OCCASIONAL PAPER

Training and assessment (TAA40104) in community providers in New South Wales: Participant intentions and outcomes

RUTH WALKER
KIAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Participant in the NCVER Building Researcher Capacity Community of Practice Scholarship Program 2009

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Australian Government
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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or state and territory governments.
Any interpretation of data is the responsibility of the author/project team

As part of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Building Researcher Capacity Scheme, a Community of Practice Scholarship Program has been created to encourage a culture of research in vocational education and training (VET) organisations. With the guidance of an experienced mentor, VET practitioners without any formal research experience undertake their own work-based research project. The scholarships also provide participants with an opportunity to have their research peer-reviewed and published by NCVER.

For more information see: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/opportunities.html#Community_of_practice_scholarships_for_VET_practitioners>.

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About the research

Training and assessment (TAA40104) in community providers in New South Wales: Participant intentions and outcomes

Ruth Walker, Kiama Community College

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a community of practice scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners without research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own research to address a workplace problem. Scholarship recipients are supported by a mentor, and NCVER publishes their research results.

Ruth Walker participated in the 2009 community of practice program. Ruth is the accredited training manager at Kiama Community College. Her research explores the goals of a sample of people who had undertaken the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, their initial expectations of the course, and how their intentions compare with their actual outcomes.

The study used a mixed method approach that comprised a quantitative survey of people who had enrolled in the qualification at one of the 25 adult and community education institutions in New South Wales in 2008, as well as semi-structured phone interviews with some of the survey participants to explore in more depth the themes emerging from the survey.

Key messages

- Eighty per cent of respondents reported that they had achieved what they wanted from the course, despite only a third of respondents gaining a training job.
- Students gained social capital from the course, with respondents reporting that they had increased their confidence, expanded their professional networks, and made employment links with the college at which they undertook their training.
- Participants were more likely to report that the course met their expectations if they also reported that pre-course information was important to them in choosing their training organisations, suggesting that preconceived notions about course content may have a significant impact on satisfaction.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

Acknowledgements

In 2009, as part of the Building Researcher Capacity program, the NCVER provided scholarships for VET practitioners to take part in a community of practice designed to develop research capacity by providing support and guidance to undertake a work-based research project. This research is the result of one such scholarship and of the support and guidance provided by the members of the community of practice.

The community of practice in 2009 was made up of ten scholarship recipients and led by Berwyn Clayton, Geri Pancini and Llandis Barratt-Pugh. The community of practice provided both a structured learning process and an unstructured support mechanism. An important feature of the capacity-building process was the linking of new VET researchers to experienced researchers through the mentoring program. My mentor was Dr John Mitchell, whose gentle guidance, support and frank advice was greatly appreciated throughout the process of research and writing. I would also like to acknowledge the support of John Ward in interpreting the data.

The NSW ACE Unit, in particular Gina Perks, provided guidance in ensuring the privacy considerations when surveying students. I would like to thank the adult and community education (ACE) colleges, in particular the administrative staff who distributed the surveys for this research.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the students who took the time to complete the online surveys and who, overwhelmingly, were prepared to take part in further phone surveys—they clearly had a lot to say about their experience of undertaking the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

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Introduction

Five years after implementation, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104, and hereafter also referred to as the Certificate IV) remains a pivotal qualification in the national vocational education and training (VET) system. Under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) it is the qualification required by both workplace trainers/assessors and trainers/assessors working in classroom situations in registered training organisations (RTOs). Graduates with this qualification are in a position to have a significant influence on the quality of VET delivery.

Consequently, opinions abound regarding the content and delivery of the qualification. There is a small but growing body of research, reports and conference papers that focus on the implementation of the qualification (Alexander 2007; Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board 2008), its fitness as the benchmark for trainers and assessors in the national VET system (Innovation Business Skills Australia 2006; McRae 2008; Smith 2007; Robertson 2008, 2009) and more recently the experiences of those who have undertaken the qualification (Down, De Luca & Galloway 2009; Clayton 2009).

This paper aims to contribute to this body of research by exploring the goals of a sample of Certificate IV candidates and their expectations of the course, and comparing their initial intentions with their actual outcomes. As the author works in the adult and community education (ACE) sector in New South Wales, the sample was drawn from among the 25 NSW ACE providers with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment on their scope of registration.

The research findings will be useful for registered training organisations who are seeking a procedure for examining and comparing intent and outcomes. Registered training organisations may also find that the report provides the stimulus for a critical examination of both the information given to potential students and other aspects of the learner recruitment process. Registered training organisation staff and VET researchers may also be encouraged by the report to explore the extent to which learner intent can be identified and accommodated during the recruitment process, for example, through the provision of information, counselling, induction or other services.

This paper provides a brief overview of current research and reports on the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and other literature relating to the measurement of learner intent and outcomes. The paper then discusses the findings that emerged from the data collected for this research.

Literature review

Key literature on the Certificate IV Training and Assessment

There is a small but growing body of research and reports relating to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. These can be categorised into two broad areas:

- those reports that seek opinions and data from the providers and designers of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and tend to focus on issues of implementation, fitness for purpose and workforce development (Innovation Business Skills Australia 2006, 2009; McRae 2008; Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board 2008; Alexander 2007; Smith 2007)
- those reports which focus on the learner experiences and outcomes of undertaking the Certificate IV (Robertson 2008, 2009; Clayton 2009; Down, De Luca & Galloway 2009).

The latter group is a much smaller body of research. This paper fits into and seeks to augment this group.

Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA), as the industry skills council responsible for the Training and Assessment Training Package (TAA04)—the training package used in the teaching of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment—has actively reviewed and consulted in relation to the package and in particular to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment itself. In August 2006 it launched a discussion paper seeking feedback on implementation of the package and in November that year produced a report entitled *Continuous improvement of the Training and Assessment Training Package (TAA04): Learning from implementation experience, proposed enhancements for testing and debate*. This report was based on the feedback received from the August discussion paper and raised some important issues and concerns, including its inflexibility and inappropriateness for workplace/enterprise trainers and the need for skills sets in the package; the need for a new qualification at certificate III level; alternative packaging rules to allow for streams of specialisation; perceived gaps in the existing range of skills presented in the qualification; and complexities associated with language and evidence requirements. This report recommended some immediate enhancements and some considerations for ongoing improvement.

In 2008 the *TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package – its fitness for purpose: A discussion paper* was released. The author of this paper, David McRae, made the following recommendations: delivery/facilitation performance skills should be included in the core units; the three environment units should be removed since their content is duplicated in other units; all core units should be restructured to reduce duplication; and the core/elective structure of the qualification should be reconsidered. In 2009 Innovation and Business Skills Australia built on these recommendations and released the *Review of Certificate IV (TAA40104) Training and Assessment with a revised model for consideration*, which proposes strategies for implementing McRae's recommendations.[1]

From 2007 to 2008, the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) conducted and reported on a strategic audit of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in New South Wales, which involved extensive surveying and auditing of registered training

[1] Since this research was conducted, a revised Certificate IV in Training and Assessment has been introduced, taking into account these recommendations, as part of TAE10, the new Training and Education Training Package (Innovation and Business Skills Australia 2010).

organisations delivering the qualification. Its aim was to identify issues that had arisen for registered training organisations during the implementation of the Certificate IV and strategies these organisations had developed to deal with the issues. Through a process of focus groups, online surveys and strategic audit, it identified that the main concerns with the implementation of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment were:

1 poor understanding of developing learning and assessment strategies to meet the requirements of the AQTF Standards and the TAA04 Training Package requirements
2 lack of understanding of the qualification by some practitioners and prospective students
3 inappropriate RPL processes
4 little regard for statements of attainment although the full qualification was not always required
5 misleading advertising of the duration of delivery of the TAA40104
6 delivery of the full qualification in inappropriate timeframes
7 sub-contracting arrangements to deliver the qualification without a written agreement specifying responsibilities of each party
8 inadequate delivery in NSW by RTOs from other jurisdictions.

(Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board 2008, p.6)

Of particular interest to this research project are items 2 and 5, relating to information provided to prospective students and the resulting student understanding of the qualifications and their expectations of the rigour and difficulty involved in completing the course. Clearly the Certificate IV is a misunderstood course: those who enrol often expect something different from what they actually get.

Another item of interest is item 6: registered training organisations differing in terms of the length of the course. This report attempts to explore the extent to which students considered course quality and duration when choosing a provider. It was felt that choices made in this regard may be an indicator of intent. For example, if you intend to learn to be a good trainer and assessor, would you choose the shortest and cheapest course you could find?

The Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board's Strategic Audit of the Certificate IV findings were based on information provided by registered training organisation staff and an audit of registered training organisation documentation. By contrast, the research in this paper looks at student perspectives on these issues: what contributed to the learners' decision to do the course and to what extent did they rely on the marketing materials provided by registered training organisations to make the decision to do the course? Also, how important were course offerings, time frames and the training organisation's reputation in choosing the provider?

In *Campus Review* in November 2007, Robyn Alexander provided a possible explanation for the attraction of the cheap and quick Certificate IV:

> There has been an increasing casualisation of the professional VET workforce. This means that many TAA trainers and assessors don't have access to paid professional development. Furthermore as sessional trainers they aren't paid while they do attend professional development activities. As a consequence it is understandable that there is some urgency amongst many trainers and assessors to acquire their TAA 'ticket' as quickly as possible and at the lowest cost. (Alexander 2007, p.15)

If it is the case that learners are looking for the fastest and cheapest Certificate IV they can find, then this aim is in direct contrast to the views expressed by Innovation and Business Skills Australia (2006):

> The ongoing roll-out of the TAA04 will have an important contribution to make to the implementation of the COAG initiatives, by virtue of the fact that it is the key tool for lifting standards of the training workforce over time.
>
> (Innovation and Business Skills Australia 2006, p.4)

Given the important, demanding and challenging role that trainers and assessors perform, it is of concern that aspiring Certificate IV students would appear to seek the fastest, cheapest, easiest course they can find. In *Campus Review* in October 2007, Erica Smith gave this advice for the aspiring Certificate IV student:

> Individuals must also take responsibility. People have a clear choice to use the availability of the new qualification to undertake proper learning and gain new knowledge and skills.
>
> … It's not easy to take the hard road when an easy road is being offered. (Smith 2007, p.15)

Following on from these comments, this research questions participants regarding the extent to which cost, length of course and mode of delivery were important in helping them choose their provider.

A current research project commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is expected to throw light on practitioner perspectives with regard to the fitness for purpose of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. *Practitioner experiences and expectations with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104): A discussion of the issues* is the title of the research being conducted by Berwyn Clayton to explore '… the extent to which practitioners believe that this certificate provides an effective foundation for the delivery and assessment of training in the VET environment'.

To date, the above project has released a background paper reviewing research on the qualification and highlighting some of the key issues for concern in relation to the Certificate IV, such as implementation inconsistencies and fitness for purpose concerns, as highlighted in the Innovation and Business Skills Australia reports. The results of this research project will be published in 2010.

Another research project currently underway, focusing on learner experiences and views, involves a study of 150 reflective essays written by VET practitioners enrolled in diploma, bachelor and associate degrees at Charles Sturt University. The essays reflect on how the authors undertook their Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Down, De Luca & Galloway 2009).

These current research projects indicate that experiences of the course vary widely and that there are many issues still unresolved regarding the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Intent and outcome in the literature

Why investigate intent?

Through a consultation process, NCVER identified five national research priorities that were agreed to by the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) to determine VET research activity until 2010. The second of these priorities recommends investigating intentions in VET students:

> 2 Motivating individuals to participate in VET: by understanding why people choose to, or not to, participate in VET, what drives demand for VET and what outcomes it offers participants in the medium to long term … some key research topics under this priority area include:
>
> What are the determinants of student demand for VET?
>
> How and why do people re-skill and upgrade their skills?
>
> What course structures and teaching and learning methods are attractive to people?
>
> What are the private returns to VET, taking account of age, prior educational attainment and employment experience, and level and field of study? (NCVER 2010)

This research asks learners a number of questions based on this priority research area. Learners were asked questions that explored: the factors that informed their decision to undertake the qualification; the factors that determined their choice of registered training organisation; and finally the outcomes achieved through undertaking the course.

If Innovation and Business Skills Australia (2006) is correct in believing that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is a crucial component in helping to meet the COAG agenda of increasing 'labour market skilling and mobility through training' (p.3), then it is crucial that registered training organisations recruit skilled people to undertake their Certificate IV and that they recruit the people with the right skills. That is, registered training organisations must ensure they recruit people who have appropriate vocational skills in identified priority skills areas and also people who have motivation towards, and an understanding of, the job role of a trainer and assessor.

So are we recruiting the right people into our Certificate IV courses and do our students have a realistic understanding of the likely employment and other outcomes of their training? How are students informing themselves of the likely employment and other outcomes of their training?

Kennedy and Haines (2008, p.7) claim the following:

> There is a broad literature asserting that vocational education and training (VET) students often have poor understandings of the likely employment, career, education and training pathways that are likely to stem from their particular chosen course of VET study.

However, they found in their study that where students possess well-developed career management skills, they also have realistic expectations of the likely outcomes of their course of study:

> Our research suggests it is not specific information on course outcomes which is lacking but, rather, the ability to successfully navigate the wide range of information sources available, and the ability to use this information to set career goals. (Kennedy & Haines 2008, p.7)

Hence this research questions students about the extent to which they accessed pre-course information when making their decision to undertake the course.

Ryan (2001, p.1) explains how important it is for registered training organisations to recruit the right students into the course, claiming that it will encourage students to return to the organisation for further study opportunities:

> Evidence about the positive outcomes achieved by VET participants is important in encouraging future participation by others and for justifying existing levels of public expenditure. Positive outcomes also encourage existing clients to return to upgrade their skills and competencies and to develop new ones.

Clearly the questions *Why do you want to do this course?* and *Did you get what you wanted from the course?* are two questions that registered training organisations could routinely ask their students, for the deliberate purpose of careful recruitment practices as well as to inform evaluation practices. If Ryan's claim above is valid, then there is another important reason why registered training organisations should be asking these questions: to ensure the future commercial viability of their organisation.

Why investigate outcomes?

Knowing the outcomes for graduates of VET training is a crucial piece of information for VET providers, both for evaluation and to inform learning and assessment design. Unfortunately, due to costs associated with destination surveying of students, training organisations rarely have access to hard data on graduate outcomes, such as employment and further study.

There are a number of sources of published data giving destination results which provide benchmarks against which registered training organisations can measure their performance to determine tangible outcomes, such as employment, and other less tangible outcomes for their participants, such as satisfaction, confidence, generic skills and the capacity of participants as lifelong learners.

The NCVER Student Outcomes Survey for 2009 reports that 89.9% of graduates in education-related fields are employed after completing training. This is a strong result. However, since the

statistics are not broken down to qualification level for each field of education, it is not possible to extrapolate findings specifically about employment outcomes for graduates of the Certificate IV.

Outcomes from the Productivity Places Program (NCVER 2009b) compares employment outcomes for graduates of the Certificate IV who undertook their studies under Productivity Places Program (PPP) funding compared with a 'control' group of students from the NCVER Student Outcomes Survey who were similarly unemployed prior to undertaking the Certificate IV. This report showed that 58.9% of PPP graduates from this course were employed after completing it, while in the cohort of those who undertook the course without the PPP funding, 45.1% were employed after completing it. While these two results vary, they provide a benchmark against which registered training organisations can measure the employment outcomes of their own graduates of the Certificate IV.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a shortage of VET trainers. The Australian Government Job Outlook website (2010) rates 'moderate' growth in VET jobs. So, are graduates from the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment obtaining jobs as trainers and assessors? This information was gathered from a small cohort of Certificate IV graduates for this paper.

While employment is clearly an important outcome of training, there are many other aspects of interest in relation to the outcomes. Priest (2009) argues that there are unexpected outcomes of VET training: 'In addition to the planned course outcomes, VET students develop social capital and gain a range of wider benefits from their studies' (p.6).

Social capital is beneficial because it helps people feel connected, develop confidence and ultimately participate in the world of work. Social capital is described as comprising the following: 'the networks, shared values and understandings between people, that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together' (p.4).

Further,

> While many students are gaining social capital outcomes incidentally, VET instructors can provide additional opportunities for their students by encouraging them to interact and work collaboratively and inviting people from potentially useful networks to co-teach or participate in the training. (Priest 2009, p.3)

Priest (2009) draws attention to three types of social capital that have previously been identified:

- ✧ bonding—forging stronger links and networks between people who have something in common
- ✧ bridging—forging links between dissimilar people
- ✧ linking—forming links with institutionalised power, for example, government departments.

The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment has the potential to create social capital for participants in all three areas. Hence this research asks participants a number of questions to ascertain whether they experienced an increase in social capital as a result of doing the course, and also whether this was an expected outcome of the course.

Increasingly, researchers and practitioners are looking at learner feedback and performance to gauge the level of other less tangible outcomes such as development of generic skills and development of the participant's capacity for lifelong learning. This trend to focus on lifelong learning skills is explained by Teh and Pendergast (2009, p.5):

> The importance of this skill has been derived from the increasing conviction amongst educators and policy makers that life-long learning is an essential attribute for one to compete successfully in the light of globalization, fast changing technological advances and knowledge-based as well as skill-based economies.

With a view to gauging the development of lifelong learning skills, this research asks participants to rate the extent to which they had developed generic skills.

Methodology

The research focused on students who enrolled in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in ACE registered training organisations in New South Wales in 2008. There were 25 such organisations with Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in their scope of offerings.

From the review of the literature, three key research questions emerged and were used to focus the study:

- What did participants want to achieve by doing the course? (intent)
- What factors influenced their decision when choosing to do the course and choosing a provider? (factors influencing decisions)
- What did they achieve as a result of doing the course? (outcomes).

A mixed method approach was employed to allow the collection of quantitative data and the further interrogation of this data through qualitative methods:

- Quantitative data on intent and outcome were collected via an online survey (see appendix A for survey questions).
- Individual phone interviews were used to acquire complementary qualitative data and also to test and confirm some of the findings emerging from the survey data. Semi-structured questions were used during phone interviews. Interview participants were chosen from a sub-strata of survey participants who volunteered for the role (see appendix B for phone interview questions).
- Strata sampling for phone interviews was done on the basis of gender, age and industry area and also to ensure a mix of those for whom there appeared to be a gap between intent and outcomes and those for whom there appeared to be no gap. Another factor considered in the sampling was the familiarity of the researcher with the participants. Since the researcher was also the trainer for some of the participants, it was decided that these participants should not be included in the phone interviews. (A profile of phone interviewees can be found in appendix C.)

Support was sought and given by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training ACE Unit for approval of the project and the collection of data and in reassuring participating colleges about privacy provisions. A small cohort of college managers was briefed and their advice sought in relation to appropriate procedures for distributing online surveys to their students. A procedure for extracting student contact data and forwarding the survey link was provided to each college to assist in the administration of the survey.

The online survey was distributed by individual colleges to their client database of students who enrolled in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in 2008. The survey was open for a period of three weeks in September 2009.

Participants for phone interviews were then selected and contacted. The phone interviews were conducted in the first two weeks of November 2009.

Limitations

Not all the 25 NSW ACE colleges with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment on scope were able to participate in the research for various reasons. There were some concerns amongst colleges regarding 'survey fatigue', their students having recently been administered Quality Indicator Learner Engagement Surveys and course evaluation surveys. Some of the colleges decided not to participate for this reason. One college advised that it had not delivered the Certificate IV in 2008, so was unable to participate. A small number of colleges appeared too busy to be involved, or felt the additional workload of distributing the surveys was too great.

The survey was conducted in September 2009 and administered to participants who had enrolled in 2008. Most of the respondents had completed the qualification, and a small number still had outstanding assessment tasks to complete. It is fair to assume that some of the respondents could well have completed the course up to 12 months prior to completing the survey, while others may have completed it far more recently. This diversity of experience could have significance with respect to outcomes, for instance, a participant who completed in 2008 and had not achieved desired employment outcomes by September 2009 is quite different from a participant who had more recently completed and not achieved the desired employment outcomes.

The use of an online survey for data collection limited the reach of the surveys to those with email addresses. The sample was further limited by the fact that candidates were selected from 2008 enrolments and the survey was administered in September 2009. By this time some people had changed email addresses and were untraceable.

The year 2008 saw a significant investment of government funding to support re-entry into the workforce for disadvantaged learners, particularly through the Productivity Places Program funding. This may have influenced some of the responses, for example, the relative importance of cost in influencing learner choice of registered training organisation.

Another limitation was that participants were being asked to recall their intent retrospectively. It is fair to assume that a certain amount of thinking about intent may have changed as a result of the outcomes of the course. To minimise the impact of hindsight thinking, questions focused on specific factors that may have influenced the decision to do the course.

