

# Monitoring of level 7 diploma programmes: 2018 summary



## *Introduction*

The purpose of this summary is to:

- review the results of the 2018 monitoring of programmes leading to level 7 diplomas
- outline the key findings
- provide guidance to ensure programmes continue to meet [Programme approval and accreditation rules](#).

This programme monitoring summary is primarily for:

- tutors and assessors
- programme developers and programme leaders
- academic and quality managers.

Appendix 1 includes top tips for these three groups.

## *Level 7 diplomas*

The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) defines a level 7 diploma as qualifying individuals with specialised and technical knowledge and skills within a professional context.

NZQA has been monitoring level 7 diplomas since 2016. Previously, there was no NZQA monitoring or external moderation of these qualifications because level 7 Diplomas fell outside of the requirements for Degree Monitoring, Assuring Consistency, and National External Moderation quality assurance.

There are a wide range of level 7 diploma programmes available, attracting large numbers of international students. This is because completing the qualification meant graduates were eligible for a three-year, post-study, open work visa. New immigration settings came into effect on 26 November 2018. These reduced the post-study work rights for international students studying for qualifications below degrees, including level 7 diplomas. NZQA is already starting to see a decline in overall student enrolments.

While we do not yet know the impact of these changes. NZQA monitoring since 2016 has identified some persistent quality concerns with the delivery of level 7 Diplomas. The monitoring findings in 2018 also suggest the educational value of some programmes remains unclear, particularly for international students. Level 7 programmes are intended to provide the New Zealand context for professional skills. However, the evidence that they do this effectively or lead to the intended employment outcomes is variable.

## ***Monitoring activities***

In 2018, NZQA monitored 16 out of 109 approved level 7 diploma programmes. These diplomas were in the following fields:

- Business
- Computing/Information Technology
- Digital Marketing
- Engineering
- Healthcare Management
- Hospitality Management.

### **NZQA's risk-based approach**

NZQA takes a risk-based approach to determining the type of monitoring activity.

Risk factors include but are not limited to:

- the number of student enrolments
- programmes with high numbers of international students
- NZQA monitoring and moderation history
- other intelligence from within NZQA or external agencies.

For the 2018 monitoring, all monitoring activities included a desk evaluation of programme documentation supplied by Tertiary education organisations (TEOs) and moderation of a sample of assessed learner work. 12 of the 16 monitoring activities also included a site visit to the provider to interview staff and learners.

### **The outcomes of NZQA's monitoring activities**

NZQA completed 16 monitoring activities and found that:

- one programme met programme criteria overall
- a further eight programmes met some programme criteria with some areas requiring remedial actions to meet programme approval and accreditation criteria
- the remaining seven programmes did not meet programme criteria overall and required significant remedial action or action leading to statutory intervention in some cases.

### **Applied and practical programmes**

Monitoring found that programmes that were predominantly applied and practical rather than theoretical provided the best outcomes for learners and for employers. Graduate destination data showed this.

In particular, assessments involving students applying knowledge in real industry contexts allowed learners to fully demonstrate that they met the programme learning outcomes. These programmes also tended to have active reciprocal links with industry.

## **Common issues**

The most common issues which prevented programmes meeting programme criteria included poor assessment and moderation practice and a lack of robust programme review.

The rest of this report explains the monitoring findings in more detail.

## ***Findings***

### **Monitoring process**

TEOs delivering level 7 diploma programmes have been cooperative in the monitoring process. They have provided NZQA with the requested, appropriately labeled documentation and access to relevant staff and learners. NZQA acknowledges the time and effort it takes for TEOs to participate in programme monitoring.

### **Changes in the monitoring approach**

NZQA has revised its monitoring and moderation approaches and reporting templates since the first round of monitoring of the level 7 diplomas in 2016/2017.

The main difference is the closer alignment of the monitoring report to the programme approval and accreditation criteria, with an overall judgement of the extent to which a programme meets the criteria.

NZQA now moderates learner work as part of all programme monitoring activities and makes judgements based on whether the learner provides sufficient evidence of meeting the learning outcomes. This happens at the level of the component/programme module.

### **Alignment of assessment, learning outcomes and the graduate profile**

Assessment against learning outcomes that map to the graduate profile is central to assuring the quality and integrity of programmes.

In some cases, NZQA has identified new issues in the programme delivery or found that the outcome of moderation was different from previous monitoring activities.

## ***Assessment and moderation***

This section of the monitoring report addresses:

- assessment methodology and procedures
- authenticity
- moderation systems and processes
- the results of NZQA's moderation of a sample of assessed learner work.

## **Approved methods of assessment**

Most level 7 programmes that NZQA has monitored use an achievement/grade-based marking system. NZQA will approve programmes with assessments that are competency/standards-based or achievement/grade-based.

There must be clear guidance for the learner and assessor on the level of performance required to meet each learning outcome.

## **Expectations for achievement/grade-based assessment**

For achievement/grade-based assessment, NZQA moderators expect to see detailed criteria for each grade. The criteria for the minimum passing grade (typically a 'C-' or 50 per cent) must align with achieving the learning outcome(s) within that assessment(s).

Grades higher than a 'C' show work over and above what is needed to achieve each learning outcome.

## **Guidance on assessments for multiple learning outcomes**

If the assessment task covers multiple learning outcomes, the assessor must ensure that the learner evidence meets the minimum passing criteria for each learning outcome.

For instance, if an assessment covers three learning outcomes, a learner might do exceptionally well on two learning outcomes, achieve a mark of more than 50 per cent, but has not achieved the third learning outcome. This is not appropriate as students should not pass if they have not provided sufficient evidence for each of the learning outcomes being assessed.

## **Types of assessments used**

In the level 7 programmes NZQA monitored, assessment was comprised of two or three assessment tools for each programme component/module.

Most of these assessments were open book or written assignments, but there were occasional closed book tests or exams.

Presentations sometimes contributed to the final grade but more often they were part of a group assessment.

## **Group assessments**

Group assessments usually accounted for less than half of the final grade of a course/programme module.

In the programmes NZQA monitored, many assessments relied on the group producing a shared product such as report or a presentation. It is difficult to assess individual achievement of the learning outcomes in this context.

Three programmes used practical projects to assess learners. Different group members were allocated tasks which meant they demonstrated only some of the learning outcomes.

## Research and associated ethics

Most of the programmes requiring research activities involving people have an established process for applying for ethical approval of their research proposals.

## Authenticity

All TEOs delivering level 7 diplomas recognise that ensuring the authenticity of learner work is critical to the quality assurance process. All TEOs monitored had policies and established practices for detecting plagiarism and the increasing use of synonym-replacement software. TEOs see tutors as the best defence against plagiarism as they know a learner's strengths in their subject. Tutors also monitor a learner's participation and performance in class activities.

Many programmes rely on similarity comparison software to help the assessor detect plagiarism. However, ensuring authenticity of learner work is more than just identifying plagiarism. A TEO's policies and processes must include prevention as well as detection of academic dishonesty. None of the TEOs NZQA monitored had policies that explicitly referred to preventing and detecting contract cheating.

For further information on preventing and detecting academic dishonesty please see the [guide](#) on the NZQA website.

## Conditions for assessment, resubmission and reassessment

NZQA also considered conditions of assessment, including resubmission and reassessment, as part of the programme monitoring.

Issues raised in this area included:

- Group assessments that do not allow the individual to meet all of the learning outcomes independently.
- Too much time to complete the resubmission or reassessment.
- Multiple opportunities for resubmission, particularly when the first attempt was minimal.
- Giving learners back the same examination script to complete a resubmission for a closed book assessment.

## Moderation systems and processes

TEOs usually had policies and processes for programme moderation, but aspects were sometimes not operating during the monitoring or were not applied effectively.

These aspects included:

- No schedule for moderation.
- Some assessments being delivered without going through a pre-assessment moderation process.
- Moderation reports with limited feedback or that made no reference to the learning outcomes or effective assessment design.
- Moderation being carried out by non-subject specialists.
- No or limited post-assessment moderation being carried out.
- Moderation reports not filled out completely (such as names, signatures, dates).

- No action plans implemented and/or monitored as a result of moderation feedback.

The best moderation systems ensured that:

- assessment tools provided learners with the opportunity to meet all learning outcomes
- TEOs gather feedback on the clarity of instructions and the appropriate level of questions
- marking guidance was clear
- action plans arising from moderation reports were sufficiently detailed and monitored
- relevant staff received professional development.

### **NZQA moderation**

NZQA conducted moderation of a sample of marked learner work from each of the 16 programmes monitored. The purpose was to verify if learners deemed to have passed had supplied sufficient evidence to meet the learning outcomes being assessed.

Rates for agreement between the NZQA moderator and the TEO assessor ranged from 0 to 91 per cent for the programmes monitored with an average of 38 per cent.

The main reasons for not verifying assessor decisions include:

- Insufficient learner evidence to meet the learning outcomes.
- Learner work not at the required level. Examples of this include providing a description when the learning outcomes require critical analysis or providing a response that does not refer to the theoretical underpinning expected at level 7.
- Lack of academic writing conventions such as referencing.
- Poor English that inhibits the learner from demonstrating their understanding or meeting the requirements of the New Zealand industry context.

#### *Poor assessment practice*

Other issues of poor assessment practice noted by NZQA moderators include:

- Assessment tasks that do not allow the learner to meet the approved learning outcomes.
- Learners passing an assessment and/or module despite not meeting the minimum passing criteria for each learning outcome.
- Marking guidance that is not detailed enough to allow for consistent marking.
- Over-generous marking.
- Little constructive feedback by the assessor.
- Potential authenticity issues such as heavy reliance on published material or copying another learner's work.
- Reliance on publicly available information in a subject that requires much more detailed information – for example from inside the business.
- Undetected use of synonym replacement software, which in some cases made the learner's work meaningless.

#### *Good assessment practice*

One example of good assessment practice that NZQA noted was unifying two assessments by requiring the learner to extend their chosen context from the first assessment into the second assessment.

The focus of the learning outcomes was on the development from introductory to more advanced skills. Using the same context meant that the learner could focus their efforts where it was most needed rather than researching another context.

Another good practice example involved the TEO partnering with a business producing an automobile prototype. The business allowed learners to base their final/capstone projects on one element of the prototype.

Learners were assessed in a real-world context and designed solutions to match a design brief. The prototype was a large project, allowing learners to meet the learning outcomes individually, even while working as part of a group.

### ***Programme review***

This section of the monitoring report addresses the ongoing review of the programme and the TEO's self-assessment of the programme.

This is an area of concern for NZQA for level 7 diploma monitoring. Of the 11 programmes NZQA monitored against the programme review criteria, only one programme met the criteria.

Good practice suggests that TEOs review their programmes at least annually, though interim review activities may feed into the annual review. Review should be thorough, robust and systematically test that the approved programme is still fit-for-purpose and meeting the needs of stakeholders.

See [Programme approval and accreditation rules 2018](#) criteria 4.1.7 and 6.1.4 for the aspects that need to be reviewed.

### **Issues with programme review**

Programmes that did not meet the criteria for programme review failed to identify issues such as:

- unapproved changes made to the learning outcomes or delivery schedule
- lack of appropriate engagement with stakeholders
- assessments that did not assess all of the learning outcomes or produce learner work at the level of the programme
- whether the programme was producing graduates employable in jobs aligned to the graduate profile.

A significant part of programme review that was neglected or not documented sufficiently was developing action plans and monitoring the results of improvements.

Some of the graduate survey data supplied to NZQA could have better content and be in a more effective format. In some cases, NZQA was not sure how the TEO used the data to confirm the ongoing relevance of the programme.

When reviewing the programme, TEOs should specify the desired employment outcomes and compare these with the actual employment outcomes. NZQA expects that most of these outcomes will reflect the graduate profile rather than unrelated roles.

Consistency between different programme documents was an issue for approximately half of the programmes. Programme and student handbooks, course outlines and assessments should all reflect the approved programme. The annual programme review is a time to check the consistency between these documents.

### ***Programme structure and delivery***

This section of the monitoring report addresses:

- learning outcomes
- delivery methods
- programme length
- learning hours.

When delivering an applied or highly practical programme it is good practice to give learners the opportunity to actually apply those skills. Good examples of this in the programmes NZQA monitored include practical “lab” sessions, projects, industry simulation activities, and field trips.

Timetabled hours in class may include lectures, tutorials or practicals, but these should also consider learner needs. Two TEOs delivered programmes in a compressed format and several more programmes had long blocks of class time, with or without formal breaks. Learners commented that they struggled to stay motivated and engaged during these long sessions.

Most of the programmes effectively supported learners with structured activities and set readings to complete outside of class time. This was actively monitored by follow-up activities in class or through online learning management systems.

### **Changes to programmes**

Changes to programmes are a natural outcome of programme review: i.e. reviewing the programme learning outcomes. Over time learning outcomes may be refined, combined or not needed.

NZQA must be notified of any changes to approved learning outcomes to ensure the programme still allows the learner to meet the graduate profile.

Six of the programmes monitored contained unapproved changes to the learning outcomes or programme structure.

### ***Programme regulations***

This section of the report addresses the regulations and how they are applied for:

- admission
- credit recognition and transfer
- recognition of prior learning
- integration of practical and work-based components
- normal progression within the programme.

Quality Management Systems and programme handbooks almost always provided sufficient policies and procedures in these areas.

However, not all TEOs monitored had effective systems that ensured these regulations were applied appropriately.

### **Ensuring admission processes are robust**

Looking at samples of learner enrolment files highlighted that many IELTS tests and qualification documents were not certified copies or verified.

Some TEOs accepted documents that did not meet the entry requirements: three TEOs breached NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rule 18, English language requirements for international students, and twice as many TEOs accepted learners that had not met the academic entry requirements.

Level 7 diplomas are a highly specialised and technical field of study so only learners that demonstrate the prerequisite knowledge and skill level should be admitted into a programme. This gives learners the highest chance of success.

NZQA recommends that TEOs monitor and review their admission processes regularly.

### **Using credit recognition and transfer and recognition of prior learning**

Credit recognition and transfer (CRT) was not used in any of the programmes NZQA monitored.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) was used in a small number of programmes.

NZQA reviewed a sample of the evidence collected to award recognition alongside the relevant policy and process. None of the samples NZQA sighted included sufficient evidence that the learner had met the learning outcomes of the programme they were seeking recognition for.

- Evidence for RPL must include mapping the current programme learning outcomes to the learning outcomes at the correct level on the NZQF that learners have previously achieved.
- The mapping should be supported by a portfolio of work and/or be verified by professional conversation/learner interview.
- All acceptable evidence should be held in the learner's academic file.

Guidance on recognising learning and awarding credit is available on the [NZQA website](#).

### **Practical and work-based learning**

Practical components of programmes were separated from theoretical studies: i.e. different sessions and rooms in the timetable. This is highly appropriate as often learners need specialist equipment to practice with.

Work-based learning was rare in the programmes monitored. Only two of the monitored programmes contained a work-based learning component.

NZQA found during the monitoring that work-based learning in a learner's own workplace can be problematic: i.e. when the roles and responsibilities as a learner are not distinguished from the role of an employee. This particularly applied to learners who may be employed in an entry-level position but the learning outcomes they needed to meet in the work-based learning context were managerial or strategic levels.

In one example of good practice for work-based learning, the TEO carefully vetted each workplace, then fully discussed the expectations of the workplace and the learners before signing a memorandum of understanding. A placement coordinator visited each learner during the placement on a weekly basis and communicated with the workplace manager and learners to ensure the process was actively monitored.

Normal progression within the programme was ensured in the programmes monitored. The programmes clearly indicated compulsory and self-selection courses and the prerequisites for some modules (such as capstone modules or final projects).

## **Resources**

This section of the monitoring report addresses:

- academic staffing and professional development
- teaching or learning facilities
- educational resources
- student support.

### **Issues with academic staff**

The biggest area of concern was the academic staffing for half of the level 7 diploma programmes NZQA monitored. All teaching and assessment for level 7 programmes should be conducted by sufficiently experienced and qualified staff ([PTE Registration Rules 2018](#)).

This means:

- having a qualification at level 8 or above in the subject they are teaching
- having or be in the process of completing an adult education qualification
- experience working in the relevant industry.

A significant number of TEOs employed staff without the above qualifications and staff were often required to teach outside of the subject area of their level 8 qualification: for example, an accounting specialist teaching marketing.

The depth of knowledge and level of engagement required at level 7 means teaching staff must have a specialised qualification. Otherwise they cannot assist learners to meet the learning outcomes of level 7 diplomas.

### **Providing professional development**

It is reasonable that staff should expect support and encouragement from their employers to develop their capabilities as teachers.

Staff who NZQA interviewed spoke highly of their employers' investment in professional development. Some employers provide in-house or external professional development programmes and/or courses. Others also pay for teachers to complete adult education qualifications.

This support could be expanded to help teachers develop links with industry to draw on current trends and practice and gain more practical/work experience. This was often a gap in staff expertise.

### **Providing student support**

Resourcing of student support was consistently good across all programmes NZQA monitored.

Students were supported before starting on the programme, took part in an orientation programme for a few days or week at the start of the programme and were given ongoing pastoral support.

Some TEOs also offered academic writing, English language support and career guidance to students outside of the programme requirements.

### **Providing appropriate facilities and resources**

Teaching and learning facilities and education resources were also appropriate for the programmes NZQA monitored.

NZQA notes TEOs are increasingly using online learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle to facilitate learning in and out of class. An LMS can be used to:

- share learning resources
- facilitate learning activities (such as quizzes and discussion forums)
- track student participation and engagement.

NZQA also notes that campus libraries are decreasing in favour of resources provided through community or shared university libraries.

TEOs are giving learners access to peer-reviewed journal articles through these facilities or independently for the programme. This is a vital aspect of study at this level.

## ***Appendix 1: Top tips from the 2018 level 7 programme monitoring activities***

- 1.** Recruit experienced and qualified staff to teach and assess on level 7 diploma programmes.
- 2.** Implement internal moderation systems, with qualified staff quality assuring assessment materials and verifying learner achievement.
- 3.** Conduct thorough and critical programme review to ensure programmes meet learner expectations and the graduate profile, including relevant employment outcomes.
- 4.** Ensure that the focus is on learning outcomes and NZQF level when designing assessments, quality assuring assessment materials and marking learner work.
- 5.** Implement robust RPL processes to ensure there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the learner meets the programme learning outcomes.
- 6.** Monitor the application of admission/entry criteria and provide more guidance if needed. This will ensure the learners who are admitted into a programme have the greatest chance of success.
- 7.** Use a broad range of prevention (as well as detection) strategies to ensure learners maintain academic honesty.
- 8.** Provide detailed formative feedback to learners, including on the quality of academic writing and English use.