



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

External Evaluation and Review Report

Wanaka Helicopters Limited

Date of report: 22 March 2024

About Wanaka Helicopters Limited

Wanaka Helicopters Limited is a well-established helicopter flight training school and commercial air operator. It is NZQA-accredited and approved to deliver Diplomas in Aviation (Helicopter) (General Aviation), (Helicopter) (Fight Instruction) and (General Aeroplane). Delivery is primarily to domestic students. Wanaka Helicopters also delivers NZQA-approved Private Pilot Licence and Commercial Pilot Licence training schemes.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	6 Lloyd Dunn Avenue, Wanaka Airport, Luggate, Wanaka
Eligible to enrol intl students:	Yes
Number of students:	<p>16 domestic diploma students in 2023 (enrolled in the two-year diploma in either 2022 or 2023). This includes three Māori and one Fijian student, as well as one female student.¹</p> <p>No international students were enrolled in the diploma (just two international students have enrolled in the diploma since its inception).</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters has not had any students enrol with a disclosed disability, likely due to CAA² medical requirements.</p> <p>Annually, on average, two to six private students enrol in the Commercial Pilot Licence training, and eight to 12 in the Private Pilot Licence (PPL) training. Students are primarily domestic and non-Māori, non-Pasifika.</p>
Number of staff:	17 full-time equivalents
TEO profile:	Wanaka Helicopters Limited

¹ Noted due to the under-representation of women among commercial pilots.

² Civil Aviation Authority

Last EER outcome:	At the last EER in 2019, NZQA was Highly Confident in both Wanaka Helicopters' educational performance and capability in self-assessment.
Scope of evaluation:	Two focus areas were selected for the EER: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diploma in Aviation (Helicopter) (General Aviation) Ref 3688, and Diploma in Aviation (General Aeroplane) (Level 5) Ref 3688-1; leading to the New Zealand Diploma in Aviation (General Aviation) (Level 5) with strands in Aeroplane and Helicopter• International Student Support and Wellbeing
MoE number:	7826
NZQA reference:	C55080
Dates of EER visit:	7 and 8 November 2023

Summary of results

Wanaka Helicopters provides high quality training steeped in a commitment to exceptional performance and outcomes. Self-assessment information is of high quality. Self-review could be further enhanced by wider coverage and better synthesis of key information.

Highly Confident in educational performance

- Wanaka Helicopters meets the most important needs of the learners. The PTE is driven by a priority focus on safety, quality, student outcomes and wellbeing.
- Students acquire valued outcomes, completing the diploma and gaining core skills. Most graduates gain aviation employment.

Confident in capability in self-assessment

- Industry needs seem well met. A small pool of employers repeatedly employ Wanaka Helicopters' graduates. Courses are tailored to industry operations. There is identified opportunity to increase employer connections and insights.
- Programme design and delivery provides students with highly relevant learning experiences, supported by qualified and experienced instructors. Students value the classroom environment for the small group and effective learning. Wanaka Helicopters fosters social and academic networks.
- The leadership team has led and grown the organisation effectively through significantly challenging times, and demonstrably supports excellent student achievement.
- The PTE monitors student progress closely and engages with student feedback. Self-assessment tools ensure meaningful insights. Data is used effectively for review and to make improvements.
- Wanaka Helicopters could look at consolidating and simplifying the reporting of key performance and self-review findings and actions to enhance self-review.

Key evaluation question findings³

1.1 How well do students achieve?

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Students achieve very well. Since 2019, 31 of 35 students enrolled in the diploma have graduated or are on track to graduate. Of the four students who did not graduate, two had to withdraw for medical reasons. Two did complete their Private Pilot Licence. Just three Māori students⁴ have enrolled in the diploma since its inception – all have successfully achieved.</p> <p>Students' first-time pass rates appear favourable against national results – Wanaka Helicopters has mostly 100 per cent first-time pass rates for the Private Pilot Licence and, to a lesser degree, for the Commercial Pilot Licence. The percentage of first-time pass rates is well above national aviation training rates in most subjects.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters' internal pass rate data comparing cohorts' maximum, minimum and mean scores year-to-year and by subject provides valuable insights. Internal benchmarking shows mean scores typically in the 80-90 per cent range. The data is a valued source for self-review as it also highlights some variance depending on the subject area.</p> <p>Some of the students enrolling with Wanaka Helicopters are re-engaging in learning after unsatisfactory past learning experiences or periods out of education. Through Wanaka Helicopters, they develop core adult learning skills. Students grow in maturity and develop life skills, critical thinking and decision-making abilities. They gain important knowledge relevant to future employment, including about employment contracts and administrative tasks associated with a commercial operation.</p>

³ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

⁴ Who self-identified as Māori.

	Student progress is closely and effectively reviewed. Instructors collectively review electronic student logs, and meet monthly, to ensure their current and coherent understanding of learner progress and needs.
Conclusion:	Students achieve excellent diploma qualification completions and pass rates, and develop valuable skills and knowledge. Student progress is closely tracked.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Students gain 'real-world' operations experience of relevance to their future employment. This reflects the wide coverage and experience they gain through their training including fire protection, ground crewing, agricultural spraying, frost prevention, night flying, sling loading and underwater escape. Wanaka Helicopters offers students optional training in addition to the requirements of the diploma, based on understanding commercial operations, to enhance graduate employability.</p> <p>Graduate survey data shows that most respondents (40 per cent response rate) received an offer of employment from an aviation company within three months of graduating from Wanaka Helicopters (otherwise within six-12 months). Through survey data, social media monitoring and ongoing graduate contact, Wanaka Helicopters identifies that, overall, 85-94 per cent of graduates are employed with an air operator within six months of graduating.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters has a robust graduate survey tool. It is well crafted and aligned to graduate profile outcomes, and produces meaningful, relevant data (though the PTE would prefer a higher response rate). The survey is closely analysed and compared with the results from the last graduate survey, including to gauge the impact of changes made and to identify areas for improvement.</p> <p>Most graduate survey question responses are positively rated, including graduates' high satisfaction with their</p>

	<p>preparation for commercial operations and different flying conditions, and their ability to make good judgements.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters identifies that a small core of employers (most are overseas) employ Wanaka Helicopters graduates almost every year. This is one indicator that employers value the graduates. The PTE has, however, experienced a poor response from employers to its surveying to gain their insights (despite the PTE's different attempts to improve this).</p> <p>Through its graduate survey reflection, Wanaka Helicopters identifies that it does not have a well-systemised job placement mechanism.⁵ The PTE has reflected on the probable need to build its employer connections as it grows its fixed wing training. While a member of the leadership team has previously visited employers in other jurisdictions to seek graduate opportunities, there is yet to be a strategic response to this consideration.</p> <p>Potentially, consideration could also extend to using direct employer engagement opportunities to gather employer perspectives on the graduates' preparedness for, and performance in, employment.</p>
<p>Conclusion:</p>	<p>Graduate employability is high and is supported by the broad, relevant coverage of the training. Graduate insights contribute useful self-assessment information to identify areas for improvement. Employer insights and relationships are an area for growth.</p>

⁵ Placement activities are mostly personal and professional interactions between the management team and employers based on their vacancy awareness within the industry and actively engaging as referees for graduates.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>The training environment at Wanaka Helicopters provides students with valued learning opportunities and real-world experience. Students gain flight experience in high altitude, mountainous terrain – experience that is not easy for students in other locations/jurisdictions to obtain, and for which Wanaka Helicopters is recognised. Instruction is carried out at Wanaka airport. Learning is integrated into the working environment of a commercial helicopter operation. Instructors are widely experienced and qualified.</p> <p>The programme is delivered to a carefully structured and prescribed syllabus, incorporating regulated pilot training requirements as well as additional modules for industry-specific skills. Wanaka Helicopters also provides optional training to students outside of the diploma and in areas where it has identified industry need – such as underwater helicopter escape training⁶ provided at no extra cost to the students. The programme and learning activities are grounded in an in-depth awareness of industry needs.</p> <p>All CAA theory and flight test assessments are conducted independently by Aspeq on behalf of CAA. A challenge of this arrangement is a lack of feedback from Aspeq about the reasons for students not passing. This impedes the PTE’s ability to use assessment results as a learning opportunity and to target remedial learning. Wanaka Helicopters uses formative assessment and close monitoring of student progress for this purpose.</p> <p>Internal moderation is largely in the form of regular peer review and instructor observations. No external evidence of moderation was provided. Wanaka Helicopters has found it challenging to source appropriately qualified (subject-matter expertise) external moderators in the absence of any third party-facilitated arrangements with</p>

⁶ This is known to be of importance to employment in Australia.