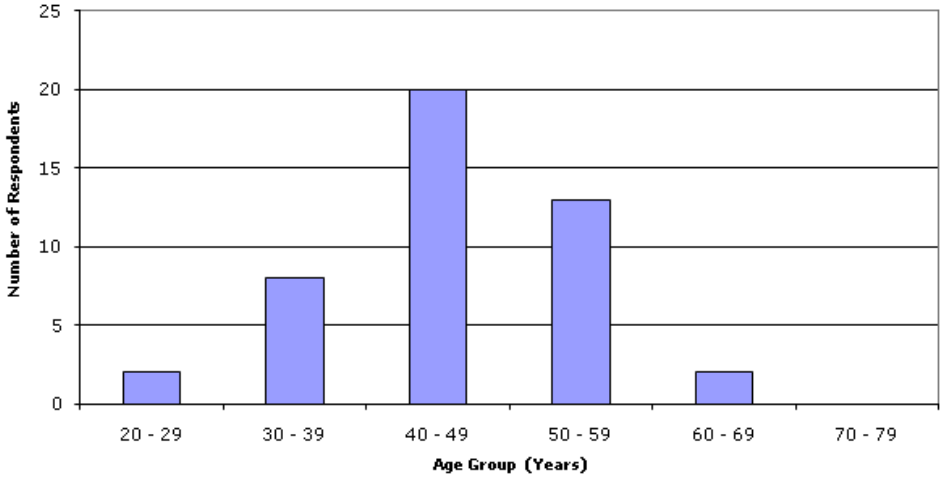
Findings

Demographics of respondents

This section provides an overview of the number of people who responded to the online survey and the number who were selected for phone interviews. It also provides a picture of the demographics of those respondents. Fifty-three people responded to the online survey; however, some questions were left unanswered by some respondents. Seven of the survey respondents were involved in a further telephone interview.

The majority of respondents were in the 40–49 year age group. The distribution of age is shown in figure 1. Eight respondents chose not to supply age data.

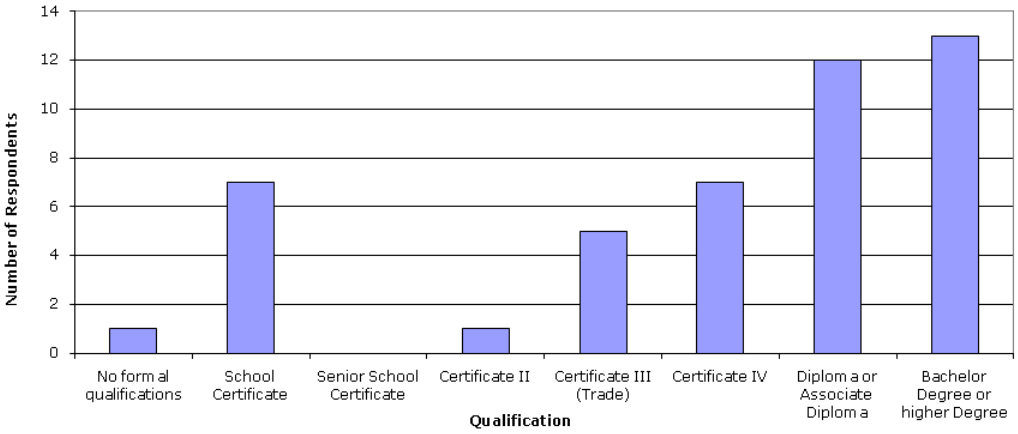
Figure 1 Age of respondents



The gender distribution of respondents was typical of the wider VET workforce (Mitchell & Ward 2010), with 26 out of 45 respondents (58%) being female and 19 (42%) male.

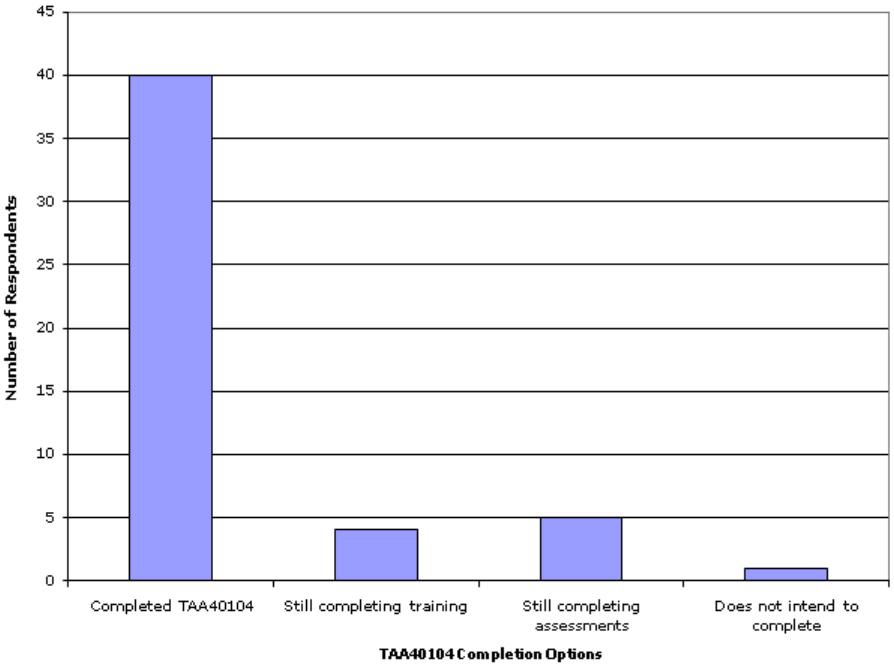
With regard to education background, 25 out of 46 respondents (54%) had a diploma or higher-level qualification prior to undertaking the Certificate IV, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2 Education background



Forty (80%) of the 50 respondents who responded to this question had completed the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, nine respondents (18%) said they were still completing assessment tasks or training components of the course and only one respondent indicated they did not intend to complete the qualification (see figure 3).

Figure 3 Certificate IV completion rates



Regarding their experiences in training and assessment prior to doing the course, 23 out of 50 respondents (46%) reported that they were conducting non-accredited training at work, 16 (32%) had not conducted any training or assessment, and ten (20%) had been working as trainers in a registered training organisation prior to doing the course (see figure 4).

Figure 4 Prior experience as a trainer/assessor

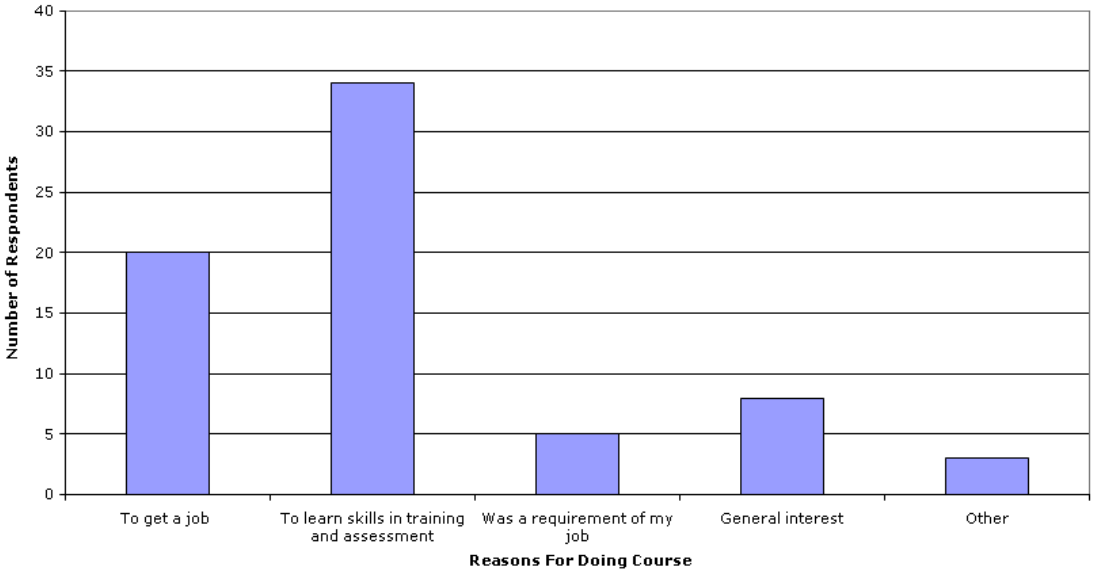


Intent

Participants were asked four questions to explore intent. The questions aimed to ascertain: their reasons for doing the course; their intended outcomes and expectations of what they would achieve by doing the course; and the factors that influenced their decision to enrol with a particular registered training organisation.

Figure 5 shows that the majority of respondents gave as the main reason for enrolling in the course was to learn skills in training and assessment (34 out of 50 respondents—68%) and to get a job or change career (20 out of 50 respondents—40%).

Figure 5 Reason for doing course



When asked about the factors that influenced their decision to do the course, the most important influence was that 'job prospects for TAA40104 graduates looked good'.

During phone interviews this was explored through further questioning about how the candidate had gathered information about job prospects for graduates. The answers were quite mixed, but it seems that word of mouth was the favoured method for researching job prospects. Only one interviewee mentioned job advertisements or online job sites, job network providers or other employment services, and several mentioned advice from registered training organisation staff that employment would be available if they achieved their Certificate IV. For the most part, they relied on advice from friends, colleagues and other trainers.

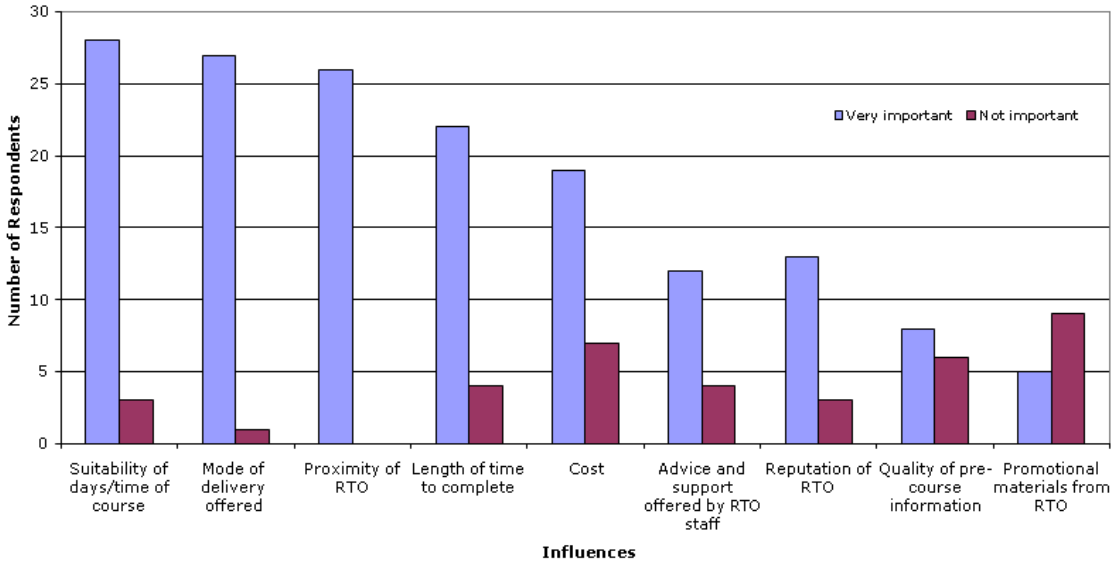
> I had spoken to people who had done the old one [BSZ40198] and are now working in TAFE. (Phone interviewee 1)
>
> There was a trainer who came to our shop and he told me there were jobs for trainers. (Phone interviewee 2)
>
> I looked at Jobs NSW website and private employment websites. There always seemed to be jobs coming up and they all required you to have Certificate IV. (Phone interviewee 3)
>
> I went to the college and asked about becoming a teacher and they said to do the course first. [Interviewer: Did you know if there were going to be jobs available at the TAFE or college in your area of teaching?] No I didn't. (Phone interviewee 4)

When asked about factors that influenced their decision when choosing their registered training organisation, the answers fell into three distinct areas:

- ✧ The proximity of the registered training organisation and the way they were offering the course were very influential factors for participants choosing the provider. Specifically, people identified the proximity of the registered training organisation to them, the length of time to complete the course, suitability of days/times and delivery mode as very influential factors.
- ✧ Slightly less important was the reputation of the registered training organisation and the cost of the course.
- ✧ Surprisingly, the least influential factor was the quality of pre-course information and promotional material from the registered training organisation.

See figure 6 for further details.

Figure 6 Influences when choosing RTO

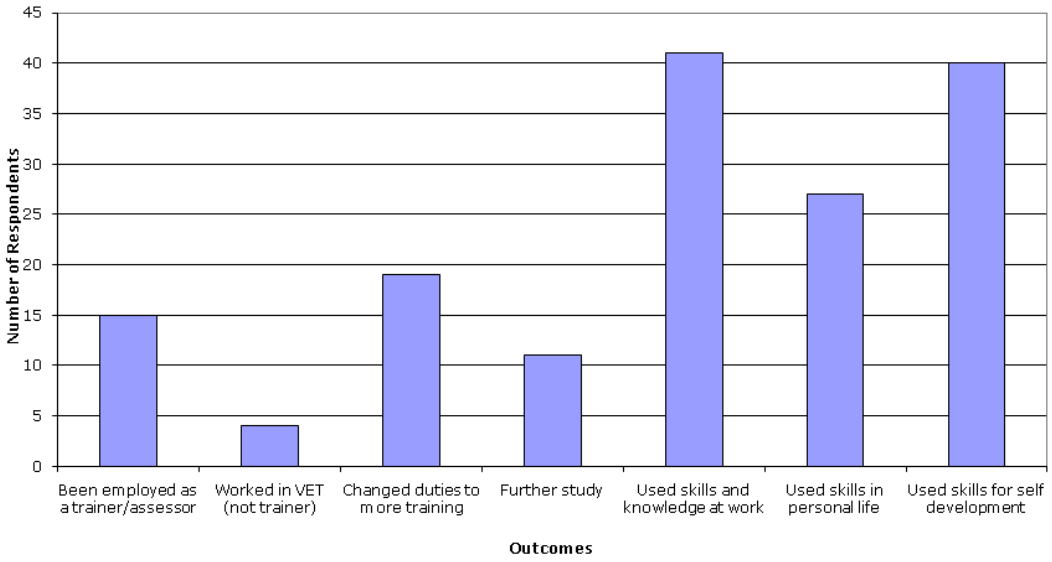


Outcomes

Participants were asked two multi-faceted questions regarding outcomes of the course. The first question explored the more tangible outcomes of the course such as employment outcomes, while the second was related to less tangible outcomes, such as confidence development and overall satisfaction with the course.

The first question asked whether they had gained employment as a trainer/assessor after doing the course and whether they had used their skills and knowledge in their workplace and in their personal life. Participants were able to select multiple answers to this question. Fifteen of the 45 (33%) of the people who responded to this question indicated they had gained employment as a trainer/assessor and 19 (43%) of the 44 respondents who answered the question on whether they had changed their role at work to include more training and assessment duties agreed that they had. It is uncertain whether this was a formal change in duties or an informal adoption of such duties. There was a strong response that participants had used their skills and knowledge at work (41 out of 47—87%) for their own self-development (40 out of 47—85%) and, less significantly, in their personal life (27 out of 46—59%). A small number had progressed to further study (11 out of 43—26%). Participants were able to select multiple answers to this question (see figure 7).

