



# TEC Investigation Report – Axiom Training Limited (7252)

## Executive Summary

1. On 15 April 2021 the Tertiary Education Commission - Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua (TEC) was notified by Axiom Training (Axiom) that they had identified “*serious issues*” with one of their pilot New Zealand Certificate (NZC) programmes. Axiom said that the issues arose as a result of a “*failure in management and tuition*” of the programme at their Hamilton site.
2. TEC investigators met with the general manager from Axiom on 28 April 2021 to discuss the issues identified. Following this meeting, a formal investigation was initiated.
3. Interviews were conducted with staff from Axiom and with former students. The responses highlighted that the level of oversight given to the transition from the theoretical delivery of the course into the work experience component was inadequate. As a result of this, students were not properly assisted to complete the programme and it was not robustly monitored and evidenced. This was corroborated during the interviews with the former students.
4. As a result of the identified issues, Axiom have made a number of changes to their processes, including better support for staff and seeking input from students.
5. Axiom assisted with the investigation by providing documentary evidence and responses to queries and by making staff available during the onsite visit. Axiom were open and transparent during the investigation.

## Background

6. Axiom is a TEC funded registered private training establishment (PTE) with its head office located in Hamilton. It has seven delivery sites in the North Island and one in Christchurch. Between 1998 and 2019, Axiom was known as AMS Group.
7. Axiom received approval from NZQA on 20 June 2019 to deliver the following programme/qualification:
  - NZC3089 New Zealand Certificate in Commercial Road Transport (Heavy Vehicle Operator) (Level 3) (the Certificate)
8. The Certificate is made up of 90 credits and was first offered in 2020 with the aim to prepare students for employment in the commercial road transport industry. It also aimed to prepare students who wanted to access more senior or specialist higher levels of study within a multi-disciplined industry, or other industries that operate heavy road transport assets.

9. The Certificate consists of 910 total learning hours, delivered over 26 weeks (excluding holiday weeks). The total learning hours per week, as entered in the *Services for Tertiary Education Organisations* system (STEO)<sup>1</sup>, are shown as being 14 hours in class, 15 hours work experience and 6 hours self-directed learning (SDL). The total hours of delivery align with what was approved by NZQA and funded by the TEC.
10. Axiom delivered the programme so that the theoretical aspect (13 weeks class time) was followed by the work experience component (also 13 weeks).
11. The table below provides a breakdown of TEC funding received in 2020:

Fund	2020 \$ GST exclusive	Actual
<b>Investment Plan</b>		
Student Achievement Component Level 3 and above (SAC3+)	849,838.00	
TTAF Funding	30,434.78	
<b>Total</b>	<b>880,272.78</b>	

## Investigation Scope

12. The scope of the investigation looked at Axiom's compliance with Student Achievement Component Level 3 (SAC 3+) and Targeted Training & Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF) funding conditions for funding they received for the programme, and whether any breaches had occurred and to what extent, if applicable. Specifically, the investigation focussed on whether or not there was:
  - Evidence to show if the total approved and funded hours for the Certificate were fully delivered for the duration of the programme, particularly the work experience hours;
  - Enrolment and attendance records, and assessment results available;
  - Evidence to assess the validity of the self-referred issues; and
  - Evidence to assess whether students' learning outcomes were or were not achieved a result of the alleged lack of support provided to students.
13. TEC investigators visited Axiom at their Tauranga site on 23 and 24 June 2021. Evidence relating to student enrolments and course delivery was provided by Axiom staff.

## Investigation Findings

### Pilot Programme

14. The programme was conducted as a pilot in two separate locations, Whakatane and Hamilton. Axiom's Hamilton site was selected for the pilot following an indication of demand for it in the area and the proximity to the Bay of Plenty, where trainers selected for the delivery of the programme could be better concentrated.

