

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Open Polytechnic

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 14 March 2012

Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Introduction	3
1. TEO in context.....	3
2. Scope of external evaluation and review	5
3. Conduct of external evaluation and review.....	6
Summary of Results	7
Findings	11
Recommendations	31
Appendix	32

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Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.

Introduction

1. TEO in context

Location:	Cleary Street, Lower Hutt
Type:	Polytechnic
Number of students:	Domestic: 28,764, or 5,921 equivalent full-time students (EFTS) (Annual Report 2010) International: 77 students, enrolled in 175 courses over 35 programmes
Number of staff:	441 staff (Annual Report 2010)
Scope of active accreditation:	The Open Polytechnic offers programmes from levels 1-7 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. The Open Polytechnic holds accreditation/recognition from the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants (NZICA) for its Chartered Accountant and Associate Chartered Accountant recognised programmes; from CPA Australia for the accounting major of the Bachelor of Business; from the Institute of Professional Engineers New Zealand (IPENZ) for its Bachelor of Engineering Technology (Civil Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering); and from the Library and Information Association of New Zealand (LIANZA) for the Information and Library Studies programme, including the Bachelor of Applied Science (Information and Library Studies); the New Zealand Teachers Council for its Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) and the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education). All of the Open Polytechnic's degrees have accreditation from NZQA or ITP Quality.

Sites:	In addition to its main campus, the Open Polytechnic has learning centres in Auckland and Christchurch.
Distinctive characteristics:	The Open Polytechnic is an open and distance learning provider of courses and programmes from levels 1-7, with the learning materials being provided in print and, increasingly, online.
Recent significant changes:	A recent restructuring of the executive management team aims to provide greater focus, cohesion, and integration of effort in the Open Polytechnic's strategic direction of continuing to excel as New Zealand's leader in open and distance vocational learning and being responsive to new learning needs and opportunities.
Previous quality assurance history:	ITP Quality conducted a full academic quality audit of the Open Polytechnic in December 2006 and, as a result, awarded the Open Polytechnic Quality Assured status for a further period of four years. Eleven good practices were identified and eight recommendations were made in the report. No corrective actions were required. A Mid-Term Quality Review conducted in May 2009 found that the Open Polytechnic was using effective self-assessment/evaluation, internal audit, and review processes to help maintain quality consistent with its Quality Assured status. ITP Quality endorsed the Open Polytechnic's Quality Assured status.
Other:	Students enrolled in online and distance programmes at the Open Polytechnic are almost all part-time and already in employment, and generally are mature students. Consequently, the number and proportion of under 25-year-old students is low. Participant characteristics are, therefore, different to those typical of New Zealand polytechnics and institutes of technology.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

2.1 Programme focus areas

Programmes chosen were drawn from a number of levels, from certificates to degrees, to be representative of the Open Polytechnic's three schools, its course and qualification completion characteristics (Table 1), and to show a range between recently developed and long-standing programmes and modes of delivery (e.g. distance or online). Programmes selected involve 40 per cent of the Open Polytechnic's students and EFTS, and the distribution of participant characteristics in the programmes selected is generally similar to that of the organisation overall (Table 2).

School	Programme	NZQA Level	Delivery ¹	No. of EFTS	2010 data	
					Completions	
					Course	Qual.
School of Business	National Certificate in Financial Services (Financial Advice) ²	5	P, O	335	61%	NEW
	National Certificate in Real Estate (Salesperson) ²	4	P	496	50%	NEW
School of Information and Social Sciences	Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology major) ³	5-7	P	277	70%	41%
	Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) ⁴	7	P, C	100	74%	NEW
	Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)	7	P,C	426	78%	74%
School of Workplace Learning	Certificate in Foundation Communications ⁵	1	P, C	168	69%	69%
	Certificate in Career and Self-Development ⁵	1	P, C	157	58%	53%
	National Certificate in Pharmacy (Technician)	5	P	94	83%	73%

¹ P – print-based distance; C – contact (“ face-to-face”); O – online
² New programme
³ There are underpinning diplomas to this degree
⁴ The degree was new in 2010, replacing the diploma; data is indicative for 2011; the diploma is included for comparison
⁵ Included in cluster of programmes

	Participant characteristics			Programme level, by EFTS				
	Under 25	Māori	Pasifika	L1-L2	L3-L4	L5	L6	L7
Sampled programmes	18%	11%	9%	14%	22%	26%	3%	35%
Institute overall 2010	21%	15%	8%	17%	24%	15%	18%	26%

2.2 Institute-wide focus areas

Agreed areas of focus across the Open Polytechnic were:

- Learning and Teaching Solutions (a business unit within the Open Polytechnic)
- Organisational Improvement (a cross-polytechnic staff group)
- Student support.

2.3 Mandatory focus areas

- Achievement and academic support of international students (included in student support, 2.2 above)
- Governance and management.

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the document Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>

The external evaluation and review was conducted by a lead evaluator and three external evaluators over a five-day period at the Lower Hutt campus of the Open Polytechnic.

Evaluative conversations were held with the executive management team, representatives of the Open Polytechnic Council, senior managers and staff of relevant service areas, programme leaders, teaching staff, and students. These conversations were complemented by discussions with members of advisory committees and employers of graduates in the focus areas. Some of these conversations were conducted by telephone with individual students/stakeholders, or by teleconference.

The Open Polytechnic has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and submissions received were fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of the **Open Polytechnic**.

Students value the flexibility of distance and online learning and the choice available in accessing the support services available at the Open Polytechnic. Students recognised the value of the programmes in maintaining their current occupation (particularly where there are new or changing requirements to meet changing industry standards or Government legislation), and/or enhancing their employment prospects. A 2010 Colmar Brunton survey¹ indicated that two-thirds of students believed employers would value the qualification they achieved. In support of the survey results, a student commented: “The course backs up the skills I have acquired at work and helps with my job every day”. Stakeholders provided consistent feedback to the evaluation team that the programmes were well tailored to industry needs; furthermore, there was evidence of linkages to industry training organisations (ITOs) and industry groups which had enabled timely and appropriate development and revision of programmes to ensure their currency and that they meet employment and legislative requirements.

Distance and online learning materials provided by the Open Polytechnic are considered by students and external stakeholders to be of high quality. The Colmar Brunton survey indicates that 64 per cent of the students rated the learning materials as either excellent or very good, the course materials being particularly well rated in terms of “being presented professionally”. Tutors and mentors who used the materials commented favourably on the resources and, where provided, also appreciated guidelines for their use of the materials. External stakeholders were consulted during development of the content of the learning materials and explicitly praised their appropriateness.

Students are supported in their use of these online and distance learning materials by interaction with tutors at the Open Polytechnic and, in some programmes, with adjunct tutors in their places of employment. More general learning support is also provided by the polytechnic’s services such as the library and the Learning Centre. Prompt contact by the polytechnic with students after enrolment by telephone (“welcome calls”) and regular contact with them during the course has already been shown by the Open Polytechnic’s Strategy and Analysis Group to increase student retention, with likely improvement in course completions; a specific example is the Oscar course.² In essence, the Open Polytechnic is complementing its highly regarded online and distance learning materials by “contact”, both generally and in specific courses, as a deliberate strategy to enhance course and qualification completion rates.

