Report of External Evaluation and Review

Avatar Institute of Learning

Not Confident in educational performance

Not Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 9 November 2010

Contents

MoE Number: 7687

NZQA Reference: C02362

Date of EER visit: 31 August 2010

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

Location:	Bell Block, New Plymouth
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	February 2005
Number of students:	Domestic: 24 equivalent full-time students (EFTS) International: None
Number of staff:	One full-time equivalent
Scope of active accreditation:	Community Support Services to level 3
Sites:	Main site only
Distinctive characteristics:	Avatar Institute of Learning (Avatar) was established out of a perceived need to have a PTE in the region offering this training after the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT) stopped offering these certificates. Avatar is co-located with the Maida Vale Retirement Village, the Mountain View Rest Home, and the Woodrow Grove Hospital.
Recent significant changes:	Avatar did not have a tutor at the time of this review. A new tutor was due to start on 27 September 2010.
Previous quality assurance history:	NZQA's previous quality assurance of Avatar was by way of audit in April 2008. Avatar did not have any students enrolled at the time, so the audit provided only a snapshot of the proposed process.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Avatar covered community support service training and the mandatory focus area of governance, management, and strategy.

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 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 external evaluation and review team, comprising an NZQA lead evaluator and an external evaluator, spent a day at Bell Block visiting the Avatar site. During the visit the team met with the managing director, the clinical services manager, and two students. The evaluation team contacted a former tutor and some other students by telephone. The evaluation team viewed key documents, for example course evaluations, publicity material, student files, and the quality assurance document.

Avatar Institute of Learning has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and the submissions received have been fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Not Confident** in the educational performance of **Avatar Institute of Learning.**

Avatar achieves poor completions and qualification rates for its learners. The institute is funded for 24 EFTS, but of the five who worked through the National Certificate in Support of the Older Person, four completed the course and qualification and three of these have been registered with NZQA. Figures for the National Certificate in Community Support Services (Foundation Skills) indicate that nine of the ten learners completed the course, but only six completed the qualification and just four learners have had it registered. Successful course and qualification completion indicates a learner's readiness for employment, further learning, or community engagement.

Longer term outcomes such as employment, further study, and community involvement are still largely aspirational for Avatar learners at this stage due to the lack of consistent teaching. It is to be hoped that this situation is turned around soon so that learners become more positively engaged with tertiary education.

The training programmes at Avatar are not being carried out in accordance with the accreditation granted. There was evidence that the teaching hours for trainees were only 3.5 hours per week, whereas the accreditations granted by NZQA specify average weekly teaching hours of ten or 12. Also, the Foundation Skills course was offered as a 12-week programme, whereas accreditation was granted based on 24 teaching weeks in a 26-week programme. Deviations from the formally agreed NZQA course delivery parameters need to be approved prior to delivery of the programme.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Avatar Institute of Learning.**

Avatar has yet to develop comprehensive, authentic, transparent, and robust processes for self-assessment. A start has been made with the self-assessment summary sent to the evaluation team after the review visit, but self-sustaining information collection processes will need to be developed to make this effective.

As an example, it was difficult for the evaluation team to establish course outputs during the visit as there was no clear system for collecting data. Systematic collection of results is important for learners' motivation and for the organisation's self-assessment.

Although the director was confident that there were many employment opportunities both within the Maida Vale complex and the wider region of North Taranaki, there were no formal records of where trainees were employed. Again, a record of these outcomes would be part of good self-assessment.

Once some self-assessment systems are in place, it should be possible for staff to reflect on the information and arrive at evidence-based conclusions and decision-making that will

feed into strategic business planning, positive change, and relevant and worthwhile improvements.

TEO response

Avatar Institute of Learning does not confirm the factual accuracy of this report.

Findings[1]

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Learners at Avatar achieve poor results. Of the five who worked through the National Certificate in Support of the Older Person, four completed the course and qualification and three of these have been registered with NZQA. Figures for the National Certificate in Community Support Services (Foundation Skills) indicate that nine of the ten learners completed the course, but only six completed the qualification and just four learners have had it registered. It was difficult for the evaluation team to establish these results during the visit as there was no clear system for collecting data. Systematic collection of results is important for learners' motivation and for the organisation's self-assessment.

Longer term outcomes such as employment, further study, and community involvement are still largely aspirational for Avatar learners at this stage. Although the director was confident that there were many employment opportunities both within the Maida Vale complex and the wider region of North Taranaki, there were no formal records of where trainees were employed. Again, a record of these outcomes is part of good self-assessment.

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 **Adequate.**

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

The aspirational outcomes for Avatar should have value for the learners themselves, improving their employment opportunities, job security, and possibly remuneration. Unfortunately, at the time of the EER there was no tutor and trainees faced an uncertain future. There was evidence that some were distressed by the prospect of not completing qualifications. Being unable to complete qualifications may lower the motivation of trainees for their current studies and discourage them from engaging with further training.

Having a supply of trained people will be of value to the occupants of retirement villages, rest homes, and hospitals in the region. There is evidence of increasing demand for carers. Immigration New Zealand's Immediate Skills Shortage List includes the occupation "Registered Nurse (Aged Care)".

Developing courses and instructional materials will be of value to the learners and the people they care for. Avatar had hoped to use instructional materials developed by

---

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

Careerforce (the industry training organisation (ITO) for health and disability workers), but these are only available to learners who enrol directly with the ITO. The director has been exploring other avenues and may develop, as a trial, a blended learning course on infection control which would be of value to Avatar and potentially to other providers. This could be a valuable innovation.

