

Learner voices in the primary industries

Insights into what learners think about their qualifications





Research aim

- ▶ Used the skill classifications of the draft Food and Fibre skills framework to explore learners' views on the extent to which the qualifications are providing them with:
 - ▶ the knowledge and skills they are getting and the transferability of these
 - ▶ content relevant to their working (or intended working) situation
 - ▶ flexibility in the qualification and its content.

Research approach

- ▶ Conducted by Dr Anne Alkema April-June 2024.
- ▶ Rapid literature review.
- ▶ 38 learner voices gathered through four focus groups (25 learners), 12 interviews and one written response.
- ▶ Studying for qualifications: pre-entry, L2, L3 (full qualifications, and micro-credentials), L4, L5 non-formal learning that includes assessments and a completed post-graduate diploma.
- ▶ Areas of study: animal care (2); agriculture (dairy, livestock breeding, milk harvesting)(15); various horticulture (20); aquaculture (1).
- ▶ Caveat: a convenience sample of learners who are actively engaged with, and supported in, their learning and data show this is not the case for around half of trainees and apprentices across all industries.

Why learners study

- ▶ Extrinsic and intrinsic reasons that encompass ambition and aspiration.
 - ▶ Skills and knowledge required for current and future work.
 - ▶ I wanted to understand the things we do on the farm [and] started L3 as soon as I started working on the farm.”(L3 Dairy)
 - ▶ I have ambition to go contract or share milking. I currently manage someone else’s cows [so it’s] the next step. I want to gain knowledge - get to the nitty gritty of the paperwork side. (L5 non formal, Dairy)
 - ▶ Learn at an accelerated rate; more money; looks good on CVs; be recognised as professionals; increase their value to the industry.
 - ▶ I figure if I have this qualification and the next one, I can get higher rate of pay. Also, I get professionally recognised and I’m not some hick who comes from the farm and can milk cows. (L3 micro-credential Dairy)
- ▶ BUT learners did not know very much about the content of the qualifications before they started.

Core transferable skills

- ▶ The draft Food and Fibre skills framework refers to these as - learning to learn (learner agency), learning for work, and learning for life ... and the cognitive, social, and emotional skills.
- ▶ Challenging to draw some of these out of learners where they are not part of the qualification.
- ▶ The wellbeing unit in L3 Dairy and Stock Breeding is appreciated.
 - ▶ The first booklet was on wellbeing - making sure you are looking after your physical and mental health. Farming can be a draining and stressful job. It was valuable... there is a lot going on and you need to know how to deal with issues. It's really good to reflect if things are a bit tough. (L3 Dairy)
- ▶ Where not part of the qualification learning these skills happen accidentally and opportunely in the workplace.
 - ▶ I don't think I necessarily get these [in the qualification], but I know how to communicate. I always ask questions, - "why do we have to do this a certain way"- even prior to the apprenticeship. ... Teamwork, I've picked up how a small team works - how each of them likes things done." (L3 Sports Turf)
- ▶ Learners accept the development of social and emotional skills happens on the job without the need for deliberate teaching. This is particularly the case for those who have spent time in the workforce, some of whom had acquired these skills in previous roles.

Core technical skills

- The draft Food and Fibre skills framework refers to these as generic or underpinning technical or work-related skills that are common to all (or most) of the food and fibre sectors.
- Concept more easily understood by learners than transferable skills.
- Using machinery and equipment; following health and safety procedures; quality management – some of this is covered in qualifications, much of it learnt on the job. Difficult to differentiate for some “it’s a blur of learning”.
 - Not too much on machinery is learnt through the qualification, apart from the milking plant. Things such as tractors are a work thing ... in farming you are part electrician, part Vet, part mechanic. You get a lot of experience. (L3 Dairy)
 - We also do a lot around Health and Safety - have toolbox talks related to the equipment... know about 5x5 risk matrix. ... I didn't know there would be so many hazards. We make maps of work areas in relation to this. (L2 Horticulture)
- See higher level responsibilities for looking after machinery, equipment and others in the higher-level qualifications.

Industry specific skills

- ▶ The draft Food and Fibre skills framework refers to these as specialised technical skills; industry specific knowledge and skills, and specialised technology and equipment skills, which are unique to the relevant industry.
- ▶ The qualification provides more than they are exposed to in the workplace.
- ▶ Learners were more aware of these than the other skills - the L3 Dairy and Stock Breeding learners talked about milk quality, mating, reproduction, effluent, soil management, calving, lambing, pasture management. The L4 horticulture learners talked about crop protection, complying with market needs, botany of plants and the biology of the growing environment.
- ▶ Learners understand and appreciate the science behind the learning and work they are doing. They talked about botany, biology, the impact of chemicals– science in practice.

Transferability of knowledge and skills

- ▶ Koopmanschap and Murray (2024) incorporate the Toi Mai (2023) definition related to the cognitive, social and emotional skills that are transferable and add that core technical skills are also transferable. They note the ability to recognise these skills as transferable is “a relatively complex process” and learners may need support to do this. This research supports this view.
- ▶ Learners in higher level qualifications or who had been in the workforce longer recognised the transferability of their technical skills more readily than those undertaking the lower-level qualifications who had been in the workforce for less time.
- ▶ Data from learners indicate the concept of transferability needs to be articulated in the qualification process so they understand the extent to which skills are transferable in the primary industries.

Flexibility of qualifications

- ▶ This research used the term, ‘flexibility’ as it relates to the qualification content and the timing/order of content – the ‘what and when’.
- ▶ Learners say the content is set, but many have some say over when they study this – and there is alignment with the seasonal nature of work in the primary industries.
 - ▶ You can choose which standards and you don't have to go through in order. ... Just do what you are working on. [Advisor] has a calendar of what we should be doing and you can pick what to do and I picked the ones that are relevant to what we have to do here. ... (L3 Horticulture)
 - ▶ Level 3 and level 4, you get a big heavy booklet and you need to do this stuff [but] they tell you what to focus on. It's reasonably flexible. You can do it as fast as you want. You could smash out a lot of stuff in a few months [if you wanted to]. ... You can identify what you want to do based on your work. (L4 Arboriculture)
 - ▶ The course is rather flexible, usually I can pick and choose what assessments I want to complete first. I decided to complete the timber projects first in both level 3&4 as that's what interested me most. (L4 Landscape Construction)
- ▶ Flexibility is also taken into account through the decision to undertake a full qualification, a micro credential, or targeted nonformal learning.

Learners get the knowledge and skills they need

- ▶ Most of the learners are getting what they need in their qualifications. For some this was more knowledge and a greater depth of knowledge than anticipated and for others it meant learning was accelerated.
 - ▶ Just able to step up quicker - get my head around feeding animals, feeding properly, advance faster. I can work things out myself and the farm owner is not always holding my hand. In the future it could lead to Level 5 - that's my goal. (L4 Dairy)
- ▶ This is balanced by some who say that some of the qualification content is insufficient or too in-depth for their job needs.
- ▶ Learner need is met because of the relevance of the core technical and industry specific content and subsequently the application to their jobs. The timing of units and the way in which programmes are run contribute to this.
- ▶ Learners appreciate the knowledge and skills they are getting for themselves and realise the impact on others and the future.

Conclusion

- ▶ The division of skills into core transferable, core technical, and industry specific appears to work as a way of talking with learners about their qualifications.
- ▶ They see themselves as getting core transferable skills – to a certain extent, and core technical and industry specific skills.
- ▶ There is some work to do on getting learners to understand the transferability of these skills within their industry and to other industries/sectors.
- ▶ The qualifications appear to be relatively inflexible in terms of content but, work in with farming and growing seasons and/or the order in which learners want to study depending on what they are working on. This lack of flexibility in content did not concern learners who are accepting of the content and the way in which their qualifications are structured.

Possible next steps

- ▶ Learners need to be provided with more opportunities to have input into their qualifications, learning and development. Such research could include gathering the voices of:
 - ▶ Māori, Pasifika and learners for whom English is an additional language
 - ▶ learners from a wider range of primary industries
 - ▶ learners for whom the qualification is not working
 - ▶ iwi and communities to find out the extent to which qualifications meet collective needs
- ▶ Learners appear not to know much about the content of their qualifications. The impact of this and ways to improve it could be worth exploring.
- ▶ The concept of transferability does not appear to be fully understood by learners so knowing more about this and how to talk about it with learners would be of benefit.