

The Importance of Qualifications – Credentialism in the 21st Century: The Use of Qualifications and Experience during the Recruitment Process

Joseph Zajda
Australian Catholic University (Melbourne Campus)

Abstract

This study, using quantitative and qualitative methods analyses the views of employers on the need for formal qualifications as opposed to skills/experience when employing skilled workers in the following three major sectors of the economy in Queensland: (a) construction and trades, (b) property and business services, and (c) manufacturing groups; and across a corresponding seven categories of employees. It evaluates measures taken by employers to improve technical and work-related training. The data utilised in this paper was collected in a formal questionnaire using a preliminary sample of 54 employers. The employers were asked how much importance their firms placed on formal qualifications and experience during the recruitment process, what they considered to be a qualification, and what factors influenced their confidence in qualifications.

The preliminary results indicate that a majority of employers consider formal qualifications as essential for job recruitment. TAFE modules appear to be more valued in construction and trade services, compared with other sectors. The importance of qualifications was 78 per cent for trades (marked as mandatory) in construction and trade services. Employers tended to give high ratings to work experience—50 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively—for technical and trade occupations in the construction sector, and 36 per cent for trades in the manufacturing sector.

Introduction: Credentialism and Employment

The study examines the degree of substitutability between formal qualifications, skills, and experience of employed workers in Queensland. It seeks to determine whether the education and training systems needs to focus on providing necessary work skills, and other desired competencies through modules, or on ensuring that qualifications are completed when necessary. The specific objectives of this study are: to explore the views of employers on the need for formal qualifications as opposed to skills/experience when employing skilled workers; to evaluate the measures taken by employers to improve technical and work-related training; and to identify any problems and issues, facing employers, due to economic, or policy factors that affect access to employment, education and training. This study focuses on the nexus between formal qualifications (secondary and post-secondary certificates, diplomas and degrees) and employers' criteria of employability (including experience and relevant skills); which are used when searching and selecting employees for specific jobs in the following three major sectors

of the economy in Queensland: (a) construction and trades, (b) property and business services, and (c) manufacturing groups.

This study analyses employers' views and opinions concerning the value of formal TAFE level certificates and diplomas and other qualifications, *versus* specific competencies and skills at the entry point of a given workplace environment. Formal qualifications refer to training where certificates, associate diplomas, diplomas (or other post-secondary level qualifications) have been awarded. Uncertified skills are defined as partially completed formal training, such as where sufficient training modules have been completed, to satisfy an individual's employment needs, informal training either on-the-job or from other sources, and 'tacit skills' (Evans, 2005). Tacit skills are implicit or hidden dimensions of knowledge and skill are key elements of 'mastery', which experienced workers draw upon in everyday activities and continuously expand in tackling new or unexpected situations. Tacit skills are perceived to be also products of the socialisation processes of apprenticeship. Evans (2005) argues that the part played by tacit skills and knowledge in work performance is well-recognised but not well understood. Evans also observes that there is a bias in the tacit skills literature towards the understanding of expert knowledge as exercised in particular occupational or professional domains. In so far as worker biography is considered at all in this context, the literature tends to assume a more or less continuous accumulation of 'know how' and expert knowledge acquired in more or less continuous occupational biographies.

Under the hierarchy of occupations, it is assumed that all advanced-skilled—and many of the intermediate-skilled—jobs will be filled by people with formal qualifications. Research suggests, however, that there are significant numbers of unqualified or under-qualified tradespersons and associate professionals in the workforce. This may be due, in part, to the presence of older workers who entered the labour market at a time when informal training was more common; or it may reflect a current intake of unqualified or under-qualified people into specific occupations where shortages of qualified job applicants exist. The presence of significant numbers of under-qualified workers in skilled occupations seems at odds with an apparent trend towards credentialism both in Australia and also globally. In theory, as qualification holding becomes more prevalent, individuals are motivated to seek higher levels of education, to differentiate themselves from other workers (Dore, 1997).

