



Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Skydiving School Limited
trading as New Zealand Skydiving
School

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 23 September 2014

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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:	New Zealand Skydiving School Limited trading as New Zealand Skydiving School
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Pudding Hill Airfield, Rakaia. (At the time of this external evaluation and review (EER), the PTE was operating from temporary premises at 72 Green Road, Parakai, Auckland.)
First registered:	2000
Number of students:	Domestic: 26 or fewer equivalent full-time students International: 15 or fewer equivalent full-time students
Number of staff:	Seven full-time equivalents. The PTE has other business streams which staff also work within, and the PTE also has access to supplementary staff when required.
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (Level 5)• Diploma in Advanced Skydiving (Level 6) (not presently offered)
Sites:	All activities are presently undertaken at the West Auckland Airport (Green Road, Parakai).
Distinctive characteristics:	New Zealand Skydiving School (NZSS) is the only provider in New Zealand offering an NZQA-approved skydiving qualification. The Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (the

diploma) is a 32-week work course comprising five modules, including a 12-week work placement at a commercial dropzone. An 'A licence' in skydiving and a 'B licence' are both integrated as part of the diploma. There are four student intakes per year.

Recent significant changes: NZSS has moved to a temporary premise at West Auckland Airport. The PTE has indicated that this temporary move has occurred with the pre-approval of NZQA, and that an application for permanent relocation to a new Auckland site is pending.

NZSS has recently been sold, with a new shareholder becoming the new chief executive officer of the school.

Previous quality assurance history: An EER of NZSS was conducted by NZQA in 2012. This EER found that NZQA was Not Yet Confident in the PTE's educational performance, and Confident in its self-assessment capability.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of inquiry was;

- Governance, management and strategy (mandatory)
- International student support (mandatory)
- Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (Level 5) (selected as it is the sole programme offered).

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/for-providers/docs/eer-policy-conduct.pdf>

The evaluation team comprised two evaluators. The team visited NZSS on 27 and 28 May 2014. Meetings and interviews were held with the following:

- Chief executive officer, and former chief executive officer (the former chief executive officer is now a contracted advisor to NZSS)
- Head tutor/instructor, second tutor/instructor, student administration officer
- Two further tutors/instructors
- Current students
- Graduates (individual telephone conversations)
- Industry stakeholders (individual telephone conversations)

In addition, the evaluation team reviewed a range of operational documentation, including programme planning materials, staff meeting minutes, a quality management manual, enrolment information and policies, and samples of delivery and assessment materials. The evaluators undertook a sample review of all materials tabled.

This documentation complemented the self-assessment information that had been submitted by NZSS prior to the EER.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **New Zealand Skydiving School (NZSS)**.

NZSS is focused on delivering a skydiving programme that provides useful skills, ensures safe practices, and provides learners with opportunities to gain employment within this sector.

This evaluation has found strong and confirmed evidence from students, graduates, stakeholders and staff, that safe skydiving practices, and a thorough understanding of skydiving techniques and environmental factors, are the primary focus of the programme offered. For these reasons, students, graduates and stakeholders considered this to be a highly valuable programme of study.

Data from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) shows qualification completion rates of 103 per cent, 69 per cent and 81 per cent respectively for 2011, 2012 and 2013.¹ These rates are indicative only, as the small student body – combined with cross-year courses – can skew outcome reports. Notwithstanding, these outcomes are still positive, as they are above the TEC's benchmark. NZSS has also collected some data on employment outcomes. This shows that all graduates in 2013 were offered employment at their assigned work placement. This is a positive indicator, which could be strengthened with more in-depth research into this area.

This evaluation found good evidence of effective processes that contribute to learning outcomes. For example, NZSS programme materials are clear and comprehensive, and evidence from tutors showed that learning outcomes are regularly reviewed, and materials are updated to incorporate new industry-specific learning outcomes. Tutors are highly experienced skydivers and are industry-qualified, although none hold adult education qualifications. Students have high confidence in their tutors in regard to both sector knowledge and communication/instructional techniques. Additional guidance and support from NZSS is largely informal, but matches the needs of the current student body.²

At the time of the evaluation, NZSS was in a transition phase, with a newly appointed chief executive and new temporary operating premise.³ There is some evidence that this transition is positive for learners, through improved and increased resourcing. However, there is still a need for NZSS management to

¹ NZSS has few Māori and Pasifika enrolments, and no statistical information for these specific cohorts could be identified.

² In the main, NZSS learners are mature learners (not school leavers).

³ The PTE's shareholding has also changed.

more fully articulate its own educational strategy to underpin and coordinate efforts relating to programme design, effective teaching and student guidance.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Skydiving School (NZSS)**.

This evaluation has found evidence that suitable self-assessment approaches are in place in relation to programme design, delivery and student support. Processes in these areas support self-evaluative performance, and information gained by NZSS is largely reliable. There is evidence that this information is used to make improvements. This includes ensuring that learning materials are suitable, that tuition is linked to industry best practice, and that resources and facilities are of suitable quality. Current examples of reflective practice and actual improvements include the transition to a new delivery site, a new suite of computers, flexibility in class scheduling (to fit with the weather), and integrating with another business area to ensure the availability of two aircraft (and thus increasing skydive opportunities for learners).

In regard to student achievement, NZSS presently relies largely on TEC data to understand student progress. This is one useful source, but it is not fully sufficient as it does not track international learners. The data is subject to skewing (due to low numbers of student) and is retrospective. NZSS has the ability to undertake its own qualification tracking for each cohort of learners, and should extend its current processes further to more fully assure itself of learning outcomes. This is also true of employment outcomes, where further evidence is required for the organisation to fully verify outcomes against performance objectives. There is scope for increased self-assessment of learning processes and outcomes within the workplace component of the programme. This evaluation finds that more formalised self-assessment in these areas would be essential if greater numbers of students were to be enrolled at NZSS. The present approach, however, is generally effective for current student numbers.

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 **Adequate**.

Learner achievement at NZSS is considered in terms of (i) the completion of formal qualifications, and (ii) the acquisition of useful skills leading to increased employability with the sector.

Formal qualifications

NZSS qualifications completion data from the TEC is shown in the table below. The TEC notes that five-year qualification completion rates for NZSS are above the sector benchmarks. NZSS indicated that this is the main data used for tracking qualification outcomes, and the PTE is pleased with the results. However, NZSS also noted – and the evaluators agree – that due to the multiple-student intakes throughout academic years (which can overlap calendar years), the potential for data-skewing exists, particularly given the small cohort sizes.⁵ For this reason, this data should be considered positive but indicative in nature.

	2011	2012	2013
Course completions	84%	82%	85%
Qualification completions	103%	69%	81%

Source: Tertiary Education Commission

This evaluation also finds that NZSS has the ability to undertake its own qualification tracking for each cohort of learners. This could include aggregated real-time tracking (rather than retrospective results), and include international learners, who are excluded from the TEC's data set.⁶ Given the circumstances (low enrolments and international learners), this action is considered to be a necessary self-assessment progression for NZSS.

Acquisition of useful skills, linked to employment opportunities

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 In percentage terms, an individual learner can account for up to 5 percentile points.

⁶ Individual student tracking is captured on whiteboards and an Excel spreadsheet, but this data is not aggregated to inform reflective teaching practice.

NZSS is focused on delivering a programme that provides useful skills to ensure safe skydiving practices, and to provide learners with a variety of employment options in this sector.

This evaluation found strong supporting evidence from students, graduates and staff that safe skydiving practices, and a thorough understanding of skydiving technique and environmental factors, are the focus of the programme. All students and graduates considered safe skydiving practices to be a highly useful skill-set.

As a link to employment, the programme concludes with a 12-week work placement module. NZSS surveys work placement providers to determine whether graduates are offered employment upon qualification completion. NZSS is of the view that, based on responses to this survey, there is a high likelihood of graduates being offered employment from work placement. In 2013, all graduates were offered employment at the conclusion of their programme of study. The documented evidence sighted for this evaluation supports this finding.

Notwithstanding, because NZSS places emphasis on employability, this evidence could be strengthened through fuller self-assessment. In particular, it would be useful for NZSS to seek information on a measure of continuity or length of employment within the sector; e.g. whether graduates are still employed in the sector one or two years after a placement (this is required because conflicting evidence was presented that graduates typically move around a lot and NZSS has difficulty maintaining contact). Fuller self-assessment is required to strengthen this area and more clearly demonstrate positive employment outcomes from studying at NZSS.

The evaluation has found that some information on potential earnings is provided in the student prospectus, but further information on the returns from study would be beneficial for learners.

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**.

The main educational stakeholders for NZSS include New Zealand and international dropzone operators, as well as learners.

Dropzone providers

NZSS indicated that it has a working relationship with the majority of New Zealand jump-sites, along with a range of international sites.⁷ NZSS focuses on ensuring a

⁷ The NZSS chief executive has an interest in one New Zealand dropzone, and the former chief executive (now advisor) has an interest in another. This facilitates workplace opportunities at these localities.

good match between students and work placement providers, to better ensure successful outcomes. Other evidence indicated that NZSS would sometimes develop a working relationship with a particular dropzone provider, if that would best meet the needs of a particular student. For example, an international student may seek to undertake a work placement in their home country, and in such circumstances NZSS would seek to facilitate this. Overall, this evaluation found, through both document analysis and direct (telephone) interviewing, good evidence of ongoing positive and focused relationships with this group of stakeholders.

Learners

Past and present students interviewed value the outcomes gained from the NZSS programme. This includes both the formal qualification (which they consider to have sector merit), the advanced skills, the focus on safety, and the opportunity to seek employment in a sector they are passionate about. NZSS surveys its students and uses the information to make improvements.

Other stakeholders

The evaluation team contacted the New Zealand Parachute Industry Association. This is the industry organisation for dropzone providers in New Zealand. NZSS has a generally good working relationship with this organisation and agrees with its objectives and protocols. The relationship demonstrates good industry alignment by NZSS.

The evaluation team also sighted the most recent Civil Aviation Authority report on NZSS activities. There were no issues arising.

NZSS indicated that it had a sector advisory board. While there was some evidence that individuals within the grouping had met from time to time, there was limited evidence presented that this process had directly led to better or improved educational practice. NZSS, through further self-assessment, may need to determine whether this advisory board still adds value to its educational offer.

Overall, NZSS has a strong focus on maintaining sector networks and relationships. Self-assessment and reflection on the needs of stakeholders, including learning, is occurring, albeit informally in places. There are, however, no significant gaps or weaknesses in this area.

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 **Good**.

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

NZSS offers a single programme, which is specifically targeted towards a niche group of learners (those seeking employment in the skydive industry). Graduates and learners interviewed consider the programme fully matches their needs, as the

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only specialist provider in New Zealand. International students also valued the opportunity to learn skydiving in New Zealand, as it met their desire to study in New Zealand, and in some cases was more accessible than programmes in their home countries.

Programme materials are clear, and learning outcomes are regularly reviewed and updated to incorporate new industry-specific learning outcomes. The PTE has a quality computer suite for the learners – computers are essential learning tools to review recordings of skydiving.

In addition, a number of learners, graduates, stakeholders and key personnel commented that the shift to Auckland presented improved learning opportunities, with more settled weather (leading to more skydive opportunities), less social isolation, and greater access for learners to other skydivers. NZSS provides basic student accommodation, has access to two aircraft, and plans to develop new physical premises if the site is approved for permanent activities. Notwithstanding, the current temporary premises are suitable for educational purposes.

Tutors say the programme is largely practical, and that the extended period of work placement at the end of a course of study is the best means for learners to improve their learning outcomes. Staff say the diverse spread of work placements – both within New Zealand and internationally – limits direct engagement with learners and workplaces to enable NZSS to assess the extent to which needs are being matched. However, it is unclear why there has not been more emphasis on technologies to strengthen this distance-based delivery (for example Skype, emailing of digital recordings of skydives, etc). Self-assessment documentation insufficiently considers this matter. NZSS has an opportunity through greater self-assessment to better assure itself of the progress of learners and gain feedback from workplaces for this component of the programme.

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**.

NZSS has a clear plan for delivery of training, which progressively takes learners through the various skydiving skill levels (and industry certificates). The programme is designed to best meet needs, with a focus on safe practice and the completion of at least 200 skydives per learner. If weather delays activities, skydives are transferred to non-teaching days. The programme is also delivered over weekends, reflecting industry work expectations.

Tutors are all highly experienced skydivers, and are industry-qualified, although none hold adult education qualifications. Tutors have the opportunity to attend industry conferences and forums, for the purpose of maintaining sector skills and knowledge. NZSS says tutor-learner ratios do not exceed 1:10, and tutors say one-to-one tuition is also offered when required. Key tutoring staff hold regular

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meetings in which the progress of individual learners is tracked and discussed.⁸ Evidence of educational reflections on the progress of learners was sighted within team planning materials, and within the individual jump diaries of learners. Comments to learners – within diaries and through structured pre- and post-skydive briefings – are designed to positively reinforce desired learning outcomes. Collectively, this approach is good practice and correlates with the evaluators' judgement that students have high confidence in their tutors, in regard to both sector knowledge and communication techniques.

The evaluation team reviewed a sample of assessments. Based on the sample sighted, the team is satisfied that assessment practices are fair, valid and transparent. Notwithstanding, NZSS needs to undertake some self-assessment of its moderation practices, as there was some internal uncertainty as to who is responsible for this area. This possibly reflects a need for NZSS to further engage with the adult education sector, to ensure the pedagogical knowledge is continuously developed.

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 **Adequate**.

Students said their experience has been that NZSS is an inclusive learning environment with a positive and friendly atmosphere, which allows them to build their confidence and knowledge of skydiving. Student support occurs largely in an informal manner, through the relationships that tutors foster, and through student-to-student support. There is little evidence to demonstrate that student surveys on learning outcomes and any support required, or other information, is considered formally within the PTE's planning.⁹

Despite the informality of guidance support, the evaluation team is satisfied that the actual level of support is appropriate and sufficient to satisfy the needs of learners. However, this approach is only suitable for the present relatively low numbers of students. If enrolment numbers increased, the current approach to student support would not be sufficient. Self-assessment practices should match growth plans with actions to maintain and develop student support services.

⁸ Meetings are generally held weekly, although scheduling could alter this. There is also evidence of a monthly staff meeting.

⁹ Student surveys are undertaken and collated. Evidence as to how this information is factored into self-assessment processes or review (such as management meetings) was not sighted.

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 **Adequate**.

At the time of the evaluation, NZSS was in a transition phase, with a newly appointed chief executive and new temporary operating premise. There is some evidence that this transition is having positive outcomes for learners, through improved and increased resourcing.

A number of stakeholders made positive comments about the knowledge and skills of the new chief executive. Within this environment, staff said they felt valued at NZSS, and the evaluators saw evidence of appropriate personnel management systems. Further, current quality management documentation was also in place to guide key processes (for example, managing complaints). In addition, the chief executive and former chief executive (now strategic advisor) attest that there are no legal or ethical matters arising.

While there is evidence of planning to conduct business transition arrangements (such as new premises, etc), there are no clear educational objectives set by NZSS as to what it seeks to achieve for all learners, including international learners. NZSS has not identified or developed a strategic approach within its self-assessment documentation to underpin and coordinate efforts relating to programme design, effective teaching and student guidance and support. Therefore, monitoring against a strategy has not occurred. NZSS will need to focus on this educational aspect, as much as site development, as it continues to develop its education programme.

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 **Good**.

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

See Recommendation 5.

2.2 Focus area: International student support

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

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

See Recommendation 1.

2.3 Focus area: Diploma in Commercial Skydiving (Level 5)

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

It is recommended that NZSS:

1. Further develop self-assessment systems that more fully track the learning progress and learning outcomes of all students – including internationals – and use these results as a basis for reviewing educational performance.
2. Determine the role, if any, of the advisory board, and reintegrate this body into the PTE's self-assessment processes.
3. Review whether the student support provided during work placements is sufficient, and whether it can be improved to ensure students continue to make educational gains for the full length of the programme.
4. Review assessment moderation practices and clarify moderation processes.
5. Develop an educational strategic plan or approach focused on learner needs and outcomes.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

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 External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

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).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

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