External Evaluation and Review Report

The Mind Lab

Date of report: 16 April 2021

About The Mind Lab

The Mind Lab delivers technology and leadership-focused postgraduate programmes and micro-credentials to professionals in industry and education.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Ground Floor, 99 Khyber Pass Road, Grafton, Auckland
Code of Practice signatory:	No
Number of students:	Domestic: 236.6 EFTS (equivalent full-time students) in 2020
	Māori 20 per cent, Pasifika 12 per cent
Number of staff:	52 full-time equivalents
TEO profile:	[NZQA-The Mind Lab](#)
	The Mind Lab markets its programmes under either The Mind Lab or Tech Futures Lab brand. All programmes are approved and accredited to The Mind Lab. For the purposes of this report, they are referred to as The Mind Lab.
	The Mind Lab was registered as a private training establishment with NZQA in September 2018. Prior to this date, The Mind Lab by Unitec Limited Partnership operated under a services agreement with explicit roles and responsibilities for delivering programmes. By January 2020, all intakes of learners under this partnership were complete and The Mind Lab is now operating and delivering programmes. This is the first EER for The Mind Lab.
Scope of this evaluation:	• Master of Technological Futures (Level 9) (MTF)
	• Postgraduate Certificate in Digital and Collaborative Learning (Level 8) (PGC-DCL)
MoE number:	9185
NZQA reference:	C40095
Dates of EER visit:	3-9 February 2021

Summary of results

The Mind Lab meets the important needs of learners and stakeholders in industry, education and the community. Innovative design and delivery of education is supported by capable leadership and authentic and embedded self-assessment practices.

Highly Confident in educational performance

- Learner achievement is generally strong. Variability in course completions across programmes and cohorts is well understood and is effectively addressed. A review of the current practice in benchmarking performance indicators in learner achievement would inform comparative analysis. Improvements are in progress to further support learners.

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

- Outcomes for learners are highly positive. Stakeholder engagement is ongoing through effective industry and education networks. An opportunity exists for further investigation of the scope and impact of outcomes for the PGC-DCL programme.

- Organisation-wide data collection and analysis is effective and informs thoughtful improvements to programme delivery and performance.

- Programmes are accessible, innovative and inclusive for all learners. Academic and pastoral support of priority learners is well managed, resulting in improved achievement rates.

- Capable management and academic leadership support applied and innovative education. Authentic reflective practice embodies the organisation's purpose and strategies. An approach of collaborative practice informs and strengthens programme design and delivery.

Final

Key evaluation question findings[1]

1.1   How well do students achieve?

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Learners acquire applied professional and digital and collaborative leadership skills relevant to their context.
	Course completion rates are strong (refer Appendix 1, Table 1). There is some variation in completion rates across the programmes and by learner cohort which is being well managed and is improving (see Appendix 1,Table 2).
	The Mind Lab is striving toward achieving parity in learner achievement across all priority groups, and has put in place some initiatives that are yielding initial good results.
	Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) data shows the 2019 course completion rates at 84 per cent, which is just below the PTE sub-sector average of 85 per cent for levels 8-10. The Mind Lab benchmarks its results against other sector providers. Benchmarking through the historical information available would be appropriate.
	The Mind Lab has a comprehensive self-assessment framework, supported by real-time data that aggregates and analyses student achievement by cohort, age, ethnicity and course completions. All learners are tracked and supported to reach educational milestones. Academic and support staff and management follow trends through analysis of data and feedback and respond to gaps in performance to develop and improve rates. Defining ethnic groups in line with TEC educational performance indicators would reflect priority group disparity rates more clearly.
Conclusion:	Learners achieve well. The Mind Lab implements effective self-assessment policies and processes to improve and support achievement rates for all learners.

