

THE CERTIFICATE IV IN TAA: HOW IS IT VALUED BY EARLY CAREER VET PRACTITIONERS?

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The TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (CIVTAA) is accepted in all Australian States and Territories as a minimum qualification for teachers, trainers and assessors. As it is now five years since the TAA04 Training Package was endorsed, it is timely to look at the benefits and the issues associated with the TAA40104 qualification.

This presentation reports on a research study conducted by Charles Sturt University staff on the experiences and values of a sample of its vocational education and training (VET) students in obtaining their Certificate IV in TAA externally from the university. In this research, student reflections on their experience in obtaining the Certificate IV qualification and the values they place on it have been analysed with the assistance of NVivo software. So far, 46 reflections have been coded, collated and analysed for correlations and patterns. As a result of the analysis, benefits and issues have been identified and these will be discussed within this presentation.

Introduction

This paper is a continuation of the paper presented at the 2009 AVETRA conference. However, whereas this early paper reported on what we intended to do, this paper reports on what the collected data has shown. The research is not complete but a clear pattern has arisen from the data analysed thus far.

The *TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package* was developed by the Business Services Training Australia (BSTA) to meet the competency development needs of individuals and organisations providing training and assessment services within the vocational education and training sector. From July 2004, the coverage of the educational industry became the responsibility of the Innovation and Business Industry Skills Council (IBISC). Volume 1 of the *TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package* states that:

The vocational education and training sector is responsible for developing the competence of individuals in areas of work required by industry, enterprises and organisations as well as providing general education for the community. It includes vocational education and training undertaken in industries, enterprises, government agencies, and community and school settings. The vocational education and training sector encompasses both recognised training leading to a qualification or Statement/s of Attainment under the AQF, and non-recognised training, such as in-house, product-based training.

The TAA04 Training and Assessment Package reflects the outcomes of the Review of the BSZ98 Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training. It was developed in conjunction with contracted consultants, critical friends and the thousands of individuals and hundreds of organisations who contributed their time

and input into the development process. The project was undertaken under the guidance of a Project Steering Committee comprising representatives of key stakeholders and a Reference Group comprising representatives of State and Territory Training Authorities and the Commonwealth government.

(BSTA, 2004, np)

Five years later, it is instructive to look at the implementation of one of the two qualifications covered by the TAA04 Training Package. *TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment* (CIVTAA) ‘specifies the competencies required to deliver training in an industry area or area of subject matter expertise, and to conduct competency-based assessment in a range of contexts’ (BSTA, 2004, np). Given this comprehensive claim, the CIVTAA has been accepted by all states and Territories as the minimum qualification for ongoing employment in public and private registered Training Organisations although some industry areas accept its predecessor, the *BSZ40198 Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training* as the basic qualification for work as an industry trainer. This has meant that there has been a large uptake of people undertaking the CIVTAA to ensure that they have current qualifications to pursue their careers as vocational education and training practitioners.

This research paper considers a serendipitous sample of people who have undertaken the CIVTAA over the past five years. This group, having obtained the CIVTAA from a large number of different registered providers, have subsequently enrolled in one of three university degrees offered by Charles Sturt University to prepare them to become VET teachers and trainers.

In order to provide a clear account of the research and the preliminary results obtained from it, this paper has been organised as follows. A background section looks at some general issues which have been discussed in the literature and at conference gatherings. A clear but abbreviated account of the research methodology follows. Then some key findings are discussed and finally there is a discussion of the implications of these findings. A previous paper on this subject contains a more detailed literature review and outline of the methodology.

Background Issues

As previously mentioned, the CIVTAA was designed and introduced to replace the previous base qualification for VET practitioners, the *BSZ40198 Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training*. The introduction of the new Training Package and Certificate IV qualification was seen as an opportunity to upskill the vocational education and training (VET) industry and to ensure that Training Packages were delivered by teachers and trainers who understood their design, flexibility and implementation issues.

Some of the issues, which the new CIVTAA was thus intended (implicitly or explicitly) to address, included:

- a single entry qualification for all teachers and trainers within the vocational education and training community with limited internal choice of Units of Competency (UoCs);
- simultaneously meeting the needs of experienced and inexperienced teachers and trainers within VET, often within the same student cohort;
- addressing the needs of teachers and trainers working in a wide range of contexts, modes and with a diverse range of students;

- providing RPL where warranted whilst at the same time being able to ensure an understanding of the role of Training Packages and their delivery;
- acknowledging past poor practices which occurred where the BSZ40104 had been awarded as a result of limited training and ad hoc assessments; and
- ensuring that only people who possessed the CIVTAA qualification could teach the qualification.

This research project has been undertaken to see if these six intents have been satisfied by the TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification. Specifically, it is the first of these intents which is the most problematic. It is the universality of having a single qualification to meet the needs of a diverse range of teachers and trainers working across numerous and diverse industries, contexts, modes, and students which appears to have strained the effectiveness of the CIVTAA to meet the demands placed upon it. It is unreasonable to expect that a single presenter can comprehend the experiences, let alone meet the needs of a diverse group of teachers and trainers coming from different industries and with differing amounts of teaching/training experience. Yet, especially in the early days of the delivery of the CIVTAA, this is what was expected and which reportedly still occurs, especially within some private providers of the qualification.

That there were some concerns about the introduction of the CIVTAA were confirmed when, in 2007, the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) reported on the outcomes of the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) strategic audit of the TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in NSW. This audit was undertaken:

in response to a number of concerns raised by stakeholders in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. The audit aimed to assemble a broad picture of the issues faced by registered training organisations (RTOs) in the training and assessment area and what strategies they had developed to manage the implementation of the TAA40104 qualification. The audit involved a number of phases including: the completion and analysis of an online RTO survey; determination of an audit sample; conduct of site audits; and preparation of this report. The audit identified areas of good practice as well as issues that need to be addressed through the continuous improvement process, which is an integral part of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) 2007.

(NSW VETAB, 2007, p. 1)

Anecdotally, other concerns have been raised when groups of participants and their employers meet, formally or informally (Down, De Luca, & Galloway, 2009). Some of these concerns have been presented at conferences or published and include the following (Brennan Kemmis, Simons, Smith, & Mayo, 2007; Bush & Smith, 2004; Down et al., 2009; Francisco & Darwin, 2007; Mitchell, 2008; Robertson, 2009). The authors of this paper also teach in CSU's Associate Degree in Bachelor of and Graduate Diploma of VET courses and have first hand experience of both teaching within the Cert IV in TAA and teaching graduates of this program. The need for the research came largely from their recognition of the need to investigate the apparent problems

Research Methodology

The objective of the research was to use reflective data in order to investigate how relatively inexperienced VET practitioners are developing their practice and expertise. This data was

available from student assignments which had been undertaken over the past four years. However, the first step in the research project was to notify all students who had undertaken and completed the particular subject involve and gain both their consent to participate in the research and to provide us with an electronic copy of their reflective essay on their TAA40104 Certificate IV experience. Further details of this process are available (Down et al., 2009).

Reflective essays which students had written for one of their CSU subjects were used as the basic data. The qualitative analysis of the students' reflective essays essentially followed the methods and conventions of narrative analysis. The data was interrogated around the three research questions on which the project was based. That is:

1. How did you undertake your TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment?
2. What did you learn by undertaking this qualification?
3. What do you still consider you need to learn in order to work effectively as a VET practitioner?

These are also the questions which framed the participants' reflective essays. The coding for the analysis was initially based on current anecdotal "memory" from originally reading the students essays. This was then augmented as the data was processed and sorted. The following section looks at the findings which have come from the data analysis using NVivo to ensure systemic and reliable analysis.

Because the research questions were very closely aligned to the assignment questions which elicited the data, the data collection has been relatively straightforward. The use of NVivo and internal double checking of assigned categorisations enabled a rigorous analysis and resulted in high quality research outcomes.

Indicative Findings

As the data analysis is still in progress, this paper reports on the demographic data from all 73 participants. However, the reflective data of only 46 of the respondents has so far been analysed. However, at this stage of the research, clear issues are emerging and these are reported upon in this paper

Participants

Most of the participants (86.5%) were between 31 and 50 years old and fairly evenly spread across this age range with 41-50 as the median age range and an estimated average age of 43.4 years. This is not unexpected because most VET teachers/trainers have had more than five years experience in industry and have formal qualifications in their industry area before being appointed as teachers/trainers. There was a gender balance with 37 females and 36 males responding to the survey. Most of the participants (57 or 80.2%) had less than 10 years experience working within the VET sector whilst a further six had between 11 and 15 tears experience and eight claimed to have been working in the sector for more than fifteen years.

The 73 participants in the survey thus far come from every Australian State and Territory excepting Tasmania with most of these coming from NSW (72.6%). When asked to describe their primary occupation, the majority responded in the category of teacher/trainer (84.5%). When asked where they worked, 55 (77.5%) responded they were employed by a TAFE institution with a further 10 (13.6%) coming from other types of Registered Training

Organisations (RTOs). The remainder were employed at Job Providers (5), higher education (1), non-RTO training providers (2), Defence (4), other Government departments (2) and other (3). Most of the participants (74.3%) were employed on a full time basis with the others being employed on a part-time (9), casual (5) or contract (5) basis. One of the respondents was unemployed.

Coding and Analysis

As previously stated, the coding was performed by first dividing the data into three main groups which corresponded to the three research questions: participants' experience of undertaking their CIVTAA; the learning it gave them; and what they believe they still need to learn. These three groups were further divided as indicated by the data itself. Whilst the original three groupings, named for expediency as experience, learning and improvement, received the majority of the comments from the dissected data, another five groups emerged. These related to confidence, the rationale for undertaking the project, selection of a provider, the value of the qualification, and workplace learning.

Rationale

Eleven of the 46 data sets so far analysed referred to their reasons for undertaking the CIVTAA. Most of these were concerned with improving practice and securing employment although other respondents commented on their career enhancement, the need to better understand and work with Training Packages, their need to understand the national VET system and the cost of undertaking the CIVTAA. Interestingly, the participants whose data was considered in this section perceived undertaking the CIVTAA as an opportunity and a challenge which would assist them in furthering their career. As one participant wrote:

In October 2007, I commenced as a full-time teacher with TAFE and began a journey of epic proportions. Having very limited experience in pedagogy and no previous exposure to the vocational education and training (VET) sector, the learning curve has been steep. While I possessed the BSZ10198 Certificate in Assessment and Workplace Training, I was ill prepared for the challenges ahead. After ten months in the position, I have come to understand that VET has endless facets and operates in a constantly changing environment and I may never feel 'fully prepared' again. Nevertheless the personal challenge and satisfaction that comes from teaching adults has far surpassed my original expectations.

(participant008)

Choice of Provider

Reasons provided for the choice of a provider included the need to study by distance because of the demands (such as travel) of their current employment; working for the provider; previous experience studying with the provider; searching the Internet; and personal recommendation. One participant wrote:

I attained my Certificate IV in Training and Assessment through a local Registered Training Organisation (RTO)... . I came across this RTO after undertaking several days' research via the Internet. There was a vast number of RTO's offering this course and on the recommendation of a colleague who specialises in Career Counselling, I approached ... [this RTO] regarding enrolment for an upgrade of my Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training.

(participant005)

Another participant used getting her CIVTAA as an opportunity to see how training was delivered away from her workplace when she wrote:

I am a full time and permanent employee of TAFE N.S.W. ... Institute. They were not delivering the program in a format that suited; also I was very interested to see how other Registered Training Organisations (RTO) delivered this new training package programme, knowing that this new qualification had increased considerably in content.

(participant039)

Value of the qualification

The six participants whose data was classified in this section valued the CIVTAA as to them it represented a well-regarded qualification which met the minimum qualifications for entry into a teaching/training career. As one participant wrote:

Overall, I am pleased that I have undertaken this training and am up-to-date with a nationally recognised qualification. This qualification will enhance my practices within the VET environment and hopefully increase my employment opportunities in the future.

(participant069)

Confidence

All fifteen participants, who wrote about the confidence they had gained from the CIVTAA, were very positive about the CIVTAA. They wrote about their growing confidence with teaching in group situations, workplace training and assessment processes. They believed that the CIVTAA had enabled them to better understand their role as VET teachers/trainers and to work with their students/learners more effectively. Training Packages and a wider knowledge of how the VET system operates and its policies and practices were cited a number of times as being factors in this new-found confidence. One participant, who had a wide experience of practice within the VET system within industry contexts, wrote:

The TAA has helped me plan and organize my lessons more effectively. It has given me a greater understanding of Training Packages and how to interpret and use them effectively. The TAA material has also greatly assisted me in developing effective assessment tools. This in turn allows me to plan and organize my assessment so that they valid and meet auditing requirements.

(participant010)

The CIVTAA experience

Data on how the participants experienced the CIVTAA was initially divided into two major subgroups, that is, comments about the delivery of the CIVTAA as they experienced it and comments about the qualification itself.

The participants' experience was very diverse and the material relating to this was initially coded into a number of groups. These included issues about the recognition of prior learning, training format, assessment, modes of delivery, benefits and challenges. Approximately one third of the participants had undertaken the BSZ40198 Certificate IV qualification before undertaking the CIVTAA. It was interesting to note that four of these participants reported that they had learnt more from the BSZ qualification than they did from the newer Certificate. For example:

In 1999, I completed Certificate IV in Workplace Training (Category 2) by attending weekly night classes at Kimberley TAFE for the entire year. This pace allowed time for consideration and reinforcement of learning. The Lecturer organised each student to prepare and deliver aspects of the course to classmates, which greatly boosted my

confidence in my ability to teach.

(participant068)

Like many of the others with their BSZ, this participant undertook their CIVTAA mainly by RPL and felt that, by so doing, an opportunity to increase her skill and knowledge had been missed. As another participant expressed it:

As I completed the Certificate through RPL without the need to learn additional material, I wonder if I have missed out on finding all the relevant information. My apparent need for as much information as possible is something that I did not realise about myself before.

(participant038)

This is not to say that the majority of those participants who undertook their CIVTAA by RPL regretted it. Most found that the process in itself was a learning experience and that their ability to undertake RPL assessments and assessment in general had benefited from their experience. As the previous participant wrote:

As I have been teaching an average of 20 hours per week for approximately 3 years, I successfully completed it through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process. Using RPL to obtain a qualification has been an interesting process in itself. I have found that gathering evidence was easier than I had anticipated. Due to having a range of teaching experience, including facilitating flex students and trainees, I was able to collate evidence that covered all Units in the Certificate IV in a relatively short period of time. It has shown me that RPL does not need to be laborious and cumbersome but can be a streamlined yet thorough process.

(participant068)

An interesting finding was the enthusiasm conveyed by a group of participants over using a group RPL process to obtain their CIVTAA. These participants reported very favourably on the collegial learning which helped them to identify not only pertinent past experiences but helped them to determine what would be acceptable evidence. One participant described how she had applied that experience with a class of her own:

By participating in a 'facilitated conversation', directed by the educator, learners demonstrate their competence by sharing specific experiences from their own employment. The educator provided prompts for the direction of the conversation, depending on the unit of competency relating to the conversation and the learners responded to each other's examples. This method was found to be incredibly successful, and all five learners achieved the qualification. By sharing examples from their experiences, the learners not only gained an understanding of their own knowledge but developed it by learning from their peers.