	<p>other like providers. The workforce development council identified that Wanaka Helicopters did not submit required pre-moderation materials, though Wanaka Helicopters says it submitted them to the previous industry training organisation.</p> <p>While stronger moderation evidence would provide better insights into assessment quality, overall the impact of moderation results is minimised, given the significant component of external assessment and multi-choice assessment for core theory (and external instructor examiners).</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters has excellent processes for student and graduate feedback, with data collated and analysed to identify areas for action, and presented to instructors and management.</p> <p>Programme review occurs on an ongoing basis through review of course performance and student feedback, as well as annual management review. The PTE has not produced an annual programme review report. Doing so could consolidate diploma performance and self-review information from across the year. This could provide an ongoing collation of key information, and an accessible overview of developments and improvements over time, to support self-review.</p>
Conclusion:	<p>The programme, learning environment and activities are well matched to student and stakeholder needs. Self-review provides real-time understanding of performance. Self-assessment could be enhanced by the consolidation of information.</p>

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>As a family business, Wanaka Helicopters is committed to family values and doing the best for the students, including through guidance and pastoral care.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters actively facilitates peer social networks. Before students begin, Wanaka Helicopters</p>

	<p>connects them through shared emails and closed Facebook groups. The PTE recognises the importance of social interaction for many students leaving home for the first time, and for providing guidance on matters such as seeking accommodation (a key challenge in Wanaka).</p> <p>International students (mainly training scheme students) are offered placement earlier than domestic students, recognising their need to make more complex preparation arrangements. Specific guidance and support are provided to help them gauge their ability to meet entry requirements before making any significant financial commitment.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters provides students with an informative diploma information pack which includes information on each course, study requirements and time commitments. Diploma students receive a comprehensive three-day orientation.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters has low instructor-student class ratios and face-to-face ground instruction. This provides students with an excellent level of instructor engagement, as well as valued collective peer learning. Programme delivery is structured so that small groups of students learn, progress and reach milestones together. This recognises the value of peer academic networks, and supports students as they develop as adult learners.</p> <p>Flight instruction and ground briefings are one-to-one, with students learning from widely experienced and qualified instructors. A notable feature of graduate survey feedback was the amount of positive qualitative comment on the classroom and group learning environment. Feedback is highly positive about key aspects of the teaching and learning.</p> <p>One-to-one support is readily available to students from all staff. The chief executive has an open-door policy that encourages students to engage with him. Guidance and support are proactively provided through close monitoring of student progress, as well as student-staff relationships. While support is effective in being collectively provided and students can approach any staff member for advice⁷, it</p>
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⁷ Students are provided with information about community support links.

	<p>may be of value to students if Wanaka Helicopters identified staff with specific support roles.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters is proactive in ensuring open, upfront conversations with students as soon as any challenges are identified. This ensures that prompt action/additional instruction is planned and put in place to support students' learning or, in some cases, to help students to decide whether to continue with the diploma.</p> <p>Student course surveys include carefully constructed questions to inform understanding of the sufficiency of student engagement and support. Feedback is reviewed across instructors and courses.</p>
Conclusion:	Students are effectively engaged in their learning. Their progress and satisfaction are closely monitored.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Wanaka Helicopters has a clear mission that drives its priority focus on safety, quality and student outcomes.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters has worked hard to sustain performance during the challenging last few years of Covid, increased inflation and the state of funding. During this time, Wanaka Helicopters achieved a low-risk Tertiary Education Commission financial rating, strategically transitioned to a new leadership structure, innovated and maintained high responsiveness to students.</p> <p>Innovation for the benefit of learners has included the successful acquisition of a fixed wing training organisation, enabling Wanaka Helicopters to offer aeroplane instruction. The PTE has also purchased land to provide accommodation for diploma students, recognising accommodation as a key pastoral issue. Resources are committed to support quality training (including provision of additional training opportunities, coverage and hours above programme requirements).</p>

