

Digital Research Skills Trainer Certification Guide

Selecting a certification pathway for recognition as a digital research skills trainer

Reading time: 15 minutes

Skills and Workforce Development team

Australian Research Data Commons

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Introduction

Many trainers have a wealth of tacit knowledge through their lived experience of training the community. Trainers are often involved in the training space because they are knowledgeable in a particular area and love sharing what they know with the community. However, their value might only be known to the esoteric few. Just as trainers aim to make learning visible to the community, how might they also make their skill sets and capabilities visible?

Objectives

This guide does not address whether certification is necessary or ideal, nor does it determine on your behalf the certification which best suits your career pathway. Neither does it aim to promote one form of certification over others.

Rather, it highlights areas for consideration before embarking on the path of trainer certification and provides a horizon scan of some of the relevant trainer certification programs currently available. This guide aims to:

- highlight the value of trainer certifications to skills training design, development and delivery
- raise the profile of trainers and support professionalisation of the trainer role through advocating formal assessment and certification
- help digital and data research skills trainers be more effective trainers by providing a shared vocabulary and advice on clear pathways for trainer certification
- help supervisors and managers support staff professional development by providing advocacy for trainer certification
- identify existing certification models that are relevant to eResearch and data skills training
- compare and contrast certification processes to enable trainers to choose certification pathways most appropriate for their individual circumstances.

Target Audience

- Digital and data research skills trainers

- Supervisors and managers of digital and data research skills trainers

Prior Knowledge

This guide has been written for those who currently design, develop and deliver training as full-time trainers or where training is part of their role, and for those who are considering becoming a skills trainer.

You do not need prior knowledge in training to understand the guide.

Why Should I Be Certified?

If you know the area, you can train ... right? Training does not automatically happen when you share what you know. Designing training and training delivery are skills in themselves. For experienced community trainers, certification might seem cumbersome and even unnecessary especially when training is second nature to them. The advantage of certified qualifications is that they serve as a shorthand to express trainer value and their skill sets.

Certifications also:

- validate your knowledge and skills
- record trainer skills for future career advancement
- increase marketability – help you be more findable when people search for the skill set
- establish a pathway for future professional development (some programs require evidence of prior knowledge, skills or experience)
- establish credibility by providing national or international audiences with a shared frame of reference.

How Are Certificates Awarded?

While it could be argued that certifications serve the similar purpose of endorsing trainer values and skill sets, it is important to note that the award of certifications might be premised differently. It is worth considering how the awarding body certifies its members before embarking on the program. Your peers

or co-workers might be able to offer insights as to which certificates or programs are more highly valued in the sector.

Generally, certificates are awarded on the basis of:

Competence

Competency-based certificates are awarded based on evidence of the participants' ability to demonstrate a skill set and usually involves assessment against fixed criteria or pre-determined benchmarks.

For details, refer to [the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment's Competency-based Training Fact Sheet](#).

Membership

In some certification models, admission into certain professional bodies or organizations automatically certifies an individual as a trained trainer. Accreditation as a skills trainer means that your skill set has been independently evaluated by qualified reviewers to have met recognised standards. Professional membership *can* mean that one has met accreditation requirements, which might also include proof of currency.

Internship or apprenticeship

Some certificates are awarded on completion of an internship (often unpaid) or apprenticeship (often paid). Specific job-related skills gained during the tenure of an internship or apprenticeship are recognised. This usually involves the learner shadowing another person who is more highly skilled or who has more knowledge or experience in an area. Assessments for certifications based on an internship or apprenticeship usually involve a practical demonstration of skills and/or knowledge acquired by the learner during the internship or apprenticeship.

Achievement

Some certifications and memberships are tied to one's level of performance in assessments.

For example, with the Data Management Association Australia (DAMA)'s [Certified Data Management Professional \(CDMP\) certification](#), your certification level reflects your industry experience and level of achievement in the written examination.

First, A Test!

Make yourself a cup of tea ... Now close your eyes (after reading all of this of course) and think about your highest level of study. How did you decide on it?

What were some of the factors that shaped your decision? Discounting personal influences and mandatory training, which were some of the program offerings that drew you in?