### Enrolment Process/Attendance Records

15. Axiom's enrolment process follows the steps recommended by the TEC and is documented in their student management system (SMS), Wisenet. The trainers support the enrolment process by helping to recruit

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<sup>1</sup> This forms the basis for the TEC's funding of the programmes and any variance between STEO/programme approvals and what is being delivered will have potential funding consequences.

potential students from their respective regions and also assist with filling out enrolment forms and dealing with any Studylink issues for students, where necessary.

16. Following confirmation of enrolments, Axiom conducted a “*headcount day*” and said that, if the student was not present on that day, they were withdrawn<sup>2</sup>. Axiom added that, if the student was not there, it created an opportunity to replace them on the programme. However, Axiom generally try to avoid late enrolments, being dealt with on a case by case basis.
17. Axiom recorded student attendance by having the trainers enter the status of the student each day on their laptops, which was then fed through to the Academic Manager. The Academic Manager checked the programme activity report weekly to ensure the students were meeting their attendance requirements. Axiom stated that the trainers knew the attendance process/policy but had previously been poor at communicating any issues to the Academic Manager or Tertiary Administrator. Axiom acknowledged that they “*slipped*” in relation to this with regards to the Hamilton Heavy Vehicle Operator (HVO) programme.
18. It is noted that staff felt that the previous QMS system, *Artena*, was not fit for purpose which resulted in the attendance issue being “*picked up too late*”. Axiom confirmed and showed TEC investigators in their visit, that there is now more accurate reporting with changes having been made to the attendance report to ensure that students do not accrue too many absences before it is raised with them.

### Trainer Resignation/Delivery of Work Experience Hours

19. The HVO trainer assigned to run the programme began their delivery in week four, 19 – 23 October 2020, following three weeks of delivery from other trainers. Axiom confirmed that, in week six, the trainer resigned, with their last day being 10 November 2020. Evidence provided by Axiom along with student and staff interview responses indicate that, after the trainer’s resignation, there was no permanent replacement trainer appointed. Staff also acknowledged that, at that point, they moved away from the “*model for the programme*”, which caused a “*mismatch and dysfunction to the delivery process*”<sup>3</sup>.
20. After the resignation of the assigned trainer, the Hamilton programme was delivered by different relief trainers. While Axiom acknowledges that this was unsatisfactory, they were able to ensure the students made it through the teaching phase, until the end of year.
21. Following the scheduled return in 2021, Axiom found that the programme had been overlooked by the staff managing it which resulted in a failure to: accurately identify learning hours, support students transitioning into the work experience component, and withdraw students who were not able to complete the programme. These issues appeared to be a result of a disconnect between staff and senior management.
22. The resulting failures, particularly supporting a successful move into the work experience component, were directly experienced by the students. Responses received during the course of the investigation from former students regarding delivery of the course and the work experience component included:
  - It was not what was expected and it often felt like they did not know what was happening one day to the next.
  - Not having a proper trainer assigned to complete the course.
  - Constantly being told that it was a pilot course.
  - Being advised that Axiom would find them work experience but feeling as though they had to find their own work placements.
  - Feeling as though they did not have anyone that could be held responsible.

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<sup>2</sup> The Tertiary Administrator advised that the Heavy Vehicle Operators course headcount day was in week three.

<sup>3</sup> Axiom Operations Annual Report – 2020

## Withdrawal Process

23. Axiom's withdrawal process is documented in Wisenet, for staff/information purposes. Axiom advised that, once a student falls below 80% attendance (or 20% non-attendance), a decision regarding potentially withdrawing that student should be made after a number of communication attempts.
24. Axiom informed the TEC during its visit that the proper withdrawal process was overlooked for a number of students, stating that an additional resource was probably needed in relation to the HVO programme to ensure that all students were correctly recorded and reported.
25. In relation to the funding aspect regarding withdrawn students, the TEC was satisfied that Axiom follows the recommended process to ensure that funding is not claimed for those students who have withdrawn. In this situation, funding was only claimed for the withdrawn students who fell outside of the 10% threshold.
26. Students spoken to during the course of the investigation felt that Axiom needed to provide better advice about the withdrawal process. Axiom staff acknowledged that they could improve the withdrawal process and, while information around withdrawals was included in the induction seminars, staff will examine what is covered during the seminars and in the learner handbooks to ensure the process is clear.

