

Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Film and Television School trading as The Film School

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 30 November 2010

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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:	Wellington
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	2000
Number of students:	Domestic: 44 equivalent full-time students International: two equivalent full-time students
Number of staff:	Five full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	One-year, 120-credit Certificate in Introduction to Film and Television Production (Level 5)
Sites:	No additional sites
Distinctive characteristics:	The Film School provides a film industry-based practical programme. This distinguishes it from other, similar tertiary education organisations which focus more on theory and television production. Teaching is conducted by the head tutor and 20-30 industry-based tutors in any one year. The programme coordinator and the technician, who are also experienced in the industry, also do some teaching.
Recent significant changes:	The Film School shifted to its current premises in late 2008. The facilities better suit the needs of the training than the previous site. Equipment has also been upgraded since the move.
Previous quality assurance history:	At its last quality audit in 2008, The Film School met all requirements for ongoing registration.
Other:	The Film School's domestic students are supported by Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) Student

Achievement Component (SAC) funding. The school was set up by experienced professionals in the industry who saw a gap in tertiary education and training. It contributes to Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) priorities of increasing educational success for young New Zealanders (aged under 25) and the achievement of advanced trade, technical, and professional qualifications that meet regional and national needs.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the external evaluation and review of The Film School included the following focus area:

- Certificate in Introduction to Film and Television Production (Level 5).

This was chosen because it is the only course that The Film School offers, and all students undertake it.

The following mandatory focus areas were also included:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- Student support including international students.

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 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/>

The external evaluation and review team comprised one lead evaluator and one external evaluator who spent two days on site. The Film School board members, director, head tutor, programme coordinator, technician, graduates, and students participated in the external evaluation.

The New Zealand Film and Television School, trading as The Film School, will have an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and submissions received will be fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **New Zealand Film and Television School trading as The Film School**. Key reasons for this include the following.

- A high proportion of The Film School students complete their course and achieve the Certificate in Introduction to Film and Television Production. Over the past three years (2007, 2008, and 2009), 86-97 per cent of students have completed the course and 93-98 per cent have achieved the qualification.
- Students train in a learning environment which from day one closely simulates working in the industry. Students graduate from being trained by industry-based and experienced tutors with sound theoretical knowledge and practical skills, which enables the students to carry out a range of different industry roles on entry into employment. Students made very positive comparisons between The Film School and their experience of film courses at universities and institutes of technology and polytechs.
- Most of The Film School graduates are successful in obtaining ongoing employment in the film industry, often in a number of different roles; their success arises from their training and the contacts and networks they establish through the school, as well as the ongoing support of The Film School, which has a good reputation in the industry. Graduates commented on the importance of the confidence, knowledge, and skills they gained to their ongoing participation in the industry.
- Assessment is based on the timeliness and quality of the completion of a series of project briefs. However, as noted by the students, assessment could be more robust. The Film School expects that assessment will benefit from a programme review that is currently under way.
- Over 60 per cent of The Film School students are under 25 years of age and graduates go on to contribute to a challenging but successful industry which has a foundation of experienced practitioners.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Film and Television School trading as The Film School**. Key reasons for this include the following.

- The Film School collects formal and informal feedback from a range of different sources which include student evaluations, visiting tutor feedback, and board members' feedback. It uses specific information as the basis to make specific improvements which typically are practical, technical, and operational.
- The board comprises experienced industry practitioners who keep the school well informed about the relevance and value of the training. However, the school has

recognised that it could further develop how it gathers, records, and analyses industry feedback to make improvements and evaluate their effectiveness.

- The Film School is aware of the progress of its graduates, especially in Wellington. Graduates are also able to provide valuable feedback on the relevance and value of their training. The Film School has identified that it could readily formally track where graduates gain employment and obtain and use their ongoing feedback by developing a website design which encourages such information and feedback and participation. It sees its tenth anniversary as an ideal opportunity to develop these ideas.
- The Film School has a number of important partnerships it uses to benefit the students. One of the more recent of these is its collaboration with Toi Whākaari, the New Zealand Drama School. Students interviewed by the evaluation team were positive about the value of working with actors but had a number of suggestions on how the relationship could be further improved. Self-assessment of such initiatives would benefit The Film School and its students and lead to further ongoing improvements.
- The certificate course was under review at the time of the external evaluation, and it is expected that changes and improvements in its structure, pedagogy, and assessment will result. The Film School is also considering future possibilities which may include developing a higher-level qualification.

