

Qualification Developers' Experiences of Certificates and Diplomas on the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications

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1. Executive Summary

This study examined 14 qualification developers' opinions on the qualification development process. Developers were represented across industry training organisations, private training establishments, polytechnics, wānanga and standard setting bodies.

Qualification developers were asked their opinions on a range of issues including how they determine demand for qualifications, their qualification development processes, and the responsiveness and relevance of the development process to learners, communities and industry.

Key themes to the development process were:

- Overall, the developers interviewed for this study have similar, well established and comprehensive processes in place for determining the demand for a new qualification. These developers engage with various stakeholders, such as students, graduates, iwi, industry, employers, and communities, and align their processes with government and organisational strategic priorities.
- Nearly all these developers said that they looked at qualifications that already exist when determining if there was a need to develop a new one. They were of the mindset that there is no point creating a new qualification if another already exists.
- The developers spoke about how the difference in funding rates contributes to the tension between standards-based and non-standards based learning.
- The developers have processes in place for reviewing qualifications including examining enrolment numbers and qualification uptake, using feedback from students, determining whether the qualification is still fit-for-purpose and identifying what other similar qualifications are available. Developers mentioned that it was easier to keep their options open for the future rather than deregister a qualification.
- Some of these developers said they write their own development guidelines to help them meet the requirements set by NZQA. They talked about the excessive number of prescriptive NZQA rules that are overly detailed, and consequently difficult to understand.
- Most of these developers said the length of time to develop a qualification should be reduced. They suggested reducing time could be achieved by streamlining the application processes. They also suggested seeking approval and funding at the same time as seeking approval for the new qualification.

2. Introduction

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education 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 Expectations 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 learners (students and trainees), as clarity is important for understanding the acquired skills and knowledge for recruitment purposes as well as potential advancement pathways.

The intent of this paper is to bring together current practices of the qualification design process. Specifically, this report examines the factors that drive the development process, how the development process occurs, and what hinders this process. In addition, this report explores how the system can be more responsive to current and future stakeholder needs. First, however, a historical context and background are provided to the National Qualifications Framework and the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications (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

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 marketplace².

Under section 253 (1)(c)(i)-(ii) of the Education Act 1989, NZQA has the function:

[...] 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 on 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.

² 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 National Qualifications Framework 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. This deadline was extended until December 2006 due to the influx of information.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

The qualification data used to determine the sample of participants was taken from the Register, which includes all quality assured qualifications (that are 40 credits or more) in New Zealand. The qualification data were extracted from the Register on 18 December 2008, and were used to obtain a list of qualification developers/owners of certificates and diplomas. The three developers who developed the most certificates and diplomas were originally selected from four provider types, including private training establishments, industry training organisations, polytechnics, and wānanga. Three were selected from each organisation type as it was expected that two were enough to provide data that will lead to saturation. An additional polytechnic was added to the list in order to gather information about distance qualification development, and two wānanga were included as the total number of wānanga in New Zealand is three. Two additional groups were added to include a standard setting body³ who develops National Māori qualifications, and a standard setting body who develops generic National qualifications rather than National qualifications for specific industries⁴.

The sampling technique in this study sought qualification developers who develop the most qualifications for their provider types. It was reasoned that targeting these developers would produce rich and informative data due to their extensive experience in the qualification development process. It should be acknowledged that while this targeted methodology is a strength of the research, it also means that the sample used does not represent the views of qualification developers who do not have a lot of experience developing qualifications. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

The method used to recruit developers was through social and work networks, which is known as the “friend of a friend” approach (Milroy 1987)⁵. The approach is used in sociolinguistic research to elicit natural or spontaneous speech, and a similar approach was used in the current research in order to assist with initiating a friendly and open discussion. Initial contacts with the developers were made through members of the targeted review working group. Once the working group member established an appropriate and willing participant, the contact information was provided to the senior researcher.

Each participant was forwarded an information sheet, which outlined the background and rationale of the study, the four broad research questions, how the developers were selected, and how the data was to be gathered and reported. Of the 14 developers contacted, all organisations agreed to take part. Up to three individuals from each organisation were invited to attend the interview. In one interview, four individuals attended.

³ Standard setting bodies is a collective term that covers industry training organisations and advisory groups; these organisations are recognised by NZQA as nationally representative of experts in a particular field for the purposes of establishing standards for national qualifications.

⁴ While the qualitative approach to research allows the process to gather data that is rich in detail, breadth and depth, the results obtained cannot be viewed as representative of all qualification developers. Thus, these results can give us general impressions only.

⁵ Milroy (1987) *Language and social networks*.

4.2. Materials

The interview schedule included four themes. The first set of questions asked qualification developers how they determine demand for qualifications. The second set of questions asked about the qualification development process, and about the choices made regarding qualification packaging and withdrawal of qualifications. The third set of questions was about responsiveness and relevance to different groups including industry, students, communities, and quality assurance bodies and Academic Boards. The fourth set of questions was about the qualification developers' opinions about how the development process could be improved. The full interview schedule is provided in Appendix A.

Key stakeholder input was sought from various business units within NZQA and the Ministry of Education in order to ensure accuracy of the data. In addition, various stakeholders provided comment on drafts of the report in order to ensure relevance of the information; the developers consulted include the Tertiary Education Commission, the Department of Labour, Business New Zealand, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics of New Zealand and the Industry Training Federation.

4.3. Procedure

Each interview was attended by one researcher and one policy analyst and from one to four individuals from each of the qualification developers. The wānanga were provided the opportunity to have an NZQA Māori Cultural Advisor present for the interview. Each interview began with an introduction to the research project, including the rationale and background of the project, how the developers were selected, and how the data were going to be used. The developers were informed that the session was going to be recorded and the transcriptions would be sent to them at a later date so that they could ensure accuracy of the information provided in the interview. All developers were then asked to review and sign a consent form.

The shortest interview was 1 hour and 13 minutes and the longest interview was 3 hours and 9 minutes, with the average interview extending over a period of 1 hour 48 minutes. The next section summarises the information provided in the interviews, as transcribed during the interviews.

5. Findings

5.1. Determining Demand

The results suggest that developers interviewed for this study had established robust and thorough processes for determining the need for creating a new qualification. The processes consisted of a variety of elements including: market research, cost versus benefit analysis, and government policies. Developers had different methods of undertaking their internal decision making processes.

- Market research was used to identify industry skill needs. For example, one organisation undertakes industry training plans to identify the number of job roles, the number of people currently in those positions and the requirements of the industry in the future. These plans are then used to identify areas that have a lack of match between existing qualifications and the skills that industry requires:

“Obviously if we haven’t got a role identified, which was outlined in the training plan well, we have a look at the criteria and then...the context for that qualification.”

As there is a significant cost in developing qualifications, developers consider the benefits of the qualification and if these outweigh the cost.

- Two developers mentioned they include a cost benefit model in their decision making process around developing new qualifications.
- Another organisation stated, that they are in the process of investigating the numbers of students who will enrol in the new qualification and if these enrolment numbers would cover the cost of developing, and consequently running, the qualification.

5.1.1 Funding and Strategic Planning

Considering the importance of government policies and regulations when determining the need for creating a new qualification was talked about by ten developers. The developers indicated that *“legislative requirements would be a good trigger”*, and *“funding drives behaviour”*. Thus, higher directives do impact on what is consequently developed.

- One National qualification developer explained that if the idea for a new qualification fitted with government strategy, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) strategy, and the Ministry of Education strategy, they would not necessarily instigate a full process of scoping.
- A polytechnic interviewee explained that strategic planning sometimes made it difficult to be responsive to market needs; for example, stakeholders may identify demand for a specific type of skill or qualification, yet this demand might not sit within the strategic boundaries of government agendas and TEC funding priorities:

“We’ve gone from a non capped environment a while ago where it was that you could get any bums on seats that you wanted...we’ve shifted to the government having strategic priorities where we’re shifting to a capped environment and a situation where we’re given direction and...we just can’t do as much as we could possibly could for the market.”

- One industry training organisation explained that while rules are a key driver for determining the demand for a new qualification, it is a juggling act to manage the rules and regulations set by a number of government agencies:

“...my team’s job is hugely difficult because you have to balance the needs of industry’s demands around what they want people to learn, the NZQA rules and regulations, the TEC funding rules and then what our own field staff say will work or how it’s going...”

5.1.2 Engagement with Stakeholders

Focus of Engagement:

All the developers engage with various stakeholder groups including learners, communities, and industry. The degree of engagement, however, varied by provider type depending on their mandate and role in the education sector. The groups with whom the different tertiary organisations focused on the most during consultation are summarised below.

- Polytechnics typically deliver vocational education to a wide range of students and must ensure that their qualifications provide skills for employment and work that meet industry needs. Polytechnics interviewed in this study reflected this by engaging primarily with students and industry in order to determine that their qualifications are meeting demand.
- Private training establishments typically focus on specific areas of study and provide specialised qualifications and training. Thus, private training establishments interviewed in this study focus their engagement with the niche markets they are developing their qualifications for, which tend to be industry. One private training establishment interviewed in this study also engaged with students when determining demand, as their key learner groups tended to be second chance learners who may have had negative past experiences in the qualifications system.
- Industry training organisations and the two other standard setting bodies interviewed for this study design National qualifications and provide leadership to their industry on skill and training matters. Industry training organisations therefore focus their consultation and engagement with industry, especially in the areas for which they have statutory jurisdiction.

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- Wānanga are established under the Education Act 1989. Under section 162 (4) (b) (iv) of the Education Act 1989, wānanga are:

[...] characterised by teaching and research that maintains, advances, and disseminates knowledge and develops intellectual independence, and assists the application of knowledge regarding ahuatanga Maori (Maori tradition) according to tikanga Maori (Maori custom).

- Wānanga aim to engage Māori learners in education and deliver qualifications that progress learners to higher levels. In the interviews with mātauranga Māori qualification developers, their focus tended to be on their learners and their communities and less on industry; however this is being reviewed in light of the present position of the economy.

Specificity of Engagement

Industry: All 14 developers indicated that they engaged with industry during the qualification development process and had well established formal and informal processes in place so that engagement could take place. In many instances industry were formally represented by sitting on:

- advisory boards
- expert panels
- reference groups
- working groups
- steering group committees
- focus groups.

These groups might include a number of people such as students and curriculum designers. Most, however, are made up of subject experts drawn from the fields and industries for which the qualification is being developed:

“Then sitting below that group [the reference group] will be the expert panel and they are at the coal face, they are the working group that will make decisions about what content will be contained within the qualification. So they are drawn from industry: they will be drawn from current providers; they may be drawn from academia, universities, vice chancellors committee, so forth, so they should be representative of all of the stakeholders that are going to use the qualification.”

Students: Half of the developers engaged with students during the development process but their degree of involvement varied. One private training establishment mentioned that they note what students are looking for in a qualification because this often reflects what is happening in the community and in the market:

“We get feedback from students in regards to what they need and students are often a good weather vane of what’s actually happening within wider community and in regards to the types of qualifications they need for the market place.”

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Some developers engage with students formally:

- Three polytechnics, one private training establishment and one wānanga had students represented on panels such as industry advisory committees or academic boards.
- Two wānanga, one private training establishment and two polytechnics carried out activities such as focus groups and pre and post qualification evaluations with current and former students to gauge students' needs.

Other developers engage with students less formally:

- One private training establishment explained that they talk to students who are undertaking similar qualifications and ask them their opinions on the proposed changes. One way in which this information was gathered was by students telling the teaching staff what their needs are. In addition, this developer's students might report back on what they have experienced at other institutions, and in turn how this impacts on their needs.
- Standard setting bodies and industry training organisations tended to not involve students and/or trainees in the actual qualification development process.
- Two industry training organisations indicated that they would instead use training advisors or subject matter experts who were usually former trainees themselves. These National qualification developers generally indicated that while students and trainees are engaged with during consultation, engagement during the actual development process would add little value to the qualification.

Communities: Developers talked about engaging with communities during the consultation and development process. One standard setting body pointed out that:

“We’re mindful that our remit is that we develop qualifications that are national in scope. That they [qualifications]...have to be representative across all groups. So certainly in selecting our expert panel we are looking for broad representation.”

- All three mātauranga Māori qualification developers engaged with iwi as part of their normal and tacit practices – this engagement is seen as being a part of their Māori identity. Two of the polytechnics, two National qualification developers and one of the private training establishments also engaged with iwi during the development process.
- Other developers engaged with migrants and communities with special needs. In some cases consultation with communities was a formal part of the process (*“It’s part of our process that you must engage with iwi and communities and industry so that’s reflective in our documentation.”*); in other cases the consultation was less formal and would be targeted towards particular groups on an as needed basis (*“We connect with whoever needs to be connected with in the consultation process for our particular programme. So we don’t say you have to do these. We say who are the relevant communities for this development? And the same sort of process right through.”*)

Informal and formal discussions with stakeholders were the most common form of method used by the developers to gain information on the needs of stakeholders. Two other methods of collecting this information was an *e-network* in which stakeholders could have input via email discussions and surveying the industry of interest.

Two of the developers mentioned they had specifically designated individuals within their organisation whose role it was to liaise with stakeholders. These individuals both had the title of Business Development Manager.

5.1.3 Viability

Once the demand for a qualification has been determined, developers must also consider the viability of developing, and consequently teaching, new qualifications.

- Student enrolment and uptake numbers were the most frequently mentioned factor when considering if a new qualification will be viable. For example:

“We also ask about numbers and sustainability because they could say well we’ve got 20 trainees right now but are they going to have 50 trainees year on year for the next 10 years because we are not going to put together a National qualification just for one small group that need it.”

- Developers most frequently surveyed current and potential learners and communities in order to ascertain whether there is the student demand to warrant developing a new qualification, and if the qualification will meet the needs of the learners. In addition, the developers also consider the method of delivery that is best suited to their learners and if they have the capability to undertake this delivery:

“So you might say ‘Okay well actually we need to go into agriculture or irrigation or something but you know, what is our student profile in this area? Are they people who are going to need it in the evenings or the day? Are we going to deliver in the classroom or are we going to deliver it via distance?’ So you know, taking into account all those pedagogical and delivery things that will align what we deliver to our student market.”

- The expertise and workload of current teaching staff/tutors was considered by six developers. These developers considered whether their current staff could teach the new qualification’s content and if so, whether they had time in their workload to accommodate teaching this qualification:
- One wānanga indicated that when they were determining demand, they consider whether the qualification fits with other programmes they are offering as part of programme staircasing and pathways thinking, as well as their kaupapa⁶. If the qualification does not fit, they would be unlikely to then move on to the development stage. Another wānanga pointed out that often it was not a case of them determining the need or demand for a qualification, but it was the community who would establish the need.

⁶ Teaching philosophy

“The idea gets to us then it turns into something else. It’s not determining need anymore because they already know what’s needed. So once it gets to us it’s more about how can we help to fulfil that need for those groups of people...”

5.1.4 Duplication and existing qualifications

All developers said that they looked at what qualifications already existed when they were determining if there was a need for creating a new qualification and were of the mindset that *“you wouldn’t reinvent the wheel”* if a qualification already exists:

“Yeah absolutely...we’ve actually written into our policies and procedures that we won’t develop something if there is something already there. These policies and procedures have only come in to place in the last year or two after seeing some of the issues that there are in terms of duplication and things like that, so absolutely...”

However, one of the polytechnics explained that in the past they might have developed their own qualification even if another similar qualification already existed as it was much more of a *“you’ve got yours and I’ve got mine”* mentality.

- Six of the developers indicated that if they found that a similar qualification already existed, yet developed their own qualification, it was generally because the existing qualification was not meeting the needs of their learners, their region, or industry.
- For mātauranga Māori⁷ qualification developers, this approach to duplication was particularly pertinent: they also explore what qualifications already exist, and would not want to develop a new qualification that was the same as another already offered elsewhere in the sector. However, if a qualification is not catering for Māori, if the programmes being offered elsewhere are not informed in design and delivery by mātauranga Māori paradigms, and if Māori are not participating in a programme due to the absence of Tikanga Māori⁸ they would consider the development of a similar qualification:

“We wouldn’t really see much point in offering Bachelor of Science that’s offered at a number of other places. We would see value in looking at designing a programme that’s going to contribute to a mātauranga Māori continuum or contribute to our understanding of what Māori science is. That’s quite key for us in deciding whether to develop a qualification or not.”

5.1.5 Information sources for similarities and differences between qualifications

The developers used a variety of information sources to access information on the similarities and differences between qualifications. Information sources included:

- KiwiQuals (ten mentions)
- NZQA website (nine mentions)
- Provider websites (six mentions)
- Google (two mentions)

⁷ Māori knowledge and understanding

⁸ Māori custom

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- Career Services (one mention)

Three of the developers who use KiwiQuals said the information is out of date and inaccurate. In one case the wrong information about a provider is listed, which causes issues for the marketing of their qualifications. Furthermore, it was mentioned that being able to sort through qualifications listed on KiwiQuals by whether they are active qualifications (a qualification accepting enrolments or currently being taught) or inactive qualifications (a qualification that is not accepting enrolments and not currently being taught) would be a useful feature and increase its usability:

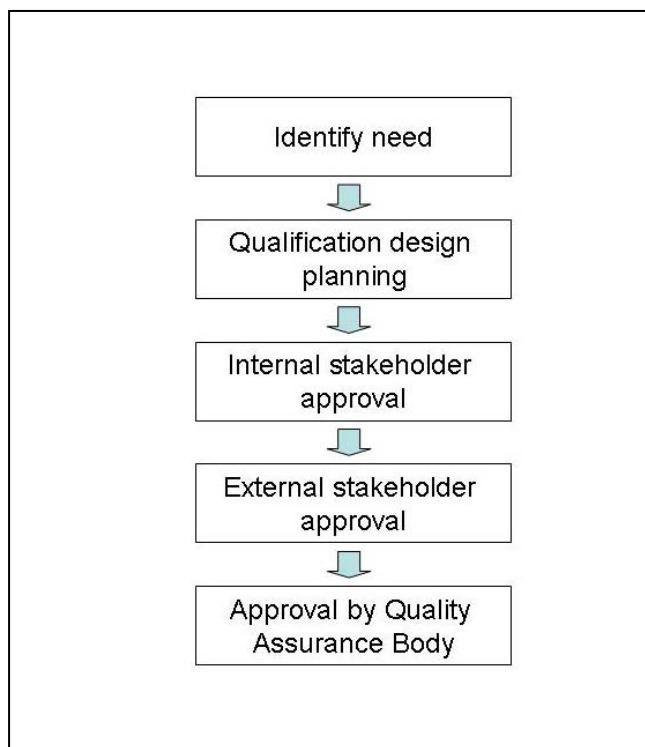
“There are a whole lot of programmes that we are accredited to deliver but it doesn’t say whether we’re delivering it this year, and is this the same as other providers. So we can’t say, “Oh they’re accredited to deliver this.” But I don’t know if they’re delivering it. So that information would be very helpful.”

Five developers said that they also found talking to people in various organisations, and using their networks and contacts beneficial for gauging what qualifications might already exist as sometimes information on providers’ websites was minimal and not particularly helpful.

5.2. Qualification Development Process

The qualification developers were asked a series of questions regarding the actual development process including how the qualification is designed, who is involved in the process, how qualifications are packaged, and what happens to qualifications that get withdrawn. The results show the developers having a variety of qualification development processes that can be simplified into a five step process (figure 1).

Figure 1. An illustration of the typical qualification development process (summarised)



Once the demand has been determined developers go through a qualification design planning stage. Developers considered a number of factors when designing a qualification. The factors that were mentioned most frequently (i.e. by seven or more of the developers) were: qualification outcomes, qualification pathways, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer, distance course options and exiting qualifications.

5.2.1 *Qualification outcomes*

Designing qualification outcomes was considered, and seen as an important part of this process, by nine developers:

“We also know that the learning outcomes are the most critical thing. They are like the foundation of a house: if they are not well written they are almost impossible to assess properly...”

- Graduate skills and knowledge, commonly referred to as the graduate profile, was most commonly taken into consideration when determining qualification outcomes in terms of the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates will demonstrate.
- The graduate profile is determined carefully during the development process so that learners obtain relevant skills and knowledge from their qualification. This makes them employable in their specific fields.
- One wānanga pointed out that graduate profiles were pivotal for showing what kind of graduate will be produced as a result of their training. Graduate profiles could be one way of examining the problem of unnecessary and overlapping qualifications:

“Does the profile give you the same graduates in the same area with the same programme? It may be that we actually have the same programme and you’re getting away from the government direction of collaboration.”

5.2.2 *Qualification pathways*

The importance of pathways for learners when designing qualifications was mentioned by 12 of the developers. The progression of a prospective learner in a qualification into a higher level qualification within disciplines was considered in the development phase of qualifications. For example:

“It would be looked at through the development and approval process, and questions would be asked: “Why are you doing this?” But let’s look at where this leads to. I mean there is no point in developing a qualification in total isolation if it’s not going to lead anywhere, and if a pathway can be included whether internal, external then all good...”

For wānanga, building pathways into their qualifications contributes significantly to the development process: it is important that qualifications do not make unrealistic jumps from level 1 to level 4 qualifications with nothing in between, and it is also important that qualifications lead onto further study and/or employment. It was also important for wānanga that they pathway students into higher learning because of the economic benefits that are often linked to obtaining higher qualifications:

“Future proofing. You’ve always got to make sure you’ve got a pathway so the pathway is dependent on the individual qualification. In a lot of cases you know for our people many come in under the certificate level and they get out of there and they want something. So always having a pathway means that you future proof the qualifications around it...”

In the qualification design phase, four of the developers consider pathways within their own qualifications, as well as pathways into other tertiary developers’ qualifications. However, one private training establishment stated that they had made attempts to build pathways with other tertiary developers but said it was hard to achieve because *“the universities and polytechnics don’t want to know you. They don’t believe that you are a valid entity. The universities here have basically said [they are] not interested.”*

5.2.3 Recognition of prior learning and credit transfer

When developing a qualification, recognition of prior learning is considered by seven of the developers. One of the polytechnics stated that prior learning is considered at the development stage along with the graduate profile. Developers mentioned two forms of recognition of prior learning. First, recognition of prior learning can be granted on life experience; second, recognition of prior learning can be granted based on credit gained from previous qualifications studied.

Developers policies about the amount of knowledge a student needed to have to recognise the prior learning, and the amount of a qualification that they would cross-credit to students varied.

- One private training establishment said that for a student to receive recognition of prior learning they must know between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of the course material.
- Another polytechnic mentioned they do not credit whole qualifications but for business and other programmes, learners can gain approximately two thirds through recognition of prior learning.
- One wānanga said that they credit recognition of prior learning on a case by case basis. However, this wānanga is receiving an increase in requests to have over a third of a qualification granted via recognition of prior learning; this is detracting from the teaching, the learning and their kaupapa. Consequently, this wānanga is currently examining the possibility of granting prior learning at a set level:

“...should we be granting over a third? Because we’re actually letting go [of] our programmes. We’re letting go [of] ourselves; we’re letting go of our kaupapa within those programmes to people who are only going to do a small part of the one programme. So we are looking at that.”

