External Evaluation and Review Report

Opus International Consultants
Environmental Training Centre

Date of report: 19 December 2018

About Opus International Consultants Environmental Training Centre

Opus offers mostly short-duration training to individuals working in numerous roles across the environmental management industry. Client organisations typically engage Opus to improve the capability of their personnel, which enables them to comply with regulatory requirements.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	33 The Esplanade, Petone
Code of Practice signatory:	No
Number of students:	Domestic: 1306 (177 equivalent full-time students); Māori 17 per cent (127), Pasifika 5 per cent (66)
Number of staff:	Five full-time equivalents
TEO profile:	[See NZQA – Opus International Consultants Environmental training Centre](#)
Last EER outcome:	NZQA was Confident in the educational performance and Confident in the capability in self-assessment of Opus at the previous external evaluation and review (EER) in 2014.
Scope of evaluation:	• Swimming Pool Water Treatment Training Scheme • Backflow Prevention training
MoE number:	9441
NZQA reference:	C30383
Dates of EER visit:	19 and 20 September 2018

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Summary of Results

Opus training meets the important needs of most of its trainees, client organisations and industry stakeholders. The PTE's systematic approach to reviewing performance has produced a range of quality improvements. However, assessment flaws on two programmes have not been effectively addressed.

Confident in educational performance

- Opus has recognised technical expertise, strong industry links and well-respected trainers. Its training delivers important outcomes for most trainees, industry stakeholders and the wider society. The trainees gain the latest, relevant knowledge and skills to apply in their workplace. Completion of training enables the trainees or organisations to operate compliantly.

Confident in capability in self-assessment

- The Opus approach to training is hands-on, scenario-based training well suited to the trainees, who learn, observe and apply their learning – typically using technical equipment – either on or off course. Most trainees are effectively supported to complete their learning.

- Assessment and moderation practice is methodical. However, internal moderation identified assessment flaws on two courses[1] that had not been rectified. These achievement results are therefore questionable.

- Opus is an innovative organisation focused on meeting the current and future needs of industry. It robustly reviews all key performance areas. The PTE has supported a range of improvements including generally increased completions, reduced duration to complete, and the implementation of a new strategic focus. It has been effective in managing key compliance accountabilities.

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[1] These two courses (of the 13 using unit standards) had only 13 per cent of the enrolled 2017 trainees. See 1.1 and 1.3 for further details.

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Key evaluation question findings[2]

1.1 How well do students achieve?	
Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Trainees working in the environmental management sector need relevant knowledge, skills and attributes, commonly to meet regulatory requirements. Many Opus trainees acquire in-depth capabilities that meet or exceed unit standard or industry requirements.
	The PTE monitors individual achievement and has a detailed understanding of what causes non-completions, including external factors such as trainees leaving a workplace role or certain roles not requiring particular capabilities. Opus has made changes that have contributed to significantly increased completion rates in various programmes.
	Moderation practice gives general confidence in the achievement results. However, internal moderation identified cases of unsound re-assessment practices on two of the 13 courses using unit standards.[3] Therefore, the evaluators have some reservations about the reliability of those results. Māori and Pasifika trainees achieve at similar rates to all students. The first report to the new governance group on learning and achievement is currently rudimentary.
Conclusion:	Trainees on most Opus programmes acquire in-depth and relevant knowledge, skills and attributes. However, there are some reservations about the results of two programmes. Self-assessment is generally strong.

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

[3] See 1.3 for further details.

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Opus has a well-founded reputation for applying its technical expertise and knowledge to the training.[4] Multiple stakeholders said the training is industry aligned and recognised. They described the organisation as 'future focused', 'proactive', and 'innovative'. Opus independently surveyed its top 10 clients; most highly rated the quality of the training and its applicability to their workplace. The influential 'Making Good Decisions'[5] programme is 'well regarded' and 'an accepted part of resource management practice'. Opus recently successfully tendered for five further years of delivery. Opus training enables industry personnel to work more effectively in environmental management. Trainees gain formal certification[6] to meet recognised standards. This helps ensure the protection of water quality, physical environments and public health and safety. However, the previously noted assessment issue[7] means the evaluators have reservations about the competency of trainees from two courses. Through self-reflection and strong relationships with industry, Opus has a rich understanding of the above outcomes. There is a pattern of ongoing improvements across programmes, improving the value for stakeholders. Opus undertook a robust strategic review of its training centre and has developed and begun to implement a plan to better meet the current and emerging needs of the sector.
Conclusion:	Opus produces generally high-value outcomes for its key stakeholders. Robust and high quality self-assessment supports ongoing improvements.

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[4] Opus personnel have been engaged as expert advisors on different aspects of environmental management.

[5] This programme trains Resource Management Act decision-makers.

[6] For example, trainees can be local council-approved 'independent quality practitioner'.

[7] See 1.3.

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Marginal**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Opus provides a real-world/scenario-based environment where trainees learn new knowledge and skills and observe the capability being demonstrated. Trainee can apply their learning (on and off course) using real equipment. This is an effective approach with consistently strong feedback from industry stakeholders[8] and trainees that the training meets their needs. Opus makes regular improvements to its programmes, including acquiring new technical equipment or revising workbooks. The trainees value and use the excellent course information and manual both during the training and as a workplace resource. As part of its new strategic direction, Opus has developed and begun carefully piloting e-learning and blended learning, which aligns with the current approach to training and meets the needs of trainees and key stakeholders. The PTE has a methodical approach to assessment and moderation. External moderation results have been strong. However, internal moderation identified assessment flaws on two courses. The trainers gave undue assistance to trainees after incorrect answers were submitted. In response, Opus organised professional development for its trainers and changed its administrative procedures. However, during the EER, this practice was found to have continued. The prevalence of re-assessments needs closer monitoring and reporting and, if necessary, further enquiry to understand why the trainees are not meeting the standard. Improved review would reduce potential risks.
Conclusion:	Programme design and delivery meets the needs of the trainees and key stakeholders on most programmes. Many robust self-assessment processes support ongoing quality improvements. However, a significant self-assessment gap has not been sufficiently addressed.