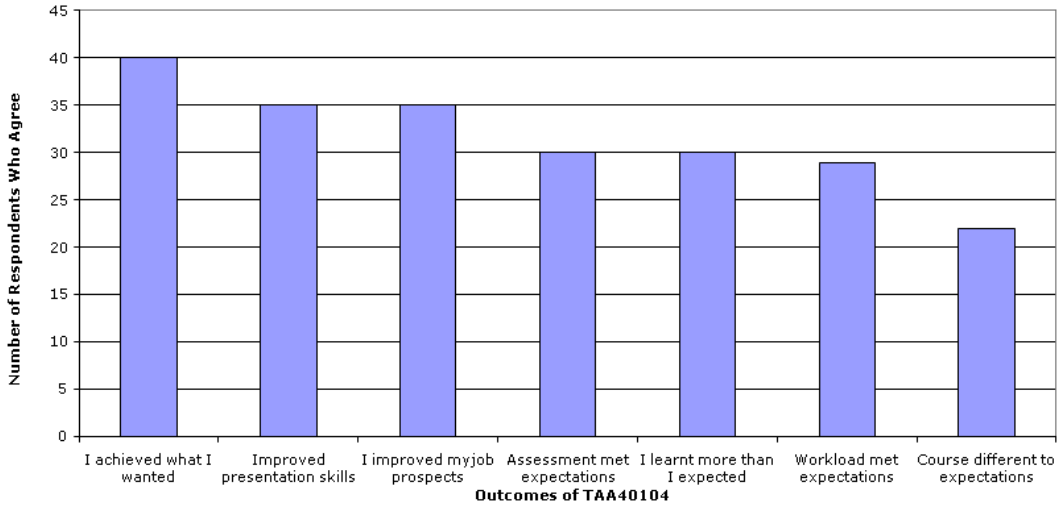
Figure 7 Outcomes



While only 15 out of 45 (33%) gained employment as a trainer/assessor, it was interesting to note that most respondents claimed they achieved what they had wanted from the course (see figure 8). This claim was confirmed by more respondents than for two other outcomes—acquisition of presentation skills and improved job prospects—even though the latter two were the most reported reasons for undertaking the course. That is, they indicated that on enrolment they strongly expected to learn presentation skills and improve their job prospects, but in the end their outcomes were not significant in this regard and yet they claim to have achieved what they wanted from the course.

Figure 8, figure 9 and table 1 show the number of respondents who agreed with the statements given. Respondents answered on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. For the purposes of this report, respondents were grouped as having agreed with the statement if they selected one of the three response options on the 'strongly agree' side of the scale, and were grouped as having disagreed if they selected one of the three response options on the 'strongly disagree' side of the scale.

Figure 8 Perceived outcomes



Note: Figures represent the number of respondents who selected one of the three 'agree' responses from a seven-point Likert scale.

Table 1 Perceived outcomes

Outcome	Agreement			
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Response count
I achieved what I wanted	40	4	6	50
I improved my presentation skills	35	6	7	48
I improved my job prospects	35	9	6	50
Assessment met expectations	30	6	11	47
I learnt more than I expected	30	13	5	48
Workload met expectations	29	4	14	47
Course was different to expectations	22	14	11	47

Note: 'Agree' represents the number of respondents who selected one of the three 'agree' responses and 'disagree' represents the number of respondents who selected one of the three 'disagree' responses from a seven-point Likert scale.

Perhaps the belief that they had achieved what they wanted from the course can be seen as a measure of satisfaction with other dimensions of the course rather than a reflection of their outcomes matching their intentions. Satisfaction with other dimensions of the course was strongly reinforced in phone interviews, with participants reporting, for example, that the flexible approach and supportive environment of the college contributed positively to their overall satisfaction rating:

> The principal was incredibly accommodating around my family needs. (Phone interviewee 3)

> The college was incredibly flexible: they let me do one module with one group then change to another group for the next module and another group for the last one, because I had a small baby. That was great and accommodating, but I don't think all students could cope with that flexibility: you had to get to know a new group each time; you had to be responsible for knowing exactly where you were up to in the course. (Phone interviewee 1)

> The teacher … she did help me to put together a program for a course at the college, she helped me structure the course, so she did help me more than doing the TAA. (Phone interviewee 4)

Another dimension that may have contributed to overall satisfaction is the experience of the unexpected in the course. There was a reasonably strong indication that participants felt they had learnt more than they expected. This response is captured in figure 8. During phone interviews participants were questioned about the outcomes of the course that had been unexpected.

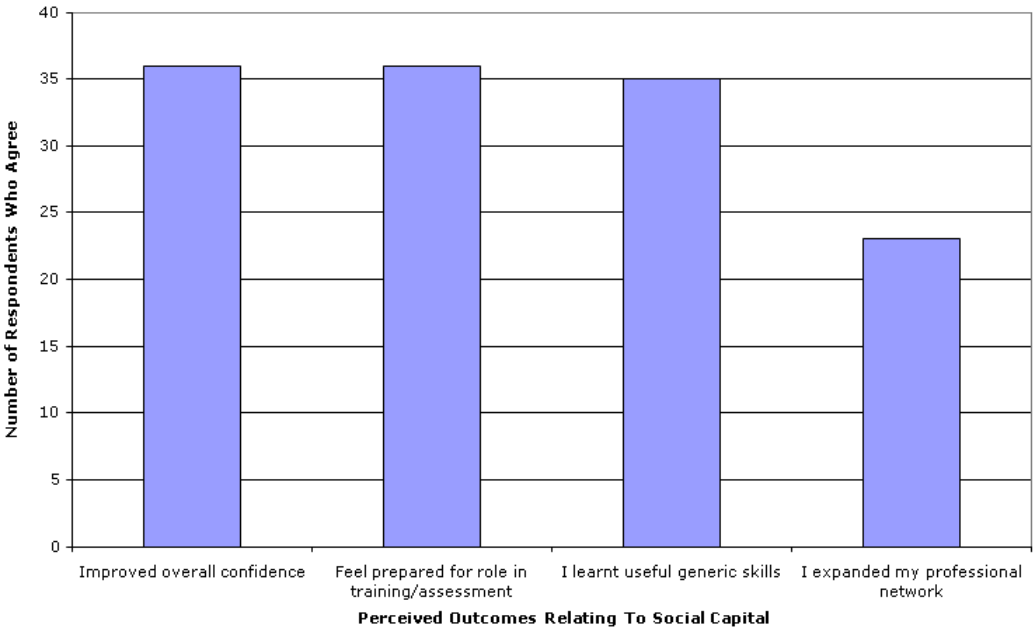
> I didn't understand prior to doing the course … the AQTF … unit codes … I didn't know it was part of the course, but it was fantastic to learn, a lot of people gave feedback that they hated all that stuff, but I really enjoyed all that. (Phone interviewee 1)

> I think having the exposure to VET and NTIS etc, the framework stuff was fantastic. (Phone interviewee 3)

> I was a terribly nervous person getting up for public speaking beforehand and now it doesn't really worry me. I didn't expect it, but it's good: it gave me confidence. (Phone interviewee 2)

Also there was a moderately high response to the statement that they had learnt useful generic skills and improved overall confidence, lending weight to Priest's (2009) claim that participants gained a certain amount of social capital from participating in the Certificate IV (see figure 9).

Figure 9 Perceived outcomes relating to social capital



Note: Figures represent the number of respondents who selected one of the three 'agree' responses from a seven-point Likert scale.

It appears that the types of social capital most developed by participants were 'bonding' and 'bridging' ties as cited by Priest (2009); that is, developing links and networks with others with common interests (bonding) and developing links between dissimilar people (bridging). The level of social capital developed was explored further during phone interviews.

> For me it's opened up a whole new world … There was a heap of other advantages, I feel much more confident. The structure of the training frameworks and all that … accredited training having to meet certain evidence, all of that backing you up as a trainer, I think is fantastic. (Phone interviewee 1)

> I gained a lot of confidence in dealing with people. (Phone interviewee 6)

> It was a very very good group of people who did the class … it was a very good class to be in to get to know the other people … a lot of bonding because you do a lot of work with them over the 15 days. (Phone interviewee 2)

The third aspect of social capital referred to by Priest (2009) is that of 'linking', defined as the forming of links with institutionalised power. While not tested in the online survey, it emerged in the phone interviews that this form of social capital was also an outcome for the Certificate IV participants. Many of the phone interviewees revealed they had made employment links with the

college at which they did their training. It would be interesting to test whether this form of social capital is also an outcome for participants from other registered training organisations.

> I am working at the college where I did the course but I haven't been able to get into TAFE or private RTOs. (Phone interviewee 3)

> Yes, the college I did the Certificate IV at employed me on a couple of courses. (Phone interviewee 2)

> I had a little bit of connection with the college, but doing the course enabled me to know the tutors at the college and how the college structures things. So for me there was a whole heap of other advantages, because now I'm working there as well. (Phone interviewee 1)

Further, it appears that the nature of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and the typical learning activities and assessment tasks designed to meet the competency outcomes of the course lend themselves to developing all three forms of social capital, and particularly 'linking' social capital. Priest (2009, p.7) points out:

> Linking social capital can be developed by setting tasks that require students to interact with networks they have not yet accessed and arranging for students to participate in activities beyond a class context. Such activities may help students to gain confidence in accessing new community groups, trying new things or interacting with unfamiliar institutions and service providers.

A common assessment task in Certificate IV requires participants to explore the policy drivers and funding support for VET in Australia. Participants do this in order to develop the competency to work effectively in VET (TAAENV401B). This activity encourages participants to develop linking social capital because they are required to make contact with organisations and register for online newsletters and professional development networks.

Another common task requires participants to seek opportunities to deliver training and assessment within organisations. This activity encourages participants to develop networks with community groups, institutions and sections of their own workplace that may be in need of their training proposals.

There is potential to explore further the extent to which participation in the Certificate IV develops social capital and the role of learning and assessment tasks within the course in effectively contributing to and enhancing social capital outcomes.

Was there a gap between intent and outcome?

The complexity of the responses from the participants suggests the participants had a rich and diverse experience that is worth further investigation in larger studies. This small-scale study has been able to highlight a few areas where it appears there is a gap between intent and outcome. These areas are outlined below. A larger-scale research project could interrogate the intent–outcome gap to ascertain whether the trends in this study are more widespread.

It appears there is a gap between intent and outcome with regard to employment. Forty per cent indicated they did the course because they wanted to get a job. Also there was a strong response that good job prospects for Certificate IV in Training and Assessment graduates was an influential factor in their deciding to do the course. Yet only 33% responded positively that they had achieved the outcome of employment, while 70% indicated they believed they had improved their general job prospects. On the subject of job outcomes, phone interviewees remained positive:

> I would have preferred to have a job, but I think it will come. (Phone interviewee 4)

> I'm looking at getting my own ABN and contracting to the college and starting my own business as a trainer. (Phone interviewee 1)

It appears there was a gap between intent and outcome with regard to skills acquired. A majority of participants responded that they did the course in order to learn skills in training and assessment, yet the reported outcomes in terms of improved presentation skills and preparedness for their role as trainer/assessor were only moderate. This apparent discrepancy was explored in detail with the phone interviews:

> I don't think there was enough emphasis on presentation skills—the how to deliver or how to create an interesting activity. (Phone interviewee 3)

> I probably would have liked more practice standing up in front of the class. (Phone interviewee 1)

> … in terms of teaching me about the training administrative system … that was really useful because it showed me a way to plan and organise training activities. In terms of preparing me to teach people: it also helped a little by introducing me to some theory and doing some practical exercises, however, I suppose teaching is the seriously tricky part that requires years of training and, especially, experience to get good at. The course seemed more like getting your license to practice training. (Phone interviewee 7)

These responses support the recommendations made by McRae (2008) that delivery/facilitation skills should have a higher profile in the qualification.

For many there appeared to be a gap between intent and outcome in relation to the content of the course and the assessment requirements. Interestingly, there was a strong association between the influence of pre-course information and expectations of the course content being met:

- ✧ Those who indicated that pre-course information was important to them and that they had accessed pre-course information in choosing their registered training organisation also reported that the course had met their expectations and the amount of work and assessment was what they expected.
- ✧ Those who indicated pre-course information was not important in their decision when choosing their registered training organisation strongly reported that the course did not meet their expectations in terms of content, workload and assessment requirements.

This last finding was evident in the online survey responses and was explored with further questioning during the phone interviews:

> I actually found the course to be much more difficult than I had anticipated … I expected to be able to teach individuals or groups, but did not expect to have to perform such detailed assessments and validations afterwards.
> (Phone interviewee 6—did not access pre-course information)

> I hear people talking about the TAA and they say Oh my god it was the worst year of my life … but I didn't get that … I didn't get a lot of those frustrations that I saw other students having. I don't know whether maybe it was because I understood that that's what it was going to be: a lot of paperwork and you've just got to get it done.
> (Phone interviewee 1—did not access pre-course information, but had done significant research, speaking to others who had done the course and had existing professional relationship with the college staff)

> There was a lot more involved than I thought it was going to be. They probably told us that on the information night, but it didn't sink in until I started to realise all the work that had to be done. But that was ok, I got it done.
> (Phone interviewee 2—accessed pre course information and attended information session—online survey response indicated course met expectations)

> The assessments were harder, more time consuming, than I expected.
> (Phone interviewee 7—did not access pre course information)

Clearly pre-course information is important in helping learners choose the correct course and preparing them for the experience of the course. These findings were in line with the findings of Kennedy and Haines (2008):

> … it is not specific information on course outcomes which is lacking but, rather, the ability to successfully navigate the wide range of information sources available …

It is recommended that registered training organisations find ways of making the pre-course information more accessible and more digestible to those who don't currently access it.

It is also recommended that registered training organisations take more care in the recruitment process to monitor intent and challenge pre-conceived notions about course content, thereby ensuring the responsible allocation of public funds.

Conclusions

This research project was designed to explore whether there is a gap between intent and outcome for participants in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in NSW ACE registered training organisations. While a gap was not universally experienced by all participants, it appears there are some gaps for some participants, particularly in the areas of:

- employment outcomes
- skills acquisition
- course content.

It is hoped that registered training organisations may be encouraged by this research to examine critically their recruitment and induction process to ascertain whether they are sufficiently investigating learner intent.

Registered training organisations could consider whether they should be challenging pre-conceived ideas about course content and potential outcomes during the recruitment process. These organisations may also be challenged by this research to examine critically the way pre-course information is provided to potential learners and to make use of a format that will allow learners to make well-informed choices about enrolment.

The cohort surveyed by this project has confirmed the criticisms of previous reports that the current content of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment provides insufficient training in presentation and facilitation skills. Those reviewing this qualification in future may note this finding.

There is good potential for the development of social capital by participation in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Group work and assessment tasks that require participants to develop networks are commonly used in the delivery and assessment of this course. Such activities appeared to have developed social capital for the cohort of this research by building confidence, networks and new links to organisations.

Finally, future studies may be able to investigate in more detail some of the characteristics and training experiences of those graduates of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment who have managed to gain employment as trainers.

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Appendix A: Online survey questions

1. Participant information

The purpose of the survey is to examine intent and outcomes for graduates of TAA40104 in NSW ACE registered training organisations.

This survey will contribute to a project being conducted as part of an NCVER scholarship program.

The information and details given for this survey will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this project. Only the researcher and research mentor will have access to the information.

Neither you or your RTO will be identified in any written report or presentation of the results of this project.

Participation in this project is voluntary.

If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences.

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please contact:

Researcher: Ruth Walker 0421593740, ruth.walker@kcc.nsw.edu.au

Research Mentor: Dr John Mitchell, johnm@jma.com.au

1. I have read the above information explaining the project.

2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

3. I understand that participation in the research project will involve completing an online survey exploring some of my experiences regarding TAA40104

4. I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, will only be used for the purposes of this project and that I or my RTO will not be identified in any written report or presentation of the results of this project.

5. I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty.

❍ Agree ❍ Disagree

2. Please select from the following options to nominate your:

a) Age

❍ 20–29 ❍30–39 ❍4–49 ❍5–59 ❍6–69 ❍7–79 ❍ 0ther

b) Gender

❍ Male ❍Female

c) Highest qualification prior to TAA40104

❍ No formal qualifications ❍ School Certificate ❍ Higher School Certificate

❍ Certificate II ❍ Certificate III (trade) ❍ Certificate IV

❍ Diploma /Associate Diploma ❍ Bachelor Degree or higher Degree

d) Main industry area

❍ automotive ❍ beauty ❍ business ❍ childcare ❍ community services

❍ construction ❍ education ❍ fitness ❍ health ❍ hospitality

❍ horticulture ❍ transport and distribution ❍ other

3. Have you finished the qualification? Please select the statements that correctly describe your circumstance:

❍ I have been awarded Certificate IV in Training and Assessment TAA40104

❍ I am still completing the training component of the course

❍ I have completed the training but have outstanding assessment tasks to complete

❍ I DO NOT intend to complete the course

4. Which of the following modes of delivery did you use to achieve your TAA40104?

❍ Recognition of prior learning

❍ Face to face training

❍ Distance learning

❍ Online learning

❍ Other (please specify)

5. Prior to doing TAA40104 were you:

❍ working as a trainer and or assessor for an RTO

❍ working in VET but not as a trainer / assessor

❍ involved in training others at work (non accredited training)

❍ an employer or supervisor of an apprentice or trainee

❍ not conducting any training or assessment

❍ other (please specify)

6. Why did you do the course?

❍ to get a job or change my career

❍ to learn skills in training and assessment

❍ it was a requirement of my job

❍ for general interest

❍ other (please specify)

7. What influenced your decision to do the course?

	Very Important						**Not Important**
Advice from employer	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Advice from job network	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Advice from others (e.g. friends, TAA graduates, trainers)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
RTO promotional material	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Job prospects for TAA40104 graduates looked good	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Fear of losing my job	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Other (please specify)

8. What influenced your decision when choosing your training provider (RTO)?

	Very Important						Not Important
Cost	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Suitability of days/times of course	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Length of time to complete	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Mode of delivery	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Proximity of RTO	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Reputation of RTO	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Promotional materials from RTO	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Quality of pre-course information	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Advice and support from RTO staff	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Other (please specify)							

9. When you enrolled in TAA40104 did you expect that your would:

	Very Important						Not Important
learn to be a good trainer/assessor	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
learn about the national VET system	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
learn presentation skills	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
learn to document assessment to RTO standards	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
get a job as a trainer/assessor	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
get a job in the VET industry	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
improve your general job prospects	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
expand your professional networks	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
expand your social networks	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
improve your overall confidence	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
other (please specify)							

10. Since doing TAA40104:

	Agree	Disagree
I have gained employment as a trainer/assessor	❍	❍
I am working in VET but not as a trainer/assessor	❍	❍
I have changes my duties to include more training/assessing	❍	❍
I have gone on to further study	❍	❍
I have used the TAA40104 skills and knowledge in my workplace	❍	❍
I have used the TAA40104 skills and knowledge in my personal life	❍	❍
I have used the TAA40104 skills and knowledge for my own self development	❍	❍
Other (please specify)		

11. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
I achieved what I wanted from the course	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Doing TAA40104 improved my job prospects	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I learnt more than I expected	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The course content was different to what I expected	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I expanded my profession network	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I expanded my social network	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The workload in the course was about what I expected	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The assessment in the course was about what I expected	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I feel well prepared for a role as a trainer/assessor	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I learnt useful generic skills	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Doing TAA40104 improved my overall confidence	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Doing TAA40104 improved my presentation skills	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Doing TAA40104 provided me with the skills to document training and assessment to RTO standards	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

12. Are you prepared to take part in a half-hour phone interview to further investigate your experience of TAA40104? Interview participants will be supplied with the interview questions prior to the interview and confidentiality will be guaranteed.

If you are willing to take part in a phone interview, please supply the following information:

Name:

Preferred phone number for interview contact (work, mobile, home):

Email address:

Preferred time for interview (day, evening, weekend):

Appendix B: Phone interview questions

Phone interviews were conducted with semi-structured questions. Interviewees were provided with the questions prior to the interview. There were five main questions each with a number of sub-set follow-up questions.

Questions:

1. Why did you decide to do your TAA40104?

   Had you already made your decision to do the course prior to approaching the RTO?

   Did you access marketing or pre-course information and was it useful?

   What sort of advice did you take into consideration when choosing to do the course?

   What sort of advice did you take into consideration when choosing your RTO?

2. Are you currently working as a trainer?

   if yes: what sort of work?

   if no: why not?

3. What did you obtain from the course that was expected?

   What did you obtain that was unexpected?

4. What did you get from the course that you value?

5. Would you do it again given what you know now?

   Have you changed your mind about a career in VET after doing the course?

   Would you recommend others do the course?

Appendix C: Profiles of phone interviewees

Table C1 Profiles of phone interviewees

Phone interviewee	Characteristics				
	Age	Gender	Education background	Awarded TAA40104?	Apparent gap between intent and outcomes?
Number 1	30–39	Female	Degree	Yes	No
Number 2	50–59	Male	Certificate III	Yes	No
Number 3	40–49	Female	Degree	Yes	Yes
Number 4	50–59	Female	School Cert	Yes	Yes
Number 5	50–59	Male	Degree	Yes	Yes
Number 6	50–59	Female	School Cert	Yes	Yes
Number 7	40–49	Male	Degree	No	Yes

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