TEO response

The New Zealand Film & Television School trading as The Film School has confirmed the factual accuracy of this report.

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**.

The Certificate in Introduction to Film and Television Production course has two intakes of students, in February and July. A high proportion of The Film School students complete their course and achieve the qualification. This has been consistent over the past three years. In 2007, 2008, and 2009 respectively, 86, 97, and 95 per cent of students completed the course and 93, 96, and 98 per cent achieved the qualification.

These rates are impressive and reflect the passion, enthusiasm, and commitment of the students to succeed in the film industry. The Film School's staff and visiting tutors have the same attributes. The positive student and tutor attitudes were evident in The Film School's own evaluations and in the evaluation team's interviews of students, tutors, staff, and graduates. Students also commented that The Film School and its tutors were demanding and they themselves were driven by the practical nature of the course and their strong desire to work in the industry regardless of the sacrifices they needed to make to succeed.

Student evaluations rate the course overall, the quality of the internal and external teaching, the management of the school, the responsiveness of the school to students' needs, the quality of the teaching, technical and student spaces, and the quality of the cameras, equipment, computers, and software. The ratings indicate areas of strength and areas for improvement, and some of the feedback provides more detailed comments. The comments are all recorded but not grouped or analysed. Doing so could provide an even richer self-assessment. The evaluation team was impressed by the quality of the feedback from the students, staff, tutors, and graduates they interviewed and believes that the school would benefit from an oral focus group approach in addition to the informal as well as formal evaluation feedback it currently obtains.

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

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including 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**.

A significant proportion of graduates gain employment in the film industry in the short, medium, and long-term. Some students commented that they believed that the qualification in itself was not as important in obtaining employment as the industry contacts students build up during their training, as well as the ongoing contact and support from the school, and the school's reputation. Graduates confirmed from their work experience that the course provides relevant knowledge and practical skills in a range of areas including directing, writing, editing, camera, lighting, sound, art, and production management. This means graduates are multi-skilled and highly employable.

Graduates and board industry representatives interviewed by the evaluation team confirmed the value of the outcomes for both themselves and the industry including the range of roles in which graduates are employed in industry projects. Graduates and current students confirmed that they entered The Film School with specific goals, for example to become a director or camera operator. Some of them said that the course had confirmed their goal, but they also appreciated the experience of other areas. In other cases, students had changed their preferred role in the industry as a result of their training.

Students train in a learning environment which from day one closely simulates working in the industry. As a result of being trained by industry-based and experienced tutors, students graduate with sound theoretical knowledge and practical skills which enable them to carry out a range of industry roles as soon as they graduate. Several graduates compared their Film School experience very favourably with their film course experience at universities and institutes of technology and polytechs. They observed that many of the university courses were more theory-focused and it was difficult to gain practical experience. One university graduate commented that following university study they only felt equipped to become a film teacher or film critic, but after studying at The Film School they felt confident they could work in the industry. Graduates commented on the importance of the confidence, knowledge, and skills they gained to their ongoing participation in the industry.

Employers commented on how they could approach the school to match an employer need with an appropriate graduate. The school also receives approaches from industry offering unpaid project experience, but usually redirects approaches to graduates and paid work. Over 60 per cent of The Film School's students are under 25 years of age and graduates go on to contribute to a challenging but successful industry with its foundation of experienced practitioners.

The board comprises experienced industry practitioners who, along with other industry practitioners such as visiting tutors, keep the school well informed about the relevance and value of the training to its graduates and the industry. However, the school has recognised that it could further develop how it gathers, records, and analyses industry feedback to make improvements and evaluate their effectiveness.

The Film School knows where its graduates are working, especially in Wellington. Graduates are able to provide valuable feedback on the relevance and value of the training to their employment. The Film School has identified that it could readily formally track where graduates are employed and obtain and use their ongoing feedback by developing a website that encourages providing such information and feedback and participation. It sees the school's tenth anniversary as an ideal opportunity to develop such ideas. Graduates are very open to this development and several already use the director's own Facebook site for this purpose.

