

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality

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Academic Audit

Summary Report

Southern Institute of Technology
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INTRODUCTION:

The Southern Institute of Technology's (SIT) quality philosophy is based on the understanding that the "stakeholders are the prime focus of the quality management system and all must be confident that SIT will deliver services that meet their needs and expectations". To SIT a stakeholder focus means "ensuring that the needs and expectations of all stakeholder groups are addressed".

Consequently the SIT quality system is designed to ensure that "information about stakeholder needs and expectations is a prime focus for establishing and maintaining quality standards and information about the extent to which SIT is meeting those needs and expectations is the central guide to assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation's performance".

The core business of the Institute is described as being the delivery of education and training services. The function of quality systems is seen as being "to assist in improving the quality of services". The focus of the quality system is a set of standards and all elements of the system are designed to enhance the achievement of these standards. The standards are identified in the introduction to the QMS and aligned to those developed by ITPNZ.

It was noted that the management structure of the Institute is relatively unchanged since the mid-term review. Minor changes involve the inclusion of the positions of Human Resources Manager and Business Research and Innovation Manager within the Management Team and the establishment of a new position of Academic Support Officer (reporting to the Academic Manager).. The latter position enables closer attention to be given to issues surrounding Unit Standard Moderation and the implementation of Internal Audit.

The Institute is taking major initiatives in the field of Flexible Mixed Mode Delivery (FMMD) principally through SIT2LRN, and programmes delivered in this mode constitute a significant part of SIT's overall offering.

It was noted that there were few examples of programmes being contracted out, with the Diploma in Aviation being the most significant.

There is a Memorandum of Understanding with Te Wananga o Aotearoa (TWOA) which provides for Te Reo being delivered on the SIT Campus by TWOA.

It was noted that programmes are delivered on three campuses as follows:

- Main Campus: 3748 EFTSs
- Gore Campus: 88 EFTSs
- Christchurch Campus: 622 EFTSs (266 EFTSs funded by ITOs)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

The Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) has a comprehensive Quality Management System which has evolved over time and is generally well understood and consistently utilised by management and staff. In some instances procedures are validated by usage and are held in the collective memory of a group of managers who have been stable over time and have worked cooperatively under strong leadership. It was noted that the Institute will be reviewing its QMS as the new system of self assessment and external evaluation and review is implemented and it was recommended that in this process the documentation should be made more comprehensive by the consolidation of policies and procedures currently located in other parts of the system.

There is little reference to the Treaty of Waitangi in the formally documented QMS, but after discussion with CEO, the Kaumātua, and Māori members of staff it was apparent that biculturalism and the principles of the Treaty are in fact given high priority at SIT. It is recommended that the Institute's commitment to the Treaty and the various initiatives being taken to support biculturalism be made more explicit in the documented QMS.

SIT has an effective system for the development and review of programmes which requires their approval by the Academic Board and the Management team. The processes used give confidence that the educational functions of the Institute are being conducted with due concern for the public interest.

It was noted that the Certificate in Business Administration is being offered in a very flexible programme which enables unit standards to be selected according to the needs of different cohorts of students. This is considered to be appropriate as it enables the Institute to operate within the original intent of the National Qualifications Framework while meeting the more recently established requirements for separate course approval in respect of unit standards-based courses. It is recommended that the Academic Board formalise the mechanism for confirming the coherence of the combinations of unit standards within such flexible course structures.

The ACE programme which was sampled (Own-choice Art) was considered to provide an admirable flexibility, allowing the tutor to engage with students, researching their needs and interests and develop a development programme which provides students with opportunities for personal extension in their chosen mode.

SIT has an exceptionally strong connection to the community which recognises the mutual benefits to be gained from cooperation. Meetings with members of external advisory committees confirmed that strong networks and advisory committees are able to provide advice and support during the development of programmes and continue this support through on-going collaboration. This was particularly evident in the close cooperation with a broadly-based and very strong advisory committee during the development phase of the Bachelor of Environmental Management. SIT2LRN has a broad-based advisory committee, but it is recommended that there be more consistent involvement of discipline-based advisory committees in SIT2LRN programme development and review.

SIT maintains excellent systems for financial management, administration and the management of human and physical resources and these contribute significantly to positive outcomes for the Institute and its students. The library, in particular, is well established and meets the needs of

staff and students, including those based on distant campuses and those studying off-campus in SIT2LRN programmes. It was also evident that the Institute is operating an effective health and safety system that meets the legislative requirements of the Health and Safety in Employment Act.

The Institute demonstrates sound practices for the induction of new staff, particularly for those with little or no previous teaching experience. The requirement for all new staff to complete the Diploma in Adult Education and Training was an example of good practice, being perceived by those who participated as helpful in developing their skills as teachers.

It was evident that teaching staff are well qualified and have a wealth of experience in the fields in which they teach. Student evaluations were favourable and students spoke highly of teaching staff. Advisory committee members also held teaching staff in high regard. The Institute has an effective process for the appointment of teaching staff but it was noted that there is no formal requirement to consult with disciplinary staff when facilitators are selected for SIT2LRN courses. It is recommended that provision be made for this.

SIT is to be commended on the Leadership Development programme that aims to enhance skills and build the capabilities of middle managers.

The calendar provides a comprehensive coverage of the courses and programmes on offer and notes caveats associated with those courses with respect to pre requisite requirements and selection criteria. There were a few inconsistencies in the descriptions and outcomes of courses and it is recommended that SIT reviews its processes for ensuring the accuracy of published information.

Students reported that the process of becoming a student at SIT was straight forward, with application and enrolment processes being both efficient and effective and SIT is to be commended for its student-focused approach to enrolment. The SIT2LRN faculty was particularly notable for the speed with which staff respond to student enquiries and process enrolments, for the initial contact made by facilitators and the welcome pack sent out to all new registrations.

The audit team was impressed with the Student Information Management System (SIMS) being used within the SIT2LRN faculty and the capability of the system to track and update information and communication relevant to student enrolment and progress. The programme provides staff with a powerful tool for providing effective service and support to students.

SIT provides a range of student services through a well-qualified, experienced and committed specialist team driven by a very strong ethos of support and guidance for students. Students, including those involved in distance learning, reported a high level of satisfaction with the guidance they received from SIT staff and the support services available to them. The Institute has effective systems in place to cater for the needs of international students and to meet the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students.

It is evident that there is a focus on effective learning and teaching at SIT and students affirmed the excellent quality of teaching and learning. This is currently not fully documented and it is

recommended that SIT develop a formal statement describing their Teaching and Learning Strategy.

The SIT2LRN Faculty is using the online environment very effectively and the flexible mixed mode delivery approach is clearly successful. The students are very supportive of the quality of the teaching and learning provided, the flexibility it affords them, and the support they receive from SIT2LRN staff and SIT in general. The Operations Manual which guides SIT2LRN activities and operations was considered to be an example of good practice. It is noted that Blackboard has all the necessary functionalities for maintaining student contact and there would be advantages for both staff and students in moving towards using this as the medium for all engagement with students online.

The management of workplace components examined within the selected programmes is viewed by the audit team as an example of Good Practice.

Moderation reports from NZQA have raised a number of issues, but many of these have been successfully challenged by the Institute. It is considered good practice that the institute has taken the initiative to appoint an Academic Support Officer with experience in the moderation of unit standards.

The Institute has in place structures, processes, and positions focused on building its research capability and has committed to fostering a research culture to underpin its degree-level teaching. The audit team recommends that an SIT research strategy document be developed to support this process.

There was verbal assurance that cultural considerations are included in the ethical approval process, but it is recommended that these be formally included in the requirements. It is also recommended that the structure of the SIT Research Committee be reviewed to take into account the focus and range of research activities. To meet the recommendations of the external monitor, the Research Committee of the Faculty of New Media, Arts & Business should take an active approach in encouraging and supporting discipline-based research within the department for those staff engaged in teaching the Postgraduate Diploma in Business Enterprise.

The Institute has a well established system for internal audits, with the collated reports receiving wide distribution encompassing the management team, Academic Audit Committee and the Academic Board. Heads of Faculties are responsible for reviewing the individual audit reports with the relevant staff to establish an action plan which includes a response due date and the receipt of action plans in accordance with this date is monitored. It is noted that the Institute has responded to the suggestion to broaden the base from which the internal audit team members are drawn as a means to enhance the commitment of staff to their philosophy of continuous quality improvement. There has also been a recent change in Lead Auditor (with this responsibility being given to the newly appointed Academic Support Officer) and more teaching and non-academic staff have been included in the team of auditors.

BOARD DECISION (4 August 2008)

That Southern Institute of Technology be awarded Quality Assured status for a further four years, consistent with ITP Quality requirements.