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Targeted Evaluation Report

Ara Institute of Canterbury Limited

Date of report: 11 November 2021

Targeted evaluation of Ara Institute of Canterbury Ltd

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) became subsidiaries of Te Pūkenga as part of the Reform of Vocational Education.

NZQA carries out targeted evaluations of Te Pūkenga subsidiaries whose external evaluation and reviews (EER) became due during the transition to the new organisation.

The targeted evaluations focus on areas of educational performance that will be important for both the subsidiary and Te Pūkenga in the new operating environment.

The limited scope of the targeted evaluation means that it will not result in organisational statements of confidence. Therefore, no EER category status will be assigned.

About Ara Institute of Canterbury Ltd

Ara Institute of Canterbury (Ara) is the largest organisation delivering vocational education in Canterbury, and in 2020 was the largest subsidiary of Te Pūkenga. Ara offers programmes ranging from levels 1-9 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. Ara operates three campuses in Christchurch and three regional campuses.

Region:	Canterbury
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of learners:	Domestic: 6440 equivalent full-time students (December 2020) International: 848 equivalent full-time students (December 2020)
Number of staff:	932 full-time equivalents
TEO profile:	Ara Institute of Canterbury Ltd
Last EER outcome:	Highly confident in both educational performance and capability in self-assessment (February 2017)
Scope of evaluation:	This targeted evaluation considered three focus areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How effectively Ara supports and guides learners2. How effectively Ara assesses learning3. Ara nominated the following area of expertise and strength for evaluation: Department of Hospitality and Service Industries
MoE number:	6006
NZQA reference:	C44468
Dates of targeted evaluation:	8-10 March 2021 with feedback to Ara on 15 March 2021

Summary of results

Ara supports its learners well and meets their most important educational needs. The benefits of this approach can be seen in the high rates of learner retention and success.

Ara has conducted a significant review of its assessment practices and developed a plan for further improvement.

The department of Hospitality and Service Industries, through its strong leadership and collegial working environment, actively supports innovation.

- The culture of Ara is collegial. There is an explicit attention to wellbeing across departments and campuses.
- Learners are well supported, both by academic staff and by a wide range of specialist services.
- NZQA noted how closely Ara self-monitors the effectiveness of these support services, and strengthens them further when opportunities are identified. In recent years, moderation by industry training organisations and NZQA has identified some inconsistencies of assessment in Ara programmes. Ara has since reviewed the quality of its assessment practice across the institution and identified both good practice to be retained and several areas for improvement.
- Ara programmes often take an integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment. Where possible, assessment is conducted in realistic work environments, including both formative and summative practical assessments in specialist facilities and workplaces.
- The Hospitality and Service Industries (HSI) department is one of Ara's strongest performers, with effective leadership and a working environment that supports innovation and learner success.
- HSI takes care to ensure that the education it offers is relevant to industry, that industry needs are understood, and programmes are targeted to meet these needs.
- Within HSI, staff are willing to try new approaches and engagement in evidence-based self-assessment. This provides an environment where new initiatives can be developed, trialled and shared with the rest of the organisation.

Focus areas

Focus area 1: How effectively are learners supported?

Findings and supporting evidence

Meeting needs

Ara learners are being well supported to succeed in their programme of study. The organisational policy and ethos around the quality and integrity of the tutor-learner relationship is fundamental and core to the effectiveness of support provision. This approach is informed by suitable professional development and managerial oversight. Depending on individual needs and circumstances, priority group learners¹ may choose to self-refer to a network of centralised and/or specialist support services. Tutors may also encourage or direct learners towards a range of learning and wellbeing support options where required. Peer support is encouraged informally or through structured and facilitated means such as student representatives and tuakana-teina mentors. The well-structured policy, 'Learner Responsibility and Rights', clearly outlines Ara's expectations for its learners and is discussed at orientation and in published resources. This resource has been in place since 1990, with refinements and review over time.

