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The Clarity of Certificates and Diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications

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1. Executive Summary

It is important for both employers and learners to understand the skills and knowledge in a given qualification. The aim of this review was to determine the clarity of qualification outcome statements as a signal of information. The outcome statements were assessed according to the clarity of links made between the specific qualification and three categories of information, including employment pathways, education pathways and skills and knowledge. A stratified (Broad Field), representative sample of 346 certificates and 282 diplomas were analysed by two researchers independently. The main findings of the analysis were:

- The majority of sampled qualifications provided a clear *employment pathway*; for certificates and diplomas, 60.11 per cent and 55.67 per cent (respectively) provided employment pathways that were categorised as *clear*.
- Distinguishing between qualifications that were intended for specific occupational training and those that provided general skills was not always straightforward. It was not possible to determine whether the qualification developer omitted the information or whether the qualification was intended to provide general skills rather than provide specific occupational training.
- An *education pathway* was *not indicated* in the majority of the sample; for certificates and diplomas, 51.16 per cent and 71.28 per cent (respectively) did not indicate if an education pathway was possible, or if so, did not provide the pathway.
- The majority of sampled qualifications clearly indicated the *skills and knowledge*, or the “learner outcome”; for certificates and diplomas, 63.01 per cent and 74.82 per cent (respectively) provided skills and knowledge that were categorised as *clear*.
- The degree of specificity for learner outcomes varied between different outcome statements, which makes it difficult to compare qualifications and limits end-users’ abilities to make meaningful comparisons.
- Overall, just over 13 per cent of all sampled outcome statements provided *clear* links between the qualification and all three categories of information (e.g. skills and knowledge, education pathways and employment pathways).
- Overall, 50.32 per cent of clarity classifications assigned were “clear”, 18.90 per cent were “implied” and 30.79 per cent were “not indicated”.
- At present, the outcome statements (as listed on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, or the “Register”) provide limited and inconsistent links between specific qualifications, and learner outcomes and pathways.

2. Introduction

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) were charged by the Skill New Zealand Tripartite Forum¹ to undertake a Targeted Review of the New Zealand Qualifications System (the targeted review), focusing on diploma and certificate level qualifications (Action 7, Skills Strategy Action Plan 2008). In April 2009, the Minister of Education approved the targeted review as planned and the project contributes to areas of focus and expectation of NZQA as contained in the Letter of Expectation with the Minister and NZQA's Statement of Intent. This review includes the active participation of the Tertiary Education Commission, Department of Labour, Business New Zealand, NZCTU, the Industry Training Federation, Industry Training Organisations, the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality, the PTE sector, Te Taihū o Nga Wānanga and individual Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics. An objective of the targeted review is to ensure the clarity of qualifications for both industry (employers) and students, as clarity is important for understanding the acquired skills and knowledge for recruitment purposes as well as potential advancement pathways.

This report examines clarity of links made between specific qualifications on the Register (within the outcome statements) and outcomes and pathways, which have been provided by qualification developers for certificates and diplomas in New Zealand. Specifically, outcome statements were chosen as the focus of this report because while individuals are able to make interpretative links between qualifications and pathways insofar as combining several different descriptors, such as the field, title or level, any specific learning outcomes should be summarised in the outcome statement².

It is important to note that this report is *not* an examination of the Register itself, but is an examination of the outcome statements contained within the Register in order to determine if they fulfil the objectives of the targeted review. First, however, a historical context and background are provided to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Register.

¹ The Skill New Zealand Tripartite Forum were brought together as part of work related to the previous government's Skills Strategy. The Forum comprises government Ministers and officials, Business New Zealand, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, and the Industry Training Federation.

² NZQA (2007) *The New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*.

3. The National Qualifications Framework and Register Background

The political, economic and social reforms of the 1980s highlighted the need for significant changes to the education sector, which was increasingly characterised by a lack of comparability in educational programmes, confusion around naming and classification, and a population who lacked the skill and education levels needed to compete effectively in an international marketplace³.

Under section 253 (1)(c)(i)-(ii) of the Education Act 1989, NZQA is required to:

- [...] develop a framework for national qualifications in secondary schools and in post-school education and training in which –
- (i) all qualifications have a purpose and a relationship to each other that students and the public can understand; and
 - (ii) there is a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications, with recognition of competency already achieved.

There was also a significant shift away from the mentality of ‘one qualification for life’ in order to maintain and enhance learners’ ability to transfer credit by the establishment of a common system of credit. To fulfil this statutory mandate, between 1990 and 1991 NZQA consulted on the development of a national qualifications framework that would include all qualifications. The outcome of this consultation was overwhelming support for a single, unified system. Subsequently the National Qualifications Framework was introduced in November 1991.

In 1994, the Tertiary Lead Group was tasked with incorporating degrees into the National Qualifications Framework. The Group recommended that all qualifications be incorporated into a single harmonised qualifications framework. Mechanisms were proposed for registration onto this framework at both National and provider level, specified in terms of learning outcomes and objectives, credits and levels.

The National Qualifications Framework was predicated on ‘units of learning’ – a term that evolved into ‘unit standards’ – with a standard format, and a National catalogue. This shift to unit standards was seen as a key change to the existing qualifications system and aimed to increase the responsiveness of the education system to industry needs by focusing less on inputs, and more learner competencies. Basing the National Qualifications Framework on unit standards caused discord with the university sector.

The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (NZVCC) argued that the introduction of a standards based system would remove academic freedom and innovation, and that university study was at too high a level to be broken down into small, competency based unit standards. Consequently, the NZVCC withdrew its support from the National Qualifications Framework in 1996 before its development was complete.

³ Hamil, J. (2001) *The New Zealand National Qualifications Framework, 1990 – 2001: A Country Characterisation Report* Wellington, New Zealand and London, UK: International Benchmarking of Qualifications Systems Based on Competency Standards Defined by Industry Project (Council for Normalisation and Certification of Competency Standards).

A record of learning was to be kept for all learners, with NZQA being responsible for maintaining it in a central computer database. The multiplicity of existing classifications was replaced by three terms for registration on the framework: National Certificate; National Diploma; and National Degree. The record of learning has since been changed to the Record of Achievement.

Originally, the NQF had eight levels of achievement. The National certificate was placed at Levels 1 to 4 (this was extended to Level 7 in March 1995), the National diploma was placed at Levels 5 to 7, degrees at Level 7 and advanced degrees and all postgraduate qualifications at Level 8. In 2001, the NQF was extended to ten levels as part of the development of the criteria for the Register. In the same year, the framework was further developed to allow the registration of ‘achievement standards’ for school subjects and the subsequent introduction of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in 2002.

In 2001 the NZQA Board agreed to the policy framework and qualification definitions for the Register, which was fully implemented by 2006. The comprehensive listing of qualifications on the Register aimed to provide learners and the public with information on, and to make comparisons between, qualifications. The inception of the Register also accommodated degrees without requiring them to be in a unit standard format by allowing providers to register a qualification that was not standards based. The National Qualifications Framework then became a subset within the Register, while sharing the same levels and qualification descriptors as the wider Register.

In May 2004, NZQA undertook a Register Compliance project to ensure that all standards and qualifications listed on the Register were reviewed against the Register’s criteria. The process was complex and involved more than 400 providers and 2,500 qualifications. During the process it was found that in many cases, provider-developed qualifications were in fact National qualifications. For this and other reasons, more than 500 qualifications were removed from the Register. The outcome was that any qualifications not compliant with the Register criteria by 1 August 2006 were removed. Due to the influx of information this deadline was extended until December 2006.

Currently, the Register not only serves as a database which brings together all quality assured qualifications available in New Zealand, but also prescribes the criteria on which all qualifications must be registered. Specifically, its purposes include: clearly identifying all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand; ensuring that all qualifications are understandable and have a purpose and relation to one another; ensuring learners’ ability to transfer credit; and enhancing and building on the international recognition of New Zealand qualifications⁴.

4. Methodology

The qualification data used was taken from the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, or “The Register”, which includes all quality assured qualifications (that are 40 credits or more) in New Zealand. Although the scope of the *targeted review* includes certificates and diplomas at levels 1 to 6, the dataset

⁴ *The New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, p4. (October, 2007). NZQA

includes all certificates, spanning from levels 1 to 7, and all diplomas, covering levels 5 to 7, in order to provide a full account of clarity across all diplomas and certificates in New Zealand. The review includes standards-based qualifications but does not include the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA).

The qualification data were extracted from The Register on 18 December 2008. Each entry on The Register contains the following information:

- **Qualification Number** (a unique code designating the qualification)
- **Qualification Title**
- **Qualification Type** (e.g. National Certificate/Diplomas or (non-National Certificate/Diploma)
- **Organisation Identification Number** (a unique code designating the qualification developer/owner)
- **Organisation Name** (the name of an organisation that developed/owns the qualification⁵)
- **Level** (levels 1 to 10, with 1 being the least complex and 10 being the most complex)
- **Total Credits** (credits are measured in terms of “notional learning hours”, which includes direct contact time with teachers and trainers, time spent in studying and doing assignment etc. and time spent in assessment. One credit is equivalent to 10 notional learning hours, and 120 credits is equivalent to one year of full-time study)
- **Classification ID** (a New Zealand Standard Classification of Education code designating the *Field* of the qualification)
- **Classification Name** (a New Zealand Standard Classification of Education name designating the *Field* of the qualification)
- **Outcome Statement** (a description of what a qualification holder will achieve in terms of skills and knowledge).

4.1 The outcome statement

KiwiQuals (launched July 2003) serves as the public face of The Register, and is a publicly-available, qualification-search website. It is a single source of information for all quality assured qualifications that are 40 or more credits in New Zealand. KiwiQuals enables individuals to find and compare quality assured qualifications that are 40 credits or above. Information on skills and knowledge as well as potential employment and/or education pathways facilitates comparability between qualifications. Individuals should be able to make interpretative links between qualifications and pathways insofar as combining several descriptors, such as the field, title or level. However, any explicit links are made by the qualification developer in the outcome statement.

One criterion for qualification registration is to provide an outcome statement, which provides the learning outcomes and pathways for the specific qualification. According to the Register Criteria (2007: 8), the outcome statement should:

- be stated as explicitly as possible

⁵ NZQA does not distinguish between a qualification developer and owner; NZQA views the organisation that registers a qualification as both the owner and developer of the qualification.

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- state expected realistic learner achievement in terms of application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes (graduate profile)
- identify what the qualification might lead on to
- suggest possible employment opportunities for a holder of the qualification (if applicable).
- allow meaningful comparisons to be made with other qualifications.

The information provided in the outcome statement listed on The Register and the KiwiQuals website is not only used by NZQA but also Career Services as part of their “education and training information”. Specifically, the information held on The Register is used to support “KiwiCareers” (www.kiwicareers.co.nz), which is intended to supply information to individuals on careers and training and as such, link education and employment. Career Services use the outcome statements to provide educational information required for occupational training.

For the purpose of ascertaining clarity of employment and education pathways as well as skills and knowledge, the outcome statements served as the source data for this report.

4.2. Sample

The sample sizes were derived from a population of 3455 certificates and 1059 diplomas, which were reported as the population sizes as at 18 December 2008 (Vermillion Peirce, 2009). A total of 628 outcome statements were included in the sample, including 346 certificates and 282 diplomas. The sample sizes allow inference to the populations at a confidence level of 95% and with a confidence interval of ± 5 for both samples. The sample was stratified according to the 12 NZSCED (New Zealand Standard Classification of Education) Broad Fields (see Table 1) and randomly selected within these categories. Table 1 illustrates the match between the sample and the population of certificates and diplomas.

In order to ensure accuracy of information, each outcome statement included in the sample dataset was compared against the information contained on the KiwiQuals website.

Table 1. Population and Sample of certificates and diplomas in New Zealand.

NZSCED Broad Field	Certificates		Diplomas	
	<i>Population total (%)</i>	<i>Sample total, rounded (%)</i>	<i>Population total (%)</i>	<i>Sample total, rounded (%)</i>
Natural & Physical Sciences	19 (0.55 %)	2 (0.58 %)	13 (1.23 %)	3 (1.06 %)
Information Technology	136 (3.94 %)	14 (4.05 %)	94 (8.88 %)	25 (8.87 %)
Engineering & Related Technology	792 (22.92 %)	79 (22.83 %)	107 (10.10 %)	29 (10.28 %)
Architecture & Building	149 (4.31 %)	15 (4.34 %)	19 (1.79 %)	5 (1.77 %)
Agriculture, Environmental & Related Studies	320 (9.26 %)	32 (9.25 %)	49 (4.63 %)	13 (4.61 %)
Health	170 (4.92 %)	17 (4.91 %)	96 (9.07 %)	26 (9.22 %)
Education	81 (2.34 %)	8 (2.31 %)	54 (5.10 %)	14 (4.96 %)
Management & Commerce	412 (11.92 %)	41 (11.85 %)	178 (16.81 %)	47 (16.67 %)
Society & Culture	709 (20.52 %)	71 (20.52 %)	223 (21.06 %)	59 (20.92 %)
Creative Arts	215 (6.22 %)	22 (6.36 %)	178 (16.81 %)	48 (17.02 %)
Food, Hospitality & Personal Services	318 (9.20 %)	32 (9.25 %)	41 (3.87 %)	11 (3.90 %)
Mixed Field Programmes	134 (3.88 %)	13 (3.76 %)	7 (0.66 %)	2 (0.71 %)
Total	3455 (100 %)	346 (100 %)	1059 (100 %)	282 (100 %)