(participant071)

Learning achieved

Material coded under this section was further subdivided to include the categories learning about, learning to do and learning to be. Most of the participants agreed that the CIVTAA had been instrumental in developing them as VET practitioners. For example, one participant wrote:

I feel that this course enhanced my ability as a VET teacher as although I had over twenty six years of vocational experience and was confident in my technical ability, this course focussed me more on the training and assessment side of VET and I feel

more confident in my delivery of training as a result, particularly in regard to the theory sessions.

(participant002)

Learning to use Training Packages was another aspect of the CIVTAA considered by participants to be useful. As one participant wrote:

The most beneficial part of my learning was the valuable time going through Training Packages and Units of Competency, which was essential for my work. This involved breaking down the elements, identifying the action words and text types, what types of communication methods are used and the language, literacy and numeracy aspects.

(participant009)

Increased awareness of the VET system, its policies and practices was also reported by many participants as a benefit of the CIVTAA. One participant expressed it as:

When addressing outcomes for “Work effectively in Vocational Education and Training”, I realised I had not kept informed of developments and changes beyond my small College into the national VET sector. Attending classes, searching websites, and reading ANTA Learning Guides and WA Department of Education and Training publications helped update and consolidate a big picture view.

(participant068)

Other learning outlined by the participants included teaching and learning strategies, meeting student needs, working with others and workplace learning. Only two of the participant believed that they had not benefited from undertaking the CIVTAA.

Further learning and improvement

Given that all the participants in this research project are currently undertaking, or have completed, further university studies since completing their CIVTAA, it is not surprising that the participants reported that they wanted to learn more about the processes of teaching, learning and assessment across a variety of contexts. As one participant wrote:

The Certificate in Training and Assessment (TAA) has provision to provide a solid foundation for the preparation and delivery of lessons and the preparation, documentation and undertaking of assessments. It does not however, prepare a practitioner for the more complex issues of managing diversity, learning styles and individualisation of training. To use Schön’s (1987) swamp analogy, the TAA certificate addresses the ‘high ground’ where ‘relatively unimportant’ issues can be solved (Schön, 1987, as cited in Hobley, 2003, p. 28). My descent into the ‘messy swamp of complex classroom practice’ (Hobley, 2003, p. 28) has been aided by my university studies which has provided a solid foundation of understanding, my growing portfolio of training experience and shared experiences of other VET practitioners.

(participant008)

Not surprisingly, all the participants regarded their acquisition of the CIVTAA as an early step in their development as VET practitioners and recognised that their continued development would be their responsibility and the result of critical reflection on their practice and enhancing their educational understanding through reading, discussion with their peers and attending professional development activities. A number of the participants wrote

about the changes they would be facing as their careers in VET developed including the following participant who wrote:

To improve my practice I have to understand the potential needs of wider society such as cultural, physical, emotional and intellectual. The RAAF is not as diverse as society as a whole so to transition I must broaden my perspective. I also need to increase my exposure to civilian training packages as the RAAF curricula system is less comprehensive due to its outcome focused nature, not allowing for much variation in delivery and design. The softer, people side of training is where I have to improve the most and my recent studies in management and training are starting to open my eyes up to different paradigms and social perspectives which will hopefully make me more effective as a teacher.

(participant067)

Conclusion

The previous section has, of necessity, only sketched the bare outlines of the data collected and analysed in the research project thus far. It has, however, illustrated some important issues raised a group of our current and graduated students who have themselves undertaken the CIVTAA over the past five years. This is important. It is also data which was obtained through a relatively unstructured process; that of a written reflection on experience within a limited framework of 800 words. So whilst there is much that might have been addressed in greater details, this paper reflects the experience and learning that the participants regard as personally important.

The TAA40104 is currently under review. One of the issues that the review has been addressing is how to keep a common base qualification for VET practitioners whilst avoiding the ills which accompany a “one size fits all” approach. This research not only confirms that some reform is needed. This includes a re-think of the concept of a single qualification for a very diverse section of the workforce but also more consistency in both teaching and assessment. The participants also acknowledged the benefits which the CIVTAA has provided for a group of relatively inexperienced but very enthusiastic VET practitioners

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