

The Benefits of Completing a Retail Industry Qualification

Chris Dunn, July 2006

This survey was conducted in May and June 2006 to find out what the people who had completed a retail, wholesale or distribution qualification in 2004 said about its relevance to them. They reported on:

- How they valued the qualification
- Why they did the qualification
- How their skills developed
- How and if they benefited
- What obstacles they faced and,
- Their intentions for further training

Who were the interviewees?

1058 people completed a retail or distribution qualification in 2004. We interviewed 242 (23%) respondents by telephone; 220 had completed a Level 2 AAP, 10 had completed a level 3 AAP and 10 had completed a Training Pathways programme. They were

- From a representative sample of businesses throughout NZ that engage with the Retail ITO
- Most full-time - working @ 43.5 hours/week
- Average age - 37 years (average pop = 36.5)
- Retail experience - 11 years
- Time with current employer – 6 years
- 60% female; 40% male
- 49% School Certificate or no qualification (19%)

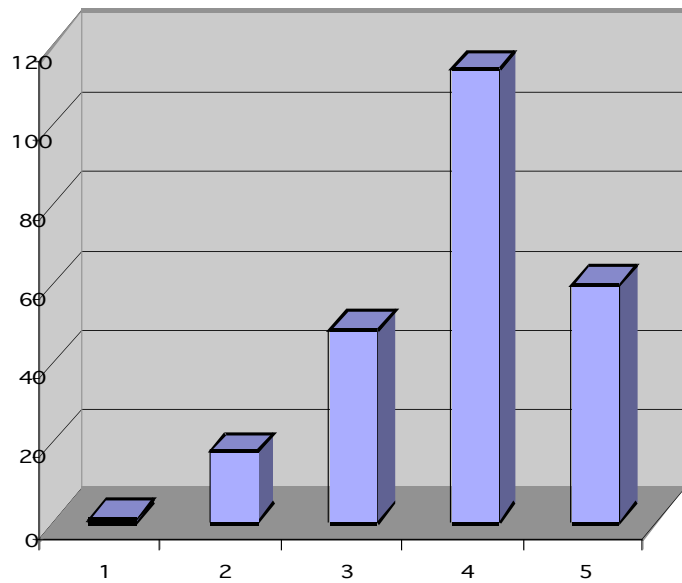
Most significantly 59% of our sample received a National Certificate in Retail or Distribution as their first post-school tertiary education qualification (142). The importance of this achievement is reflected in the results of the survey.

How valuable did they find the qualification?

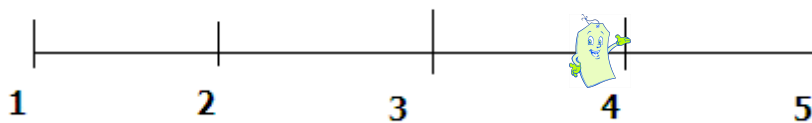
Very valuable - the interviewees rated the qualifications in answer to the question: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents “of no use at all” and 5 represents “very valuable”, how valuable did you find the qualification. 72% gave a rating of 4 or more and 92% gave a rating of 3 or more.

Rating	Number	%
1	1	0.4
2	18	7.4
3	49	20.2
4	114	47.1
5	60	24.8
	242	100

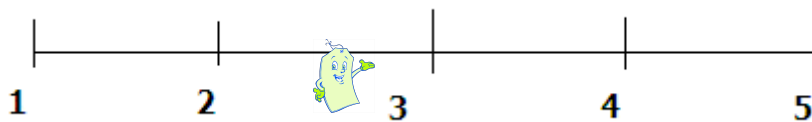
Value of Q1



The average score was 3.9



This question was used in a RITO survey in July 2004, at that time the average rating given by the respondents was 2.6



The difference in rating between 2004 and 2006 may be due to a greater appreciation that has arisen over time of the value of retail and distribution qualifications to employees and employers

Why did they do the Qualification?

Almost half the respondents said they did the qualification because it was offered to them by their employers, many also added that they did it to up-skill or improve themselves (44%) or because they wanted to have a retail qualification (31%).

Applying the Skills Recognised in the Qualification

95% of the interviewees said that they had been able to apply the skills that were recognised in the qualifications. Customer service skills and the knowledge and application of retail legislation were most often cited.

Skills Development

79 % of respondents said that their skills had developed as a result of doing a qualification:

For many respondents this occurred as an improvement in all of their workplace skills or as a result of building on their previous training. A noticeable trend was that of employees taking greater autonomy and responsibility for their own actions. For example, typical responses included statements such as

“Now I do everything better – I think about what I do and why”

“I work on my own better and make my own decisions”

Interviewees often came up with insightful and personal explanations that demonstrated how they'd lifted their game. For example several described how they were now able to identify a shopper's interests when they entered the store and could adjust their approach accordingly.

Such seemingly minor changes in behavior represent significant improvements in the ability to think and be self-reflective about their behavior and the responsibilities to their customers, team and employers. Such changes can lead to ongoing improvement in skills and productivity

Support to Complete the Qualification

The main sources of support for people completing a qualification came from workmates (55%) supervisors (50%), assessors (43%) and the employer (18%). Twenty five respondents indicated that they had no support (10%). Although support was often available from immediate supervisors, it is of concern that many respondents had to rely on their workmates for support and advice when completing the qualification. This result (and others below) indicates that some managers and business owners did not engage with the process of achieving qualifications in the workplace. Comments from interviewees about the support that they received included:

“Brilliant support - study time, time to learn and ask question of people in office”

“Assessor was helpful in clarifying questions and being supportive”

“Not a lot at work left to do a lot of it on my own”

Obstacles to Completion and Desired Support

Evidence that the qualifications and assessment tools are appropriate to the employees and their level of skills comes from the finding that 50% of the sample reported that there were no obstacles to the completion of their qualification. However 48 respondents (20%) did report difficulties understanding aspects of their evidence portfolio, such as the wording of some questions, an issue that is currently being addressed. The main obstacles to completion appear to be the pressure of work and the lack of time at work to complete tasks related to the qualifications. This was a concern for 65 respondents (27%) and 12% of respondents (30) indicated that having time at work or time off work for study would have helped them complete their qualification.

Benefits of Completing the Qualification

Respondents were asked to identify the benefits they felt that they had received as a result of completing the qualification. Many of these benefits would have a flow on effect on the performance of employees in the workplace.

- 95 % of respondents said that the qualification refreshed their knowledge of retail (227)

- 75% said that it lead to the recognition of their skills (182)
- 72% said that it lead to an increase in their confidence at work (175)
- 61% said their motivation at work increased (147)
- 60% agreed that their productivity increased (145)
- 57% said their commitment to their employer increased (138)
- 57% said that their confidence as a learner increased and (138)
- 55% said that their ability to work with others had increased (133)

In two areas the response rate was less than 50%

- 29% said that completing the qualification led to an increase in their pay (71), and
- 30% said that it lead to increased opportunity for promotion (73)

Promotion and Improvement in Position at Work

48% of respondents said that the qualification had led to an improvement in their position at work, for some this involved more responsibility (16%) and for others a promotion (22%). For example two employees commented:

“My position is the same but now I have more responsibility – not hugely but I’m treated as if my opinions count, and this is helped by the qualification”

“I was an assistant manager with Trendy Sports. I’m now a store manager, the L2 qualification was great asset in getting a new job with more responsibility.”

Further Training and Career Development

It was very clear that employees valued the qualification as a step in their career pathway and an opportunity for further personal development

- 84% regarded the qualification as an asset that would help them gain another job in the retail industry (203)
- 65% said that they would like to do the next level of the retail or distribution qualification
- 21% are doing or have completed a level 3 qualification
- We had requests from 98 (45%) of the interviewees for information on further training opportunities.

Themes

The survey found that interviewees were highly motivated to gain a retail qualification, to improve and apply their retail skills and continue with further training.

Most consider the qualification of value to them. Their skills have been recognized and enhanced; they have tools to improve and to increase their productivity and an asset to their CV and future career.

