Soft Skills or Soft Option?: "Raising the bar" in the Helpdesk paper

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In the past, students in the second year of the Bachelor of Computing Systems degree at the EIT chose the level 6 Helpdesk paper because it was seen as an easy paper. Typically, the "soft" skills such as training, requirements analysis and dealing with and managing clients were perceived by the students as being of little value.

This poster shows some of the problems associated with allowing Helpdesk to be the "soft option" and the changes made to the Helpdesk paper to refocus the course - and the students - on the soft skills that are important to IT professionals. These included:

■ The students identifying the skills they felt to be important to IT Professionals and would like to cover, which prepared them to value the skills taught

■ Expanding the topics in the curriculum to cover more material

■ Adding practical sessions on the soft skills required for the assignments

■ Setting high expectations of the quality of assessment work and class participation

Emphasizing that the students provide real value to their clients when completing their assignments (a training manual and Industry placement).

The poster presents the results and feedback on the changes, which exceeded expectations. They included:

■ Positive feedback from the students

■ Students' manuals being used in teaching

■ Very positive attestations by sponsors

■ One student being offered paid employment at their placement.

Changes will continue to be made and the poster sets out the proposed future direction of the course.