Ara provides a diverse range of relevant internal and external support services (see Appendix). The availability and scheduling of services varies depending on campus location and size; however, learners were aware of services and how to access them. The evaluators also heard about the continuation of strong relationships supporting both learners and stakeholders in work placements. Support is being effectively provided across the sites and modes of delivery, including work-integrated learning.

Ara has developed a Next Step Centre for Women, and the Women in Trades activities are helping facilitate pathways to apprenticeships for more women. Some of the impacts of this were explored by NZQA with trades tutors, learners and industry stakeholders in the painting and decorating field. NZQA finds this initiative a notable example of Ara meeting emerging stakeholder needs. Increasingly, care is taken to ensure learners are enrolled on an appropriate course and that individual learner needs are considered and understood as early as possible in the learner journey.

There is also a continued focus on opportunities for early engagement of learners with support services. The evaluators were provided with a compelling case study of how the practice of foundation learning enrolments has changed. Guidance material has become better targeted, and each learner's readiness for study better assessed. In turn, this has led to improved programmes and higher retention and completion rates.

¹ Māori, Pacific, young people (under 25) and learners in foundation-level programmes.

Support resources

Ara's organisational focus on health and wellbeing for staff both supports and complements its strategies for enhancing learner wellbeing. The series of tragedies that have occurred in Christchurch since 2010 have been deeply challenging to Ara and its stakeholders. Through this adversity, Ara has developed a strong focus on collegial support, explicit attention to wellbeing, and encouragement of practices which identify and support people who are struggling. A few examples of this are the sensitive attention to monitoring staff wellbeing in the regular departmental reporting to Te Kahui Manukura (senior leadership team); the decision to bring counselling services in-house and deliver that resource from within Ara core staffing; and the relocation of the Muslim prayer room to a more central site within the city campus to ease any learner apprehensiveness.

Technology has recently been implemented which enables better communication between those providing support and those monitoring learner engagement. This will potentially contribute to better gauging the effectiveness of support, including equity aspects. The development and use of case management tools for pastoral support is a notable initiative to monitor service delivery in real time and assist with equitable utilisation of finite resources.

Quantitative data on learner use of services is gathered and reported. The thoughtful and creative Māui Te Taurira² pilot includes such components. Support for learners with disabilities is well delivered, and self-assessment of the effectiveness of this identified a need to better utilise learning from experience and the range of data already gathered.

Ara's comprehensive self-review shows conformance with the Code³, appropriate actions for improvement, and identifies examples of strong communication and support processes. The AraApp, Ara website and notifications through the learning management system were all referenced by international learners interviewed about support, as were the role of student advisors. Notably, these were also a means of communication and maintaining continuity across all learner groups during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Self-assessment

External benchmarking of learner satisfaction is reflected by the 2019 ISB Survey findings, where 94 per cent rated themselves 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the level of support and information received during their enrolment at Ara. Review of the new domestic Code had been completed at the time of the NZQA visit, and the findings were under consideration by Te Kahui

² Māui te Taurira is part of the Academic, Innovation and Research Division's (AIR) implementation plan of the Framework for Māori Achievement designed to respond to the priority areas for Māori achievement.

³ International Student Support and Wellbeing Education (Pastoral Care Of International Students) Code of Practice.

Manukura. One notable example of change arising was the linking of daily 'in-class' attendance monitoring to Ōtautahi House learner accommodation protocols.

NZQA found evidence of self-assessment leading to service changes which benefit learners. The mechanisms for providing support have been subject to ongoing review since the last formal NZQA evaluation (2016). Ara is listening to the learner voice at multiple levels of the organisation, and is using a range of formal and informal mechanisms to respond. Plausible examples were found during the interviews held with staff and learners. This included formal feedback processes and immediate responses to concerns raised, to easily addressed issues identified by focus groups. Ara has adopted the 'You said, we did!' framework as a way of reflecting back and underlining the value to the institution of the learner voice.

Embedded self-assessment at both the programme and policy-setting levels shows that Ara seeks to continuously improve learner support, with an overarching goal of retention and success for all learner groups.

