

Final report on the Course Durations Investigation

16 January 2020

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Purpose

This report outlines what has become known as the ‘course durations issue’; the identification, investigation, and confirmation that some courses, and the programmes within which they sit, were not being set up in PeopleSoft nor delivered as they were approved.

The main issues identified, and which this report addresses, include: programmes not being delivered as they were approved, inconsistencies between programme information held by Unitec, NZQA and TEC, and the total learning hours not necessarily being delivered over the entirety of a course’s duration.

Any of the above issues put Unitec into a situation of non-compliance with NZQA and or TEC.

Although the course durations investigations covered all academic provision at Unitec, this report focusses on programmes which lead to qualifications. This is because it is only these programmes which typically (but not exclusively) have approval from NZQA and TEC.

This report does not detail the next steps needed to fully address the issues identified through this process. Actions to address the underlying issues are currently being developed and implemented through the *Programme Refresh Project* (interim name).

Throughout this report particular words/phrases have very specific meanings. These are detailed in the [Definitions](#) in the appendices.

Introduction

In order for Unitec to deliver programmes it must obtain and maintain programme approval from NZQA, secure funding via TEC, and ensure domestic students have access to loans and allowances via StudyLink. In addition, it must enrol students into courses (within programmes) which have been set up as classes (an occurrence of a course) which in turn have been allocated resources for their delivery (physical space, teaching staff). This process involves a significant number of people across the institute and is supported by many different processes.

The Course Durations issue and the resolution thereof was completed under urgency in order to avoid compounding any (potential non-compliance) issues in 2020 delivery while also ensuring that the enrolment of students into 2020 courses would not be unduly delayed. The investigation into course durations was undertaken between July and December 2019. The work undertaken was focussed on the resolution and prevention of issues for 2020 in the context of 2019 delivery. Delivery in other earlier years has not been investigated.

This report describes these issues and their resolution including the results of that work. It also provides some background to their identification and contextually relevant legislative requirements relating to programme delivery.

The Investigation

The investigation of the issues sought to identify and, where possible, resolve any inconsistencies between course duration and activity duration setup (in the Timetabling component of PeopleSoft) and what Unitec was approved (at programme level) to deliver. It also sought to confirm the timing of the final assessment of each course so as to confirm that the total learning hours for each course were being delivered over the duration of the course. Part way through the investigation a comparison of directed and self-directed hours (as detailed in the course descriptor) against the face to face hours was also initiated. The information obtained from these queries is incomplete and hence not reported on in this report.

Preparatory analysis of courses on a programme by programme basis was completed and distributed to inform the face to face meetings between Schools (Heads of School and Academic Programme Managers) and relevant support teams (Te Korowai Kahurangi and the Timetabling Office) and the Schools Operations Manager. The aim of the meetings was to confirm, for each programme:

- The course duration of each course
- The activity duration of each course
- The start and end date (week) for each course
- The week in which the final assessment was to occur/due
- The face to face hours for each course (from part way through the investigation)

Prior to the meetings (in most cases) the existing 2020 timetabling information (or 2019 information if the 2020 timetable was not available) was provided to Schools. This included teaching information for all courses and classes for 2020. In most cases, the timetabling information was analysed against local School timetables and corrections made. It must be noted that, due to the way in which the timetabling system creates default course and activity duration data for the upcoming timetabling year, corrections to the information extracted cannot be considered an indication of non-compliant setup.

Once the Schools' intentions for the delivery of each course/class was confirmed the data was then updated in the timetabling system and/or PeopleSoft, extracted, and checked against the programme requirements. If necessary, any issues were investigated and resolved. The final version was provided back to the Schools for confirmation of accuracy before being utilised in the next step of the timetabling and enrolment setup process.

