

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Ardmore Flying School Ltd

Not Yet Confident in educational performance

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 26 June 2013

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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

Name of TEO:	Ardmore Flying School Ltd (AFS)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Harvard Lane, Ardmore Airfield, Auckland
Delivery sites:	Delivery only at the Ardmore site. In late 2012 AFS also had a site approved in Nelson, but no training was occurring there at the time of the external evaluation and review (EER).
First registered:	21 October 1991
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NZ Diploma in Aviation (Flight Instruction) (Level 6)• NZ Diploma in Aviation (Airline Preparation) (Level 6)• NMIT Diploma in Aviation (due to be discontinued from July 2013. Current students are being 'taught out')• Various licensing courses including Private Pilot Licence, Commercial Pilot Licence, Instrument Flight Rules, Air Transport Pilot Licence
Code of Practice signatory?	Yes (for 18 years plus)
Number of students:	Domestic: approximately 250 International: 10
Number of staff:	Instructors – permanent 26

Front desk/Line operational	11
Management/Executive	five
Total	42

Scope of active accreditation:	<p>Consent to Assess in the domains of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircraft Operation to level 6 • Aviation Core to level 4
Distinctive characteristics:	<p>AFS is the largest and one of the oldest flying schools in New Zealand, having been established over 50 years ago.</p>
Recent significant changes:	<p>The current chief executive officer and senior staff at AFS had been in place for only 12 months at the time of the EER. The previous chief executive officer resigned in late 2011 after an extended period of ill health. The new management team had significant challenges with the state of the administration and information management systems. Much effort in the early months has gone into reconciling data and funding with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).</p> <p>Funding for the programme delivered in partnership with Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) was discontinued by the TEC, and all current students are required to be complete by 30 June 2013. The TEC has instead funded a number of aviation providers, including Ardmore, directly.</p>
Previous quality assurance history:	<p>No history of non-compliance. At the last quality assurance visit by NZQA, an audit in May 2009, the provider was compliant.</p>

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope for the EER consisted of the mandatory focus areas:

- Governance, management and strategy
- International students.

In addition, the following focus areas were selected:

- NMIT Diploma in Aviation

This had been taken by a significant proportion of the student population at Ardmore and is in the process of being 'taught out', as the partnership is in the process of being discontinued.

- General Flight Training

Includes all other flight training offered by Ardmore.

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 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.

The EER was conducted in March 2013. Prior to the EER visit, the lead evaluator visited the provider to discuss and agree the scope and process. The evaluation team consisted of two evaluators. A two-day EER visit was made to the AFS site at Ardmore Airfield, where the evaluation team reviewed a range of documentation and met with the chief executive officer, flight instructors, deputy chief flying instructor and students (international and domestic) from both the AFS and NMIT programmes. A follow-up visit was made the following week to meet with the enrolments officer/marketing manager who had been on leave at the time of the EER visit. The evaluation team also met with an examiner from the Civil Aviation Authority and had telephone and email communication with Aviation Services Limited (the body delegated to test and examine pilots), and the aviation programme leader from NMIT.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the educational performance of **Ardmore Flying School Ltd.**

The course completion rate for students on the NMIT Diploma in Aviation for 2011 was 66 per cent and for qualification completion, 16 per cent. NMIT has since indicated that the 2012 provisional qualification completion rate at AFS is 41 per cent. The low programme completion rates are attributed to the fact that most students are motivated primarily to attain licences and ratings and have little regard for completing the diploma. This in turn raises questions about how well the NMIT programme is matched to the needs of the students. The AFS programmes relate directly to attainment of licences and ratings, which more closely match students' needs and aspirations.

Completion rates on other AFS programmes are difficult to establish. Although pass rates for flight tests and examinations for students are at an acceptable level, this only applies to students who are still active in their programme of study. AFS does not monitor the completion rates against the overall number of students who start programmes. Subsequent to the EER visit, AFS provided data that indicated approximately 50 per cent retention. AFS has not, at this stage, completed any analysis of who drops out, at what point, and what might be done to improve retention. Those students who do make it to the end of their course achieve well in external examinations and flight tests. The examination body, Aviation Services Limited, reports that AFS students are well trained and well regarded by industry.

Employment rates for those students who do complete their study appear to be good, and the outlook for employment in the aviation industry is strong. Again, the exact numbers are difficult to ascertain as AFS has only recently begun to formally monitor graduate outcomes.

Feedback from current students indicates that the AFS programmes are delivered and assessed in a manner that enables the students to understand and apply the material being presented. Instructors are enthusiastic and relate well to their students. However, the high proportion of contracted instruction staff and the nature of the employment contracts limit the ability of these staff to participate in and contribute to the long-term academic and professional development activities of the organisation.

The lack of cumulative and accessible records of student achievement and graduate outcomes has limited the evidence available to AFS to demonstrate the full range of its educational performance over time, and hence NZQA is unable to be confident in AFS's educational performance.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Ardmore Flying School Ltd.**

There was clear evidence of movement towards improved educational performance since the current management took over in 2012. To date, improvement has centred on significant administrative challenges, for instance sorting out complex funding issues with the TEC and ensuring that students are able to maintain their student loan eligibility.

However, there is inconsistent evidence that AFS recognises the value of self-assessment and methodically uses it as a tool to improve its educational performance. There was no indication of engagement with the NZQA key evaluation questions by any of the staff interviewed. AFS has not benchmarked its educational performance either externally or against its own year-to-year performance. Management and staff were unaware of publicly available benchmarking data, for instance: TEC educational performance indicator (EPI) data; EER reports of other providers; or Aviation Services Limited examinations data.¹

AFS has systems for gathering learner and some stakeholder feedback, but this information is not being systematically shared with staff or analysed and used to make improvements to the programmes.

The challenge for AFS is to ensure that the good intention evident in the organisation is translated to the wider organisation's systems for quality improvement. AFS should direct its self-assessment efforts towards developing a systematic approach to gaining a greater level of understanding of educational performance and using this understanding to bring about improvements linked to valid and reliable achievement data and valued outcomes for learners and internal and external stakeholders.

¹ Soon to be available through the Aviation Services Limited website portal.

Findings²

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

The lack of cumulative records of student achievement and graduate outcomes has limited the evidence available to AFS to demonstrate the full range of its educational performance over time or for the EER team to make a reliable assessment of its performance. AFS was unable to present coherent and reliable student achievement data for its programmes, and discussion with management and staff revealed varying perceptions about the actual levels of achievement of the students. While instructors were talking in terms of 80 per cent pass rates in exams and flight tests, this figure did not include students who started the programmes but dropped out. The evaluators asked the question of all of the students interviewed, 'Think back to when you started your ground course, how many students were in your class?' 'How many of those students are still actively studying or have completed?' Although the answers were approximate, invariably the students who were still studying at AFS said they comprised between 10 and 25 per cent of their original cohort.

Aviation Services Limited, the body that tests pilots on the theory and practice of flying under delegated authority from the Civil Aviation Authority, reports that AFS students perform well under test conditions. Although empirical data was not available, Aviation Services Limited stated that AFS students have a 'first time pass rate' of about 70 per cent, which is 'about the national average'. Aviation Services Limited also reported that AFS is respected within the industry for the quality of the pilots it produces. However, AFS did not demonstrate how it uses this information to inform or reflect on the achievement of its enrolled student body.

NMIT provided summary information on student performance on the NMIT Diploma in Aviation for 2011:

Course completion:

- AFS students – 66 per cent
- NMIT pilot training average – 74 per cent

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

Qualification completion:

- AFS students – 16 per cent
- NMIT pilot training average – 13 per cent

NMIT has since indicated that the 2012 provisional qualification completion rate at AFS is 41 per cent

To date, AFS has not made any sustained attempt to monitor and understand student achievement, let alone undertake analysis so that organisation-wide improvement strategies might be implemented. Without this systematic approach to increasing student achievement, it is likely that any improvements in individual student success can only be the result of personal student and/or staff effort rather than methodical processes by AFS.

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**.

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

In addition to the NMIT and New Zealand diplomas on offer, the immediate outputs from this training are licences and ratings as awarded by the New Zealand Civil Aviation Authority, and these also meet the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization. To enhance the future employment prospects of its graduates, AFS regularly employs graduates as flight instructors. In 2012 it employed 17 of the 20 graduates from the Instructor Rating (C Category) courses that it offered. Employment as an instructor enables pilots to build up their flying hours and experience to make them more employable as commercial pilots. Anecdotal information points to AFS instructors being of a high standard and highly employable.

AFS could not comprehensively demonstrate the long-term benefits of its programmes. The organisation has anecdotal information about some of its graduates and the positive way in which the programmes have contributed to their lives, and some excellent examples of AFS graduates who have begun successful careers in the aviation industry. However it does not have a definitive list of recent³ graduate outcomes or a formal analysis of graduate feedback that can be used to make improvements. The data provided subsequent to the EER, indicates that of the 642 students enrolled between 2004 and 2011, 247 graduates had a 'successful employment outcome' up to and including 2102. This data indicates

³ The most recent graduate data available for the EER visit was 2004-2008. Subsequent to the draft report, further information was made available.

that there may be a significant number of ex-students who may have received poor value from their considerable investment at AFS.

The programmes and staff at AFS are, however, highly employment-focussed and have a good understanding of what it takes for graduating students to be successful in the aviation industry. In the past year, AFS staff have endeavoured to ensure that prospective and incoming students have realistic expectations about their employment prospects in what is a very competitive industry.

AFS acknowledges that the organisation needs to know more about the students post-study, whether they be graduates or students who have dropped out of study. As AFS's self-assessment systems develop, the EER team expects that engagement with ex-students will inform programme improvements in a systematic way.

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 **Adequate**.

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

AFS's approach to ensuring that stakeholder and student needs are being identified and met is not systematic. Several of the students, especially those enrolled on the NMIT Diploma in Aviation, stated that they did not know until several months into their study that they were enrolled on the programme or that they were required to do additional study to gain the diploma. They thought they were enrolled in 'AFS's flight training' and that it came as some surprise when they found that they had to do additional study for an NMIT diploma, which they did not actually want. A senior staff member at AFS confirmed that this situation was quite probable given the lack of enrolment processes and information prior to 2012. Several students were also unclear about what they now had to do to complete their NMIT study before the cut-off date of 30 June 2013. AFS said it has produced an individual plan for each student and that this information was communicated verbally to the students. However, it was clear that this information had not been retained by the majority of the students, and individual written learning plans are now needed.

The NZ Diploma in Aviation, which AFS has begun delivering this year, is much more aligned with the needs of students in that it incorporates only the flying qualifications without the 'padding' that many students have found tedious and irrelevant.

AFS delivers a 'ground school' in the first 18 weeks, which requires students to complete all of the theory study and examinations for the Private Pilot Licence, Commercial Pilot Licence and Instrument Flight Rules. This structure means that students who may not have the academic capability to complete the theory components self-identify before they commit large amounts of money to flight

training. However, the structure also means that students who then continue with flight training for the next 18-24 months are flying only about two to five hours per week – a regime that allows lots of scope for students to become distracted by other aspects of their lives and possibly drop out of the programme. Although AFS has not undertaken a formal analysis of attrition patterns, the enrolments officer agreed that most students successfully complete the ground school and then drop out ‘somewhere in the flight training phase’.

The main source of external input at AFS appears to be through the external involvement of the chief executive officer. Nationally the chief executive officer has wide sector involvement, including being the deputy chair of the Flight Training Division of the Aviation Industry Association of New Zealand and contributing to changes in the sector. Although he is passionate about lifting the quality and relevance of the flight training industry, at this point in time it is unclear how these external relationships enhance the quality of the programmes being delivered at AFS.

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 **Adequate**.

Instructors and students relate well to each other. Students spoke highly of AFS instructors and the evaluators saw evidence of good teaching taking place. Students liked the open, friendly style and found their learning activities interesting and challenging. Because the majority of the instruction staff are themselves on a pathway to a commercial aviation career (refer section 1.2) it is an ongoing challenge for AFS to retain instructors for more than two years, especially in the current environment where there are concerns about a potential international shortage of airline pilots in some aviation sectors. This is an issue for not only AFS but for the flight training industry per se and one that must be addressed on a national level.

Course evaluations completed by the learners contain positive feedback. However, the processes stop at the collection and collation of data and there is no evidence yet of the information collected systematically informing improvements to teaching practice. A more systematic approach following the gathering of feedback, which could include reporting back to students on any actions taken, would be preferable and may improve educational outcomes for students.

Staff give students comprehensive feedback after every training flight. In addition to their log book, every student has a student record book, which includes achievements and running records. The record book gives students a detailed record of how they are progressing and provides handover notes if there should be a change in flight instructor.

Several students report that assessments marked by NMIT are often returned to them late and that they contain little feedback. One student reported having completed four assessments before getting the first one returned. This situation is unacceptable as students need feedback from their teachers to enable them to learn and improve before submitting their next assessment.

AFS has recently employed a contractor to produce teaching and learning materials for the NZ Diploma in Aviation. Although the EER team did not see the material, staff reported that it is high quality and will improve the professionalism of the programme.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

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

AFS has client-friendly systems for the pastoral care of its students. The organisation is providing a safe and supportive learning environment for its students and is in contact outside of the normal hours of tuition. Although AFS provides support in the intuitive belief that there is likely to be a positive correlation between student support and achievement, to date the organisation has not formally analysed the link between the two. A more analytical and systematic approach to student support may lead to increased completion rates. For instance, the two instructor groups had quite different approaches to student support. One group advocated strategies to engage and support students while the other group commented that engagement is a student's responsibility. AFS could benefit from having a consistent and structured sharing of good practice teaching and support strategies as part of rolling out the NZ Diploma in Aviation resources that are being developed.

There is a designated support staff member for international students with 24-hour phone contact should the students require assistance when away from the site. Homestay accommodation for international students is managed in-house by the homestay coordinator, although there are only two or three students in homestay accommodation. The enrolments officer has overall responsibility for ensuring that requirements of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students are met, but has not completed a formal self-review to determine this. A sample of four international student files were audited and it was found that mandatory information was incomplete in three of the four files.⁴

Recent students reported that they received good pre-enrolment guidance and that they completed a 'trial flight' before enrolling at AFS. As previously discussed, some students prior to 2012 received poor enrolment guidance, which could

⁴ The documents required were eventually located by AFS staff.

account for the high attrition rates experienced. Several students, especially those on the NMIT diploma programme, report confusion about what was required and inadequate levels of guidance and academic support from either NMIT or AFS staff.

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**.

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

AFS is well located at Ardmore Airfield, New Zealand's busiest airfield. The campus is well supplied with physical and learning resources for the number of students that it currently has, and AFS has a fleet of single and multi-engine aircraft. The Civil Aviation Authority representative reported it as 'the best air training fleet in New Zealand'. Students reported a bottleneck of demand for multi-engine Instrument Flight Rules training being a barrier to completion. This situation is predominately a symptom of the high numbers of students enrolled in 2011 and should 'smooth out' over coming months.

Clearly, there has been movement towards improved understanding of business processes since the appointment of a new chief executive officer 12 months prior to this EER visit, and management is making an effort to understand and improve the educational performance of its programmes. Self-assessment over the past 12 months has generally been based around compliance with TEC requirements or the marketing and financial needs of the organisation, rather than deriving from a focus on educational achievement.

The proposed purchase of a new student management system should result in good quality data becoming increasingly available to management to enable them to monitor and improve student achievement. This information also needs to be distributed across the organisation so that it is readily accessible to teaching staff and students.

This report should serve as a clear signal to AFS that it is below minimum expectations in terms of its educational performance. The challenge for AFS is to direct its efforts towards developing a greater level of understanding of educational performance and bringing about improvement by more systematic analysis and consequent action from self-assessment activities.

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: International 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 **Poor**.

2.3 Focus area: NMIT Diploma in Aviation

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

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

2.4 Focus area: General Flight Training

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Ardmore Flying School:

- Continue development in the collection of data for self-assessment
- Build capability in analysing this data
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive self-assessment regime that leads to improvement in student outcomes.

Listed below are some specific suggestions that may lead to improvements. This should not be seen as an exhaustive list:

- Implement a system to formally gather feedback from students about the key aspects of their experience, including but not limited to ground school, flight instruction and briefings. Ensure that the information is appropriately analysed and used to improve teaching and programme design.
- Ensure that the staff designated as having responsibility for the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students are fully conversant with the responsibilities under the code. This should include regular self-review (as required for compliance) and attendance at Code Office professional development sessions.
- Use the opportunity of rolling out new teaching and learning materials for the NZ Diploma in Aviation to hold instructor training sessions to ensure consistency in the standard of instruction and support for students.
- Use the learning from short-term instructors to identify areas that would strengthen the instructor induction process. Ensure this includes Code of Practice and student support and guidance standards.
- Build whole-of-organisation capability in self-assessment processes, including engagements with the key evaluation questions.
- Develop an improved understanding of why attrition occurs from AFS programmes and implement strategies to reduce it.
- Implement systems to engage with graduates and use the information gained to inform improvements to programme design and delivery.
- Benchmark programme performance both externally and internally.
- Produce a moderation plan that ensures that all teaching and assessment materials are moderated on a regular cycle.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of programme approval and accreditation (under sections 249 and 250 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the Criteria for Approval and Accreditation of Programmes established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act and published in the Gazette of 28 July 2011 at page 3207. These policies and criteria are deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under the new section 253.

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 programmes they own or provide. These criteria and policies are also deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under section 253. Section 233B(1) of the Act requires registered PTEs to comply with these rules.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes 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 EER process 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/>

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