Certification – Factors for Consideration

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the smorgasbord of courses out there. Each of the courses are undoubtedly selling their best features. In deciding a certification or program which best suits your circumstances, it is also useful to first determine which factors you value most. Here are some factors to consider:

Flexibility

Course content

How flexible is this program/course in terms of the content? Will you get to choose which units to study? Some courses comprise a fixed set of units, while others allow you to customise parts of the course through unit selection.

Delivery

How is the course delivered? Some courses are delivered in person, some online, and others are hybrid courses, which offer the flexibility of the first 2 modes of delivery.

Flexibility in course delivery can also be seen in the course design. A good course should be designed to cater to different learning styles and a diverse range of learners, including [neuro-divergent](#) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners.

Course providers have differing degrees of flexibility when it comes to course delivery. If you have unique circumstances which would require alternate arrangements, consider reaching out to the provider before course enrolment to see if the provider is able to accommodate your request.

Recognition

Levels of recognition

Certifications can be recognised at different levels:

- international
- national
- state.

It is a good idea to check if the certification is recognised in Australia if you are interested in a course offered by an overseas course provider.

Some others might not be formally recognised but might be highly regarded by those in the know.

Credits or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Experienced trainers who are looking for fast-tracked endorsement of their current skill sets could consider checking with the course provider if they are able to offer Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or credits to demonstrate competence in course delivery or other parts of the course.

The following is taken from [the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency \(TEQSA\)](#), Australia's independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education:

‘Credit’ is a benefit provided to a student by waiving one or more of the normal requirements for completion of a course of study, such as not having to complete a particular unit of study. Credit is obtained on the basis of evidence that the student has already undertaken learning that is deemed to be equivalent to the parts of the course of study for which credit has been granted.

‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ (RPL) is defined in the Australian Qualifications Framework as a *process* through which eligibility for the award of credit is assessed, through assessment of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Source: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), 15 March 2019, TEQSA website, “Guidance Note: Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning”, accessed 16 Dec 2022, <<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/guidance-notes/guidance-note-credit-and-recognition-prior-learning>>

[The Australian Skills Quality Authority \(ASQA\)](#), Australia's national regulator for vocational education and training (VET), explains RPL as follows:

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process that assesses your competency—acquired through formal and informal learning—to determine if you meet the requirements for a unit of study.

You can use a variety of documentation to apply for RPL. This includes, but is not limited to:

- records of completed training
- assessment items
- assessment records
- declarations from your employer, and/or
- a copy of your student records provided by ASQA.

Each provider has its own RPL process, so when you are accepted by a new provider, speak to your new provider for assistance with applying for RPL.

Source: Australian Skills Quality Authority, Australian skills quality authority website "What is RPL?", Australian government, accessed 29 July 2022, <<https://www.asqa.gov.au/faqs/provider-closures-students/what-rpl>>

Duration

How much time are you able to invest in the course? Train-the-trainer-type courses vary widely in duration and structure. Some of the courses we looked at comprised 2-day workshops and some took 6 months to 2 years.

In thinking about the time you can invest in the course, it is a good idea to also consider the non-contact hours and time you need to spend reviewing what you've learned in addition to the contact hours and/or self-directed learning.

Portability

Training is a transferable or 'portable' skill. Trainers who are concerned with demonstrating their training skills in other contexts might want to think about these questions:

- How portable is the certification?
- Would the certification still be useful if I were to change career pathways?
- How might this certification be useful in a different context?
- Is the certification sector specific? Would it be recognised outside of higher education?

For example, the Certificate in Training and Education (TAE Cert. 4) is a requisite qualification for delivering training in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

Cost

How much is the course? What kinds of financial help might you be able to access?

Currency

How current the course is might not be easily discernible at first glance. If course currency is a concern, check with the course provider to find out:

- how frequently they run the course
- when was the last time this course was run.

There is a danger of the course not being current enough if it has not been run in a while.

Expiration

Some certifications have a certification expiry date. In order to ensure currency, some certifications are only valid for a fixed number of years. This means that you will need to be recertified to maintain currency.

Other certifications might have changes to the units of competency, with the new version of the certificate superseding the previous one. An example of this is the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment [TAE40110](#), which was superseded by [TAE40116](#) with changes to the qualification structure and inclusion of 2 identified units as part of the core units. (TAE40116 has in turn been superseded by [TAE40112](#).)

Artefact

While the artefact that validates your successful completion of a course is unlikely to be a main consideration in course selection, it's useful to bear in mind that there's great variety out there.

Some people value increased visibility of their skill sets in the form of [digital badging](#), while others value the ability to choose how they stack their skills in the form of [micro-credentials](#).

Think about these questions:

- What will you get when you successfully complete the course?
- How is that successful course completion represented (artefact received)?

Assessment

Course assessments vary from provider to provider and can take different forms, such as written examinations, teaching demonstrations, and class participation. Certificates of completion indicate that the learner has attended a course, which might or might not include learner assessment.

It is worth asking the course provider these questions:

- How are learners assessed? (Practical component? Written examination? Participation?)
- How are assignments weighted?
- Are learners assessed for practical delivery (teaching demonstration)?
- Would I need to prepare a portfolio of work?
- Do you offer recognition of prior learning or credits?

Theory or practice?

Some courses are entirely theoretical, while others also offer workplace learning and/or practical delivery opportunities.

If there is a practicum or work placement component to the course, check with the course provider if they will be organising placement or if you are expected to source your own placement.

Here are 2 useful questions to ask course providers:

- Is there a workplace learning component to the course?
- Who will be organising the practicum or work placement (if any)?

Endorsement

Are the qualifications or certifications offered by the training provider endorsed by a credible body? If there is a professional association you or your workplace belong to, it is a good idea to check with them if the certification you are interested in is endorsed by them.

Certifications at a Glance

What are some courses relevant to digital and data research skills trainers? What sort of certifications do they offer? We performed a horizon scan and selected 10 to highlight for a flavour of the current programs.

Table 1. Certifications relevant to digital and data skills trainer as of July 2022

CERTIFICATE NAME	SCOPE	PROCESS	COST (APPROX.)	BENEFIT(S)	CONSIDERATION(S)
The Carpentries Instructor Certification	Available to people in member organisations. Instructors can be given a sponsored seat in instructor training	2 full days or 4 half days of training Complete 3 short tasks as part of the checkout process .	US\$500 to 1,000 per instructor	Internationally recognised skill Instructor is qualified to teach data, software or library carpentry lessons Opportunities to participate more fully in the global Carpentries community	Qualified instructors are expected to peer-teach.
Advance HE's UK HEA Fellowships	For people teaching in higher education environments. Geared	Reflect on teaching practice, and	GBP100 to 200	Internationally recognised teaching qualification	Possibly lengthy

CERTIFICATE NAME	SCOPE	PROCESS	COST (APPROX.)	BENEFIT(S)	CONSIDERATION(S)
	towards certifying academics. Some universities explicitly support their academic staff with these	submit a reflective report.		Postnominals (letters after your name)	
Certificate IV in Assessment and Training	Requisite qualification for all trainers and assessors working in the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector with registered training organisations (RTOs)	0.5 to 2 years to complete the course Complete 9 core units and one elective unit successfully	Subsidised: A\$4910	Nationally recognised qualification in Australia Ability to work as a trainer and/or an assessor in RTOs	Might need reaccreditation when units are updated
ELIXIR-EXCELERA TE Train the Trainer	Based on Carpentries Instructor training Focuses on bioinformatics	2 full days of training Online version now developed with 4 half days of training	Information not available	Widely delivered throughout the EU since 2016 Opportunities to practice delivery and receive feedback	Available to ELIXIR members (no precedence for external provision) Possible wait time due to its popularity

CERTIFICATE NAME	SCOPE	PROCESS	COST (APPROX.)	BENEFIT(S)	CONSIDERATION(S)
IBCT Certification	The organisation certifies trainers, centres and training materials and offers train-the-trainer programs.	Admission interview 50 contact hours and 20 hours of self-study and assignments	Information not available	3 levels of trainers' certification which cater to different career stages	Recertification needed every 3 years Recognition in Australia Availability of online or hybrid delivery
The Virtual Training Team's Train-the-Trainer	A range of virtual programs, including a train-the-trainer program designed for trainers with some experience in the classroom and who wish to deliver effectively in the virtual environment	3 theory (virtual) masterclasses and 2 practical (virtual) sessions	Information not available	Choice between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certification (proof of completion of training) • accreditation (demonstrated competence in delivery) 	Private, UK based company Recognition in Australia
The Open Data Institute's Train-the-trainer program	A data trainer specific course designed to help trainers build open data	Involves designing an open data training course	GBP1,470 plus VAT	Clarity in assessment and learning outcomes	Check if the course is recognised in Australia. Frequency of

CERTIFICATE NAME	SCOPE	PROCESS	COST (APPROX.)	BENEFIT(S)	CONSIDERATION(S)
	knowledge into their core specialist area	Includes a follow-up mentoring session			course run
Australian Institute of Training and Development (AITD)	<p>Offers a range of entry points for anyone interested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PD (short courses) ● bespoke "In house courses" ● webinars ● mentoring program ● conferences 	Short courses: one-day face-to-face courses in CBD locations across Australia	Information not available	<p>Offers digital badging</p> <p>Opportunity to participate in statewide divisional council (10 per state) and to broaden one's network and increase one's profile within the learning and development community</p>	Availability of online or hybrid delivery
Australian Institute of Management (AIM)	Available to interested, fee paying parties	<p>Short courses (F2F or virtual): one to 2 days</p> <p>Mini MBA (blended course): 20 hours of self-paced online</p>	<p>One-day course: A\$716</p> <p>Mini MBA: A\$4,400</p>	Flexibility: choice of course electives for Mini MBA	<p>Private company?</p> <p>A range of other courses offered, including TAE40116</p>

CERTIFICATE NAME	SCOPE	PROCESS	COST (APPROX.)	BENEFIT(S)	CONSIDERATION(S)
		study, 2 full-day F2F workshops, and 2 short course electives			
Charles Sturt University's Graduate Certificate in Adult and Vocational Education	Available to interested, fee paying parties interested in Adult and Vocational Education	0.5-year full-time study or equivalent Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> workplace learning practicum 	A\$11,000	Relevance: higher-education specific 2 sessions (start dates) per year 100% online Practical application: Workplace Learning (EPT502) and Practicum (EPT509) units available	Costly Commonwealth supported placement (CSP) does not apply to this course.
LinkedIn Learning Coursera	Available to interested, fee paying parties	Virtual, self-paced courses of varying duration delivered	A\$44.99 per course	Many courses to select from Some courses are free.	Currency of materials Industry recognition

CERTIFICATE NAME	SCOPE	PROCESS	COST (APPROX.)	BENEFIT(S)	CONSIDERATION(S)
edX		<p>by a range of trainers</p> <p>Some include practice exercises and learner checks.</p>		<p>Self-paced, bite-sized courses</p> <p>Digital badging</p>	

Useful Resources

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

[The Australian Qualifications Framework \(AQF\)](#) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It incorporates the qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework.

Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)

[The Australian Skills Quality Authority \(ASQA\)](#) is Australia's national regulator for vocational education and training (VET).

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

[The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency \(TEQSA\)](#) is Australia's independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education.

Skills Framework for an International Age (SFIA)

[The Skills Framework for the Information Age \(SFIA\)](#) is a global standard that defines digital and other ICT related skills.

National Microcredentials Framework

[The National Microcredentials Framework](#) is a nationally consistent framework for defining microcredentials across higher education, vocational education and industry in Australia.

Digital badges

Display your skills and experience through verifiable online credentials in the form of [digital badges](#).

The University of Sydney addresses [some frequently asked questions about digital badging](#).

Monash University explains [how digital badging and microcredentials work at the university](#).

Learning Vault explains [the value in digital badging](#).

Skill Finder

[Skill Finder](#) is an Australian online course marketplace that lists current courses for a range of skill sets. You can use Skill Finder to search for relevant short, online courses according to skill types.

We'd Like to Hear From You!

How did you use this Trainer Certification Guide? What did you like about it? What could be improved? Let us know contact@ardc.edu.au.

Contact us

If you have questions about the content of this guide or would like assistance, please contact the ARDC Skills and Workforce Development team via contact@ardc.edu.au.