

Addressing the Career Development Needs of Women Returners in Australia

What did the school set out to achieve?

As a component of the Graduate Certificate in Career Development, within the School of Management, Faculty of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, a research project was undertaken which explored the key issues of women seeking to re-enter the workforce after a career break, and identified the important career development needs of this target group.

Utilising the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, key career competencies and performance indicators significant to women returners were identified. This knowledge provided a framework to devise a career development workshop for women returners, which addresses the key issues of this target group and supports them to enhance their career competencies. This empowers them to return to the workforce with confidence.

The impetus for this project was provided by the recognition of the economic need in Australia to increase the participation rates of women in the workforce, in the context of an ageing population and a declining future labour force; and an acknowledgement of the relative lack of career development services for women returners in Australia.

Research recognised that women returners represent an increasingly important segment of the labour market, yet they face a host of potential obstacles in successfully re-entering the workforce. This project aimed to identify these obstacles and develop an appropriate career development program to help women overcome them.

What did the research project do?

During the research project, the *Blueprint* was used to:

- Identify the career competencies and performance indicators most significant to women returners, based on the understanding of the issues, challenges and concerns they have in re-entering the workforce, and
- Apply these findings and use the *Blueprint* guidelines to create a one-day career development workshop for women returners.

The following methodology was employed:

- Researched and understood the issues, challenges, concerns and needs of women returners. This research was informed

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by a review of national and international literature, together with professional knowledge.

- Utilised this research, together with an understanding of the *Blueprint*, to identify the career competencies and performance indicators significant to this target market.
- Employed this understanding to develop a workshop addressing the issues and needs of women returners and encompassing identified career competencies and performance indicators.
- Mapped the content of the workshop against identified *Blueprint* competencies and performance indicators.

In addition, by clarifying the career development issues and needs of women returners, and, by identifying specific career competencies relevant to this target group, it was hoped that this research project would serve as a guiding tool for the assessment and creation of other career development programs and resources appropriate for women returners.

Further, this project represented an opportunity for the author to develop a strong working knowledge of the *Blueprint* to enhance future career development activities for women returners and other adult clients.

How did the Blueprint help?

The *Blueprint* provided a framework and a process by which the needs, issues and concerns of a specific target group could be matched to specific career competencies. This formed the basis of a targeted career development workshop created to assist women returners overcome recognised barriers and facilitate the development of the skills and knowledge to confidently re-enter the workforce.

An evaluation of these issues against the framework provided by the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*, highlighted the career competencies most significant to women returners:

1. Build and maintain a positive self-image.
4. Participate in life long learning supportive of career goals.
5. Locate and effectively use career information.
7. Secure/create and maintain work.
9. Maintain balanced life and work roles

Notably, this process highlighted the importance of not assuming all adults are at learning stage IV. The mapping process identified career



blueprint case study

competencies and performance indicators across all learning stages
from I to IV.