## Single Data Return (SDR) Reporting

27. Some students were identified as being reported in the SDR as '*extended/grade not available*' or '*did not complete*' for some courses, but the unit standards part of the related courses were shown as completed on the students personal files. When clarifying this, Axiom explained that the use of the above classification codes<sup>4</sup> on the SDR for various students was due to:
  - Supporting student 510543 to gain the qualification by approving an extension for them to complete the qualification when they return to Hamilton from working in Dunedin (based on the time limit for completion of the qualification being 2 years).
  - Student 137720985 waiting for the NZTA time restriction to end (3 month time restriction ends in August 2021) before attempting an outstanding unit standard. The student was recorded as an extension, however, due to the circumstances of the programme and difficulty in getting in touch with them, they have been recorded as incomplete. Upon discovery that the student had not attended any work experience, a withdrawal date was entered on the SDR.
  - Student 111534761 was shown as extended/grade not available for one course due to Unit 26777 theory has been completed however the conditions for assessment of this unit standard require a learner to complete six months practical driving without incident.
  - Student 102479613 not completing the practical component of two units so were recorded as incomplete. If the student is able to be contacted and return to complete these units, they will be re-enrolled.
  - Student 113754880 was shown as 'Extended/Grade not available' on the SDR due to the practical assessment requirement, as referred to above for student 111534761.
  - Student 1233879 was shown as did not complete on the SDR but should have been shown as withdrawn, due to the lack of contact following the end of year break.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://services.education.govt.nz/assets/STEO-files/SDR/2020-manuals/Single-Data-Return-Manual-2020-ver-1.4.pdf>  
(page 122)

28. TEOs have the option of using the practicum code rather than the extended code for students. The difference being that the TEO can show that the programme has a practicum component which is why it is not yet completed<sup>5</sup>, as opposed to it appearing as though it is taking the student a long time to complete.
29. If TEOs consider they need to extend a student beyond three SDRs, then there will be a reporting issue. The correct course of action for the TEO is to write to the TEC before that eventuates to explain and to see if there is a solution.

### Axiom Response

30. In their original approach to the TEC, and in subsequent correspondence and interviews, Axiom have accepted that the programme lacked proper oversight.
31. Axiom said that, as part of the recommendations already implemented, they now have fortnightly hui's, provide better support for staff, have conducted a self-assessment and have run a two day tertiary programme workshop. In addition, they regularly seek students' feedback on Axiom's performance. Axiom said that, to date, implementing their recommendations has had the desired effect for the pilot.

### Outcome

32. Axiom were able to show that the work experience component was mapped and planned, however acknowledged that they could not provide evidence of satisfactory oversight in the work experience component. Axiom acknowledged that *"no one took responsibility to support the learners with their work experience"*. This, combined with administrative issues and the personal circumstances of some students, resulted in a *"failure to deliver the required learning hours"*.
33. There will be no funding recovery sought in this matter as Axiom are still working with students to ensure that they complete all aspects of the course. We also note that this was a pilot programme with a small number of students.

### Conclusion

34. It was agreed that the lack of oversight following completion of the theoretical aspect of the programme combined with the circumstances of some students, meant that no one took responsibility for ensuring that students were appropriately transitioned into work experience. The relief trainers did their part by assisting in the delivery of the programme, but it was agreed that this should have been better managed so that, students who were not able to complete this component, were withdrawn at a much earlier stage.
35. We expect Axiom to ensure that the delivery of all learning hours will continue to form part of their compliance processes for any future or similar offerings of this qualification. We will check in future audits to ensure appropriate compliance and to ensure sufficient practices are in place.

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<sup>5</sup> **Classification Code 5 - Practicum to complete** – on job training (NZQF levels 1-8) - By the extraction date, the theory training with the academic provider is complete but the student still has to complete a practical module. A completion result will be available after the external practical module has been completed.