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| <b>To</b>    | Ako Ahimura   | <b>From</b> | Te Puna Ako & Te Korowai Kahurangi |
| <b>Title</b> | Issues arising from NZQA 2018 report on monitoring NZDip Business (Level 5 & 6) [Refs: 2459 & 2460] | <b>Date</b> | 2019/11/07                         |

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## **Recommendation/s**

That the Ako Ahimura discuss the following high-level summary of issues identified in the NZQA 2018 report on monitoring NZDip Business (Level 5 & 6) [Refs: 2459 & 2460] with a particular focus on the concerns/implications raised by both TPA and TTK for Unitec and determine whether to seek clarification, and/or to provide feedback to NZQA about any issues raised in the report.

## **NZQA monitoring of the NZDip Business (Level 5 & 6) [Refs: 2459 & 2460]**

In 2018 NZQA began monitoring the programmes leading to New Zealand Diplomas in Business (Levels 5 and 6) [Refs: 2459 and 2460]. NZQA found that many of the programmes did not meet the criteria for programme approval and accreditation.

Of the 21 Level 5 programmes monitored:

- two programmes met programme criteria overall
- a further five programmes met some programme criteria with some areas requiring remedial actions to meet programme approval and accreditation criteria
- the remaining 14 programmes did not meet programme criteria overall and required significant remedial action. In some cases, NZQA made a statutory intervention.

Of the 11 Level 6 programmes monitored:

- no programme met programme criteria overall
- a further three programmes met some programme criteria with some areas requiring remedial actions to meet programme approval and accreditation criteria
- the remaining eight programmes did not meet programme criteria overall and required significant remedial action. In some cases, NZQA made a statutory intervention.

## ***The most common issues which prevented programmes meeting programme criteria included:***

- ***poor assessment and moderation practice***
- ***unapproved changes to the programmes***
- ***a lack of robust programme review.***

As a result of this review NZQA presented a range of findings which included their guidance for improvement. Much of the advice given by NZQA is very useful and would be applicable to many different teaching teams and deserves wider distribution. However, there are some statements that conflict with Unitec's current understanding of those processes, and which may pose challenges to our current systems. It is important to note that this report was for pre-degree programmes under



level 7, however there is no indication that these views are specific to any particular level or qualification type and the tone of the report suggests that all statements and recommendations made herein are standard across all levels. The following summarises the issues raised by NZQA.

## Limitations:

- TPAs sphere of expertise and responsibility lies in the first of the three areas of concern in the NZQA report listed above (assessment and moderation). The following responses relate to that section only – the other two (programme changes and review) are left to TTK to respond to.
- The Unitec-specific report on the NZDB is not yet available so the relevance of some of the findings stated in the NZQA national report to the Unitec context is unclear. There are, however, implications in some of these requests for changes to assessment practice which are comment-worthy.

For clarity and ease of reference, these responses follow the structure of sub-headings used in the Assessment and Moderation section of the report.

## Achievement Based Assessment methodology and procedures

NZQA approves programmes with assessments that are either competency/standards-based or achievement/grade-based. They remind us that “assessing against learning outcomes that map to the graduate profile is central to assuring the quality and integrity of programmes”. For achievement/grade-based assessment they go on to state:

*NZQA moderators expect to see detailed criteria for each grade. The criteria for the minimum passing grade (typically a C- or 50 per cent) must align with achieving the learning outcome(s) within the assessment(s). Grades higher than a 'C' show work over and above what is needed to achieve each learning outcome.*

*Course grades higher than a 'C' or '50 per cent' should mean that learners have achieved each learning outcome assessed. Some providers had this requirement clearly in their course outlines or programme documents, which was useful because it avoids any misunderstandings over marking for both assessors and learners.*

The implication here is that every learning outcome must be met through assessment in the course in order to pass. Unitec does not have a policy statement that confirms the status of each assessment element in a course and allows some assignments to be non-compulsory. Institutional memory carries understandings that there is no requirement to assess every learning outcome within a course, which dates from a time when the aim of the course was the vehicle for achieving the Graduate Profile statement, rather than the Learning Outcomes. The vast majority of our Degree level programmes date from this period and their courses were designed using this thinking. It is, however, important to note that this position was fairly well understood when designing the recent NZ Certs and NZ Dips, therefore the same situation does not exist across the entire portfolio.

