “competent”. These are specified in the AQTF (see under “Is ABSOLUTE Education accredited?” above) and are:

² This is from the definition of “competency” in glossary of the AQTF 2007 Users’ Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration

- **The evidence must meet the requirements of the training package.** Your assessor will make sure that the assessment tasks do this; however, you are welcome to get copies of the relevant sections from the training package if you like. Just ask your assessor.
- **The evidence must be authentic.** This means it must be your own work, and the assessor must know this. No copying off the internet!
- **The evidence must be sufficient.** It should show that your skills and knowledge meet all the requirements of the unit of competency. It should also show that you can use the skills and knowledge repeatedly—not just on one occasion. In most cases it should cover a range of contexts, and different assessment methods should be used.
- **You must show that you can carry out the workplace tasks under real workplace conditions.** It should show that you can manage yourself and your time during the tasks, deal with unexpected situations, and do all of this in a real work environment (or in a simulation as close as possible to this). For example while doing the assessment, you might have to follow typical company policies and procedures, complete it within a deadline similar to one you would have to meet in real life, deal with safety issues and do it in cooperation with colleagues.
- **Assessment should be fair.** This means: (a) if you have any special characteristics that may affect your ability to do the assessment, the assessment is adjusted. For example, someone with poor eyesight may be given a large-print version of a text, or assessed in a practical way instead of through writing. However, the adjustment must not make the assessment invalid, and must meet some other rules as well. It is for this reason that some students may be assessed in different ways. We will take care to ensure that no-one has an advantage or disadvantage by doing a different kind of assessment. (b) The assessor must make sure you understand the assessment and are able to do it. (c) You can appeal against the assessment decision if you feel the assessor made a wrong decision (see “How do I appeal against an assessment decision”, below).
- **Assessment should be flexible.** This means that your skills should be recognised no matter how or where you learned them (see the information about RPL and Credit Transfer below). It also means that assessment may be adapted to the needs of different candidates; this is the same as part (a) about fairness above. Additionally, flexibility means that a variety of different assessment methods may be used depending on the situation.
- **The evidence should be interpreted reliably.** This means that the same assessor would make the same decision every time they see the same evidence, and also that different assessors would make the same decision based on the evidence.
- **The assessment process and evidence must be valid.** That means that (a) all the points above must apply, and (b) the assessment process must actually assess what it says it assesses.

The evidence you submit for assessment may be seen by other people. For example, it may be used for moderation, in which different assessors talk about and compare their assessment decisions, to make sure they are consistent with each other (to help ensure the points about reliability and validity above). Also, when the college is audited (see above under “Is ABSOLUTE Education accredited?”) the government auditors may ask to see some student assessments. All people who see your assessment under these circumstances are obliged to maintain confidentiality.

Other things you should know about include Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer. See the separate questions on these below.

Who can assess?

All assessors must meet certain national requirements about their qualifications and work experience. At ABSOLUTE Education, we go above the national requirements and all assessors have:

- Considerable experience working in the field in which they are training, and above the level at which they are training
- A qualification in training and assessment.

What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Many people learn skills and knowledge through work experience or life experience. For example, you may have developed teamwork skills in a job that's unrelated to the one you are training for, or communication skills through organising activities for your children and coordinating them with other parents. Often, people don't realise the skills they have.

Recognition of prior learning is a way of formally recognising these skills, and giving you credit for them.

If you think you might have skills that are relevant to your course, speak with your teacher, the Director of Studies as soon as possible. See below for more information about how to apply.

Assessment for RPL is similar to assessment in your course. The assessor has to see evidence of your competence, and match it against the criteria in the training package. If your evidence shows you meet the criteria for a unit, you are given RPL for the unit and you do not have to study or take assessment for this unit during your course. The RPL units may be counted towards a qualification and will appear on your transcript when you finish your course.

Evidence must meet the same requirements as listed under “How will the assessor assess me?” above. There is also one more requirement:

- **The evidence must be current.** It must show that you can perform the workplace tasks now. For example, if you studied Owner-Building five years ago, you will have to show what you have done between then and now to keep your workplace skills and knowledge up-to-date.

What is Credit Transfer?

As we mentioned above, qualifications issued by one RTO must be recognised by all other RTOs. This also applies to units of competency. So, if you have already obtained a unit that counts towards a qualification at ABSOLUTE Education, we can transfer credit and you will not have to do the same unit again. This process is sometimes called “national recognition”.

Credit transfer can also include credit from qualifications outside the Australian Qualification Framework. This is assessed in a process similar to RPL (see above and below).