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

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

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Outcomes are significant for learners and their education and industry communities. Feedback on the focus area programmes supports the relevance of the learning. There is evidence of improved graduate mindsets, enhanced applied technical capabilities and robust leadership qualities contributing to the workplace. The 2019 post-study outcomes survey of the PGC-DCL show 11 per cent of graduates completed another qualification and another 22 per cent were currently studying. These are high quality outcomes. However, given the magnitude and breadth of graduates, applied and innovative research and evaluation would clarify the nature and pattern of the impacts of the learning, to support further improvements. The Mind Lab contributes toward building knowledge capabilities in education, having contributed professional development for the digital technologies learning areas of the New Zealand curriculum. Connections to industry through innovation projects provide further opportunity for collaborations. The Mind Lab is working toward building relationships with iwi and community stakeholders to guide and inform self-assessment. Formalising the networks and systems to gather and analyse feedback will support assessment of graduate outcomes for priority group learners.
Conclusion:	The Mind Lab plays an active and respected role in creating useful outcomes for learners and their industries and communities. Continued emphasis on gathering information from stakeholders on the significance and scope of outcomes for learners will strengthen self-assessment.

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

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Innovative programmes are designed and delivered to develop and enhance the learners' professional digital and collaborative leadership skills through blended and applied learning. Highly experienced industry contacts and advisory committees inform and guide programme development and improvements. Industry experts and advisors contribute to reflect emerging technologies and innovative practice. The learners themselves are experts in their fields and supply valuable feedback to ensure improved outcomes for graduates. A range of new programmes and micro-credentials has been approved that address the needs of new contexts. Learning and assessment activities are aligned to Te Ara Kōtihi teaching and learning strategy: to integrate and provide equity for all learners to contribute successfully. The Mind Lab has a collaborative learning approach[2] which builds on the considerable experience of its mature learners, where they apply knowledge gained back to their working context, through projects. Assessment methods include collaborative group assessment options, competency-based assessments, capability in assessing oratory or visual submissions and assessing in te reo Māori. Assessment is supported by robust moderation practice which verifies assessment methodology and results and leads to improvements as evidenced in APERs (annual programme evaluation reviews). The blended and online delivery of programmes provides greater accessibility to a wider range of learners and in the Master of Technological Futures has led to improvements in the quality of assessments being noted by the moderator. Programme self-assessment is informed by programme operation plans approved annually by the academic quality

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[2] This approach is informed by the following whakatauki: 'Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi'; 'With a collective purpose we shall thrive'.

	working group and through the maintenance of quarterly programme review from which annual reviews are prepared. A comprehensive review culture ensures academic quality is maintained. A recent change was a revision to the design and delivery of the PGC-DCL after a five-year review.
	Programme-level research strategies are aligned to the teaching and learning strategies of Te Ara Kōtihi; for example, research on engaging Māori learners online. Research is supported by a research, enterprise and ethics policy.
	Learners benefit from research-led teaching and applying research in their practice.
Conclusion:	The Mind Lab is delivering high quality programmes that are relevant to their stakeholders and learners. Ongoing programme and assessment analysis through self-assessment processes leads to improvements and new initiatives.

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

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
Findings and supporting evidence:	The Mind Lab is highly focused and effective in supporting the students on their learning journey. Robust systems provide academic interventions leading to improved student engagement. Support interventions are informed by high quality, real-time data including tracking attendance, monitoring online engagement, and analysis of student feedback. Highly qualified academic staff and advisors provide technical, research and educational expertise and one-on-one support.
	Te Ara Kōtihi provides a culturally responsive framework which is informed by kaupapa Māori and Pacific values in learning and support, including virtual Talanoa. Dedicated and reflective staff support learners and help to improve access and retention in programmes. The Take 2 Initiative of the PGC-DCL, for example, has led to improved Māori and Pasifika completion rates for the first two cohorts.[3]
	The Mind Lab uses learning platforms such as providing opportunities for collaboration and building online learning

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[3] The Take 2 initiative sits within the PG-DCL, where students with two of the courses to complete to finalise the programme were given academic and scholarship support.

	communities supporting each other to remain engaged.
	Highly individualised support systems track learners through their journey. There is a responsiveness to challenges that learners may face. For example, the demographic of the PGC-DCL now contains many learners working in challenging conditions, such as low-decile schools with high-needs students. The Mind Lab helps these learners to complete assessments through extensions, and provides solutions to the issues they face.
	Learner feedback, both quantitative and qualitative, is aggregated and analysed and informs the working groups and leadership team. Action plans resulting from working groups and programme reviews lead to improvements.
	The success of the support system is reflected in generally low withdrawal rates; student feedback confirms the effectiveness of the support offered.
Conclusion:	Learners are well supported to stay involved and complete their learning. High quality student support services are valued by governance and management.

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

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
Findings and supporting evidence:	The Mind Lab has experienced and strong leadership skills in the governance and management team. This ensured a successful transition to becoming a registered PTE in 2018.
	Vision and mission statements on creating impactful futures, and sharing and collaborating on knowledge are clearly reflected across different levels of this organisation. The Mind Lab is answering the need for innovative, digitally capable, collaborative leaders who are responsive to evolving work and community contexts. A strong illustration of this is the newly established programme, Leading Change for the Good, instigated by programme staff having evaluated feedback and drawing conclusions from student programme engagement trends.
	The Mind Lab seeks to operate in a culturally inclusive manner. Kaupapa Māori values are progressively being embedded across

	the organisation. Academic and pastoral support for priority learners is representative, well documented and effective. The Mind Lab is working towards establishing better links with Māori and Pasifika communities, to guide and improve its service for these communities.
	Systems and processes have been reviewed and revised to better support more effective management. Five-year programme reviews are completed and the PTE has made improvements that are resulting in better accessibility and better learner achievement. Working groups report to the academic board. Monitoring, review and reporting activities are regular and thorough. Academic leadership is robust.
	Investment in a bespoke quality management system informs staff at different levels of the organisation. Data is used effectively to track educational performance and support decision-making. Use of real-time data and tracking systems, including engagement on technology platforms, provides information on the learner journey.
	The research culture is supported by strategy, and staff are expected to produce two quality assured research outputs every two years. Continued support for staff in reaching this target should be a priority.
Conclusion:	Governance and management are highly effective in supporting educational performance. Robust processes, investment in technology and an ethos of ongoing, authentic self-reflection by well-qualified staff have produced high quality educational outcomes for learners and stakeholders.

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
Findings and supporting evidence:	The Mind Lab has appropriate systems and monitoring processes in place to manage its key compliance accountabilities. The academic board is responsible for overseeing the quality management system and reports to The Mind Lab board on key governance issues.
	Programme learning hours are monitored via timetabled semester structures in a flexible academic calendar and scheduled submissions. A recent TEC audit found no gaps. A comprehensive data-gathering system supplies real-time data that informs the internal quarterly reports for each delivered programme. Extensions and allowances for in-work learners struggling to complete programmes creates complexity in data management and reporting. This seems well managed.
	Internal and external moderation processes are planned, are thorough and responsive to contexts, and focus on programme improvement.
	External monitoring by NZQA in 2019 for both programmes raised no significant concerns, and all recommendations made by the monitors have been responded to as evidenced in APERs. Similarly, the one requirement from the NZQA validation visit in 2019 was responded to quickly. Attestations and other documents, including recent programme approval submission documents supplied to NZQA, are appropriate and well managed.
Conclusion:	Well-managed systems and robust reporting mechanisms support The Mind Lab to effectively comply with important regulatory compliance accountabilities.

Focus areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Master of Technological Futures (Level 9)

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Achievement rates are strong. Course completion was 87 per cent for all learners in 2019, Māori at 79 per cent and Pasifika at 100 per cent. Current data predicts 95 per cent course completion in 2020, trending upwards in achievement for both Māori and Pasifika. Participation is inclusive and attractive to Māori and Pasifika, and kaupapa Māori values are embedded throughout the programme delivery. Retention rates remain very high. Leadership and highly focused digital skills for emerging technology are acquired through collaborative learning opportunities leading to valued research outputs. Some graduates are recognised in industry awards. Further longitudinal tracking of graduates' performance will contribute to alumni input and evaluating programme delivery. In response to the 2019 NZQA monitoring visit, The Mind Lab has made improvements, as evidenced in programme reports and APERs. The blended delivery of the programme is fit for purpose, and the offer to run the programme part-time to busy professionals has resulted in higher quality assessments being submitted (2019 NZQA Degree Monitoring report). High quality staff support learner engagement through collaborative learning agreements and individualised feedback. Research outputs are in line with and supported by The Mind Lab's Research, Enterprise and Ethics policy. An emphasis on technology-based research outputs seems appropriate for this programme.
Conclusion:	This is a high performing programme. The continued gathering of evidence and analysis of graduate outcomes over time will support self-assessment.

2.2 Focus area: Postgraduate Certificate in Digital Collaborative Learning (Level 8)

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Learner achievement is generally strong. Course completions for 2019 were 81 per cent, with projections for 2020 of 77 per cent (as at January 2021). Qualification completion for the two intakes completing in 2019 were 80 per cent and 72 per cent. While disparities persist for Māori and Pasifika learners, The Mind Lab understands achievement well and is addressing the issues. Recent improvements to course completions through the Take 2 initiative in mid-2020 show 16 of 20 Māori learners were successful and two of three Pasifika learners. Participation rates for Māori and Pasifika learners sit above the national demographic average.
	Needs analysis of recent learners points to a changing demographic of learners, from early adopters to more mainstream learners working in challenging contexts and requiring additional support to complete. The PGC-DCL support team is highly capable at engaging learners to ensure attendance, contributions and achievements meet programme requirements.
	The Mind Lab has a range of good primary sources such as focus group interviews that show strong outcomes for learners and their education communities. Significant improvements in applied knowledge impact positively on learning communities. More full and comprehensive reflection would enrich the programme and knowledge of outcomes. With the staff research capabilities, an opportunity exists to demonstrate this programme and its outcomes more thoroughly.
	The Mind Lab has upgraded its systems to provide high quality, real-time data to inform the organisation about student performance. A robust system of programme analysis through quarterly reports and APERs enables programme leaders to make improvements to delivery and support learner progression.
	Programme design, assessment and moderation practice supports the validity of the results. The online learning delivery enables accessibility for learners, and achievement -based assessments provide a good feedback mechanism that is applicable to the learners' practice. The five-year review has led to major changes focused on more integrated learning.
	Learner feedback on the effect of the programme on their

	teaching practice is generally highly positive.
Conclusion:	Programme outcomes for learners are highly valued and result in significant improvements in teaching practice. Achievement is generally strong. Disparities that remain are effectively managed. Self-assessment practice is sound and authentic and leads to improvements. There is an opportunity for more in-depth analysis of learners and their stakeholders' outcomes.

Recommendations

Recommendations are not compulsory but their implementation may improve the quality and effectiveness of the training and education provided by the tertiary education organisation (TEO). They may be referred to in subsequent external evaluation and reviews (EERs) to gauge the effectiveness of the TEO's quality improvements over time.

NZQA recommends that The Mind Lab consider:

- Defining ethnic groups in line with TEC educational performance indicators to reflect priority group disparity rates more clearly.

- Review its benchmarking of completion rates across all programmes offered.

- Develop research and evaluate the substantive and varied impacts of the established PGC-DCL programme.

Requirements

Requirements relate to the TEO's statutory obligations under legislation that governs their operation. These include NZQA Rules and relevant regulations promulgated by other agencies.

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

Appendix 1

Table 1. The Mind Lab course completions 2019*

Ethnic group	Intended qualification cohort group	2019
Māori	Level 8-10	74.9%
Non-Māori and non-Pasifika	Level 8-10	87.5%
Pasifika	Level 8-10	79.6%

Participation			
Ethnic group	Intended qualification cohort group	2018	2019
Māori	Level 8-10	18.8%	19.7%
Non-Māori and non-Pasifika	Level 8-10	69.2%	68.2%
Pasifika	Level 8-10	13.5%	13.3%

*2019 Tertiary Education Commission SDR data

The Mind Lab started delivering as an independent PTE at the end of 2018. As there is only one full year of performance information (the 2019 year), the educational performance indicator data available for The Mind Lab is limited to course completion only.

Table 2. Course completions – targeted and actual*

Course completion		2019 target	2019 actual	2020 target	2020 current**	2020 maximum+
The Mind Lab	All students	82%	84.1%	84%	80.1%	85.2%
	Māori	71%	74.9%	78%	78.0%	80.4%
	Pasifika	75%	79.6%	78%	75.4%	81.4%
	<25	82%	92.0%	83%	90.2%	94.9%
PGC-DCL	All students	82%	80.6%	84%	74.1%	77.0%
	Māori	71%	67.1%	78%	65.1%	66.3%
	Pasifika	75%	71.7%	78%	71.4%	72.2%
	<25	82%	100%	83%	93.3%	94.7%
MTF	All students	82%	86.6%	84%	94.6%	94.6%
	Māori	71%	78.6%	78%	100.0%	88.4%
	Pasifika	75%	100%	78%	85.3%	89.4%
	<25	82%	-	83%	100.0%	100%

*Above data gathered by The Mind Lab

**As at 18/01/2021 (data shows the outcomes for courses where all grades are finalised and locked)

+As at 18/01/2021 (Upper limit of course completions (i.e. results if all students currently enrolled to complete a course in 2020 are successful).

Participation by priority group

Final

Priority group		2019 target	2019 actual	2020 target	2020 current*
The Mind Lab	Māori	20%	19.7%	21%	19.55%
	Pasifika	7%	13.3%	8%	11.7%
	<25	3%	8.8%	3%	8.8%
PGC-DCL	Māori	20%	19.0%	21%	23.0%
	Pasifika	7%	14.0%	8%	12.1%
	<25	3%	3.5%	3%	4.2%
MTF	Māori	20%	22.7%	21%	12.2%
	Pasifika	7%	7.4%	8%	8.6%
	<25	3%	-	3%	1.4%

*As at 18/01/2021 (data shows the outcomes for courses where all grades are finalised and locked)

Appendix 2

Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published rules. The methodology used is described in the web document https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/. The TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Disclaimer

The findings in this report have been reached by means of a standard evaluative process. They are based on a representative selection of focus areas, and a sample of supporting information provided by the TEO under review or independently accessed by NZQA. As such, the report's findings offer a guide to the relative quality of the TEO at the time of the EER, in the light of the known evidence, and the likelihood that this level of quality will continue.

For the same reason, these findings are always limited in scope. They are derived from selections and samples evaluated at a point in time. The supporting methodology is not designed to:

- *Identify organisational fraud[4]*

- *Provide comprehensive coverage of all programmes within a TEO, or of all relevant evidence sources*

- *Predict the outcome of other reviews of the same TEO which, by posing different questions or examining different information, could reasonably arrive at different conclusions.*

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[4] NZQA and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) comprehensively monitor risk in the tertiary education sector through a range of other mechanisms. When fraud, or any other serious risk factor, has been confirmed, corrective action is taken as a matter of urgency.

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted under the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016, which are made by NZQA under section 452(1)(t) of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister of Education.

Self-assessment and participation and cooperation in external evaluation and review are requirements for:

- *maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities, and*

- *maintaining consent to assess against standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards for all TEOs including ITOs but excluding universities, and*

- *maintaining training scheme approval for all TEOs other than universities.*

The requirements for participation and cooperation are set through the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018, the Consent to Assess Against Standards Rules 2011 and the Training Scheme Rules 2012 respectively.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Rules 2018 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review as a condition of maintaining registration.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes, training schemes and consents to assess and registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016. The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz). All rules cited above are available at https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/.

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz