



# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Adventure Education Limited

Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 22 December 2011

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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:	Level 1, 63 Chapel St, Tauranga
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	1996
Number of students:	Domestic: 359 equivalent full-time students (EFTS)
Number of staff:	33.5 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New Zealand Institute of Management (NZIM) Certificate in Management (Level 4)</li><li>• National Certificate in Diving (Foundation Skills) (Level 3)</li><li>• Certificate in Master Diving (Level 4)</li><li>• Certificate in Dive and Trailer Boat Operations (Level 3)</li><li>• National Certificate in Diving (Instruction) (Level 6)</li><li>• Certificate in Bicycle Mechanics (Level 3)</li><li>• Certificate in Bicycle Mechanics (Level 4)</li></ul>
Sites:	Head Office: Tauranga Diver training delivery sites: Auckland (East Tamaki), Napier, Gisborne, Whangarei Bicycle mechanics site: Auckland (Mt Wellington)
Distinctive characteristics:	Adventure Education Limited (Adventure Education) is one of three private training

establishments owned and operated by the Big Fish Group Limited.

Adventure Education delivers dive training through a network of individually owned businesses in a number of locations throughout New Zealand.

The NZIM Certificate in Management is delivered by Adventure Education through distance education.

Recent significant changes: A new appointment was made to the NZIM course coordinator role in February 2011, following a review of the role.

Previous quality assurance history: The NZQA quality assurance audit in 2009 found Adventure Education did not meet six requirements relating to: governance and management; personnel; physical and learning resources; learning information, entry and support; assessment and moderation; and notification and reporting on learner achievement.

NZQA moderation history indicates good moderation results in 2009, exemption in 2010 from national external moderation, and an assessment plan submitted in 2011.

Other: A fatal diving incident, involving students from Adventure Education, occurred in July 2011 at the Auckland site. Subsequently, NZQA completed an investigation at the Adventure Education sites in East Tamaki and Whangarei, focussing on the National Certificate in Diving (Foundation Skills) as well as the Certificate in Master Diving at the Whangarei site. The NZQA team included two independent dive industry experts. The report confirmed that Adventure Education met all of the sampled policy requirements of the *Policies and Criteria for the Ongoing Registration of Private Training Establishments*. At the time of the EER visit, investigations by the New Zealand Police and the Department of Labour were ongoing.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the external evaluation and review included:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- NZIM Certificate in Management (Level 4)
- Certificate in Master Diver (Level 4) (and optional companion qualification, Certificate in Dive and Trailer Boat Operations (Level 3)).

The first focus area is mandatory. The NZIM Certificate in Management is the largest programme delivered by Adventure Education. This distance education programme is managed out of the Tauranga head office site. The Certificate in Master Diver is offered at all dive sites. Through cross-crediting and completing one additional course, most students also achieve the Certificate in Dive and Trailer Boat Operations.

## 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/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>*

A team of three evaluators visited Adventure Education over three days. One day was spent at the head office site in Tauranga, where the distance delivery of the NZIM Certificate in Management is based. Interviews were held with the general manager PTEs (on behalf of the managing director), the PTE operations and development manager, the dive programme manager, and the course coordinator for the business management programme.

The evaluation team also visited one dive delivery site in Auckland (Helix Training Limited) and interviewed the management and tutorial staff and student representatives. Telephone interviews were also conducted with current and past management students, the New Zealand manager of Scuba Schools International, management and staff of ProSkills (a contract marking agency), Skills Active (the industry training organisation for the dive sector), and NZIM. A wide range of documents and online resources were sighted and reviewed.

Adventure Education has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and submissions received have been fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Adventure Education Limited**.

Qualification achievement rates at Adventure Education are generally good, based on external benchmarking with similar tertiary providers, and have improved from 63 per cent overall in 2009 to 74 per cent overall in 2010. Māori and Pasifika students are achieving qualifications at the same rate, or better, than students at similar tertiary providers. In 2010, 74 per cent of the students enrolled for the NZIM Certificate in Management and 77 per cent of the students enrolled for the Certificate in Master Diver completed successfully.

In addition to the acquisition of course-related skills and knowledge, students are gaining transferable study skills and achieving improved levels of confidence and well-being. Students report positive short-term study and employment outcomes and benefits, although there is limited information available on medium to long-term outcomes for learners. External stakeholders generally confirm the quality, value, and relevance of the dive and management training provided.

Adventure Education staff are committed to, and focussed on, the academic progress and well-being of students. Dive tutors are highly experienced practitioners who maintain their industry currency through ongoing certification and professional development. The learning experience for distance students in the NZIM Certificate in Management programme is generally positive and is facilitated by a course coordinator. The support she provides complements comprehensive course materials and thorough assessment and feedback processes.

The evidence drawn on in reaching these conclusions is contained in the body of the report.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Adventure Education Limited**.

Adventure Education has established an ongoing review and improvement cycle involving all staff, which has both formal and informal components and incorporates the essential compliance components associated with the dive industry. There are many examples of improvement initiatives as a result of purposeful and systematic collection and review of data and information from a variety of sources. While the impacts of individual changes were not always apparent, improved trends in retention and qualification completion were provided as evidence of effective self-assessment.

Regular engagement with dive industry stakeholders (such as Scuba Schools International, the Dive Training Council, and Skills Active) ensures dive provision remains compliant with industry standards and programme content meets the needs of the local dive industry. However, there is currently no engagement directly with employers of the management students to confirm the value of the learning in the workplace.

Student feedback is collected both formally and informally, including from evaluation surveys, group discussions, and emails. Examples of worthwhile changes made in response to feedback include a comprehensive revision of course materials for the NZIM Certificate in Management and a rescheduling of activities in the Certificate in Master Diver to provide an earlier opportunity for practical experience and assessment.

There have been genuine efforts made by the provider to understand the effectiveness of contributing processes. These efforts include the development of an evaluation matrix and an assessment of the organisation's processes against the matrix by two key staff. There are opportunities to enhance organisational capability in self-assessment further, by extending such evaluative activities to a wider group. The planned integration of a self-assessment portfolio into formal annual reporting processes at the end of 2011 will confirm the alignment between self-assessment and organisational decision-making.

# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Academic achievement at Adventure Education is generally good. Comparisons with previous years indicate steady improvements in course and qualification completion rates and in retention overall. Māori and Pasifika students are achieving qualifications at the same rate, or better than, students at similar tertiary providers.

In 2010, 74 per cent of the students enrolled for the NZIM Certificate in Management completed successfully, and retention improved from 63 per cent in 2009 to 82 per cent in 2010. Benchmarking information against comparable providers indicates similar achievement levels. Achievement levels across the organisation's dive network are monitored closely for consistency and to identify any issues. In 2010, 77 per cent of the students enrolled for the Certificate in Master Diver across all sites completed successfully (compared with 62 per cent in 2010), and 80 per cent of these also completed the optional companion qualification, Certificate in Trailer Boat Operations. In addition, these students received industry certifications from Scuba Schools International. In comparison with two other, similar tertiary dive providers, learner achievement was slightly lower for 2010, but reflected a higher rate of improvement over recent years.

Most students enrolled for the NZIM Certificate in Management are already working. They report that they are acquiring useful skills and knowledge which are contributing positively to their current employment or employment prospects. Eighty per cent of the graduates from the Certificate in Master Diver go on to further study or employment, although few currently achieve dive-related employment because of New Zealand industry requirements for a minimum of 100 dives. Of these graduates, a further 20 per cent enrol for the National Certificate in Diving (Instruction) and achieve instructor certification from Scuba Skills International. Six of the 25 current dive tutors across the Adventure Education delivery network are the organisation's own graduates. In addition to the acquisition of course-related skills and knowledge, students are gaining transferable study skills and achieving improved levels of personal confidence and well-being.

Staff at Adventure Education have a good understanding of the barriers to achievement for their learners and have focussed their improvement initiatives on

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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.

maintaining students' engagement with the programmes. These initiatives include follow-up processes and close monitoring of assignment submissions in the distance management programme. Helix Training picks up students from home and follows up non-attendance on a daily basis to encourage student attendance and also schedules remedial and catch-up days to enable students to keep current in their learning. The steady improvements in completion and retention rates attest to the effectiveness of such initiatives.

## 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 **Good**.

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

Students at Adventure Education are achieving qualifications and gaining useful knowledge and study skills. In addition, there is good evidence of improved learner well-being and confidence and the development of communication and organisational and leadership skills.

Some positive short-term employment and recreational outcomes and benefits are reported through the end-of-programme surveys. Most of the management graduates are already working and they report that their learning is useful in their workplace. Examples include financial skills and knowledge, preparing a business plan, and improved time management skills. Graduates are confident of enhanced employment opportunities as a direct outcome of their learning, and some report having already achieved promotions or salary increases. However, while Adventure Education maintains regular contact with NZIM and meets all its expectations, there is no attempt made to identify the value of the programme for the employers of the learners or to verify the work-related benefits reported by graduates.

The staff members of Adventure Education maintain close relationships with key dive stakeholders such as Scuba Schools International as well as being actively engaged with industry through the Dive Training Council and associated programme reviews. The representative from Scuba Schools International confirmed that the dive training provision was of a very high standard. Students were particularly well prepared for employment, benefitting from the inclusion of unit standards in the programme and acquiring additional relevant knowledge and skills. The Master Diver programme is primarily a pathway qualification and does not, on its own, lead to many dive-related career opportunities in New Zealand. While 80 per cent of graduates go into either employment or further study, they generally either go off-shore for dive jobs or work in other sectors.

The value of the medium to long-term employment and study outcomes for both the dive and management groups of students is not fully known, as there are difficulties in maintaining contact with ex-students. Mechanisms are being implemented to

maintain ongoing contact with NZIM graduates via an email list, or to contact dive graduates by phone on a regular basis, but these are not yet yielding useful information.

### 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**.

The programmes offered by Adventure Education are appropriate in level and delivery method for the targeted learner cohorts. Recruitment processes for the NZIM Certificate in Management are designed to attract busy people with work and family commitments for whom the flexibility of distance delivery is most suitable. All students are required to have access to a work environment, which ensures the learners can contextualise and apply their learning and gain formal recognition for their work experience in a national qualification.

A record of improvements made has been maintained by the course coordinator for the management programme. This provides many examples of steps taken to better meet learner needs. Changes made in response to student feedback include a comprehensive revision of course materials, and the significant improvement has been positively reflected in student surveys. Email communications between the coordinator and students ensure a high level of responsiveness to individuals, and are potentially a rich source of information for further improvement.

Adventure Education understands the student profile for the dive certificates, which are seen as a vehicle for engaging young people with learning, and a pathway to employment or further study. The varied and practical nature of the activities align well with the needs of these learners, many of whom have little motivation or prior experience of educational success. An initial self-assessment provides an opportunity to identify barriers to learning, in particular relating to literacy and numeracy. Through having a good understanding of the learning needs of their students, programme staff ensure that course materials, teaching approaches, and assessment methods address any identified learning difficulties.

Detailed schedules have been developed for the dive programmes to ensure each site delivers a well-organised programme to its learners. Programme design also provides a mechanism for maintaining learner engagement with the programmes through the scheduling of meaningful activities. An example of adjustments being made in response to learner feedback was the scheduling of the first open-water dive earlier in the programme. A careers session has recently been included in the Certificate in Master Diver to increase student awareness of career opportunities, and the local provider visited (Helix Training) is working actively to build relationships with local employers.

The comprehensive log of improvements for the dive programmes provided evidence of a significant number of changes made in response to student and stakeholder needs. The leadership component of the Certificate in Master Diver has recently been extended to better prepare graduates both for employment and for the National Certificate in Diving (Instruction). Stakeholders confirmed that the changes made to include key aspects of the New Zealand marine environment in the programme content would also better prepare learners for local employment.

#### 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

Adventure Education has a number of long-standing staff with appropriate and varied backgrounds in tertiary education who are strongly focussed on providing the best possible learning experience.

Dive tutors are highly experienced instructor-practitioners who maintain their industry currency through ongoing certification and professional development and have a good understanding of the skills base required for teaching adults. The students interviewed said they valued the support and accessibility of their tutors highly and were satisfied with the learning environment and resources.

Effective facilitation and student support complements the course materials in the NZIM Certificate in Management programme to deliver a positive learning experience for distance students. During 2011, additional online learning resources have been developed for this programme, as well as improvements to the hard-copy course materials.

Staff report that they are supported and resourced to be effective teachers. Formal performance appraisals of all staff complement the day-to-day supervision and feedback provided by managers. This is supplemented by regular observations of dive tutors at all sites by the dive programme manager. Verbal and written feedback to the tutor and their manager, and professional development plans and follow-up, provide a high level of assurance of consistent teaching standards across the dive network. A monthly professional development programme for all staff was in place at the Auckland site visited, based in part on an “aspirational” document prepared by the programme manager which detailed the ideal knowledge base for both tutors and students.

There are effective processes in place to monitor student progress. Regular tracking of assignment submission and course completion provides the course coordinator for the management programme with opportunities to identify potential issues and to initiate email contact with learners. All marked assignments are sighted and significant grade variances also prompt follow-up. The teaching schedule for the dive certificates describes the ideal progression of students

through the programmes. Daily meetings are held at the dive site visited to monitor student issues, particularly attendance and progress. A wall chart for tracking each student's achievements is displayed and maintained in response to student feedback that they were not sure how they were progressing, and has contributed to increased levels of motivation.

The evaluation team found evidence of good assessment and moderation practice. The majority of the marking for the NZIM Certificate in Management is outsourced to an appropriately qualified and experienced sub-contractor. Sound systems, processes, and communication practices have been established to provide accountability and ensure consistency and to facilitate feedback on assessment. Recent revisions to the finance paper had been made, in part, in response to market feedback. While the arrangement appears to be working satisfactorily, with frequent informal contact between Adventure Education and ProSkills, regular formal reviews would provide more assurance against the potential risks, to educational quality, of outsourcing this important activity. Adventure Education is compliant with the moderation requirements of all standard-setting bodies. Scuba Schools International, in its role as a dive certification agency, also confirmed its confidence in the validity of the assessment processes.

## 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**.

Adventure Education staff demonstrated a good understanding of learner needs and a strong culture of pastoral care. Appropriate support mechanisms are in place to ensure individual needs are identified and met. Attendance (or ongoing engagement in the distance programme) is considered a primary indicator of student progress and well-being. Staff monitor withdrawals (before and after 10 per cent of the course has been completed) in both programmes and focus on guidance and support as an important strategy to reduce withdrawal rates. However, while retention trends are generally positive across the organisation as a whole, little is known with certainty about why learners withdraw. A more proactive approach might yield more useful information.

Dive students interviewed said that staff were very supportive with both academic and well-being issues. Students appreciated the daily pick-ups which encouraged attendance, and were comfortable talking with staff and seeking assistance. Management and tutorial staff are all accessible and available to guide and support students when required. The small size of the classes presented opportunities for students to provide direct feedback regularly, formally and informally. Recognising the limitations of written surveys, the dive programme manager now meets regularly with student groups at all sites to establish the veracity of survey results and to identify key issues.

The student surveys indicate 97 per cent satisfaction among NZIM Certificate in Management students with service and student support. However, a review of comments on the surveys and conversations with students indicated to the evaluation team that a more proactive approach to support might be appropriate, particularly given the educational background of many students. Staff are aware of this. A comprehensive induction pack is provided on enrolment, and recent improvements have been made to the student website to incorporate more study support information. Plans are also in place to provide administrative relief to the course coordinator in order for her to focus more on student support.

The openness of Adventure Education to student feedback is reflected in its commitment to listening, identifying issues, making improvements, and reporting back to the student body, including via testimonials on the website.

## 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**.

Adventure Education has a well-defined and effective governance and management structure which supports educational achievement and is driven by a commitment to learners. This is managed and delivered through effective strategic and business planning, decision-making, and communication which are aligned with self-assessment activities. An appropriate level of resources is available to ensure the needs of learners can be met and to support staff with professional development opportunities that enhance teaching and learning.

Effective selection and structured induction processes are applied to the recruitment of individual staff members and the identification of dive delivery partners. The Tauranga office functions as both a support centre and a head office to the other sites, effectively balancing the provision of guidance and resources with ensuring compliance and accountability. Different management models are applied to the dive sites, depending on their size, level of experience, and scope of provision, and monthly reporting is a standard requirement. Although there is no formal opportunity for providers to share best practice directly, information sharing across the network is effectively channelled through the dive programme manager who visits and communicates with all sites regularly. Stakeholders confirmed a high level of consistency in the educational standards across the delivery network.

Staff members are actively involved in the review of educational performance, and the EER team identified many examples of improvement initiatives arising from the analysis of data and information which is systematically collected from a variety of sources. There was evidence that changes made had been reviewed as part of day-to-day operations and that management staff are monitoring and reflecting on the impacts of changes on educational performance.

There have also been genuine and wide-ranging efforts made to understand the effectiveness of contributing processes. These efforts include the development of a self-evaluation matrix and an assessment of the organisation's processes against that matrix by two key staff. The extension of this evaluative activity to the wider organisation, together with the planned integration of the self-assessment portfolio into formal annual reporting processes at the end of 2011, will further align self-assessment and organisational decision-making.

## 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

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: NZIM Certificate in Management (Level 4)

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

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

### 2.3 Focus area: Certificate in Master Diver (Level 4)

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

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

The evaluation team visited the East Tamaki dive site which has been owned and managed by Helix Training since April 2010. Clear and comprehensive evidence was found that this provider has already developed an excellent understanding of the learning and pastoral needs of its learners. The organisation has implemented a significant number of initiatives designed to improve learner outcomes. In particular, the evaluation team noted the improvements made to developing study skills (incorporating library, research, and computer-related activities) and soft skills (such as responsibility for personal behaviour extending through to sharing responsibility for group well-being).

A collaborative team culture has been developed with the instructors who value the open communications and structured approach to their professional development. While a structured process of self-assessment has not yet been devised, there are plans for this to happen. Self-assessment is largely informal at present.

Achievement and retention rates are being closely monitored. Analysis of withdrawal trends at programme and tutor level has resulted in improved understanding of the contribution of tutorial approaches to retention and identified the need to maintain student engagement over the Christmas break.

# **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/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>*

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