How do I apply for RPL or Credit Transfer?

If by any chance you are reading this before enrolling, speak with the same person who told you about the course, or speak directly with the college. You will be guided through a process similar to the one below.

If you are a current student:

1. Speak with a staff member. You will be referred to the Director of Studies or an experienced assessor.
2. The Director of Studies will explain the process to you, talk through your work and life experience, and help you with some ideas about the evidence you might need.
3. You then complete the RPL Application Form. This gives some ideas about the evidence you need to provide. It is important to ask us if you have any questions, and we are happy to help.
4. Hand or send in the completed, signed application form and all your evidence together in one package. If you can bring the original documents to college, any member of college management can sign copies as true copies; otherwise, you should submit true copies certified by a Justice of the Peace (or equivalent in other countries, such as a notary).
5. The college assesses your application (see above, “What is RPL?”)
6. You will be informed in writing of the outcome within ten working days of the date the college receives your application. You may be granted the units you applied for, asked for further information, asked to do further assessment tasks to cover any gaps, or a combination of these.

While ABSOLUTE Education will make sure that you have enough information on which to base a decision about how to apply for RPL, you will be required to pay the appropriate fees before the full process is started.

How will I know the result of an assessment?

Your will automatically be marked for the multiple choice questions. Your assessor will notify you of corrections required to other sections of your

assessment. You will have access to these at all times and will be able to print theses off for your own records.

What do I get at the end of my course?

All students who undertake assessment get a transcript, which lists all units taken and the assessment outcome. Units for which RPL or credit transfer was granted are included on this.

Students who meet the requirements for a complete qualification get a certificate for that qualification, in addition to their transcript.

If you don't obtain enough units for a full qualification, you will get a Statement of Attainment listing the units in which you were competent.

If you obtain a full qualification plus some extra units, you will get a statement of Attainment listing those extra units in addition to your transcript and qualification.

Qualification certificates and statements of attainment are in a standard national format that employers and educational institutions around Australia should understand. If you show your documents when you apply for a job or another course, we may be contacted to verify the documentation.

However, we can only issue these qualifications if you do not owe the college any money.

What if I disagree about an assessment?

You always have the right to appeal against any assessment decision.

First, though, we suggest you read the section above about "What do I have to do to get the qualification". If this doesn't help you understand the assessment result, speak with your assessor or the Director of Studies as soon as possible.

If this also doesn't help, the next step is to complete an Appeals/Complaints Form (available from our website). A committee of assessors is then formed, and they look at your assessment and the evidence you have provided.

You will receive the result of your appeal within ten working days of the date we receive your completed and signed Appeals/Complaints Form.

Note that, in most cases, you must make your appeal within four weeks of the result of the assessment (however, if you have a good reason to appeal later, the Director of Studies may make an exception to this rule). The reason for this period of time is to ensure the fairest possible process. This system works best if the assessment is fresh in the mind of the assessor.

Section 3: Difficulties with your studies

I find it difficult to read and write. What can I do?

First, speak with your trainer. Then, your trainer might use less written material. You trainer may also give practical assessments, instead of writing.

There are a few other things we can do. It will depend on the situation. Your trainer will explain more.

If you require assistance with numeracy, please feel free to **contact Peter Berginc** who also holds a sub-major in business mathematics.

English is difficult for me (it is not my first language).

You probably marked this on your application form. If not, tell your trainer straight away. He or she may be able to make changes to the course.

There are a few things we can do. It will depend on the situation. Your trainer will explain more.

Currently our staff are versed in the following languages and can assist in translating the course material verbally face-to-face or over the phone. All our staff are versed in English as well as the following languages.

Peter Berginc: Croatian, Serbian.

I have a disability. What can I do?

ABSOLUTE Education is dedicated to providing fair and equitable opportunities for all, including people with a disability. We follow the Disability Standards for Education (2005).

ABSOLUTE Education will do what it can to ensure that people with a disability can participate in all college activities, including training and assessment. For example, training materials may be printed with a larger font size for people with eyesight problems. Or assessments may be adjusted to give the person with the disability the same opportunity as someone without. Such adjustments, though, have to be reasonable—that is, they must not cause undue hardship to the college or to other students.

If you have a disability and did not mention this on the application form, speak with your trainer. Any information you give will be kept confidential. All staff are instructed to act sensitively and with consideration at all times.

I feel I am being discriminated against or harassed

Harassment is any behaviour that is reasonably likely to lead to humiliation, offence, intimidation or distress. This can include behaviour or comments in relation to age, sex, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, English language ability, literacy or numeracy ability, unemployment, area of residence, socio-economic group, disability, unemployment or any other personal characteristic that a person has little control over.

Harassment or discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.

ABSOLUTE Education works hard to make sure discrimination or harassment of any kind is avoided. If you feel that fellow students or staff are discriminating against you in any way, or harassing you, speak as soon as possible to your teacher, the Director of Studies or any staff member you can talk with comfortably. It is their job to help you, even if it is another member of staff discriminating against you. Alternatively, the regular complaints procedure can be followed.

All reports will be taken seriously and followed up.

Actions that can be taken include:

- Expulsion/Termination of course (in the case of students)
- Dismissal (in the case of staff)

Other problems

If you are experiencing other problems, speak with your trainer or a member of management as soon as possible. The more we know about such issues, the more easily we can deal with them. Such problems could include having trouble keeping up with the work, part of your personal or work life interfering with your studies, etc.

Possibilities include:

- Providing extra support (such as training in study skills, tutorials, or counselling)
- Repeating parts of the program
- Deferring your studies
- Changing to a different course time
- Adjustments to assessments (as long as they are reasonable and don't affect the validity of your assessment) such as amended deadlines

However, we are very flexible and other solutions may also be possible.

Section 4: General points

I can't come to class. What should I do?

ABSOLUTE Education only offers its courses by correspondence or online and your enrolment is valid for 2 years. There are NO classroom based modules.

Photocopying and copyright

Before copying anything, it is important to understand intellectual property rules.

Any person associated with another RTO in anyway is not permitted to access ABSOLUTE Education's course material for any purpose. Persons, not registering to complete the ABSOLUTE Education courses for the sole purpose of gaining a certificate of completion will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Keeping us up to date

It is very important that you let us know about any changes of contact details, including address, phone numbers and email address. You can do so by speaking with Angela on 1800 427 407.

How does ABSOLUTE Education look after my privacy?

Your privacy is important to us. We will keep your records confidential.

We collect information about you from, for example, the application form. Records of your assessment will also be kept. In other cases, such as if you make a complaint, you will be aware of any information you are giving us. Records may also be used for any other purpose given in this handbook.

Any records may be seen by government auditors. These people act under a code of conduct which means they will keep information confidential.

How can I see my records?

For records kept by your assessor, such as records of your progress and assessment results, ask your assessor.

You can ask for a copy of any records about you that we hold by asking any member of the management staff. You must prove your identity by identifying most of the registration details we have with you (e.g. username and password and full address). This ensures that we do not disclose your information to the wrong person.

What do I need to know about paying fees?

Please see the current list of fees and charges leaflet, available on our website. If any fees change, the college will let you know by sending you an email or putting a notice on our website.

If your fees are not up-to-date, the Principal may exclude you from enrolment into the course and assessment activities until they are paid. Also, qualifications, statements of attainment and transcripts will not be issued while there are any fees owing.

When you pay your fees, they are put into a trust fund. They are not taken out until you have finished the part of the program to which they apply. In this way, your fees are protected.

Refunds

The policy may change from time to time, so rather than referring to the current one, you should look at your copy of your application form for details.

ABSOLUTE's Policy is as follows.

Full refund of fees less administrative expenses (\$50) assuming no certificate or statement of attainment has been issued already.

If a statement of attainment or certificate has already been issued, then NO refund is available.

I want to withdraw from my course. How do I do this?

The most important thing is to speak with your trainer, the Director of Studies or another member of management as soon as possible. If you are having problems with your studies, we want to provide all the help we can.

If you would like to withdraw for other reasons, still speak with us. For example, if it is because you do not need to complete our course, we may be able to prepare a plan for you to complete assessments early so that you have the maximum number of units of competency on your transcript.

No matter when you leave, you will be given documents as explained under "what do I get at the end of my course", above, as long as you are eligible for them.

What happens at the end of my course?

Qualifications, transcripts and statements of attainment will be posted immediately upon successful completion of any course. (Qualifications, transcripts or statements of attainment documents will not be given out if you still owe outstanding fees).

Section 6: Complaints and appeals

ABSOLUTE Education aims to ensure that all complaints and appeals are dealt with in a constructive and positive way, with a minimum of bad feeling.

There will be no discrimination as a result of a complaint. ABSOLUTE Education will do its best to ensure that complaints and appeals are handled in an unbiased and fair way. If English is not your first language, or you have special needs, staff will understand this and help you with the process.

