

WHERE DID THE B..... GO AND IS IT STILL IMPORTANT?

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ABSTRACT

At the annual conference of the National Advisory Committee on Computing Qualifications (NACCQ) in 2001, it was decided to remove a word that began with “B” from the names of the level 5 and 6 qualifications that are part of the NACCQ family of qualifications.

These qualifications were restructured for the 1992-year into an 18-module qualification structure. In the years since then, the number of modules being taught that relate to the same “B” word have reduced in proportion to the total number that are being taught.

This paper describes the extent to which the decline in teaching modules related to the “B” word has actually happened; develops a hypothesis as to why this happened; and asks the question as to whether employers of graduates from these qualifications now place less importance on knowledge and skills related to the “B” word.

Keywords

NACCQ, Business, ICT Qualifications

1. INTRODUCTION

When the names of the level five and level six qualifications that are overseen by the National Advisory Committee on Computing Qualifications (NACCQ) had the word “Business” removed from them from the year 2002, was this a sign of business related subjects becoming less important relative to other subjects that are part of these qualifications?

The rates at which different business courses making up these qualifications are moderated nationally as a proportion of all of the courses being moderated nationally was investigated to determine whether there was a trend in the number of business related courses being taught, and if there were any compensating trends in other subject areas.

A short literature review is conducted to explore the changing importance of business skills for graduates in computing related subjects, and the trends found are compared with the trends in what is being taught in the qualifications, and a hypothesis is developed to explain the trends that are taking place.

2. CHANGING OF THE NAMES

Robertson and Ross (2003) described some of the history of the qualifications that are overseen by the National Advisory Committee on Computing Qualifications (NACCQ) from its inception in 1986 through the development of the Certificate in Business Computing (CBC), the Advanced Certificate in Business Computing (ACBC) which was later renamed the Diploma in Business Computing (DipBC) and the National Diploma in Business Computing (NDBC).

At the annual conference of NACCQ in 2001, the CBC and DipBC qualifications were renamed the Diploma in Information and Communications Technology (Level 5) and the Diploma in Information and Communications Technology (Level 6) respectively, thereby removing the “B” word Business from the names of these qualifications. This leaves the NDBC as the only NACCQ qualification with the “B” word as part of its name, and as shown in Robertson and Ross (2003) the number of Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) offering the NDBC qualification dropped considerably from 1995 to 2002, and have continued to drop further.

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Table 1 – Groupings of Modules and Timing of Moderation

Group	Semester	Years	Business Modules	Other Modules
A	One	1997 2000 2003	AA500, AA700, AS700, BA600, ET600, HR700	BC600, CA600, DC600, DE600, PC500, DB500, DT500, PR51n, PR62n, IO600, OO700, PM600, SD700, SP591
B	Two	1997 2000 2003	AA600, BA500, IS700, SS600	AE610, AM500, DC700, HF500, OS500, FS600, PD500, PP590, PR50n, PR61n, PR740, EP600, SA600, SC600, SP700, IN600, MA700
C	One	1998 2001 2004	AA620, BA620, IS710	CA700, DB600, DE610, DG600, FG700, FG70n, ID500, IG600, NM500, NM650, OO500, PJ700, PR530, PS600, SA610, SA611, SA61n, SD600, SF400, SP590, SP592, SP600, US500
D	Two	1998 2001 2004	AP600, EC700, OM500	IP500, HM600, NM600, DB700, DM700, ST500, EX600, PR65n, HD600, OO600, QA600, RA600, SP500, SP510, IN610, MA500
E	One	1999 2002 2005	BA700, MP600	BC500, EL500, HS600, NE600, NM61n, OS610, TS600, DA600, DB620, MB500, AN600, PP490, WN500, GW700, PP400, PR630, PR70n, PR750, PR75n, EP500, OO500, SI600, TR700, SP520
F	Two	1996 1999 20002	AA610, BA610, PE700	AE600, DC500, NC500, NE700, OS600, OS60n, OS610, OS65n, EC710, PP51n, PR60n, PR700, PR730, PY600, FG600, SA700, SO500, SR700, TR600, US500, WX500, SP590, SP610, IN500, MA600

tute of Technology (CPIT) was the only ITP to have the “B” word included in the name of its computing or information technology degree, which was originally developed in the mid 1990s as the Bachelor of Business Computing (BBComp). However it was restructured during 2001, and since 2002 has been named the Bachelor of Information and Communication Technologies (BICT).

3. CHANGING OF THE MODULES BEING OFFERED

To determine whether there had been changes in the proportions of business course being taught in the NACCQ qualifications that are at level 5 or higher, the moderation reports for the 9 years from semester two of 1996 to semester one of 2005 were used. With all modules being moderated on a three year cycle and with moderation being conducted in both semesters of two years, the modules are separated into six groups. These groups, the semesters and years when the mod-

ules in those groups have been moderated, and the business and non-business modules that are in those groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 2 shows the total number of modules and the number of business modules that have been moderated in each moderation round from semester two of 1996 to semester one of 2005, with this allowing for each group of modules to have three rounds of moderation. This data shows that in most groups of modules, the percentage of business modules has dropped across the years being reviewed, with the only group where the percentage increased across the years being group D. This group has only a small number of modules, with one module being responsible for the increase (EC700 - eCommerce Business).

The data from Table 2 is further summarised in Table 3 which shows the number of business modules and total number of modules moderated in the three year blocks commencing in semester two of 1996, 1999 and 2002.

This shows a steady decrease in the proportion of business modules being moderated over the 9

Table 2 – Business Modules and Total Modules Moderated By Semester

Group	Year	Business Modules Moderated	Total Modules Moderated	Percentage Business Moderated
A	1997	25	81	30.9%
	2000	26	104	25.0%
	2003	17	70	24.3%
B	1997	23	90	25.6%
	2000	28	133	21.1%
	2003	14	102	13.7%
C	1998	4	67	6.0%
	2001	2	49	4.1%
	2004	1	54	1.9%
D	1998	2	71	2.8%
	2001	3	67	4.5%

Table 3 - Business Modules as a Percentage of Total Modules Moderated

3 Year Moderation Period	Business Modules Moderated	Total Modules Moderated	Percentage Business Moderated
Sem 2 1996 to Sem 1 1999	67	480	14.0%
Sem 2 1999 to Sem 1 2002	64	556	11.5%
Sem 2 2002 to Sem 1 2005	36	454	7.9%

years under review. In looking for a corresponding pattern, it was then identified that modules that could be grouped together as being “Web and Multimedia” related were being moderated more often as a percentage of the total number of modules being moderated. The modules included in this group were: DG600, IN500, IN600, IN610, MA500, MA600 and MA700. The number of these modules being moderated compared with the total number of modules being moderated is shown in Table 4, with this showing a steady increase in the percentage of Web and Multimedia modules being moderated.

Table 5 shows the percentage of modules moderated that are either business or web/multimedia related. This shows an increase from the first period to the second period, but a levelling out from the second period to the third period. This may suggest that the reason why ITPs may have chosen to reduce the proportion of business

modules that they offer as part of the NACCQ qualifications is so that modules related to the Internet and Multimedia can be included.

4. THE LITERATURE

A number of writers have investigated the importance of business skills for IT professionals and IT graduates including Kaarst-Brown and Guzman (2005), Cash, Yoong and Huff (2004) and Gallivan, Truex and Kvasny (2004), with a brief summary of their findings following:

Kaarst-Brown and Guzman (2005) identified a number of trends that point to the high and in some cases increased need for IT graduates to have good business skills, this these including that IT workers are employed across a range of industries, including business services; there are increasing requirements for IT management knowledge; there is a need for IT knowledge within management functions and for manage-

Table 4 – Web/Multimedia Modules as a Percentage of Total Modules Moderated

3 Year Moderation Period	Web/MM Modules Moderated	Total Modules Moderated	Percentage Web/MM Moderated
Sem 2 1996 to Sem 1 1999	6	480	1.3%
Sem 2 1999 to Sem 1 2002	40	556	7.2%
Sem 2 2002 to Sem 1 2005	49	454	10.8%

Table 5 – Business and Web/Multimedia Modules as a Percentage of Total Modules Moderated

3 Year Moderation Period	Business Modules Moderated	Web/MM Modules Moderated	Bus/Web Modules Moderated	Total Modules Moderated	Percentage Web/MM Moderated
Sem 2 1996 to Sem 1 1999	67	6	73	480	15.2%
Sem 2 1999 to Sem 1 2002	64	40	104	556	18.7%
Sem 2 2002 to Sem 1 2005	36	49	85	454	18.7%

ment knowledge within IT functions; and that IT staff are increasingly having control over budgets.

Cash, Yoong and Huff (2004) seek to answer the questions of: “what competency changes have been demanded by the rise of the Internet and ecommerce?” and “what factors have driven those changes in demanded competencies?” Some of their work points to the increased importance of the following in IT professionals: knowledge of organisational structure; knowledge of the organisational strategy and culture; the ability to understand the business environment; the ability to understand ethics; knowledge of environmental constraints; and knowledge of project management

Recent research has underscored the fact that IT does not exist in a social vacuum, but that the only sustained competitive advantage to using IT derives from the human capital of talented employees who know how to fit technology to the organization’s needs and who can skilfully partner with business users to manage organizational change (Mata et al., 1995; Ross et al., 1996 as cited in Gallivan, Truex and Kvasny, 2004).

The common thread running through these three pieces of work is that IT professionals and graduates still need good business skills, and that in particular areas, such as information management, organisational change and organisational strategy, the importance may be increasing.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Even though the “B” word has been removed from the names of the level five and six qualifications that are overseen by NACCQ and the percentage of modules relating to the “B” word have reduced significantly over the nine years under review, this does not appear to have been based on the perceived importance of “B” word skills for IT professionals and graduates in the literature reviewed.

It does instead appear to be related to the increasing percentage of modules related to the Internet and multimedia. It would appear that when ITPs made the decisions to incorporate Internet and multimedia modules into their programmes that this was done at the expense of modules in business related areas. While the decision to in-

roduce these new modules is not in question, it may be worth considering the re-introduction of business related modules into the level five and six programmes that are offered at ITPs.

With the only “B” word related module that is being taught more frequently at the end of the nine year period being an eCommerce business module (EC700), this suggests that the increased importance of the Internet in that period has caused the change in the percentage of business modules being offered, and may point to a direction that NACCQ could head by contemplating the introduction of more business related eCommerce modules. Possible topic areas for these could include Internet Marketing, eTailing and Current Trends in eBusiness.

The data included in this paper is based on how frequently the modules have been moderated as part of the NACCQ external moderation process. A more accurate measure would be gained by surveying the ITPs offering the qualifications, and this would enable qualitative information relating to why their changes were made.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The “B” word doesn’t appear to have reduced in importance, but instead the importance of the Internet (and multimedia) has increased dramatically over the period under review, and that this has been the driver for a lower percentage of business related modules as a percentage of all modules being offered. ITPs need to seriously consider revisiting the number of business related modules that are offered as part of the level five and six diplomas, if they are to continue to address the identified needs for IT graduates.

The focus of this paper has been on the business modules that have been offered as part of the diploma qualifications that are delivered by ITPs, and has not explored the extent to which degree level qualifications in the ITP sector require students to complete courses in business related subjects. This is an area that could be the subject of further investigation in the future.

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