External Evaluation and Review Report

Aspire2 International Business & Technology Limited

Date of report: 15 September 2021

About Aspire2 International Business & Technology Limited [1]

Aspire2 International Business & Technology predominately trains international learners in IT (information technology) and business, to help them gain employment and effectively work in these sectors.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment
Location:	20 Hobson Street, Auckland CBD; 144-146 Durham Street, Tauranga; 289 Tuam Street, Christchurch
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	International: 231 equivalent full-time learners in enduring programmes; 123 equivalent full-time learners in teach-out programmes (at the time of the EER visit)
Number of staff:	Full-time: teaching, 28; part-time: teaching, eight; shared services (50 per cent of Aspire2 International): 23
TEO profile:	[Aspire2 International Business & Technology Limited](#)
Last EER outcome:	NZQA was Not Yet Confident in the educational performance and Not Yet Confident in the capability in self-assessment of the PTE EER in November 2019.
Selected focus areas:	• New Zealand Diploma in Systems Administration (Level 6) • International Student Support and Wellbeing
MoE number:	7664
NZQA reference:	C45977
Dates of EER visit:	23 February 2021

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[1] Aspire2 International has shared services across three PTEs. This EER visit was conducted concurrently with the Aspire2 International Hospitality & Healthcare EER. Because of the shared services, much of the content in the two reports is the same.

Summary of Results

Aspire2 International Business & Technology provides work-ready graduates for information technology and business-related roles. The PTE has improved its overall academic systems and processes since the last EER, though some moderation and monitoring problems remain, limiting NZQA's level of confidence overall.

Not Yet Confident in educational performance

- Learner completion rates across all programmes are very high.

- Some of these achievements, however, have been undermined by poor NZQA national external moderation results and programme monitoring

- There are, however, more positive indicators of PTE performance. These include strong post-programme employment outcomes for its graduates, and evidence that the most important needs of learners and industry are being met.

Confident in capability in self-assessment

- In addressing ongoing moderation problems, the recent "academic excellence" project, which has been heavily resourced, is a step in the right direction, although it is too soon for NZQA to measure its effectiveness.

- Pastoral care is effective in supporting the diverse needs of its learners.

- Data, analysis and self-assessment are used well to inform ongoing organisational improvement. However, the ongoing career progression of the PTE's graduates is not yet being clearly measured.

- Compliance accountabilities are effectively monitored and managed by the leadership teams.

Key evaluation question findings[2]

1.1 How well do students achieve?

Performance:	**Marginal**
Self-assessment:	**Marginal**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Achievement rates across all programmes are high. Since the last EER, 98 per cent of the learners in the enduring information technology programmes have completed. Average completion rates for the business programmes over the same period are between 78 and 100 per cent.
	However, recurrent NZQA external moderation findings, undermine the validity of some of these results. Over 40 per cent of Aspire2 International Business & Technology students have been enrolled in business programmes that are, by agreement, in the process of being taught out because of their poor moderation history (see Appendix 1).
	For the enduring programmes, Aspire2 International Business & Technology has implemented an academic excellence project, which includes increasing external moderation to strengthen post-assessment. This effort is to be commended, though its long-term effectiveness is still to be seen.
	Completion rates are analysed by programme leaders, management and governance teams to understand themes and trends. Often withdrawals are related to personal or family commitments, which Aspire2 International Business & Technology tries to accommodate wherever possible.
	Unfortunately, despite these efforts, a recent external NZQA external moderation of one of the largest of the enduring programmes, the New Zealand Diploma in Information Technology Technical Support (Level 5) identified several serious problems. These include a failure of assessment tasks to meet the learning outcomes – a problem which had been previously identified in other accredited programmes. Further remedial work is now required here.

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

Conclusion:	Aspire2 International Business & Technology has made some progress since the last EER, through strengthening its own moderation systems. However, these real improvements are still offset by ongoing assessment problems, identified by NZQA's external moderation and monitoring activities.

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Aspire2 International Business & Technology produces graduates who are able to gain employment in the information technology and business sectors in New Zealand.
	Most learners progress from the level 5 to level 6 information technology programme. Data collected and analysed shows employment outcomes are typically higher for learners who complete both programmes.
	Aspire2 International initiated a graduate outcome project during 2020 to measure and analyse the outcomes for graduates and stakeholders. This showed that 95 per cent of graduates of the level 6 information technology programme are working full-time. Of those graduates, 52 per cent are in employment relevant to their programmes of study, and 67 per cent found that the programme they completed helped them gain employment.[3] Overall, the project indicated that outcomes for learners are high; however, data collection on graduate progression over time within the industry could be strengthened.
	Industry networks are well utilised – some employers use their connections with Aspire2 International to hire graduates. The practice of inviting guest speakers, including graduates working in the industry, helps prepare graduates for employment.
Conclusion:	Graduates are well prepared for working in the New Zealand context, and the graduate outcome project aims to measure and

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[3] The response rates to the graduate outcome project surveys were high; overall, 47 per cent of graduates responded. Two main metrics were surveyed: 'relevant employment'; and how helpful the programmes have been to gaining employment. Both of these are determined by the graduate when they complete the survey, by using a 10-point scale. More than five points indicates a positive result.

	analyse meaningful data to inform improvements. Staff have reported a clearer understanding of achievement and outcomes.

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:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Overall, since the last EER, there has been a noticeable improvement in organisation-wide moderation practices. Aspire2 International initiated external post-assessment moderation has been significantly increased to address findings from previous NZQA moderation activities. Internal moderation occurs for all programmes, and cross-campus moderation supports the consistency of assessor judgements across campuses. These findings feed into the quarterly programme performance reports and the annual programme review.
	Despite these improvements, however, Aspire2 International Business & Technology failed to identify that many of the assessment tasks in the New Zealand Diploma in Information Technology Technical Support (Level 5) programme do not align with the learning outcomes (see 1.1 for more details).
	An industry advisory group meets twice a year to feed into programme development and review. Stakeholders that NZQA spoke to confirmed they can give input into programmes, and that their feedback is valued and acted on when appropriate. Each campus also has relationships with its own local industry, to reflect the contextual and local nature of the business and information technology sectors.
	Guest speakers who are stakeholders from industry give learners insights into what it is like working in the industry. Guest lectures are recorded so that learners across campuses can view the lectures online.
	There is a noticeably high use of the 'further evidence required' (FER) policy. This gives learners the opportunity to resubmit the part of the assessment they did not get correct in their first attempt. It is not clear whether there is a 'first time pass rate' expectation. However, most learners pass after their first FER (i.e. their second attempt at the assessment), which is

	acceptable to Aspire2. While an opportunity to re-attempt a task is standard practice in competency-based assessment, NZQA has expressed some concerns about the potential reliance on this policy.
	Given the high reliance on FER attempts by learners, this may indicate that learners may not be ready for a summative assessment at the point they are being assessed. Being able to resubmit the same assessment multiple times, without any change to the task, may also reduce the authenticity of the assessments.
Conclusion:	Programmes are well understood to meet the needs of industry. Some of the assessment and moderation practices are sound, though there are serious concerns with regards to delivery of the New Zealand Diploma in Information Technology Technical Support (Level 5), as noted earlier in this report. It is also too early to measure the overall effectiveness of some improvements in the academic excellence project.

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

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Learner support is managed by the Aspire2 shared services team. This team supports Aspire2 International Business & Technology Limited, Aspire2 International Hospitality & Healthcare Limited, and Aspire2 Education Limited.
	Learners are supported by the principle of 'awhi'. This guides the support that Aspire2 International offers, from orientation to ongoing support through programmes. Each learner has a personal development programme (PDP) which includes a formal orientation schedule. The PDP supports learners integrating into New Zealand, helps create an inclusive environment for learners of different backgrounds to engage with each other, outlines Aspire2 expectations, and enables staff to gain an understanding of individual learner needs.
	Attendance and the academic progress of individual learners is closely monitored, and Aspire2 International acts when necessary to support learner progress. Teaching staff,

	programme leaders and academic managers are in regular contact so that they are aware of learner progress.
	Small class sizes mean that learners are well supported and their needs are understood by tutors. However, Aspire2 Education, part of the Aspire2 Group, also has gained programme approval and accreditation with the intention to deliver to domestic learners – these learners attend the same classes as the international learners. Tutors are optimistic about the diverse and inclusive environment this will create, and domestic students will receive the same support as international learners. However, the PTE has not fully considered the challenges and different needs when delivering to domestic and international learners at the same time.
Conclusion:	The wrap-around pastoral care and academic support provided supports learners to achieve in their studies. The Aspire2 Group will be delivering programmes to domestic students shortly. While all learners will receive the same support, any different or additional support required has not been fully considered.

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	The Aspire2 International Business & Technology management team is also part of Aspire2 International and the overall Aspire2 Group.
	The management teams have a purpose and clear direction in delivering effective learning to support career advancement, supporting learners to gain employment relevant to their study.
	The governance and management teams are effective in supporting educational achievement, and the leaders understand teaching and learning well. Regular reporting, including educational performance indicators, are discussed at governance and management meetings, and any resulting actions are delegated effectively to ensure changes are implemented. Systems and data are used effectively to measure performance and create actions which are tracked and reviewed.

| | Learners and teaching staff have been supported during Covid-19. During the pandemic lockdowns, teaching continued online, and relevant resources were provided to tutors so they could continue teaching.

Tutors conduct peer observations and are supported by the learning and development manager in their professional development. Some professional development opportunities are not mandatory, but the staff that NZQA spoke to highlighted that it is encouraged and supported.

Aspire2 International's main business is centred on international students, so the closing of the borders over the past year has had a significant impact on the business, and many staff have been made redundant. The remaining staff members feel valued and supported.

Significant challenges, including Covid-19, have mostly been managed well.

Implementation of the graduate outcome project, and the academic excellence project have shown management's commitment to supporting educational achievement. The academic excellence project comprehensively outlines factors and actions for quality curriculum, delivery, assessment, data, and reporting and review. This includes increased external moderation. That said, the academic excellence project and external moderation initiated by Aspire2 International did not identify many of the issues noted in the NZQA moderation of the New Zealand Diploma in Information Technology, which has identified some gaps in assessment design and practice.

Aspire2 International is future-focused, with a determination to continue supporting educational achievement and outcomes. |
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| Conclusion: | The leadership has been effective in supporting quality performance, especially during challenging times. Self-assessment is generally robust. While there are some gaps, they are not significant. |

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Compliance accountabilities are mostly well managed. A compliance calendar outlines the key compliance requirements that need to be met.
	The requirements of the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice are closely monitored. Accurate information is provided to learners, and material is regularly reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose. Review of the Code of Practice is collaborative, and input is given across Aspire2 International.
	A number of student files were randomly sampled by NZQA to check that entry requirements had been met, that learners had an appropriate visa, and that they had sufficient insurance. There were no issues identified.
	Attendance is monitored and reported on weekly to ensure that learners comply with their visa conditions. Aspire2 International reported there have been no disciplinary actions required for lack of attendance.
	Learners are encouraged to gain employment (particularly relevant employment) while they study, and Aspire2 International works with them to ensure they are meeting visa/INZ requirements.
	Relevant NZQA attestations are present and have been submitted on time.
Conclusion:	Compliance is understood and well managed by the leadership team. The requirements of the Code of Practice are understood by staff, who also have the opportunity to contribute to the self-assessment review.

Focus Areas

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

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**

2.2 Focus area: International Student Support and Wellbeing

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**

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 & Technology Limited:

- Collect graduate destinations at multiple intervals over a period of time to analyse and understand the impact of completing a programme on career advancement.

- Review the 'further evidence required' (FER) section of the assessment policy to consider ways to reduce the frequency and potential reliance of learners on FER attempts, to strengthen good practice assessment principles.

- Consider the differences and challenges in supporting domestic and international learners in the same classroom.

- Continue to work on improving organisation-wide moderation processes and outcomes.

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.

There are no requirements arising from the external evaluation and review.

Appendix 1

Table 1. Qualification completion rates since the last EER of programmes being taught out

Qualification	Completion rate
Diploma in Accounting (Level 7)	100%
Diploma in Health Services Management (Level 7)	98%
Diploma in Computing (Level 7)	95%
Diploma in Business (Level 7)	93%
New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 6)	91%
New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5)	78%

Source: Aspire2 completion rates of non-enduring programmes

Table 2. Qualification completion rates since the last EER of enduring programmes

Qualification	Completion rate
New Zealand Diploma in Information Technology (Level 5)	98%
New Zealand Diploma in Systems Administration (Level 6)	98%
Graduate Diploma in Applied Management (Level 7)	95%
Graduate Diploma in Information Technology	93%
Diploma in Technology Management	94%

Source: Aspire2 EER self-assessment summary 2021

Appendix 2

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 fraud[4]*

- *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.*

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[4] 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.

Final report

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/.

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Final report