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External Evaluation and Review Report

Excel School of Performing Arts

Date of report: 9 November 2020

About Excel School of Performing Arts

Excel is a Christian-based school established in 1994 and focused on providing young people with a sense of purpose through the performing arts. Programmes are practical and performance-based in three disciplines: music, drama and dance. Its vision is to create a vibrant, creative and innovative performance school where students come to learn, create, grow and find their place in this world.

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	20 Portage Rd, New Lynn, Auckland
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	Domestic: 65 ¹ International: one Māori (22 per cent) and Pasifika (46 per cent)
Number of staff:	Six
TEO profile:	Excel Ministries Charitable Trust
Last EER outcome:	Confident in educational performance and Confident in self-assessment
Scope of this evaluation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Zealand Certificate in Music (Level 4)• New Zealand Diploma in Dance (Level 5)
MoE number:	9531
NZQA reference:	C35745
Dates of EER:	16 and 17 July 2020

¹ 67 EFTS (equivalent full-time students) in 2019 according to the Annual Fee Return Form; 63 EFTS in 2020.

Summary of results

Excel provides student with opportunities to excel in the performing arts while also growing and nurturing their personal and spiritual wellbeing. Students graduate with skills and knowledge relevant to industry but also with direction and purpose. Excel is well run with a responsive and effective teaching, management and leadership team. Assessment and compliance management are two areas that require strengthening.

Confident in educational performance

- Excel has a strong focus on students achieving success and personal growth. This is evident in its overall educational performance data, and the range of positive outcomes achieved by graduates. Māori and Pasifika achievement is variable but affected by small enrolment numbers and at times high attrition rates. Self-assessment and improvement to address achievement challenges is ongoing but has yet to achieve significant results.

Confident in capability in self-assessment

- Tutors are qualified and experienced practitioners of the performing arts. They are well supported as tutors and their contributions to the programme are valued.
- Programme design and assessment is focused on practical skills and performance. Moderation processes are systematic and thorough. However, Excel's assessment tasks would benefit from external review to ensure they are at the level of the qualification. Students are well supported and engaged in their learning, with opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge in real-work contexts.
- Leadership is empowering of others and inclusive. Strategy and improvement is informed by data that is robust and analysed comprehensively.
- Compliance management was a weakness in some areas, in particular meeting Outcome 3 of the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice (2016).

Key evaluation question findings²

1.1 How well do students achieve?

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Excel is committed to its vision of providing young people with opportunities to build confidence, find purpose and achieve success through the performing arts. Over the past three years, qualification completions have mostly met the internal target of 80 per cent. However, achievement for Māori and Pasifika students has fluctuated over the years as a result of small enrolment numbers and late withdrawals (refer Table 1, Appendix 1). Strategies to address this gap, including increasing pastoral support and reviewing programme design, are a work in progress.</p> <p>Low enrolments and high student withdrawal rates in the first year of study have impacted on the organisation’s educational performance. Year two achievement is generally stronger, attesting to Excel’s view that those who continue their study achieve well (refer Table 2, Appendix 1).</p> <p>Students, teaching staff and stakeholders agreed that students also grow in confidence, develop their purpose, strengthen their faith, as well as improve their skills and knowledge in their chosen field.</p> <p>Excel has invested in good systems to monitor and review individual student achievement. Achievement data and student feedback is analysed by the director and reported to the board.</p>
Conclusion:	<p>Students generally achieve well at Excel. However, there is a persistent achievement gap between Māori and other students. Excel uses good self-assessment processes to understand and improve student success. Improvements to address achievement are yet to show results.</p>

² The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation’s activities.

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including students?

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Excel programmes provide students with a performance-based qualification that is immediately relevant to industry. Graduates learn performance and tour management-related skills that help them to engage in the real world. They also gain softer life skills including communication skills and being able to relate with others. These are equally important to achieving success in the industry. Graduate feedback attests to being able to understand the reality of the industry and how to promote themselves in the 'working world'.</p> <p>Excel has formal mechanisms for understanding valued outcomes, including destination and graduate surveys which show the majority of students continue with further study or employment. In 2019, Excel celebrated its 25-year anniversary which was a further opportunity for students and graduates to showcase their talents and the value they have gained.</p> <p>Excel contributes to community through performances and tours which are fundraising events for local initiatives. Excel is also part of sector groups for the creative sector and is involved in industry through its contracted tutors (some of whom are past graduates).</p>
Conclusion:	Excel provides opportunities for students to achieve personal growth, development and direction through performing arts. Long-term relationships with stakeholders, including graduates, demonstrate the value of the programmes to the creative 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>Programme design and delivery is well aligned to the needs of students. The majority of tutors are active in the industry, therefore the skills, knowledge and experience they have are current and immediately relevant to the students. All tutors have the opportunity to plan together and adjust learning materials for each delivery. This means the learning material is fresh and engaging, and delivery of content is aligned and coordinated across a number of part-time tutors.</p> <p>Intending students are required to audition and participate in an interview to understand their personal goals, motivations and commitment. Personal development is an integral part of the programme and is reviewed daily.</p> <p>The programme has a strong focus on performance; therefore, students practise their skills in a group and one-on-one with tutors every day. Level 4 students are involved in short performances as part of their study. Diploma students have the opportunity to participate in two four-week tours where they experience the reality of the industry. Tutors have identified that theory aspects of the music programme in particular can be a challenge. Changes are being made to make theory more practical and to gauge intending students understanding of theory in the audition process.</p> <p>Excel invites an external assessor to mark the final performance assessment, in addition to a tutor. Video assessments are also used for moderation purposes. Assessment of performance-based tasks is supported by internal moderation which is regular and systematic and affirmed by an external moderator. The evaluation team did not see strong evidence that the theory-based aspects of the level 5 diploma were being moderated to determine that the assessment was at level 5. Or that moderation feedback was being addressed. It is recommended that Excel include this in the scope of its planned external programme review and future moderation activity.</p> <p>Excel has a range of mechanisms for engaging with</p>

	stakeholders, including graduate and student surveys; regular staff meetings and tutor surveys; and participation in industry, community events and sector groups. There was evidence of information gained being used for improvement.
Conclusion:	Programme design and delivery effectively meets the needs of students and stakeholders. The teaching staff are experienced practitioners, the majority of whom are still working in the industry. It is recommended that Excel review its level 4 and 5 programmes to ensure, among other things, that assessments meet the learning outcomes at levels 4 and 5.

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

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Excel students enjoy the practical nature of the programme and the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in community performances. Students are provided with immediate feedback on their progress which helps them to improve. Students engage in one-on-one sessions with tutors and book their own individual practice time which is monitored.</p> <p>The relatively high level of student attrition is a challenge for Excel, specifically for Pasifika students, as reflected in its 2019 data. Excel has analysed the reasons impacting on student retention and has made changes to improve, including investment in pastoral care, programme design (project-based learning), and engaging families more in orientation. This year, however, has been challenging, with Covid-19 impacting further on attrition despite best efforts to support learners online.</p> <p>Excel has also made a concerted effort to be responsive to Māori and Pasifika through personal engagement, including pronouncing names correctly, pōwhiri processes as part of orientation, and noho marae in semester one. Excel is also employing staff in teaching, management and administration positions that reflect the demographic of the students to make the learning environment more inclusive.</p> <p>Excel students have access to a person responsible for pastoral care, devotion time, free counselling services, and literacy support. Students attested to personal and spiritual growth as a</p>

	<p>benefit from studying at Excel. Feedback is regularly sought from students to monitor their experience and satisfaction with the programme, the effectiveness of the teaching, and pastoral care. This information is reviewed at the time by the director and shared with the management team so that any issues are addressed.</p> <p>Where the English language is a barrier, students have the opportunity to present assessments in their native language; Excel also provides readers and writers.</p> <p>Project-based learning has been introduced into the level 5 programmes which has challenged teachers to provide learners with an authentic and integrated assessment process.</p>
Conclusion:	Excel staff are passionate about the personal and cultural wellbeing of their students. Academic and pastoral support is provided to address barriers to learning. Improvements to pastoral care are in place and are being monitored for effectiveness.

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

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>The organisation is well managed and has a clear philosophy, purpose and values which are evident throughout the organisation. Formal organisational reviews of performance are regular and ongoing. Recent organisational changes in governance due to the retirement of long-serving trustees, has provided an opportunity for new leadership that is culturally informed and industry-based.</p> <p>Excel is facing challenges with small student numbers, variability in achievement for Māori students, and high withdrawals. Excel is constantly self-assessing its performance using internal and external achievement data to understand performance, and to review pastoral care, programme design and staffing to adapt and make change. Changes are linked to strategy and are resourced. Improvements resulting from the changes are yet to be fully realised.</p> <p>New staff are well inducted and supported into teaching.</p>

	<p>Teaching and learning are well resourced with good equipment and teaching materials. Permanent staff have professional development plans, and contracted staff are included in professional development activities. Tutors are regularly observed by peers and by the director twice a year, as a collegial opportunity for growth and development. Regular staff meetings keep staff up to date, the teaching seamless, and all staff engaged in the values of the organisation.</p> <p>Self-assessment and reflection are both structured (embedded through systems) and informal, which allows the organisation to be proactive as matters arise.</p>
Conclusion:	<p>Excel has a clear vision and purpose. Staff are valued and supported. Leadership is committed to providing the resources and guidance needed to support educational performance. Excel is currently facing a range of challenges. Its response to these challenges is strategic and purposeful but improvements are yet to be fully realised.</p>

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	Marginal
Self-assessment:	Marginal
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Compliance management is overseen by the principal. There were some weaknesses in Excel's compliance management relating to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sole international student did not have appropriate insurance in place prior to studying at Excel. The issue has been resolved. 2. Statutory declarations for new governance members were not up to date at the time of the EER. <p>Excel also needs to assure itself through regular self-assessment that it is monitoring activity-directed learning hours and that practical and theory assessment is meeting the learning outcomes at levels 4 and 5. An external review of the programme is planned.</p> <p>Overall, the evaluation found no further gaps or weaknesses in compliance management.</p>

Conclusion:	Excel must review its compliance management system to ensure it is managing and meeting all important compliance accountabilities.
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Focus areas

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

2.1 Focus area: New Zealand Certificate in Music (Level 4)

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good

2.2 Focus area: New Zealand Diploma in Dance (Level 5)

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good

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.

It is recommended that Excel:

- Review level 4 and 5 programmes to ensure, among other things, that assessments meet the learning outcomes at levels 4 and 5.
- Review compliance management to ensure all compliance responsibilities are monitored and met, including statutory attestations for new governance members.

Requirements

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

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

Appendix 1

Table 1. Qualification completions (%) 2017-2019

	2017	2018	2019
All students	85	72	81
All Dance students	90	73	75
All Drama students	85	86	67
All Music students	83	69	79
All Māori students	81	64	69
All Pasifika students	88	69	81

Source: Data provided by Excel School of Performing Arts

Table 2. Qualification completions (%) 2017-2019 by year level

	2017	2018	2019
All students – Year 1	75	69	80
All students – Year 2	95	82	81

Source: Data provided by Excel School of Performing Arts

Appendix 2

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 fraud³*
- *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.*

³ 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 2016, which are made by NZQA under section 253(1)(pa) of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister authorised as responsible for Part 20 of the Education Act.

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 ITOs 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 2018, the Consent to Assess Against Standards Rules 2011 and the Training Scheme Rules 2012 respectively. These rules were also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Rules 2018 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2018 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

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 2016. 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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