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 Film School's students have a brief introduction in their opening week or two which includes a history of New Zealand film. Thereafter the course is based around gaining knowledge and hands-on experience in practical skills in a range of areas including directing, writing, editing, camera, lighting, sound, art, and production management.

Students undertake a series of short, punchy, intense, practical projects such as music videos or short documentaries which culminate in three 12-minute films screened at graduation. The film is recorded on DVD with all contributors' names and contact details. This helps promote graduates to the industry and shows the capabilities of graduates. The production projects are carried out both at the school and on location and enable all students to experience all the roles referred to above.

From day one, students learn through experience based on industry employment standards. They develop and work to briefs within tight timeframes. Students and graduates alike commented on how much they enjoy and learn from their hands-on, practical experience, the challenging mentoring, and their own collegiality to the extent that several said they wished the course was a bit longer to enable them to conduct additional projects. Students and graduates said the programmes and activities provided by The Film School exceeded their expectations.

The Film School has a number of important partnerships it uses to benefit its students. One of the more recent of these is its collaboration with Toi Whākaari (the New Zealand Drama School) and the introduction of a directing workshop. Students interviewed by the evaluation team were positive about the value of working with actors in training but had a number of suggestions on how the relationship could be further improved. These included having more time watching how the actors learn; more time observing the directors from Toi Whākaari and their own head tutor in action, making explicit their methodologies when they were working with actors and discussing their approaches afterwards; and getting to know Toi Whākaari students before they worked with them. This would enhance the way film students work with drama students. Self-assessment of such initiatives would benefit The Film School and its students and lead to further enhancement of what is already a very effective improvement. Further development of self-assessment based on feedback from

industry and graduates referred to in section 1.2 above would also ensure that the programmes and activities continue to match the needs of industry and learners as effectively as possible.

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**.

Students and graduates alike identified that the key strength of the teaching is the industry experience of all The Film School's own staff and in particular the head tutor, as well as the visiting tutors. Students are exposed to 20-30 specialist visiting tutors during their course and a total of 60-70 visitors in all. Further professional development is available to staff, but the tutors' most effective professional development is their ongoing and current connection to, and work in, the industry.

The students appreciate that the programme coordinator and technician both have industry experience; both would also like to teach more. The programme coordinator, in consultation with the head tutor, develops weekly schedules and call sheets. The programme coordinator also helps develop briefs. The technician teaches students how to use equipment and assesses them before they use it themselves. The students' training and degree of proficiency is recorded and signed off in individual student equipment "passports". This is an effective new initiative. Feedback from The Film School staff, including the technician, students, and graduates, suggests that the technical capacity of the school could be developed even further.

The quality and consistency of the teaching and communication skills and level of industry experience of the visiting tutors is monitored by The Film School through informal and formal feedback from students and tutors. Students and graduates confirmed that some tutors, who are briefed by The Film School in advance, were better than others, but that they learned much in the way of knowledge and practical skills from all tutors. The Film School said there were very few instances where a visiting tutor was not invited back to the school, although sometimes a tutor needed to be reminded to take an interactive rather than directive approach to learning and teaching.

The effectiveness of, and commitment to, interactive, practical, hands-on learning and teaching which engages students was strongly supported by The Film School, its students, graduates, and tutors. Assessment is based on the timely completion of briefs and the quality of the product and the contributing processes. However, assessment could be more robust. For example, some students said they would have liked to have known more about assessment in advance, which may have influenced them to allocate their time differently. The Film School is aware that assessment could be further developed and made more robust without harming the quality of the learning. It expects that improvements will result from the programme review, along with changes to the structure of the course and the pedagogy of its delivery. One-to-one reviews of progress held each term, usually with the director or head tutor, ensure that students are very aware of their progress and how to succeed. Students have an opportunity to be assessed until they reach the industry standard or to be

reassessed. Assessment includes not just technical skills but also areas such as working in a team and showing support and leadership towards achieving a common goal.

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 **Good**.

The Film School's students receive individual guidance and support from the time they access information about the school's courses from its website or by mail. The application form provides the school with information about the applicant's knowledge, skills, motivation, and passion for film. This information is complemented by an interview with the director or head of studies, which students said was helpful in clarifying the content of the course and their career path. The information determines acceptance into one of the school's two intakes of a maximum of 24 students in each intake per year. It also helps establish the students' needs and contributes to establishing, monitoring, and modifying students' learning plans and progress.

From day one and their induction, students receive close guidance and support from all The Film School's staff and tutors, including the visiting tutors. While the head tutor is a main source of guidance and support for students' study, students also receive helpful support from the receptionist/administrator, programme coordinator, technician, and director. Students and graduates confirmed that visiting tutors gave them their contact details and were always willing and able to help during the course and after they graduated. Graduates also commended the school on help after graduation, including getting them work and employment. The school intends to further develop this help, along with getting feedback from graduates and the industry as referred to in section 1.2 of this report.

The effectiveness of the teaching is further enhanced by the small classes of never more than 24 students, the even smaller groups which students often work in, and the ready availability of one-to-one learning and teaching. Such factors were confirmed by the student and tutor evaluations, the evaluation team's interviews with students, graduates, and tutors, and the oral and written feedback given to students by tutors.

The Film School's students are able to access health services through an arrangement with Massey University. Unfortunately, international students are not able to access these services. However, the two international students and the evaluation team were satisfied by the level of guidance and support given to them. The Film School confirmed that it fulfils its obligations to the Ministry of Education Code [of Practice] Office requirements in terms of regular review of its documentation. All students receive a domestic or international student handbook which contains all the information they need.

Student and graduate evaluations and evaluation team interviews confirmed that all staff and visiting tutors are approachable and help with matters related to their learning in particular, but also with personal issues. They also observed that staff were open to feedback and suggestions for improvement. While there may be pressure on editing resources at particular times of the year, students appreciated that uninterrupted access to

the facilities gave them flexibility and enabled them to meet their tight timeframes. Some students expressed concern about the transport costs they bear in addition to their fees and the board has undertaken to explore this issue with management.

Students are mentored throughout by The Film School's head tutor and visiting tutors. Students also valued highly the contributions from visiting tutors and graduates during the course and at the end of the course graduation week, which helped facilitate their transition from graduation to working in the industry. Students and graduates considered that the level of guidance and support they received exceeded their expectations.

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

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 Film School's board is highly representative of the industry and provides complementary knowledge, experience, and skills. Its delegation of the functions of finance and programme review to two smaller committees, which include board representatives and comprise people with specific skills, enables both the committees and the board to be effective in carrying out their functions. The finance committee is responsible for ensuring ongoing financial viability while the programme review committee is responsible for reviewing and improving the current course while also supporting possible new initiatives including a higher-level qualification referred to in section 1.1 of this report. The board focuses on governance while supporting management, including the director who was the main driver for the new premises. It is aware that The Film School has only a small team of full-time staff and supports them as much as it can. The board also oversees and contributes ideas and feedback to its initiatives such as the programme review.

The board is very focused on The Film School providing the highest and most relevant quality training. The programme review is very thorough and comprehensive and more robust than the regular ongoing evaluations that the school conducts. The board is considering several programme scenarios. The process is fully documented but does not reflect the importance of student and graduate feedback and the contribution this could make.

The board fully supported the move to the school's new premises, which suit its needs much better than the previous site. Facilities include a multi-purpose, flexible space with backdrop curtains to enable animation. Students confirmed that The Film School's equipment was sufficient for their learning and teaching. The school continually upgrades its equipment and has approved upgrades to its edit suite and the introduction of new handycams in its capital expenditure plan for 2010-2011. Additional equipment is hired on an as-needs basis. The school is also changing and developing how it teaches directing and sound. The board supports management's openness with its students such as sharing information on how their fees and TEC funding are spent. This ensures that the students are well informed and realistic about their expectations with regard to expenditure on

equipment without dampening their enthusiasm for giving feedback and completing evaluations.

Board members as well as management make direct and effective contributions to educational achievement as governors, visiting speakers, and providers of industry feedback which help ensure The Film School is relevant and up to date in its activities. One board member is a regular visiting tutor. In addition, individual board members are able to provide employment opportunities.

The board approves The Film School's investment plan with TEC but does not develop and work off a strategic plan as such and the manager does not work off an operational plan. Regardless of the quality of the school's educational performance and knowledge of its processes, it could well benefit from such formal processes.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

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

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

2.2 Focus area: Student support including international students

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Certificate in Introduction to Film and Television Production (Level 5)

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

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

Recommendations

There were no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review other than those embedded in 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/>

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E eeradmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz