Report of External Evaluation and Review

Media Design School

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Contents

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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.

Brief description of TEO

Location: Auckland

Type: Private training establishment

Size: 370 equivalent full-time students

Sites: Auckland

Media Design School (MDS) was founded in 1998 to deliver training to produce graduates for the creative technologies and digital content sector.

MDS delivers high-level diplomas and graduate diplomas which give the graduates qualifications to gain employment as specialised designers, animators, game developers, and creative innovators. In ten years the school has grown from just 30 students in 1999 to 488 full-time students and 40 staff in 2009.

MDS is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students and currently has 35 international students enrolled.

Executive Summary

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Media Design School.**

Key reasons for this are the following.

The exemplary quality of training at MDS is reflected in the high qualification achievement rates across the school and the strong evidence that the majority of students gain relevant and sustainable employment in the industry. The average qualification completion rate across the school of 86 per cent over the past four years is a result of a carefully constructed selection and admissions process which enrols students who understand the clearly laid-out expectations of the qualification and embark on an intensive, industry-driven programme which thoroughly engages them in learning. Students are taught by highly experienced staff who have strong links with the industry and who demonstrate passion, energy, and dedicated support for the successful qualification achievement and employment of the students.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Media Design School.**

Key reasons for this are the following.

There was clear evidence of a systematic and comprehensive self-assessment process throughout each department at MDS. The overall self-assessment showed that valuable information from all stakeholders, including students, is gathered, collated, and analysed to a level that enables MDS to implement purposeful changes for improvement. The robust and thorough nature of the self-assessment is essential to ensuring the students graduate with current, work-ready skills for this rapidly evolving sector. Self-assessment is evident at both course and qualification levels of the programme, highlighting MDS's proactive approach to successful achievement of quality and relevant qualifications.

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 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQuality) is responsible, under delegated authority from NZQA, for compliance by the polytechnic sector, and 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).

Findings

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

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

Outline of scope

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Media Design School included the following focus areas:

- Diploma in Digital Creativity (Foundation) (Level 5)

Innovative introductory-level qualification developed in conjunction with the Encouraging and Supporting Innovation (ESI) project "Champions for Success" for Māori and Pasifika students. This diploma was delivered for the first time in 2009.

- Diploma of Digital Media (Level 6)

One of the longest-standing qualifications which has been reviewed many times as it is constantly evolving to meet, and keep up with, industry needs.

- Diploma of Graphic Design (Level 6)

This is the most popular qualification with the largest number of enrolled students.

The mandatory focus areas are:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- Support of students (including international students).

Part 1: Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation

This section provides a picture of the TEO's performance in terms of the outcomes achieved and the key contributing processes. Performance judgements are based on the answers to key evaluation questions across the focus areas sampled. This section also provides a judgement about the extent to which the organisation uses self-assessment information to understand its own performance and bring about improvements, i.e. capability in self-assessment.

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 **Excellent.**

Context

Each department at MDS monitors the progress of students' achievement throughout the qualification. Students' course and qualification completions are reported through the Single Data Return to the Ministry of Education three times a year. Each department collects information on graduate destinations and this information is now being fed into a collective database of graduate destinations recently developed by the marketing team.

The Diploma in Digital Creativity was developed as an introductory option for students that needed to gain basic design skills before embarking on a level 6 course or for those who sought a "taster course" before specialising in a similar qualification at level 6. This diploma was delivered for the first time in 2009 and included two students from the Champions for Success project which supports Māori and Pasifika students to achieve in higher-level qualifications.

Explanation

Achievement of qualifications at MDS is very high due to the stringent admissions process which enrols students who are committed to achieving a well-recognised qualification that will secure their employment in the creative technologies and digital content sector. The experienced tutors share their passion for the industry with the students and through the practical, interactive nature of the programme support and guide each learner to successful achievement.

Qualification completion rates are consistently above 80 per cent across the school, which compares favourably with an average 75 per cent across the private training establishment sector for all qualifications.

Self-assessment showed high achievement rates for the Diploma in Digital Creativity, with an 89 per cent achievement of the qualification and 100 per cent of those completing the qualification moving on to qualifications at a higher level. Of the 16 graduates, 15 are now enrolled in qualifications at MDS and one at Auckland University of Technology. This programme had two enrolments from the Champions for Success project who are both now studying at level 6. One significant change implemented as a result of thorough self-

assessment of this programme has been a rise in expectation by the MDS tutors of the time that students spend in self-directed study to better prepare the students for study and successful achievement at a higher level.

There was evidence to support that a high number of graduates from the level 6 programmes gain good jobs in the industry on completion of the qualification. Self-assessment shows that within eight months, over 70 per cent of graduates have secured jobs in the industry or are studying at a higher level in the same field.

All staff, students, and industry stakeholders spoken with at the evaluation confirmed that students gained additional personal skills from the intensive programme. With the strong support of the tutors there has been a significant increase in the students' confidence and time management skills and their application of effective team work as developed through the interactive nature of the programme.

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 **Excellent.**

Context

Each department at MDS delivering a level 6 qualification has an industry panel they engage with on a regular basis and formally invite to review all students' final portfolios at the end of the programme.

Many of the industry panel members are graduates of MDS, and the MDS marketing department is in the process of developing a web-based programme for MDS alumni.

Explanation

There was strong evidence to demonstrate that MDS is fully immersed in the industry and has ongoing formal and informal stakeholder feedback which supports the highly valued qualifications delivered at MDS.

Because of this ongoing collaboration, and the students' work being appraised by industry, students who successfully complete the qualification have a good chance of gaining employment in the industry or being accepted onto qualifications at a higher level, either internally at MDS or at another tertiary provider.

The industry panel members spoken with at the evaluation confirmed that due to the high quality of the programmes, graduates from MDS are sought after. Industry gains employees with work-ready and up-to-date skills from using the highest levels of technology, and who can effectively critique and solve problems.

Completion of qualifications in more than one specialised area broadens the students' employment opportunities on graduation. This has proven to be the case in this industry when demand fluctuates for web and graphic designers. MDS is approved and accredited for a number of media industry qualifications. Clear evidence that these qualifications

complement one another is shown in the self-assessment data on the further study of graduates. Of 1644 students that have graduated from one qualification at MDS in the past eight years, 21 per cent have gone on to do another qualification, 3 per cent have taken three qualifications, 2 per cent have taken four qualifications and 1 per cent (17 students) have taken more than four.

The new alumni, web-based programme will collect further evidence of the value of the outcomes gained and provide networking and employment opportunities for the school and its graduates.

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 **Excellent.**

Context

Each department at MDS has its own industry panel to ensure the content and delivery of the qualifications is up to date, relevant, and producing well-qualified graduates for the industry. All tutoring staff are engaged in freelance work within the industry.

Explanation

Industry panel members spoken with at the evaluation confirmed the strong evidence of stakeholder engagement demonstrated by MDS. Formal and informal stakeholder engagement is an integral part of course development and content because the industry advises, guides, supports, and endorses the qualifications delivered at MDS. Many staff belong to specialist associations and are on forums relative to their specialty such as Google, Flash, and Adobe user groups.

The delivery approach to each diploma is applied and immersive, which appeals to students as they are effectively completing all requirements of a two-year diploma in 19 months.

Comprehensive self-assessment across all stakeholders, together with the tutors' ongoing research, showed MDS to be proactive and responsive to feedback, and implementing changes effectively for the improvement and currency of courses.

Regular analysis of student evaluations, one-to-one sessions with the tutor and students, and ongoing informal feedback assure the school that the programme is matching the needs of its students. This was also confirmed by graduates spoken with at the evaluation.

Interviewed graduates from the Diploma in Digital Creativity in 2009, now studying a level 6 qualification at MDS, said they saw the level 5 as an introduction to the industry which has enabled them to make informed decisions about their study at a higher level. Some said that the level 5 had given them the opportunity to study at level 6, in that previously they may have lacked the prerequisites.

There was evidence to demonstrate effective student needs analysis at the admissions stage where extra support for identified learning needs has been successfully implemented to assist qualification achievement.

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.**

Context

Tutors are sought nationally and internationally by MDS for the right skill set and experience.

MDS conduct an induction process for all new tutors which includes information on processes and practices, mentoring, and peer observation.

All MDS tutoring staff have industry experience and continue to engage in freelance work in the industry.

Explanation

The school's learning environment is immersive and is based on production and resolution-based learning, reflecting the requirements of the industry.

The tutors, students, graduates, and industry representatives engaged in the evaluation spoke of the students' development in business acumen and problem-solving as they are taught critical thinking and reflective skills.

The tutors' initial focus is on understanding learning styles and group work. This is to enable the students to work well together and learn respectful critiquing skills for each other's work. Self-assessment reflected the positive support of the small classes, practical, hands-on application, and the ability to work together through group work. Due to the intensity of the programme the students develop time management skills as they receive a "layered learning" style of delivery, with repetition of tasks that continually reinforce the learning.

