



# Report of External Evaluation and Review

ACG Norton College

Date of report: 27 April 2010

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# Purpose of this Report

*The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.*

## Brief description of TEO

Location: 345 Queen Street, Auckland

Type: Private Training Establishment (PTE)

Size: 285 students, all international, and 14.2 academic staff (full-time equivalents)

Site: Auckland

ACG Norton College (ACG Norton) is now part of the Academic Colleges Group (see [www.acgedu.com](http://www.acgedu.com)), having been first registered as a PTE in 2003. The campus at 345 Queen Street includes two other ACG establishments: ACG New Zealand International College and ACG English School.

ACG Norton College delivers the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) International Foundation Certificate (IFC) to international learners who wish to qualify for admission to degree courses with AUT or other universities that accept this certificate as part of their entry criteria. The qualification was developed by AUT, and ACG Norton effectively delivers the programme on behalf of AUT.

The International Foundation Certificate can be completed in eight, 12, or 16 months depending on whether the student's English language proficiency level, as determined by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), is 5.5, 5.0, 4.5 or equivalent.

Successful completion of the AUT International Foundation Certificate to prescribed grades guarantees entry to an appropriate AUT undergraduate degree. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has approved the AUT International Foundation Certificate for entry to all New Zealand's universities. The programme has also been approved for entry to selected Australian universities, including Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

# Executive Summary

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **ACG Norton College**.

The college has done very well by its learners in enabling 91 per cent of them over the past three years to be offered admission to degree or certificate courses at universities. Central to this achievement is very good teaching of English language skills. The college's programmes enable learners with initially low English language skills to progress quickly to university admissions standard. The programmes also support the development of study skills and knowledge of New Zealand. There is evidence that these skills enable the students to do well in their subsequent university studies.

The programmes are well matched to the needs of learners and other stakeholders. There is evidence from students that the programmes meet their needs and the teaching is engaging and effective. There is also evidence of effective communication with parents and sponsors of students, and with AUT.

AGC Norton provides a very good learning environment and there are good support services for students. The college supplies good information on the web and in handbooks, and students said they were well informed. There is a tutor group system and accommodation support and senior staff have an open-door policy. This focus on learner well-being has a positive influence on learner engagement and achievement.

AGC Norton is well managed and the clear purpose and direction of the college are understood and shared by staff and students. There is evidence that the plans, policies, and practices support the purposes of the college. This clear direction and purpose focuses decision-making and improves effectiveness.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **ACG Norton College**.

AGC Norton senior management have good systems for assessing the needs of international students and are very experienced and responsive in addressing these. The processes and practices at the college have evolved to improve the learners' experience of education and to achieve better outcomes. An excellent system of classroom observation and staff appraisal reinforces the primary importance of good teaching. A recent innovation includes professional development sessions into the pattern of the monthly staff meetings.

The system for student evaluations was recently improved by requiring all students to complete them at the end of each trimester rather than just the students in the graduating classes.

ACG Norton uses a web-based computer management system which enables all students (and their parents) to keep track of their progress. This system supplies very good

information on learner achievement to all concerned, and senior management monitors English language results closely.

Currently self-assessment arises out of reflective discussion between senior managers on outcomes and processes and the cost-effectiveness of staff practices. The managers then consult and make decisions, but there is no evidence of processes that would encourage staff and students to reflect on the data and the issues. That said, there is evidence that decisions and changes resulting from the present self-assessment system are relevant and worthwhile.

## TEO response

ACG Norton confirms the factual accuracy of this report.

# Basis for External Evaluation and Review

*Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of course approval and accreditation (under sections 258 and 259 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the course approval and accreditation criteria and policies established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act.*

*In addition, for registered private training establishments, the criteria and policies for their registration require self-assessment and external evaluation and review at an organisational level in addition to the individual courses they own or provide. These criteria and policies are set by NZQA under section 253(1)(ca) of the Act.*

*NZQA is responsible for ensuring TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses and/or registration. The Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQuality) is responsible, under delegated authority from NZQA, for compliance by the polytechnic sector, and 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 policies and criteria approved by the NZQA Board.*

*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](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)).*

# Findings

*The conclusions in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.*

*Information relevant to the external evaluation and review process, including the publication Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review, is available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>*

## Outline of scope

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of AGC Norton College was:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- Student support, including international students
- International Foundation Certificate.

## Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation

*This section provides a picture of the TEO's performance in terms of the outcomes achieved and the key contributing processes. Performance judgements are based on the answers to key evaluation questions across the focus areas sampled. This section also provides a judgement about the extent to which the organisation uses self-assessment information to understand its own performance and bring about improvements, i.e. capability in self-assessment.*

### 1.1 How well do learners achieve?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

#### **Context**

The overall measure of student achievement at ACG Norton is the learners' success in being admitted to courses at AUT or other universities. The primary goal is admission to a degree course. Certificate courses are offered to some who do not qualify for degree courses. All students study English: English 1 in the first semester and English 2 in the final semester. Students need to achieve a 65 per cent achievement rating (equivalent to IELTS 6.5) to be admitted to degree courses. They select one of three streams for the International Foundation Certificate: Business and Mathematics; Science; or Electronics and Engineering

For details of subjects in these streams see:

<http://www.acgedu.com/nortoncollege/index.php?section=23&actmnu=6>

### Explanation

As shown in the table below, over the three years 2007-2009 an average of 75 per cent of ACG graduates have been admitted to degree courses. The PTE did not offer any data comparing the results with other tertiary organisations, but these appear to be very good results.

Year	Admitted to degree course		Admitted to certificate course		No offer	
	Number	% of cohort	Number	% of cohort	Number	% of cohort
2007	46	68%	11	16%	11	16%
2008	64	88%	7	9%	2	3%
2009	86	69%	27	22%	11	9%
Totals 2007-09	196	75%	45	16%	24	9%

This data was compiled at the request of the evaluation team. Although it was readily available and management was aware of the importance of learner achievement, there was no evidence that the college had reviewed information in this form as part of self-assessment.

Self-assessment at ACG Norton involves mainly senior staff. Staff are consulted and learners complete course evaluations, but there was no evidence of processes enabling all the staff and learners to reflect on self-assessment information.

There is a lack of clear key performance indicators around student achievement. Informally the senior staff monitor the rate of progress in English carefully, as students who achieve less than 60 per cent in English in the first trimester have little chance of achieving the required 65 per cent in their final trimester. This monitoring has probably contributed to the very good levels of achievement in English language skills.

Tertiary Preparation Studies and Introduction to Culture and Society are compulsory subjects in all streams. Students can acquire the skills and knowledge they need for tertiary study and a wide understanding of relevant New Zealand issues. This is good information for students and adds value beyond what could be achieved by focusing solely on English language skills.



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

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

### **Context**

The main value to learners at ACG Norton is the access the course gives to university study. The college also provides a pathway for those who have attended other language schools, such as the ACG English School, to go on to tertiary study. AUT is clearly a key stakeholder as is the wider society that benefits from skilled people taking up employment.

### **Explanation**

The fact that 91 per cent of AGC Norton graduates over the last three years have gained admission to degree or certificate courses at universities is a significant and valuable outcome for both the graduates and the universities.

ACG Norton helps international students discover their academic strengths and weaknesses. Students choose from a range of optional subjects and the evaluation team heard of cases where students who were struggling with the subjects initially chosen were able to be redirected to other subjects and achieve success.

AGC Norton has an excellent system for encouraging punctuality in students. Latecomers are required to attend an early morning “catch-up” session the following day. Students told the evaluation team that “catch-up” was a great system and they appreciate the good discipline that has resulted. The evaluation team felt that the institution had a good tone and that the students were well mannered and keen to learn. It appeared that being strict on punctuality and having high expectations encouraged or resulted in good discipline in other areas.

AUT engages with stakeholders, including students, on an ongoing basis, particularly with the parents of Saudi Arabian students. About 30 per cent of students come from Saudi Arabia, many on government scholarships. The college liaises closely with Saudi Arabian consular staff in Canberra and devised the extended four trimester course largely to meet Saudi students’ needs. The college reports that Saudi Arabia values the pathway provided to university and the longer-term output of graduates.

AGC Norton could provide little data about the ongoing success and achievements of its graduates at AUT and other universities. Nor was there any data about subsequent employment as these aspects of the value of the outcomes were not part of self-assessment.

### 1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

#### **Context**

ACG Norton's programmes are well matched to the needs of students and AUT. Tutors check that examination materials and assessors' judgments are fit for purpose and consistent. The staff noted that they had good professional relationships with AUT staff in their subject areas.

#### **Explanation**

ACG Norton seeks to make its programmes relevant to the needs of learners. It has further lengthened the Extended three-trimester IFC programme to accommodate the needs of learners with a lower IELTS equivalent score, and has developed the Pre-Extended Foundation four-trimester course.

Senior staff sit on the AUT academic board which meets to approve admissions to courses. In 2009 none of the design students from ACG Norton were accepted by AUT because a new AUT staff member was unaware of the nature and history of the IFC programme. The students were instead admitted to other universities. AUT management and staff are taking steps to ensure this sort of misunderstanding does not happen again.

In 2009 senior management discussed professional development for all ACG staff on the ACG campus, including staff at Norton. A campus model was adopted with emphasis on using instructional techniques other than MS PowerPoint in the classroom. Students commented favourably on the teachers using less MS PowerPoint, so this development is matching their needs. That said, MS PowerPoint is well supported with a data projector in every classroom.

Students commented that the timetabling is not always focused on students' needs. Although there are gaps between classes during the day, it would seem that not all students are motivated to use the AUT campus for individual study. There is a plan to make more quiet space available on the ACG campus to better match the learners' needs.

As part of the close ties with AUT, Norton students are issued with cards entitling them to use AUT library and gymnasium facilities. AUT is only five minutes walk from the ACG Norton campus.

## 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

### Context

ACG Norton uses a web-based computer management system (CMS) which enables all students (and their parents) to keep track of their progress. Learners are given feedback through classroom activities, test results, and through discussions with tutors.

There is a culture and expectation that homework will be set and reviewed.

### Explanation

There are excellent relationships and interactions between learners and teachers at ACG Norton. This was evidenced by comments made to the evaluation team and more importantly from the scores and comments made in the students' course evaluations. These positive relationships foster the students' engagement with learning.

The students reported that their assessments were valid, fair, and consistent. In a few cases there were some issues about the timely return of scripts after tests and examinations, but they have been resolved.

English language skills are taught using very practical methods. Students reported that the English teaching was a real strength of the college. English skills were made relevant in all the subjects they studied which enhanced their learning.

Teaching methods at ACG Norton respect and cater to different cultural backgrounds. Although students from China (41 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (31 per cent) dominate, all classes have a mix of nationalities. Students noted the advantages of mixing with other nationalities, evidence that staff manage an inclusive learning environment very well.

## 1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

### Context

ACG Norton has a website and provides a pre-departure manual for students to use before they leave for New Zealand. Induction arrangements include facilitating visas online. The welfare and accommodation handbook is comprehensive and includes a section on culture shock and a directory of helping agencies.

There are three full-time support staff including a homestay and accommodation officer. Students are given the contact number for the accommodation officer, who is available to assist students 24 hours a day.

All students at ACG Norton are assigned to a tutor group. The tutor meets formally with each student three times each trimester. At the first meeting the parties agree on a set of

learning objectives. The second meeting is informed by a report on the student's achievement on assessments, and a third formal meeting helps prepare the student for the examinations at the end of term. There are also opportunities for informal meetings before and after classes.

### **Explanation**

Study information on the web and in handbooks is comprehensive and up to date. ACG Norton issues a complete reprint of the student handbook every term. Senior management said they visit each class mid-term to discuss the requirements for admission to AUT. Students noted that they had no difficulties accessing the information they needed and appreciated the open-door policy of senior staff.

ACG Norton responds to students' specific needs. Between the support staff and the academic staff they are able to offer most students support in the student's own language. Classes are timetabled so that Muslim students can attend the Mosque on Friday afternoons. This support fosters well-being, engagement, and achievement.

There was no evidence of a system for making anonymous suggestions. While most students said they were happy to speak directly to staff, some would have preferred the opportunity to submit suggestions or complaints anonymously.

## **1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?**

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

### **Context**

Academic Colleges Group is headed by a board comprising academic and community leaders. There is an academic sub-committee and the seven principals of the New Zealand colleges meet quarterly. ACG aims to attain excellent academic outcomes from quality teaching and providing a superior quality of service. The academic registrar has responsibility for all international student matters including the Code of Practice. Currently the principal of AGC Parnell College is acting principal of the Queen Street campus which includes AGC Norton, although a new campus principal has been appointed. Campus staff meetings are held monthly. These have been dominated by management information in the past, but recently staff development topics have been discussed.

### **Explanation**

The message from management that the function of the college is to help students gain entry into AUT is clear and positive. Staff are closely involved in programme delivery, student support, and liaison with AUT. There was evidence of staff sharing their learning with other teachers, working hard to deliver support to their tutor groups, and working closely with AUT staff in drafting and marking examinations. Staff were a little confused about finer details such as which manager they should see for particular issues, but the evaluation team noted that this is not unusual in smaller organisations. The manager's

open-door policy allows staff to have their queries answered quickly, but staff suggested that having a full-time campus principal would clarify roles.

The communication of information to staff was generally sound. Those who were more proficient at using the computer management system were happier with the quality and timeliness of information. There were some complaints about students joining classes at the last minute, but this practice is not uncommon in many educational organisations at the beginning of the academic year.

Staff induction experiences varied. One noted that although the process was “a bit patchy” other staff were always willing to fill any information gaps. Another felt the induction was thorough as they had been given a “buddy” and a mentor and learned the important information about the organisation in the first few days. Some assessment of the induction process could help to better tailor it to the needs of new staff. Another area where self-assessment could improve is in obtaining feedback on the performance of ACG Norton graduates at AUT and involving staff in reflecting on how that data could inform improvements.

There were some observations by staff that may need more thorough self-assessment to develop options and improvements. Staff commented that the mix of two and three trimester timetables meant that some staff had few weeks clear of classes. Staff also identified a concern with increasing class sizes. They viewed a class size of 15-17 students as optimal, but some recent classes have numbered more than 25. Better self-assessment would provide feedback on the effects of changes and help develop commitment to agreed solutions.

Observation of classroom teaching is very well done at AGC Norton. An AGC staff member does all the classroom observations across all the educational organisations in the group. Staff said they respected this observer and valued the reports he generated and the speed of his feedback.

Senior management are very experienced and manage unpredictable change well. At the time of the EER, the managers were still in discussion with a sponsor who had requested the admission of a large number of students. This process gave the evaluation team a good insight into ACG Norton’s handling of the wide range of issues involved.

# Statements of Confidence

*The statements of confidence are derived from the findings within and across the focus areas. A four-step scale is used: highly confident, confident, not yet confident, not confident.*

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **highly confident** in the educational performance of **ACG Norton College**.

Key reasons for this are:

- Very good learner achievements, in that 91 per cent of all students over the last three years have been offered degree or certificate courses at universities
- Excellent English language teaching which enables students to achieve the scores they need for admission
- Firm yet fair discipline systems, typified by the “catch-up” system, which encourage and enable student achievement and instil skills that are useful in further study
- ACG Norton offers a range of programmes which enable students to identify their strengths.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **ACG Norton College**.

Key reasons for this are:

- ACG Norton senior management is continually assessing the needs of international students and addressing them
- There is an emphasis on good teaching with a regular system of observation and appraisal and reflection on student course evaluations
- The computer management system supplies very good information on learner achievement to all concerned and senior management monitors English language results closely
- Processes for the assessment of the outcomes for students need review, particularly the longer-term outcomes of success at university and employment
- Current self-assessments practices allowed limited opportunities for staff and students to contribute their reflections to self-assessment
- Actual improvements resulting from the present self-assessment system are relevant and worthwhile.

# Actions Required and Recommendations

## Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's regular scheduling policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that ACG Norton develop its self assessment practices to:

- involve all people in the organisation in self-reflective processes and
- capture longer-term outcomes of its graduates at university and employment.

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