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[8] Key stakeholders include industry organisations, large corporates, small businesses and regional and national government bodies.

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Most Opus training is typically short-duration block courses, sometimes with work to be completed afterwards or between modules. Opus engages trainers who are experienced and qualified subject matter experts, well respected by industry and the trainees. The organisation supports its trainers to develop their teaching ability and gain adult education qualifications. The trainers use a range of delivery approaches well suited to the needs of the trainees. Classes are small, and trainees from diverse workplace roles support engagement and add value. Trainers provide individualised feedback and support. Participant feedback is typically positive about the support the trainers provide. Opus head office tracks completions and understands well the factors affecting completions, such as leaving employment, changing roles, or a lack of client commitment to completions. Opus has introduced a fee, paid by the client, for late submitted course work; trainee completions have significantly improved and the duration to complete has fallen.
Conclusion:	The support provided is generally effective in enabling students to stay involved and complete their training. Student and client feedback is used to make improvements.

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

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Opus has strong industry relationships and recognised training and environmental management expertise. The PTE leadership has successfully drawn on this resource to fulfil its core purpose of delivering training that generally meets the evolving needs of the sector.
	Opus recently implemented a revised strategic focus on developing e-learning and blended learning as well as micro-credentials. Opus has partnered with a recognised organisation and established an enhanced governance group to support the change. The group members – while having clear technical and leadership expertise – have no specific background in training. Opus has invested significant resources in this new direction, while continuing to support current delivery with new software, equipment and high quality learning materials.
	The academic leadership team has attracted and retained reputable and capable trainers and invests in their professional development. However, Opus did not provide evidence of how the trainers as a group view the support that the leadership provides.
	Opus has a reflective organisational culture. It collects and reviews data in an ongoing, transparent and business-as-usual fashion. Decisions are informed by evidence and there is an explicit focus on quality improvement across the organisation, which has been mostly effective.
Conclusion:	Governance and management support the PTE to meet the important needs of most of its students and key stakeholders. A robust self-assessment culture identifies performance and self-assessment gaps and effectively manages most of them to bring about a range of important developments.

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1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	**Good**
Self-assessment:	**Good**
Findings and supporting evidence:	Opus has recognised expertise in the significant regulatory requirements of environmental management. This expertise informs the training and the systems and procedures the PTE has established to meet its compliance accountabilities. The organisation has a formal quality management system and procedures that meets ISO 9001 quality standards.[9] There was evidence of processes being followed and procedures being reviewed and revised over time.
	The PTE reviews its key compliance accountabilities annually before signing the required NZQA statutory declaration. This review confirms that Opus has:
	• reviewed and met its key programme and training scheme requirements
	• put in place a formal assessment and moderation system; procedures have been updated over time; the PTE has participated in external moderation as required
	• engaged trainers who are appropriately qualified and experienced
	• maintained enrolment and academic records.
	Ensuring health and safety is an important compliance accountability for a PTE delivering environmental management training. There was evidence that health and safety procedures have been followed and reviewed. Opus said there were no significant legal or ethical issues facing the organisation at the time of the EER visit.
Conclusion:	The organisation has been effective in staying current with and managing its important compliance accountabilities.

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[9] https://www.iso.org

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Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Backflow Water Prevention programme

Performance:	**Marginal**
Self-assessment:	**Marginal**
	A respected subject matter expert with an adult education qualification delivers this three-day programme. Equipment is shipped to each delivery site, enabling trainees to learn, observe a demonstration, and apply their learning on site. Completion of the programme enables the trainees to gain 'independently qualified practitioner' status from local councils. Opus is the dominant trainer in the market, and key industry stakeholders expressed a high level of confidence in the training. Feedback from students about the programme is typically positive. The programme has a high completion rate (recently 100 per cent for the two core unit standards). However, internal moderation identified flawed re-assessment practices that have not been sufficiently addressed.[10] Therefore, there are reservations about the competency of the trainees.

2.2 Focus area: Swimming Pool Water Treatment programme

Performance:	**Excellent**
Self-assessment:	**Excellent**
	Opus is the dominant trainer in this market. An experienced senior trainer with recognised adult education qualifications and subject matter expertise delivers this programme over three block courses. Training includes field visits to swimming pools and trainees applying their learning in the workplace, with their supervisors verifying their performance. Key industry stakeholders and trainee feedback confirm that their important needs are being consistently met and in areas exceeded. Completion of the training enables client

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[10] This issue is noted earlier in this report.

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	organisations to meet industry quality standards. Internal and external moderation results confirm that assessment is sound and the results reliable. Key quality improvements include delivering the course over three modules, adding a unit standard, increasing completion rates, and reducing the duration for trainees to complete.

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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 Opus International Consultants Environmental Training Centre:

- Closely monitor the frequency and significance of any re-assessments.

- Strengthen the current programme review procedures.

- Ensure there is sufficient training expertise in the newly established governance group.

Requirements

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

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

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Appendix

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[11]*

- *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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[11] 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.

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Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016, which are made by NZQA under section 253(1)(pa) of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

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. The requirements are set through the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

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 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). The Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016 are available at https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/qa-rules/external-evaluation-rules-2016/1/, 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

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