Another implication of the above is the extensive use of 'non-compulsory' assessment items used in some programmes. The risk here is that there are a number of Learning Outcomes that may not have evidence of achievement being presented by some students. This conflicts with NZQAs



assertions that mandatory achievement of each Learning Outcome is required in order to pass a course.

### Assessment covering multiple learning outcomes

NZQAs guidance on assessments which measure multiple learning outcomes includes:

*If the assessment task covers multiple learning outcomes, the assessor must ensure that the learner evidence meets the minimum passing criteria for each learning outcome. For instance, if an assessment covers three learning outcomes, a learner might do exceptionally well on two learning outcomes, achieve a mark of more than 50 per cent, but has not achieved the third learning outcome. This is not appropriate, as learners should not pass if they have not provided sufficient evidence for each of the learning outcomes being assessed.*

The implications of this statement are linked to the previous issue and are wide ranging in that there are instances where Unitec does not comply with NZQA's understanding. Marking schedules that separate out Learning Outcomes and measure them independently of each other within a single assignment, especially in 100% portfolio conditions, may not have been created to demonstrate NZQAs requirements.

The requirement to determine the level of mastery of each learning outcome being assessed represents a departure from standard assessment practice that is likely have a significant negative impact. If the statement quoted above were to be actioned, an assessment task with three LOs effectively becomes three assessment processes within one task. Rational assessment designers are likely to then fragment the task into three separate assessments to both ensure compliance (separation of marking) and keep the assessment process as straightforward as possible for both staff and students. That will have one of two negative consequences. Either each LO is only assessed once in the course (so a course with four LOs will have four assessment tasks) and these tasks are all very high-stakes as the student only gets one opportunity to 'pass' each LO; or reassessment of LOs is preserved by increasing the number of assessment tasks, resulting in major overassessment.

Furthermore, the educational rationale for integrated assessment was in part a desire to move away from reductionist assessment of each separate component and towards the creation of the sort of direct, complex, authentic assessment experiences that are more relevant to the real world and the measurement of Graduate Profile achievement.

In effect, this new requirement to assess each LO separately creates a de facto Unit Standard assessment mechanism, with all well-documented problems inherent in that system, represents move away from orthodox assessment practice and a poor preparation of students for both the real world and degree-level study.

The overall impression from the NZQA guidance is that it is more related to Competency based assessment, rather than Achievement based assessment. While it may be easy to understand their strict position where a learning outcome is measured only once in only one course in a programme, it is difficult to understand the requirement when multiple learning outcomes lead collectively to the achievement of Graduate Profile statements. This is especially true when learning outcomes are progressively stair-cased through various course repetition, and levels to assist a student in finally achieving the Graduate Profile outcomes by the end of the programme.

### Summary of identified issues:



- NZQA guidance is more related to Competency based assessment, rather than Achievement based assessment.
- Unitec does not have a policy statement that clarifies the compulsory/non-compulsory status of assessment elements in courses
- A risk that there some Learning Outcomes are not being assessed and therefore students are not evidencing the achievement of the required learning.

## **Assessment methods**

NZQA observed in their review that in some cases, the assessment method used was not relevant to the learning outcomes assessed: for example, using an exam with multiple-choice questions when the learning outcome required explanation and implementation of a certain concept. Their contention is that using relevant assessment tools is critical to designing assessments that ensure learners can demonstrate achievement and meet certain learning outcomes.

For Unitec this is a useful reminder that we need to constantly review our assessment methodologies in a constructive way and not simply rely on pre-existing methods that may no longer be relevant. Moderation can also play a part in this by questioning the quality of evidence from students with regard to meeting learning outcomes. This is especially important for those programmes which pre-date the shift to a focus on learning outcomes and their relationship to graduate profiles.