4.3. Analysis

The sample outcome statements supported by the qualification titles were analysed according to clarity of links made between the specific qualification and three categories of information: (1) *Employment pathways*, (2) *Education pathways* and (3) *Skills and knowledge*. Classifications of clarity for each of these three categories were identified and described, and then discussed by two researchers until agreement was reached. The three general classifications were:

- A *clear* link or indication of information was made,
- Information was *implied* or ambiguous, or

- Information was *not provided*.

The clarity of each outcome statement was analysed by both researchers independently according to the agreed classifications for each of the three categories of information (i.e. employment pathways, education pathways and skills and knowledge). After the analyses were complete, the independent assessments were compared for each of the 628 qualifications. The initial rate of agreement across the three categories was 72.89 per cent. The majority of differences were found as a coding disparity between the researchers, as well as differentiating between *clear* and *implied* information. The latter issue was resolved by clarifying the category definitions (provided in Section 4.0). Any values which were found to be different were discussed until agreement was made and 100 per cent rate of agreement was reached⁶.

5. Clarity of Information

5.1. Employment pathways

The employment pathway provided within the qualification description is important for learners as they need to determine the direction of employment that the qualification provides. Employment pathways are also valuable for employers in that they provide a clear link between learned skills and knowledge and occupation. At present, there is little available on the Register that links qualifications to employment. One immediate way a learner and/or an employer may link a qualification to an occupation on KiwiQuals is through the field of the qualification. However, the field may be too broad to link to a specific occupation. For example, qualifications in Motor Vehicle Engineering as well as Computing can both be classified in the field “Engineering”.

The link is also unclear in the classification coding structure. The NZSCED lists the educational subject of the qualification, as nominated by the qualification developer, without any alignment to an occupational classification used by government agencies or employers. The classification system was not designed to be used by learners or employers but rather as administrative codes. As the classifications between education and occupations are not clearly connected, determining how well the current qualification system structure supports employer/employee needs is problematic and ultimately imprecise.

Employment links, if made at all, are provided in the outcome statement. The information provided in each outcome statement along with the title of the qualification was used to categorise the qualification according to the clarity of the link made between the specific qualification and the *employment pathway*. Three classifications of clarity were identified: *clear*, *implied* and *not indicated*.

⁶ It should be noted that the analysis of the outcome statements was performed subjectively by two “naïve” researchers, i.e. researchers who were not totally familiar with all of the subjects and fields examined. Others, more familiar with the individual subjects and fields, may judge the outcome statements differently. The current research methodology did not allow the use of “experts” to make judgements on individual outcome statements. Future research as part of the targeted review will canvas employers to ascertain the ways in which they interpret the material and determine differences with the current analysis.

Qualifications were nominated into the *clear* category when the outcome statement or the title designated the occupation, such as “civil engineer” or “salon support staff”. The *clear* category was also used to identify qualifications that implied the occupation through naming a specific industry that could be linked to a specific occupation, such as “professional practice in acupuncture”. For certificates and diplomas, 60.11 per cent and 55.67 per cent, respectively, provided employment pathways that were classified as *clear*.

The second category designated qualifications with employment pathways that were *implied* in the title or outcome statements, such as naming an industry that was too broad to link directly to a specific occupation. One example of an *implied* employment pathway is “employment in the computer industry”. Although the industry is named (e.g. computing), the qualification cannot be clearly linked to a specific occupation (e.g. programmer, software developer, hardware maintenance). In order for a qualification to qualify for the implied category, reference to employment had to be made in the outcome statement. This qualifier was added to avoid including qualifications that were not intended for employment. For certificates and diplomas, 15.03 per cent and 19.50 per cent, respectively, provided employment pathways that were categorised as *implied*.

The *not indicated* category designates outcome statements that did not provide occupational information, nor was reference to an occupational field made. For certificates and diplomas, 24.86 per cent and 24.82 per cent, respectively, provided employment pathways that were categorised as *not clear*.

