

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Skills Update Training Institute

Date of report: 16 February 2010

Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Brief description of TEO	3
Executive Summary	4
Basis for External Evaluation and Review	5
Findings	6
Part 1: Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation	6
Part 2: Performance in focus areas	13
Statements of Confidence	16
Actions Required and Recommendations.....	17

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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.

Brief description of TEO

- Location: Head office and delivery site Mangere, Auckland
- Type: Private Training Establishment
- Size: 500 students and 50 staff
- Sites: Three sites in Auckland: Mangere, Kelston and Papakura; and one at Richmond, Nelson, offering courses on behalf of Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology.

Skills Update was first registered as a private training establishment with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in 1992, and currently offers Training Opportunities and Youth Training courses which are fully funded through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). The courses currently offered include: carpentry, computer skills, English for employment, heavy transport, warehousing, business administration, computing, and freight forwarding.

All of these courses lead to the achievement of unit standards and national certificates on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and prepare students for employment in a related field. Courses include a mix of classroom and workshop-based learning, and work experience.

Skills Update also delivers a wide range of training under contract to several regional polytechnics and institutes of technology. This aspect of Skills Update's business was not included in this external evaluation and review because it is reviewed separately by ITPQuality.

The most recent quality audit of Skills Update was conducted in 2006 and resulted in all relevant requirements being met.

Executive Summary

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **confident** in the educational performance of Skills Update.

- Students achieve competency assessed by unit standards at significantly higher rates than those required by the TEC contracts. This is a significant achievement by Skills Update for this level of training.
- An increasing number of students complete national certificates. This is additional to the minimum requirements of the TEC contracts.
- Students move into employment or into further training at significantly higher rates than those required by the TEC contracts.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **confident** in the capability in self-assessment of Skills Update.

- Students' needs are formally assessed at the time of enrolment and informally assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the course. These assessments are used to address individual needs.
- Skills Update has well managed and consistent processes for monitoring and collecting data on students' progress and achievements across all delivery sites.
- Management and teaching staff are aware of students' actual results and achievements and these are used to make improvements.
- Processes to critically analyse contributing factors to student achievements and results across all sites are not yet fully developed.

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 (ITPQuality) 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).

Findings

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

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/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>

Outline of scope

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Skills Update included the following mandatory focus area:

- Governance, management, and strategy

This evaluation also included the following programme focus areas:

- Freight Forwarding
- Business Administration and Computing
- Construction.

Part 1: Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation

This section provides a picture of the TEO's performance in terms of the outcomes achieved and the key contributing processes. Performance judgements are based on the answers to key evaluation questions across the focus areas sampled. This section also provides a judgement about the extent to which the organisation uses self-assessment information to understand its own performance and bring about improvements, i.e. capability in self-assessment.

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Context

- Students are achieving competency in unit standards at approximately twice the TEC contract target rate.
- A significant and increasing number of students complete the requirements to gain a national certificate.

- Students move into employment or into further training at approximately 10 to 20 per cent above the TEC contract rate.
- Student results are monitored monthly on all courses and across all sites.
- Emerging issues are discussed and addressed at monthly staff meetings.
- The reasons for the range of the student achievement across courses and sites is not yet critically analysed as well as it could be in order to make improvements.

Explanation

Skills Update's courses are developed to meet the requirements of national certificates designed by industry training organisations, and are highly relevant to the workplace. Students achieve credits on the National Qualifications Framework at rates between 0.8 and 3.96 credits per week, which equates to an average achievement rate approximately twice the baseline set by the funding body, TEC.

Across the programmes included in this evaluation, a significant and increasing number of students are gaining a national certificate. This is a significant achievement for Skills Update because many of its learners have previously not experienced educational success in other institutions.

Skills Update has been able to facilitate its students progressing into employment or further training within two months of completing their training at rates approximately 10 to 20 per cent higher than that required by the TEC contract. The organisation monitors this rate two months post-completion but is currently not collecting outcome data over longer time periods.

The organisation has a well established quality management system which provides clear guidance for the monthly monitoring of student achievements. This is working very well and all teaching staff and management consistently use the collected data to review individual student progress and to make improvements and address issues as they arise.

There is a considerable range in student achievement rates of credits on the National Qualifications Framework across all courses and all sites. While this is not unexpected for this level of training, the organisation does not yet have processes to critically analyse the reasons for these variations or to share good practice across tutors as well as it might.

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

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

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

Context

- The organisation has been offered a significant number of extra places by TEC for 2010.
- Students are regularly surveyed and these surveys show a high level of satisfaction.

- Several industry advisory groups are convened to have industry input into course development and feedback on the results of the courses. Industry advisory group minutes show satisfaction with the outcomes.
- Intermittent feedback is collected from employers who have recruited ex-students.

Explanation

Skills Update is consistently achieving educational and labour market outcomes at rates that are highly valued by the funding body, TEC. This has resulted in Skills Update being offered further places for its Youth Training programmes for 2010.

Students complete satisfaction surveys regularly, and these show a consistently high level of satisfaction across all courses. A selection of students was interviewed at this evaluation and they confirmed their satisfaction with their educational achievements to date. Students also discussed ex-students who had gained employment and felt a reasonable level of confidence that they would also gain employment.

Each industry programme has input from an industry advisory group which includes local employers. Meeting minutes showed that the design of programmes included input from these groups and that the employers valued the knowledge and skills that students gained on the programmes, including the workplace values developed through the courses, such as timeliness. However, it was noted that industry representation on some advisory groups was low.

Although Skills Update's staff confirm that ex-students who gain employment when they leave are still in employment two months later, they are aware that they are not yet maximising their contact with employers to confirm how well employers value the programmes, or to check that students are appropriately prepared for their industry.

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**.

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

Context

- Students' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed when they enrol.
- All programmes are developed to meet the requirements of national certificates which have been designed by industry training organisations, to meet their industry sectors' needs.
- All programmes include the development of skills required to gain and hold employment.
- Programmes include a mix of theory and practice, and work experience where this is available.
- Industry advisory groups are convened to provide input to course design.

- Teaching material is adapted to ensure that it matches students' abilities, and additional course content is added at times to better prepare students to gain employment.

Explanation

When students first enrol with Skills Update they are interviewed to ascertain the extent of their past work experience, and are given a literacy and numeracy assessment. This information is used to establish an individual Training and Career Pathway Plan which sets out their training month by month. Students and staff interviewed confirmed that this plan helps ensure their learning and employment needs are met.

Skills Update has developed its courses to meet the requirements of the unit standards that make up the national certificates offered. All course teaching and assessment material has significant input from the relevant industry training organisations to ensure that the training content, resources and equipment, and assessment practice meet industry requirements.

Courses are designed to include the work-readiness skills that will help students gain and hold employment. These skills include such things as personal presentation and timeliness. Skills Update management is currently developing this area to further ensure that staff model these attitudes and behaviours as well as develop them in their students. Skills Update management believes this is one of the keys to the organisation's success.

Programmes have a mix of classroom-based theory and practical experience. There is some variation in how this is applied across all courses, and management is yet to fully maximise opportunities to facilitate the sharing of good practice among all staff.

Skills Update management is in regular contact with industry training organisations and convenes industry advisory groups for input to course development. This has resulted in programmes that meet the needs of local employers well and meet the standards required by the relevant industry training organisations.

Tutors have the flexibility to add extra content to programmes to match employers' expectations and this has resulted in adding value to programmes and better preparing students to gain employment. Tutors have also adapted teaching material to better meet the individual students' learning needs and abilities, for example to ensure the language and terminology is more accessible and understandable to students. It was noted that there was no systematic process to ensure that individual improvements and good ideas were shared between tutors, courses, and delivery sites.

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 **Good**.

Context

- The organisation has well structured and effective internal moderation of its assessment practices and is actively compliant with standard-setting bodies' national external moderation processes.
- Tutors are well supported to gain relevant teaching qualifications in adult education and recently in adult literacy education.
- Effective performance appraisal processes are in place.
- A high level of respect was noted between students and staff.
- Students achieve credits towards national certificates in all courses and many achieve the full national certificate.
- Tutors showed a good level of empathy with their students.
- Across the organisation there are significant variations in achievement rates, and the organisation has yet to fully analyse the reasons for the variation.