One of the key questions for this research is to what extent qualifications and experience are substitutes in the eyes of employers, and whether this is a temporary phenomenon that is limited to the current tight labour market? The central theme of the study is to analyse the link between theory and practice of vocational education and training (VET) in certain sectors of economy in Queensland, focusing on the relationship between formal qualifications, work-related modules and experience. Currently in Australia, as elsewhere in developed countries, the majority of labour market entrants now possess secondary and post-secondary qualifications, and the percentage is increasing. The research has demonstrated that employers value formal qualifications, which are used by them to recruit employees with an appropriate knowledge-base and skills-set. Formal qualifications are likely to improve applicant's employment prospects, as they appear to influence and define employers' skill needs.

A major question from an economic perspective is to what extent there may be ‘over-education’ in the VET (vocational education and training) sector. If employers are happy to hire unqualified people with necessary skills and experience, then additional training content to make up a full qualification may represent an inefficient use of resources. Alternatively, the additional knowledge and skills that workers get from qualifications may produce gains to both individuals and employers. An important issue for policymakers, therefore, is whether or not qualifications or particular skills are necessary. The literature is divided on this, if we consider these parameters, taking into account low unemployment and high labour demand in some industries and in some geographic areas. However, in all cases employers want appropriately skilled workers. For some employers, this means a full qualification while other employers are satisfied with relevant modules or units. Where there is difficulty obtaining workers with qualifications, some industries have no alternative but to take in unskilled workers and to provide on the job training. This creates a niche for the provision of general employability training.

Literature Review

The Policy Context

The global economy, market forces, competition, and increasing completion rates of secondary and postsecondary education in developed countries may well have created reliance on qualifications, and the qualification escalation phenomenon, which has been labelled as ‘credentialism’, discussed by Dore (1976, 1997) in his influential book, *The Diploma Disease* (1976). In Australia, in general, it is assumed that qualifications carry both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. As Keating et al. suggest that employers are motivated by ‘human capital objectives’, ‘generic skills’ and ‘specific knowledge and skills’ denoted by academic qualifications:

... employers are motivated by human capital objectives, particularly the potential for high levels of labour productivity. These objectives are mitigated by market interventions in the form of regulations, licenses, and industrial awards. They can also be mitigated by other objectives, such as status, especially for high-level qualifications. ... The holders of qualifications may be regarded as having qualities such as a work ethic, a capacity to complete tasks over a long period, and reliability and punctuality. Qualifications can signal generic skills as well as a capacity to learn. They also can signal more specific knowledge and skills (2005, p. 36).

Due to globalisation and the changing nature of the market, work, and increasing competition for markets and jobs there is a need to re-examine not only the significance of vocational qualifications but also the nexus between qualifications and the job market in the global economy (see also Zajda & Biraimah, 2008). Keating et al. argue that over the last decade there has been a significant investment in training qualifications:

Vocational education and training qualifications have been developed directly from workplace practices and vetted by industry upon the criteria of their skill needs. Higher education qualifications have moved further towards criteria for employment outcomes, and most are subject to accreditation procedures that take account of the advice of professional and industrial bodies. There has been a substantial investment in qualifications in Australia, and there are relatively advanced quality assurance systems in both the VET and the higher education sectors (2005, p. 36).

Both training institutions and the employment sector have been influenced by: (a) the significance of globalisation in education policy, training and employment, and (b) the encroaching homogeneity of the global economy, which has the potential to reduce adaptability and flexibility (Sheehan, 2005). The impact of globalisation and the global economy on education policy, training and employment is a strategically significant issue for the Australian economy in the future, if Australia is to maintain its competitive edge in an increasingly competitive climate globally. It has become clear that, since the 1980s, international globalisation, marketisation and quality/efficiency driven reforms have resulted in structural and qualitative changes in education, policy, training and employment opportunities. These include: an increasing focus on the 'lifelong learning for all', or a 'cradle-to-grave' vision of learning and training of the lifelong learning paradigm, and an increasing manifestation of the 'knowledge economy'.

In their quest for accountability, quality and relevance in education and training, governments increasingly turn to international and comparative data analysis. All agree that the major goal of education and training is to 'enhance the individual's social and economic prospects'. This can only be achieved by providing relevant and quality education and training for *all* in the coming decades (Zajda, 2005, p. xix). We already use futuristic-style knowledge and skills, which are vastly different from the more traditional, linear, and structural-functionalist industrial economies of the 1950s and '60s. Adaptability, flexibility and multi-skilling for work were already discussed widely in during the last three decades (Illich, 1971, 1978, 1981; Carnoy, 1997, 2000; Wilson, 2001; Evans, 2005; Zajda 2005; Zajda, 2007). Recent advances in knowledge, technology and industry have impacted on the importance of qualification for employment.