Many interviewees were very aware of the career pathways available in the retail industry and wanted to develop their career opportunities by completing further retail qualifications

However workplace training cultures varied from very supportive to those that are not supportive at all, and employer recognition of the achievements of their employees also varied greatly. This theme was apparent from case study material gathered during the interviews and in the concern of some employees for: the lack of time at work to address the requirements of the qualification; the absence of support from management in some work places; and a lack of recognition felt by some on completion of their qualification. These concerns are illustrated in some of the case studies in the appendix.

Implications

Whilst the outcomes for these respondents can be regarded as positive and successful on the evidence of the survey data, their responses indicate that further attention to two issues identified in the survey might lead to an improvement in the overall completion rate of qualifications.

- 1) A review of the assessment materials to develop more easily comprehensible resources.
- 2) The need to address employer/management approach to workplace training processes

Managers/employers

- May need training in how to facilitate and train

- May need to engage more in the training and assessment process
- Should be able to support candidates and assist in managing their learning and assessment
- Should reward/recognize employee training achievement as a basis for future development

Appendix – Case Studies

Case Study # 1

Megan from “Big-store” has done the Level 2 and 3 National Certificate in Retail and is currently working through Level 4. She signed up to Level 2 to get more knowledge and wanted a recognised qualification to show her skills and knowledge. As a manager she thinks the qualification helps identify keen staff and encourages everyone in her store to do Level 2.

As someone who wasn't very good at school and left with no qualifications she is really proud of herself to get into the Level 4 programme. Megan now feels really confident about her future and she has great plans for the future at work, including productivity systems and sales goals.

Case Study #2

Melanie was an assistant store manager when she did the Level 2 National Certificate in Retail. While she has her school certificate, her retail certificate is her highest post-school qualification. Now she is the store manager, she says that the Level 2 qualification was a great asset in getting her new job, she “wouldn't have got an eyelid in for the interviews” without the qualification.

Melanie uses all the skills covered in the qualification and has applied her improved product knowledge and team building skills to training and working with her staff. Her employer encourages training but she had difficulties “putting words on paper” and would have liked more support from management. She would like to do a level 3 qualification, but is too busy at work.

Case Study #3

Tom (22), a NZ Maori from Gisborne, went into forestry straight out of school with no qualifications. His partner talked him into applying for a job in a clothing store. He realised that he wanted a career in retail and did the Level 2 National Certificate in Retail for his CV. He said the qualification was a “refresher” and contained “nothing

new” but he found the customer service skills, learning about legislation, and working to improve his product knowledge were very useful.

The qualification helped Tom get a job in an appliance retail business where he wants to expand his product knowledge and skills. He was “looking at moving up the ranks”, the qualification had helped build his confidence and “definitely helped me get this job”. Tom had support from his workmates, manager and assessor but found doing the writing difficult. He would like to go on and do L3.

Case Study # 4

George was a policeman for 30 years who had to start again on the shop floor. He did the Level 2 and Level 3 National Certificates in Retail to prove himself in the industry. Completing the qualifications gave him the confidence to apply for a position in store security. He is now the security team-leader and has developed a model of security best-practice for the enterprise.

Being busy at work was his main obstacle but he was told that “if he couldn’t do it in his own time he shouldn’t be doing it”. He would have liked some study leave, paid time off work or perhaps a mentor. He now wants to go onto a L4 or L5 qualification in security. George commented “I have confidence in getting any job because I have these qualifications.’

Case study # 5

Phyllis manages a retail gift outlet. She came up through the ranks and wanted a qualification to show for her achievements. She said the qualification gave her a “bigger picture to see the wider range of skills and work involved in retail.” Her staff did the qualification together and as a result now works better as a team.

Phyllis said that her employer did not recognise their achievements: “We are just a cog in a wheel - we showed initiative in accepting the challenge and doing the qualification but there was no recognition or reward from management”. According to Phyllis, employers do not appreciate the amount of time pressure there is on managers. “The employer doesn’t make time for this form of training and doesn’t give time or monetary rewards - empty encouragements. Time at work to complete some

of the qualification and paid time out side of work to work on it would be appreciated.”
Phyllis found level 2: “Inspirational motivational, stimulating and of benefit, but having the time to do it was a problem”