



## Technical Communication Industry Survey

### Report on qualifications and courses

April 2007

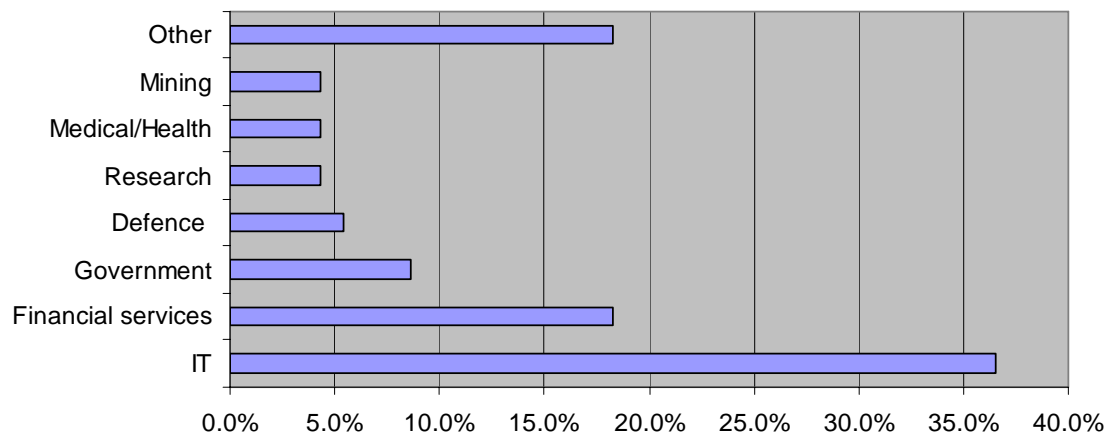
#### Summary

Most managers recommend formal qualifications but few use these as a primary selection tool. In our technical communication industry survey<sup>1</sup>, many respondents indicated that they placed a higher importance on relevant work experience. However 55% indicated that they would recommend employees undertake formal qualifications. This seeming contradiction may be explained by a general lack of awareness of courses on offer (especially by those outside of Victoria) and the lack of suitable courses.

#### Respondent Profile

Most respondents were from NSW (51%) and Victoria (34%). Respondents were managers (29%), team leaders (15%) and technical communicators (21%). The main industries involved were IT (36%) and Financial Services (16%).

**Respondents by Industry**



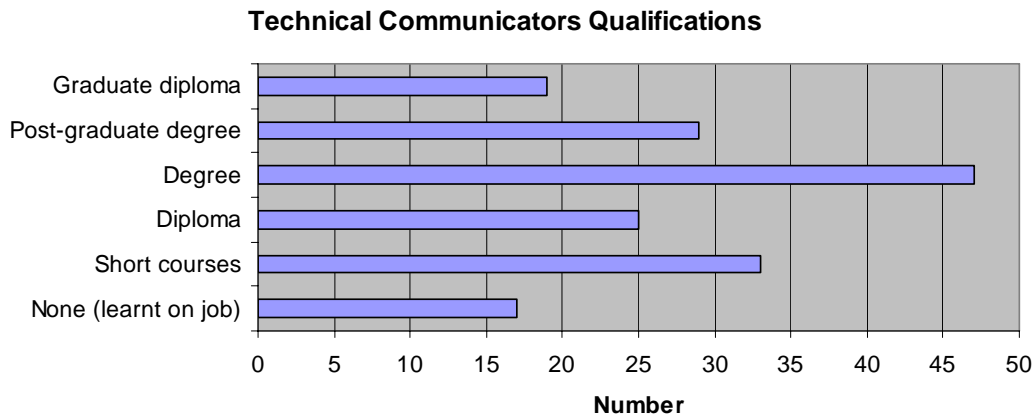
The majority (40%) of respondents were from large organizations with greater than 500 employees. A significant majority (67%) had a dedicated in-house documentation team.

#### Qualifications

The information related to the desirability of formal qualifications continues to be mixed. Many respondents (60%) indicated that their team members had an undergraduate degree or better. This is supported by our own experience which shows most of those working in the field have at least an undergraduate degree and many

<sup>1</sup> Full report available at [www.techwriter.com.au/news/survey.htm](http://www.techwriter.com.au/news/survey.htm)

have post graduate qualifications. However, few of these qualifications are specifically in the areas of technical communication. Technical communicators who have over 15 years experience tend to have fewer qualifications and to rely almost entirely on past experience and their own skills developed over time.



When asked what qualifications team members ideally needed, many respondents indicated that experience and good writing ability were most sought after. This is supported by responses to the key competencies questions where the top two sought are “writing clearly for specific audiences” and “write, test and edit documents”. Possession of an undergraduate degree was seen as an advantage rather than necessary for most roles. Some typical comments were:

I think a degree is helpful, but it doesn't have to be specific to technical communication as long as the individual has enough relevant work experience.

I think formal qualifications are useful and provide the basics or guidelines on technical communication but I think if the person has good written communication skills, an interest in what they are doing, the right tools and want to learn, they could do it effectively.

But the courses aren't recognised in the industry and technical communicators are rarely solely writers: they often have multiple strings to their bow which give them other degrees and expertise.

I don't have them, regard experience and aptitude as more important. Would not dismiss a qualification, just don't see it as essential.

Despite this, 55% of respondents indicated that they would recommend employees obtain formal qualifications in technical communication.

### **Courses**

One of the reasons for not recommending employees undertake courses is that respondents feel that there are no suitable courses available

There are NO current courses that give more than the basics of technical communication and they use the wrong tools and seem to focus too much on the psychology aspects.

Courses are very few and far between, on the job experience is invaluable. If formal education is required I feel this area is quite limited.

Impossible to do so in Western Australia as no courses here; online courses may have value, but I don't know anyone who has done one.

Very few courses of value ....

There isn't much of value around.

Our own efforts to identify a range of courses (covering seminars to degree/post graduate offerings) also indicate significant gaps.

The survey showed that there was generally low awareness of the technical communication courses on offer with 61% of respondents omitting the question or indicating that they did not know of any courses at all. Only 30% of respondents were able to name a specific course. Unaided recall of the Swinburne course was good particularly amongst Victorian respondents (only three respondents couldn't mention any courses at all).

### Courses known to respondents

Named courses		
Swinburne	17	42.5%
Christchurch Polytechnic	3	7.5%
RMIT	3	7.5%
Other university (RMIT, Canberra, Uni Sydney, Macquarie editing, UTS)	9	22.5%
Short courses	8	20.0%
<b>Total Named</b>	<b>40</b>	

Those who would recommend that employees complete a course supported most methods of delivery, with strong support for classroom based instruction (74%) as well as online (67%) and distance learning (52%). Of these, 17% of responses indicated support for a combination of methods.

### Conclusion

There is definitely an opportunity for improvement in the awareness of courses on offer, the range of delivery methods and the content of courses in technical communication. Especially in NSW, few respondents were aware of their options, which are in fact quite limited particularly at the specialist and tertiary level. There is also an opportunity and need to promote the benefits of employing a professionally trained technical communicator.

A key target market for those offering courses is those who are early in their careers who may have completed a tertiary qualification in a related discipline such as IT and who are now attracted to writing as a career. For these people and others seeking to change career, the current emphasis on work experience is a real impediment to their being able to obtain work. Our experience in recruitment indicates a shortage of technical communicators especially at the more junior level.

For further information or to discuss these findings, call Elizabeth at TechWriter on 02 9955 5768 or 1300 788 716.