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External Evaluation and Review Report

Aspire2 International Business and
Technology Limited

Date of report: 29 November 2019

About Aspire2 International Business and Technology Limited

Aspire2 International Business and Technology Limited delivers business, management, accounting, information technology and engineering programmes to international learners. Programmes are at levels 5, 6 and 7. Campuses are in Auckland, Christchurch and Tauranga.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Swanson Towers, 20 Hobson Street, Auckland
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	1,318 as at 8 March 2019
Number of staff:	111 permanent full-time and seven full-time fixed term (20 permanent part-time, 58 fixed part-time and 49 casual staff)
TEO profile:	<p>See: NZQA – Aspire2 International Business and Technology Limited</p> <p>At the last EER, the PTE was called Concordia Institute of Business Limited (CIB). In 2015, the Aspire2 Group purchased the Ntec consortium of which CIB was a part, as well as Queens Academic Group. Seven PTEs including CIB became integrated as Aspire2 International. From late 2016 to the end of 2018, work was undertaken to reduce the seven PTEs to three including the transfer of programmes to the enduring PTEs. The PTE's name was changed in December 2018.</p> <p>Aspire2 International operates a shared services model for provision of services and resources to its three PTEs including governance, finance, quality assurance, student pastoral care and counselling. Aspire2 International is part of the Aspire2 Group.</p>
Last EER outcome:	In 2015, NZQA was Highly Confident in both CIB's educational performance and capability in self-

assessment.

Scope of evaluation:

The following focus areas were selected to inform the EER:

- International Students: Support and Wellbeing
- Graduate Diploma in Information Technology (Level 7) (GDIT7)
- Diploma in Business (Level 7) (DB7)
- New Zealand Diploma in Systems Administration (Level 6) (NZDSA6)

MoE number:

7664

NZQA reference:

C31834

Dates of EER visit:

The EER site visit took place 13-15 March 2019.

The evidence synthesis and drafting of the EER report extended to April/May 2019 following NZQA's release of a programme monitoring report and associated moderation reports for the NZDSA6 on 24 April 2019 and the PTE's response to that report on 6 May 2019. The final NZDSA6 moderation report was released on 20 May 2019.

Summary of Results

There are gaps and inconsistencies in educational performance and the quality of self-assessment. The evidence is yet to show that significant assessment and moderation issues are fully or effectively managed.

Not Yet Confident in educational performance

- The PTE has been working hard to remediate significant assessment and moderation issues, but was not able to show evidence that key gaps have been fully and effectively resolved. Common assessment-related concerns identified across programmes by NZQA in 2018 are yet to be fully or effectively managed. The evidence does not instil confidence that future performance will be consistent and sound.

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

- Significant 2018 academic performance issues were identified by NZQA, not the PTE, indicating gaps in self-assessment.
- While there are some appropriate self-assessment processes in place and useful data leading to improvements, there are inconsistencies in the quality of self-assessment, including variability in industry involvement and programme review. Graduate outcomes data is limited and variable. Gaps in the data used to review educational performance limit a full and effective understanding of educational performance.
- The PTE's self-assessment did not show a solid organisational-level analysis of the strength of learner outcomes. There was a lack of evidence of robust underlying data and in-depth reflection to meaningfully interpret self-assessment information.
- Academic and pastoral support is strong, as is responsiveness to the Code of Practice. Staff development is supported. Excellent performance and valuable industry integration were found in the Graduate Diploma in Information Technology.

Key evaluation question findings¹

1.1 How well do students achieve?

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>In 2018, learner achievement was negatively impacted by significant issues with assessment design, concerns with the validity of assessment practice, and programme under-delivery. Over-generous marking was found in different programmes. The evidence did not show that these issues had been self-identified or responded to until required by NZQA.</p> <p>The PTE has recently undertaken significant remediation work, including the rewriting of assessments in business programmes. External post-assessment moderation in the business area is showing that marking has improved, but over-generous marking is still being found. NZQA's recent 2019 moderation of 12 pieces of learner work from four of the six NZDSA6 modules, found a significant issue with the design of one of the programme's assessments used to assess learners in 2018.</p> <p>Changing programme delivery from 2.5 to 4-5 days per week in 2019 is identified as contributing to improved learner engagement, as are processes implemented to respond to assessment issues and reconfirm learners' achievements.</p> <p>The GDIT7 is the one focus area programme where no issues have been found with the quality of assessment and marking. Learners achieve excellent results in that programme, assisted by a valued industry project and opportunities. Learners enter that programme with at least a qualification at level 7.</p> <p>Learners value the personal development programme and pastoral care and academic support, particularly the one-to-one attention provided to support learners who are struggling.</p>
Conclusion:	Learner achievement for 2018 is undermined by significant assessment and moderation issues found in four programmes.

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

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

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Understanding the value of outcomes for key stakeholders is limited by the quality and coverage of self-assessment data.</p> <p>Employment outcomes data does not identify the percentage of graduates surveyed or response rate by total numbers graduated; there is no identification of graduates already in employment before graduation. 'Relevant employment' is undefined and there is no analysis of the nature of the employment gained or career progression. There is no annual data on progression to further study.</p> <p>Employer feedback on graduates' skills and knowledge in employment is not systematically collected. This is under review by the PTE. The impact of this gap is less in the GDIT7 as existing industry networks provide insights into the value of the qualification, including positive graduate testimonials. But it is a gap with an impact on programmes, such as the DB7, where industry input is less strong and information on the value of outcomes is limited. In information technology, graduate surveys about confidence in the graduate profile outcomes are providing useful self-assessment information.</p> <p>Graduates interviewed for the EER appreciate the PTE's employment support. Some found it challenging to gain employment without industry connections. Greater industry connections could support learning and assist with employment. The PTE is focused on building industry engagement.</p> <p>Graduate employment data is variable, seemingly strong in the GDIT7, less so in the DB7, and limited data for the NZDSA6.</p>
Conclusion:	Gaps in the extent and coverage of self-assessment data limits a full understanding of the value of outcomes for key stakeholders. Available information shows variable performance.

1.3 How well do programme design and delivery, including learning and assessment activities, match the needs of students and other relevant stakeholders?

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Significant assessment and moderation issues, and the need for assessments to be rewritten and learning reassessed or reconfirmed in 2018, do not match learners' and NZQA's needs. Four business programmes were under remediation during the EER. In 2018, NZQA found under-delivery due to programme length and learning hours, and delivery over 2.5 days each week (a concern raised by NZQA since 2017). These issues had been addressed in 2019. In 2019, the PTE changed to 4-5 day delivery and is noticing improvements.</p> <p>Subsequently, NZQA has found a significant assessment issue in one NZDSA6 module used to assess learners in Term 3 2018 (under review and redevelopment by the PTE at the time of NZQA moderation in May 2019). The PTE states that it had self-identified the issue with the problematic assessment but that is not clear to the evaluation team.</p> <p>Industry input is inconsistent – strong, longstanding advisory input into the GDIT7, but quite a new DB7 advisory group with little input into the DB7. Programme review is inconsistent. The programme review evidence provided for DB7 was for 2018 and this was limited, given remediation. The identification of the significant issues in the DB7 identified by NZQA monitoring were not seen in the PTE's self-assessment evidence. Programme and term reviews were evidenced for the GDIT7 and NZDSA6.</p> <p>Student survey satisfaction results are variable, including some ratings being below desired benchmarks. Examples showed feedback is used to strengthen programme delivery. However, an issue with overtly negative student feedback from 2018 being unnoticed was identified at the EER. Survey ratings are tabulated by programme, term and year. There was no evidence of overall analysis reflecting on varying results, or on the effectiveness of actions taken in response to feedback.</p>
Conclusion:	Significant assessment and moderation issues do not match stakeholder needs. Self-review processes are variable, with significant issues identified by NZQA rather than the PTE.

1.4 How effectively are students supported and involved in their learning?

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Pastoral care and academic guidance and support is strong, and this has been consistently recognised in recent external monitoring reports. Support is individualised to meet learners' needs well. Students interviewed for the EER across programmes valued the one-to-one academic support, particularly when they faced challenges. Students also value the organisation's orientation and personal development programme focused on their settlement, socialisation and study success. They appreciate the Aspire2 Work service which supports learners to develop and update their CVs and with employment interview preparation.</p> <p>Effective attendance monitoring enables early identification of learners who may need additional support. The customer services team has useful processes in place to appropriately respond, track and review individual pastoral care cases referred to it. Enhancing self-assessment opportunities to gain further insights from learners about the effectiveness of support would add to a better understanding of the extent and value of the strong support identified. It was not clear from the self-assessment information what feedback looks like over time, specifically on the question of learner guidance and support.</p> <p>The PTE identifies that students' involvement in their learning has improved in the DB7 in 2019 following the move to programme delivery over 4-5 days a week. The extent of academic information for business students in the student handbook is an area for improvement.</p>
Conclusion:	Strong academic support and pastoral care effectively supports students in their learning. There are opportunities to improve self-assessment to gain stronger insights on the value and effectiveness of the support provided.

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

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>The PTE's mission is high quality programmes to support learner career progression and enhance employability. However, the evidence in terms of achieving this mission shows recent significant issues in the business programmes in the PTE's largest faculty (now under remediation), variable employment outcomes and little information linked to demonstrate career progression.</p> <p>Evidence of analysis of learner outcomes data at an overall PTE level is limited. There is no evidence to show data reported to the board on learner achievement and outcomes. Overall, the significant academic-related issues in 2018 identified by NZQA do not demonstrate effective monitoring of educational performance.</p> <p>There is yet to be an overall robust analysis and reflection on the issues of educational quality leading to remediation and therefore, a targeted, systematic response to issue identification. The PTE indicates that it will undertake analysis once remediation is complete. The PTE has rewritten assessments. Some actions are in place aimed at improving assessment and moderation, such as assessment and moderation workshops, but are not widely engaged in and their impact is yet to be seen.</p> <p>Resourcing is appropriate. The PTE has committed resources to required remediation. Investment and work to improve the learning environment is underway, including setting-up a learning and development unit, new student management system and staff training solutions. Processes support consistency across campuses and regular feedback at management level. Staff are supported with regular performance appraisals, professional development opportunities, and encouragement with research.</p>
Conclusion:	<p>Gaps in self-assessment negatively impact identification of and responsiveness to issues affecting educational performance. Organisational learnings from programmes under remediation are yet to be identified and responded to. Gaps with impact are yet to be effectively managed.</p>

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Ongoing and recent significant assessment issues found by NZQA do not demonstrate effective management of key compliance activities. In the business area, the PTE is in the process of remediation and is not yet able to demonstrate how effectively it has sustainably addressed issues or how it will effectively monitor academic-related compliance processes. The May 2019 NZDSA6 moderation report finds that the PTE has not met criterion 6.1 of the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules. The moderation report states that remedial action would address issues found and it is noted that the PTE's response to the moderation findings indicated that the review and redevelopment of the assessment was already underway.</p> <p>The PTE identified that it undertook its own internal audit of matters including delivery to programme hours prior to the 2018 NZQA monitoring visits. However, the PTE did not identify that it was under-delivering. That issue has now been addressed. The PTE's self-assessment summary identifies that programme review involves regular review of entry requirements, teaching hours, tutor qualifications and assessment and moderation. However, the 2018 NZQA monitoring visits found issues in each of these areas to varying degrees. Also, the EER has found variable quality and frequency in programme reviews being undertaken. Thus, there are clear gaps in the effectiveness of the PTE's own self-review.</p> <p>The PTE is effectively managing compliance activities related to the Code of Practice. This is assisted by effective monitoring of learner attendance and agent effectiveness.</p>
Conclusion:	Recent key academic compliance-related gaps demonstrate variability in the effective management of important compliance accountabilities and inconsistent quality and coverage of self-assessment. The evidence is yet to demonstrate that all gaps are effectively managed.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: International Students: Support and Wellbeing

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Learners are well supported by academic and pastoral support services. A solid body of data is captured to track support provided and there is functionality to undertake trends analysis (though the extent to which that occurs is unclear).</p> <p>There are opportunities to expand self-assessment processes to more systematically capture learner feedback on the effectiveness of support and wellbeing. This could add further insights to the strong picture of performance found.</p>

2.2 Focus area: Graduate Diploma in Information Technology (Level 7)

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>High achievement and outcomes are demonstrated. Recent and previous external programme monitoring confirms the strength of teaching and learning processes. Industry integration within the programme, and management's responsiveness to industry input, ensures a dynamic, up-to-date and relevant programme.</p> <p>Learners come to the programme with a minimum level 7 qualification and value the quick pace of the qualification and its ability to provide a new career path. The industry project component is highly valued. Improving the quality of self-assessment data to better understand employment outcomes data and career progression would add value. The PTE's focus on increasing employer engagement would add to the data on graduates' performance in employment, and potentially add to the breadth of industry contacts for the benefit of learners.</p>

2.3 Focus area: New Zealand Diploma in Systems Administration (Level 6)

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>NZQA's May 2019 monitoring report found a significant assessment issue, alongside some other less significant issues, in the PTE's quality of assessment for this qualification. The significant assessment issue undermines learner achievement in the module where all learners have been assessed by an ineffectively designed and delivered assessment in 2018.</p> <p>It was not clear to the evaluation team that the significant assessment issue had been self-identified (though the PTE says it was). Learner survey feedback has been variable. Learners interviewed for the EER were mixed in their satisfaction with a couple of specific areas raised as areas for improvement.</p> <p>Greater industry involvement could better match learners' needs. The body of employment outcomes data is minimal to date. In part, this reflects that graduates are surveyed 12-months after graduation and the first batch of graduates was not until 2017. But it also reflects that there is minimal data identified about the outcomes for those who have graduated, and a lack of employer feedback.</p>

2.4 Focus area: Diploma in Business (Level 7)

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Remediation work is still in process as a result of gaps found by external monitoring in 2018. Overall analysis of issues and related sustainable strategies for change are not yet in place. There is limited evidence of programme review and no evidence of key issues having been identified pre-monitoring. Graduate outcomes and learner feedback are variable.</p>

Recommendations

Recommendations are not compulsory but their implementation may improve the quality and effectiveness of the training and education provided by the tertiary education organisation (TEO). They may be referred to in subsequent external evaluation and reviews (EERs) to gauge the effectiveness of the TEO's quality improvements over time.

NZQA recommends that Aspire2 International Business and Technology Limited:

- Proceed with plans to increase industry networks.
- Proceed with plans to gain employer feedback on graduates once in the workforce.
- Strengthen reporting of graduate employment and destination data, and data on learner progression.
- Analyse learnings from recent remediation work to implement a PTE-wide response to address gaps and weaknesses identified.
- Review the effectiveness of current processes for assessment, curriculum and programme review, with a focus on identifying gaps and weaknesses that may have contributed to issues not being identified, and addressing any lessons learnt from that review.
- Ensure a PTE-wide robust process for assuring the quality of external and internal moderation.
- Consider whether and how examples of good practice and remedial learnings at an individual programme level can be applied across programmes.
- Implement processes to systematically collect learner insights into the effectiveness of student support.

Requirements

Requirements relate to the TEO's statutory obligations under legislation that governs their operation. This include NZQA Rules and relevant regulations promulgated by other agencies.

NZQA requires Aspire2 International Business and Technology Limited to comply with:

- [Sections 12\(1\)\(a\) and 12\(2\)\(a\)](#) of the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018 requiring that the institution has the capability and capacity to ensure assessment materials and decisions are fair, valid,

consistent and appropriate for the level, given the stated learning outcomes (this is a criterion for accreditation: [section 6.1 NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018](#)).

- [Section 5.1.8\(a\) of the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2018](#) and the requirement to operate a coherent system to ensure assessment and moderation requirements are met across all programmes for which it has accreditation.

Appendix

Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published rules. The methodology used is described in the web document <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/>. 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.

Disclaimer

The findings in this report have been reached by means of a standard evaluative process. They are based on a representative selection of focus areas, and a sample of supporting information provided by the TEO under review or independently accessed by NZQA. As such, the report's findings offer a guide to the relative quality of the TEO at the time of the EER, in the light of the known evidence, and the likelihood that this level of quality will continue.

For the same reason, these findings are always limited in scope. They are derived from selections and samples evaluated at a point in time. The supporting methodology is not designed to:

- *Identify organisational fraud²*
- *Provide comprehensive coverage of all programmes within a TEO, or of all relevant evidence sources*
- *Predict the outcome of other reviews of the same TEO which, by posing different questions or examining different information, could reasonably arrive at different conclusions.*

² NZQA and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) comprehensively monitor risk in the tertiary education sector through a range of other mechanisms. When fraud, or any other serious risk factor, has been confirmed, corrective action is taken as a matter of urgency.

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted under the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016, which are made by NZQA under section 253(1)(pa) of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister authorised as responsible for Part 20 of the Education Act.

Self-assessment and participation and cooperation in external evaluation and review are requirements for:

- *maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities, and*
- *maintaining consent to assess against standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards for all TEOs including ITOs but excluding universities, and*
- *maintaining training scheme approval for all TEOs other than universities.*

The requirements for participation and cooperation are set through the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018, the Consent to Assess Against Standards Rules 2011 and the Training Scheme Rules 2012 respectively. These rules were also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Rules 2018 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2018 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, training schemes and consents to assess and 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 Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016. 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). All rules cited above are available at <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/>.

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz