



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Auckland Institute of Studies Limited
trading as AIS St Helens

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 6 October 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. AIS St Helens in context

Location:	28a Linwood Avenue, Mt Albert, Auckland
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	1991
Number of students:	Domestic: 232 equivalent full-time students International: 790 equivalent full-time students
Number of staff:	98 full-time; 72 part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Master of Business Administration (Level 9)• Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (Level 8)• Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration• Bachelor of International Business (Level 7)• Graduate Diploma in International Business (Level 7)• Diploma in International Business (Level 6)• Diploma in International Business (Level 5)• Bachelor of Tourism Management (Level 7)• Graduate Diploma in Tourism Management (Level 7)• Diploma in Tourism Management (Level 6)• Diploma in Tourism Management (Level 5)

- Bachelor of Information Technology (Level 7)
- Graduate Diploma in Information Technology (Level 7)
- Diploma in Information Technology (Level 6)
- Diploma in Information Technology (Level 5)
- Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (Level 5)
- National Certificate in Hospitality (Food and Beverage Service) (Level 3)
- Certificate in Foundation Studies (Level 3)
- English as a Foreign Language

Sites:	Mt Albert, Auckland (Main and Asquith campuses)
Distinctive characteristics:	AIS St Helens is a large private tertiary education organisation. It is an unusual PTE in that most of its programmes are at degree level.
Recent significant changes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of Bachelor of Information Technology and associated diplomas, January 2010 • Preparations for launch of proposed Bachelor of Hospitality Management and new Graduate Diploma in Information Technology in January 2011 • Development of Master of International Business • Introduction of internship and field study options in the Master of Business Administration
Previous quality assurance history:	Audit report January 2008 found the TEO to be a sound organisation.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The focus areas selected were:

1. Master of Business Administration (MBA) (Level 9)
2. Bachelor of International Business (BIB) (Level 7)
3. Staff research development
4. Governance, management, and strategy
5. Student support

The Master of Business Administration is the flagship programme and involves about 250 students per annum. The Bachelor of International Business (BIB) also has about 250 students and there are also diploma qualifications within this programme. AIS St Helens has an active research sub-committee coordinating staff research activity which is an important component of providing degree courses. The fourth and fifth focus areas are currently mandatory components of all external reviews.

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 web 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/>

The initial evaluation was conducted over three days by two NZQA lead evaluators assisted by an external evaluator. NZQA's principal evaluation adviser attended as an observer.

The evaluation team spoke to the chairman, chief executive officer, president/chief operating officer, corporate services director/ academic registrar, academic director, heads of programmes, lecturers, marketing and student support staff, and students. Over these days the team also reviewed a range of documents and records. Follow-up interviews were conducted with managers and tutors and further documentation was examined.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Auckland Institute of Studies Limited trading as AIS St Helens**.

Achievement results are analysed at the tutor, programme, and academic board levels along with other self-assessment information, including student feedback, review reports, and moderation information. AIS St Helens collects this formal data systematically. It is analysed and reflected on at programme meetings and by the academic board to determine what changes need to be made.

A high percentage of students at AIS are achieving qualifications. For the two focus areas, successful course completion rates were between 82 and 89 per cent for 2010. These rates are comparable with a national average for business and management degree courses in New Zealand of 78 per cent for Bachelor's and 87 per cent for Master's.¹

The quality of learner achievement and the value of the outcomes include:

- Relevant and meaningful knowledge and skills
- An international, multicultural experience while studying in New Zealand
- Projects that integrate the knowledge gained across the different subjects in the degree programmes in real-world applications.

Staff research at AIS St Helens is well organised and supported. Research competency mapping revealed many strengths but also areas for improvement. There is a core group of active and experienced researchers who are implementing a programme which they hope will develop the research skills of less experienced staff and produce high quality research publications over time.

Follow-up interviews were conducted to investigate comments by some staff that some students appeared to have been admitted without adequate English skills. While the evaluation team found a few errors in the administration of English entry criteria, the wider issue for AIS St Helens is meeting the needs of students who meet formal entry requirements but lack the English language skills necessary to study and succeed. The management team has acknowledged this as an issue but staff comments indicate that more needs to be done to address these needs.

While moderation was thorough in the BIB programme, this was not so in the MBA.

¹Ministry of Education (2010) Education Counts: Retention and Achievement: Passing Courses. Retrieved 26.4.2011 from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/retention_and_achievement

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Auckland Institute of Studies Limited trading as AIS St Helens**.

The organisation has multiple feedback mechanisms to inform decision-making processes embedded in a robust quality management system. There was good evidence that the organisation had responded to changes such as those in tertiary education funding and the international student market.

AIS St Helens has a comprehensive, organisation-wide committee system for considering academic results and feedback from students. However, the small self-assessment review group has not yet been expanded to the wider consultative groups that could reflect on the data, identify areas for improvement, and propose changes and processes for measuring the effectiveness of these changes. A wider system may have identified and addressed other concerns.

Also, although the organisation has focussed on the achievement of qualifications, the value of those qualifications is not well understood among some learners and the wider community. Evidence of graduate employment outcomes and career development is not comprehensive. AIS St Helens acknowledges that it needs to find innovative ways of obtaining information from alumni about their AIS St Helens experience to contribute to improvements in programmes and processes.

Staff interviewed by the evaluation team expressed some frustration that their observations and insights sometimes appeared to be ignored. For example, comments to heads of programmes about the English skills of some class members were not addressed, nor were some concerns relating to moderation and peer review. While management responds to staff comments made in programme committee meetings, it is not clear that themes such as English skills are always identified and addressed. NZQA is of the view that AIS St Helens has committed, well-qualified faculty members who could contribute more to informing planning and generating innovation and improvement.

TEO response

Auckland Institute of Studies Limited trading as AIS St Helens 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.

Findings²

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

A high percentage of students at AIS St Helens are achieving qualifications. For example, in 2010 the successful course completion rate for all students was 86 per cent. For the two focus areas, successful course completion rates were between 82 and 89 per cent for 2010. These rates are comparable with a national average for business and management degree courses in New Zealand of 78 per cent for Bachelor's and 87 per cent for Master's.³

The knowledge and skills achieved by the students are relevant and meaningful. There are a number of experienced visiting lecturers who have a significant input into the learners' education. The evaluation team noted that AIS St Helens implements a comprehensive programme of regular consultation with business and other key stakeholders. There is good evidence that the feedback received has a positive impact on the programmes delivered.

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

There is effective, comprehensive analysis of achievement data at all levels of the organisation and across time. This analysis is robust, authentic, and honest. For example, the analysis of MBA achievement showed that while the overall completion rate was 86 per cent, only 21 per cent were completing within the prescribed 18 months. Further examination showed that many students were struggling to write their dissertations. This has led to staff giving more support around research techniques. In addition, discussions internally and with the local advisory committee have led to the development of alternate pathways of internship or field study.

Achievement results are analysed at the tutor, programme, and academic board levels, along with other self-assessment information, including student feedback, review reports, and moderation information. AIS St Helens collects this formal data very systematically. It is analysed and reflected on to determine where worthwhile improvements can be made. This is good self-assessment. However, a closer analysis of reasons why some learners are not achieving in their first semester could enable AIS St Helens to lift the learners' English skills and achievement rates.

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

³Ministry of Education (2010) Education Counts: Retention and Achievement: Passing Courses. Retrieved 26.4.2011 from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/retention_and_achievement

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 Adequate.

Students value the qualifications they gain and the international, multicultural experience of studying in New Zealand at AIS St Helens. Students come from over 30 countries and AIS St Helens encourages the celebration of diverse cultures. AIS St Helens is proactive in ensuring cross-cultural communication and project work within the classroom.

Students gain valuable knowledge and skills that are readily applicable to the workplace. The BIB applied business plan project enables students to bring together the knowledge and skills obtained from earlier study in a practical, real-world application. The local advisory committee stressed the importance of courses being relevant to current business practice and involving the practical application of the principles and theories of business. Thus, the committee strongly supports the internship and field study options in the MBA. The practical emphasis and application of these programmes increases their value to the students and their employers.

Graduates and employers gave evidence that a number of AIS St Helens graduates have used their qualifications to obtain relevant and meaningful employment in New Zealand and overseas. However, the current economic recession has constrained employment options for graduates, and some students expressed concern about the difficulties they faced in obtaining New Zealand work experience.

Much of the evidence of value for students is anecdotal and more formal data may demonstrate that the value of the outcomes is good.

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

While the organisation has focussed on the achievement of qualifications, the value of those qualifications is not well understood by the learners and the wider community. Evidence of graduate employment outcomes and career development is not comprehensive and AIS St Helens acknowledges that it needs to find innovative ways of obtaining information from alumni about their AIS St Helens experience to foster improvements in programmes and processes.

The organisation is currently working on its exit survey to understand better the value of the students' experience. The evaluation team commends this work as the value of the AIS St Helens experience is not well understood. For example, students expressed concerns over the lack of work experience, but this issue did not appear in AIS St Helens' self-assessment.

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 Good.

AIS St Helens has clearly identified its key stakeholders and has meaningful, ongoing engagement with them. The advisory committees provides important links with industry and there is a mutual exchange of ideas which results in graduates acquiring relevant knowledge and skills. Staff are encouraged to build active relationships with professional bodies and other providers. This enhances the quality of the information that informs planning, programme delivery, and evaluation.

Programmes and activities are generally planned and structured to benefit learners and match their needs. For example, the MBA programme is provided in weekend sessions which maximises students' opportunities to participate. The organisation does have issues with learners being enrolled without the level of English they require to be successful. The support for staff who teach these students is not sufficient. However, the overall achievement rates are strong.

Students emphasised being drawn to the organisation by the quality of the staff and small class sizes. The large number of "word of mouth" referrals is evidence that AIS St Helens is perceived as meeting most students' needs.

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

The organisation has a number of mechanisms in place to help it understand and match the needs of stakeholders. These include regular programme evaluations, student fora, advisory committees, student leaving questionnaires, routine course satisfaction surveys, and ongoing liaison with local and overseas agents. A current concern of students that management recognises is matching the needs of those students who are aiming to gain chartered accountant status in New Zealand. The organisation is attempting to address this complex issue.

AIS St Helens also promotes culturally based groups such as the Māori and Pacific Island (MPI) Forum, which means that the voices of different ethnic groups are heard.

The assessment of study skills, English ability, and career needs of learners could be improved. AIS St Helens should look at gathering information to prioritise actions in these areas to match the needs of learners more closely and more promptly.

More effective engagement with graduates could well provide information that would improve the extent to which AIS St Helens' programmes and activities match their needs.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

The effectiveness of the teaching is evidenced by the good student achievement at AIS St Helens. Students confirmed the self-assessment evidence of good relationships and interactions between tutors and students. Class sizes are generally small which is conducive to positive interactions between students and tutors and among students. Students respect the knowledge and experience of their tutors and the guidance and feedback provided by the tutors. This assists students to achieve.

Staff are generally supported by the organisation to develop as lecturers. For example, professional development is encouraged and funded. There is a process for regular teaching observation, formal and informal, by both peers and heads of programmes, but this is applied inconsistently. Staff told the evaluation team that feedback from these sessions, in conjunction with student evaluation and achievement results, assists tutors to develop as teachers.

The evaluation team noted a range of teaching approaches, including project-based, guest speakers, and group work. There is also an e-learning enhancement for students whereby tutors' presentations are made available electronically for preparation and revision. An inclusive developmental research culture is strengthening teaching and learning, for example supporting dissertation and research work. This is a solid base of teaching practice which could provide opportunities for innovation.

Moderation processes, where applied, are generally robust and effective but have not been implemented consistently across programmes. For example, in the BIB programme there is a comprehensive moderation process applied to all assessments, and changes to the programme are overseen by the programme head and academic board and, in some cases, the industry advisory committee. However, assessment, moderation, and staff review processes were applied less effectively in the MBA programmes.

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

Some academic processes are thorough and comprehensive. Programmes are reviewed regularly and programme committees and the academic board meet to consider achievements and possible improvements. An example of improvement resulting from this self-assessment was the improvement in achievement in the newly introduced Bachelor of Information Technology after disappointing initial results. The academic director addressed the need for high quality teaching and results have improved.

A notable feature of AIS St Helens is the multiple channels by which students can give formal and informal feedback. As well as the standard evaluations each semester for each course, there are regular student forums on both programme and institutional issues, and opportunities to give feedback in the students' first language. The evaluation team was impressed by the readiness of students interviewed to give honest and thoughtful feedback.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

AIS St Helens provides comprehensive and timely study advice to students. There is a large marketing team and their role includes ensuring that students are appropriately enrolled and understand the requirements and regulations. Members of this team speak a wide range of languages and are able to offer advice to most students in the students' first language. An orientation is delivered at the beginning of each semester and an extra orientation was offered this year to students who arrived two weeks late because of the Chinese New Year. Students get a condensed version of the student handbook in their first language and a summary of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students in that language too.

Students receive continued support to assist achievement. Although this support is mostly provided by their tutors, a study skills advisor is available who not only runs study skills workshops and provides individual help but is also responsible for following up on students with attendance and achievement problems. This study skills role is seen as particularly valuable by both staff and students, and the evaluation team noted the high demand for this support.

AIS St Helens complies with the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students. There was clear evidence that the organisation conducts regular, thorough reviews of its compliance. The management board discusses these reviews, and recommendations are actioned and tracked.

The facilities at AIS St Helens are of a high standard. They include spacious grounds, a well-resourced library, and a fully equipped gymnasium. Student development is supported by the celebration of culturally significant festivals including Divali, Chinese New Year, and Ramadan. Sports events and barbeques and the St Helens Ball help build the student community.

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

As noted above, there are multiple channels through which students can give self-assessment information. Also, management observed from staff performance review interviews that having a number of staff covering the study skills advice role after a previous advisor left was not working and a full time advisor was recruited. However, the organisation needs to analyse wider information as to whether the current resources can deliver AIS St Helens' vision.

Students are well supported by the marketing staff, and bus drivers and security staff provide physical security support. The evaluation team noted that students wanted more guidance and assistance in gaining part-time work to build their work experience. The careers support function offers a range of activities, but resources are limited and cannot meet all student needs. AIS St Helens should consider how to gather better information that would lead to setting priorities in this area so that resources can be used to maximum effect.

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

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

AIS St Helens is an organisation where policies and procedures are clear. There is a comprehensive quality management system which includes a hierarchy of committees. These committees meet regularly to review progress and educational achievement. However, there are inconsistencies in the application of some important academic processes. Although these inconsistencies are not widespread, practices such as the poor moderation in the MBA programme could have a significant impact on the validity of results.

The organisation is conservative with resources, although it has made considerable investment in important areas such as IT equipment, library books, and databases. AIS St Helens takes care to appoint and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff. There is an effective staff performance appraisal and a management system that encourages development.

The management team articulated a clear vision of a boutique international university-college providing high quality education in a multicultural context. However, it was not apparent that this vision is shared throughout the organisation or beyond. Students expressed concern about the lack of wider awareness and understanding of the organisation within New Zealand and the impact this might have on their employment prospects.

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

As noted above, the organisation has multiple feedback mechanisms to inform decision-making processes embedded in its quality management system. Although there was good evidence that the organisation had responded to changes, such as those in tertiary education funding and the international student market, it was not evident that the self-assessment review group had involved the whole organisation in self-assessment. Wider groups reflecting on the analysed data could produce a greater range of possible actions to improve performance. It is not evident that AIS St Helens has yet moved to using self-assessment as the primary means of understanding and improving its educational performance.

Some staff interviewed by the evaluation team expressed frustration that their observations and insights sometimes appeared to be ignored. For example, comments to heads of programmes about the English skills of some class members were not addressed. While management responds to staff comments made in programme committee meetings, it is not clear that themes such as English skills are identified and addressed.

Processes for gauging staff satisfaction were unclear. Performance reviews and programme meetings do not address satisfaction issues directly, and measures of increasing staff workload and the effects of competing research and teaching demands may not be detected by current information-gathering processes.

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 Adequate.

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

2.2 Focus area: Student support

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Master of Business Administration (Level 9)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is Adequate.

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

AIS St Helens' academic processes, including peer observation, moderation, and staff consultation are not applied consistently in this programme.

2.4 Focus area: Bachelor of International Business (Level 7)

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

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

2.5 Focus area: Research

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

Staff research at AIS St Helens is well organised and is a well-resourced part of staff activity. There is a core group of active and experienced researchers. The research sub-committee of the academic board has produced a clear and comprehensive policy on research outputs. It has also coordinated conferences, produced journals and, most importantly, mapped staff research competencies, an exercise that revealed many strengths but also some gaps, such as the need for some staff to develop their researching skills further.

Evidence for AIS St Helens' contribution to academic research indicates some problems, but also several areas of success. For example, the Bachelor of Information Technology degree monitor's report from February 2011 noted that "while some research had occurred staff were not yet aware that there was a need for it to be published in academic journals or through academic conferences so that [it] could be seen by the wider academic community". However, this limitation does not seem to apply to other research fields. AIS St Helens' 2010 annual research report notes significant research outputs in business and tourism.

There is no doubt that, as its research increases and gains consistency, AIS St Helens will benefit directly through the additional credibility and currency thereby bestowed on its programmes.

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

The competency mapping project was a valuable information-gathering and self-assessment exercise which has informed the research programme and the professional development of staff.

Recommendations

NZQA recommends, in addition to those recommendations implied or expressed within the report, that AIS St Helens:

1. Review the relationship between the self-assessment review group and other parts of the organisation to enable the issues identified by this group to be considered in a timely fashion by the appropriate academic and operational groups.
2. Address the issue of students lacking the requisite English language skills to achieve successfully in its programmes.
3. Improve processes for collection of robust information from all staff.

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 all non-university 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).

*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/>*

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E eeradmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz