

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

SkydivingNZ.Com Limited  
trading as New Zealand Skydiving  
School

Not Yet Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 21 November 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.....	5
Summary of Results .....	6
Findings .....	9
Appendix .....	18

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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 Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, 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

Name of TEO:	SkydivingNZ.Com Limited trading as New Zealand Skydiving School
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Pudding Hill Airfield, Arundel Rakaia Gorge Road, Rakaia
First registered:	13 December 2000
Courses currently delivered	Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (Level 5)
Code of Practice signatory	COP signatory, for students aged 18 years and over
Number of students:	Domestic: ten International: two
Number of staff:	Six full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (Level 5)</li><li>• Diploma in Advanced Skydiving (Level 6)</li></ul>
Distinctive characteristics:	New Zealand Skydiving School (NZSS) is the only provider in New Zealand offering NZQA-approved skydiving qualifications. The Diploma in Commercial Skydiving is a 32-week course of five modules, including a 12-week work placement at a commercial dropzone and 200 skydives. An A Licence in Skydiving (25 jumps) is part of the diploma course. The school became a PTE in 2000 but has a 28-year history of providing training courses in static line accelerated freefall and

tandem skydiving prior to that. There are four intakes per year, enabling a staff-to-student ratio of 1:10, with a maximum of 18 students. The buildings and land are owned by the two directors' trust. NZSS offers skydiving training to domestic and international learners 18 years and over. The principal aim of the school is to supply qualified skydiving graduates to a national industry experiencing a skill shortage. There is a focus on the need to increase training in the adventure tourism sector and NZSS supports this demand. The Diploma in Commercial Skydiving trains graduates to an entry level. It covers a broad range of employment options in areas such as parachute packing, video editing, manifesting (the organisation of skydivers on the jump plane), and freefall photography.

- Recent significant changes: Two new highly qualified and experienced instructors have been appointed in 2012. The course director has completed over 20,000 jumps since 1983 and is one of the world's most experienced skydiving coaches. He holds five world records and 28 national medals.
- Previous quality assurance history: An NZQA compliance visit was undertaken in November 2011 as a consequence of a number of student complaints. The Ministry of Justice Order of Disputes Tribunal has subsequently made an order in favour of a student stating a breach of Section 13 (b) of the Fair Trading Act and a failure to comply with the guarantee contained in section 29 of the Consumer Guarantees Act.
- Other: Training is conducted at the Pudding Hill Airfield and in the purpose-built training facility on site. Work placement sections are offered nationally at various dropzones (the name for the place where parachutists land).

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The mandatory focus areas selected were governance, management and strategy, and international student support. The programme focus area was the Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (Level 5). This was the only programme operating at the time of the external evaluation and review (EER) visit.

## 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 web 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 TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.*

The evaluation team consisted of two evaluators, one of whom led the evaluation. The visit was over two days at the Pudding Hill Airfield site, near the township of Methven. The team spoke with the two directors, two instructors (course director and operations manager), the receptionist, the systems administrator, course facilitator, a past student who is now a contract instructor, and past and present students from the Diploma in Commercial Skydiving. External stakeholders who owned dropzones and took students for work placement sections were contacted by phone. One dropzone owner was a former student. In addition, the team spoke with the technical director of the New Zealand Parachute Industry Organisation, of which NZSS is a member, and a representative from the Civil Aviation Authority. The evaluation team also looked at a range of documentation including student evaluations of tutors and programmes, minutes of meetings, and information published in skydiving magazines detailing NZSS graduate achievements.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the educational performance of **SkydivingNZ.Com Limited trading as New Zealand Skydiving School**.

Staff and external stakeholders spoken to by the evaluators described the dropzone facilities and location as unique and world class. The instructors noted that NZSS was one of the most well-resourced facilities in the world and that requests to management for resources and equipment were always met. Many students are attracted to NZSS by word-of-mouth recommendations from previous students, and, until the disruption caused by the Canterbury earthquakes, there was a waiting list.

All students spoken to by the evaluation team (current and past graduates) were very satisfied with the training they had received at NZSS. In 2010 the retention rate was 77 per cent, the qualification completion rate was 77 per cent, and course completions were at 83 per cent. In 2011 the retention rate was 80 per cent, the qualification completion rate was 60 per cent, and the course completion rate was 88 per cent.

The qualification completion rate is lower than the course completion rate because once a person has the requisite 200 jumps they are highly employable even without the diploma qualification, as there is a shortage of trained skydivers in New Zealand. NZSS is working with workplace section employers (dropzone owners) to encourage them to support students to complete the qualification, and since 2011 has included this requirement in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreed between the parties.

All graduates can get work in New Zealand and the qualification is recognised internationally. In 2011, 28 out of 30 students were offered work. The two who did not get job offers did not meet visa requirements. Skydiving qualifications are on the Immigration New Zealand Immediate Skill Shortage List, and most students are offered employment by workplace section employers. These employers said NZSS students were 'dropzone-ready', and had good interpersonal skills and high levels of safety awareness. NZSS has recently employed two new instructors, both of whom are highly experienced and internationally respected trainers.

NZSS works alongside the commercial arm of the business. This allows students to gain first-hand experience of the industry and develop a realistic appreciation of the work required once they graduate, including the stepping stones for advancement within the industry. This relationship, in combination with students having intensive training (as many jumps as practicable in a short timeframe), means student learning is accelerated as they are able to quickly correct faults from jump to jump.

However, an NZQA compliance visit was undertaken in November 2011 as a consequence of a number of student complaints. The Ministry of Justice Order of Disputes Tribunal has subsequently made an order in favour of a student stating a breach of Section 13 (b) of the Fair Trading Act and a failure to comply with the guarantee contained in section 29 of the Consumer Guarantees Act because the Diploma in Advanced Skydiving did not have the promised outcome, that is, a qualification from the New Zealand Parachute Industry Association (NZPIA). In addition to this, the tribunal found that there had been a breach of the Consumer Guarantees Act under Section 29 where there is a guarantee that a service will be reasonably fit for a particular purpose. In this case the particular purpose the applicant required the qualification for was to qualify to tandem jump within the main New Zealand jump sites. Without an NZPIA qualification he would not have been able to do this, and the tribunal found this to be a failure to comply with the guarantee contained in Section 29.

The evaluators noted that this situation will not reoccur because the result of a recent review means that the Civil Aviation Authority is now the primary body for awarding certificates and ratings. The Civil Aviation Authority has recently audited NZSS and found them to be in full compliance with the authority's rules and regulations. However, on balance, the evaluation team concluded that because of the student complaints and subsequent Disputes Tribunal ruling, it was not possible to be confident in the educational performance of NZSS at this time.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **SkydivingNZ.Com Limited trading as New Zealand Skydiving School.**

The training provides a mix of theoretical and practical learning, with training jumps being videoed and reviewed post-jump by the student and instructor. Perfect weather during the time of the evaluation allowed the evaluation team to observe the learning cycle of action and review, both individually and collectively, at a debriefing. This showed the reflective organisational practice that is business as usual for the school.

NZSS reviews the diploma content annually, in relation to industry input. Management staff attend international industry conferences and the directors have presented at international forums. Close and regular links with the international industry provides access to current trends, especially in relation to equipment, safety, technology, and training practices.

There is an independent group of advisors who review suggestions that come from stakeholder consultation. NZSS informally benchmarks by regular visits from overseas instructors; for example, the President of the United States Parachute Association recently spent two weeks at NZSS. These visitors may make suggestions about the content of the diploma that NZSS will incorporate into future reviews.

The evaluators sighted minutes for the all-of-staff meetings, advisory board meetings and management meetings (all held monthly), and a folder of feedback from trainees' workplace employers. All these documents included decisions made and actions to be undertaken, as well as the personnel and timeframes involved. Standing items, such as pass rates, are discussed at the weekly meetings.

Regular evaluations by trainees of satisfaction with the course and instructors forms part of a feedback model where instructors discuss any issues arising from these evaluations with trainees, including reviewing the effectiveness of consequent actions with trainees. An example of responses to student feedback was the purchase of two extra editing computers to satisfy the demand for more video editing opportunities. Self-review by instructors themselves and peer teaching also provide opportunities for improving practice.

Although recent complaints and the recent Disputes Tribunal decision found that NZSS did not meet aspects of the Fair Trading Act, the evaluators found that the current owners are being constructively responsive to student feedback and have appropriate processes for dealing with complaints. They also noted that NZSS was a long-established and reputable organisation, with no previous complaints or compliance issues.

Positive feedback given by both internal and external stakeholders, past and present students, and a range of employers, and the open manner with which the directors discussed the tribunal decision with the evaluators, contributed to the confidence of the evaluation team in the self-assessment capability of this organisation.



# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 How well do trainees 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**.

All students spoken to by the evaluation team (current and past graduates) were satisfied with the training they had received at NZSS. In 2010 the retention rate was 77 per cent, the qualification completion rate was 77 per cent, and the course completion rate was 83 per cent. In 2011 the retention rate was 80 per cent, the qualification completion rate was 60 per cent, and the course completion rate was 88 per cent. One reason why the qualification completion rate is lower is because once a person has the requisite 200 jumps they are highly employable, even without the diploma qualification as there is a shortage of trained skydivers in New Zealand.

However, NZSS was not happy with the qualification and course completion rates and after discussing and analysing the possible reasons for these rates, staff concluded that, aside from high employability, once students were away from the school on work placements they lost focus on their assignment work. To influence these outcomes positively NZSS has actioned a number of initiatives. Prior to the work placement, students are encouraged to map out an outline of their assignments, and at the pre-work placement lecture a greater emphasis is placed on getting assignments in on time. The MOU signed with all the workplace employers included employers agreeing to remind students about assignment obligations. A reminder email is to be sent from NZSS to both students and workplace employers three to five days prior to assignment due dates, and if the assignment is not received a fail letter will be sent to students the day after their assignment was due. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest these initiatives have had a positive effect, although it is too early to determine the impact of the changes.

While NZSS is very responsive to students and their training needs, and collects and reports achievement data to the appropriate funders and the New Zealand Parachute Industry Organisation, a more systematic analysis of this data might show trends that could be useful for internal benchmarking and future planning. For example, NZSS tracks progress through the course modules and most students achieve on the first attempt; only two of ten students needed a re-sit for the most recent module test. However, NZSS is not comparing performance across each cohort of students (there are four intakes each year) or across years. If they did this they would have more information on which to assess the effectiveness of

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<sup>1</sup> The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

changes made to the diploma and whether these changes were reflected in achievement levels.

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

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

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

Employment of trainees is a priority for NZSS, and since the school started employment outcomes have tracked at 90-100 per cent. Most trainees are offered work by their work placement provider. In 2011, 28 out of 30 students were offered work. The two who did not get job offers did not meet New Zealand Immigration visa requirements. Skydiving qualifications are on the Immigration Immediate Skill Shortage List, and most students are offered employment by workplace section employers. These employers said students were 'dropzone-ready' and had good interpersonal skills, essential for customer service and high levels of safety awareness. Safety is a priority at NZSS. First aid unit standards are gained through an external provider who has customised the first aid training to include skydiving scenarios.

NZSS is the only provider of its kind in New Zealand and graduates are prepared to be able to work in Australia and other international dropzones. For example, NZSS is an accredited United States Parachute Association site and can award US licences. NZSS maintains informal industry links by attendance at key industry events such as the Australian Parachute Federation conference and United States Parachute Industry Association symposiums, where training and the latest developments in equipment and subject matter information are discussed. This information is shared with the team and used to inform curriculum development.

Graduate employment outcomes are monitored through a work placement questionnaire and social media networks such as Facebook. The skydiving industry is relatively small and well connected and if a trainee stays in the industry NZSS will know anecdotally where they are working. NZSS also maintains student profiles post-course, enabling them to link students with work opportunities. The school also hosts 'boogies' (gatherings of skydivers), usually focussed on fun rather than competitions. NZSS will be hosting the National Skydiving Championships in 2013. All these links provide networking opportunities.

Some trainees work on weekends in the business, on a voluntary basis, as they are passionate and committed to improving their knowledge about skydiving and enjoy sharing this passion with the public and other skydiving enthusiasts. While individual outcomes are known, more systematic tracking of employment outcomes over time could be useful to identify employment trends.

However, despite these positive results for the students, the Disputes Tribunal decision referred to in the summary indicates that at least some students are not

receiving value for money, and the rating for this key evaluation question reflects that understanding.

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

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**.

NZSS has purpose-built facilities at Pudding Hill Airfield. These include a 12-seater plane with a dedicated pilot and up-to-date equipment for students' use. The larger plane was purchased to ensure adequate resources are available for both the training and commercial aspects of the business. The directors developed the training arm of the operation in response to difficulties they found in staffing their commercial dropzones with qualified staff. Working alongside the commercial arm of the business, SkydivingNZ, allows students to gain first-hand experience of the industry and develop a realistic appreciation of the work required for their workplace sections. This feature, in combination with students having intensive training (as many jumps as practicable in a short timeframe), means student learning is accelerated as they are able to quickly correct faults from jump to jump.

NZSS knows workplace employers well and is careful to match students with work placements where they will have the greatest likelihood of success. Feedback on individual trainees from workplace providers about performance and work-readiness skills is closely monitored and has shown that trainees are punctual, well presented, safety conscious, and have very good technical skydiving skills. The systems administrator emails the trainees three times over the three months they are on work experience and logs a record of this contact. Instructors also have ongoing contact with students while they are on workplace sections to ascertain progress, both practical and academic.

Due to its unique situation, NZSS has limited opportunities to externally benchmark the Diploma in Commercial Skydiving. However, all the external stakeholders spoken to by the evaluation team, including workplace providers and a graduate who now operates his own successful skydiving business, indicated that NZSS provides graduates who closely match the needs of the industry. This includes adapting aspects of the training to accommodate, for example, Australian industry needs. These include the ability to land on more confined areas, such as beaches. To meet the variable physical and weather conditions graduates might encounter post-course, not all 200 jumps are completed at the same dropzone. Another response to stakeholder feedback was changes made in the manual and curriculum regarding canopy size and control.

While NZSS has effective systems for gathering trainee feedback and reporting back to trainees on any actions taken as a result of this feedback, this data is not collated over time to identify possible trends across intakes or over years.

## 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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**.

Students are instructed by leading New Zealand and internationally respected instructors. Moderation involves activities such as the director checking all exam papers and observing classroom practice on a regular basis, peer teaching, and instructors checking each other's marking. If trainees do not achieve an assessment, a re-sit of a different exam on the same topic will be offered.

Every six months the professional development of all staff is reviewed. This might involve achieving further ratings and attending international conferences. The evaluators observed the course director and another trainer facilitate a debriefing after students had to land in an unexpected cross-wind. The evaluators were impressed by the engagement and focus of the trainees as the instructor took each of them individually and collectively through a question and answer session about their experience. This included discussion of possible scenarios from various choices made at the time and possible scenarios if other choices had been made.

This reflective approach was well received by all the trainees and demonstrated the good working relationships developed between the trainers and trainees, between trainees themselves, and the decision-making skills required to become a technically competent and safe skydiver. The trainees' responses showed that they understood the need to work as a team at all times. The instructor also commended the fact that they had all made sensible decisions during an unanticipated situation, to ensure their own and others' safety even though this may have included a variation to the agreed original plan. The incident described above would be reported to the Civil Aviation Authority and these incidents are collectively reviewed across the sector to identify any trends.

The expertise and knowledge of the training staff at NZSS are very high. The staff are a new coaching team with lots of enthusiasm and ideas for improving the training provided. Their success at many levels of the skydiving world would indicate that any changes made will add value to the training experience; however, it is too early for the results of any initiatives to be evidenced and evaluated.

## 1.5 How well are trainees 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**.

NZSS has a 1:10 staff-to-student ratio. If student numbers grow, extra staff are employed to maintain this ratio. While a lot of the theory is taught in a classroom setting, many of the practical parts of the course are taught one-to-one. For example, after each coaching jump instructors give one-to-one feedback to students highlighting the aspects they have managed well and areas for improvement.

The selection of trainees includes their providing a written curriculum vitae, two written references, and completing an equipment questionnaire and a criminal declaration form. These processes help to identify students who have English language difficulties and people who may not meet the Civil Aviation Authority requirements. The director signs off on all applications prior to a student being accepted into the school. Students are also given random breath tests every week and there is zero tolerance of drug taking.

The systems administrator speaks to trainees and uses social media to help them organise accommodation and to get to know others who will be joining the school in the same class. This is an effective way to ease students' transition from their current circumstances. International students contacted by the evaluation team noted that it meant they had some acquaintances prior to their arrival in New Zealand and that these people were able to assist them with becoming familiar with the New Zealand way of life.

Once accepted onto the course, students are met at the airport, and have a half-day orientation at the school which includes advice on banking and providing 24/7 contact numbers of NZSS staff. International students are buddied with a domestic student. Each intake is inducted together and a teamwork ethic is encouraged.

NZSS demonstrated that they were aware of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (COP), including the necessary record-keeping and insurance requirements, and that they undertook a yearly review of the COP. At the time of this EER there were only two international students at the school.

NZSS tracks attendance closely and follows up absences promptly, attempting to assist students as soon as any issues arise. The expectation is 100 per cent attendance and NZSS supports this expectation by, for example, providing a school van to collect students each morning. The school expects students to treat the school as they would any workplace. This includes being well prepared for both practical and theoretical learning and being committed to meeting the requirements of the course. There are four formal opportunities for students to give feedback over the 32-week course. Current students who spoke to the evaluation team were very confident that they could approach any member of staff at any time, should the need arise.

Although there are adequate selection processes prior to acceptance on the course, there is no face-to-face interview and the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) entry requirement of 5.5 for admission to the diploma is not always adhered to strictly.

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

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

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

The directors and management of NZSS are focussed on learner achievement and trainee satisfaction, including the mastery of skills, completing the diploma qualification, and trainees gaining employment in New Zealand and overseas. The purpose-built facilities, including equipment and the dropzone at NZSS, are world-leading. There are regular reviews of achievement against targets, while retention, qualification completion, and employment outcomes are monitored, although more comprehensive tracking of this data over time might reveal useful trends.

NZSS provides much-needed employees for dropzones in New Zealand, and external stakeholders contacted by the evaluation team noted that they are only just keeping up with demand as the adventure tourism sector in New Zealand continues to expand. The ability for trainees to get a student allowance for their skydiving training is a distinct advantage over many other countries, including New Zealand's closest neighbour, Australia. In addition, many international students have to look offshore for this training as there is nothing comparable in their home country. These factors make NZSS a strategic part of New Zealand's largest export earner, tourism. New Zealand is second only to the United States of America for the number of tandem jumps.

While current and past trainees are well supported, this evaluation acknowledges that there have been a number of student complaints in relation to the Diploma in Advanced Skydiving. These complaints have been formally addressed by the recent Disputes Tribunal decision and NZSS was found to be in breach of parts of the Fair Trading Act. The evaluation team discussed this issue with the directors and has concluded that the circumstances surrounding this decision, while significant, related primarily to the Diploma in Advanced Skydiving, which is not currently offered.

However, the rating for capability in self-assessment is a measure of how well an organisation manages negative outcomes as well as positive ones. The evaluation team understands that the particular set of circumstances that led to the Disputes Tribunal decision is unlikely to reoccur. Recent rule changes affecting the commercial skydiving industry will also require the Diploma in Advanced Skydiving, a level 6 diploma, to be amended. These rules also clarify who can and cannot endorse certificates and ratings. There is strong demand from the industry for a

greater output of well-trained domestic students in particular, and for the additional higher-order skills that the level 6 advanced diploma offers.

NZSS is a credible provider with well-qualified and highly experienced instructors and knowledgeable governance, offering a targeted qualification that is well respected inside the skydiving industry and providing graduates who are in high demand in both New Zealand and overseas.

## Focus Areas

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

### 2.1 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

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

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

### 2.2 Focus area: International students

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

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

### 2.3 Focus area: Diploma in Commercial Skydiving

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

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



# Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review, other than those expressed or implied within the report.

# Appendix

## Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

*Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of programme approval and accreditation (under sections 249 and 250 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the Criteria for Approval and Accreditation of Programmes established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act and published in the Gazette of 28 July 2011 at page 3207. These policies and criteria are deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under the new section 253.*

*In addition, for registered private training establishments, the criteria and policies for their registration require self-assessment and external evaluation and review at an organisational level in addition to the individual programmes they own or provide. These criteria and policies are also deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under section 253. Section 233B(1) of the Act requires registered PTEs to comply with these rules.*

*NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes 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 EER process 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](http://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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