

**NZQA Monitoring Report  
Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre (8504)  
25 February 2015**

## **Executive Summary**

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) has carried out a detailed review of a range of Taratahi's programmes, and has identified no significant educational concerns with programme delivery, assessment or the validity of qualifications awarded.

Action is required to ensure that Taratahi's programme documents and the approvals given by NZQA are consistent with Taratahi's intended methods of delivery. Applications are already in progress for approval of all sub-contracting arrangements being used.

NZQA has sighted assessment evidence that supports the award of the Level 2 Agriculture qualifications to Taratahi staff members at the end of 2013. NZQA agrees with Taratahi's view that it would have been more appropriate for these awards to have been made through a formal 'assessment of current competency' process, rather than enrolment in a programme of study.

## **Background**

In August 2014, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) received information alleging that Taratahi had enrolled staff in its Level 2 National Certificate in Agriculture (General Skills) programme in late 2013, to compensate for students who had been expelled from the programme. It was stated that these staff members received recognition of prior learning and did not attend classes, but that Taratahi claimed full TEC funding.

In the course of preparing for a TEC review of the situation, Taratahi identified a number of programmes where delivery hours appeared to fall well short of the hours outlined in the respective programme approval documents. Taratahi engaged an independent educational consultant to undertake an initial 'verification audit', focusing on enrolment processes, programme effectiveness, assessment validity, and compliance with TEC/NZQA rules.

Deloitte (for TEC) and NZQA then conducted further reviews, informed by the findings of Taratahi's initial verification audit. Deloitte (for TEC) has prepared a separate report, which focuses on Taratahi's compliance with TEC's funding conditions. This report outlines the outcomes of NZQA's review in relation to educational quality.

## **Scope of NZQA review**

NZQA used two approaches to review Taratahi's programme delivery:

1. *Student file review*
  - 15 students were randomly selected from each programme.
  - The selected students' completed assessments were subject to a detailed review.
  - Qualification completion and reporting dates were checked.
  - Attendance records were checked.
2. *Programme structure review*
  - Current delivery methods were compared with the original programme document.
  - The annual programme report from 2013 was reviewed.
  - A detailed review of assessment methodology/ tools was undertaken.
  - Completed assessment material was sighted.
  - Other relevant documentation (e.g. student handbooks) was reviewed.

The student file review was carried out in conjunction with Deloitte's first review visit on 5–6 November 2014. Deloitte gathered a range of additional information about the sampled students, including enrolment information.

The programme structure review was carried out at a site visit on 4 December 2014. It focused particularly on programmes where the hours of delivery appeared (from Taratahi's own examination) to be significantly lower than approved.

Information was sourced from a range of documents as well as discussion with key staff.

Table 1 lists the programmes reviewed by NZQA, and whether they were subject to a student file review, a programme structure review, or both.

*Table 1: Programmes reviewed by NZQA*

| Programme  | Level | Credit value | Taratahi estimate of teaching hours/<br>Programme document teaching hours | Student file review | Programme structure review |
|--|-------|--------------|---|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Certificate in Agriculture                           | 3     | 149          | 1,032 / 1,000   | Yes                 |                            |
| National Certificate in Farming Skills (Work Ready)  | 3     | 120          | 720 / 806   | Yes                 |                            |
| National Certificate in Agriculture (General Skills) | 2     | 40           | 432 / 420   | Yes                 |                            |
| Certificate in General Farm Skills                   | 3     | 43           | 160 / 312   | Yes                 | Yes                        |
| Certificate in Rural Leadership                      | 3     | 52           | 45 / 240  | Yes                 | Yes                        |
| National Certificate in Fencing                      | 3     | 101          | 50 / 320  |                     | Yes                        |
| National Certificate in Fencing                      | 4     | 120          | 50 / 320  |                     | Yes                        |
| National Certificate in Horticulture                 | 3     | 106          | 86 / 260  |                     | Yes                        |
| National Certificate in Agricultural Contracting     | 3     | 69           | 156 / 300   |                     | Yes                        |

In addition to these specific programme reviews, NZQA examined the assessment evidence in relation to the Taratahi staff members who were awarded the National Certificate in Agriculture (General Skills).

## Findings

### Delivery mode

Taratahi uses a wide range of delivery modes across its programmes to cater for the needs of the target students and the specific demands of the programme. Examples of this diversity are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2: Description of delivery for a range of programmes*

| Programme                                      | Description of delivery  |
|--|--|
| National Certificate in Horticulture (Level 3) | On-line/distance learning with optional face-to-face workshops/tutorials and an emphasis on self-directed study. |
| Certificate in Rural Leadership (Level 3)      | Fortnightly workshop-based learning with collaborative challenges and community-based projects.                  |
| Certificate in Fencing (Levels 3 and 4)        | On-the-job learning alongside experienced practitioners with periodic visits from a tutor.                       |
| Certificate in Agriculture (Level 3)           | Full time residential delivery on site at an operational farm, including classroom sessions and farm sections.   |

Even within some programmes, different modes of delivery are available. For example, the Certificate in General Farm Skills has three main types of students:

- Students who are concurrently enrolled in one of Taratahi's other programmes, and are therefore studying full-time.
- People who are engaged in full-time employment, who 'pick and mix' the combination of elective programme content that meets their work needs, and whose programme is delivered by Taratahi contractors.
- Local farmers who participate in night-time classes.

NZQA considers that the mode of delivery being used in each programme examined is appropriate and educationally sound.

Work-based learning is a strong feature of many of Taratahi's programmes, and appropriately so. Students benefit from practicing the skills they are learning alongside experienced practitioners in a real-life situation. They experience the demands, discipline and challenges of a work environment, which prepares them for transition into employment.

The delivery of these programmes is more closely aligned with an apprenticeship/industry training model than a traditional classroom model. While students have relatively low contact hours with Taratahi tutors, they are nonetheless actively engaged in teaching and learning experiences that provide opportunity for them to gain, practice and demonstrate the required competencies.

During visits, the Taratahi tutor seeks feedback from the student's supervisor about their role and performance, conducts assessment of the student's competence, and provides guidance about ongoing skill development needs in relation to the programme requirements.

### **Hours of delivery**

Taratahi's estimates of teaching hours (as outlined in Table 1) do not provide a comprehensive picture of programme delivery, particularly in programmes where there is a significant on-the-job component. Students enrolled in these work-based programmes are undoubtedly engaged in a package of learning that reflects the credit value of the qualification and allows them to gain the necessary knowledge and skills.

The amount and type of instruction is based on the competency levels of the students and assessment is carried out when they are ready, rather than after a set number of hours. The

focus is on ensuring that students have met the learning outcomes, which is educationally sound.

It would be difficult to quantify exactly how many hours are actually 'delivered' in this type of learning environment. NZQA is confident, however, that the delivery of these work-based programmes is of appropriate magnitude for their respective credit value.

The National Certificate in Horticulture (Level 3) was approved as a distance programme, and the learning material is designed to be accessed online. Taratahi provides regular workshops and tutorials which students can choose to access if they wish to. Given that there is a wide range of students enrolled in this course, from people employed in the industry to retired 'hobbyists', the flexibility of this delivery approach is appropriate. Taratahi may need to reconsider the guidance it gives to students in its pre-enrolment information about the time commitment they make in enrolling for this course.

The discrepancy in teaching hours between the programme document and actual delivery is material for the Certificate in Rural Leadership. This is a 55 credit programme. The original programme document stated that teaching hours would total around 240. This programme is currently being delivered through nine fortnightly workshops of five hours each. Students are expected to attend all the workshops, and there is a minimum attendance requirement of 80 per cent, which is monitored. The workshops are supported by learning journals, group and individual projects and assignments over a five to six month period.

While the direct contact hours are lower than stated in the original programme document for the Certificate in Rural Leadership, NZQA has reviewed the content of the programme and does not consider that the reduced hours have significantly affected the effectiveness of this programme or rendered students' qualifications invalid. Taratahi has identified challenges with the programme through its own self-assessment processes and is currently considering the ongoing viability of offering it, given the impact of the targeted review of qualifications.

In 2014, Taratahi applied, and was granted approval, for Type 2 changes to the National Certificate in Agricultural Contracting. This included an amendment of programme duration, and revised documentation to reflect the part-time, blended, extramural nature of the programme. The approved programme document is now an accurate reflection of Taratahi's delivery, and is a good model for how changes could be made to bring the remaining programmes in line with NZQA approval.

## **Attendance**

At an organisational level, Taratahi is not currently complying with the requirement to maintain records of student attendance. Some tutors keep attendance records on an informal basis. Students participating in work placements are in small groups, and any non-attendance is therefore likely to be noticed and quickly followed up on.

Some new initiatives have been introduced in the last year, such as tracking and written documentation of tutors' visits to students out in the field.

Attendance tracking is an area that could be strengthened to ensure that Taratahi is compliant with NZQA and TEC requirements and has a full picture of each student's engagement with the programme.

## **Evidence of assessment**

Taratahi retention of completed assessment materials exceeds NZQA's minimum requirements (as set in the PTE Enrolment and Academic Records 2012). Assessment evidence was readily available for all selected students. This included both written (theory) assessments and completed checklists of practical assessments. There was sound evidence that students are completing the required assessments in all programmes examined.

## **Validity of assessment methodology**

Assessments covered both theoretical and practical aspects of the programme content. While literacy levels present a challenge for some students, it is evident that all students are expected (and supported as necessary) to complete the required written assessments. In some cases this involves maintaining a diary over a period of time. In other cases there are questionnaires covering the content of the unit standard.

Most practical assessments are recorded as checklists against the relevant unit standard. These checklists are well presented and include significant levels of detail about the required skills that are to be demonstrated. The checklists are supported by tutor manuals which provide useful information about the level of performance required. In some instances, assessors add commentary about the student's performance alongside the checklists, which is good practice and could be applied more widely across Taratahi's delivery.

Overall, the assessment material appears to comprehensively cover the content of the programmes. Assessor decisions were not moderated as part of this review.

## **Self-assessment**

While the scope of the review did not specifically include self-assessment, the second visit did present the opportunity to review some of Taratahi's annual programme reports from 2013. There were positive comments from students, staff and stakeholders, as well as areas for development which have been identified.

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) in 2011 resulted in ratings of 'Confident' in Taratahi's educational performance and 'Highly Confident' in Taratahi's capability in self-assessment. The next EER will be conducted in 2015.

## **Approval of sub-contracting arrangements**

It came to NZQA's attention in September 2014 that Taratahi is using a number of unapproved sub-contracting arrangements to deliver its programmes. This is currently being rectified through applications that have been submitted to NZQA for approval.

## **Award of qualifications to Taratahi staff members**

The National Certificate in Agriculture (General Skills) is a 42 credit, Level 2 qualification incorporating both theory and practical components such as the safe use of chainsaws and agricultural vehicles of various types.

Taratahi enrolled many of its staff members in this programme towards the end of 2013. These staff members predominantly already had the skills and knowledge covered by the qualification, through prior experience and having received informal training and professional development during their employment with Taratahi.

Each staff member achieved around 10–12 unit standards. NZQA reviewed all available student files in detail, and concrete evidence of assessment (including marked scripts and completed practical checklists) was present for 95 per cent of the unit standards awarded to these students.

On this basis, NZQA has confidence in the resultant award of qualifications. Taratahi has acknowledged that it would have been more appropriate for these awards to have been made through a formal 'assessment of current competency' process, rather than enrolment in a programme of study.

### **Summary and next steps**

NZQA considers that there are no significant grounds for concern about the educational quality of Taratahi's programme delivery or assessment, and is confident that past qualifications awarded by Taratahi are valid.

There are inconsistencies in some cases between Taratahi's current delivery methodology and the original programme approval document. Having given careful consideration to the delivery structure, NZQA does not believe that this is necessarily indicative of poor quality programmes. However, it is important that this be confirmed through a formal process of applying for NZQA approval of Type 2 programmes changes, where necessary. NZQA recommends that Taratahi give particular consideration to the Certificate in Rural Leadership.

It is noted that Taratahi's programme delivery is in a period of transition, with new qualifications following the targeted review expected to be rolled out in 2016. This should be taken into consideration by all parties in determining the most appropriate action to take with respect to Taratahi's 2015 programmes.

Applications are in progress for approval of all sub-contracting arrangements being used.