



TRAINING- DIPLOMA OF COMMUNITY SERVICES – FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

It has been a long time coming but we are getting closer to the ongoing delivery of the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling). Whilst no formal announcement is possible as yet, it has been indicated to me that I can make an informal announcement within the sector. This document aims to make clear the short term options for all potential Diploma students in semester two of 2011.

Victoria University has been chosen as the university of choice as it is both a college of TAFE and a University and has a central and accessible location. As a university, VU has the capacity to develop pathways into higher studies in the future, along with an understanding of the community services sector through the delivery of other community services training at TAFE level.

Since we are jumping into a major sea of students (53,000 to be exact) over a number of VU campuses, the process to have the course approved and move towards having space, time and people to deliver the training has been *and still is* encumbered with many burdensome requirements and processes.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in commencing delivery of a new qualification mid-year, it remains the commitment of FCRC to endeavour that this occurs.

UNIVERSITY RULES

In using institutions such as universities there are many processes which become part of training that are governed by the institution and whilst we have had input into this, there are some things that we are not able to control or dictate.

Examples include fees, RPL processes, timetables, and intake processes. Once a university opens a course, the criteria for entry to that course have to be very specific but cannot be exclusive or discriminatory; a great deal of work has been done about how this process can occur.

We have been able to influence many other things around this qualification such as the content, the need to have face to face delivery, which units we could use as electives amongst other things. We have tried to work timelines of subject delivery that will fit with working schedules of students and possible tutors.

The other challenge facing the university is how to enrol people on a very short timeline and how to best manage the starting point of this Diploma. The university has to meet very stringent census dates to receive government funding for course participants. The census date for semester 2 is 31 August 2011. This means that every person enrolled must have completed an entire unit PRIOR to that date and 20% of course work for the other enrolled units. That is a very big task to complete within the timeframes.



WHAT IS THE DIPLOMA MADE UP OF?

You may or may not be aware that the Diploma is a high level diploma requiring a considerable amount of work. It comprises 17 units of study, including 5 units in counselling, 3 financial counselling specific, 1 legal specific, 2 advocacy (direct and systemic) and a number of electives around development of community programs, working with clients with mental health issues, working with culturally diverse clients and co-workers, case management and social housing. As you can see, it is quite a lot of work to achieve the Diploma, but it gives ground for us as financial counsellors to be skilled not only in the financial units but also in the broader application of counselling skills and community development knowledge. There are 2 units that are very generic, but compulsory: occupational health and safety and workplace communications.

This Diploma is the nationally recognised approved training for the financial counselling profession.

An applicant will not be able to obtain Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the whole Diploma. This is a rule that the university apply to ensure that there is quality of outcomes. For example, regardless of whether a financial counsellor has been working for a long time, the university cannot assume that the financial counsellor has the capacity or knowledge to pass the 5 counselling units.

The learning guides for the 4 financial and legal units have been produced by Financial Counselling Australia and were recently reviewed to include updated legislative changes. However, the other 13 units have to be sourced in other ways.

A full time Diploma takes 2 years to complete; a part- time Diploma takes 4 years to complete.

RPL can be conducted at the pace of the student.

FEES

Fees are to be notified by the university. Students who do not have any formal qualifications at Diploma level will be eligible for funded places, hence the fees will be minimal.

Students who have a Diploma qualification or higher, will not be eligible for funded places and will be required to pay full fees according to the university schedules.

The University has the ability to offer Fee Help to those students with concession cards etc. These are the normal rules of the university.

RPL is generally charged per unit of RPL.

SO WHAT CAN HAPPEN NOW?

Since we have not had formal approval from the university, but are hoping to have that soon, we need to have some strategies that will allow us to begin regardless of the limitations that exist at this time.

Hence, for semester 2 this year, Victoria University has suggested the following approach:

- (i) All those wishing to undertake the Diploma studies that ***already have a Diploma in a related field*** can apply for RPL for relevant units. Charges will be made to the student and this will not be affected if the start date for face to face delivery becomes delayed
- (ii) All students who do not yet have a Diploma of any kind, but have completed some units of the Diploma in Community Services (Financial Counselling) in the past will be eligible for funded places and will be able to apply for RPL should approval come through prior to mid July.
- (iii) All prospective students who have not ever completed any Diploma studies and who have not done any financial counselling units and have started working as financial counsellors will be eligible for funded places, but enrolment will need to wait until full approval is granted by the university.

If approval is officially obtained in the next few weeks, we will need to act in the following manner:

- (i) Enrol all students eligible for funded places and allow all those to apply for RPL in at least 1 unit before the end of July. All these students must then complete one unit entirely and start delivery in the other units. Thus we have chosen to have 1 day of delivery for the OHS unit to cover off on that requirement and set aside some days in August to have face to face delivery of the first financial counselling unit and the unit in Advocate for Clients. Provided the students attend and do one assessment, they can be funded and go forward to the rest of the Diploma studies into 2012.
- (ii) Enrol all students who have not completed the Diploma of Community Services – financial counselling in the past but are working as financial counsellors and can apply for RPL for a number of units. These students will receive funded places provided they do not have a higher qualification. These students will need to fulfill the same requirements as those outlined in (i)



- (iii) Enrol all students who have a previous qualification and allow them to apply for RPL. There is not the same time constraint since these students will not be eligible for funded places.

If approval is NOT obtained in the next few weeks prior to commencement of semester 2, we will need to do the following:

- (i) Allow all those who have previous Diploma Qualifications and are working as financial counsellors to apply for RPL for those units that they can apply for in view of completion of the other Diploma units in 2012.
- (ii) If approval is not obtained prior to semester 2, the only people we can focus on are the fee paying students who are not eligible for funded places.

Please note: if you have only completed the 4 units legal and financial units of the Diploma of community Services- financial counselling, you have NOT completed the Diploma and unless you have other qualifications at Diploma level, you will not be able to enroll for RPL until full approval for the course to go ahead is obtained from the university.

If you completed those 4 units some years ago (prior to end of 2008) you will have the units from the previous qualification, which means that you will need to apply for RPL for those units when you complete the entire Diploma.

I am pleased to be able to say that the ability to study this Diploma in Victoria brings with it the ability to develop some specialist units into the future which will allow for specialization and the ability for experienced financial counsellors to develop further areas of expertise.