## **Group work and group assessment**

NZQA make the distinction that group assessment is different to group work:

*In group work, learners collaborate as part of the learning process, but they are assessed individually. In group assessment, learners are typically awarded the same assessment result for something they produced collectively.*

NZQA agree that where it is appropriate to the outcomes of a qualification, and where teamwork and collaboration skills are fundamental to working in the destination workplace, then group assessment is a valid method of assessment. However, as in the above section about assessment methods, they caution that it is important to ensure that group assessment is only used where it makes sense to use it (i.e. where it is appropriate for the learning outcome being assessed). They noted in their assessment of the NZDB:

*Assessments relied on the groups producing a shared product such as a report or a presentation. It was difficult to assess individual achievement of the learning outcomes in this context. There was no evidence showing which member of the groups produced which part of those assessments. Group work rather than group assessment may be more appropriate in these cases.*

Their contention is that it is important to ensure that all group members have contributed to the assessment task to a degree where the assessor is sure of everyone's ability in relation to the



learning outcomes. They recommend the use of the following good practice observed in their review:

*Some used individual tasks within a group-based assessment, which were measured independently to ensure that learners had met all learning outcomes assessed. Moderators considered this a useful method because it provides learners with the opportunity to collaborate and achieve the learning outcomes.*

They also noted that recording group presentations and using individual assessment forms (e.g. individual tasks mapped against each learning outcome being assessed) were also useful ways of collecting evidence for a group-based assessment. They stressed that overusing group assessment makes it difficult to provide this assurance.

This section is at odds with orthodox good assessment practice and these contradictions are even apparent in the text of the report. Group assessment is widely considered to be the most important form of summative assessment in vocational education, for good reason. The clear signal from industries across the employment spectrum is the almost universal overriding importance of interpersonal skills and collaboration in graduates. The approval given in the report to the compromise of attempting to turn group assessments into individual tasks within a group context shows a poor understanding of the skills and attitudes the group context is intended to nurture and that industry wants.

The suggestion that group assessment should be minimized, for no other reason than to ensure an absolute focus on individual performance against each individual LO, is a rather draconian solution to the well-documented difficulties associated with grading group assessment. There are, however, very effective ways to accurately determine individual performance within group assessment, which the report fails to acknowledge let alone endorse or encourage. Furthermore, LOs are written as definitions of performance, not assessment process so it is illogical to suggest, as the report does, that group assessment can only be justified when it is explicitly signaled in the associated LO.

## **Conditions for resubmission and reassessment**

NZQA provided some useful guidance on the application of resubmission and reassessment. They identified the following issues:

- learners completing their assessments in class with excessive guidance from tutors
- learners submitting drafts multiple times before submitting their assessments
- TEOs allowing multiple opportunities for resubmission, particularly when learners received excessive feedback on the first attempt.

NZQA cautioned ITO's to ensure that practices in place do not hinder learners from demonstrating their independent learning and prevent them from developing the capability to repeat their performance in an unfamiliar context.

## **Moderation systems and processes**

NZQA have noted that despite all TEO's having relevant policies and processes for their internal and external moderation, the actual practice was often not effective in all cases. They have identified issues including:



- TEO's internal moderators failing to identify critical issues in assessments or assessor judgements, particularly issues that NZQA moderators identified (e.g. learning outcomes not being achieved by learners)
- TEO's internal moderation reports containing limited feedback, or no reference to the learning outcomes or effective assessment design
- TEOs not addressing issues identified by moderation
- no follow-up moderation in response to assessments failing pre-assessment moderation
- no evidence of TEOs conducting pre- or post-assessment moderation
- lack of clear oversight of moderation system by TEO management
- no plans of proposed actions to address issues identified by moderation

These ongoing issues have highlighted for NZQA the need to provide guidance on best practice for moderation across the sector:

- assessment tools must allow learners to meet all learning outcomes
- TEOs must gather feedback on the clarity of instructions and the appropriate level of assessment tasks
- there must be clear guidance for marking assessments
- action plans arising from moderation reports must be sufficiently detailed and monitored
- moderation activities must be clearly scheduled in a regular cycle
- staff must, where required, receive professional development in assessment and moderation.

Unitec policy and procedure meets these requirements, however there remains a level of inconsistent practice in some Programmes. A focus of Te Korowai Kahurangi is to work with Academic Quality Administrators and Programme Academic Quality Committees to create better processes and reporting mechanisms for moderation. However the responsibility for ensuring the moderation occurs according to plan and is used for course improvement lies with the academic staff.

### **Next Steps**

While there are some areas of concern noted above, it is acknowledged that much of the other criticism in the assessment and moderation section is valid and TPA has had clear indications that Unitec needs to heed what NZQA has identified and make significant improvements.

### **Attachments**

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Level 5-6 NZDipBus Programme monitoring summary report SEP 2019

### **Contributors / Co-Authors**

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