In Australia there has been little research into the recruitment behaviour of employers (Keating et al., 2005), apart from a study conducted by Wooden et al. (1997) offering the most comprehensive analysis of qualification skills and experience. Wooden et al. place 'education' after 'attitude', 'skills', 'experience' and 'appearance', as essential selection criteria. Existing recent studies in Australia provide some insight into attitudes to, and level of, knowledge about qualifications, skills and VET (Davies et al., 2001; Hauka et al., 2004; Keating et al., 2005; NCVER, 2005; 2007). In *Qualifications Use for Recruitment in the Australian Labour Market* (Keating et al., 2005), it was demonstrated that VET qualifications are commonly recognised by employers. The report suggests that most employers prefer vocational education and training to university qualifications; and that VET qualifications appear to score more highly in the categories of job stability, reduced training, job skills and general skills (p. 27). In the case of VET students, 96 per cent of those surveyed intended to complete their qualification for employment and promotion-related reasons (Davies et al., 2001). This suggests that VET students highly regard their TAFE qualifications.

The Commonwealth Government is particularly concerned about the low numbers of people pursuing careers in the traditional trades. Recent data on the latest apprentice and trainee activity from the NCVER (2007) show that the number of people undertaking traditional trades ('in training') rose from 129,200 in 2001 to 181,200 people in 2006.

However this ‘healthy’ growth in the traditional trades has been accompanied by increasing cancellations and withdrawals. In the 2006 December quarter 76,400 people had commenced training in the traditional trades and 35,600 people had completed their training; yet another 31,700 people had cancelled/withdrawn from their training.

The 2005 *Survey of Employers’ Use and Views of the VET System*, conducted by NCVER, aimed to measure the extent of employer engagement and satisfaction with VET in meeting the skill needs of their workforce. The survey demonstrated that employers were generally satisfied with the way the VET system helps them to meet their skill needs. However, employers were also more satisfied with unaccredited training than training from the VET system, as a way of meeting their skill needs. The main reasons why employers were dissatisfied with nationally recognised training as a means for meeting skill needs in the economy were: i) the relevant skills were not being taught; and ii) there was not enough focus on practical skills.

Theoretical Framework

In order to analyse the impact of credentialism, knowledge and skills on employment and mobility in certain industries in Queensland, we have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The survey measuring employers’ attitudes to formal qualifications, skills and experience, aims to determine both what attitudinal perception/change needs to be assessed and what sort of comparison(s) need to be made as part of an assessment of current attitudes towards vocational education and training (VET), TAFE modules or short courses and other qualifications.

Methodology

This project employs both quantitative and qualitative methods comprising of an empirical survey and individual interviews. These are utilised to determine current patterns of employment of under-qualified workers, with regard to assessing possibility for future improvements. The survey investigated the views, and opinions of some 300 employers in Queensland concerning qualifications, credentialism, experience and skills and their significance for employment. The survey attempted seeks to identify use made of formal qualifications and skills in recruitment process by employers when searching and selecting employees. The resulting data will offer a better understanding of the complexities surrounding the attributes and indicators that are denoted by qualifications, their ultimate relevance and value within selection criteria, and the key factors that influence employers’ trust in formal qualifications and experience.

Background of the measure

To test the relationship between formal qualifications, skills and work-related experience, a 15-item instrument (along with a 5-point Likert-scale for some key questions) was used. The questionnaire included certain questions that were designed to test and analyse the employers’ attitudes to qualification and experience when recruiting; and their attitudes to modules (i.e. TAFE modules or short courses) or part qualifications that are considered

to be relevant and essential to the position. Other questions explored employers' confidence and trust in qualifications, their support for on-the-job training, and the extent of support given for employees to complete formal qualifications in certain areas.

Data collection

The data utilised in this paper was collected in a formal questionnaire from a preliminary sample of 54 out of 300 employers in three major sectors of the economy in Queensland: (a) construction and trades; (b) property and business services; and (c) manufacturing groups; and across a corresponding seven categories of employees. Complete findings from the survey and the follow-up interviews (to be conducted during the January/February 2008 period) will be included in the final report.

Results

The survey data has been recorded in SPSS format. The first data analysis from a sample of employers who completed the instrument offers an analysis of the important determinants of various attitudes and opinions about the importance of qualifications (including TAFE modules), experience and job opportunities.

Analysis of Research Data

Employers' attitudes towards formal qualifications

To determine the value of qualifications in industry, respondents in Queensland were asked how much importance their firms placed on formal qualifications, during the recruitment process, what they considered to be a qualification, and what factors influenced their confidence in qualifications. Some 54 firms out of 300 in the sample have responded after one month, representing 18 per cent of the employers surveyed. Preliminary findings indicate that academic qualifications and VET/TAFE qualifications are most commonly recognised by employers in the three sectors surveyed. The sample of the survey indicates already that a majority of employers consider formal qualifications as essential for job recruitment. However, some employers use qualifications for technical and trade occupations, and plant and machine positions. **Table 1** shows the percentage of firms in each sector that indicated that they consider qualifications when recruiting employees for the seven occupational categories.

Table 1: Percentage of firms taking into consideration applicant qualifications (as mandatory) when recruiting employees, by industry sector and occupational area (n= 54).

Industry sector	Occupational area						
	A* %	B* %	C* %	D* %	E* %	F* %	G* %
Construction and Trade Services (c. 18)	33.0	78.0	21.0	86.0	63.0	20.0	33.0
Manufacturing: (inc Machinery	29	42.0	10.0	13	20.0	0	57.0

and equipment and Electronic equipment (c. 19)							
Property and Business Services (inc Technical services, Marketing and Business Management Services) (c.17)	33.0	25.0	21.0	40.0	17.0	17.0	67.0

Note: * A: Technical; B. Trades; C. Clerical, sales and service; D: Plant/machine operators, E: Labourers;
F; Management and administration; G: professional

The importance of qualifications in construction and trade ranged from 78 per cent for trades (marked as mandatory), to 63 per cent for labourers; for property and business services it ranged from 67 per cent (in the professional sector), to 21 per cent (clerical and sales); for manufacturing it was 57 per cent (in the professional sector), and 42 per cent for trade occupations. The preliminary findings indicate that for all three services the areas where qualifications are most valued are the occupational areas classified as Trades and Professional. Interestingly the occupational area where they seemed to be least valued was Management and administration. The general pattern seems to show that the Australian qualifications (vocational education and training, degrees, and school certificates) appear to be recognised and valued by a majority of employers in Queensland.

This sample shows that formal qualifications are used in the recruitment process to select suitable applicants, and the importance of qualifications may be growing. Some 78 per cent of employers in construction and trade services (in trade occupations), and 42 per cent in manufacturing (in trade occupations) in Queensland have indicated that they use qualifications in their recruitment and selection processes, and very few have indicated that they are unimportant. Given the strength of the labour market at the time of the survey, the importance of qualifications could strengthen even further with a possible downturn in the economy in the future. The use of qualifications by employers may well be a combination of sorting and screening, despite the variations across industry sectors and occupation categories.

From a policy perspective, the question is whether (a) the government should be attempting to set target levels for qualification holdings in various occupational groups or (b) whether education and training should be viewed as a flexible means of delivering only those skills that are required by workers. However, the question still remains whether intuitional-based education and training can deliver the set of skills, knowledge base and qualities that employers want in recruits better than or 'as well as work and industry experience' (Keating, Nicholas, Polesel & Watson, 2005, p. 32).

