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External Evaluation and Review Report

Media Design School Limited

Date of report: 17 November 2022

About Media Design School

Media Design School (MDS) offers specialist industry, sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate training and qualifications in the digital and creative technology industry. Delivery includes offshore and online, and in-person and blended modes.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Levels G – 4, 10 Madden Street, Auckland
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	Domestic: 803 students; Māori 83 (9.3 per cent) and Pasifika 66 (7.4 per cent) International: 89 students
Number of staff:	79 staff; 96 per cent are full-time employees
TEO profile:	Media Design School MDS, alongside Torrens University and Think Education in Australia, is owned by Strategic Education Inc (USA).
Last EER outcome:	MDS's previous EER outcome in 2018 was Highly Confident in educational performance and in capability in self-assessment.
Scope of this evaluation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International Student Support and Wellbeing• Bachelor of Art and Design (3D Animation and Visual Effects) (Level 7) (ID:114100-2)• Digital Creativity (Foundation) Programme (NZQF Level 4) (ID:121330-3)• Graduate Diploma in Creative Advertising (Level 7) (ID:124129-2¹)
number:	8192
NZQA reference:	C50173
Dates of EER visit:	12-16 September 2022 (virtual)

¹ Comprising the New Zealand Certificate in Arts and Design and the New Zealand Certificate in Digital Media and Design.

Summary of results

MDS provides high quality digital and creative technology programmes, which are well regarded by industry and employers. Graduates gain work within industry, applying work-ready skills to this specialist industry within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Highly Confident in educational performance

- Students gain qualifications and current industry skills and attributes. Comprehensive data analysis provides insight into individual, cohort and whole-of-organisation student progress and opportunities for improvement. Analysis of the parity of priority learners with other learners should be strengthened.
- Employment and other outcomes important to students and industry are consistently gained. MDS produces graduates who are sought after by employers and who immediately add value to the digital and creative technology industry.

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

- MDS delivers high quality specialty programmes which reflect and expose students to authentic industry experiences during their study, preparing them appropriately for employment.
- Highly effective support and increased communication mechanisms and monitoring, particularly over the duration of Covid-19, has resulted in students being well supported academically and pastorally.
- MDS's affiliation with an international university² and other education organisations, exceptional local industry engagement, and delivery of quality programmes by experienced staff supports the strong educational achievement of students.
- MDS has a clear understanding of its compliance accountabilities and manages these effectively to ensure obligations are met.

² Torrens University Australia

Key evaluation question findings³

1.1 How well do students achieve?

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Across all MDS programmes, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is an overall pattern of strong course and qualification achievement, and retention in study. A dip in achievement rates of between 3 and 8 per cent⁴ occurred due to the impact of Covid-19 and the extended lockdown period in Auckland. Overall, students continued in study, while additional academic support and resourcing supported achievement. Achievement benchmarking against year-on-year performance, Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) contracted outcomes, and Ngā Kete data (including universities) indicates strong performance, particularly in qualification completion.</p> <p>In response to efforts made, the number of Māori and Pasifika students has doubled since 2018. Māori comprise 9 per cent and Pasifika 7 per cent of the current student body. There is disparity in achievement across programmes, which MDS is proactively working to improve through initiatives, including establishing a Māori and Pasifika steering committee in 2020. Parity is discussed well at programme level; this is less evident in academic board and key committees and should be improved to further track progression in parity of achievement.</p> <p>Students acquire relevant and important skills to participate effectively in industry. Abilities are enhanced through continuous⁵ participation and repeated success and recognition in national and international competitions. This is an important industry-established and recognised form of external benchmarking of students with other education providers and students on the world stage.</p>
Conclusion:	Students gain qualifications and current industry skills and attributes. Comprehensive data analysis provides insight into

³ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

⁴ Based on MDS – Educational Performance Indicators updated with 2021 data document.

⁵ Competitions did not occur during 2020 due to the global pandemic.

	individual, cohort and whole-of-organisation student progress and opportunities for improvement. Analysis of the parity of priority learners should be strengthened.
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1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including students?

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Graduates are progressing into employment relevant to their qualification in the digital creative technology industry. In 2018 and 2019, 93 per cent of all level 7 graduates and above gained employment (full-time, part-time, contracting, freelancing and self-employed). During 2020 and 2021, the rate of employment was 88 and 85 per cent. Level 4 graduates mostly also move into employment. Increasingly there is progress to further study at MDS – 13 per cent in 2018 to 33 per cent in 2021.</p> <p>MDS tracks graduates for up to a year following graduation and has improving response rates, from 78 per cent in 2018 to 90 per cent in 2021. This effective data and information gathering is providing detail useful for analysis, to understand destination outcomes.</p> <p>Individual student success in competitions directly improves students’ employability, drawing agencies’ attention to the quality of their work, matching MDS’s mission to have graduates prized by industry.</p> <p>MDS engages exceptionally well with its industry and is fully immersed through ongoing formal and informal connections which support the highly valued qualifications delivered. Because of this ongoing collaboration, and the students’ work being appraised by industry (see 1.3), graduates are being actively sought during study and at graduation. Agencies that employ graduates recognise the quality and value of the graduates and rate their performance highly.</p>
Conclusion:	Employment and outcomes important to students and industry are consistently gained. MDS produces graduates who are sought after by employers and who immediately add value to the digital and creative technology industry.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Programmes are highly relevant, focusing on speciality areas within creative design and technology needed by industry. Pathway programmes support further study at higher levels.</p> <p>The merit of MDS's programmes lies in the structure and design which mimics industry practice and need, as well as in the formalised teaching of attributes (such as professionalism, confidence in giving and receiving feedback, communication and collaboration) in all programmes.</p> <p>MDS achieves this through strong industry engagement, specifically at programme level through the contribution of well-respected New Zealand agencies and their staff, who provide live project briefs, mentoring of students, feedback on students' formative and summative work, and who also participate on assessment and award panels. MDS's formal industry advisory boards ensure whole-of-organisation programme currency and alignment.</p> <p>External endorsement of MDS's programmes is also evident in the consistent ranking as number one of two animation schools in Australia and New Zealand, and number five of 12 animation school and colleges in the world, 2019 through 2022.</p> <p>MDS uses the feedback from programme review and updates, term reviews, external monitor reports, internal and external moderation, and student and faculty feedback to make changes and meet student needs. There is some good evidence of improvements to the programme made in response to this feedback. The academic board and its subcommittees have oversight, and maintain and monitor academic standards and integrity.</p>
Conclusion:	MDS delivers high quality, specialty programmes which reflect and expose students to authentic industry experiences during their study, preparing them appropriately for employment.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Students are well supported both academically and pastorally.</p> <p>Prospective students are connected with course and careers advisors, to align intended career pathways with programme choices. Full orientation and a range of student support services are available to all learners online, offshore and in person, including professional counselling from an experienced full-time counsellor.</p> <p>Qualified faculty mostly come from industry, with expertise in the digital and creative technology space that is beneficial in guiding and supporting learners. Real-world learning experiences (see 1.3) and project-based learning – key features of degree-level study and above – are realistic and actively engage students in their learning. Access to contemporary and current technology and resources supports the type of learning wanted by industry. Any barriers to learning are identified through close monitoring of progress, with the small class sizes facilitating individualised support by faculty.</p> <p>Student Evaluation of Subject and Lecturer Surveys (SESLs) yield a 60 per cent response rate on average. Survey tools are comprehensive, gathering specific feedback in relation to each programme. SESLs are systematically undertaken, and collated feedback then links to faculty academic meetings, as well as providing useful information for support services and programme coordinators. These self-assessment activities are well implemented and purposeful, and are clearly intended to support and improve achievement.</p> <p>The student voice is evident at every level of the organisation, including representation on the academic board. Student feedback from surveys to the student executive inform change. The provision of additional support and training for the student executive would improve the capability and function of students in these roles.</p> <p>Covid-19 prompted the move to online delivery, and MDS pivoted all student support services to ensure continued accessibility and use by online and offshore students. Increased communication between faculty and students and between</p>

	students, using technology, supported continuing engagement in learning. Hardship grants were distributed based on student surveys and feedback, including the provision of computer hardware and software loans or licences, and this supported continued achievement.
Conclusion:	Highly effective support and increased communication mechanisms and monitoring, particularly over the duration of Covid-19, has resulted in students being well supported academically and in their wellbeing.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>The purpose, direction and values of MDS are clear, understood by staff and reflected in their key performance objectives. Professional development activities have a clear link to MDS's education purpose and to industry.</p> <p>MDS benefits from international ownership and the relationship with Torrens University. Shared operational services are useful. Most notable is the level of digital and creative technology resources, relevant to the programmes, available to faculty and students, including access to extensive library resources and specialised services.</p> <p>Academic leadership capability is enhanced with membership from Torrens University on MDS's academic board. Oversight and structured subcommittees with specific functions effectively monitor and uphold the integrity of programmes and assessment.</p> <p>Research-active staff have produced portfolio outputs every year, with research informing the currency of curriculum and software development. MDS has a goal to enter into the 2026 PBRF⁶ round. Outcomes from a focus on culturally relevant teaching and learning and the relationship of tikanga and emerging technology are in progress.</p> <p>Faculty are qualified to deliver undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Most are permanent employees, an improvement</p>

⁶ [Performance Based Research Fund](#)

	<p>since the last EER, providing job security for staff and intellectual property safeguards for MDS.</p> <p>The well-resourced and physical location at Wynyard Innovation Neighbourhood is providing networking opportunities and prompted MDS’s partnership and recent initiatives with secondary schools, as well as subcontract arrangements to engage with priority students at level 4.</p> <p>MDS pivoted quickly in response to Covid in the technical space as well as in programme delivery from in-person to online. Continuous delivery and support for staff and students and strong outcomes were preserved. MDS continues to build on these changes and initiatives, improving organisational and programme sustainability.</p> <p>The establishment of a Māori and Pasifika steering committee in 2020, with new appointments to support the committee, is a sound initiative with clear objectives and a clear strategy. High-level outcomes are a work in progress and support MDS in an important area of supporting educational achievement.</p> <p>Alongside collection and analysis of data and information, independent audit and evaluation reviews have informed and validated performance and identified areas for further improvement which MDS has prioritised.</p>
<p>Conclusion:</p>	<p>MDS’s affiliation with Torrens University and other education organisations, exceptional local industry engagement, and delivery of quality programmes by experienced staff supports the strong educational achievement of the students.</p>

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>MDS manages its compliance obligations well, and there are effective systems in place to monitor and respond to accountabilities.</p> <p>Compliance with the Code of Practice⁷ has been reviewed, involving a range of MDS staff; the self-review process was well considered. The evaluators' review of student files raised no concerns or inconsistencies. All MDS student services team members attended the Code training delivered by NZQA in 2021, and updates have been completed in student and MDS resources. Appropriate student support services, monitoring of attendance, and engagement with agents are evident and effective. A disability action plan has been developed. MDS is considering its position in anticipation of the requirements that will emerge, in time, from TEC and NZQA for this priority group.</p> <p>MDS leadership is proactive in managing areas for compliance. MDS revises its policies and procedures on a schedule aided by the academic policy and appeals committee. The policies are reviewed often and as appropriate.</p> <p>NZQA attestations and returns have been completed within required timeframes. Programmes are being delivered consistent with NZQA approvals. MDS is positive about meeting TEC financial obligations and increased funding allocation, including Performance Based Research Funding.</p> <p>Positive external quality assurance by B Lab® assessed MDS as a Certified B Corporation.⁸ Attaining certification verifies social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability.</p>
Conclusion:	MDS has a clear understanding of its compliance accountabilities and manages these effectively to ensure obligations are met.

⁷ Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021

⁸ B Lab certifies companies that meet standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency.

Focus areas

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

2.1 Focus area: International Student Support and Wellbeing

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Conclusion:	International students achieve at a higher rate than domestic students, support is strong, and educational performance is convincing. Differentiating and understanding the graduate outcomes of international students consistently across programmes would add value.

2.2 Focus area: Bachelor of Art and Design (3D Animation and Visual Effects) (Level 7)

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Conclusion:	Qualification completion overall is very good, although there is not yet full parity of achievement across all priority groups. The programme provides strong value for employers and industry, with high rates of graduate employment. Self-assessment is strong, with industry input to develop and refine content based on feedback. Monitoring and moderation activity informs change and improvements. Students are well supported.

2.3 Focus area: Digital Creativity (Foundation) Programme (NZQF Level 4) comprising the New Zealand Certificate in Arts and Design and the New Zealand Certificate in Digital Media and Design.

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Conclusion:	Qualification and course completions are generally high. Although there is not parity among priority groups, MDS has good support systems to improve parity over time. Destination data is systematically collected and shows graduates are entering relevant pathways.

2.4 Focus area: Graduate Diploma in Creative Advertising

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Conclusion:	Qualification achievement is exceptional – 100 per cent in 2019 and 2021 and 91 per cent in 2020. The programme focuses on a specific media design pathway, and specialist teaching and industry exposure supports achievement and graduate employment.

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 Media Design School Limited:

- Ensure priority student data and parity are reviewed and analysed systematically across all key academic boards and committees.
- Consistently collect and analyse international student graduate outcomes.
- Strengthen the student representation system through provision of support and training for student executive members.

Requirements

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

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

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 fraud⁹*
- *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.*

⁹ 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.

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted under the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2021, which are made by NZQA under section 452(1)(t) of the Education and Training Act 2020 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister of Education.

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, and*
- *maintaining consent to assess against standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards for all TEOs including TITOs but excluding universities, and*
- *maintaining training scheme approval for all TEOs other than universities.*

The requirements for participation and cooperation are set through the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2021, the Consent to Assess Against Standards Rules 2021 and the Training Scheme Rules 2021 respectively.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2021 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review as a condition of maintaining registration.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes, training schemes and consents to assess and 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 2021. 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). All rules cited above are available at <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/>, 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/>.

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