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Employers' Opinions of Certificates and Diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications

Patricia Vermillion Peirce and Sophie Parker
New Zealand Qualifications Authority
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1. Executive Summary

This study examines employers' opinions on the clarity and number of certificates and diplomas in New Zealand. The study was undertaken in early 2009.

In a computer-aided telephone survey, employers who had advertised vacancies on the internet website seek.co.nz were asked a range of questions about certificates and diplomas including their opinions on numbers, relevance and importance, and where they go to find out about qualifications.

The key findings of the survey were:

- The majority of respondents indicated that they used prospective employees' qualifications to assist them in the hiring process. In addition, the majority of respondents thought it was important for applicants to have formal qualifications.
- Over half of the respondents believed that there were between 1-20 qualifications available for their specific industry, yet many indicated that they were unsure of how many qualifications there are.
- More than half of the respondents indicated finding information about a qualification's title, level, and provider useful. Less than half found the number of credits in the qualification useful, nor knowing who the teachers or tutors that the applicant had.
- Half of the respondents were unsure of the differences between National qualifications, Provider qualifications and New Zealand qualifications, suggesting that the information available to employers is not clear.
- Most respondents thought qualification developers understood the needs of their industry, thought that qualifications for their specific industry were relevant for their business, and thought that qualifications provided employees with the keys skills for their specific business.

2. Findings

This study targeted employers of people with certificates and diplomas, and asked their opinions on the number and clarity of qualifications in their industry. There were three key findings from the study.

First, most respondents indicated that they used prospective employees' qualifications to assist them in the hiring process. In addition, the pattern of results in the current study suggest that in regard to the relevance of qualifications, the majority of respondents thought that qualifications in their industries were generally relevant and provided employees with key skills and knowledge. However, while employers think employees' qualifications give them the basic grounding and skills to work in their job, they also take the view that qualifications alone aren't enough: they may give employees' a "foot in the door" so to speak, but experience is also important.

Second, the results obtained in this study suggest that regardless of the actual number of qualifications offered in employers' industries, generally respondents thought there were between 1 – 20 qualifications in their industry. For many employers this estimate was correct as the majority of participants in this study came from industries where there were between 1 – 20 qualifications. However, employers who are in industries in which there are more than 20 qualifications still tended to estimate that the number of qualifications fell in between 1 – 20.

Third, a key result highlighted the information sources that employers use to get information about qualifications. Many indicated that if they needed to find out more information about employees' qualifications, they would ask the employee directly, would search Google, or would go to providers' websites. Few indicated that they would use KiwiQuals, which is the public face of the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, or the "Register"; the majority of respondents did not use KiwiQuals because they were unaware that it existed.

Together, these results together suggests that employers may not have a consistent, comprehensive and comparable source to go to when they require further information about prospective employees' qualifications and this has implications in regard to their knowledge of the number of qualifications that are available in their industry. While an earlier report suggests that more could be done to increase the user-friendliness of KiwiQuals¹, it seems that more could also be done in promoting the site to employers.

Finally, one limitation of the current study is that because the majority of fields only offer between 1 -20 qualifications, more of these fields could be linked to particular jobs and the frequency of these jobs on seek.co.nz was greater. Consequently, most employers in the current study came from fields in which there was relatively low proliferation of qualifications (although what constitutes "too many" or "too few" is a subjective judgement).

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

While questions have been raised around the proliferation and duplication of certificates and diplomas, a report by Vermillion (2009)² suggests that the problem of proliferation is not common to all fields. For example, the average number of certificates and diplomas across all subject fields is 11 and 5.12 (respectively). In fact, the issue of proliferation appears to occur in particular fields: just over 25 per cent of certificates are categorised under 10 fields, with the average number of certificates taught being 89, and just over 25 per cent of diplomas categorised amongst 9 different fields with the average number of diplomas taught being nearly 30. In order to gain a greater understanding of the issue of proliferation, it is recommended that more work be undertaken looking at how the approval/registration processes are applied for new qualification requests in fields that have been identified as having an excessive number of qualifications.

3. Introduction

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) were charged by the Skill New Zealand Tripartite Forum³ to undertake a targeted review of the qualifications system, 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 of the Qualification System* (the targeted review) as planned and this 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 2009-2012. This review includes the active participation of the Tertiary Education Commission, Department of Labour, Business New Zealand, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, the Industry Training Federation, the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality, the private training establishment sector and Te Taihū o Ngā Wānanga.

An objective of the targeted review is to ensure the clarity of qualifications for both industry (employers and employees) and students. Clarity is important for understanding the acquired skills and knowledge for recruitment purposes as well as potential advancement pathways. In the first phase of the targeted review process, Vermillion (2009) undertook descriptive analyses in regard to the number of certificates and diplomas listed on the Register. In the second phase, Vermillion and Grice (2009)⁴ investigated the clarity of information held within the outcome statements of qualifications on the Register insofar as identifying employment and educational pathways, and outlining the skills and knowledge that should be acquired from the qualification. In the third phase, Vermillion and Parker (2009) examined the currency of information provided on the Register in order to provide a context and perspective to Vermillion's Numbers report, which stated that there were 5937 qualifications listed on the Register as at 18 December

² Vermillion Peirce, P. (2009) *The number of certificates and diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, Wellington: NZQA.

³ The Skill New Zealand Tripartite Forum were brought together as part of work related to the previous government's Skills Strategy. The Forum comprised government Ministers and officials, Business New Zealand, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, and the Industry Training Federation

⁴ Vermillion Peirce, P. & Grice, S. (2009) *The clarity of certificates and diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, Wellington: NZQA.

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2008, and that just over 76 per cent of these qualifications were certificates and diplomas.

This study moves away from examining information contained in the Register, to examining *how* end-users of the qualifications system, namely employers, view the number and clarity of certificates and diplomas in New Zealand. Specifically, employers' opinions on the clarity and number of qualifications were examined in order to form impressions on the effectiveness, user-friendliness and relevance of the system. First, however, a historical context and background are provided to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Register.

4. 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 marketplace⁵.

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

⁵ 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).

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.

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

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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 qualifications⁶.

5. Methodology

5.1. Sampling method

There was no existing sampling frame that could be used to select a representative sample of employers with staff in the particular occupations where certificates and diplomas are common. In addition, the budget and time was not available to do a representative sample of all employers in New Zealand. Thus, the sampling method chosen for this study was designed for two purposes. First, the method aimed to provide a sample of employers who did not self-select themselves for the survey as self-selection for surveys can introduce significant bias into the results. Second, in order to obtain a relevant sample, the method targeted employers who had recently hired employees with certificates and diplomas.

To ensure that a range of employers for certificate and diploma-level were included, the sample was derived from the subject fields and outcome statements of certificates and diplomas offered in New Zealand. Qualifications listed on the Register are represented as fields within the New Zealand Standard Classification of Education (NZSCED). At present, all qualifications are categorised into one of the three categories: a Broad Field (e.g. *Society and Culture*), a Narrow Field (e.g. *Sport and Recreation*) or a Detailed Field (e.g. *Sports, Coaching, Playing, Officiating and Instructing*).

As at 18 December 2008, there were 3455 certificates and 1059 diplomas listed on the Register offered across a range of 329 different fields. Eleven of the fields represented by certificates and diplomas were Broad Fields, 44 were Narrow Fields and 274 were Detailed Fields. As Detailed Fields are more closely associated with specific occupations, only these fields' outcome statements were used for selecting a sample of occupations.

The qualification availability within the fields ranged from 48 fields offering one qualification, to 1 field offering 272 different qualifications. The qualifications were then categorised into 14 bands according to the number of qualifications within each field. Table 1 illustrates the spread of qualifications available for each of the bands.

⁶ NZQA (2007) *The New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*, Wellington: Author, p.4.

Table 1. The spread of qualification availability across Bands 1 - 14

	Number of qualifications	Number of NZSCED detailed fields	Total number of qualifications
Band 1	1-20	219	1437
Band 2	21-40	36	1089
Band 3	41-60	7	329
Band 4	61-80	7	523
Band 5	81-100	2	191
Band 6	101-120	0	0
Band 7	121-140	2	249
Band 8	141-160	0	0
Band 9	161-180	0	0
Band 10	181-200	0	0
Band 11	201-220	0	0
Band 12	221-240	0	0
Band 13	241-260	0	0
Band 14	261-280	1*	272
Total		274	4090

*Not included in sample

Specifically, Band 1 included fields with the fewest number of qualifications, ranging from 1 to 20 different certificates and diplomas. There were 219 different fields included within this band. The other end of the scale was Band 14, which represented one field with the highest number of different certificates and diplomas. The bands in between this range were differentiated in the number of qualifications offered within the field in increments of 20 (e.g. 21-40, 41-60, 61-80, etc).

As evident in table 1, the spread of fields across the bands illustrates skewed data, with the majority of fields (219) offering between 1-20 different certificates and diplomas (Band 1). In other words, there are few fields which offer more than 20 different certificates and diplomas and few that offer more than 40 different qualifications. For the purpose of the current analysis, the sample was derived from Bands 1 to 7, not including Band 6, which did not include any fields. Bands 8 to 14 were omitted from the dataset as they included one field, namely *English for Speakers of Other Languages*, which provided general skills rather than training for a specific occupation.

In order to ensure that a range of different employers from different industries were sampled, a total of ten occupations were sought for each band by first identifying the field (e.g. *Hairdressing*). Next, a list of unique occupations specifically named in the qualification outcome statements were identified (e.g. "...will be able to work as a hairdressing assistant"). This occupational total was not possible across Band 5 (*Business Management and Travel*) and Band 7 (*Sport and Religion*) due to their limited number of fields (two per band). Ten occupations were achieved across Bands 1-4, all of which could provide specific occupational training.

The resulting list of occupations was sought out on the job advertisement site www.seek.co.nz over a period of two weeks in April 2009. Up to five job advertisements, where possible, were collected for each occupation. If more than five vacancies were available for each occupation, they were selected based on their location (in order to obtain employers in a range of regions), and based on whether there was a contact phone number and name. Again, due to the limited and specific nature of Bands 5 and 7, obtaining five occupations for each occupation was not possible. The resulting list of occupations provided a pool of 181 job advertisements.

5.2. Materials

The materials consisted of one 39 question Computer-aided Telephone Style survey. The questions aimed to gather a range of both quantitative and qualitative information from employers on:

- whether prospective employees qualifications were used during the recruitment for the position
- the number of qualifications available for their industry, the importance of qualifications for the advertised position
- the ease of determining the suitability of a candidate based on their qualifications
- the information that employers find useful when determining if a job applicant has the right skills and knowledge to work in the industry
- their use of the internet site KiwiQuals
- the types of qualifications most valued by employers
- whether qualifications in employers' industries are relevant for their businesses.

There were a range of questions that asked employers to choose an answer from a list of options; other questions allowed the employers to provide their own responses.

5.3 Procedure

Four interviewers used the pool of job advertisements to ring employers. First, the interviewer filled out the title of the job occupation that she was ringing for, the NZSCED code, the region in which the job was located and the industry in which the job fell. Industries were represented by level one (the broadest division) of the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) 2006. Next, the interviewer rang the employer, introduced herself to the potential participant, and explained that the purpose of the survey was to find out employers' opinions on the qualifications available in their industry. Participants were told that they would be asked a number of questions and their involvement should take no more than five minutes. If the participant was willing to take part, the interview began.

6. Analysis

Due to the nature of the sampling method, it is important to note that the results presented in the following sections cannot be viewed as being representative of all employers in New Zealand. However, the careful selection of the respondents

minimised the effect of bias in an attempt to show a truer picture of general opinions than has been shown in previous surveys.

6.1. Profile of Participants

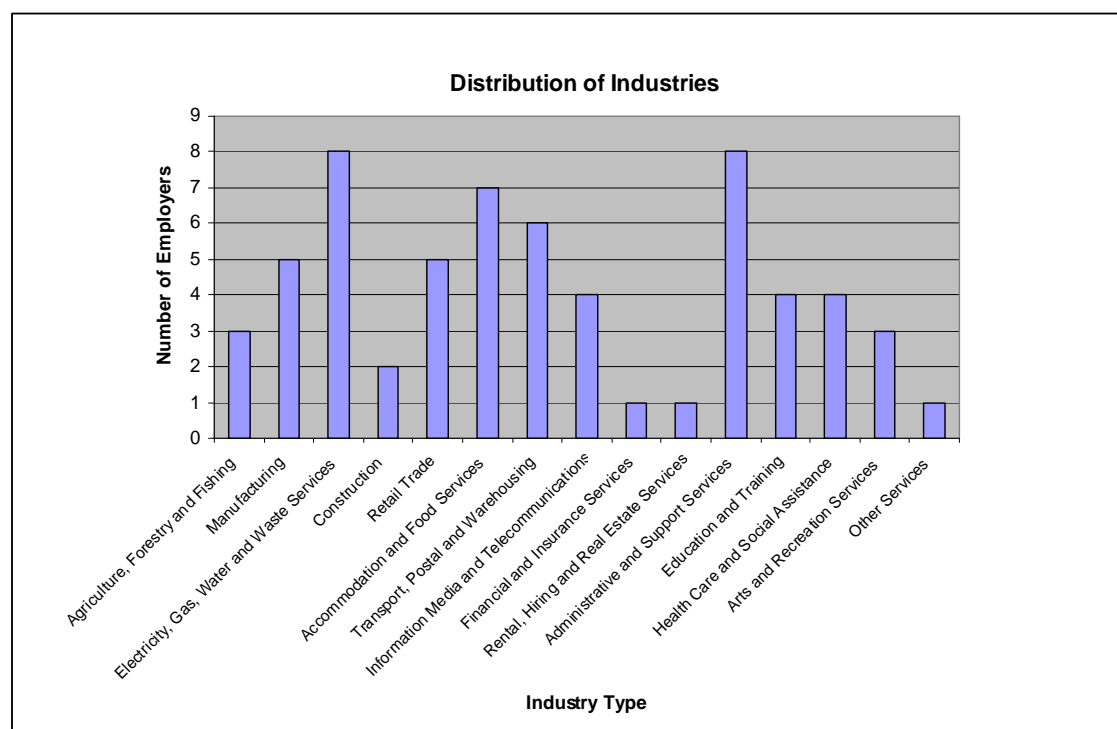
Four interviewers made a total of 116 phone calls. Of the calls made, 75 were successful whereby the correct person was obtained on the phone; 35 of the calls were unsuccessful in that the correct person could not be contacted, or there was no answer.

Of the 75 successful calls made, 62 employers agreed to take part and 13 employers declined because they were unwilling or unable to take part. If employers said no to answering the survey they were asked if they would like to fill it out over email or hard copy. Six respondents said yes to this option, however, none returned the survey. Thus, the resulting response rate was 83 per cent. Of the employers who said yes to participating, 48 were employers of people who typically held certificates and diplomas. This sample size is sufficient at the 95 per cent confidence level with a confidence interval between 13-15 per cent. The confidence interval would be decreased only moderately by increasing the sample size to 100⁷.

6.2. Industry

As can be seen from figure 1, although employers were represented across 15 different industry types, the majority of employers represented the Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services industry and the Administrative and Support Services industry. The fewest employers were represented in the Financial and Insurance Services industry, and the Rental, Hiring and Real Estate industry.

Figure 1. Distribution of employers across ANZSIC industries

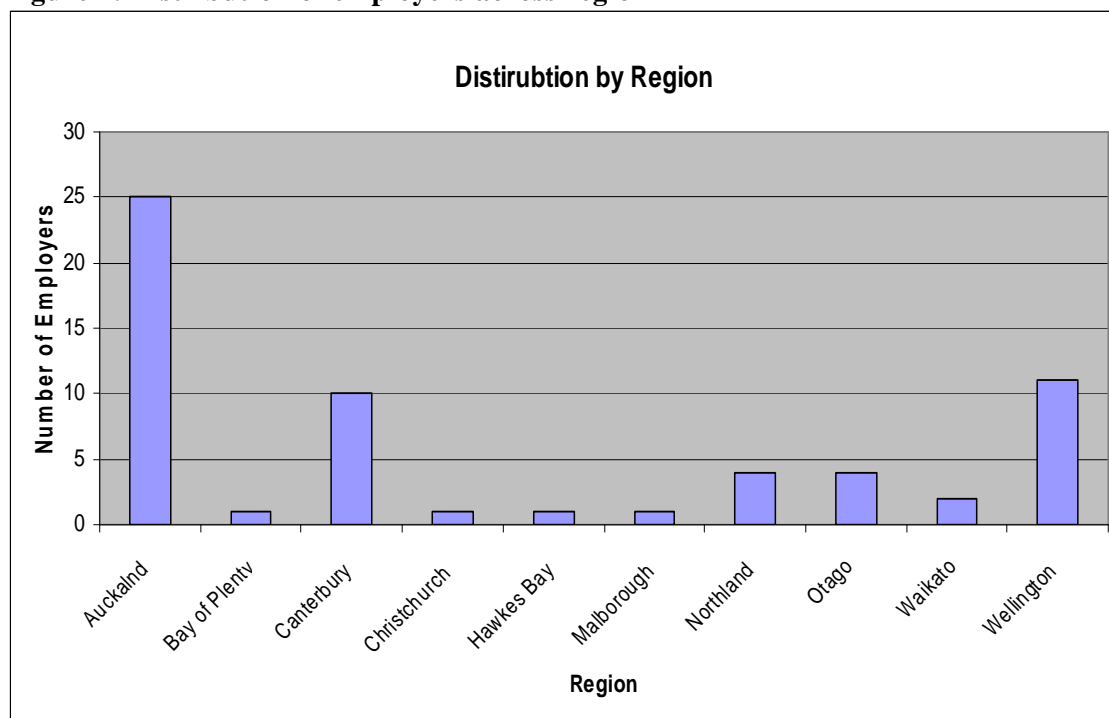


⁷ Cozby, P. C. (2001) *Methods in Behavioural Research* [7th ed.], CA, USA: Mayfield Publishing.

6.3. Region

Figure 2 shows that employers were sampled from a range of regions throughout New Zealand, however, the largest proportion of employers were from the Auckland region, followed by the Canterbury and Wellington regions.

Figure 2. Distribution of employers across region



6.4. Employer and company characteristics

Examining the positions that respondents held in their company showed that the majority were managers or owners (33.3 per cent and 25 per cent respectively), 16.7 per cent of respondents were recruitment consultants, one employer (2.1 per cent) was a CEO, and eight respondents (16.7 per cent) classified themselves as “other”. Three respondents (6.3 per cent) did not answer the question. The median number of staff employed by respondents was 15 (range 1 – 9000), and the median number of times respondents had taken part in the recruitment process over the last 12 months was 3.5 (range 0 – 150).

7. Results

7.1. Qualification use in the hiring process

Overall, employers indicated that they used prospective employees’ qualifications to assist them in the hiring process. Forty employers (83.3 per cent) indicated that they used prospective employees’ qualifications, three employers (6.3 per cent) sometimes used them, and five employers (10.4 per cent) did not use prospective employees’ qualifications to assist them in the hiring process. There were different types of responses from the employers who did not use qualifications to assist them in the hiring process, which included:

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- *“New Zealand certificates in scaffolding are not worth the paper they are written on. They [individuals with the qualification] don't know what they are doing. Experience is more valuable.”*
- *“Because I [employer] knew the applicant.”*
- *“Experience is more valuable.”*

In addition, one employer who used qualifications in the hiring process said that the company would still provide additional training and another employer said that they used qualifications but experience is more important.

7.2. Number of qualifications

Each respondent was asked for their opinion on the number of qualifications available for their specific industry. They were asked to make a “best guess” as to whether there are 1-20 qualifications, 21-40 qualifications, 41-60 qualifications, 61-80 qualifications, 81-100 qualifications, more than 100 qualifications or they had “no idea”. The majority of employers (58.3 per cent), or 28, believed that there were between 1-20 qualifications, five employers (10.4 per cent) believed that there were between 21-40 qualifications available for their specific industry, one employer (2.1%) believed that there was more than 100 qualifications, 13 employers (27.1%) indicated having “no idea” how many qualifications there were and one respondent did not provide an answer.

A further breakdown of this analysis appears in table 2, which demonstrates the parity between respondents’ guesses and the actual number of qualifications available in their industries. The table shows that respondents’ guesses in Band 1 generally corresponded with the actual number of qualifications in their band. In Band 2, respondents were less accurate as respondents still tended to say that there were between 1 – 20 qualifications, while one respondent in this band guessed that there were more than 100. In Band 3, in which there are 41 – 60 qualifications, respondents’ guesses did not tend to correspond to the actual number of qualifications available. A similar pattern emerged with respondents in Bands 4, 5, and 7, in which the actual number of qualifications ranged from 61 to more than 100: respondents in these bands generally guessed that there were between 1 – 40 qualifications or they answered “no idea”. The table demonstrates that regardless of the actual number of qualifications, the majority of employers believe that there are between 1 – 20 qualifications available for their industry.

Table 2. “Best-guess” on the number of qualifications in employers’ industries by actual number of qualifications

	Band						Total number of responses
	1	2	3	4	5	7	
No Answer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1-20	13	6	2	3	1	3	28
21-40	1	0	1	1	2	0	5
41-60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
61-80	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
81-100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
More than 100	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
No idea	2	3	3	4	0	1	13
Total in Band	17	10	6	8	3	4	48

Finally, when asked if there are “too many” “just enough” or “too few” qualifications available for their industry, 17 respondents (35.4 per cent), indicated that there are just enough and 13 (27.1 per cent) indicated there were too many qualifications for their industry. Eight respondents (16.7 per cent) indicated that there were too few qualifications. Ten respondents (20.8 per cent) opted out from responding to the question.

8. Value of qualifications

8.1. Importance

When the respondents were asked about the importance of applicants having formal qualifications, 40 respondents (83.3 per cent) thought it was “important” whereas two (4.2 per cent) thought it was “unimportant”. Five respondents (10.4 per cent) opted out of the question and one respondent (2.1 per cent) did not provide an answer.

8.2. Ease

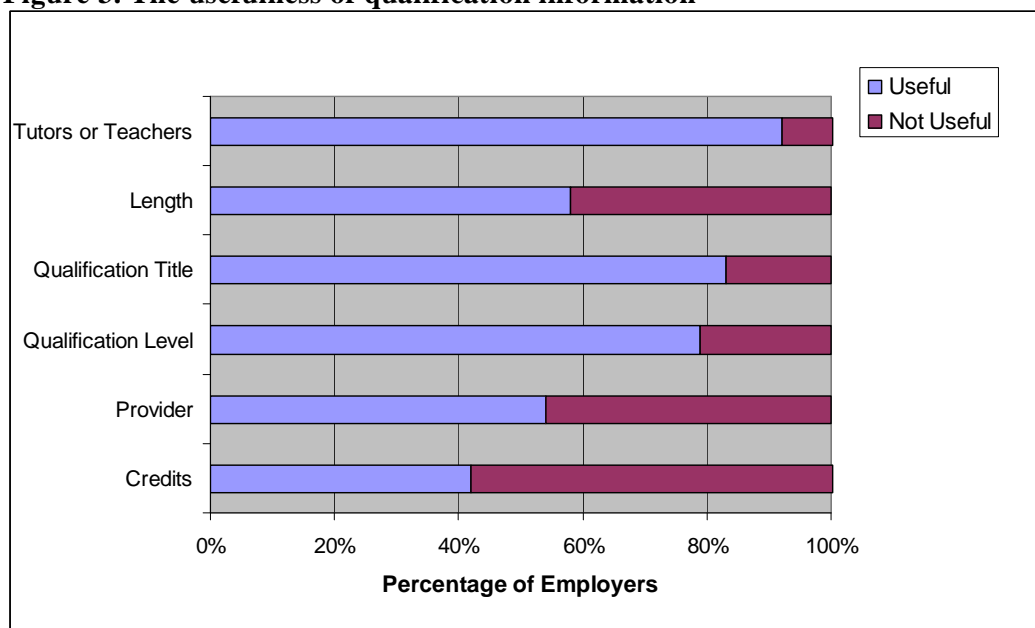
When asked about the ease in determining the suitability of candidates for the position based on their qualifications, 21 respondents (43.8 per cent) thought it was “easy” whereas 14 (29.2 per cent) thought it was “difficult”. Another 11 respondents (22.9 per cent) thought that it was “neither difficult nor easy”, one respondent (2.1 per cent) chose to opt out of answering the questions, and one respondent (2.1 per cent) did not provide an answer.

8.3. Usefulness

Respondents were also asked about the information about a qualification that they find useful in determining if a job applicant had the right skills and knowledge to work in their industry. Forty respondents (83.3 per cent) indicated that the qualification title was considered to be useful; 38 respondents (79.2 per cent) found the qualification level useful; 26 (54.2 per cent) found the provider of the

qualification useful information; 20 (41.7 per cent) found the number of credits achieved in the qualification useful; and 4 (8.3 per cent) found that knowing the tutors or the teachers that the applicant had was useful.

Figure 3. The usefulness of qualification information



When asked what other information that they find useful, employers offered mixed responses. Six respondents noted experience, making comments such as:

- *“Experience is more important than qualifications.”*
- *“Experience outweighs qualification. To get ahead in [occupation] you need the qualification.”*

Another respondent noted similarly:

- *“Having the qualification does not mean that they are right for the role. Other aspects play a part.”*

International qualifications affected the usefulness of information:

- *“I would like to know what the level for overseas qualification is equivalent to in New Zealand. For example, is it a BA or MA rather than level 7?”*
- *“What country they gained their qualification from.”*
- *“Overseas qualifications are difficult to understand.”*

Other employers noted that they find other sources of information useful:

- *“We asked the professional bodies in the health area to find out more information around qualifications.”*

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- *“The applicant had a special teacher, who the boss had been taught under.”*

8.4. Qualification Type

The respondents were told that there are three different types of certificates and diplomas in New Zealand. The “National”, such as a National Certificate in English, the “Local”, such as a Certificate in English, and the “New Zealand”, such as the New Zealand Certificate in English. When asking respondents which type of certificate and diploma they valued more as an employer, they were provided with five options: National qualification, Local qualification, New Zealand qualification, no preference, and don’t understand the difference. The results suggest that the differences between the types of qualifications are not clear as twenty-four respondents (50 per cent) indicated that they “don’t understand the difference”. Nine respondents (18.8 per cent) said that they valued National qualifications most. When asked for reasons why they valued this type of qualification most, five responses were given:

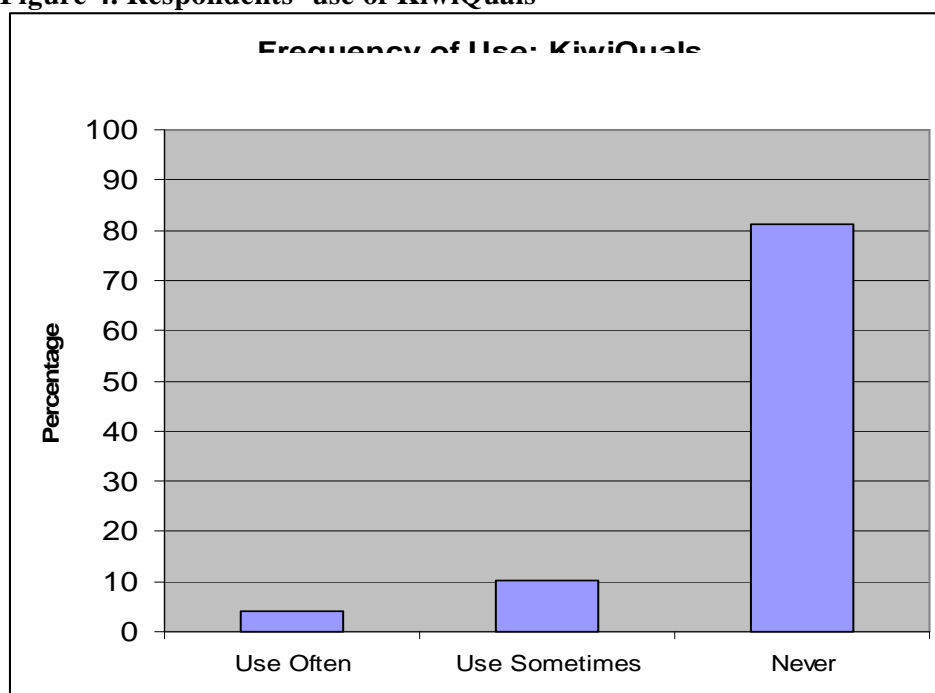
- *“National qualifications are most recognised.”*
- *“National qualifications offer a vaster array of skills rather than local which may be too specialised.”*
- *“The moderation process adds consistency.”*
- *“National qualifications offer recognition for working throughout new Zealand.”*
- *“Local qualifications can be dependent on the quality of the institution.”*

Four respondents (8.3 per cent) indicated a New Zealand qualification and eight respondents (16.7 per cent) said that they had “no preference”. There were no respondents who valued local qualifications most, and three respondents (6.3 per cent) who did not answer the question.

9. Information search

When asked if they use the internet site KiwiQuals, five respondents (10.6 per cent) said “yes, sometimes” and two respondents (4.2 per cent) said “yes, often”. Two respondents did not provide an answer (4.1 per cent) and the remaining 39 respondents (81.3 per cent) said “no, never”. Of the respondents who never use KiwiQuals, 28 (71.8 per cent) said that they had never heard of it. One respondent noted that work history is more important than qualifications, one said “too busy Googling, which is easier” and another said “We mainly employ people internationally e.g. from Europe”, and another respondent said “don’t need to [use KiwiQuals]”.

Figure 4. Respondents' use of KiwiQuals



When asking the employers if they use any other internet sites to help them find out about qualifications, 27 respondents (56.3 per cent) said “no”. Two respondents said the “NZQA website”, five noted “provider websites”, one said “Google”, one said “Career Services” website, one said “local industry sites” and another said “www.seek.co.nz”.

The employers were also asked where they gather additional information about qualifications if they want to know more. Ten respondents indicated that they would ask the applicant, twelve said they would contact the providers or the teachers, seven said that they would use the internet (NZQA, providers’ sites, Google) three said that they would call NZQA, two said that they would call a professional body for their industry, four said that they would ask for references, one said they would do background checks on provider, and one said that they would ask colleagues.

10. Understanding and relevance

A number of questions were asked around the understanding and relevance of qualifications in employers’ specific industries. First, employers were asked (in general) if they thought qualification developers understood the needs of their industry, to which 24 (50 per cent) responded “yes”, 14 (29.2 per cent) responded “no”, eight (16.7 per cent) responded “I don’t know” and two respondents did not provide an answer (4.2 per cent). Comments around why they felt why there was a lack of understanding included:

- *“There should be more qualifications and more people that can provide them.”*
- *“From an academic point of view and they teach historically. In general, I don't think they are commercially adept as they could be.”*

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- *“There is a disconnection between NZQA and the providers. Should be employer led training.”*
- *“The general skill level is really behind the equivalent levels in the UK. Young guys coming out of college have only been half taught. Tend to teach them basics but not enough.”*
- *“Non-responsive.”*

Second, employers were asked (in general) if they thought that qualifications for their specific industry were relevant for their business. Two respondents said “I don’t know” (4.2 per cent) and two respondents (4.2 per cent) did not provide an answer. Thirty seven respondents (77.1 per cent) said “yes”, however, comments from those who answered “yes” indicated that there is still room for improving the relevance of qualifications:

- *“More could be provided.”*
- *“Grammar and spelling - I notice that that particular aspect is really, really bad.”*
- *“Dips [diplomas] are but not certs [certificates].”*
- *“They are improving.”*
- *“New Zealand qualifications definitely.”*

Four respondents (8.3 per cent) indicated that qualifications for their specific industry were “not relevant” to their business. Comments as to why included:

- *“Workplace experience is more valuable.”*
- *“Some qualifications teaching students old techniques that aren't used anymore and wastes their time.”*

Three respondents (6.3 per cent) answered that qualifications for their specific industry are “sometimes” relevant to their business. Comments included:

- *“Some organisations give a fantastic job in respect of training but it's difficult to know the quality of the course and the rating.”*

Finally, employers were asked if the qualifications provided their employees with the key skills for their specific business, to which 31 (64.6 per cent) said “yes”. However, comments from those who said “yes” included:

- *“...but [it] depends on individual and skills and knowledge of the individual person.”*

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- *“[Qualifications] distinguished between those with skills and those who didn’t.”*
- *“Theoretically yes but doesn’t necessarily mean that they will be good teacher. Experience means more.”*
- *“Good grounding.”*

Eight respondents (16.7 per cent) said “no” and comments included:

- *“Their experience did [got them the job]. It [the qualification] had a bearing but their experience and personality was what got them the job.”*
- *“I feel the tutors or whoever has written the course has done it from the point of view [of someone] who has not been in the industry. They’re [students] taught by a teacher not by an engineer.”*
- *“Because it is hands-on and you can’t learn it in a class.”*

Four respondents (8.3 per cent) did not provide an answer while five respondents (10.4 per cent) thought qualifications “sometimes” provided employees with the keys skills for their specific business and commented:

- *“Informal learning and work-based learning most important once a basic qualification has been achieved.”*
- *“Qualifications give the basics.”*

11. Conclusions

This study examined employers’ opinions on the number and clarity of certificates and diplomas in New Zealand.

The results suggest that in regard to the number of qualifications, respondents generally believe that there are 1-20 qualifications for their specific industries. In relation to the clarity of qualifications respondents are generally satisfied. The majority of respondents in this study believed that qualification developers understood the needs of their industry, thought that qualifications for their specific industry were relevant for their business, and thought that qualifications provided employees with the keys skills for their specific business.

In order to ascertain issues around number and proliferation, it is recommended that more work be undertaken with specific subject fields in which proliferation might be a problem.

Appendix A: A copy of the interview schedule

01. What type of industry is the business?

- A Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
- B Mining
- C Manufacturing
- D Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
- E Construction
- F Wholesale Trade
- G Retail Trade
- H Accommodation and Food Services
- I Transport, Postal and Warehousing
- J Information Media and Telecommunications
- K Financial and Insurance Services
- L Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
- M Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- N Administrative and Support Services
- O Public Administration and Safety
- P Education and Training
- Q Health Care and Social Assistance
- R Arts and Recreation Services
- S Other Services

02. The specific title of the occupation (e.g. "bricklayer", "senior hairdresser", "waitress" etc) that the participant is hiring / hired?

03. BEFORE INTERVIEW - Location (City):

04. BEFORE INTERVIEW - NZSCED code:

05. Do you have a spare few minutes to answer a few questions?

- (a) Yes - go to Q7
- (b) No (unwilling or unable to take part) - go to Q6

06. IF NO - would you consider filling out a questionnaire if I mailed or emailed it to you? Postal address or email:

07: Were the typical qualifications that applicants had for the position Certificates or Diplomas?

- (a) Yes - got to Q8
- (b) No - below

IF NO TO Q7: We are now investigating employers of certificates and diploma holders. As this is not the typical qualification for your position, we cannot use your answers at this time. Thank you for your time and we wish you the best of luck with your recruitment process.

08. If YES to question 7: When selecting for this position, did you use prospective employees' qualifications to assist you?

- (a) Sometimes - go to Q10
- (b) No - go to Q9
- (c) Yes - go to Q10

09. If no, why not?

10. How many different qualifications do you believe are available for your industry?

- (a) 1-20
- (b) 21-40
- (c) 41-60
- (d) 61-80
- (e) 81-100
- (f) More than 100
- (g) no idea

11. What do you think about the number of different certificates and diplomas available specifically for working in your industry? Are there:

- (a) Too Many
- (b) Just Enough
- (c) Too Few
- (d) (Opt out)

12. In general, how important was it that job applicants had a formal qualification for this position?

- (a) Important
- (b) Unimportant
- (d) (Opt out)

13. During your last recruitment for this position, how easy was it to determine the suitability of candidates for the position based on their qualifications? Was it:

- (a) Easy
- (b) Neither easy nor difficult
- (c) Difficult
- (d) (Opt out)

14. In general, what information about a qualification do you find useful to determine if a job applicant has the right skills and knowledge to work in your industry? Please say yes or no to the following list (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

- (a) The Qualification title

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- (b) The Qualification level
- (c) The Qualification Provider (or school)
- (d) The number of credits in the qualification
- (e) The length of the qualification
- (f) The Tutors or teachers the applicant had
- (g) (Opt out)

15. What other information - if any - do you find useful?

There are three types of certificates and diplomas in New Zealand. The "national", such as called a National certificate in English, the "local", such as called the "certificate in English" and the "New Zealand", such as called the "New Zealand certificate in English".

16. Which type of qualification do you value most as an employer, if any:

- (a) National qualification
- (b) Local qualification
- (c) New Zealand qualification
- (d) You have no preference GO TO Q18
- (e) (Opt out) GO TO Q18
- (f) You don't understand the difference GO TO Q18

17. Why do you value this type of qualification most?

18. If you want to find out more about a job applicant's qualification, what do you usually do to get this information?

19. As an employer/recruiter, do you use the internet site "kiwiquals"?

- (a) Yes, often - go to Q21
- (b) Yes, sometimes - go to Q21
- (c) No, never - go to Q20

20. Why not?

21. As an employer/recruiter, do you use any other internet sites to help you find out about qualifications?

22. In general, do you think the organisations that develop qualifications understand the needs of this industry?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) I don't know

23. NOTES (Q22):

24. In general, do you think that qualifications for this industry are relevant for the business?

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- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) sometimes
- (d) I don't know

25. NOTES (Q24):

26. Did the qualification provide them with the key skills for your specific business?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) sometimes
- (d) not employing a person with a specific qualification

27. NOTES:

28. For this position previously, have you had staff without an industry-specific qualification?

- (a) Yes - Go to Question 29
- (b) No - Go to Question 32.
- (c) (opt out)

29. If yes - Did you provide them with formal training at work?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

30. If yes - As a result of that training, was that person awarded a qualification in the past four years (did a school or training organisation recognise their on-the-job learning as equivalent to a qualification and awarded them accordingly)?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) Don't know

31. If yes, - can we contact you again at another time to find out more about your experience with this process?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

32. Which best describes your position in your business?

- (a) Owner
- (b) CEO
- (c) Manager
- (d) HR

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(e) Other

33. If Other (or if recruitment agency), please indicate here:

34. How many full-time and part-time employees does your business employ?

35. As an employer, how many times have you taken part in the recruitment process in the last 12 months?

36. Thank you for your time and cooperation! Upon request, you may be given a summary of results from the study to be sent to you at a later date. Would you like to receive a summary of results?

(a) Yes

(b) No

37. We would also like to hear about employee opinions on the qualifications in your industry. Could we send a slightly different questionnaire to you for you to pass onto your newly appointed employee?

(a) Yes

(b) No

38. If YES to Question 36 or 37, what is your postal address or email

39. BEFORE INTERVIEW/AFTER INTERVIEW: Band

(a) Band 1

(b) Band 2

(c) Band 3

(d) Band 4

(e) Band 5

(f) Band 7

Appendix B: The list of jobs that respondents were recruiting

3D Animation modeller/Technician
Accommodation Manager
Administrative Assistant
Automotive Sales
Barber
Barista
Chef
Cook
Corporate Relationship Manager (Banking)
Customer Service Officer
Diesel Mechanic
Electrical Engineer
Electrical Fitter
Electrician
Fabrication Engineer
Farmer
Fast Food Manager
Fitness Instructor
Forklift Driver
Graphic Designer
Hairdresser
Health Care Assistant
Housekeeper
Insurance Sales Team Leader
Joiner
Mechanic
Mental Health Support
Nail Technician
Office Administrator
PA Tax Administrator
Patisserie
Personal Assistant
Plumber
Printer
Printer (Lay Operator)
Restaurant Manager
Scaffolder
Secretary
Social Worker
Taxi Driver
Teacher
Travel Agent
Web Software Developer
Workshop Foreman