The ease with which some organisations grant recognition of prior learning was talked about by one private training establishment who felt that granting recognition of prior learning too easily sets students up to fail as they do not understand some of the material that they have been credited for:

“Some other places will give it very easily. So that’s kind of a concern for us because we have had students come in claiming they have gained recognition of prior learning who turn round and say to us, “Look I can go to any university in the country now and study because I’ve been given recognition of prior learning for these papers.” And we go “Do you actually understand what that subject is or what the standards are that are required?” We’ve discovered sometimes they just don’t correspond to reality and that’s a concern because it’s setting students up to fail.”

- Three of the developers mentioned that they do not specifically consider recognition of prior learning when designing a qualification. One industry training organisation stated:

“So if somebody comes to you and says, “I already know how to do this, I have been doing it for 30 years.” If they really know it they should be able to do the assessment in a short amount of time. Otherwise, for recognition they will need to go and gather loads of evidence from present and past employers.”

- The transfer of credits from one qualification to another was considered by nine developers in the qualification development process. Developers mentioned designing qualifications that can provide the option of cross-crediting between different tertiary developers.

5.2.4 National and Provider Qualifications

Developers were asked questions about how they package their qualifications and how they decide whether or not to include unit standards in a qualification. The majority of the developers indicated that there is a place for both National and provider qualifications. Indeed one of the polytechnics stated that they do not go out with the mindset that *“we are only going to do local qualifications.”*

- The majority of polytechnics and private training establishments said that they would try to use a National qualification first, but if there was not one that suited their learners’ needs, they would then develop a provider qualification.
- Some providers choose to develop a new qualification as opposed to using an existing National qualification because sometimes the National qualifications or unit standards do not exist for a particular subject.
- Another issue is that National qualifications are sometimes not specific enough for the providers’ distinctive learner groups or industry needs.

“National qualifications have their place but I believe local qualifications also have their place and I think here at [provider], we have quite a good balance between local [provider] qualifications and National qualifications. A lot of our local qualifications have National qualifications within but we find that we need to look at a National qualification and if we decide that there is extra material that we feel is appropriate then that’s what we do.”

The private training establishments and polytechnics talked of the strengths of National qualifications and of unit standards indicating that they are well recognised

both nationally and by industry. However, a drawback is that when unit standards are changed and updated, providers have a lot of work to do in order to make sure they can continue to deliver a qualification or course that they already delivering.

“We are forever having to rewrite programme [documents] because we’ve got new versions of the National qualification and sometimes those new versions will have different credit levels and so we’re going to have different EFTS value and...we’ve got to redo the TEC funding [application].”

Other issues raised were that National qualifications can be very inflexible.

- When one polytechnic wanted to add in some new material, NZQA said they could not develop a new unit standard for it at the time because they were “too busy”. If the provider did not add the material in they “were dead in that industry” so they developed a provider qualification.
- Another private training establishment also indicated that whether they use unit standards depends on whether the unit standards exist and whether they address the material that is required to be taught in the qualification.

One wānanga said they consider the use of unit standards when examining what was needed to pathway to another qualification or higher learning; however they tend to be restrictive, prescriptive and are not based in mātauranga Māori philosophy. This wānanga also explained that embedding National qualifications in their provider qualifications also impacts negatively on learning as their qualifications become assessment driven as opposed to learning driven.

“It can be quite restricting, constraining when it comes to moderation and assessment because they’re quite strongly dictated by NZQA, which doesn’t advance our mātauranga Māori usually and our whole approach to education.”

For another wānanga, their approach was to start with a blank page as looking at the unit standards may colour their thinking:

“But if we’re designing something new, if we look too much at some other things it can lead you down a certain track and it will influence your ideas in some way. So we don’t do that; we look at what we need and why we need it.”

A number of the developers have specific issues with unit standards.

- One private training establishment wrote their own “unit standards” as opposed to using NZQA unit standards because of cost:

“It’s something that the assessors are comfortable with and if they are comfortable with it, they can understand it. It’s going to save me \$150 an hour.”

- Other issues regarding unit standards were around their fragmentation. Two developers thought it was, in some instances, better to assess and build a qualification looking at the qualification as a whole as opposed to small individual components. For example, when one polytechnic produced course descriptors

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modelled on unit standard descriptors, they found it hard to see how the qualification fitted together.

- Similarly, another polytechnic talked about how unit standards make assessment a lot less integrated; even though someone may have gained all the individual unit standards, they will not necessarily be able to perform the overall skill when those standards are put together to form a whole qualification. For example:

“But they could do all these bits like have their wash cloth or do all the little elements and still not bath the dog...so it’s a matter of looking at the whole in the parts.”

Unit standards and National qualifications are also not utilised in all industries.

- One of the polytechnics talked about how the decision to use unit standards or National qualifications depends on the subject area. For example, if a qualification is being developed in a trades or tourism area, it would be likely to have unit standards in it. However, other industries do not recognise unit standards to the same degree:

“If you look at somewhere like marine or aviation, which is quite big for us...I mean there aren’t the unit standards. Students want more the statutory tickets than perhaps unit standards for those areas. So we’re looking at incorporating those rather than unit standards. So it’s very dependent on the subject area really.”

The mandate of standard setting bodies is to develop standards and National qualifications yet rules around funding cause problems for National qualification developers.

- Two industry training organisations took issue with the fact that they can only be funded if a qualification is more than 40 credits, while polytechnics, wānanga and private training establishments are able to be funded for provider qualifications, and short awards: *“...that’s a problem with the rule thing that because we’ve got to have 40 credits there is a risk that you would assign credits to a unit standard that might be perhaps overloaded in order to get your qualification.”*
- The 40 credit funding rule means that sometimes National qualification developers are not able to be as responsive to industry as they would like to be because *“the actual fact is that industry often want a shorter programme than what we have to put together in order to make a National qualification.”*
- One industry training organisation indicated that there is sometimes not enough material to go into a 40 credit qualification:

“So the directive is to reduce duplication and we have got a directive to staircase, and a nice staircase is a short level 2, level 3 and a level 4. So those two directives are completely pole opposites to start with, but the best way from the educational point of view is to have nice stepping stones for candidates. But the other issue with that, is because you have to have 40 credits in a qualification sometimes it’s a struggle to get enough content to make up the 40 credits.”

5.2.5 Distance learning

Seven of the developers stated they offer distance learning. These developers mentioned that while they must still consider who the qualification is being delivered for (learners, industry, communities), there are differences in developing these types of qualifications. The most commonly mentioned considerations were:

- qualifications take longer to develop as the development of resources is more intensive and often more difficult (*“More emphasis, time, energy, resource, put into the creating of learning and teaching resources for distance learning programmes.”*)
- course materials have to all be developed before the qualification starts rather than developing them while the qualification is underway (*“I mean [provider], they have to do everything so much more up front than a conventional face to face delivery where you might still be amending your lesson plan before you go into class. I don’t know, but you can’t do that with an online delivery of a programme and even if you’re sending out material in hard form, in hard copy, you still perhaps need to think more about that.”*)
- the infrastructure and resources needed to develop online qualification options (*“That’s a lot more difficult perhaps to develop because the online environment. It’s not just a matter of students downloading pieces of papers off the internet site or whatever. It’s the whole interaction between a student and the online environment.”*)
- students’ expectations in terms of response time to send out materials, assessments and responding to course enquires (*“the students’ expectations have shifted over the years to wanting things quicker, online...”*)

5.2.6 Existing qualifications

The developers actively consider existing unit standards and qualifications in the qualification design phase. As two of the developers stated, they would rarely develop a completely new qualification, but rather they would extend on the qualifications they already offer, or review and update existing qualifications. Even when developers create a new qualification they investigate current qualifications:

“...[the]early childhood qualification is an example because we went to Canterbury...to the School of Education to see if theirs was appropriate. Then we integrated the nanny programme into the first year, but we worked with [provider] to take their programme. So we did scout around first and looked at our existing programmes to see where we could integrate them.”