It was clear that the student-tutor relationship and interaction was positive in all cases and has strongly contributed to student achievement and their ultimate independence.

MDS conducts a well-structured and closely monitored assessment process which students report to be challenging but fair. A thorough internal pre- and post-moderation process is in place for all assessments across the school, ensuring quality and consistency.

The ongoing feedback from both formative and summative assessments shows that the students are knowledgeable about their progress and what they have achieved.

The mid-year industry panel session for the graphic design group provided the students with valuable feedback about their work to date and what was still required to secure employment in the industry on completion of the qualification. Guest speakers and site

visits to the industry are regular features of the programmes for all qualifications and have proven to be very beneficial to the students' insight into industry expectations.

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 **Excellent.**

Context

The marketing manager leads a team which deals with the interview and application process of each potential student at the school.

Processes are implemented and continually reviewed to capture accurate and valuable data on attendance, progress and feedback from the students.

There are several processes and activities in place that ensure all students are guided and supported throughout their training at MDS.

Explanation

All students spoken with at the evaluation confirmed the effective support they received from all staff at MDS. Thorough self-assessment analysis, including valuable and consistent data from the anonymous online evaluation form, ensures staff are aware of any potential issues which are then dealt with appropriately.

There was evidence to show that students found the information they received prior to enrolment and the expectations of the programme to be accurate and the whole experience of the enrolment process to be very efficient and positive.

Self-assessment showed that guidance in options for further study on completion of an MDS programme was effective as in the case of the Diploma in Digital Creativity, where 100 per cent of graduates enrolled on courses at a higher level either internally or with another tertiary provider. Other programmes showed over 50 per cent of students coming from other programmes within MDS.

All students spoken with felt supported by their tutor. The "open-door" policy allows students to have access to tutors outside the classroom sessions, and students are continually receiving feedback on their progress. The one-to-one sessions formally record progress twice throughout the programme of study, while the peer and student representative support ensures issues are dealt with quickly and smoothly.

Recent initiatives implemented to monitor attendance more closely are likely to be effective and demonstrate MDS's commitment to supporting each learner to a successful achievement.

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 **Excellent.**

Context

Media Design School has a board of advisors who are responsible for the strategic direction of the school. As well as being a board member and sole director of MDS the chief executive officer (CEO) heads the current MDS senior management team of the academic leader, human resources manager, and marketing manager. In the last nine months the senior management team have seen a change to their reporting line and the creation of a new position.

Explanation

The CEO is effective in making the purpose and direction of MDS very clear to all staff and stakeholders. The evident strong links and positive industry focus embedded in all areas of the school is driven by the CEO. There was clear evidence that the effectiveness of the senior management team's leadership is reflected in the consistent exemplary achievements across the organisation. Although there is only one academic manager in the team this model has proven to be successful as ownership of the outcomes is infused at the course leaders' level. Currently the strength of the programme is at the course leader and tutor level.

MDS management actively supports excellent teaching, learning, and research by investing in the highest levels of technology available (which is often ahead of many industries in the sector), and providing extended access to those resources for 13 hours each day.

MDS management has been successful in recruiting nationally and internationally for highly experienced industry experts to deliver the training. Staff are encouraged in their desire to maintain freelance work in the industry which keeps their skills current and up to date, and embark on professional development courses that enhance their skills and knowledge for their role. Historically, tutors at MDS have completed a formal adult teaching qualification and some continue to do so; however, in addition to the internal adult teacher training workshops facilitated by the academic manager, the school is researching a more appropriate external adult teaching course which a selected number of tutors will attend. The majority of tutors spoken with at the external evaluation and review saw professional development as relevant and valuable and felt well supported by the MDS senior management team.

MDS continually reviews and updates well-structured policies and practices that underpin the continuity of the programmes, while it researches and explores innovative ways of maintaining comprehensive service to the sector. The existing programmes are readily changed in response to stakeholder feedback through a thorough process which maintains the quality and outcome focus of the school.

Part 2:   Performance in focus areas

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

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

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

2.2 Focus area: Support for students (including international students)

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Diploma in Digital Creativity (Foundation) (Level 5)

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

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

2.4 Focus area: Diploma of Digital Media (Level 6)

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

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

2.5 Focus area: Diploma of Graphic Design (Level 6)

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

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

Actions Required and Recommendations

Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's regular scheduling policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

Recommendations

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

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