Through all these meetings and the subsequent work, decisions were made as to how to set up the courses for 2020 to ensure compliance whilst not significantly negatively impacting on students. In some instances, the decision was made to remain non-compliant with (for example) the approved teaching weeks, while ensuring compliance with the total learning hours, to ensure an appropriate student experience. In other instances, the final assessment date was required to be moved toward the end of a course so as to ensure that the total learning hours for a programme were being delivered over the duration of the course.

There were a number of challenges to implementing this approach, including:

- Not all programme teams having a teaching calendar easily replicable in PeopleSoft
- Particular types of programmes are complex to timetable:
 - Modern apprenticeships
 - Programmes with placements where learners in a particular course are not all placed within the same time period
 - Programmes with different delivery modes which have different programme duration
- A significant number of programmes without NZQA programme data (as per NZQA's R0482 report)¹
- An inability to make changes to teaching practice at short notice
- The default data created by and extracted from the Timetabling system and used for 2020 course durations defaults the course duration to the activity duration
- The limited timeframe for resolving the issues.

¹ Given the state of the data, the decision was made early on to use TEC (rather than NZQA) data as the basis for comparison. This was due to both the dearth of NZQA data on Unitec programmes and the link between course durations reported through the SDR and loans and allowances.

As a result of the above, the following principles were applied for the immediate resolution of issues for 2019 and 2020:

- The needs and wellbeing of learners was paramount
- The programme duration held in STEO would be considered the “approved” duration due to the consistency of data available (with some exceptions where the data was clearly incorrect)
- In a standard 16-week (or thereabouts) semester, having a final assessment within the last two weeks was acceptable. The expectation stated to Schools was that assessments for students should be balanced across both weeks.

Findings

Summary of findings

Course durations

Of the 87² programmes reviewed:

- 69 had consistent data across NZQA (where available), TEC and the programme document (note that for 31 programmes NZQA holds no data)
- At the commencement of this work: 47 were 100% compliant, 31 were non-compliant and 9 were “not applicable” due to not yet being delivered or similar
- Following amendments to course durations 73 of 87 were compliant
- Of the 14 that remain non-compliant following this work:
 - 1 programme is set up in STEO for half its expected duration – suspected error in setup (GDCPM)
 - 1 is a programme which incorporates a thesis and clinical placement which don’t align with the approved programme duration (they have a longer duration). (MOST)
 - 1 is a graduate diploma which is non-compliant with TEC but which is compliant with the Bachelor’s degree to which it is aligned. Courses are co-taught. (GDBUS)
 - 1 practicum course is longer than approved by TEC but compliant with the programme document – likely due to limitations of STEO data fields (NZDVN)
 - 3 have clinical placements which makes it difficult to confirm durations so compliance cannot be confirmed (BHSMI, BNURS, BN)
 - 3 are modern apprentice programmes whereby it was in the best interests of the students to maintain current delivery patterns for 2020 (NZCD4, NZCG4, NZCP4)

Total learning hours

- Schools were advised, and agreed, that all courses were required to have their final assessment due date in the final two weeks of the course.

Addressing outstanding non-compliances

Those programmes which remain non-compliant will be expected to make the necessary changes as soon as possible in 2020. This work will be carried out in addition to what will be required during the *Programme Refresh Project* noted above.

Impact on students

Despite all the issues and challenges, it does not appear that any students now, or previously, have had their education constrained or compromised as a result of the issues identified. This opinion is

² Actually 86 but MAP Social Practice and MAP Professional Accounting were considered as separate programmes for the purposes of this exercise

based on the extent of the non-compliances identified (typically minimal) and supported through the outcomes from the operation of existing quality systems, including external moderation, monitoring and the measuring of graduate outcomes. No systemic analysis has been undertaken to confirm this view.

Contributing factors

The issues identified and partially addressed through the course durations work have come about for a number of reasons. The identification of these contributors has been iterative and apply to varying degrees across systems, programmes/programme teams and the institute:

- Extant programme documentation is not definitive
- Key programme data is inconsistent across Unitec, NZQA and TEC
- Courses within programmes were not always set up to ensure that programmes were being taught over the approved programme duration
- A lack of understanding leading to the total learning hours not always being delivered over the total duration of a course (due to early final assessment)
- A lack of clear processes and requirements, including responsibilities and delegations
- A lack of accountability for programme setup in PeopleSoft (Timetabling system³)
- A lack of fully documented processes

It is believed that these issues have come about due to:

- Ongoing restructuring over the last few years which has led to:
 - o A loss of institutional knowledge; and
 - o a breakdown in quality systems with the shift to a centralised model
 - o poor transition of responsibilities
- Documentation management being out of step with accepted good practice
- A lack of robust processes to manage changes to course durations
- A general lack of understanding amongst staff

³ See *Timetabling Changes* below

Background

Identification of the issue

The course durations issue was identified and subsequently confirmed through a series of events, though the full extent of the issue did not become clear until the full investigation was undertaken.

Initially, through preparation for the 2018 External Evaluation and Review some programme documentation related issues were identified, as well as with the delivery of a specific programme. Inconsistencies between Unitec documentation and NZQA and TEC were then confirmed through the *Data Consistency Project* and the *Annual Attestation process*. Around the time of the completion of the Data Consistency Project, issues with the setup for some course durations were also identified. Additionally, at the time of these investigations there were known instances of some grades being published *prior* to course end dates, and in the odd instance, prior to course start dates. There had also been a significant spike in the number of course date alterations after a course had commenced delivery in 2019.

This information, together, led to a focussed investigation using eight randomly selected programmes. This investigation was undertaken to confirm whether there was a systemic issue which needed to be resolved. The sample of programmes confirmed the incorrect setup of course duration and activity duration in the system was likely to be a widespread and systemic issue.

It *appeared* that for a significant number of courses, students were not being provided with the total learning hours which Unitec is required to provide (as per NZQA and TEC approval). Further investigation was then undertaken, which indicated that for 2019:

1. A majority of courses were set up to be delivered over a 16 week period. Of these, a significant number had an activity duration of 13 weeks. From a small number of discussions and based on the sampling undertaken, this was due to a misunderstanding (by some) that all courses are taught for 13 weeks, have 1 week study leave, and a two weeks exam period when there are other courses within a programme which do have exams. Only a small number of courses across the institute (approximately 180) have exams. For these courses, the 13+1+2 week delivery is appropriate. For courses without formal invigilated exams, it is not.
2. For courses without formal exams, whether the appropriate amount of teaching / learning was occurring depended on the due date of the final course assessment. If the final assessment was due in week 15-16, then there was no issue. If it was not due in week 15-16, then it was highly likely that the course was non-compliant with the NZQA definition of learning hours:

All planned learning activities leading toward the achievement of programme or qualification learning outcomes.

Ergo, if learning is not being assessed, then it does not lead to programme or qualification outcomes.

Contributing factors

Programme Management Approaches

Unitec's approach to the management of programme documentation has, in one sense been very robust, whilst in other ways has been inadequate.

Following the creation of a programme document for approval, the document itself is filed in the Programme Library. Relevant parts of the programme document are extracted and used in different

ways; the Programme Regulations are uploaded to the Unitec website, and the course descriptors are used as the basis for the *My Course Details* reports provided to students. Both of these artefacts (regulations and course descriptors) have generally been reviewed and updated annually with, in most cases, good version control. What has not occurred is the ongoing upkeep of a single programme document which details, for example, how courses within a programme continue to align with the graduate outcomes of the qualification to which the programme leads. The approach described above was driven by the centralisation of the approvals process in 2016.

Programme changes were generally managed well, with Type 2 (significant) changes historically being considered by the Qualifications Alignment Board and/or Academic Board and applications being made to NZQA. Type 1 (minor) changes were considered by the Programme Improvement Committee and notified to NZQA following each semester, though some 2019 changes were not reported within the expected timeframe. Full programme documentation (in the form of an updated programme document) has never been a requirement of these processes within Unitec. It should be noted that this approach has been supported through successful applications to NZQA utilising this approach.

In recognition of this issue, and as a result of a number of poor outcomes (in 2019) following applications to NZQA, the Change and Improvement Procedure was reviewed and the Academic Approvals Committee formed (in late 2018).

Timetabling changes

The purpose of the Timetabling System (and the Timetabling Office) is to match the resource needs of courses and classes (types of teaching spaces, etc) to the resources available for allocation. The Timetabling system (specifically the Annual Data Planner) is the location within PeopleSoft where both the Course Duration details and the Activity Duration details are recorded and subsequently input into PeopleSoft from where data for the SDR is extracted.

Historically, course duration has been confirmed by Schools (as they are now known) and the class number was generated by Academic Administration followed by Operations Administrators who managed physical space booking through Syllabus. This process was problematic and in 2017 an Annual Data Planner was introduced along with a Class Validation process to address known issues of poor planning, over-allocation of physical spaces and incorrect course and activity duration setup.

The Class Validation process, at the time facilitated by the Academic Administration Team, required the generation of reports of classes and sending these lists through to the relevant Academic Leader to verify the course duration and the associated class information. The Activity Dates validation process was facilitated by the Timetabling office in parallel with the Academic Administration class Validation. If, during this process, Academic Leaders did not respond, or did not wish to alter any of the course duration dates, then they remained as they had been generated.

The Timetabling Office took over the Class Validation process in November of 2018 after the Class Validation process had already been finalised. The Timetabling Office has identified and followed up with Academic Leaders (now disestablished), where the class information was required to be reviewed and reconfirmed.

Responsibility for confirming the correct course and class durations is not explicitly stated in any policy, nor was/is the requisite data collected at the programme approval (or any other) stage.

Detailed findings

Individual programme level details [are available here](#).

Summary of 2019 situation

	Number of Programmes
Total number of Programmes	87 ⁴
Programme data consistent across the programme document, NZQA and TEC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - includes programmes with no NZQA data - includes one programme where all the data was incorrect 	69
Number of programmes with no NZQA data	31
Number of programmes with no programme document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2x national certificates 	2

The number of programmes in 2019 where the programme document and the NZQA and/or TEC programme durations match

Count of Approved Docs matching?	N	N/A	Y	Y*	Y**	Grand Total
Applied Business	4		5			9
Architecture	2		7			9
Bridgepoint			9			9
Building Construction	1		4		1	6
Community Studies	2		8			10
Computing and Information Technology	2		4			6
Creative Industries	4		2	1		7
Engineering & Applied Technology	1	1	4			6
Environmental and Animal Sciences			7			7
Healthcare & Social Practice			7			7
Trades and Services		1	10			11
Grand Total	16	2	67	1	1	87
Total Yes						69
Total No						16
Total other						2

Table Notes:

1. Where there is no NZQA data for a programme but other values match then it has been considered compliant.
2. Y* TEC weeks include summer school but otherwise correct
3. Y** GDCPM - course duration consistently incorrect

⁴ Master of Applied Practice (MAP) counted twice (once each for Social Practice and Professional Accounting)

The number of programmes in 2019 where the programme duration is/was compliant with TEC programme duration

Count of 2019 Programme duration Compliant with TEC?	Column Labels								
Row Labels	N	N*	N**	N/A	Y	Y*	N****	N*****	Grand Total
Applied Business	4				5				9
Architecture	7			1	1				9
Bridgepoint				1	8				9
Building Construction	3			1	2				6
Community Studies	1				7	1		1	10
Computing and Information Technology	2				4				6
Creative Industries	5				1	1			7
Engineering & Applied Technology	1			1	4				6
Environmental and Animal Sciences	1	1		1	4				7
Healthcare & Social Practice			3		4				7
Trades and Services	3			2	4		2		11
Grand Total	27	1	3	7	44	2	2	1	87
Total Yes									46
Total No									34
Total other									7

Table Notes:

- Y* TEC weeks include summer school
- N* NZDVN Compliant other than one practicum course setup longer which factual Summary stipulates.
- N** BN and BNURS, BHSMI practicum duration varies, mostly block courses, as a whole 43-44 week hol inclusive
- N**** Apprentice courses duration setup longer
- N***** Thesis course duration setup longer
- N/A Unknown, class not offered or National certificate and duration unknown

The number of programmes setup to be compliant with TEC duration in 2020

Count of 2020 Programme duration Compliant with TEC?	Column Labels											
Row Labels	N***	N/A	Y	Y*	Y***	Y****	N****	N*	N**	N*****	N*****	Grand Total
Applied Business			8							1		9
Architecture			9									9
Bridgepoint			9									9
Building Construction	1		4			1						6
Community Studies		1	7	1							1	10
Computing and Information Technology			6									6
Creative Industries			6	1								7
Engineering & Applied Technology		1	5									6
Environmental and Animal Sciences		1	5					1				7
Healthcare & Social Practice			4						3			7
Trades and Services		1	6		1		3					11
Grand Total	1	4	69	2	1	1	3	1	3	1	1	87
Total Yes	73											
Total No	7											
Total other	7											

Table Notes

- Y* determine confirm why TEC weeks include summer school
- Y** GDCPM - course duration consistently incorrect
- Y*** Full time offering compliant
- N* NZDVN Compliant other than one practicum course setup longer which factual Summary stipulates.
- N** - BN and BNURS, BHSMI practicum duration varies, mostly block courses, as a whole 43-44 week hol inclusive
- N*** GDCPM - courses are embedded in BCONS. Two courses setup as 19 weeks, TEC 32 weeks
- N**** - Apprentice course duration setup longer
- N***** - GDBUS - course setup under BBS which is longer than GDBUS approved duration
- N/A - Unknown, class not offered or National certificate and duration unknown

The number of programmes which have their final assessments in each course within the final two weeks of the course prior to the investigation

Count of 2019 Final Assessment Compliant (i.e final 2 weeks)	Column Labels				
Row Labels	Apprenticeship	N	N/A (prog not offered)	Y	Grand Total
Applied Business		8		1	9
Architecture		1		8	9
Bridgepoint				9	9
Building Construction				6	6
Community Studies		1		9	10
Computing and Information Technology		2		4	6
Creative Industries		1		6	7
Engineering & Applied Technology	1	2		3	6
Environmental and Animal Sciences		3	1	3	7
Healthcare & Social Practice		2		5	7
Trades and Services	8			3	11
Grand Total	9	20	1	57	87

The number of programmes which have their final assessments in each course within the final two weeks of the course following the investigation

Count of 2020 Final Assessment Compliant (i.e final 2 weeks)	Column Labels			
Row Labels	Apprenticeship	N/A (programme not offered)	Y	Grand Total
Applied Business			9	9
Architecture			9	9
Bridgepoint			9	9
Building Construction			6	6
Community Studies		1	9	10
Computing and Information Technology			6	6
Creative Industries			7	7
Engineering & Applied Technology	1		5	6
Environmental and Animal Sciences			7	7
Healthcare & Social Practice			7	7
Trades and Services	8		3	11
Grand Total	9	1	77	87

Appendices:

Definitions

<i>Total Learning Hours</i>	<p><i>The sum of “All planned learning activities leading toward the achievement of programme or qualification learning outcomes⁵”.</i></p> <p>This has been interpreted as the time from which students are first directed in their learning (i.e., their first engagement in a course through to the date (week) of their final assessment.)</p> <p>Learning activities includes what is commonly known as directed and self-directed study. The definition above mandates that all learning is teacher directed</p>
<i>Total Teaching weeks</i>	<p><i>The number of weeks over which learners are directed in their learning</i></p> <p>This is the number of weeks that all courses in a programme are delivered over. Courses do not need to be delivered over the duration of the entire programme.</p> <p>This is important for StudyLink purposes.</p>
<i>Total weeks, including holiday weeks</i>	<p>The sum of the total teaching weeks and the total number of holiday weeks.</p> <p>This is important for StudyLink purposes.</p>
<i>Course duration</i>	<p>The time period, measured in Monday-Sunday weeks, over which the total learning hours of a course are delivered and for which TEC funding is received.</p> <p>In PeopleSoft Course Duration is defined by the Class Start and Class End dates</p>
<i>Activity duration</i>	<p>The time period in which physical space is booked to enable face to face learning to occur. This may also (but typically doesn't) include non-physical timetabled activity (i.e., fieldwork).</p> <p>Activity duration is set to the day (i.e., not on a full week basis)</p>
<i>Type 1 change</i>	<p>one or more changes to components of an approved programme which do not impact on the programme as a whole.</p>
<i>Type 2 change</i>	<p>one or more changes to components of an approved programme which do have an impact on the programme as a whole.</p> <p>Includes any changes to NZQA Data Requirements.</p>

⁵ NB. This definition of learning hours came into effect 1 January 2018. All programmes developed after this time are required to comply with the new definition
<https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/consultations-and-reviews/notional-learning-hours/>

Legislative requirements

New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Programmes of Study (Programmes) are required to meet the requirements of the [NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018](#) (PAA Rules), made under Section 253 of the Education Act 1989, both to gain approval of the programme and accreditation to deliver the programme, as well as to maintain these approvals. Approval is granted by NZQA upon demonstration of how the programme meets the relevant criteria, and includes a requirement to meet and continue to deliver the programme in accordance with the “Data requirements” (*the details required to be filled out in the fields in the relevant online application form available on NZQA’s website*). The data requirements include the following:

- Title, level and total credit value
- Aim, content and outcomes
- Entry requirements
- Delivery mode, delivery method, assessment method
- Total learning hours
- Self-directed learning hours
- Total teaching weeks
- Total holiday weeks
- Total hours of learning per week

Any variation to the Data Requirements is ipso facto a Type 2 change which requires approval from NZQA prior to the change being implemented. Uses for the specific data noted in the bullet points above include: for NZQA approval, for TEC funding and fees approval, for the determination of loans and allowances.

Tertiary Education Commission

TEC funds delivery based on course duration and the average number of learning hours per week. One EFT (equivalent full time student) is equivalent to 120 credits and 1200 notional hours of learning. Unitec does not currently stipulate in any of its documentation the required course durations. Rather this has been extrapolated from the programme teaching weeks and confirmed with Schools (see below). If courses are set up with incorrect durations (a duration that does not allow the programme duration value to be achieved) then they are highly likely to be non-compliant with both NZQA and TEC requirements.

In order to access TEC funding, Unitec must provide to TEC:

- confirmation of approval from NZQA
- details required for STEO which are predominantly (but not entirely) the same as the NZQA *Data Requirements*

Delivery against course duration requirements is overseen by TEC through SDR (Single Data Return) reporting and by NZQA indirectly through assurances from an institute’s self-assessment practices, and directly through monitoring (i.e., the recent New Zealand Diploma in Business monitoring visit), External Evaluation and Review, and data sharing with TEC.

StudyLink

The Ministry of Social Development’s StudyLink administers student loans and allowances. Education providers are required to retain specific information about its students that relate to their students’ entitlement and eligibility for student loans and allowances.

For students to qualify for StudyLink services they have to be studying a certain amount of EFTS. For full time study this is measured by how many EFTS a student has over the number of weeks of study.

Number of weeks	Minimum EFTS you need to be full-time
Under 12 weeks	0.025 EFTS a week
12-15	0.3
16-19	0.4
20	0.5
21	0.525
22	0.55
23	0.575
24	0.6
25	0.625
26	0.65
27	0.675
28	0.7
29	0.725
30	0.75
31	0.775
32-52	0.8
53 or more	1