One organisation mentioned it was beneficial to look at existing qualifications as it is costly to develop new qualifications and they were conscious of the large number of unit standards and qualifications already on the framework that could be used.

“So we are looking at the way we design things - clumping things together not developing some of our own units [standards], but looking at other industry training organisation’s units [standards] and seeing whether we can use those with a slight tweak...so we stop creating more and more in the framework.”

5.2.7 External stakeholders' involvement in the qualification development process

All developers have contact with a variety of stakeholders throughout different parts of the qualification development phase. Stakeholders are involved in qualification design, consultation on draft qualifications and reviews of existing qualifications.

- Subject experts were used in the designing of qualifications, in particular, designing the structure, content and determining assessment outcomes.
- Subject experts included a variety of people, specifically, academic professionals, employees in the area of interest and employers of graduates.
- Developers stated subject experts were very important in the development of qualifications but as one organisation mentioned these individuals can be hard to find:

... "when we developed the Early Childhood Education Diploma we just scoured the country for people to write these courses...and it was an absolute nightmare finding writers. So we would have been able to go faster, but we just couldn't find the subject matter experts who could write the material for us."

To ensure that technical knowledge and skills within the proposed qualification were relevant to the industry, involving industry groups in the qualification design phase was regarded as an important step in qualification development.

- Trying to get a cross section of people within an industry was important for one organisation and phone conferencing and emailing was used so that no one was excluded based on location.
- One industry training organisation explained that when their industry advisory group is developing a qualification they have to consider the requirements of all the industry:

... "because one of the things that [tends to] happen is they come in with their own company requirements and it's like...well...leave your company hat at the door because we've got to make sure that we cover everyone throughout New Zealand who are in the industry whether they're the small man or small business or a big business, and making sure that none of those people are disadvantaged. So those things have to be considered when the qualification is being developed as well."

Three developers mentioned collaborations with other developers.

- One organisation stated, they follow similar processes and produce similar documents as the polytechnics that they are collaborating with to make the process more efficient.
- An industry training organisation interviewee mentioned that there is sometimes cross over with other industry training organisations when developing qualifications. Each organisation involved will form a working group to develop a qualification.

The developers gain regular feedback from stakeholders on the draft designs of their qualifications. Specific stakeholders mentioned in this process were:

- subject experts

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- pastors
- academic committee members
- employers

One organisation used focus groups to gain feedback while another gained feedback via email discussions. One organisation kept a record of this for their quality assurance body:

“Yes, it goes out at different stages for feedback on external and internal stakeholders. We keep a consultation log and also the role of the people who consult as well, and so that if ITP Quality want to follow anything up they can...”

5.2.8 Internal stakeholders’ involvement in the qualification development process

All developers engaged with internal stakeholders in the qualification development process.

- Three developers mentioned specific staff within their organisation who are involved in the qualification development process including unit standard writers and individuals who decide on the content of qualifications.
- One of the polytechnics mentioned they have around thirty-five instructional designers on site at any one time who develop and print course materials. Having a project team of instructional designers when developing qualifications was seen by this polytechnic as common practice in ‘big’ institutions that deliver distance learning:

“Now that’s not to say that you couldn’t do it another way and in small institutions people have to wear more than one hat...the writer might also be instructional designer and the editor and everything else. But you get a better standard, a better evenness of quality, assured quality if you have a project team where you have a subject matter expert, an instructional designer, a graphic designer, an editor, a typesetter, a technical editor and so on...”

- Designers were also mentioned as being internal staff involved in the development process. However, one organisation stated this role can be designated to an external person:

“...social work which [the development of] has effectively been subcontracted out...that’s because we don’t regard ourselves as having an internal subject matter expert right now...”

The involvement of a number and variety of people in the development of qualifications was mentioned by three developers:

- One organisation stated that they have an open door policy and project teams can start with five to six people and grow up to 20 people.

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- Two developers also mentioned it is important to involve the staff who will be teaching the qualification in the development of it:

“Because we have a little more experience [about] how unit standards work and how the assessment is, to retain various people who will be writing it, will be actually the people who will be teaching it.”

5.2.9 Withdrawal of qualifications

The most commonly mentioned reason behind deciding whether to remove a qualification from the Register was the lack of enrolments or uptake in the qualifications:

“So that people at the beginning of the year...know how many students they have to enrol before they can run it, and if you don’t get the students you don’t run it unless there’s exceptional circumstances. And if that happens once or twice then usually we will withdraw it.”

Seven of the developers mentioned they undertake qualification reviews within their organisations. The qualification review cycle ranged in frequency from annually to a five yearly process. A number of elements were included in these reviews. The most commonly mentioned was feedback from industry about whether the qualifications are meeting their needs. For example:

“...we exited horticulture a couple of years ago and that had a couple of reviews around that with industry, looking at what industry needs were and if we could meet them...”

Five other elements were part of developers’ qualification review processes. These included:

- enrolment numbers and qualification uptake
- feedback from students
- whether the qualification is still fit-for-purpose
- identifying what other similar qualifications are available
- low learner completion rates

Following the qualification review, developers would put forward a case to withdraw a qualification to their boards.

- one standard setting body and two polytechnics stated if their boards approve the withdrawal of a qualification it is discontinued
- two other developers stated after their board has approved the withdrawal of a qualification they consult with their stakeholders before making a final decision
- two developers continued the withdrawal process by sending a letter to NZQA so that the qualification would be removed from the National Qualifications Framework.

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Transitioning out of offering a qualification was mentioned by three of the developers.

- Most of these developers had a phase out process during which they did not take new enrolments but those students already enrolled could finish the qualification. This process can range in time from six months to five years:

“So there is a process to go through and [it] depends on the qualification. [It] can take quite some time if you’re talking about a Diploma. The transition phase out is about five years because of the timeframe for people to get through the qualification.”

Some developers mentioned that they would not remove qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework even though a number of their qualifications were inactive. Developers’ reasons for not withdrawing qualifications were:

- time and effort to get qualifications back onto the framework (*“there is sometimes a hesitancy...because then you have to think about the whole time it’s going to take to get it back on the framework. But, no, we would certainly not want anything on there that we certainly weren’t going to be offering in any form again.”*)
- changes in market demand (*“we can either have it sitting there and not offer it, which is often what happens first time around. You know, in case it’s just a blip in the market or something. But then sometimes if you’ve got a blip in the market they’ll decide to review the area and then they’ll look at market demand and all those of things.”*)
- keeping options open for the future (*“people want to keep options open for the future. So I don’t think we’ve ever withdrawn one.”*)

One developer mentioned not identifying inactive qualifications on KiwiQuals meant they were misleading students into thinking a qualification was going to be offered. Another interviewee suggested improvements were needed to make the students aware of inactive qualifications on the KiwiQuals website:

“Yeah, for it to be flagged not currently offered and still be visible to the public would be okay. For it to be flagged – inactive - and then we retain the accreditation and it disappears from public view, that would be ok as well.”

5.3. Responsiveness and Relevance

In order to understand how qualification developers created qualifications that were responsive and relevant to their different stakeholders, developers were asked a series of questions regarding the needs of different stakeholder groups, how they develop qualifications to be responsive to those needs, and how stakeholders' needs are prioritised.

5.3.1 Learners' Needs

All the developers believed that learners need qualifications that are meaningful and valuable. Developers differed, however, in terms of how they viewed these two concepts:

- Six developers talked about learners needing qualifications that make them employable, provide evidence that they can do the job, and are current and relevant to industry and employers. *“Something that is recognisable and that will give them skills for the job and maybe that has some transferable skills.”*
- Four developers talked about learners needing qualifications that are recognisable *“It’s the fact that the qualification they come out with could be, if they decided to go and work in the UK or wherever, that that qualification would be able to be accepted there.”*
- Five developers indicated that learners need qualifications that give them transferable skills. For example, teaching learners life skills, stimulating learner motivation, and providing learners with the ability to keep learning and growing, provides them with more than just ‘hard’ skills that link specifically to employment.

“I...really hope we build our qualifications, that the students build on their ability to be able to teach themselves and find the knowledge they need to continue to find after they leave here because they are really only here for a short time in the big scheme of things...wherever they go they are going to need to keep learning things.”

- Flexibility was also discussed in relation to how the qualification was actually delivered. For example, one industry training organisation and one wānanga mentioned that students should be able to learn in environments that facilitate their learning and accommodate different learning styles.

“A lot of people in my day were affected by a single learning style where you know, if you had a different learning style you might have got better opportunities so we’ve got to think about that.”

Mātauranga Māori qualification developers talked about their students needing qualifications that build and enhance mātauranga Māori philosophy and that provide learners with a quality education in accordance with kaupapa Māori philosophies, principles and approaches:

“One thing we use to help us or to ground us is our theoretical framework which is based upon a mātauranga Māori concept and integrates our values (our uara) and our organisation, our kaupapa, any purakau (stories), our historical knowledge. Our traditional knowledge comes in and helps us to ground whatever sits around it whether it’s business or computing or whakairo tanga (carving), Tā Moko, it’s grounded there first.”

5.3.2 Industry Needs

The majority of developers indicated that industry and employers need employees with relevant skills and knowledge, and qualifications that allow them to “hit the ground running”. As one polytechnic put it:

“I mean employers want graduates to come out with a qualification that enables them to fit into whatever work place that they are in, and carry out what they need to be carrying out as part of their role. I mean it needs to be current. The qualification needs to be current and meet employers’ demands and needs.”

However, while ‘hard’ technical skills and knowledge were perceived as important, developers also indicated that industry want graduates with flexible ‘soft’ skills such as communication, stickability, perseverance, competency and the right attitude:

“I think an employer would like to know that they’ve got the skills to do the job but then that they’ve got the attitude... the skills is about the aptitude. But I’ve seen a lot of people that have got qualifications, that are the most laziest [people] I’ve ever met because they don’t have the attitude to do the job.”

Yet, one industry training organisation indicated that it is difficult to obtain funding for soft skills:

“In an ideal world qualifications would address soft skills and specific skills for the job, but only the thing that happens is that it tends to be hard skills for the job because employers don’t have the money or resources to send people to all the soft skills training. It’s quite simple really; you get what you pay for. So if you really want employers to do more training in areas for the social good, you have to pay for it.”

5.3.3 Communities’ Needs

When qualification developers were asked about what communities’ need in qualifications many began their answers with phrases such as “how long is piece of string” and “it depends”. The concept of who comprised a community, and how this community was related to the provider varied; it was said that a one size fits all approach does not work.

The qualification developers perceived different types of factors in terms of communities needs. These included:

- accessibility and flexibility (“nothing to prevent a particular group from being able to undertake and complete the qualification. Instead of bringing people in here to learn about horticulture, we go to where the horticulture will occur and contextualise the program to the facility and the community.”)

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- simplicity in the design and delivery so that communities can access and complete the qualification quickly (*“easy steps...they’re really down to earth people with a passion for what they do.”*)
- tailoring qualifications more specifically to individual groups’ needs (*“if you’re working in this region, you’ve got to have strong cultural skills as well.”*)

For mātauranga Māori qualification developers, there was a strong tie to the community. As one developer pointed out *“The secret of wānanga is our connection to the communities... you know a lot of allies in community fight for wānanga”*, and another wānanga pointed out that they were initially set up by iwi. Thus, it was seen as important to create qualifications that their communities valued, needed, and supported.

- It was important for mātauranga Māori qualification developers to ground their qualifications for the community on frameworks that integrate their organisational values, their Kaupapa and their historical knowledge. Furthermore, for communities, wānanga stated that qualifications need to revive and enhance Te Reo Māori and advance mātauranga Māori:

“It’s our blessing that we can bring mātauranga Māori to the delivery of education in this country whether it’s veterinary care, aged care, cultural care or anything... our otherness, our minority is actually a blessing; our impression is our capital.”

- A point made by one wānanga was that it was important to future proof their qualifications for Māori communities so as to facilitate Māori moving up the educational ladder and utilising pathways. People in the wānanga who are subject to privileged information should use their knowledge to create qualifications for the Māori community that meet their needs both currently, and in the future:

“We’ve been the subject of policy decisions and government decisions because we sit in a marginalised minority within the country...because the communities that we work with do not have the same, and even access to information, because the systems of dissemination and decision making reside with the dominant group.”

5.3.4 Quality Assurance Bodies and Academic Boards

NZQA is primarily responsible for quality assurance matters in the tertiary education sector (Education Act, 1989, s159AD(2)). In respect of ‘local courses’, the criteria for the approval of courses and the granting of accreditation to provide these courses are established by NZQA under sections 253(d) and (e) of the Education Act 1989. The criteria cover the quality of the course aims, learning outcomes and coherence, while accreditation relates to the tertiary education organisation’s capability, capacity, adequacy and appropriateness to deliver the qualification. NZQA, NZVCC and ITP Quality carry out the course approval and accreditation functions. ITP Quality, under delegation from NZQA, carries out this role for polytechnics up to and including undergraduate degree level (levels 1 to 7).

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In respect of National qualifications, NZQA approves standards and National qualifications developed by standard setting bodies for registration onto the National Qualifications Framework. NZQA also accredits providers to assess against standards on the National Qualifications Framework.

The developers were asked for their opinions on how they demonstrate demand to quality assurance bodies and Academic Boards. Although the providers ranged from industry training organisations, private training establishments, polytechnics, wānanga and standard setting bodies, and thus report to different quality assurance bodies under different criteria and guidelines, the requirements tend to be quite similar.

Standard setting bodies and National qualification developers whose quality assurance body is Framework Registration indicated that they need to show who will deliver the proposed qualification, that consultation has taken place, that there is a demand for the qualification, and that unit standards relate to specific bodies of knowledge. However, evidence of this consultation was not required by Framework Registration. As one developer put it, it was a case of “*tick a box that says that we’ve consulted with industry*”. It should be noted, however, that this evidence can be requested by NZQA during audits.

“...NZQA and TEC require us to do all that consulting, and we do, and keep it and file it. They very rarely ask for it but you have to do it so that if they ask a question you can pull out something that supports your [case], so if they query something you’ve got something that supports it.”

Polytechnics, who report to Academic Boards and ITP Quality, indicated having similar criteria guiding their requirements for demonstrating demand. However, according to the interviewees from the polytechnics, stronger evidence was required to show that consultation had taken place such as market research, market and needs analysis, long term investment plans and strong evidence of stakeholder endorsement including letters of documentation. In addition, polytechnics indicated that the qualification must be shown to be economically viable.

“We have to show very strong evidence of stakeholder demand so that’s been extremely clear right down to having letters from each appropriate professional body showing demand.”

Private training establishments are guided by the criteria set out by the quality assurance body of Registration, Approvals and Accreditation. According to these developers, they are required to show that there are people who will enrol in the qualification (often based on surveys and market research), that the group proposing the qualification had information about who it was for, and why it was being created, that they have support and endorsement from industry, and the overall goals of the qualification.

Finally, while wānanga are also guided by the NZQA quality assurance body of Registration, Approvals and Accreditation, one wānanga explained how they demonstrate demand according to their internal quality assurance bodies of Te Rautiaki Mātauranga, and Te Puna Waihanga, which are the equivalent of an Academic Board, and a program development committee respectively. These

developers explained that the role of Te Puna Waihanga is to analyse documentation based on checklists that take into account approximately 30 to 40 requirements that should be met. For example, Kaiako (tutors) availability and ability to teach the particular qualification, the physical teaching resources that are available such as the delivery site, entry requirements, graduate profiles, outcome statements, pathways and staircasing. Next, two Kaiāwhina go through the documentation and then go back to the developers until both parties are satisfied. Once they are satisfied, it goes back to Te Puna Waihanga for endorsement, then goes to Te Rautiaki Mātauranga for sign off and then to NZQA. Evidence of demand is demonstrated in ways previously mentioned including market research, environment scanning, and levels of support and meeting minutes.

5.4. Responsiveness

5.4.1 Responsiveness to Learners

Developers mentioned several factors that they believed would make the development process more responsive to the needs of learners, communities, and industry.

For learners, factors included:

- the speed with which qualifications are developed (*“I think we’re a bit too slow.”*)
- include greater flexibility into delivery and content (*“I think sometimes our product is a little bit one size fits all...more variety possible both in the type of material and even also in the delivery options.”*)
- engage with learners more often (*“one of the concerns about the way that we have traditionally operated is that very often we’ve not had a lot of contact with students. When our staff go out to the companies they seem to be more often than not talking to the manager or the training officer or somebody like that...”*)
- better convey to learners what the purpose of the qualification is and what they will achieve by doing it (*“I think you need to articulate how this qualification will help them in their life or their future aspirations or better articulate that in plain language because a lot of the qualifications now aren’t like that...”*)
- allow developers to make small changes to National qualifications by “NZQA letting people make tweaks to unit standards.”

5.4.2 Responsiveness to Industry

In order to be more responsive to industry, developers talked about:

- having more regular reviews of qualifications (*“Possibly more regular sampling of whether the qualification still meets the needs.”*)
- the time taken to develop the qualifications being long, cumbersome and made lengthy by unnecessary bureaucracy (*“I’ve had situations where I’ve written something in my course document application and they [NZQA evaluators] haven’t agreed with it and then we’ve spent a week arguing over a paragraph.”*)

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- knowing TEC's long term focus and the governments' strategic goals (*"bringing into account of what its [TEC] priorities for this region will be in terms of funding. [Including] those key kind of inputs into the process the better off we'll be about emergent need which is the biggest issue I think."*)
- being able to make small changes to unit standards and greater flexibility in and around programme design (*"NZQA should let industry training organisations make small changes to units at anytime like they do in Australia."*)
- working on relationship development between providers and industry, or providers and industry training organisations (*"we see industry training organisations for example as being in a partnership with...but how it comes across is more of a dictatorship: so these are the units you have to deliver for this sports programme or whatever and if you don't we're not going to endorse it when it shouldn't really be like that you know."*)

Wānanga perceived that industry training organisations and some industries do not have a good understanding of mātauranga Māori. This lack of knowledge around mātauranga Māori means engaging with NZQA in the development process weighs heavily on their resources, is time consuming and draining. One wānanga also perceived that industry training organisations dictate the units that they have to use as opposed to working together to find out what works best for them.

5.4.3 Responsiveness to Communities

The developers talked about similar themes that have been identified above. Specifically:

- strengthening relationships with communities and increasing the level of engagement with communities (*"I suppose we need that link, you know, a stronger link with them. Cause sometimes we feel like we sit here in this big building, you know, making these qualifications and unit standards and put them up in the framework and then everyone's going to clamber to use them and... but it doesn't happen."*)
- speed up the development process (*"I have often thought that we are not able to develop a program very quickly and have it approved very quickly."*)
- work on the relationship between standard setting bodies and communities (*"I suppose we need that link, you know, a stronger link with them."*)

5.4.4 Stakeholder Priority

Seven of the developers indicated that in terms of prioritising their stakeholders, students were generally their main priority. For example:

"We always try and put the student, you know, the needs of the student [first] because pretty much they're the ones that are going to use it and they're the ones that are going to be impacted by our standards and qualifications."

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Four of the developers saw industry as a main priority:

“I guess the most important people [are] industry and the trainees, like when I say industry I mean the companies that we have trainees with and of course the trainees.”

However, five of the developers talked of the importance of finding a balance so that all key stakeholders voices are heard and represented:

“Usually we try to find a good middle ground as in, you’ve got to be a good negotiator so that’s why it’s not just about project management or curriculum design. It’s all about ensuring that you can see a middle ground for compromise without compromising because you’re balancing everything. You’re looking at the organisation thinking of the physical responsibilities there, ensuring that all voices are heard. We negotiate to find that middle ground.”

Seven developers said that issues of Statement of Intent, Minister’s directives and TEC funding also impacted on how, and who they assigned priority to:

“TEC probably come first because if we don’t then we don’t get any funding...everything else would fall over. That would be my thinking and I mean that’s the voice of government, through TEC anyway.”

5.5. Opinions on Issues

Finally, the qualification developers were asked a series of questions regarding what they perceived as barriers to the responsiveness of the qualifications system, and their opinions on the number and clarity of qualifications.

5.5.1 Barriers to Responsiveness

The developers highlighted that a necessary and important part of the qualification development process is consultation: consultation yields meaningful information that can be used for determining demand. Yet the extent to which consultation must take place is seen as sometimes unnecessary and “*extraordinarily micro*”:

- Some of the developers explained that in certain industries there is an “obvious” need for a new type of qualification. This need is indicated by looking at government directives around social development and TEC strategic planning. However, in the current process these types of indicators are not sufficient and developers must find proof of specific individuals who write letters of support of their own volition.
- Some developers see this aspect of consultation adding little value to the development process because it is far too low level. One private training establishment stated:

“There is a sense where this whole justification of external market need at times feels highly like ticking the right boxes as opposed to really adding value to the process...[it]does feel a bit facile at times I have to say, because it’s too detailed.”

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The processes and rules set out by the quality assurance bodies were also viewed as barriers to responsiveness by qualifications developers:

- There was the perception that the TEC and NZQA need to “*talk the same language*” and communicate more effectively so that developers are not required to duplicate processes. In some cases developers indicated that a qualification could go through NZQA’s approval process and receive sign off, but TEC would not approve it because they do not view it as a qualification that should be subsidised.
- In addition, applications cannot go through to the TEC until they are approved by the quality assurance body, which adds another layer of time, and bureaucracy, to the process.
- Developers indicated that it would be faster if processes were streamlined and applications go through to the quality assurance body and TEC at the same time:

“NZQA are now the main approver, but my last lot of qualifications took me eight weeks to get through NZQA. It took me five months to get through TEC because I basically had to resubmit the entire qualification again through to TEC.”

The developers talked about the excessive number of prescriptive NZQA rules that were perceived to be overly detailed, and consequently difficult to understand:

- some of the rules add unnecessary time to the development process and add layers of unnecessary bureaucracy at a time when the government is moving to an environment of high trust and high accountability.
- some of the developers took issue with the wording of unit standards (“*we try to write things so that they’re easy to understand and we get it thrown back at us.*”)
- some developers have difficulty understanding the myriad rules in the style guides and rule books and resort to making their own guidebooks (“*there are a lot of times when the rules don’t apply exactly and so you try and work out how to interpret them.*”)

“There are pages and pages of documents, there is a 200 page style guide, and there are about five different forms that you need to fill in to send in a unit standard or a qualification. The forms are different for each type of application...documents that contain the rules, often there are no definitive answers in those rules...if you call NZQA evaluators to ask a question that needs a definitive answer you will usually get referred back to the rule book...if the answers were clear in the rule book you would have got it out of the rule book in the first place.”

There were also issues raised about the flexibility of rules around qualifications:

- National qualifications are perceived as being far too prescriptive as are unit standards.

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- Some qualifications are not able to be made more flexible to learner and market needs because of funding rules. One industry training organisation indicated that: *“We don’t think it’s fair that polytechnics are allowed to have, and private training establishments are allowed to have their own local qualifications that can be any size basically and they get funded for them and we can’t.”*

“...the other issue with that is because you have to have 40 credits in a qualification sometimes it’s a struggle to get enough content to make up the 40 credits. Lots of times industry just wants a short sharp 20 credit programme, which covers skills for the job. ITPs [polytechnics] are allowed to do this but industry training organisations aren’t.”

- One wānanga indicated that NZQA’s responsiveness was often slow as evaluators and reviewers do not understand the wānanga ideology, nor do they have a comprehensive understanding of mātauranga Māori. This lack of understanding means that it lengthens the process for development and also drains wānanga resources:

“Our reviewers are lovely people but none of them received mātauranga Māori training or education at school so we’re putting a 22 wheeler in the hands of 15 year olds with a learners licence... they’ll ask questions that are quite clear to us, but they struggle to understand the content and then we’ll wait three months for them to approve. By that time the whole process could take a year to a year and a half...Māori communities don’t like that time delay you know.”

5.5.2 Clarity

The developers were asked if they felt there were issues around the clarity of qualifications in terms of how they are packaged and how they are presented.

Eight of the developers thought that there were issues. Factors mentioned included:

- confusion around the number of overlapping qualifications (*“it’s too hard for the student to differentiate.”*)
- needing to be clearer in the purpose and outcome statements (*“occasionally it can be written in bureau speak.”*)
- confusion around the databases that qualifications are contained in such as TEC, STEO⁹, KiwiQuals and the NZQA provider page (*“they’re represented on the different databases in New Zealand, now that must be so confusing for students.”*)

In terms of the clarity of the qualifications system, the developers felt that users of the system might have difficulty understanding the differences between National, New Zealand or provider qualifications.

⁹ Services for Tertiary Education Organisations

5.5.3 Number

The developers were asked their opinions on whether they perceived a large number of similar qualifications as an issue. Ten of the developers said that a large number is an issue, one of the developers said a large number is not an issue and three of the developers said “*it depends.*”

For the developers who thought a large number of qualifications were a problem, two were concerned about it creating issues around recognition and portability, while two were concerned that it might cause confusion for employers:

“I think it’s an issue when the students want to take a local qualification and then go somewhere and then we get emails saying “Well it’s not being recognised and what do I need to do?””

The developers indicated that proliferation of qualifications may occur in response to people trying to get around the complicated quality assurance process surrounding National qualifications and the rigidity of the system.

The developers who said that a large number of qualifications are not necessarily an issue reasoned that if similar qualifications exist, it is likely due to the local environments needing them. Also, if similar qualifications are a problem, they believe that as the sector moves into a more collaborative phase, the issues of proliferation may decrease.

Wānanga indicated that there is a difference between duplication and unnecessary duplication; it is important to be clear that these are not the same thing. Indeed, one wānanga felt that it was their mandate to create qualifications that may look or sound similar to already existing qualifications. However, these similar looking qualifications are designed to address a need in the market that qualifications for Māori grounded in mātauranga Māori, Tikanga Māori and Te Reo Māori. One wānanga viewed overlapping qualifications as a problem when they start producing the same types of graduates. However, if developers have similar qualifications, but with different methods and different outcomes that are good for the country, and engage different groups then similar qualifications are acceptable:

“Our drive for us is a kaupapa driven drive. It’s based on demand of our people to experience education and wellbeing not because she gets that from programmes similar to what they’re running because we can make some money out of that. We’re not into copycat education.”

The developer who said that overlapping qualifications are not an issue, indicated that a lack of qualifications would limit people’s choices, access to education and the right to choose the education that they want and need.

5. Conclusions

This study examined 14 qualification developers' opinions on the qualification development process of certificates and diplomas for the Register. Overall, the results suggest that these developers have robust, rigorous and thorough practices in place.

The developers indicated that they undertake significant engagement with various stakeholders before developing a qualification and examine how the qualification will benefit their key interest groups such as students, industry, iwi and communities. In addition, they undertake environmental scanning to identify already existing and similar qualifications, aligning demand with government and strategic priorities, and examining whether or not it is viable for them to develop and then run the qualification. Once a qualification is approved for development, the organisations interviewed indicated that they go through a rigorous qualification design planning stage. The developers considered a number of factors when designing a qualification such as qualification outcomes, qualification pathways, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer, distance course options and exiting qualifications.

The results of this study, however, do highlight that the system could be improved in order to speed up the qualification development process and make it more responsive. This could include providing clarity around rules, reducing the prescriptive nature of the rules in order to allow more flexibility in qualifications, and speeding up the time it takes to develop qualifications by streamlining application processes.

Appendix A: A copy of the interview schedule

Determining Demand

Prompt Questions:

- i. How do you determine the need for creating a new qualification?
 - a. Who's involved and what factors are considered?
- ii. Do you look at what's existing?
- iii. If there is a similar qualification, would you develop a new qualification?
 - a. What are the drivers?
- iv. How do you access information to identify the similarities and differences between qualifications? Kiwiqual? Other sources/websites?
- v. When you are considering developing a qualification, how different does a qualification have to be to create a "new" qualification?

Qualification Development Process

2a. Theme: Process of qualification development.

Prompt Questions:

- i. How do you design a qualification?
- ii. Who's involved in the process?
- iii. How do you decide what's in it?
- iv. How long does it take to develop a certificate and/or diploma? Are there differences in distance and contact?
- v. How do you determine the overall outcomes?
- vi. How do you confirm that these outcomes are met?
- vii. Why do you do it the way you do?
- viii. What would you like to do to the process to make it more responsive?
 - o Why don't you do it this way?

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2b. Theme: Choices made in qualification development / Packaging

Prompt Questions:

- i. How do you choose if a local qualification is made up of unit standards?
- ii. What rules and regulations affect your choices? NZQA, TEC, Moderation, etc.
- iii. How do you design your qualifications for Recognition of Prior Learning? Pathways? Credit transfer?
- iv. In your opinion, how can these processes be improved to be more responsive to industry needs?

2c. Theme: Withdrawal of qualification

- i. How do you determine the withdrawal of a qualification (that it is no longer needed)?
- ii. What is the process to withdrawal a qualification?

Responsiveness and Relevance

3a. Theme: Industry

Prompt Questions:

- i. Do you connect with industry in the development process?
 - o How? When?
 - o Small industries or local industries
- ii. How do employers know how to have their say?
- iii. What do you think industry and employers need from a qualification?
- iv. How do you know that you have been successful in that?
- v. How do you think that responsiveness to changing industry needs can be improved?
- vi. How do you differentiate between regional and national needs?

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- vii. How do you take these into account in the development of qualifications?
- viii. Do you future proof your qualification?
 - o How?

3b. Theme: Students

Prompt Questions:

- i. Do you connect with students or trainees in the development process?
 - o How? When?
- ii. How do students know how to have their say?
- iii. What do you think students need in a qualification?
- iv. How do you know that you have been successful in that?
- v. If they change, do you think that responsiveness to changing students' needs can be improved?

3c. Theme: Communities

Prompt Questions:

- i. Do you connect with communities in the development process? Iwi, Migrants, persons with disabilities, sex.
 - o How, when?
- ii. How do communities know how to have their say?
- iii. What do you think communities need in a qualification?
- iv. How do you know that you have been successful in that?
- v. If they change, do you think that responsiveness to changing communities' needs can be improved?

3d. Theme: Quality assurance bodies and Academic Boards

Prompt Questions:

- i. What are the requirements for demonstrating demand? From QAB? From internal (e.g. academic board).

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- ii. Is responsiveness to industry an issue with QABs and Academic Boards?
How?

3e. Theme: Priorities of stakeholders

- i. How do you assign different priorities to different stakeholders?

Concluding Questions

4a. Theme: Opinions on issues

Prompt Questions:

- i. What are some issues that you think hinder the responsiveness of the qualification development process?
- ii. Do you think that there are some issues with the clarity of qualifications?
- iii. Do you think that a large number of similar qualifications is an issue?
 - a. Do you think that a large number of similar qualification arise from an attempt to tailor qualification too specifically to individual needs?
 - b. What other issues may cause the large number of similar qualifications?