Explanation

Skills Update has a well defined and well implemented internal moderation process which checks the quality of assessment material and assessors' decisions, and this process results in ongoing improvements to both the assessment material and validity of assessors' judgements. The organisation is also actively engaging with standard-setting bodies to ensure that their assessment material and assessors' judgements meet the national standard. Where there have been issues raised by the standard-setting bodies, Skills Update has addressed the issues appropriately and gained the approval of the relevant standard-setting bodies.

Management provides a high level of support for tutors to improve their teaching knowledge and skills in adult learning theory, and currently 45 staff are being supported to study for the National Certificate in Adult Literacy Education (Vocational) (Level 5). Skills Update has an effective performance appraisal process that assesses tutors' performance annually and has resulted in identified improvements, such as improving the educational achievement rates of students.

The evaluation team interviewed a selection of students and staff and there was a high level of respect and empathy noted. Some staff discussed putting considerable extra effort and time, beyond their contract, into their students to support and follow up on their progress.

As already noted, students achieve credits on the NQF and national certificates at a higher rate than the TEC contract requires across most courses. Where there are variations in achievement, the organisation has yet to fully analyse the reasons for the variation.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

Context

- Skills Update management provides a high level of support for tutors and students and are available as needed.
- A high level of integrity and transparency was evident at the evaluation, both at the teaching and management level. This was reflected to some extent by management's support for tutoring staff as the key to the organisation's success.
- Students have an individual Training and Career Pathway Plan.
- Staff and student interviews confirmed that students are well supported and guided within the course structure and as individual students.
- Skills Update's complaints process is transparent and well managed, and issues are resolved in a timely manner.

Explanation

Skills Update management has an open-door policy and this was observed during this evaluation, and confirmed by staff and student interviews. Student evaluations confirm that they are provided with a good level of guidance and support. The evaluation team had easy and ready access to interview staff and students, and to view documentation.

Soon after students enrol, tutors work with them to develop a Training and Career Pathway Plan. This plan notes students' past achievements and work experience, their goals for the future, and includes monthly educational goals. The plan is reviewed monthly and updated. This provides personalised support and guidance to new students.

Students have an appropriate balance of theory and practical components in their courses. However, it was noted that in some instances students were gaining extra benefit and higher achievement rates on some courses where there is more flexibility and better linkages between practice and theory.

Skills Update has effective processes for managing student complaints and a review of the complaints file confirmed that issues were dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner.

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**.

Context

- Skills Update has effective systems for monitoring student achievements and supporting staff to improve educational achievements.

- Effective resourcing is provided for all courses, and maintenance and repairs of resources is well budgeted for.
- Management recognises high-performing staff and has appropriate reward systems that contribute to lifting educational achievement.
- Management expressed a keen awareness of the needs of the student population and of how to lift their skills to meet local employers' requirements.
- Skills Update management has yet to take full advantage of opportunities to gain direct input from employers on how best to meet their needs.

Explanation

Skills Update has provided sufficient staff with appropriate skills and resources to monitor and review student achievements. All courses from all sites report students' achievements and progress monthly to the national office and these are reviewed and tracked in detail by management. This process provides an effective oversight of students' achievements and course progress, and regular meetings with staff are held and appropriate strategies are developed and put in place to address emerging issues.

All programmes reviewed were well resourced and had access to up-to-date and appropriate tools, equipment, and technology. This was confirmed in the interviews with students and staff at this evaluation.

Management has developed appropriate rewards for staff performance, and the organisation believes that this has contributed to the attainment of high student educational achievement and labour market outcomes.

The management and owners of Skills Update displayed a close empathy for, and awareness of, their students' needs and have clear and effective strategies to develop students' skills to gain and keep employment. This was evidenced in discussions and documentation and is supported by the students' results.

Part 2: Performance in focus areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Freight Forwarding

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

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

Context

- Students' educational achievements on this programme are higher than average for all courses, and the labour market outcomes when students leave this programmes are well above the TEC contracted target.
- Although self-assessment practices are common across the organisation, some particular strengths were noted in this programme.

Explanation

In the past calendar year students on this programmes achieved over two credits per week and over the last three years there has been a steady increase in the number of students achieving the full national certificate. This represents above average educational achievement, both in relation to other courses within Skills Update and in relation to the TEC contract target figures.

Staff interviewed indicated a high level of experience and understanding of the industry, a high level of empathy for the students, and clearly described processes for gaining students' trust and commitment, and for fostering their subsequent achievements.

The challenge for Skills Update management is to ensure that these strengths are defined and shared across the organisation. Teaching staff were able to describe how they gained the students' trust and subsequently worked with them to achieve well. This awareness has been a significant strength and contributing factor to the success of this programme.

2.2 Focus area: Business Administration and Computing

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

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

Context

- The average educational achievement per student per week on this programme across all sites is similar to other courses within Skills Update.
- The self-assessment practices in this programme are common to all other programmes within Skills Update.

Explanation

The course curriculum has been adjusted to include extra content, beyond the minimum required for the national certificate, to better prepare students for employment. This was seen as a strength by students and staff interviewed at this evaluation. The last complete year's educational results were slightly improved on other Skills Update course results.

2.3 Focus area: Construction

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

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

Context

- The educational performance varied considerably across two of the sites.
- Self-assessment practices on this programme are common to all other programmes within Skills Update. However, full advantage is not yet being taken of the opportunity to share good practice across the organisation.

Explanation

Four construction classes operate across two sites and the educational achievements vary from less than one credit to nearly four credits per week. Although the lower of these rates still meets the TEC contract figures, this variation in education outcomes is not well understood or analysed. Because of this range in achievements across all courses, the evaluation team rated the educational performance here adequate. The organisation is aware that its self-assessment practices currently lack strength in identifying and critically analysing these outcomes in order to share identified good practice to make improvements.

2.4 Mandatory focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

The overall rating for performance in governance, management, and strategy is **Excellent**.

The overall rating for capability in self-assessment in governance, management, and strategy is **Good**.

Context

- The organisation's governance and management structure is clear and effective.
- Appropriate policies and procedures are well established and provide clarity for staff.
- The organisation operates with integrity, and with open, transparent processes.
- Some opportunities for exploring and critically analysing successes are not yet fully realised.

Explanation

Skills Update is a well established private training establishment with a well developed supporting quality management system. Lines of communication between all staff are well maintained and clear. This was confirmed in discussions with teaching and management staff.

The organisation supports its staff well and provides easy access to all information. The staff interviewed at this evaluation expressed a high level of support, passion, and commitment for the organisation, and stated that they felt well supported by the organisation to achieve the targets that are required of them.

Current self-assessment practices are well established and function well in establishing the needs of the various interested parties, including the students. Internal reviews and monitoring processes are effective in achieving good educational and labour market outcomes. However, Skills Update is not yet critically analysing its own strengths and weaknesses as well as it could in order to make improvements.

Statements of Confidence

The statements of confidence are derived from the findings within and across the focus areas. A four-step scale is used: highly confident, confident, not yet confident, not confident.

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **confident** in the educational performance of Skills Update.

- Students achieve competency in unit standards at significantly higher rates than those required by the TEC contracts. This is a significant achievement for Skills Update for this level of training.
- An increasing number of students complete national certificates. This is above the minimum requirements of the TEC contracts.
- Students move into employment or into further training at significantly higher rates than those required by the TEC contracts.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **confident** in the capability in self-assessment of Skills Update.

- Students' needs are formally assessed at the time of enrolment and informally throughout the course.
- Skills update has well managed and consistent processes for monitoring and collecting data on students' progress and achievements across all delivery sites.
- Management and teaching staff are aware of students' actual results and achievements and these are used to make improvements.
- Processes to critically analyse contributing factors to student achievements and results across all sites are not yet fully developed.

Actions Required and Recommendations

Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's regular scheduling policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

Recommendations

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

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