	<p>Wanaka Helicopters’ academic coordinator provides effective academic leadership and, in tandem with the chief executive, has an in-depth understanding of the sector and is connected with and advocates to sector and regulatory bodies.</p> <p>The academic coordinator and leadership team work extremely hard – the level of which may require ongoing review, alongside role coverage and forward sustainability and succession planning. Currently, the organisation does not have a strategic plan or associated goals.</p> <p>Staff retention is important to Wanaka Helicopters and is supported by various policies and activities. Annual staff performance and development reviews include a focus on staff goals and development needs. Professional development is aligned to staff and organisational goals and is well resourced. It may be of value to extend coverage to include a focus on student pastoral care and wellbeing.</p> <p>Instructor recruitment is focused on hiring well-qualified and experienced instructors. New instructors receive mentoring from more experienced and qualified instructors. Pedagogic support is also provided by the academic coordinator. All instructors complete a CAA instructional techniques course.</p> <p>The leadership team has a good understanding of educational performance, supported by established review and reporting processes and close staff relationships.</p> <p>It would be useful for the PTE to develop a reporting summary of specific matters and actions that it has identified from self-review, and any associated responses and outcomes. This will provide a synthesised record for ongoing analysis, reflection and review over time.</p>
<p>Conclusion:</p>	<p>Governance and management are highly effective in supporting educational achievement. Self-assessment is effective and could be further supported by enhanced reporting, forward strategic planning, and planning for senior staff roles, backup and support.</p>

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Aviation compliance accountabilities are the specific focus of the CAA. Wanaka Helicopters has received CAA recertification for its operations. In 2023, this includes the granting of its Part 141 Aviation Training Organisation Certificate for the maximum period of five years, and Part 135 Air Operations Certificate. The CAA's Flight Instructor Code of Conduct is embedded across the organisation.</p> <p>Diploma students are guided and encouraged to report incidents, occurrences and concerns as part of their integration within Wanaka Helicopters' safety management system. Any reports are reviewed by Wanaka Helicopters' safety manager and actioned if necessary or if beneficial to improve practices.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters understands and generally meets its NZQA and education-related accountabilities. The PTE's last Tertiary Education Commission audit in 2021 confirmed Wanaka Helicopters' compliance with rules and regulations, record-keeping and learning hours, student withdrawal information and recognition of prior learning policy. Only minor non-conformities were found.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters submits Code of Practice attestations as required which are informed by its Code self-review report. Documenting the reasons for improved self-assessment ratings against Code outcomes reported in different Wanaka Helicopters documentation would add to self-review.</p> <p>International student numbers are small. For the sole two international diploma graduates, visa, passport, insurance and English language appeared to meet requirements, though improved record-keeping would better demonstrate this and make the information more accessible.</p> <p>In 2023, NZQA identified that Wanaka Helicopters had not updated its training scheme approval to ensure the inclusion of all key information. This has been addressed and seems to have been a one-off issue. Wanaka</p>

	<p>Helicopters has been successful in obtaining NZQA programme approval, as well as subcontracting approval, for fixed wing delivery. The subcontracting arrangement appears well managed due to cohesive and shared processes, leadership and academic oversight, and location.</p> <p>Wanaka Helicopters' credit reporting is timely, and NZQA attestations are submitted as required.</p>
<p>Conclusion:</p>	<p>Compliance accountabilities appear to be appropriately managed. Better documenting of information in some areas could improve review processes.</p>

Focus areas

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

2.1 Diploma in Aviation (Helicopter) (General Aviation) Ref 3688 and Diploma in Aviation (General Aeroplane) (Level 5) Ref 3688-1 leading to the New Zealand Diploma in Aviation (General Aviation) (Level 5) with strands in Aeroplane and Helicopter

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent

2.2 International Student Support and Wellbeing

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good

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 Wanaka Helicopters Limited:

- develop its recording and reporting of information to synthesise and more easily identify and highlight, year-to-year, evidence of performance and key self-assessment findings, actions and improvements
- review the coverage of leadership roles as part of forward planning and develop a strategic plan and goals to guide and support future organisational sustainability, innovation and/or growth.

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

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 fraud⁸*
- *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.*

⁸ 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 2022, which are made by NZQA under section 452(1)(t) of the Education and Training Act 2020 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister of Education.

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 excluding universities, and*
- *maintaining micro-credential approval for all TEOs other than universities.*

The requirements for participation and cooperation are set through the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2022, the Consent to Assess Against Standards on the Directory of Assessment and Skill Standards Rules 2022 and the Micro-credential Approval and Accreditation Rules 2022 respectively.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2022 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review as a condition of maintaining registration.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes, micro-credentials 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 2022. 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