

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Wanaka Helicopters Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 15 February 2012

# Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Introduction .....	3
1. TEO in context.....	3
2. Scope of external evaluation and review .....	4
3. Conduct of external evaluation and review.....	4
Summary of Results .....	6
Findings .....	8
Recommendations .....	15
Appendix .....	16

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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

Location:	4 Lloyd Dunn Avenue, Wanaka Airport, Wanaka
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	2007
Number of students:	Domestic: 15 students currently International: nil currently
Number of staff:	Four full-time and two part-time staff
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wanaka Helicopters Commercial Pilot Licence (Helicopter)(Level 5)</li><li>• Wanaka Helicopters Private Pilot Licence (Helicopter)(Level 5)</li><li>• Wanaka Helicopters Certificate in Advanced Mountain Flight (Helicopters)(Level 6)</li></ul>
Distinctive characteristics:	Wanaka Helicopters Limited (WHL) is both a training provider and a commercial operator (offering scenic and charter flights).
Recent significant changes:	A fatal incident, involving a senior instructor (who was also the WHL training manager) and a student from WHL, occurred in April 2011. At the time of the external evaluation and review, the investigation by the New Zealand Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) was ongoing. A second full-time instructor subsequently resigned. WHL has recently recruited two experienced flight instructors and contracted a third pilot with an educational

background to assume training manager responsibilities on a part-time basis.

Previous quality assurance history: The NZQA quality assurance audit in 2008 found that WHL did not meet one requirement relating to learner information, entry and support

Other: Currently, students at WHL are unable to access student loans and many of them enrol on a part-time basis. WHL primarily delivers flight instruction to students, who complete the required theory through self-paced learning. Theory exams and flight tests are administered by Aviation Services Limited (ASL).

WHL has recently received NZQA approval to deliver the New Zealand Diploma in Aviation (Level 5 and Level 6). Discussions are underway with local partners to launch an aviation centre of excellence, which will include ground facilities for theory delivery.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the external evaluation and review included:

- Governance, management, and strategy (including international student support)
- Helicopter flight training.

The first focus area is mandatory, and helicopter flight training is the only training 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>*

A team of two evaluators visited WHL over two days. Interviews were held with the two owner-directors (one of whom is the chief flight instructor), the director of flight, and two flight instructors. Telephone interviews were also conducted with students and employers, as well as a representative from the Aviation, Tourism and Travel

Training Organisation (ATTO). A number of documents and other resources were sighted and reviewed.

Wanaka Helicopters Limited has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Wanaka Helicopters Limited**.

Ninety-five per cent of students who have commenced training for the Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) at WHL have achieved the licence, which compares very favourably with the wider industry (reported to be approximately 70 per cent). This result confirms the very high standard of flight instruction provided by WHL, which was commented on by all stakeholders.

Eighty-two per cent of CPL graduates from WHL have gained employment in the aviation industry. Pilots are particularly well prepared for employment by the training environment, including the challenging local topographical and climatic conditions, the level of air traffic at Wanaka airport, and the daily exposure to the commercial operation. WHL's Mountain Flying course was developed to further enhance CPL graduates' employment prospects.

WHL's success in training well-rounded, professional helicopter pilots is largely attributed to the experience, expertise, and reputation of the chief flight instructor and the organisation's emphasis on professionalism as well as technical flying skills. Trainees are engaged and motivated, benefitting from a structured, individualised programme and a team of qualified and experienced instructors.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Wanaka Helicopters Limited**.

WHL has a culture of improvement and striving for excellence in flight training. The training and administrative systems and processes are fit for purpose, being appropriate for the organisation's size and well understood by all staff.

Since 2009, WHL has tracked the average total number of flying hours taken by students to complete their PPL and CPL relative to the minimum of 50 hours, as an indicator of educational performance, and established an internal standard of 72 hours for PPL and 85 hours for CPL. Examples were provided of changes made to training delivery and structure that were considered to have contributed to the downward trend in average hours for the attainment of each licence type.

Educational performance at WHL is largely monitored through close management of each student's progress through the theory and practical flying components of the helicopter training. This involves regular discussions with the students and among the instructors, and appropriate record-keeping. As a small provider, WHL's relatively informal processes are effective in ensuring that learner needs are understood and met, and consistently high standards are maintained. The planned

replacement of the current annual review of flight training activity, with a quarterly review of educational performance and outcomes, will provide a greater opportunity to analyse and reflect on student achievement levels and improvement initiatives.

The regular engagement of the chief flying instructor with local and national aviation-related organisations and employers ensures that the expectations and needs of external stakeholders are well understood within WHL. Engagement includes ongoing relationships with ex-students. However, more regular and formal processes for inviting and recording feedback, and for tracking employment outcomes, would enhance WHL's ability to meet the needs of learners and other stakeholders.

## TEO response

Wanaka Helicopters Limited has confirmed the factual accuracy of this report.

# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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**.

Ninety-five per cent of students who have commenced training for the Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) at WHL have achieved the licence. This achievement rate compares very favourably with the wider industry (reported to be approximately 70 per cent).

There are difficulties in establishing meaningful performance comparisons between WHL's students, who pay their own fees on an hourly basis, and the full-time students in government-funded providers, who receive loans to complete the licence within a fixed period of time. Since 2009, WHL has tracked the average total number of flying hours taken by students to complete their PPL and CPL relative to the CAA minimum of 50 hours, as an indicator of educational performance. An internal standard of 72 hours for PPL and 85 hours for CPL has been established for the purposes of monitoring. Various changes have been made to training delivery and structure in response to student progression rates, which have contributed to a downward trend since 2009 in average hours for the attainment of each licence type. These changes include improved management and clarification of the "staged" approach to the syllabus, and an increased emphasis on using pre- and post-flight briefings to prepare students for the next lesson and better utilise flying time.

Eighty-two per cent of CPL graduates from WHL have gained employment in the aviation industry, which is reported to be better than the industry norm. Employers confirmed that WHL produces well-rounded professional pilots with excellent technical flying skills, attention to safety, and a good understanding of commercial operations.

As a small provider, WHL's relatively informal processes are effective in ensuring that consistently high standards are maintained. The planned replacement of the current annual review of flight training activity with a quarterly review of educational performance and outcomes will provide a greater opportunity to analyse and reflect on student achievement levels and improvement initiatives.

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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.

## 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 **Excellent**.

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

WHL demonstrates a very strong focus on training helicopter pilots who will meet the sector's expectations, especially in relation to attitudes to safety and professionalism. Students and other stakeholders interviewed by the evaluators attested to the reputation of the chief flight instructor as one of the most experienced in the industry, and students are referred to WHL on the basis of this reputation. Employers confirmed their satisfaction with the flight training and the quality of the graduates from WHL and their willingness to employ them.

Eighty-two per cent of WHL CPL graduates are working in the aviation industry despite the challenges for newly qualified low-hours pilots in achieving employment in a very competitive industry. WHL graduates are particularly well prepared for employment. This preparation is greatly enhanced by the training environment, including the challenging local topographical and climatic conditions, the level of air traffic at Wanaka airport (which is an uncontrolled space), and the variety of helicopters in the training fleet. Exposure to WHL's commercial operation is an added value, providing trainees with opportunities to assist with ground preparations and to observe professional pilots assessing weather conditions and engaging with clients. The ten-hour Mountain Flying course was developed by WHL to further enhance graduates' employment prospects.

The helicopter industry is small, but the employment opportunities are varied, such as in the tourism, energy, or agricultural sectors, or search and rescue. Much of the engagement with ex-students is informal, but efforts are made to maintain contact through email and Facebook. A more systematic approach to tracking and analysing graduate destinations, especially the longer-term outcomes, could provide useful insights into career pathways for helicopter pilots.

Through his role as an examiner for CAA, as well as his engagement with local aviation-related organisations (such as the Wanaka Airport Users Group and the Aviation Industry Association), the chief flying instructor of WHL contributes significantly to maintaining high standards in initial helicopter flight training and the ongoing learning of professional pilots. Examples include his involvement in the production of a mountain flying video by CAA and sharing his knowledge of industry developments and best practice when conducting annual flight renewal tests with working pilots. WHL has established a process to facilitate the sharing with all staff of useful information that arises from these personal connections. This could be usefully augmented by more systematic industry consultation, such as that recently undertaken by WHL in relation to the introduction of the New Zealand Diploma in Aviation.

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

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

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

A selection process establishes student suitability for pilot training, including mathematics and English tests and a trial flight. Comprehensive information on the requirements of the training programme is provided, as well as realistic advice on employment prospects. The programme content is prescribed by the CAA licence requirements and the ASL theory examinations; however, the one-to-one instruction ensures close attention can be paid to the needs of individual students. The directors advised that they deliberately limit the number of trainee pilots so they can ensure that a high level of individual support is provided. In addition, good communications and thorough record-keeping are utilised to minimise the challenges for those part-time students whose flying is more intermittent, as a result of needing to work to fund their training.

WHL endeavours to ensure its graduates are distinguishable from others in a competitive employment market by exceeding the minimum requirements for the CPL, both in terms of levels of competency and range of skills. Examples include advanced mountain flying skills and the ability to achieve flight ratings on a range of different helicopters. WHL is planning to add work placement to the programme to further enhance student employment opportunities, and has identified the need for pilots to be able to demonstrate appropriate information technology skills.

The instructional model provides multiple opportunities for students to raise issues in relation to the theory content or flight training. Students also confirmed that they had raised issues of a more general nature with instructors as well as with other WHL staff. Feedback is invited from completing students via an online survey, and this is collated and reviewed. Incidents where students had been disadvantaged by the competing demands of the commercial and the training operations for aircraft and instructors had been highlighted through the survey. This issue has been addressed through operational procedures and additional resourcing, and current students confirmed that they have not lost any flight time as a result of commercial operations. WHL has recognised that there would be value in providing further formal opportunities for feedback in order to address learner issues at an earlier stage.

WHL is a small, highly regarded training organisation characterised by open communication and good relationships between staff, students, and external stakeholders. More regular and formal processes for inviting and recording feedback would enhance WHL's ability to meet the needs of learners and other stakeholders.

#### 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 **Excellent**.

Learner achievement at WHL is largely monitored through close management of each student's progress through the theory and practical flying components of the helicopter training, including ASL external theory exam and flight test results. The theory component is self-paced, requiring students to complete study at home or attend block courses at Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology. The theory is tightly integrated with the flight instruction by the programme structure, which contains nine discrete stages. Formal reviews are conducted and documented at the end of each stage. The pre- and post-flight briefings provide additional opportunities to answer questions and review aspects of theory. An in-house grading system of pass, merit, and excellence has been introduced to encourage students to strive for more than the minimum pass rate of 70 per cent. Students interviewed by the evaluators were highly motivated to achieve well and confirmed that they were given additional assistance by instructors whenever they needed it.

Despite the significant staffing changes in 2011, learner progress indicates that the standard of instruction has been maintained at a high level. The trainers are qualified and experienced flight instructors, who have also worked in commercial aviation. They have performance agreements and professional development opportunities to improve their qualifications and skills. In addition, the standard of their day-to-day instructing is closely monitored by the chief flying instructor, who flies regularly with each of the trainers and with each of the students. Daily conversations on student progress are routine among the staff members, and recently they agreed to record key points in a book in the briefing room, to ensure information is shared with all instructors.

The flight instruction is supported by the availability of good quality learning materials, including the in-house flight training manual, which is reviewed annually, and access via Moodle software to practice tests and mock ASL theory exams. Although no international students are currently enrolled, all instructors have experience in teaching students for whom English is their second language.

#### 1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

WHL understands that qualification and employment outcomes depend on learner attitudes and levels of motivation. The low student numbers enable staff to build strong relationships with each learner in a family-like atmosphere, and to foster an organisational culture which fosters excellence, safety, and professionalism. This is accompanied by an awareness of the high cost of training and a commitment to

ensuring students receive value for money, both in terms of the training experience and employment opportunities. Students were very positive about the staff, who they found friendly and approachable. Regular informal contact with staff, as well as more formal progress reviews and flight briefings, ensures students have plenty of opportunities to discuss their training and how they are coping with balancing work and study.

WHL had 15 domestic students enrolled at the time of the external evaluation and review. The organisation has trained small numbers of international students in recent years and provided evidence to the evaluators that processes and arrangements are in place to provide the required level of support as set out by the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students. These arrangements include relationships with other local education providers for accommodation services and English language training.

The effectiveness of the guidance and support available to the students is enhanced by the small number of students and the ability to foster personal relationships. More systematic mechanisms to invite feedback and to identify issues and ensure a timely response would ensure that current high levels of support are maintained in the event of the planned growth of the organisation.

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

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**.

The owner-directors and staff of WHL share a vision for excellence in helicopter training which is grounded in an organisational culture focussed on the highest standards of safety and professionalism. Communication practices are open and inclusive, ensuring all staff members are able to contribute to organisational planning and improvement. Regular operational meetings and informal communications are focussed on day-to-day activities and individual student progress. Recently, the annual planning cycle has been revised to provide for a quarterly review of learner achievement and to identify progress against improvement targets. This will support management and staff in using self-assessment to improve educational performance.

The commercial operation and training programmes of WHL are delivered from the same facility, using the same aircraft. The directors have minimised the potential for conflicts between these two activities through additional resourcing, including recent staff appointments. Indeed, the co-location was identified by a number of stakeholders as a key added value for trainees.

WHL has demonstrated that it has the capacity to respond well to change, through its ability to recover from the loss of key instructing staff, maintaining high standards of learner achievement, and achieving approval to deliver the New

Zealand Diploma in Aviation. These examples reflect the high standards and quality systems that underpin the helicopter training delivery at WHL. Plans, policies, and practices are generally appropriate for an organisation of this size, and the current approach to sharing information and ideas about helicopter flight instruction and individual student progress is effective. The adoption of more formal stakeholder feedback mechanisms and periodic reflection on overall student outcomes will strengthen WHL's planning and ability to support educational achievement.

## 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 (including international student support)

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

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

### 2.2 Focus area: Helicopter flight training

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

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 implied or expressed within the report.

# Appendix

## Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

*Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of course approval and accreditation (under sections 258 and 259 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the course approval and accreditation criteria and policies established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act.*

*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 courses they own or provide. These criteria and policies are set by NZQA under section 253(1)(ca) of the Act.*

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

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

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

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

*External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website ([www.nzqa.govt.nz](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/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>*

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