



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Academy of Diving Trust

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 2 February 2011

Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Introduction	3
1. TEO in context.....	3
2. Scope of external evaluation and review	5
3. Conduct of external evaluation and review.....	5
Summary of Results	6
Findings	8
Recommendations	15
Further Actions.....	15
Appendix	16

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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:	Head office, Palmerston North
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	1991
Number of students:	Domestic: 312 equivalent full-time students International: one equivalent full-time student
Number of staff:	37 full-time and 15 part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diploma in Professional Scuba Instruction (Level 5)• Diploma in Wilderness Adventure Tourism (Level 5)• National Certificate in Diving (Instruction) (Level 6)• National Certificate in Diving (Leadership) (Level 4)• National Certificate in Diving (Foundation) (Level 3)• Certificate in Medic First Aid Career Instruction (Level 4)• National Certificate in Outdoor Recreation (Instruction) (Level 5)• National Certificate in Outdoor Recreation (Group Leadership) (Level 3)• Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI) Certifications: Divemaster, Open Water Scuba Instructor, Specialty Instructor.

Sites: Ten independently owned and operated sites at:
Upper Hutt, Christchurch, Dunedin, Palmerston North,
Tauranga, Whitianga, Auckland Central, West Auckland,
Bay of Islands – Kerikeri, Wellington, and a national office
based in Palmerston North.

Distinctive characteristics: The Academy of Diving Trust (Academy) is a not-for-profit trust registered by the Charities Commission as a charitable entity under the Charitable Trusts Act 2005, and is governed by an elected board of trustees. The Academy delivers training primarily focussed on training dive instructors. This is delivered through its ten sites via annually negotiated Notices of Terms and Conditions (NOTACs). Each site includes a dive retail outlet, except the site in Upper Hutt which operates the Medic First Aid registry and associated training. These sites deliver a range of programmes at certificate and diploma levels relating to recreational diving, dive instruction, and adventure tourism. The organisation is affiliated with the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), and students can graduate as a PADI Specialty Dive Instructor with additional specialty ratings.

The Academy is partially funded through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), and New Zealand domestic students are eligible for student loans and allowances.

The Academy is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students, allowing it to enrol international students.

Recent significant changes: N/A

Previous quality assurance history: The Academy's most recent quality assurance visit was an audit conducted by NZQA in 2009. At this audit the Academy met all but one requirement of the standard in place at the time. The one requirement not meet related to information provided to learners at one site. This non-compliance has subsequently been fully addressed.

The Academy is required to submit students' assessment material to a number of standard-setting bodies and industry training organisations (ITOs) including NZQA, Skills Active (Sport Fitness and Recreation ITO), Competenz (New Zealand Engineering, Food and Manufacturing ITO), ETITO (Electrotechnology ITO), and NZITO (New Zealand Industry Training Organisation), for checking for consistency and validity, (national moderation). This

material has not always met the national standard in each instance, but where issues have been identified the organisation has made appropriate changes and improved assessment practice.

No issues or concerns have been brought to NZQA's attention by any other auditing or quality assurance body.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

This external evaluation and review included the following mandatory focus area:

- Governance, management, and strategy.

The following programme focus areas were included:

- Local diploma programmes (Level 5)
- Certificate in Medic First Aid Career Instruction (Level 4).

These programmes were chosen because they included the diplomas and certificate programmes with the highest student enrolments.

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/>

This external evaluation and review included one NZQA lead evaluator and one external evaluator and was conducted over three days on site at the head office in Palmerston North and at two sites with the highest number of student enrolments. The evaluation team interviewed members of the board, management, teaching staff, and two groups of students, and reviewed a sample of the organisation's documents to confirm and validate the evidence discussed with the personnel above.

Academy of Diving Trust 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 in educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Academy of Diving Trust**.

The Academy's overall educational performance across all ten sites is at or above the national mean for all private training establishments, with 78 per cent of students successfully completing courses, 71 per cent of students completing qualifications, 42 per cent of students progressing to a higher level of study, and 73 per cent of students completing the qualification or enrolling for further study with the Academy. While there is some variation in student success rates among the ten delivery sites, in some cases the lower and higher percentages involve very small groups of students. In the main, students are gaining the necessary skills to gain employment and are in fact sought after by many employers within New Zealand and overseas. Fifty-six per cent of students gain employment.