What is an appeal?

An appeal is a request to change a decision that the college has made.

Appeals against assessment decisions are mentioned under Section 2: Nationally Recognised Training, although they follow the same general procedure as outlined here.

Although appeals and complaints use the same form and a similar procedure, an appeal should not be considered a complaint. Rather, an appeal is simply a way of making sure that everyone is treated fairly, and that the occasional mistake is dealt with.

How do I make a complaint or appeal?

The procedure is:

1. Try to solve the problem through discussion. For example, speak with the person concerned, or with the Director of Studies or any other member of management.
2. If discussion does not resolve the matter, the best next step is to complete an Appeals/Complaints form. You can get these from our website. Formal complaints and appeals can also be lodged by email or telephone. Friends, family or organisations may also lodge the complaint or appeal on your behalf. If you prefer, you may also lodge the complaint anonymously, though without a name, there may be limits on how much the investigation can cover.
3. Email or post the form to the secretary, who will pass it to the Principal. You might want to put it in a sealed envelope to make sure it stays private, but if you do, mark the envelope with "to the Principal—Urgent" and also write the date. Alternatively, you can hand it directly to the Principal.
4. The Principal discusses the complaint with the head of the department that the matter concerns. They may also discuss the matter with other people who are involved with the complaint. They may also discuss the matter with you. If they do, you can bring another person to the meeting. The matter may also be discussed at a Management Meeting.

5. You will receive a letter within ten working days of lodging the complaint/appeal, to acknowledge the complaint/appeal and to let you know approximately how long the matter will take to resolve (unless you lodged the matter anonymously).
6. The matter will be investigated by college staff.
7. The college will tell you the outcome in writing. This will also explain the reasons for the outcome. In addition, someone may speak with you about the decision.
8. If you are still not happy, there are two things you can do:
 - a. Engage an independent arbiter. This is a person who has no relationship with the college or with you, who can consider all the information and recommend a decision. This may be at your expense. Both you and the college have the right to ask for a different arbiter if bias is suspected.
 - b. You can complain to an outside organisation, such :

NSW VETAB

Department of Education and Training

Locked Bag 21

Darlinghurst

NSW 1300

Tel: (02) 9244 5335

National Training Complaints Hotline

nationalcomplaintshotline@dest.gov.au

Tel: 1800 000 674

If the complaint or appeal involves an alleged contravention of the Disability Standards for Education, the matter can be taken to the **Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC)**:

Director,

Complaint Handling

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

GPO Box 5218

Sydney NSW 2001

www.hreoc.gov.au and click on 'lodge a complaint'

A register is kept of all appeals and complaints. Information about your complaint will be entered into this register. The register may be inspected by government auditors at any time.

All complaints will be taken seriously. Details of who made the complaint will, as much as is possible, be kept confidential. This policy does not remove a student's right to take further action under Australia's consumer protection laws. The registered provider's dispute resolution processes do not circumscribe the student's right to pursue other legal remedies.

Section 6: Rules (student code of conduct)

We want the atmosphere at ABSOLUTE Education to be positive and friendly. We believe that showing courtesy and respect for others is important for this.

Most of you will no doubt just see these as a matter of common sense, but it sometimes helps to make them clear to everyone. Remember also that, to be assessed as competent on your courses, you will have to demonstrate that you can act professionally while undertaking workplace tasks. These guidelines can be seen as minimum professional standards.

Some actions are considered serious enough that they may result in being removed from the course. These include:

- Harassment of staff
- Racist, sexist or other discriminatory remarks to staff

Any decision to cancel a student's course will be made by the Principal.

Section 7: After you finish your course

The most important thing to say is: Good luck! And stay in touch. We are always happy to hear about what our former students do after they graduate, and we will always be happy to hear about your work experience and/or projects.

It is important that you keep us up to date with your contact details. We will contact you within a year of your graduation date with a survey for you. These surveys help us a lot to improve our courses.

If you want another copy of your transcript, qualification or statement of attainment after you graduate, you can do so at any time up to thirty years after you graduate. Just contact Angela on 1800 427 407. There is a small fee for this, just to cover administration costs. The fee will be as stated on the list of fees at the time you ask for the new copy.

If a future employer or educational organisation wants to verify your qualification, we are very happy to do so. Just ask them to call or email us with your details.

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Position responsible for this handbook: CEO		
Date last updated:	Signature of CEO: Peter Berginc	
12/08/2008		