Employers' attitudes towards TAFE modules/short courses

As to TAFE modules and short courses, in construction and trade services responses ranged from 56 per cent (mandatory for trades) and 39 per cent (a great deal); for manufacturing it ranged from 43 per cent (a great deal) for technical to 36 per cent for trades; for property and business services, it ranged from 50 per cent (a great deal) for professional occupations, to 29 per cent for clerical and sales. Part qualifications and TAFE modules appear to be most valued in construction and trade services. Some indicated that TAFE training was in need of a 'major overhaul', especially in plumbing and gas fitting, and that 'extra training should be made compulsory'. This suggests that

there should be a much stronger link between training institutions and the industry regarding qualifications, skills and the employment sector:

...education and training systems and providers that wish to build stronger currency for their qualifications in the labour market...they should look towards means of linking qualifications with the industry and work experience so that they can also be associated with behaviours and experiences that are most valued by employers (Keating, Nicholas, Polesel & Watson, 2005, p. 39).

Table 2: Percentage of firms taking into consideration applicant part qualifications (TAFE modules), as mandatory, when recruiting employees, by industry sector and occupational area

Industry sector	Occupational area						
	A* %	B* %	C* %	D* %	E* %	F* %	G* %
Construction and Construction Trade Services	40.0	56.0	15.0	13.0	0.0	27.0	14.0
Manufacturing: (inc Machinery and equipment and Electronic equipment	14.0	9.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
Property and Business Services (inc Technical services, Marketing and Business Management Services)	8.0	0.0	21.0	0.0	17.0	38.0	0.0

Note: * A: Technical; B: Trades; C: Clerical, sales and service; D: Plant/machine operators, E: Labourers; F; Management and administration; G: professional

It seems that there are many occupations within the industry, particularly Construction and Construction Trade Services, and Property and Business Services sectors where possessing successful completion of TAFE modules is of no concern with regard to employment. Either the modules are perceived by the employers as irrelevant to the occupation or modules that are particularly tailored for these occupations are nonexistent. This needs further investigation.

Employers' placing greater overall importance on experience when recruiting

The importance placed by employers on experience, when recruiting, varied in different sectors and occupational groupings. Preliminary findings indicate that employers tended to give high ratings to work experience in all sectors. In construction and trade services, the value placed on work experience within the industry ranged between 78 per cent for professional occupations, 50 per cent for technical occupations, and 33 per cent for trade occupations, followed by property and business (from 91% for professional occupations, to 33% for management and administration), and manufacturing (44% for professional occupations, and 36% for trade occupations). Experience within the industry is ranked most highly for professional, technical and trade occupations in the construction, manufacturing and business sectors (91% and 78% respectively for professional occupations in business and construction sectors). Experience in the construction/trade services, and manufacturing, was 50 per cent and 14 per cent respectively for technical and trade occupations.

In general, when recruiting, companies seemed to prefer experience to qualifications. For property/business services, experience for professional occupations was 91 per cent. The mean was 30.3 per cent for construction, 27 per cent for property and business services and 26 per cent for manufacturing.

Table 3: Percentage of firms placing greater importance on experience, as mandatory, when recruiting employees, by industry sector and occupational area

Industry sector	Occupational area						
	A* %	B* %	C* %	D* %	E* %	F* %	G* %
Construction and Trade Services	50.0	33.0	15.0	13.0	0.0	23.0	78.0
Manufacturing: (inc Machinery and equipment and Electronic equipment)	14.0	36.0	20.0	22.0	25.0	22.0	44.0
Property and Business Services (inc Technical services, Marketing and Business Management Services)	25.0	13.0	29.0	0.0	0.0	33.0	91.0

Note: * A: Technical; B: Trades; C: Clerical, sales and service; D: Plant/machine operators, E: Labourers; F: Management and administration; G: professional

Thus, when making decision about who to employ it appears from these preliminary findings that in certain occupations employers require both qualifications and prior experience in the occupation as important to making decision about employability. Interestingly for both Technical and Management and administration in the Manufacturing industry, employers seem to rely entirely on past experiences when making decisions about employability. Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the different importance each sector places on mandatory qualifications, TAFE modules, and past experiences when recruiting employers for the seven occupational categories.

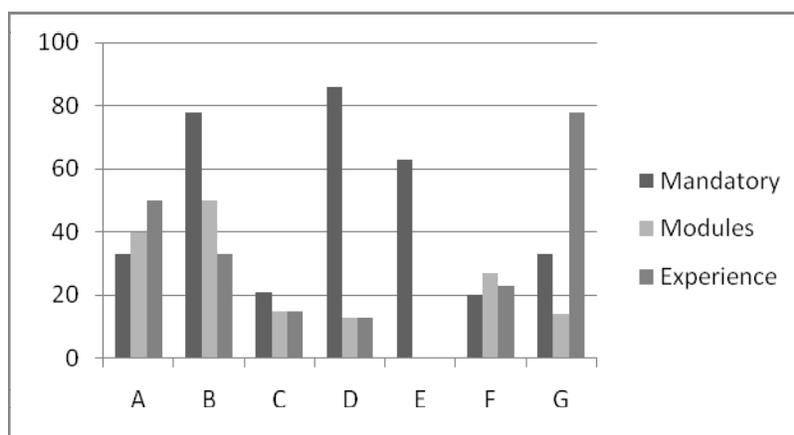


Figure 1. The relevant importance firms within the Construction sector place on mandatory qualifications, TAFE modules, and past experiences when recruiting employees.

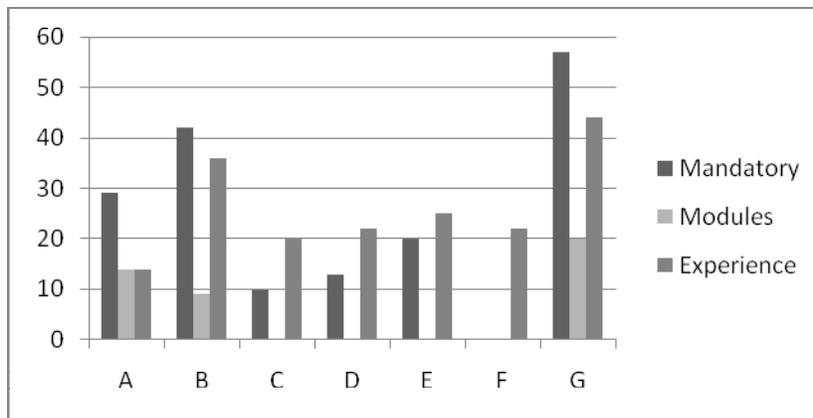


Figure 2. The relevant importance firms within the Manufacturing sector place on mandatory qualifications, TAFE modules, and past experiences when recruiting employees.

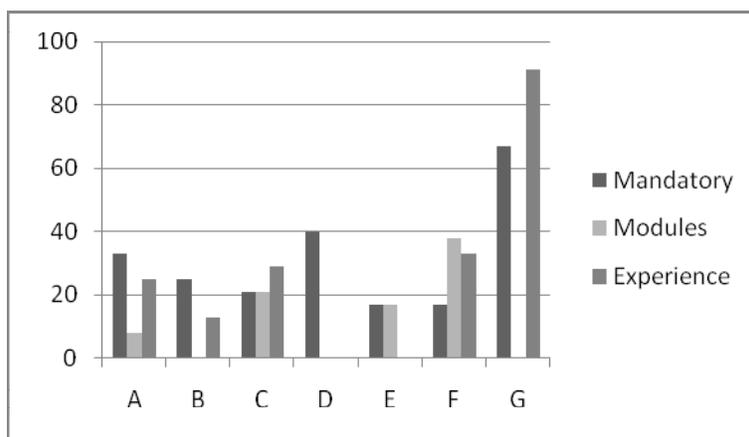


Figure 3. The relevant importance firms within the Property and Business Service sector place on mandatory qualifications, TAFE modules, and past experiences when recruiting employees.

Employers' provisions for the job training/leave to complete training

Employers were asked to indicate what measures were taken by them to improve skills in the industry. One of these measures would be allowing individuals to complete some TAFE training. The Australian vocational education and training (VET) system trains large numbers of students. In 2004 alone, there were over 1.6 million students enrolled in the public VET system (NCVER, 2006, 1). In general, there are various path ways for training: through the VET system (including the use of apprenticeships and traineeships), through other forms of nationally recognised training, through unaccredited training, and informal training. In general, employers can meet their skill needs in particular industry by recruiting people who have the required qualifications, skills, and experience. Alternatively, firms can develop the required skills in their own organisation—by providing training for newly hired staff. Employers can contribute towards the cost of individual employees undertaking further study, or upgrading of their qualifications and skills, or provide the necessary skill training themselves.

The preliminary data shows that most firms offer on the job training. The responses ranged from 100 per cent for construction and trade services (professional occupations), to 80 per cent for management occupations, and 60 per cent for trade occupations in the manufacturing sector. Employers were also asked to show what was done for unqualified people in terms of job skills in their respective firms. To the question ‘Are there plans to upgrade skills, responses for ‘yes’ ranged from 100 per cent for construction and trade services (for professional occupations), 80 per cent for manufacturing (in management occupations), to 50 per cent for property and business services (in the management and professional occupations).

Table 4: Percentage of firms that have plans to upgrade skills, by industry sector and occupational area

Industry sector	Occupational area						
	A* %	B* %	C* %	D* %	E* %	F* %	G* %
Construction and Construction Trade Services	80.0	43.0	22.0	33.0	0.0	38.0	100.0
Manufacturing: (inc Machinery and equipment and Electronic equipment	67.0	60.0	60.0	50.0	40.0	80.0	67.0
Property and Business Services (inc Technical services, Marketing and Business Management Services)	58.0	63.0	43.0	33.0	33.0	50.0	50.0

Note: * A: Technical; B: Trades; C: Clerical, sales and service; D: Plant/machine operators, E: Labourers; F: Management and administration; G: professional

Factors which influence trust or confidence in qualifications, across all firms

Employers were asked to indicate factors that influenced their company’s confidence/trust in qualifications. In general, across all sectors, between 45 per cent and 30 per cent respondents indicated that it was the type and length of the qualification, 63 per cent (construction) indicated it was the institution or training provider, 75 per cent (construction) indicated that it was their experience of employees with similar qualifications, and between 64 per cent (manufacturing) and 50 per cent (construction and business sectors) indicated that their trust was based on qualifications issued in Australia.

Table 5: Factors which influence trust or confidence in qualifications for across the industry

Industry sector	Trust indicators				
	A* %	B* %	C* %	D* %	E* %

Construction and Construction Trade Services	36.0	63.0	8.0	75.0	50.0
Manufacturing: (inc Machinery and equipment and Electronic equipment)	30.0	10.0	20.0	73.0	64.0
Property and Business Services (inc Technical services, Marketing and Business Management Services)	45.0	42.0	11.0	60.0	47.0

Note: * A: The type and length of qualification; B: The institution or training provider; C: The year the qualification / training was completed; D: Your experience of employees with the same type & level of qualification; E: The qualification was issued in Australia

Evaluation

The preliminary results indicate that a majority of employers consider formal qualifications as essential for job recruitment. TAFE modules appear to be more valued in construction and trade services, compared with other sectors. In construction and trade services it was 56 per cent for trades, followed by 43 per cent in the construction sector. The importance of qualifications was 78 per cent for trades (marked as mandatory) in the construction sector, and 42 per cent in the manufacturing sector. Employers tended to give high ratings to ‘experience’ in the industry, between 50 per cent and 33 per cent respectively for technical and trade occupations in the construction sector.

The results also confirm that a majority of companies in the sample indicated that such attributes as the type and length of qualifications, the institution or training provider and the fact that qualifications were issued in Australia, were important characteristics which defined the notion of trust in the quality of qualifications in Australia. Such an indicator, as ‘experience of employees with the same type of and level of qualifications’ proved to be highly significant, with the mean of 69.3 per cent for the industry. Also, the mean for ‘the qualifications issued in Australia’ was 54 per cent.

The above results support other similar findings in Australia and elsewhere on the attributes that employers believe are denoted by academic qualifications and their primary role during the recruitment process, as a sorting mechanism. However, the above results need to be treated with caution owing to the low cell sizes for each of these industries and occupational groupings. Nevertheless, the preliminary findings suggest that the more traditional and regulated industries, such as construction and trade services, and manufacturing, continue to value formal qualifications very highly.

Conclusion

The results from this sample seem to be consistent with those from other studies that support the importance that employers attach to formal qualifications and relevant work experience, which are perceived to be desirable attributes for employment. These two characteristics indicate that the majority of the employers in the sample regard both

qualifications and industry experience as a reliable signal for recruitment of potential employees. As the survey demonstrates, there are clear differences in the use of qualifications and/or experience across different categories of workers and occupations. They have a stronger role in construction, trade and manufacturing sectors, especially for such categories as trade and technical occupations, plant and machine operators, rather than for management/administration, and clerical and sales positions. However, most employers in Queensland use and value, as anticipated, both qualifications and relevant experience for recruitment.

References

- Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (2002). *Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook* (3rd ed.). Carlton: AQFAB.
- Carnoy, M. (2006). Technological change and education. In J. Zajda (Ed.). *Education and Society*. Melbourne: James Nicholas Publishers.
- Carnoy, M. (2000). *Sustaining the New Economy: Work, Family, and Community in the Information Age*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Davies, M, Polesel, J & Teese, R. (2001). *Completion, non-completion and re-orientation*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Dore, R. (1976). *The Diploma Disease*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Dore, R. (1997). *The Diploma Disease*. (2nd ed.). London: University of London Institute of Education.
- Evans, K. (2005). Tacit Skills and Occupational Mobility in a Global Culture. In J. Zajda (Ed.), *The International Handbook of Globalisation and Education Policy Research* (pp. 65-83). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Hauka, S, Keating, J and Lamb, S. (2004). *Alternative mechanisms to encourage individual contributions to vocational education and training*. Adelaide: NCVER.
- Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling Society*. NY: Harper & Row.
- Illich, I., (1978). *The Right to Useful Unemployment*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers.
- Illich, I. (1981). *Shadow Work*. Boston: Marion Boyars Publishers.
- Keating, J, Nicholas, T, Polesel, J, and Watson, J. (2005). *Qualifications use for recruitment in the Australian labour market*. Adelaide: NCVER.
- NCVER (2006). *Employers' Use and Views of the VET System: 2005*. Adelaide: NCVER (2007).
- Australian vocational education and training: Students and courses 2006 – Summary, NCVER: Adelaide.
- Robb, A. (2007). Training our workforce for tomorrow. Address to the National Press Club on 14 March 2007. Retrieved 16 July from <http://www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Robb/2007/03/R001140307.asp>
- Sheehan, P. (2005). Foreword. In J. Zajda (Ed.), *The International Handbook of Globalisation and Education Policy Research* (pp. xi-xiii). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Wilson, D. (2001). Reform of TVET for the Changing World of Work. *Prospects*. XXXI(1), 21-37.
- Wooden, M & Harding, D (1997). *Trends in staff selection and recruitment*. Canberra. DEETYA, AGPS.
- Zajda, J. (2005). Global Trends in Education and Academic Achievement. In J. Zajda (Ed.). *The International Handbook of Globalisation and Education Policy Research*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Zajda, J. (2007). Credentialism in the 21st Century: The Importance of Qualifications. *Educational Practice and Theory*, 29(2), 61-79.
- Zajda, J. & Biraimah, B. (2008). (Eds.). *Education and Social Inequality in the Global Culture*. Dordrecht: Springer.

The Author

Joseph Zajda, Ph.D, is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the Australian Catholic University (Melbourne Campus). He specializes in comparative and international education (Russia, Poland, and Australia), education and policy, decentralisation and privatisation, and excellence and quality in education. He edits *World Studies in Education, Curriculum and Teaching*, and *Education and Society* for James Nicholas Publishers. His book publications include: *Education in the USSR* (Pergamon Press,

1990), *Education and Society* (James Nicholas Publishers, 2005), *Society and the Environment* (James Nicholas Publishers, 2005), *Curriculum, Culture and Teaching, Learning and Teaching* James Nicholas Publishers, 2005). He is editor of the *International Handbook of Globalisation, Education and Policy Research* (Springer, 2005). He is also the editor of the 12-volume book series *Globalisation, and Comparative Education* (Springer, 2008/9).

In April 2004, he received the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, Australian Catholic University. He was chair & co-chair (2003-08) of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) Publications Standing Committee. He was also on the Board of Directors of the Comparative and International Education Society, USA (2004-06).

Contact address: Associate Professor Joseph Zajda, Trescowthick School of Education, Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's), Australian Catholic University, 115 Victoria Parade, and Fitzroy VIC 3065 Australia. E-mail: j.zajda@patrick.acu.edu.au