



Using SOLAR in Hairdressing vocational awards at Ambition Centre for Training

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The use of online testing in the assessment of knowledge and understanding in hairdressing has resulted in significant efficiencies for an Edinburgh-based training company.

The Institution

Ambition Centre for Training (ACT) is an award winning provider, founded in 2004, that has taken a radical new approach to hairdressing education, giving salon hairdressers and aspiring hairdressers an opportunity to gain comprehensive certified training of the highest quality. In the ACT approach, salon owners and managers keep control over the practical training of their new employees themselves while delegating to ACT the teaching of theory and the management of assessment and record keeping.

The founders of ACT, Lynda McGivern and Isabel McKeown, are both experienced trainers and salon owners. They have embraced technology-based solutions for the delivery of education to the trainees and for the management of the collection of assessment evidence. In 2013/14 ACT has been contracted to deliver over 60 Modern Apprenticeships for Hairdressing and also has 15 candidates in Get Ready for Work provision.

The Challenge

With trainee hairdressers located in salons across a wide geographic area, the challenge for ACT was to find an efficient means of offering on-demand testing for the theory aspects of the Hairdressing awards. In addition, there was a requirement for ACT to manage and support students in the production of a portfolio of their practical work in client care and practical hairdressing.

The Activity

The first step was for ACT to develop its own Learning Management System (ACT:ONline) that included an e-portfolio system to support the delivery and assessment of its vocational qualifications. Trainees can access the learning materials remotely, including access from tablets and mobile devices, and keep track of their own progress through the online system. ACT tutors monitor progress and are able to provide feedback to trainees in text or audio formats.

ACT also committed to the use of SOLAR assessments for the summative assessment of knowledge in the Hairdressing SVQ 2 (SCQF Level 5) and SVQ 3 (SCQF Level 6) awards. The areas where a question paper is to be used for assessment is mandated by Habia and incorporated into the assessment arrangements for the SVQ.

The table below shows the Hairdressing SVQ Units for which SOLAR assessments were used to assess the knowledge component of the Unit. ACT has implemented SOLAR as its means of assessment for all of the mandatory and optional units as indicated below.

SVQ 2 in Hairdressing (at SCQF level 5)

Mandatory Units

| SSC Code | Title | SCQF Level | SCQF Credit |
|----------|---|------------|-------------|
| G7 | Advise and consult with clients | 5 | 3 |
| GH8 | Shampoo, condition and treat the hair and scalp | 5 | 4 |
| GH9 | Change hair colour | 5 | 11 |
| GH10 | Style and finish hair | 5 | 6 |
| GH11 | Set and dress hair | 5 | 6 |

Optional Units:

| | | | |
|------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| GH13 | Plait and twist hair | 5 | 4 |
| GH14 | Perm and neutralise hair | 5 | 8 |
| GH15 | Attach hair to enhance a style | 5 | 3 |



G9F1 23 SVQ 3 Hairdressing (at SCQF level 6)

Mandatory Units:

| SSC code | Title | SCQF Level | SCQF Credits |
|----------|--|------------|--------------|
| G21 | Provide Hairdressing Consultation Services | 6 | 3 |

Optional Units:

| | | | |
|------|---|---|----|
| GH17 | Colour Hair using a Variety of techniques | 6 | 12 |
| GH18 | Provide Colour Correction Services | 7 | 13 |
| GH22 | Create a Variety of Permed Effects | 6 | 8 |
| GH23 | Provide Creative Hair Extension Services | 6 | 8 |

The Outcomes

Through the use of ACT:ONline, ACT has been able to realise significant savings in travel time and cost for its assessors. Trainees can upload to their personal e-portfolio any images, video and audio files that have been approved by their local mentor. Assessors no longer have to travel to distant locations to observe candidates performing tasks such as hair colouring or perming. With approximately 130 trainees spread over a wide geographical area, ACT's investment in an e-portfolio system has realised substantial time and cost savings.

In relation to SOLAR, ACT has provided estimates of the efficiencies that it has realised through its use for assessment of knowledge in one of the units it delivers and assesses - the SVQ 2 Unit GH9 Change Hair Colour. In the 2013-14 session around 60 trainees are expected to undertake this Unit.

With trainees spread across a wide geographic area, in a paper system ACT would require to arrange for the knowledge test to be administered during an assessor visit to a salon. This involved travel time as well as supervision and marking time and would amount to around 300 hours of assessor time over the 60 candidates.

However, using the online SOLAR system, all that is required is for the trainee to be allocated a keycode for access to the online testing system and to complete the test under observed conditions either in their own salon or in one of ACT's training suites. This reduces the overall time for testing and marking to around 1 hour per candidate.

Also, ACT's quality assurance procedures require that a 20% sample of marked scripts are moderated. The moderation of 12 marked scripts from the cohort of 60 candidates would require an estimated 3 hrs of assessor time. ACT saves this further time by using the online SOLAR assessment. A total saving of over 240 hours has been achieved, thus reducing the operating costs of the training company.

Learner Perception

Hairdressing trainees with ACT are enthusiastic about the e-portfolio system as it allows them to work on assessments at times that suit both their home life and workloads, and ensures that evidence is kept securely so that there is no repetition or lost paperwork

They particularly appreciated the availability of online testing of their knowledge and understanding through the SOLAR assessments. Trainees valued the flexibility of being able to ask to be assessed at the point when they felt ready for it.



Lessons Learned

ACT's principals are satisfied that their decision to adopt digital approaches to the management of the learning and assessment of their hairdressing trainees has been fully justified by the efficiencies and effectiveness that this has brought to their business.

Isabel confirms this: "this exercise to quantify our efficiencies has been valuable for the company and will help our business case as we continue to invest in innovative approaches that will enhance the experiences of trainees and salon owners"