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 **Adequate.**

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

Avatar has the potential to meet community and regional needs and provide good educational pathways. The director has a wide network of people in the aged care community and is well aware of the changing needs of the sector. An advisory group, which includes residential stakeholders, has been formed and is due to have its inaugural meeting in October 2010. There is some evidence to show that work-based training on site using the Maida Vale care facilities is making learning relevant and meaningful for trainees. Avatar can provide skills and abilities of continuing relevance.

The training programmes at Avatar are not being carried out in accordance with the accreditation granted. There was evidence that the teaching hours for trainees were only 3.5 hours per week, whereas the accreditations granted by NZQA specify average weekly teaching hours of ten or 12. Also, there was evidence that the Foundation Skills course was offered as a 12-week programme, whereas accreditation was granted based on 24 teaching weeks in a 26-week programme. Deviations from the formally agreed NZQA course delivery parameters need to be approved prior to delivery of the programme.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

Teaching effectiveness has been variable at Avatar. There is evidence from student evaluations that the tutor who left Avatar earlier in 2010 was effective and learners valued the one-to-one time with her. Unfortunately, the replacement tutor, who left in mid-August 2010, was less effective. She did not produce lesson plans; nor were there any student evaluations of her work available. Learners spoken to by the evaluation team compared her unfavourably with the previous tutor and some were still consulting the previous tutor to help them with their studies. There was no tutor on site at the time of the evaluation, and the new appointee was not due to join Avatar until 27 September, creating a gap of six weeks in the provision of teaching. Engagement with learning is more likely where there are positive relationships between learners and tutors.

Assessment of learning at Avatar relies on the high standards of individual staff. For the Foundation Skills course, Avatar used the assessments provided by Careerforce but there

was no evidence of pre-moderation of the actual assessments used. There was also no evidence of internal post-assessment moderation, although Avatar did participate in external moderation with Careerforce and NZQA in 2009. Staff who assessed learners in 2009 had completed appropriate assessment training and qualifications. The qualifications of the present cohort of assessors have yet to be reviewed and verified. Avatar has not engaged with Careerforce and NZQA in 2010 for external assessment. Valid assessment is important, especially when it leads to the award of qualifications.

The self-assessment of the effectiveness of teaching at Avatar is in its early stages of development. The student evaluation form used for the initial courses needs review and development, and procedures for internal moderation need to be addressed. Effective self-assessment and reflection on data obtained should be the primary means of improving Avatar's educational performance.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

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

Learners are not well guided at Avatar. Although they receive information at their pre-course interview and during induction, and from the student handbook, the evidence from students interviewed by the evaluation team was that the current learners lacked guidance and support. Issues include:

- ineffective communication of procedures for assessment of prior learning

- inability to complete the qualifications they have started

- conflicting advice on course length, cross-credits, and amount of workplace practice time required

- lack of guidance on how learners can complete their studies and proceed to further training.

Learners need timely and accurate advice to help them make appropriate study decisions and improve their chances of completing qualifications.

Systems for supporting learners at Avatar need improvement. Learners reported that they have not received the support and direction they need. There was no evidence of assessment of special requirements, such as literacy and numeracy skills or study skills. Improvements to procedures, including questions on evaluation forms about academic support and pastoral care, could help Avatar learn how to meet the needs of its learners. Learners are more likely to succeed when ongoing support is provided and used.

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

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

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

Avatar aspires to be an educator, but this aim is not shared throughout the organisation. There was little evidence of student-oriented purposes being arrived at or communicated to the whole organisation. The training institution is part of Maida Vale Retirement Village and the associated Mountain View Rest Home and the Woodrow Grove Hospital. Staff in these three organisations, although willing to help students with information and supervision, did not appear to understand the purposes of Avatar nor were they involved in the TEO's systems. Thus, normal training processes, such as feedback on workplace learning, were not evident. Better understanding of and support for the aims of Avatar and more involvement of staff may aid self-assessment and increase effectiveness.

While some policies are clearly written, these are not reflected in processes. For example, Avatar's various training outlines for the teaching of the NCCSS (core competencies) do not match the delivery schedule approved by NZQA.

Recruitment and development of staff could be improved. There has been only one tutor position at Avatar, but three different tutors in 2010. This is evidence of staff not being valued enough and that the accountability for student learning is not generally shared in the organisation. There was no evidence of performance management processes for the tutor and perhaps consequently, there was a lack of understanding of roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities both by tutors and the training manager. Clear assignment of responsibilities and accountabilities to roles can contribute to organisational improvement.

Avatar could improve its processes for anticipating and responding to change. The organisation lacks a clear plan for producing training courses for the level 3 qualifications it has been accredited to teach. The Careerforce materials are not available and so resources, lesson plans, and assessments will need to be developed. Avatar did not have a plan for providing ongoing training when the last tutor left in early August. Learners will have been without tutor assistance and support for at least six weeks before the new tutor is in place. This lack of anticipation and timely response to change can diminish the effectiveness and credibility of the establishment.

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 **Poor.**

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

2.2 Focus area: Community Support Service Training up to level 3

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

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

Recommendations

There are recommendations implied or expressed in the above report but in particular NZQA recommends that Avatar:

- develops a self-assessment system

- provides comprehensive and timely study information and advice effectively

- ensures that training programmes comply with specified parameters of accreditation, and

- develops a staffing strategy

Further actions

Because NZQA is Not Confident Avatar's educational performance and Not Confident in Avatar's capability in self-assessment, NZQA will contact Avatar to agree appropriate actions aimed at the organisation achieving a level of at least Confident in educational performance and capability in self-assessment

Progress toward improvement will be monitored by NZQA and a further EER scheduled at an appropriate time.

Appendix

Regulatory 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 (ITP Quality) 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).

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/

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E eeradmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz