

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Abacus Counselling, Training and
Supervision Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 30 May 2012

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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.

Introduction

1. TEO in context

Name of TEO:	Abacus Counselling, Training and Supervision Limited (Abacus)
Location:	8 Pompallier Terrace, Ponsonby, Auckland
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	2004
Number of students:	Domestic: seven equivalent full-time students (EFTS)
Number of staff:	Nine staff, eight in Auckland
Scope of active accreditation:	No accreditations currently held
Sites:	One in Auckland
Distinctive characteristics:	<p>Abacus was formed in 2002 with four directors, who are employed as full-time managers in the areas of human resources, training, research, and quality assurance. The quality assurance director is based in Wellington. The directors are also trainers and supervisors for the company, which offers training in alcohol and drug harm minimisation and provides supervision services. Two of the full-time staff (the Asian and consumer representatives, respectively) also provide training services for the company. The remainder of the staff form the administration and support team.</p> <p>Abacus contracts a range of services to government organisations such as the Accident</p>

Compensation Corporation (ACC), the Counties Manukau District Health Board (CMDHB), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and more recently the Earthquake Commission New Zealand (EQC), and a large multinational company in the primary industry sector.

Previous quality assurance history: Abacus had a successful audit from the Ministry of Health in 2009 and a successful external evaluation from the Counties Manukau District Health Board Project (CMDHB Project) in 2010/2011.

Other: The majority of the training is undertaken off site at stakeholders' workplaces during trainees' paid employment time. Courses are from part-day to two days in length, depending on identified need. Attendees do not pay individually for training and receive certificates of attendance, as there is no formalised assessment and moderation process.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The focus areas selected were the mandatory focus area of governance, management, and strategy, the CMDHB Project, and the Problem Gambling Interventions Training programmes. The CMDHB Project was selected as it has been in operation since 2007, received an external evaluation from the Centre for Social and Health Outcomes Research and Evaluation (SHORE), Massey University in 2011, and has been central to the self-assessment plan developed by Abacus for this external evaluation and review. Including the CMDHB Project as a focus area also offered an opportunity for Abacus to evaluate outcome indicators for its training, a self-identified area for further analysis. The Problem Gambling Interventions Training programmes provide a wide range of subject areas for the targeted training offered by Abacus to the problem gambling sector,

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the web document Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction>. 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.

The evaluation team comprised two lead evaluators and occurred over one day at the Abacus head office in Auckland. The team spoke to the human resources, training, research, and quality assurance directors face to face, and by telephone to the Abacus consumer representative educator and counsellor and eight stakeholders who were representative of the course focus areas of the CMDHB Project and the Problem Gambling Interventions Training programmes. These stakeholders included Māori, Pasifika, refugee organisation representatives, managers, and trainees. A range of documentation, including the SHORE Evaluation of Drug and Alcohol Workforce Development Programme One report to Counties Manukau District Health Board, reports to the Ministry of Health, and a 'relationship folder' containing stakeholder feedback, was sighted by the evaluation team.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Abacus Counselling, Training and Supervision Limited**.

Abacus meets all the requirements of a highly functioning organisation. The organisation shows near to 100 per cent completion rates for the training offered across all courses. Abacus has a very wide range of contracts, including counselling individuals, a national supervision contract with a large government organisation, and ongoing contract work with large corporate organisations around compliance with drug and alcohol legislation in workplaces. An area of strength is the ability to work with a diverse range of health sector clients, such as nurses, social workers, and general practitioners, and offer training integrating theory and practice through the use of real-life scenarios and tapping into clients' experiences.

The evaluation team received overwhelmingly positive feedback from all the stakeholders contacted, including managers and trainees, as to the usefulness, timeliness, relevance, quality of delivery, and calibre of the training received through Abacus. The directors bring a unique mix of skills, previous shared work experience, and collective passion to the company. They all hold Master's-level qualifications, and the research director has a doctorate. In addition, they are actively involved in postgraduate study to maintain their academic currency and to inform the development of up-to-date, relevant training resources and standards of supervision. External accountability is made possible through membership of appropriate professional associations, such as the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, New Zealand Association of Counsellors, Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa, the Nursing Council NZ, and the New Zealand Psychological Society. These organisations provide codes of ethics, practice standards, resources, educative links, processes for complaints, and collegiality.

Abacus employs a 'strengths-based' approach, evidenced by the four director portfolios (human resources, training, research, and quality assurance). The directors have worked proactively for a decade to develop and enhance working relationships with each other and the people in the sectors they contract into. An essential part of the strengths-based approach was the employment of a consumer representative, who provides personal experience that is integrated into the training.

The directors balance innovation and continuity and have a breadth of expertise which is highly regarded across the alcohol and drug sector, evidenced by stakeholder feedback and the ongoing contracts they have been able to secure in a fiscally difficult environment. The organisation is a 'working model' of a cross-discipline approach to working with gambling addiction and alcohol and drug harm minimisation. It is uniquely placed to champion current government initiatives around alignment of the various service providers that consumers interact with. Its understanding and commitment to the transformative power of building and growing

good relationships at all times and with all people, underpinned by the latest research evidence, impressed the evaluation team as an excellent platform for the continuation of the highly effective training and continuing leadership in the alcohol, drug, and addiction sectors.

Both the staff of Abacus and external stakeholders described an organisation that was 'good to work for and with', 'walked the talk', was 'culturally aware', encouraged professional development, and worked from an evidence base.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Abacus Counselling, Training and Supervision Limited**.

Abacus undertakes pre-training needs analysis to establish shared agreements regarding training outcomes between trainers and trainee organisations, systematically reviews training needs during training and makes adjustments as required, and collects and analyses post-training feedback to inform future training content and delivery. Debriefing occurs after all training sessions, which enables immediate reflection and analysis by trainers. In addition, stakeholders spoken to by the evaluators noted that Abacus feeds back the summative training assessments to them and initiates conversations about this feedback. The organisation works with internal and external clients from shared values of respect and responsiveness underpinned by personal integrity.

Abacus has adopted an evaluative systems model which values outcomes and building good relationships, and has a cycle of ongoing improvement encompassing relevant up-to-date research, well-written training materials, and innovative and effective delivery methods. The organisation has a range of carefully selected associates who work with them, further developing their connectedness to the community.

Challenge and support is available through regular 'supervision', a structured process of reflection on a person's experience of their work, professionally and personally. Supervision is a well-understood expectation of professionalism in the social service sector, and all staff, including the directors, have regular supervision.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do trainees 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 **Excellent**.

Abacus is in the fifth year of the CMDHB Project. The project sits within the context of CMDHB's 2006-2010 action plan for mental health and addiction services, which aims to increase the preventative focus of addiction services as well as to develop community-based services in partnership with community providers. SHORE was contracted by CMDHB to conduct an evaluation of two alcohol and drug (AOD) programmes between May 2010 and January 2011. The SHORE report evaluated programme one, implemented by Abacus.

The aim of the SHORE evaluation was to assess the quality of the implementation of the programme and to assess the extent to which short-term outcomes had been achieved. The short-term aims of the programme were to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence, and attitudes of trainees in relation to AOD-related issues, practices, and actions. The survey findings showed that the programme positively increased trainees' perceptions of their skills/abilities, confidence, and attitudes in relation to AOD issues and related practices/actions. The SHORE report concluded that the programme was successful in achieving these intended short-term outcomes.

Completion rates across all programmes at Abacus are close to 100 per cent. The Problem Gambling Interventions Training programmes take many forms depending on the organisation being trained. Abacus trains a wide range of stakeholders from non-specialist AOD organisations such as probation and refugee services, engineering firms, and churches. It also trains AOD specialist organisations such as CareNZ and the Salvation Army Bridge programme; consumer organisations such as Challenge Trust; health and medical providers such as Plunket, medical centres, hospitals, occupational health nurses, Tiaho Mai (Middlemore Hospital Mental Health); and Māori-based services such as Raukura Hauora o Tainui, Mahitahi Trust, and Waipareira Trust (South Auckland Wraparound Service). The diversity of trainees and training needs has made Abacus very adept at tailoring programmes to meet the specific needs of trainees and their organisations, leading to high completion rates.

The SHORE report and Ministry of Health reports produced by Abacus, as well as stakeholder feedback and interviews with staff at Abacus, confirmed to the

¹ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

evaluation team that the quality of the training offered by Abacus is of the highest standard. It is informed by the needs, context, and relationships developed between trainers and trainees, an analysis of the latest literature relevant to the training, and ongoing review and discussion with trainees, trainers, and the contracted organisation before, during, and after training. Successful training outcomes are also enhanced by the professional approach adopted by the directors and other staff at Abacus.

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

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 **Excellent**.

Abacus has diversified its business opportunities over the last decade to both meet new challenges and build variety into its training portfolio. The organisation has done this by building on its existing extensive networks and developing relationships across sectors that traditionally operate in silos. The systems-model approach followed by Abacus has led to effective interventions, such as a programme where youth offenders and their parents attended together. In this way, the family received the same information and training which enabled them to support each other after the training was completed. One such programme with youth offenders had no recidivism six months later.

Abacus uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate outcomes from programmes. The organisation has considerable knowledge and experience of working with social science indicators and research. This expertise means that Abacus has assisted agencies in regard to their outputs and outcome data and the best way to use this data to more accurately represent valued outcomes, in contrast to the data driving interventions. In one instance, the organisation was able to guide staff around the best way to input data to capture important information and also mentored staff to record data appropriately.

Stakeholder feedback, staff interviews, and the evaluators' discussions with Abacus staff showed that they are individuals who enjoy people and understand and work hard at relationships within and outside the Abacus team, with the aim of creating respectful long-term relationships. This approach has led to contracts with diverse organisations where Abacus has shown the ability to successfully engage with people from diverse personal and cultural backgrounds, such as a programme initiated in 2008 where Abacus was contracted by CMDHB to develop the capability of Penina, a Pasifika mental health service provider, to deliver a range of AOD-related services.

Abacus' staff are a multi-talented team who are open to others' input, determined to 'make a difference', and who openly share resources and information. For example, Abacus does not copyright its material. The organisation's outreach into the local

and national community is extensive and it is regarded nationally as a leader in the alcohol, drug, and addiction services.

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

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 **Excellent**.

Abacus' business is closely aligned to stakeholder needs. All contracting undertaken by Abacus follows the pattern of evaluating the needs of the individual or organisation to be trained, planning and delivering the training, reviewing the training as it is happening, making any required adjustments, and comprehensively reviewing the programme with all stakeholders at completion. Many contracts require detailed reporting of results and outcomes.

Abacus maintains contracts by being very responsive to stakeholder needs, having training outcomes that are clear and measurable, and being well informed by the latest research. This was confirmed for the evaluators by feedback from the trainees spoken to, by trainee evaluations of the delivery and design of programmes, and by stakeholder comments about the reasons Abacus was their 'trainer of choice'. Examples of activities matching the needs of trainees are the delivery of separate training to Pasifika (fono), Māori (hui), and Asian provider forums.

Another example is the programme for youth and parents delivered in the evenings, mentioned in section 1.2 above. Originally, Abacus planned to supply meals for the trainees only, but as the parents were often coming straight from work to the training they decided to extend the meals to parents as well. Evaluations of this training mentioned this as being generous and helpful for the learning process. In this programme, baseline evaluations of knowledge and expectations are completed by all participants at the beginning of the programme. This is supplemented by participants writing up the 'best' and 'worst' aspects of each evening's training. This information is read and analysed by the trainer each week and used to make adjustments and modifications before the next training session. Other training programmes contribute towards professional development requirements for some trainees, for example with the Nursing Council NZ, indicating external recognition of the credibility of the training offered.

1.4 How effective is the training?

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 **Excellent**.

The key findings from the SHORE report were that Abacus trainers took a collaborative approach, allowing them to contribute their diverse knowledge, skills, and experience to the programme. Staff had specific roles, allowing them to lead different aspects of the programme. The collaborative approach allowed the team to have input into programme development and delivery.

Abacus met the targets specified in the CMDHB contract and delivered a significant volume of training in the first three years of the programme. There was wide-ranging evidence of programme staff using multiple strategies to ensure programme activities were responsive to local needs, experience, skills, and roles, supporting the conclusion that programme activities were appropriately informed by local context. Trainees surveyed rated the training highly in terms of relevance, usefulness of content, and quality of facilitation and delivery.

Staff are supported through annual performance reviews which inform the team's professional development for the year. Staff meeting times coincide with the monthly management meeting schedule and the annual general meeting, which occurs mid-year. In this way, the free flow of information is enhanced between staff and management.

The Abacus consumer representative supports the 'rehabilitative' as opposed to the 'punitive' approach to harm minimisation. This staff member, with personal determination and the active support of Abacus, has progressed from undertaking part-time contract work for Abacus to being a full-time employee. In addition, the consumer representative has become well qualified and is involved in developing ethical frameworks around peer support for consumer advisory roles, an area of considerable growth.

The SHORE report found that the contribution of consumer knowledge and experience in the development and delivery of programmes was regarded by stakeholders as having had many positive impacts across programme design, content, delivery, and impact. Training was delivered to specialist and non-specialists and has been very successful in stimulating demand for AOD training, particularly from non-specialist organisations. Anecdotally, there is unlimited demand for AOD training in the community. However, there is limited resourcing for AOD workforce development, and Abacus is considering a more targeted approach to the delivery of the training in the future.

The SHORE report also found that the education and training content at Abacus was appropriate, accurate, and up to date and that staff delivered the content in a way that reflected the values and models on which it was based, particularly by following a motivational, strengths-based, enabling approach. Delivery was

informed by appropriate theories of learning and behavioural change and principles of adult learning.

Further evidence of training effectiveness was found in the Abacus Relationship Folder, containing feedback from training. The evaluation team sighted specific, focussed feedback from managers and trainees, from a wide range of organisations, all very complimentary about the content, delivery, and responsiveness of trainers to trainee needs.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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 **Excellent**.

Abacus understands the importance of relationship-building to successful training or interventions with clients. The SHORE report found evidence that the investment in relationship-building supported the high levels of training uptake achieved under the programme, as well as the level of trust and satisfaction that stakeholders reported in Abacus as a provider of AOD training and with the training itself. In addition, staff built relationships that reflected values of trust, respect, honesty, communication, transparency, and commitment to long-term relationships.

Stakeholder feedback consistently reported that Abacus was always looking to improve training and to make courses more relevant, and staff were available to answer questions and were open to different options to improve delivery. Trainees are provided with pre-course training materials and reported that the training was focussed but flexible and that if they needed extra assistance this was willingly provided.

Although not a focus for this report, Abacus has an extensive nationwide supervision contract with a large government organisation that contracts 50 supervisors who have, over time, supported up to 1,000 supervisees. They also provide mentoring post-training as a way to support small groups and individuals after they return to their respective workplaces. This fits well with one of the recommendations from the SHORE report that transfer of learning longer term requires ongoing advice and support. It also enables Abacus to encourage and facilitate interagency connections as it works across many different organisations who share many of the same goals.

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

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 **Excellent**.

The governance and management structure at Abacus has strong leadership, clear purpose and direction, engages widely and effectively with the relevant sectors, anticipates and responds to change, and uses the results of self-assessment to guide and develop the business plan and strategic direction. There is an annual review of policies and procedures and the Abacus training manual is reviewed as part of this process. The annual business plan records quality improvement projects and these are reviewed and discussed at the mid-year annual general meeting. Every three years a strategic plan is generated.

As part of discussions prior to this external evaluation and review, Abacus identified that while an evaluation of the quality of the training is incorporated into most contracts, this was not the case for all training initiatives and that Abacus does not always know the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners, after training is complete. While repeat business and recommendations from others who had used the services were reasonable indicators of quality, Abacus decided to develop an action plan to address this issue. Some of the actions, such as written trainer feedback after each training session and reviewing trainer performance at annual staff performance reviews, are already occurring. Other actions have yet to be fully implemented. These include developing a questionnaire to be sent to trainees and stakeholders a couple of months after training to assess whether the training had been useful and was able to be integrated into their work, and follow-up contact to assess the level of integration of previous training prior to developing additional training resources.

The CMDHB action plan signalled the intention to support consumer-led and peer-delivered services, with the aim of enabling AOD consumers to be more actively involved in their recovery. The growing emphasis in the sector is on early and brief interventions, delivered by non-specialists, to prevent the progression of addictive symptoms. The idea is that intervention can occur at different levels or stages of problem development, and not only once problems have become severe. This leads to a 'stepped care' model of service delivery which seeks to match service level and type to need. The capability of both the specialist and non-specialist AOD workforce to undertake appropriate screening and referral at each step is important and central to the idea that stepped care can focus specialist services on those in most need. Abacus is well aligned with these developments through the consumer representative on staff, links with colleagues, and awareness of the latest research into consumer-delivered services.

Every six months Abacus provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the latest AOD research to the Ministry of Health. Abacus is at the forefront of government initiatives to maximise the effectiveness of interventions for consumers

by aligning services to meet individual needs, and acknowledging co-existing problems.

Abacus is also involved in moves to contribute to the professionalism of the AOD sector by championing the development of tertiary AOD qualifications, establishing AOD practitioner competencies and their registration with the Addiction Practitioners' Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Abacus responds to training needs and models good practice in all aspects of its business. The directors have complementary skill sets and are actively engaged in upskilling themselves and their staff. They contribute to the professionalism of the sector by continuously improving the quality of the training they offer through effective self-assessment, including ensuring that training resources and methods are supported by reputable, relevant, up-to-date research. The strengths-based approach allows Abacus to develop genuine relationships with all stakeholders that enable the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

2.2 Focus area: Counties Manukau District Health Board Project (CMDHB Project)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

2.3 Focus area: Problem Gambling Interventions Training

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review, other than those expressed or implied within the report.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of programme approval and accreditation (under sections 249 and 250 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the Criteria for Approval and Accreditation of Programmes established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act and published in the Gazette of 28 July 2011 at page 3207. These policies and criteria are deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under the new section 253.

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 programmes they own or provide. These criteria and policies are also deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under section 253. Section 233B(1) of the Act requires registered PTEs to comply with these rules.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or 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 EER process 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).

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/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>

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