The programmes of study offered at the Academy, which include the PADI certifications, are internationally recognized and accepted. Most students achieve their PADI certifications as well as the local diplomas or certificates offered. The local diplomas are in effect extensions to the PADI certifications and are highly valued by students and employers.

The evaluation team observed a high level of passion and dedication during interviews with members of the board, head office and delivery site management, as well as teaching staff and students. There was a high level of respect shown between teachers and students, with students being well engaged in the theory and practical aspects of the training.

The organisation has exemplary resourcing for the training offered and is actively engaged in forward thinking and exploring changes in the diving industry. A brief strategic plan is prepared which includes an appropriate focus on achieving and lifting educational outcomes, such as students completing qualifications and gaining employment. At the governance level, development of an annual plan which could be reported on at each board meeting could give focus to board monitoring of organisational performance.

Statement of confidence in capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Academy of Diving Trust**.

The Academy personnel demonstrate an appropriate level of awareness and risk-management for the dive industry. The organisation has a wide range of processes including compliance auditing, should this be appropriate, and evaluative "peer reviews" which are carried out between delivery sites. This peer review process has been in place for three years and involves staff from one site visiting and reviewing systems, processes, and outcomes at another site. These visits result in written reports which go to national office and are presented to the board. This appears to be a valuable process, combining some

compliance checking and evaluative comment on effectiveness, for example of safety processes and staff-student interactions.

The organisation's quality management system and data collection, such as on student achievements and progress, are coordinated from the national office in Palmerston North. This is effective in minimising errors, ensuring quality control, and sharing good practice between national office and individual sites. However, the evaluation team considers that there could be significant benefits gained from an increased level of information-sharing between delivery sites, for example sharing best practice in areas such as teaching strategies, addressing student learning difficulties, opportunities for improving students' links with employers, and following up long-term student outcomes.

The Academy is extremely well connected with the dive industry. The organisation interacts with a wide range of businesses and professional associations relevant to the dive industry. This has ensured that the Academy stays up to date with current industry changes such as in technique, safety, and equipment.

The evaluation team observed that staff are effective in addressing students' learning needs as they arise from the programme. Examples were provided of where specific learning issues with students had arisen and appropriate actions were taken to support students to succeed in their course. While students are interviewed prior to enrolment, and at some sites are observed on dive trips prior to enrolling, the early identification of students' needs could be strengthened by a more structured approach to needs assessment early in the course.

The Academy's self-assessment processes are currently developed more fully at the operations level than at the management and board levels. The board's capability in self-assessment may benefit from developing a board evaluation tool such as that produced by the Institute of Directors for reviewing how well the board is functioning as a governance body.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Students are achieving very well. Across all measures reviewed at this evaluation, students were gaining significant benefits. These ranged from gaining qualifications (71 per cent across all programmes²), completing courses (78 per cent), moving on to higher-level study (42 per cent), and staying in study the following year (73 per cent), with all of these figures being at, above, and in one case twice, the national mean. Further to this, students talked about their growth in confidence in their ability to gain employment as dive instructors.

Figures for the most recent group of graduates show that students are also moving into employment (56 per cent). This evaluation identified that the Academy and its tutors are very well linked to the dive industry through the worldwide PADI network. This network has provided many opportunities for Academy graduates to gain employment working in a wide variety of international locations over past years.

Students gain one or more internationally recognised PADI dive and instructor certifications as well as local diplomas or certificates, depending on their particular programme, such as the National Certificate in Diving (Instruction) (Level 6) or the Certificate in Medic First Aid Career Instruction (Level 4). These local programmes are additional achievements above and beyond what is offered and achieved at similar training programmes elsewhere in New Zealand and overseas.

The Academy's self-assessment processes are effective and are successfully managed by the Academy national office. The organisation has ready access to longitudinal data across all ten sites via its student management system, and this is used insightfully to manage the individual sites. The organisation is using the publicly available benchmark data published by the Tertiary Education Commission to benchmark its performance and to monitor how well it is performing at an organisational level. The Academy is developing processes to establish internal benchmarks, such as reviewing their programmes or courses over time, to compare student cohorts over time and to compare individual sites against each other.

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

² Source: Tertiary Education Commission website: <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Learners-Organisations/Learners/performance-in-tertiary-education/Educational-performance-at-individual-tertiary-providers/>

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

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

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

Students are moving into employment at very good rates, as noted above. Students are gaining employment because they have been completing the appropriate PADI certifications to apply for employment worldwide as a dive instructor. Students and employers put very high value on the PADI certification as well as the diplomas gained. This is confirmed by the Academy from a range of sources, such as through anecdotal feedback from employer networks in the international diving community, returning students, and graduates' comments on the organisation's Facebook page. This process and feedback appear to be reasonably consistent and genuine, but it is an area where the Academy could strengthen its self-assessment processes, for example by collating the feedback or by seeking feedback on specific aspects of the training to determine how well these aspects are meeting employers' and students' needs.

The Academy is proactively involved with a wide range of appropriate professional associations to stay up to date with industry changes in, for example, the dive industry itself, health and safety, business practice, and tertiary education. This involvement has enabled the organisation to stay ahead of emerging issues and to grow the business and has resulted in the organisation being held in high regard by students and the business community. This perception was reflected in comments the evaluation team received from industry experts as well as students.

Students and staff interviewed at this evaluation commented that the local diplomas and certificates, such as the Certificate in Medic First Aid, provided additional value to their training. These programmes are seen by employers as providing extra skills and experience beyond the PADI certificates, and therefore adding considerable value to students' readiness for employment. This is confirmed regularly by unsolicited comments from employers of Academy graduates.

The strength in the Academy's self-assessment processes is in the informal networks and unsolicited feedback which provide regular and reasonably broad feedback confirming the value of the qualifications and initial employment outcomes for stakeholders, including learners. The weakness is in the dependence on tutor contacts. However, the Academy has begun planning how to collate this information more systematically, to become more proactive without losing the "organic" nature of what is working well. The Academy does not yet have very broad information on long-term student outcomes.

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 **Good**.

The Academy uses a variety of processes to identify and address students' needs. In general, programme design and delivery matches students' needs well. Students are interviewed prior to enrolment to ascertain their motivation and capability for becoming a dive instructor, and are asked to self-identify any learning barriers such as literacy and numeracy.

Students evaluate the programmes at each site, and these evaluations are used by the tutors to improve the programmes. A more formal collation of these assessments could lead to cross-year and cross-site comparisons so that examples of best practice could be spread across the organisation's sites.

Staff discussed examples of support provided to students where they were struggling early in a programme because of poor study skills or literacy and numeracy. Across sites there is a variety of ways students' needs are addressed, and these interventions have been effective in helping most of these students to complete their studies and achieve a qualification.

There are some cases where students do not succeed, and while staff have provided appropriate support and guidance when needs arise, the evaluation team considers that developing a more structured approach to assessing students' learning needs at the start or early in the programme could improve this.

The programmes match the needs of the dive industry very well. This was confirmed by comments from tutors and students, and feedback from employers and an external specialist. A good number of graduates gain employment in dive-related jobs.

The Academy is proactive in exploring changes in the dive industry and planning how best to match the needs of industry growth areas, for example in aquaculture and oil exploration.

The Academy's self-assessment processes in this area, as in other areas of its business, are informal and based on business and tutor networks, resulting in a good level of awareness of how well the organisation's programmes match stakeholders' needs. While the organisation surveyed employers some years ago, this has not occurred recently.

Improvements in evaluating employers' satisfaction with graduates could lead to more specific information about the skills and attributes employers are looking for and how well their needs are matched by graduates.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

The Academy's tutors are highly effective. Tutors are very committed and passionate about the dive industry and student success. There was a high level of respect and engagement between staff and students at the sites visited on this evaluation. Students have opportunities to embed theory in a variety of practical situations, with dives taking place regularly.

Tutors hold appropriate PADI certifications, and new tutors are well supported and mentored through their structured induction period. The Academy places clear expectations on new staff to gain appropriate training in competency-based assessment and the moderation of competency-based assessment, and many hold or are working towards gaining the National Certificate in Adult Education and Training, resulting in tutors developing their skills and understanding of adult teaching and learning practice. This focus on professional development was confirmed by tutors' and students' comments, as well as students' achievement and progress rates.

Students are regularly surveyed both by the Academy and independently by PADI, and these surveys consistently show that students are very satisfied with their training and their rate of progress. The organisation could strengthen its use of these surveys by comparing results over time or across sites.

The Academy has engaged with standard-setting bodies as required to determine that its assessments are valid, fair, and consistent. The submitted material has not always met the national standard in each instance, but where issues have been identified the organisation has made appropriate changes and improved assessment practice.

Assessments are well planned and well linked to the course learning outcomes. Training and assessment towards PADI certifications follow the PADI-controlled processes as applied internationally, and these are supplemented by a wide range of learning aids such as quizzes, presentations, and exercises.

Approximately 2 per cent of students exit diploma programmes early with a lower-level New Zealand Qualifications Framework qualification, such as a national certificate plus entry-level PADI certifications, and this is appropriate for these students. However, the majority of students (71 per cent) continue on to complete the diploma, Medic First Aid Certificate, and PADI certifications as planned.

The Academy's self-assessment processes in this area are very effective in identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement. Appropriate strategies are put in place to maintain and improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

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

Students enrolled with the Academy are very well supported to succeed, are provided with excellent teaching and support staff and resources appropriate for the nature of the training, and are supported to get a job. For example, supplementary study material is available to students on the Academy's website, and students are supported to write their curriculum vitae and to apply for employment using the organisation's and the tutors' international dive industry networks.

The organisation has excellent processes to ensure the safety of students during and after dives. This was confirmed by an external dive expert, and by staff, students, and the organisation's records and internal audits and inter-site peer reviews.

The Academy is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students and on average enrolls one or two international students per year. At the time of this evaluation, one international student was enrolled, and no issues or concerns were identified. The organisation has excellent systems and practices in place to look after international students and provides full and accurate information as required by the code, prior to and at the time of enrolment.

Poorly performing students are well supported to achieve a lower-level qualification, or are referred on to alternative courses more suitable for them.

Few student complaints are lodged and these are resolved effectively, with appropriate action being taken.

The Academy has a good level of understanding of individual students' needs. The organisation reviews how well it is meeting students' needs and how well it is supporting students, including international students, to achieve success. The organisation regularly reviews its compliance with the Code of Practice as required.

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

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**.

The Academy is well managed and governed. The board, and the staff at the sites visited, have very good engagement with their local dive clubs and communities, and have extensive networks internationally. These relationships are actively maintained, enabling the organisation to remain up to date with current industry changes and good practice. Three members of the board of trustees are Academy site directors and two are independent, providing an external perspective and input to the Academy. There are currently ten

independent sites operating under an annually negotiated Notice of Terms and Conditions, which has clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each party.

The board has established appropriate organisational goals, purpose, and direction, and has established an effective strategic overview of the industry, as well as negotiating ongoing “investment plans” with the Tertiary Education Commission. These investment plans form the organisation’s business plan.

The organisation operates on a centralised business model, with operations directed from the national office in Palmerston North. There is a comprehensive quality management system, which is readily available to all sites. The Academy has very good systems for monitoring the effectiveness, consistency, and compliance of each site, through regular quality and safety audits, and a developing internal evaluation process known as “peer review”. Peer review involves staff from one site reviewing another site. Over the last three years all sites have been visited, although not all sites have participated in the role of reviewer. The reviews completed so far have resulted in comprehensive reports to the board that the evaluation team consider are likely to result in meaningful and ongoing improvements to educational achievement.

The board and management of the Academy have taken appropriate action to support poor performing or non-compliant sites, and where improvements have not occurred, the site’s Notice of Terms and Conditions have been cancelled.

The evaluation team noted that the Academy has made considerable progress in developing its self-assessment practices, and in the main they are effective. The organisation has started to benchmark its educational performance across sites, but its self-assessment could be strengthened by better use of this educational performance data, for example by sharing the data during the peer reviews. The Academy could also examine the data to explore the reasons for high and low achievement and share this information across all sites, with the objective of bringing about improvements to students’ achievements overall.

Focus Areas

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

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

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

2.2 Focus area: Three local diploma programmes (Level 5)

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Certificate in Medic First Aid Career Instruction (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**.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review, other than those implied or expressed within the report

Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this 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 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITP Quality) is responsible, under delegated authority from NZQA, for compliance by the polytechnic sector, and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the policies and criteria approved by the NZQA Board.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

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

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

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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