¹ Open Polytechnic Kuratini Tuwhera Student Satisfaction 2010, Colmar Brunton (December 2010). The survey had a response rate of 21 per cent, i.e. 2,109 respondents from 10,223 invitations to participate.

² Out of School Care and Recreation Certificate (Level 4)

The Open Polytechnic's course completion rates (62 per cent in 2009, 63 per cent in 2010) are lower than the median of other New Zealand polytechnics and institutes of technology (70 per cent in 2009), but are similar to other online and distance education providers, which are typically 20 per cent lower than for providers delivering courses face to face.³ This difference in learner achievement has been attributed by the Open Polytechnic to the very different characteristics and needs of students learning from online and distance materials (generally part-time, mature age, and already in employment) from those students being taught at "contact" institutions (generally full-time, with a higher proportion of students under 25 years of age). However, in order to ensure that programmes match the needs of learners, the Open Polytechnic has introduced contact workshops and other face-to-face mentoring to complement its online and distance learning materials in some courses and programmes. This has been done particularly in those courses and programmes where completions have been historically low, or those in which either the nature of the course or its participants (e.g. students in foundation programmes, with limited literacy and numeracy) indicates that contact teaching would be beneficial.

While qualification completion rates at the Open Polytechnic have been low (21 per cent in 2009) in comparison with the sector median (51 per cent in 2009), this reflects an historic emphasis, both by students and the Open Polytechnic, on completing courses that met short-term educational or professional development needs or employment aspirations. In accordance with Government expectations for tertiary education, the Open Polytechnic has recently implemented a strategy to shift its emphasis from course completions to qualification completions. This strategy involves a combination of semesterising courses, reducing the number of courses in which a student enrolls in a given semester, and ensuring structured and regular contact with students to foster retention in study. By these means and improved administrative processes, the qualification completion rate in 2010 increased to 33 per cent.

Many students (70 per cent) at the Open Polytechnic are already employed, and the Colmar Brunton survey indicates that a significant proportion of students believe that their study and qualifications will be of value and relevance to their future employers and will improve their employment prospects and personal growth. The proportion of students with this perception in 2010 was slightly lower than in previous years. An online graduate destination survey is being implemented which has the potential to triangulate with this perception.

³ For example, the course completion rate for Massey University's online and distance provision is 60 per cent, and for its face-to-face provision is 80 per cent. From: *Educational Performance Indicators for ODL Institutions*, Open Polytechnic of NZ (March 2010).

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Open Polytechnic**.

At the organisational level and in business units that extend across the organisation, especially Student Support and Learning and Teaching Solutions, self-assessment is systematic and involves ongoing, robust analysis of data. However, while guidelines for the preparation of the Open Polytechnic's Annual Programme Evaluation Reports (APERs) are based on the NZQA tools for evaluation and have a strong self-assessment focus, most of the reports did not reflect the same level of analysis and evaluative thinking as those of the central units. A report compiled from the APERs and presented to the Open Polytechnic's academic board in June 2011 reported themes and trends in performance improvement across the programmes offered by the Open Polytechnic, and evidence of increasing capability in self-assessment.

There is considerable informal reflection by tutors and programme staff, and there is anecdotal evidence that this is used to make improvements to learning materials and, where appropriate, to workshops and other contact activities associated with courses. The content of courses and programmes is continually updated as a result of staff and student feedback, as well as consultation with advisory committees, relevant ITOs, and government agencies as appropriate. Examples of changes to programmes resulting from needs assessment include the replacement of a three-year diploma in early childhood education with a degree, and the continual improvement of pharmacy and psychology programmes to ensure the programmes respond to industry changes and the needs of learners. Internal and external moderation reports also inform self-assessment at the programme level.

A recent measure of the effectiveness of the Open Polytechnic's ability to balance innovation and continuity has been its ability to respond nimbly to the educational opportunities provided by changes in Government legislation in respect of financial advisors and real estate salespeople. New programmes were developed in a timely way that not only reflected the changed legal requirements but also introduced greater professionalism to these occupations, which was recognised by students and by industry stakeholders. These changes were made as a result of a self-assessment process that entailed working with the relevant industries and ITOs to identify regulatory changes (e.g. in financial management and real estate programmes) and modifying courses and programmes as a result.

The Open Polytechnic's executive team is focused on the goal of being a pre-eminent provider of open and distance tertiary education, embracing new methods of programme delivery and student support through the effective use of technology that enhances the student experience. Changes are implemented at senior levels of the organisation, having regard to international research and after local modelling of the effects of the proposed changes. Lifting student educational achievement is a clear priority of the executive and council, and it is clear that self-assessment that identifies further improvements in the design of learning materials, the online and contact support (e.g. enrolment and follow-up processes, subsequent contact with students) and the interaction between students, staff, and stakeholders (including wider use of online techniques) is directed to that end. The organisation has been very systematic in gaining feedback from employers, starting at the

programme development stage. The graduate destination survey has been implemented and there is confidence that this will provide increased data about graduate outcomes which will be useful in the future and will complement the detailed information about the Open Polytechnic's learners which is already collected and used in self-assessment activities.

TEO response

The Open Polytechnic disagrees with the EER's final statement of Confident in educational performance. It also considers that the recommendations, if followed, are unlikely to lead to a change in performance which would lead to a statement of Highly Confident in educational performance.

Findings⁴

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

International benchmarking indicates that course completion rates at the Open Polytechnic (62 per cent in 2009, 63 per cent in 2010) are comparable to or slightly exceed those achieved by other distance and online education providers. For example, for first-time students, the course completion rate at Open Polytechnic (62 per cent) exceeds that of the Open University in the United Kingdom (59 per cent); for returning students, the course completion rate at Open Polytechnic (72 per cent) also exceeds that of the Open University (69 per cent).⁵ Within New Zealand, course completion rates at the Open Polytechnic are comparable to those offered by distance through Massey University. Course completion rates at the Open Polytechnic (62 per cent in 2009) are lower than the median of other New Zealand polytechnics (70 per cent in 2009), consistent with the difference in course completions between Massey University's distance and face-to-face provision, and that shown in a Canadian study.⁶ Given that qualification completion rates are generally lower than course completion rates, qualification completion rates at the Open Polytechnic (21 per cent in 2009, 33 per cent in 2010) are, as anticipated, also low in comparison with the median for other New Zealand polytechnics (51 per cent).

The Open Polytechnic delivers vocational qualifications, including degrees (e.g. early childhood and psychology) and diplomas and certificates (e.g. in financial services and real estate). However, there is a tension between the Government's desire for increased qualification completions and the value of qualifications to those Open Polytechnic learners who have traditionally enrolled in particular courses to meet employment-related objectives. The Open Polytechnic recognises the need to balance these two factors. For example, changes have been made in the time allocated to students to complete courses, as well as to the number of courses a student enrolls in for a given trimester. Modelling of these changes suggests that over the next few years, higher course and qualification completion rates will be achieved and thereby better meet the expectations of Government stakeholders.

In addition, measures to foster student retention are being implemented through a greater use of telephone and email contact with students, which will monitor progress and facilitate

⁴ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

⁵ Gibbs, G., Regan, P., & Simpson, O. (2006-2007). Improving student retention through evidence-based proactive systems at the Open University (UK). *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(3), 359.

⁶ Anderson, T., Annand, A., & Wark, N. (2005). The search for learning community in learner-paced distance education programming or "Having your cake and eating it too". *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 21(3), 222-241.

the provision of learning support as required. Students have been surveyed on the value to them of these contact initiatives, and their effectiveness will become apparent during the ongoing monitoring of student achievement and its reporting. In addition, self-assessment in 2010 by the newly appointed senior management team showed that the Open Polytechnic's first-time enrolled students have a 17 per cent less chance of success in their study, either through withdrawal or failure in courses, than those who have previously studied with the Open Polytechnic. Workshops with new students, facilitated by learning advisors, are already contributing to a reduction in the rate of withdrawal and academic failure.

Features of the self-assessment regime overseen by members of the executive team include: monitoring the Open Polytechnic's own experiences and using the data – together with information from online and distance learning providers overseas – to assess the likely effects of changes; and “dashboard” reporting of the effects of implemented changes.

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

As a national provider, the Open Polytechnic has excellent linkages with relevant ITOs (e.g. Pharmacy ITO) and national bodies (e.g. for real estate, psychology, and early childhood education programmes), which contribute to its ability to offer courses and programmes that are valued highly by industry, employers, and learners and are responsive to changes in legislation. These external stakeholders and participating students spoke highly of the value of these developments to the industries concerned, including the greater professionalism being introduced into programmes. In times of rapid change, the nimbleness of response to legislative change, in respect of the financial management and real estate industries, is certain to be noticed by Government stakeholders.

The continual self-assessment of the programmes, in which the involvement of advisory committees and industry representatives is pivotal, ensures that the value to external stakeholders is maintained. The value to students, particularly in retaining and gaining employment, is currently assessed through the Colmar Brunton survey and, anecdotally, through comments made online; and, in the future, through the graduate destination survey.

In some programmes, adjunct tutors, graduates of programmes, and sometimes even the students themselves have built or contributed to networks of professional practitioners, and these are valued in local communities. As another example, in the foundation programmes presented to students by community-based coaches, the evaluation team heard evidence from advisory group members and coaches that the students are developing a hunger for further education and are valued as positive educational role models by their families, church groups, and communities. Many students were reported as progressing to other education and training opportunities, although not necessarily with the Open Polytechnic, and the collection of systematic – rather than anecdotal – evidence for this progression is envisaged. The value of programmes represented by the extent of progression to higher

qualifications was also present in the psychology programmes, where all graduates who applied for acceptance into higher qualifications were successful. Moreover, all were involved in the research community, with two being accepted into doctoral programmes.

1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

Students at the Open Polytechnic are often attracted to online and distance learning because of the advantage of being able to fit it around employment and other activities. The fact that the demographic distribution of students reflects that of the population (including 30 per cent in Auckland) suggests that the Open Polytechnic is chosen because online and distance learning matches the needs of learners; it is not chosen as a polytechnic “of last resort” because no other learning opportunities are available. The Open Polytechnic has found that some students perform better educationally where there is contact with the organisation, either via telephone or email, and that these interventions or other course-related activities encourage retention and progression. The Open Polytechnic has good systems for tracking the effectiveness of these types of interventions and develops profiles of its students in an attempt to ensure that any such interventions are targeted at those who would benefit. As a specific example, the redesign of the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) included bicultural elements to ensure the degree programme continued to meet the needs of Māori and Pasifika students, and simultaneously conformed to the philosophy of Te Whariki, the curriculum framework for early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. More generally, the Open Polytechnic has recognised the need to engage with Māori students on the basis of whanaungatanga as a complement to study skills development through its Study Wise online workshop. Already opportunities are being provided for students to engage with other Māori and Pasifika learners.

The Open Polytechnic responded quickly to changes in Government legislation in respect of financial advisers and real estate salespeople, developing programmes that not only reflect the changed legal requirements, but also introduce greater professionalism to these occupations. Less spectacularly, but equally importantly, programmes are revised continually to meet the changing requirements and expectations of industry. Examples include: the replacement of the Diploma in Early Childhood Education with a degree that prepares graduates for entry into a profession in which standards are being raised and which has an expectation of subsequent postgraduate study; the re-organisation of pharmacy training in association with the Pharmacy ITO; and – for the Open Polytechnic’s diploma and degree programmes in psychology – an active programme of stakeholder engagement complemented by a graduate destination survey for this particular programme.

Students are generally already in employment and undertake courses and qualifications in order to maintain or improve employment prospects. They were well aware of the value to them of achieving qualifications that reflect current industry needs, professional body registration requirements, and changes to legislation. The Open Polytechnic is currently

implementing an online graduate destination survey for all graduates in order to acquire more comprehensive information about the longer-term outcomes of students' education.

The Open Polytechnic has a project-management approach to developing its online and distance learning courses and programmes. This involves in-depth consultation with industry and employers as well as academic staff from other educational organisations, including universities where appropriate. The needs analysis undertaken as part of programme development and review also involves the relevant ITO. The consequence of this approach is that the Open Polytechnic has been able to be responsive to industry needs, and particularly when changes are needed as a result of political decisions (e.g. financial management), changing regulations (e.g. pharmacy, real estate), and changing Government and societal expectations (e.g. real estate, early childhood education). The Open Polytechnic has demonstrated that it has excellent systems in place for matching the needs of its stakeholders, even when those needs change, sometimes at short notice. As noted previously in regard to these vocational qualifications, matching the needs of professional bodies and industry is a major component of also matching learners' needs.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

Teaching and learning in an open and distance environment is a different experience for learners who have been used to more traditional models. The bringing together of subject specialists in faculty and instructional designers in the Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS) group generates learning materials that are well received by students and praised by the adjunct tutors and coaches in programmes where they are used alongside contact teaching. The annual Colmar Brunton survey of students indicated that in 2010, 64 per cent of students rated course materials overall as excellent or very good, with the materials being well rated (at 65 per cent) in both "being presented professionally" and "being relevant to their goals". Moreover, the fact that the success rates of Open Polytechnic's students are comparable to other online and distance learning providers provides strong independent evidence that the quality of the learning constitutes highly effective teaching.

It is important to recognise that the success of online and distance learning is critically dependent on the quality of instructional/educational materials. LTS has an engagement model which enables the expertise of instructional design, media design, and information technology to complement the subject-specific knowledge of academic staff.

Teaching/tutorial staff engage with their students in a very different way from that typical of polytechnics delivering courses face-to-face. The engagement is heavily focused on supporting students in their understanding of the learning materials.

A well-managed process ensures that feedback from teachers is incorporated into the process of revision of learning materials by LTS. The annual Colmar Brunton survey indicates high levels of satisfaction with the learning support provided by tutors: 65 per cent of students rate their tutor as very good or excellent and 36 per cent give an excellent rating. LTS also obtains feedback directly from learners which contributes to its self-assessment

and the regular professional development of LTS staff and hence improvements in the learning materials. Institutional research on the characteristics of successful learners also informs these processes.

Although many courses continue to be offered using print-based material, the Open Polytechnic requires its students at level 5 and above to access learning materials online. The development of the “Online Campus” enables students to submit assessments online, as well as to give and receive feedback on the content of the courses and on the student experience. The Open Polytechnic offers some blended programmes that combine paper-based and online components, e.g. the National Certificate in Financial Services (Financial Advice). In some programmes (e.g. foundation courses), distance and/or online learning is complemented by face-to-face tutorial assistance. Such programmes provide clear evidence of the Open Polytechnic’s determination to adapt its online and distance learning approaches to better meet the needs of learners where appropriate.

As indicated above, the annual Colmar Brunton survey provides feedback on the quality of the learning materials as well as the support provided by the tutors. There is also evidence of tutors and teachers reflecting on teaching strategies, and support is provided for academic staff to acquire teaching or e-learning qualifications. However, there is little evidence of systematic evaluation of the quality of teaching activities undertaken by the teachers themselves.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

Support for student learning takes a variety of forms: course information and enrolment advice, phone and email contact between students and tutors, advice about books and online resources from the library, and assistance from the Learning Centre.

After making enquiries about their programme, 80 per cent of students were satisfied with the timeliness of response, according to the annual Colmar Brunton survey. After enrolment, 55 per cent of students were contacted within seven days, meeting 51 per cent of students’ expectations in this regard. The most highly regarded post-enrolment assistance to students was being provided with feedback on progress, with 83 per cent of those who received this assistance saying it was extremely or very important for the continuation of their studies. Similarly, contact calls designed to foster continued student engagement with their learning were well received by many students, although surveys about this activity indicated that some students do not want to be contacted by the Open Polytechnic in this way.

The evaluation team received many positive comments about these centrally provided services. These comments were supported by evidence from the annual Colmar Brunton survey that rated the service provided by the library very highly: 89 per cent of users rated it either excellent or very good, with 65 per cent rating it excellent. Of those students who used the Learning Centre, 63 per cent rated the services received as excellent or very good.

The Learning Centre is available for direct calls up to 9.00pm on four evenings a week, after which calls are diverted to a 24-hour call centre and referred the following morning either to staff in the Learning Centre or to teaching staff.

In response to feedback from Māori and Pasifika students, a Māori office has been established and this is supported by initiatives to enable Māori students to relate to each other on the basis of whanaungatanga, as well as to assist the student academically.

There is increasing emphasis on enhancing the engagement of students with the Open Polytechnic through the provision of online services (e.g. online forums, results online, and information about progress), and investment in the analysis of student use of the Open Polytechnic's Online Campus website. Continuing analysis is undertaken, which will undoubtedly include an understanding of the trends in the use of Online Campus. The Colmar Brunton survey reported a decrease in the use of Online Campus in 2010, with 57 per cent of students visiting the site (down from 60 per cent in 2009). The survey included questions relating to satisfaction with the site for those who had visited it, and for those who had not, the reasons why. The satisfaction with the site was high in 2010, and higher than in 2009. Most of those who had not visited the site had not felt the need to do so, with a smaller proportion being unaware of its existence. Changes to the site were made in 2010 in response to feedback, and the effectiveness of the changes will be evident in the 2011 Colmar Brunton survey.

Sixty-five per cent of students rated their tutor as excellent or very good in the Colmar Brunton survey, but support provided to learners appeared rather more variable at the level of the individual programmes evaluated as part of this EER. Nevertheless, regional tutors in the early childhood education degree were spoken of very highly, as were the community coaches in the foundation programmes. There was also increasing use of student study plans in which the recommended sequence of courses to complete a programme of study are provided to students by programme and student advisors. Student feedback confirmed the value of this process, and this intervention is said to be playing a significant role in lifting student achievement.

Students can provide feedback about courses online, and some use is made of this in self-assessment of some courses. Although there is currently no central database for systematic analysis of this feedback, a central evaluator coordinator position has been established to undertake this activity.

1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

Over the last two years, the Open Polytechnic has undergone a period of rapid change, with a new executive team and council quickly establishing themselves as effective management and governance bodies respectively.

The Open Polytechnic has adopted a strategic plan which identifies four key focuses: academic portfolio, financial and funding performance, student demographics, and educational performance. The council is focussed on raising educational performance, particularly through raising qualification completions. The recently appointed management team has implemented self-assessment practices, including monitoring of progress towards the key shifts in performance which it has set out to achieve. The culture of self-assessment is strong in the central units of the organisation. It is robust and systematic, with a planned cycle of self-assessments until 2014. This is supplemented by a schedule of evaluations – based on NZQA’s key evaluation questions – with a whole-of-organisation focus. A large amount of continuous monitoring and evaluation takes place in the central units, including the library, Enrolment, Logistics, and Learning Support, where all efforts are aimed at improving the learner experience.

The guidelines for the Annual Programme Evaluation Reports (APERs) are based on the NZQA EER tools for evaluation and have a strong self-assessment focus. All of the 2010 APERs were presented at a two-day academic board workshop in late May, when each programme leader was also interviewed by the academic board. The reports and interviews were then analysed by the Quality and Academic Development division, and a report presented to the academic board in June 2011. The report identified common themes and trends across the polytechnic in performance improvement and provides evidence of increasing capability in self-assessment.

The continued use of templates in the annual programme evaluations and a clearly articulated programme of training in the key evaluation questions (including a self-test on self-assessment on the Open Polytechnic’s intranet) foreshadows a more consistently applied evaluative approach being adopted across every programme within a four-year period. The current excellence of the approach to self-assessment practised by the Open Polytechnic’s governance and management will then be matched at all levels in the organisation.

Programmes appear well resourced, and there are good mechanisms in place to prioritise competing needs of programme development and review.

Focus Areas

This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.

2.1 Focus area: National Certificate in Real Estate (Salesperson)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Adequate**.

This programme was developed in response to legislative changes relating to the real estate industry. The Real Estate Agents Authority confirmed that the programme is meeting expectations relating to legislative requirements. Feedback from graduates spoken with, and confirmed by information collected by programme staff, was positive about the value of the outcomes in informing their practice, particularly in residential real estate. Students have been enrolled from August 2010; as at March 2011, 64 per cent of those who had enrolled in August 2010 had successfully completed their qualification.

Students can undertake the programme using the learning materials alone, or they can attend classes or learn using a mixture of both. Students acknowledged the excellent support of staff involved with the programme; there is regular contact with the students by staff, encouraging them to seek support as necessary. Responses to queries were prompt and assignments were marked and returned in a timely way.

Members of the real estate industry advisory group expressed the view that the new course is far superior to the former programme and is attracting a higher calibre of person to the industry than formerly. Students interviewed noted that the new programme was practical in its approach, made them more knowledgeable on important issues, and gave them the confidence to approach senior colleagues on matters relating to legal requirements.

There are strong relationships with industry, which ensures the programme meets current legal requirements and is relevant to the industry. It is clear that student feedback, external moderation, and feedback from industry organisations all contribute to continual self-assessment of the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of the programme and the learning materials. Peer teaching and peer observation of class teaching provide opportunities for evaluation of teaching quality, and teaching staff are encouraged to undertake professional development towards an educational qualification and are required to spend a week in industry each year. That said, there seems to be little systematic collection and analysis of self-assessment data to improve the quality of teaching or the effectiveness of student support.

2.2 Focus area: National Certificate in Financial Services (Financial Advice)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Adequate**.

This qualification was introduced in 2010. It is highly valued by the industry and the Open Polytechnic was highly responsive in meeting industry needs by developing the course to market in order to meet the regulations that required financial advisors to become “authorised” by 1 July 2011. The programme is moderated by the multi-industry training organisation, the ElectroTechnology ITO, which also retains responsibility for assessing five of the unit standards included. The Open Polytechnic has close relationships with the industry, the industry’s professional body, and the ITO.

High levels of achievement (82-92 per cent course completions) were gained for the first three months of enrolments in the programme; the EFTS-weighted course completion rate in 2010 was 61 per cent. However, changes made by the Government meant that many of those initially enrolled no longer were required to obtain the qualification; this is inferred to have caused a large attrition rate which negatively affected the completion data. It is important to note that this development was outside of the control of the Open Polytechnic, i.e. the overwhelming majority of withdrawals were caused by legislative change. As currently offered, the programme continues to meet the requirements of the legislation, but fewer workers in financial advisor roles are required to undertake the programme than originally envisaged.

Teaching materials are of high quality. The Open Polytechnic has responded well to learner preferences by providing print or online resources. The Online Campus is seen by students as helpful, as are the online student handbooks. Many students were very anxious about returning to study as they had not studied for many years. This anxiety was compounded by the fact that their jobs were at risk if they did not complete the qualification. The Open Polytechnic responded to the needs of these students by ensuring that adequate support was provided in the workplace as well as by providing encouragement on an individual basis.

While it is still early in the delivery of the programme, there has been good monitoring of learner achievement. Anecdotal feedback is received by tutors, although it is not well analysed. Some early problems were identified with the web portal and improvements have been made. Learners are now able to see their own progress, including results online. The use of online assessments is receiving continued attention in response to some learners noting that the assessments are too easy and others commenting that the lack of feedback did not assist their learning.

Learners can submit feedback via the Online Campus, and the Colmar Brunton survey also seeks learner feedback, although it is not programme-specific. The collection and analysis of data at programme level is not well focussed on outcomes. This was evident in the APER report for this programme, which was heavily focussed on inputs rather than reaching evaluative conclusions consistent with the Open Polytechnic’s APER reporting guidelines.

2.3 Focus area: Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) (superseding the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education))

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

Stakeholders hold this newly offered degree in very high regard. It has been developed to meet a national need and therefore has a pedagogy that expedites its effectiveness in relating to all regions and communities. It effectively builds on the already excellent outcomes from the diploma by preparing students for postgraduate study and leadership roles.

Learning materials are of high quality and complemented by the use of a blended delivery approach which complements the normal range of learning materials with facilitated online forums, workshops, practicums, and noho marae (the evaluations of which have high response rates). This combination contributes strongly to learner achievement and is considered by stakeholders as being an excellent way of making the programme accessible to a wide range of learners wanting more flexible study options, e.g. learners in rural areas.

The overall course completion rate was 74 per cent in 2010 (its first year of offer), with that for Māori learners at 80 per cent and Pasifika learners at 63 per cent. There is a strong bicultural character to the degree. The diploma which this degree replaces achieved an 86 per cent course completion rate in 2010 and a qualification completion rate of 74 per cent; it is anticipated that the degree programme will achieve similar course and qualification completion rates.

The School of Information and Social Sciences has played a central role in developing a research culture at the Open Polytechnic, with a number of its lecturers actively engaged in research. A Ministry of Education-funded project into field-based early childhood education appears likely to make a contribution to the future of early childhood education in New Zealand. Thus, there is a good research base for the degree.

There is provision for 30 days leave for research and development, in line with the employment agreement negotiated with the union. External advisors consulted were of the view that this provision of both time and funding may not be sufficient to realise the capabilities of staff. However, once all the courses for the degree are rolled out later this year, lecturers will have more time for research.

Self-assessment is undertaken in a variety of ways, ranging from formal meetings of the education advisory group to informal feedback from employers, students, and graduates. The development of the degree has been informed by this feedback as well as research into current pedagogical methods relevant to the content and delivery of early childhood education programmes. A number of the lecturers in this programme are or have been directly involved in this process.

Formal self-assessment of student evaluations at the programme level is systematic, although there are challenges in raising the low response. Feedback from learners is also gained through polytechnic-wide mechanisms such as the Colmar Brunton survey, and

comments can be made by students through the website at any time. Course evaluations provide an opportunity for bringing self-assessment information together. Course reports identify learners who may have been experiencing difficulties, and commentary is provided on the interventions that have been put in place to assist the learners, the follow-up that has taken place, and the likelihood of success.

Records relating to the provision of support for individual students are held by regional lecturers and “strand” leaders; members of the team reflect on these and make any changes needed. Hui (e.g. annual regional, and biannual strand regional) provide opportunities for staff to share experiences and develop improvements and complement other self-review of all aspects of the degree programme, including teleconferences between course leaders. Hui and teleconference data is dated and documented and provides evidence of formal collection of self-assessment information and its analysis.

2.4 Focus area: National Certificate in Pharmacy (Technician)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

The Open Polytechnic is the Pharmacy Industry Training Organisation’s (PITO’s) preferred provider of this programme. It is currently delivered as a print-based distance programme, reflecting the preference of learners. Online delivery is being considered in the context of the strategic intention of the organisation to require internet access by students to all programmes at level 5 and above. The learning materials provided to students are complemented by the use of adjunct tutors and mentors who provide support as required to their assigned students. All adjunct tutors are registered pharmacists and are closely supported by and in regular contact with pharmacy staff at the Open Polytechnic. They are provided with marking guides, their assessment is regularly monitored, and there is an annual training day for all adjunct staff. In 2010, the programme achieved a 71 per cent qualification completion rate, with a course completion rate of 83 per cent. Educational performance of Māori and Pasifika was only marginally lower than the overall completion rates.

Students value the knowledge and skills gained and that the programme meets the legislative requirements for their technician role. The programme’s management has a strong relationship with PITO, which ensures that the programme remains professionally current and continues to meet legislative requirements. The programme is externally moderated by PITO; the most recent moderation identified minor areas of improvement which have been addressed.

The Annual Programme Evaluation Report includes a section outlining the self-assessment activities undertaken by programme staff. Feedback from students, staff, adjunct tutors (including through telephone and email logs), other pharmacists, and an annual workshop attended by adjunct and on-campus tutors provide suggestions for improvements. An example of changes implemented to better meet student needs was to include a change in assessment requirements for a compounding unit standard so that it can be taken either as a

workshop or in a workplace. The programme is continually reviewed and changes made through the close relationship between programme management and PITO.

While there is active self-assessment, comments about the quality of programme delivery and its value are not routinely analysed. The Open Polytechnic has recently introduced an online graduate destination survey, but none of the students interviewed were still studying the programme and they had not engaged with this at the time of the EER.

2.5 Focus area: Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) and underpinning diplomas at levels 5 and 6

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

Students are able to enrol directly in the degree or progressively develop a degree study plan by cross-crediting courses from one or more of the five diploma programmes (each comprising six undergraduate courses). Students may also use a diploma qualification as the exit point from study in this field. In general, those students who enrol for the degree perform better than those enrolled for the diplomas. For the Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology), the overall course completion rate is 73 per cent, but is significantly higher (81 per cent) for level 7 courses. Historically, qualification completion rates have been comparatively low for the level 5 diplomas (courses from which can contribute to the degree). These low rates are attributed to the open entry (for students aged 20 years and over) permitted previously at this level and is now being addressed by the pre-entry test (described later). In another initiative, those students who had passed the entry test but withdrawn from the programme within the first 28 days were surveyed on their reasons for withdrawal. Reasons were overwhelmingly related to personal circumstances beyond the control of the Open Polytechnic.

The level 5 diploma programmes attract large numbers of students from a group of candidates with low prior qualifications or academic experience and for whom this is their first year of study. Historically, these programmes have had a low overall completion rate for all courses, although the rates are now rising with interventions being made to enhance opportunities for success, such as the contact by the Learning Centre of all first-year students with an offer of introductory workshops.

There is strong stakeholder support for both the diplomas and the degree and the place they have in the range of qualifications available in applied psychology. An earlier graduate destination survey for the psychology major showed that all respondents who had applied to other institutions for entry to postgraduate programmes had been accepted, with two subsequently enrolling in doctoral programmes. Those respondents, and students and stakeholders who were interviewed, reported that the award of the Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) had facilitated their employment opportunities. Diploma-level students and graduates have also confirmed the vocational value of their qualifications. One student stated: “The course backs up the skills I have acquired at work and helps with my everyday job”.

In 2010 there was a good critical mass of research from the School of Information and Social Sciences, within which the psychology programmes are located. A major research project in the field of psychology has been an international well-being study, led by one of the Open Polytechnic's lecturers. Psychology staff are also working collaboratively with university colleagues. A key outcome has been the development of the *International Journal of Wellbeing*, sponsored by the Open Polytechnic, and an international conference planned for later in the year, also sponsored by the Open Polytechnic. Staff are supported to engage in professional development and research. In 2010, three of the psychology lecturers were given Open Polytechnic awards for excellence in teaching. Stakeholders from universities considered that Open Polytechnic staff are performing admirably.

The faculty is working with the Social Services ITO and the Social Workers Registration Board to explore new pathways for psychology students, consistent with the way that the Open Polytechnic regularly seeks the advice of external stakeholders when making changes or new developments relating to courses or programmes. An advisory committee for the psychology programmes is also to be established.

Annual Programme Evaluation Reports for all diploma programmes and the degree in 2010 were provided to the evaluation team, along with course and programme completion rates. These reports show a generally close match with the Quality and Academic Development Guidelines (2011) for the presentation of Annual Programme Evaluation Reports to the academic board, although they tend to be more descriptive than evaluative. Course evaluations by students show a good level of satisfaction with the teaching. Staff receive feedback from students in different ways, including anecdotally, but have yet to develop systematic ways of recording and analysing this feedback.

Self-assessment has provided insights into different groups or cohorts of students. For example, first-year psychology students are now being given more course guidance prior to enrolment than previously. This has resulted in a better understanding of which level 5 courses have a better success rate for particular students. Among options that have been trialled has been a pre-entry test. When this was used in 2010, it resulted in a pronounced improvement in completions and retentions. Through this intervention, one course showed an increase in the completion rate from 58 per cent to 80 per cent after the pre-entry test was used. Having been evaluated, the pre-entry test is now implemented for all new enrollees in this cluster of programmes.

The programme evaluation of the degree (2009) used the six NZQA key evaluation questions (KEQs), as well as two organisational KEQs, as its basis, from which improvement opportunities and good practices were identified. A sample of the improvement opportunities considered by the evaluators for this 2011 EER concluded that many of the improvement opportunities have now been addressed. For example, there is now a greater focus on student study planning, from enrolment to graduation.

2.6 Focus area: Foundation programmes: Certificate in Foundation Communications – Get Ahead Start; Certificate in Career and Self-Development – Get Ahead Skills

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Adequate**.

The two foundation programmes considered in this focus area are designed to increase communication and skills in career and self-development. Completion rates of the two programmes (communications: overall 69 per cent, Māori 59 per cent, Pasifika 65 per cent; career and self-development: overall 58 per cent, Māori 53 per cent, Pasifika 56 per cent) exceed the targets set by the Tertiary Education Commission for the Open Polytechnic's foundation programmes (overall 55 per cent, Māori and Pasifika both 40 per cent). In addition to these formal learning outcomes, there is a marked increase in self-confidence and often a hunger for continued learning by participants, as reported by their community coaches. Many students are reported as progressing to other education and training opportunities and are role models for their families and communities. In essence, these are sound programmes which match and meet the needs of learners in an innovative and effective way which is highly regarded in the communities in which they are offered. Many students were reported as progressing to other education and training opportunities, although not necessarily with the Open Polytechnic, and collection of systematic – rather than anecdotal – evidence for this progression is envisaged. This is an important dimension which needs to be included in the self-assessment of the effectiveness of such programmes.

Recognising that online and distance learning may not be appropriate for learners with low literacy and numeracy, the Open Polytechnic's learning resources for these programmes use DVDs, workbooks, and pictorial dictionaries to complement written materials. Students described the learning resources as exemplary, being particularly excited by the nature of some resources, e.g. the recipe books and pictorial dictionary. These resources are then delivered using a network of community-based coaches who guide learners through the exercises on a one-to-one and group basis as required. Coaches praised the support provided by the Open Polytechnic, through seminars provided for them and through the provision of guidelines for using the learning materials.

The programme leader monitors the delivery by visiting each partner organisation at four to six-weekly intervals. The learner achievement at each partner site is also monitored. Although data collected is analysed and feedback provided and good practice shared, there appears to be no formal measure of the quality of coaching. Similarly, while there is clear anecdotal evidence that students are supported in their learning by the network of coaches, the Open Polytechnic could benefit from developing a more systematic approach to ascertaining whether learning support is effective for these programmes, e.g. by conducting exit interviews of the students at the end of the programmes. Recognising that after completing these programmes, many students will pursue learning opportunities other than those offered by the Open Polytechnic, it could be useful to attempt to gather data on student destinations a short time after the students have completed the programmes. While there is some evidence of informal and ongoing self-assessment, and it is clear that this activity would be enhanced through a more formalised and systematic approach, the EER

team recognises that implementation of such an approach would need to be undertaken so as not to undermine the community involvement and goodwill that is instrumental to the programme's effectiveness and success.

2.7 Focus area: Learning and Teaching Solutions

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS) is a central unit which is responsible for the development of the online and distance learning resources that are pivotal to the educational success of the students. The unit combines the expertise of instructional design, media design, and information technology with the knowledge of academic staff to develop quality resources that are able to be used not only by students but also by tutors and teaching staff to support student learning. Feedback from teaching staff and students participating in the evaluated programmes confirms that the material provided to support their learning is relevant and of quality. More significantly, this feedback is used by LTS in a systematic way to further enhance the learning materials it produces. Two-thirds of students participating in the Colmar Brunton survey rated the course materials produced by LTS as excellent or very good, with the professional presentation of the materials being well regarded. The Open Polytechnic benchmarks its educational performance against Massey University, the Open University (UK), and Athabasca University (Canada). That it achieves course completion rates comparable to these organisations provides an independent measure of the quality of the learning resources that LTS develops.

LTS staff report the existence of a healthy tension between individuals which enables different pedagogical views to be debated and discussed. Peer review panels are used to ensure that solutions are chosen that improve the learner experience rather than simply respond to technological innovation. This has ensured that both educators and communications technology experts are respected as professional educators.

A programme of change over the last two years, supported by effective self-assessment, has resulted in the LTS team shifting from an individualised approach to quality (driven by a tension between time constraints and quality) to one based on meeting student needs. Examples include engaging with learners during the development (or redevelopment) of learning materials, expediting turnaround times for addressing student concerns, and tracking students' use of the Online Campus website. Both of the latter are readily quantified and thus their effectiveness assessed. These activities are supported by effective planning and a team approach within LTS, across the organisation, and with external stakeholders. The involvement of LTS in Annual Programme Evaluation Reports workshops earlier this year identified an opportunity to contribute more actively to the reporting process, and measures are being taken to address this.

Self-assessment undertaken by this unit is a systematic, honest, and continuous process which has been stimulated by a sense of professionalism arising out of a shared expectation of improving the student experience and engagement with learning.

2.8 Focus area: Organisational improvement

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

The Open Polytechnic's heritage is one of open entry to those over 20 years of age, in which the student selects their courses on the basis of their perception of relevance and for which enrolment could be initiated at any time of the year. Extensions and transfer of courses to other programmes is easy and, in most cases, there is no maximum time for completion of a qualification. Historic enrolment data would demonstrate these attributes of access choice and flexibility as the hallmarks of the Open Polytechnic's operation. The organisation is in the process of a change from a culture in which participation was particularly highly valued to one in which performance is emphasised.

This tension between the historic preference of industry and many students for an emphasis on courses and the current Tertiary Education Commission preference for attaining qualifications (as measured by educational performance indicators) is well recognised and understood by the Open Polytechnic. As a response, the organisation has implemented several measures (e.g. changing enrolment period lengths, modification of enrolment and re-enrolment periods, reducing the number of courses in which a student enrolls), which are intended to place an emphasis on qualification completion and so to enhance course completion rates.

The Open Polytechnic maintains a comprehensive database which provides continual updates – in a dashboard format – on the progress made in achieving its planned key shifts in its academic portfolio, and on student enrolments and demographics, educational performance, and financial and funding performance. By such means, the Open Polytechnic can monitor the effects of its changed procedures. The Open Polytechnic uses its own data and that from other online and distance learning research to model proposed strategies through which educational performance might be enhanced.

The Open Polytechnic has recently implemented an online graduate survey and has recognised the potential value of qualitative comments to complement quantitative data from student evaluation of teaching and learning obtained from an online, course-specific survey and the annual more generic Colmar Brunton survey. These aspects of self-assessment are currently under development.

There are recent initiatives by the Open Polytechnic towards engaging with industry to develop programmes that provide competence in areas of concern to Government, as reflected in recent legislative changes, especially in the real estate and financial services areas. More widely, the Open Polytechnic indicates a willingness and nimbleness to continually update programmes and maintains good relationships with the relevant industry training organisations and other industry representatives in order to achieve this.

The Open Polytechnic is committed to the professional development of its staff and has key performance indicators for staff to attain educational and e-learning qualifications generally, and specifically the National Certificate in Adult Literacy Education (NCALE)

for staff teaching at levels 1-3.⁷ At the individual staff level, there are biannual performance appraisals. The Open Polytechnic affirms the value of cross-institutional collaboration and has a variety of groups and teams working on projects to this end.

2.9 Focus area: Student support (including achievement and academic support of international students)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

The Open Polytechnic's strategies in respect of student support reflect its investment plan, all contributing to increased rates of completion and retention and the success of learners. Across all business areas associated with support and guidance there has been a focus on organisational improvement associated with the strategic plan. This is driven by the requirements for student success and the need to be sustainable and give value for money. Recent strategies to enhance guidance and support have been driven by the Open Polytechnic's Strategy and Analysis Group. These strategies include the intervention by the Learning Centre with first-time students, the enhancement of the website, and proactive actions taken at the point of contact with the organisation.

The Open Polytechnic has integrated the facilities and services offered to students so that at every point of contact with students the central service units have adapted their products and processes and are continuing to find improvements to ensure that students have the greatest chance to succeed in their studies. All business units are implementing the organisational strategy to provide excellent learning experiences while enhancing retention and completion of qualifications.

The Open Polytechnic is building relationships with other institutions to enable the integration of pathways of study. Some students are engaged in their primary course of study at another tertiary education organisation and are choosing elective courses from the Open Polytechnic portfolio. Through this, students gain more flexible options for completing their studies, but the Open Polytechnic is currently not able to claim these qualification completions.

Sound and effective networks for guidance and support have been developed and are making a difference to the engagement and success of students.

Typical of the integrated approach to self-assessment at Open Polytechnic has been the response to lower success rates. These had been identified as being most significant with first-time students, and so a survey of student success was undertaken which led to the development of a strategy by the Strategy and Analysis group. This was endorsed by the

⁷ The Strategic Plan 2011-2013 includes the following indicators and 2012 targets in respect of teaching staff qualifications: proportion of academic staff having or undertaking a teaching qualification, 60 per cent; proportion of academic staff having or undertaking an e-learning qualification, 40 per cent; proportion of academic staff teaching levels 1-3 with NCALE or equivalent, 80 per cent.

executive and incorporated into the investment plan as a specific strategy for improvement. It then became a component of the business plan for each unit.⁸ Responding to this imperative, the Learning Centre developed an intervention based on direct telephone contact with students who were enrolling for the first time. Any difference in performance was measured at the end of the year and students were asked their perceptions of the new approach.

Another example of effective self-assessment is the way in which the work of the Learning Centre is underpinned by research. Self-assessment in 2010 showed that first-time students have a 17 per cent less chance of success in their study, either through withdrawal or course failure. The introduction of workshops with new students, facilitated by learning advisers, is already contributing to a reduction in this failure/withdrawal rate. The Open Polytechnic participated in the pilot of the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE). Inferring that “extramural” students in this survey are predominantly those of the Open Polytechnic, the survey report stated: “While extramural students reported lower levels of engagement with study across the board, these students also reported lower levels of departure intention and slightly higher satisfaction with their experience than other students. These data suggest that, overall, ITPs are meeting extramural students’ expectations well”.⁹ This provides independent evidence of the effectiveness of the student support provided.

The effectiveness of student support at the Open Polytechnic is canvassed in the annual Colmar Brunton survey, and overall shows 65 per cent satisfaction with the services provided. When last specifically surveyed (in 2008), the Learning Centre achieved 70 per cent satisfaction, while the services provided by the library are consistently rated at 90 per cent.

The few international students at the Open Polytechnic either live overseas or are living in New Zealand on work permits. The latter group can be enrolled at the Open Polytechnic only with a variation in their work permit to allow for part-time study, although this requirement is due to be relaxed by Immigration New Zealand shortly.

In 2011, 29 international students of the Open Polytechnic (representing 19 countries) are residing overseas. These students are enrolled in 42 courses across 17 programmes. Also, 48 students (representing 14 countries, dominated by Fiji and the United Kingdom) are in New Zealand on work permits. These students are enrolled in 133 courses across 18 programmes. Because of this diversity of enrolment and the small numbers of students involved in each programme, comparison of qualification completions means little. However, in terms of course completions, international students are typically more successful than domestic students, as shown in the table below.

⁸ The 2010 Investment Plan specifically identifies the issue: “First time students perform up to 17 per cent below returning students”, and indicates that an internal measure of success will be that the proportion of students withdrawn because of non-engagement will not exceed 5 per cent.

⁹ <http://akoaootearoa.ac.nz/ausse-ntp>

Year	Number of course enrolments by international students	Course completion rate (%)	
		International students	Domestic students
2010	376	72%	58%
2009	458	77%	57%

The Open Polytechnic's Academic Registry informs international students about requirements, such as the necessity for health insurance, before enrolment. However, all international students at the Open Polytechnic will have ACC insurance because they are on work permits and are employed. Once in the system, however, international students enjoy the same provisions made for guidance and support as do all other students. They are all contacted as first-time students and thus undertake the initial Learning Centre workshop.

Course materials are couriered to overseas international students. For them, the provisions for guidance and support are identical to their domestic counterparts, with the exception of telephone support which is not available to students residing overseas. This applies to support provided by teaching staff, the Learning Centre, and Library Services (for online services).

The Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students does not apply to international students living overseas, although their support and guidance through the Online Campus is available as for all students. Although the Code of Practice applies in general to overseas students who are resident in New Zealand with work permits, some requirements are not relevant and do not apply to these students. Information for international students is available on the Open Polytechnic website in a dedicated space. A common reason for international students choosing to study at the Open Polytechnic is their preference for open and distance learning.

The Open Polytechnic has undertaken a formal audit of its compliance with the Code of Practice and this resulted in six recommendations which have been actioned as appropriate. The most significant of these related to the need to seek clarification and agreement with the Ministry of Education in regard to the application of the code's requirements in the context of the online and distance learning provided by the Open Polytechnic. A consultation has subsequently taken place with the ministry's Code of Practice team and actions are being implemented on the basis of the advice received.

2.10 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

Course completion rates have risen marginally, from 62 per cent in 2009 to 63 per cent in 2010. These results are low in comparison with other providers of polytechnic education in New Zealand, but compare well with the international providers against which the Open Polytechnic benchmarks its performance. Qualification completion rates have shown a

marked increase from 2009 to 2010, which, in part, results from the changes to enrolment procedures and length of study periods, resulting from self-assessment activities, and a communication – perhaps overdue – to students of an emphasis on completion of qualifications as well as on completion of courses. Although the investment plan makes it clear that further improvement is both required and anticipated to be achieved in this area, the ultimate objective must surely be that the likelihood of academic success should not be as dependent on the nature of the academic delivery as is currently the case, when the Open Polytechnic is compared with other New Zealand institutes of technology.

There is a clear commitment to providing and updating learning materials to ensure they are of high quality and pedagogically sound and meet the needs of external stakeholders (the latter of whom are actively involved in the development of new programmes and the rejuvenation of older ones). Some of the focus areas demonstrate a willing and nimble responsiveness to new opportunities,

The executive team has a planned approach to monitoring educational performance, shown most obviously in its dashboard reporting against its four key strategic shifts (academic portfolio; student demographics; educational performance, most obviously in the reporting of qualification and course completions, and also in areas of student support and engagement; financial and funding performance). The culture of self-assessment is strong throughout the organisation, evident in the large amount of monitoring and analysis that takes place on a day-to-day basis in administrative and logistics areas, which complements that in academic areas. Central to self-assessment in the academic areas are the Annual Programme Evaluation Reports, which include year-on-year statistical trends. All APERS are presented at an academic board workshop, when each programme leader is interviewed by the board. The reports are then analysed by the polytechnic's Quality and Academic Development section, and a further report provided to the board. This approach gathers together common themes in performance, identifies areas for improvement, and overall provides evidence of increasing capability in self-assessment.

Self-assessment is modelled by the executive team, the academic board – in particular by the academic board evaluating the APERS and then developing an overall report against the KEQs – and by Council through a self-assessment of its own activities to complement ongoing, informal evaluation of the performance of individual members as well as of Council as a whole.

That said, the Open Polytechnic recognises that self-assessment will continue to evolve and develop. As an example, it recognises the need to complement the information on the perceived value of study in the Colmar Brunton survey with improved graduate destination information, and segmentation of its databases for better tracking of success of both students and graduates.

Recommendations

In addition to those recommendations implied or expressed in the report, the following recommendations are made.

1. Although the course and qualification completion rates achieved by the Open Polytechnic are comparable to those of other online and distance providers, it is recommended that the Open Polytechnic continue its initiatives in raising course and qualification completion rates, in order to ensure its viability as an education choice among New Zealand's institutes of technology and polytechnics.
2. The educational performance data in terms of qualification and course completions would be well complemented by information related to the improvement of employment outcomes for graduates (given that most students are in employment), and other measures of the effect of the learning experience on longer-term and personalised outcomes for learners. It is recommended that the polytechnic develop online tools or enhance the Colman Brunton survey to systematically collect and evaluate this information.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of rules for programme approval and accreditation made under the Education Act 1989. The Course Approval and Accreditation Criteria that were made under the former section 253 of the Act are deemed (by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011) to be rules for programme approval and accreditation made under the new section 253 of the Act. Rules are also being made for training schemes, which will include requirements for self assessment and external evaluation and review.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the policies and criteria approved by the NZQA Board.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

*Information relevant to the external evaluation and review process, including the publication *Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review*, is available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>*

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