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

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September 2009

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1. Executive Summary

A report by Vermillion 2009¹ stated that there were 5937 qualifications listed on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications as at 18 December 2008, and that just over 76 per cent of these qualifications were certificates and diplomas. This analysis was carried out to determine the currency, and to provide some context, to the figures presented in the Vermillion's report.

The analysis used a targeted sample of eight qualification developers and asked them to indicate if they are currently offering a list of qualifications ("active"). More than a quarter of the qualifications that were listed on the Register for these eight developers are not permitting enrolments (either because they were not running at the time or if they were no longer offered). The results indicate that while the Numbers Report by Vermillion represent the numbers of qualifications listed on the Register, the report does not represent the number of qualifications currently on offer in New Zealand, as the number of qualifications listed on the Register include both active and closed qualifications.

Based on this finding, two recommendations are made:

- The New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications as well as the publicly available website (KiwiQuals) requires modification in order to reflect the current state of the qualifications listed.

At present, it is not possible to determine the number of active qualifications in New Zealand using the Register/KiwiQuals as neither distinguishes between active/closed enrolments. Minimally, qualifications need to be differentiated according to those that are currently accepting enrolments ("active"), those that are not currently accepting enrolments ("closed") and those that will never be accepting enrolments but qualification holders remain within the public ("historic"). This information would provide the public with a current account of the qualifications available in New Zealand (past and present).

- A second analysis of the information held on Register is required.

In order to determine the rate of active vs. closed qualifications currently listed on the Register, it is also recommended that a representative analysis be carried out, which would enable NZQA to determine the number of active qualifications within New Zealand at present (to a specified degree of certainty).

2. Introduction

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) were charged by the Skill New Zealand Tripartite Forum² to undertake a *Targeted Review of the New Zealand Qualifications System* (the targeted review),

¹ Vermillion Peirce, P. (2009) *The numbers of certificates and diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, Wellington: NZQA.

² 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

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.

An objective of the targeted review is to assess the current situation with regard to the number of New Zealand qualifications. The data source used to ascertain the number of qualifications in New Zealand was the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, or the "Register". The currency of the information contained within the Register is vital to NZQA as the information serves as the sole data source for all New Zealand, quality-assured qualifications (greater than 40 credits). The information is also used to supply the public with information about New Zealand qualifications. This report noted that the number of qualifications listed on the Register (and subsequently within the report) may be an incorrect account of active qualifications. For the purposes of this report, any qualifications that were accepting enrolments were defined as "active". Qualifications that were not accepting enrolments (either because they were not running at the time or if they were no longer offered) were defined as "closed qualifications".

Examination of the data currency is required in order to ensure that Vermillion's Numbers Report reflects the number of qualifications presently taking enrolments in New Zealand. It must be noted, however, that this report is *not* an investigation of the Register itself, but aims to highlight what the information listed on the Register represents, and to place the figures presented in the Numbers Report into perspective. First, however, it is necessary to provide a historical context and background to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Register.

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).

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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. The Register and KiwiQuals

The public face of the Register is KiwiQuals (launched in July 2003) which allows individuals to search for information on quality assured qualifications (40 credits or

⁴ NZQA (2007) *The New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, Wellington: Author, p.4.

more) in New Zealand. KiwiQuals provides information on each listed qualification, including:

- **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/own 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).

The information provided on KiwiQuals may be used by a number of individuals. For instance, students may use KiwiQuals to compare qualifications for their chosen field of study; employers may use the site to compare or understand the qualifications of prospective employees; career counsellors and secondary teachers may use the qualification information to assist students with their education and/or career path choices; and qualification developers may use the information to ascertain existing qualification provision. Government organisations, such as Career Services, link to KiwiQuals to support the information that they supply to the public on their websites.

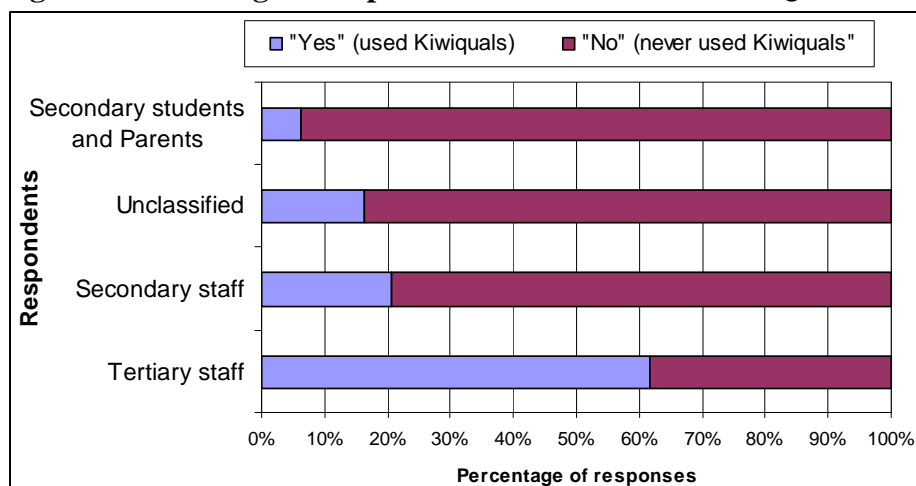
Although there is much useful information provided in KiwiQuals, a number of end-users do not appear to use the website service. A research study was carried out by NZQA Research and Knowledge Services in March 2009, which investigated the effectiveness of NZQA’s communications with the public. The online survey was available on the NZQA website, and participants self-selected after viewing a link on the NZQA website. The participants included 37 tertiary staff, 90 secondary staff, 331 secondary students and parents, and 266 unclassified (“general”) respondents. Three questions were included in the online survey, which investigated the use of KiwiQuals.

The first question was “Have you ever used the KiwiQuals website (www.KiwiQuals.govt.nz) in order to learn about qualifications or providers?”

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.

which permitted either a “yes” or “no” response. Overall, 14.29 per cent of respondents (98) indicated that they have used KiwiQuals (“yes”) whereas the majority, or 85.71 per cent of respondents (588), indicated that they have never used KiwiQuals (“no”). The majority of respondents (greater than 50 per cent) from one group reported having used KiwiQuals, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who have used KiwiQuals.



Specifically, 61.76 per cent of tertiary staff participants (21) reported having used KiwiQuals whereas 38.24 per cent (13) have not used KiwiQuals. The majority of the remaining groups of participants have not used KiwiQuals. Specifically, 20.78 per cent of secondary staff (16), 16.40 per cent of unclassified respondents (41) and 6.35 per cent of secondary student and parents (20) reported having used KiwiQuals.

A follow up question (Question 2) asked: “If YES, how useful was this website for you?”, which permitted one of five possible responses; 16.32 per cent of respondents (16) indicated that KiwiQuals was “Not useful at all”, 35.71 per cent (35) indicated that the website was “Somewhat useful”, 32.65 per cent (32) indicated that the website was “Useful”, 14.29 per cent (14) indicated that KiwiQuals was “Very useful”, and 1 respondent indicated that they “Don't know”.

The final question asked in the survey was “If NO, why haven't you used this website?”, which permitted one of four possible responses; 74.32 per cent of respondents (437) had “Never heard of the website”, 19.05 per cent (112) had reported that they “Never had any reason to use the website”, 1.36 per cent (8) indicated that they had “Never had the opportunity to use the website”, and 2.72 per cent (16) indicated “Other”. Fifteen respondents did not complete this question.

The results of the survey suggest that the majority of visitors to the NZQA website are not using the KiwiQuals website. In addition, the majority of respondents had never heard of KiwiQuals. It should be noted here that the results of the survey may be somewhat limited by the sample frame used. In order to provide an accurate account of the use of KiwiQuals, a more neutral sample would be required in order to investigate the useability of KiwiQuals by

different groups. Nevertheless, the status of the information provided to the public should be clear and current. Clarity of outcome statements was assessed in an earlier report (Vermillion & Grice, 2009)⁶; currency of information is the subject of this report.

5. Currency analysis (initial indications)

This analysis aimed to determine the currency of the information provided in the Numbers Report (Vermillion 2009). It was stated in the report that there were 5937 quality-assured qualifications listed on the Register (as at 18 December 2008), and that just over 76 per cent of these qualifications were certificates and diplomas. Further analyses were done on the qualifications available within specific subjects or fields, the numbers of qualifications developed by specific organisations, and the numbers of qualifications offered at different levels and credits. The report also noted that the numbers of qualifications may not reflect the actual number of active qualifications in New Zealand. The aim of this analysis was to determine if the Numbers Report accounts for the number of qualifications currently available in New Zealand.

With this aim in mind, a currency analysis was designed to gain an initial indication of the currency of the data presented in the Numbers Report. Convenience sampling was used in which the same organisations that took part in a separate research task were also asked to take part in the current study. Specifically, the separate research task was a qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of the current qualification design processes, using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. Qualification developers were interviewed for this purpose, and the same individuals were asked to complete a survey as a supplementary activity.

The survey consisted of nine separate lists of qualifications extracted from the Register (as at 18 December, 2008), and each list was developed and owned by one of nine different organisations. Each unique list served as the survey for each qualification developer. In order to confirm that the list of qualifications was active or not active, each interviewee at the specific organisation that developed the qualifications was asked to indicate whether they are currently accepting enrolments in each of the qualifications (“Yes”), or whether they were not accepting enrolments (“No”). The lists were also compared to the list of available qualifications on the Register, as at 29 May 2009. The comparisons were made in order to ensure that the organisations were responding to current accounts of the Register at the time of their responses (May 2009).

Seven of the organisations completed the task. The total number of qualifications included in these seven lists was 601 qualifications. Within these lists, 151 different qualifications were noted as “not currently accepting enrolments” whereas 450 qualifications were noted as “currently accepting enrolments”. In total, 25.12 per cent of the qualifications that were listed on the Register for these seven providers are not currently accepting enrolments.

⁶ Vermillion Peirce, P. & Grice, J. (2009) *The clarity of certificates and diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, Wellington: NZQA.

6. Further Considerations and Recommendations

An earlier report (Vermillion 2009) indicated that there were 5937 quality-assured qualifications listed on the Register as at 18 December 2008, and that just over 76 per cent of these qualifications were certificates and diplomas. The aim of the current analysis was to determine if the Numbers Report provides a current account of the number of qualifications available in New Zealand. The findings from the analysis indicate that the initial report does not represent the number of available qualifications in New Zealand. The report represents the number of qualifications currently listed on the Register and the publicly available face of the Register, KiwiQuals. However, this number combines qualifications that are currently on offer, and qualifications that are not accepting enrolments. It is not possible to determine the number of active qualifications in New Zealand using the Register/KiwiQuals at present, as neither distinguishes between active/closed enrolments.

Based on this finding, it is recommended that the Register of Quality Assured Qualifications as well as the publicly available website (KiwiQuals) be modified in order to reflect the state of the qualifications listed. Minimally, qualifications need to be differentiated according to those that are currently accepting enrolments (“active”), those that are not currently accepting enrolments (“closed”) and those that will never be accepting enrolments but qualification holders remain within the public (“historic”). This information would provide the public with a more current account of the qualifications available in New Zealand (past and present).

In order to determine the rate of active vs. closed qualifications currently listed on the Register, it is also recommended that a second study be carried out. The required sample size for a more representative analysis would include 628 certificates and diplomas (346 and 282 respectively) derived from a population of 3455 certificates and 1059 diplomas, which were reported as the population sizes as at 18 December 2008 (Vermillion 2009). This sample would allow inference to the populations at a confidence level of 95% and with a confidence interval of ± 5 for both samples. The sample would then need to be stratified according to the 12 NZSCED broad fields and certificates and diplomas. The result of the suggested analysis would determine a percentage of probable active vs. closed qualifications on the Register, which would enable NZQA to determine the number of active qualifications within New Zealand at present (to a specified degree of certainty).