The “not indicated” category represents at least two types of qualifications. First, qualifications that do not indicate an employment pathway although the qualification is intended as occupational training. Second, qualifications that do not lead onto a specified occupation. It was clear during the analysis that a number of qualifications were clearly not designed to provide specific occupational training, such as those intended to lead onto a pathway of further study or those intended as general skills rather than directed occupational study.

Two Broad Fields included a number of qualifications that were clearly not intended as training qualifications for specific occupations, such as *Society and Culture* and *Mixed Field Programmes*. The Broad Field with the largest proportion of certificates and diplomas classified as “not indicated” was Mixed Field Programmes (93.33 per cent). This Broad Field included a number of general skills qualifications, such as *Learning Skills*, *General Education Programmes*, and *Literacy and Numeracy Programmes*. The second highest number of certificates and diplomas classified as “not indicated” was in Society and Culture (48.46 per cent). This Broad Field included languages certificates and diplomas, such as a large number of *English for Speakers of Other Languages* certificates (252).

Distinguishing between qualifications which were intended for occupational training was not always straightforward. It was often difficult to determine whether the qualification developer did not include the information or whether the qualification was not intended as occupational training. At present, the Register and subsequently, KiwiQuals do not clearly distinguish between qualifications intended as occupational training and qualifications that prepare learners for further

study or acquisition of a set of general skills (i.e. not targeted as training to a specific occupation).

5.2. Education pathways

The education pathways provided by the qualification are important for both employers and learners as both need to determine what the qualification may lead onto, particularly if the qualification holder requires further training for specific employment. The Register contains information that can imply education pathways, including the qualification type and the level. However, qualification types and levels do not always clearly define education pathways. Certificates do not always lead onto diplomas within the same fields. Level 5 qualifications do not always follow on from level 4 qualifications. In order to determine if educational pathway was clearly defined in the outcome statement, each outcome statement was assessed to determine the clarity of information provided as *clear*, *implied* and *not indicated*.

Qualifications were classified as *clear* when the outcome statement designated an education pathway(s), if applicable. Such pathways included a specific formal qualification that the qualification may lead onto (e.g. “this qualification may lead onto the Diploma in Science”) or specific training, such as an apprenticeship. Pathways were also clearly provided in outcome statements that stated what the qualification leads on from (e.g. “This qualification builds on the National Certificate in Retail” or “this qualification follows on from”). Qualifications which clearly indicated that there was no education pathway, such as “stand alone qualifications”, were also noted as “clear”. For certificates and diplomas, 37.57 per cent and 15.25 per cent, respectively, provided education pathways that were categorised as *clear*.

The *implied* category designates education pathways that were not clearly indicated but rather reference to further study was made in the outcome statement. One example of an *implied* education pathway is “to undertake further roles of study”; although further education is indicated as possible, a clear pathway was not provided. For certificates and diplomas, 11.27 per cent and 13.48 per cent, respectively, provided education pathways that were categorised as *implied*.

The *not indicated* category designates outcome statements that no education pathway was provided in the outcome statement. An education pathway was not provided in the majority of the sample. For certificates and diplomas, 51.16 per cent and 71.28 per cent, respectively, provided education pathways that were categorised as *not indicated*.

5.3. Skills and knowledge

Ideally, the outcome statement “is a description of what the holder of that qualification is expected to have achieved... in terms of application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes...” (The Register, 2007: 8). Rather than an implied set of skills and knowledge through a subject code or qualification title, the outcome statement should provide clarity by “accurately and clearly describing [learner] achievement” (ibid). Once again, the clarity of information provided about the taught skills and knowledge was classified as *clear*, *implied* or *not indicated*.

Qualifications were categorised as *clear* when the outcome statement outlined the skills and knowledge that the learner achieves through the qualification. For example, the outcome statement of a hairdressing qualification listed the skills as “will have the skills and knowledge to shampoo the hair; rinse colour from the hair; apply conditioning treatments and massage the scalp”. The majority of sampled qualifications clearly identified the taught skills and knowledge. For certificates and diplomas, 63.01 per cent and 74.82 per cent, respectively, provided skills and knowledge that were categorised as *clear*.

Any qualification descriptions that made reference to the sets of skills and knowledge without clearly stating or listing these skills were categorised as *implied*. One example of *implied* skills and knowledge is “to acquire the skills and knowledge for the computing industry”. By naming the industry the acquired skills and knowledge are inferred but not clearly stated. For certificates and diplomas, 34.10 per cent and 19.50 per cent, respectively, listed skills and knowledge in the outcome statement that were categorised as *implied*.

The *not indicated* category designates outcome statements that the acquired skills and knowledge were not provided nor implied. For certificates and diplomas, 2.89 per cent and 5.67 per cent, respectively, did not provide any reference to skills and knowledge.

Although the vast majority of certificates and diplomas did provide the skills and knowledge to be taught, the degree of specificity varied between qualifications. Specific information is necessary to provide clarity, which would enable end-users (e.g. learners and employers) to compare qualifications. Although commonly provided, learned skills and knowledge may not supply enough consistent information for qualification comparison.

5.4. Overall clarity of links

The total makeup of clarity categories is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Clarity classifications of Employment pathways, Education pathways and Skills and Knowledge for diplomas and certificates.

Clarity	Employment	Education	Skills & Knowledge	Total
Not indicated	156	398	26	580 (30.79 %)
Implied	107	77	172	356 (18.90 %)
Clear	365	153	430	948 (50.32 %)

Table 2 illustrates that 50.32 per cent of clarity classifications assigned were “clear”, 18.90 per cent were “implied” and 30.79 per cent were “not indicated”.

Few qualification outcome statements provided “clear” information for all three categories of information. Specifically, 83 of the 628 qualifications (13.22 per cent) provided clear employment and education pathways as well clear skills and knowledge. The majority of qualifications provided a mix of clarity. 86.46 per cent

of qualifications provided neither consistent clarity across the three categories (i.e. three “clear” indications) nor consistent lack of clarity (i.e. three “not indicated” indications). Few qualifications did not provide any information of the three categories of information; specifically 0.32 per cent of qualifications did not provide employment pathways, education pathways nor skills and knowledge.

6. Summary and Conclusions

The outcome statements on KiwiQuals provide insufficient and unclear information on their own. They do not permit qualification comparisons and employment pathways are not always evident. There is little information available on KiwiQuals which links qualifications to employment. Subject/field often does not provide enough information to link a qualification to specific employment. The title and the outcome statement provide opportunity for such links to be made. The analysis showed that the title of the qualification and the outcome statement combined provided “clear” employment pathways in the majority of certificates and diplomas (61 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively). Nearly 25 per cent of all sampled qualifications did not indicate an employment pathway, which may be indicative of qualifications that are not intended for occupational training or of qualifications that comprise general skills that are applicable to a number of industries and occupations.

Education pathways were provided in fewer outcome statements than employment pathways. The majority of certificates and diplomas, 51.16 per cent of certificates and 71.28 per cent of diplomas, did not provide education pathways within the outcome statement. Education pathways are important for both employers and learners to determine what the qualification may lead onto, particularly if the qualification holder requires further training for specific employment.

Although the vast majority of certificates and diplomas (63.01 per cent and 74.82 per cent, respectively) did provide the skills and knowledge to be taught, the degree of specificity varied between qualifications. Specific information is necessary to provide clarity, to enable end-users such as employers, employees and learners, to compare qualifications. Although commonly provided, learned skills and knowledge may not supply enough consistent information for qualification comparison. Further research is required to determine the information that learners and employers find most useful when comparing qualifications.

7. Further Considerations

There are several issues that merit further consideration based on the analysis of the outcome statements:

- The purpose of the outcome statement

The function of the outcome statement requires consideration. In its current form, the outcome statement does not appear to convey successfully the information that would permit learners and employers to compare qualifications in terms of employment pathways, education pathways and skills and knowledge. While the vast majority of certificates and diplomas do provide the skills and knowledge to be taught, the degree of specificity varied between qualifications. Specific information is necessary to provide clarity to enable end-users to compare qualifications.

Although commonly provided, learned skills and knowledge may not supply enough consistent information for qualification comparison. This may be particularly important in times of economic recession, when job losses increase and the need for retraining or upskilling becomes more vital.

- The form of the outcome statement

The outcome statement is currently a statement which identifies a number of categories of information, including learner outcomes, education pathways and employment pathways. In its current paragraph form, it is difficult to determine whether the specific information was not provided by the qualification developer or whether the information was not applicable to the specific qualification. For instance, it became clear during the analysis that a number of qualifications were not designed to provide specific occupational training. Some qualifications were intended as preparation for further study and others intended for the holder to gain general skills rather than directed occupational skills. Changes to the Register rules and criteria to more accurately reflect these distinct outcomes are necessary to better signal these differences. Greater clarity could be obtained by separating out the different categories of information, such as the categories required of the qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications of Ireland. These include Knowledge, Know-how and Skill, Competence, Progression and Transfer, and Articulation.