Connected to the Ara Transformation Agenda (2018) there has been a fundamental and forward-looking shift in philosophy around supporting taura Māori to succeed at Ara. A framework for Māori achievement was launched in 2020: it is multi-faceted, references iwi goals and is explicitly aligned to the goals and requirements of Te Pūkenga, the TEC and NZQA. It envisages shifting organisational perspectives and culture around mātauranga Māori, teaching and learning, and the learner experience. The framework is holistic and takes a whole-of-organisation approach. Departments can use this framework to both evaluate and plan for change depending on their strengths and weaknesses, with the assistance of skilful facilitation, pilot programmes and resources where required.⁴ The Pacific Plan has led to projects targeting areas that present barriers to Pacific learners.

Course and qualification completion trends are closely monitored. There has been a lower course and qualification completion rate for Māori and Pacific learners. Interventions to better engage and support taura Māori and Pacific learners have had some positive results, with evidence of increased engagement with support services.

Conclusion

Learners are well supported. Fundamental to the effectiveness of this support is the intentionally developed relationship between tutor and learner. There is an appropriate range of specialist support services that tutors can refer learners to, and priority learners can self-refer to.

⁴ 'The Framework for Māori Achievement is designed not only to grow cultural competency but to establish developmental areas for greater embedding into our programmes and support for learners.' Ara self-assessment summary p.5

Focus area 2: How effectively is learning assessed?

Findings and supporting evidence

Self-assessment

In 2018, Ara instituted a whole-of-institution review of assessment practice that reported to the chief executive in October 2020. The report identifies good practice occurring both at an institutional level and in some departments, that can usefully be shared across Ara. The relatively recent introduction of 'department groups' provides an appropriate mechanism for sharing this good practice.

Themes for improvement have also been identified, along with appropriate recommendations. Effective implementation of the recommendations will improve the effectiveness of assessment at Ara and provide confidence that assessment is effective across the institution. A steering group is to be formed to oversee and plan the implementation of the report findings. Key areas to be addressed are:

- strengthening quality assurance of assessment and oversight of this
- improving the development and design of assessment, including the development and use of rubrics to ensure consistency
- the storage and retrieval of assessment materials.

As part of the review, specific evaluative feedback was provided for sample programmes. NZQA finds that some areas of feedback have been addressed, as for example reductions in over-assessment, and the introduction, in one department, of a new position that has responsibility for the oversight of moderation.

Policy

Generally, policy related to assessment and moderation is comprehensive and appropriate.

Internal pre-assessment moderation is undertaken for all assessments prior to first delivery of a programme. This process aims to ensure that the assessment tasks are aligned to the course and graduate outcomes. Identified issues are addressed before the assessments are used. Any newly developed assessments or adapted assessments are also internally pre-moderated prior to use. Internal post-moderation occurs regularly, with all identified actions documented and implemented by the teaching team. NZQA sighted relevant examples from three different programmes that follow the internal policy and accords with good practice. Although in its self-assessment submission Ara noted some opportunities for improving oversight of its assessments, in its own sampling of process and materials NZQA found no significant problems.

Assessment design

There is good institutional support for staff developing assessments for new programmes and for undertaking recognition of prior learning. This also serves to build staff capability. For example, trades staff worked collaboratively with learning designers to develop online/blended assessments for a new plumbing programme. Staff capability in assessment is also developed through teacher training which all staff are required to undertake. Ara intends to include specific assessment criteria in their in-house Teaching and Learning Awards, as a further enabler of improved assessment practices.

Ara is assessing at levels 1-9 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, with a wide range of assessment methods used across the institution. Where possible, Ara aims to conduct assessment in realistic work environments. This includes both formative and summative practical assessments in specialist facilities and workplaces. Formative assessment in placements is ongoing, and learners valued the support they received from both placement providers and Ara tutors in this aspect of their learning. The evaluators heard several good examples of the collection of naturally occurring evidence in the workplace and simulated environments.

Quality of assessment

Ara has been able to demonstrate for each of the 12 NZQA consistency reviews that it participated in over the last year that its graduates match the graduate profile at the appropriate threshold. This provides assurance that assessment is aligned with qualification graduate outcome statements and is at the appropriate level.

In recent years there has been some variability in the results of moderation by industry training organisations and NZQA monitoring and moderation. Additionally, action plans developed in response to adverse findings have not always been effective. Work to address identified issues is underway in departments as part of an institution-wide response to the assessment review findings. Ara is currently undertaking work to ensure compliance with NZQA's requirements for the storage and retrieval of assessment materials. Ara aims to complete this work by the end of 2021.

Conclusion

Ara's review of its assessment practice has identified good practice in assessment and of key themes for improvement. Staff are supported to develop real-work related assessments as an aspect of their professional development.

Focus area 3: What are the subsidiary's areas of strength?

Findings and supporting evidence

Ara selected the Hospitality and Service Industries department (HSI) as a strength of the organisation. This selection was based on the culture of the department including innovation, continuous improvement and focus on learner achievement. The evidence gathered by the evaluation team supports the conclusion that this is a high-performing department within Ara.

The department has strong leadership and a collegial working environment that supports innovation and expectation of improvement with learners at the heart of what they do. This provides a workplace where individual staff members can express their passion for both education and their area of vocational expertise. The leadership style of the department is well embedded and has developed over time under various leaders.

Teaching is generally applied in nature, with practical work integrated into delivery. The department's facilities provide the opportunity for learners to learn and be assessed in realistic work situations. This aspect of learners' engagement with Ara was particularly valued by them. The department pointed to the range of industry awards received over recent years and successful participation in competitions such as the Toque D'Or as evidence supporting their relevance to the industry.

Both learner satisfaction measures and teaching observations confirm the quality of teaching in the department. The strong teacher-learner relationships discussed under Focus Area 1 of this report were evident in this department. Learners value their tutor's accessibility and willingness to help. Learners are aware of the high expectations regarding their presentation and the development of personal skills and the relevance of this to employment opportunities.

There is a clear focus on learners and their success. Primarily this focus is based on the formation of strong relationships between learners and academic staff. These relationships are intentionally developed at the start of programmes and are supported by the accessibility of tutors throughout the learners' courses. Learners particularly value this aspect of study at Ara.

Learner satisfaction is high and overall course completion rates are consistently above 80 per cent. Considering the HSI learner profile, NZQA considers this to be strong feedback. External benchmarking against similar programmes with similar cohorts would strengthen Ara's own understanding of the value of this feedback and how it could be best used.

Successful course completion rates for Māori and Pacific learners have been persistently lower than those of others over recent years. The department has responded to this gap in achievement by developing and piloting interventions aimed at closing the gap. The pilot for one initiative showed a significant improvement in Māori learner achievement and is now being rolled out more

widely. Such initiatives demonstrate the department's willingness to address issues and find innovative solutions. They also demonstrate how the department uses effective self-assessment to understand performance and leverage improvement.

The proactive approach of HSI leadership and their willingness for staff to try new approaches and engagement in evidence-based self-assessment is a strength of Ara. This provides an environment where new initiatives can be developed, trialled and shared with the rest of the organisation.

Conclusion

Hospitality and Service Industries is a high-performing department with strong leadership that is willing to share their expertise. The department clearly puts learners at the heart of what they do. Care is taken to ensure that the education provided is relevant to industry, that industry needs are understood, and that programmes are targeted to meet these needs.

Appendix

Support services directly discussed with Ara by the evaluation team, or otherwise referenced in material provided, included: students' learning and academic support services; student advisors (guidance on course admissions and StudyLink for example); Ara career services; library services and IT Helpdesk; Ara Health Centre and counselling services; disability services; child care services; Ōtautahi House student accommodation; a recreation centre; student advocacy and Student Council. External providers of support referenced in student-facing guidance include: Citizens Advice Bureau, The Salvation Army, Smoking Cessation Support and the New Zealand Police.

Disclaimer

The findings in this report have been reached by means of a modified 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 fraud⁵*
- *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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⁵ 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.