



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Avatar Institute of Learning

Confident in educational performance

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 2 August 2011

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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. Avatar in context

Location:	917 Devon Road, Bell block, New Plymouth
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	February 2005
Number of students:	Domestic: 20 International: nil
Number of staff:	Two
Scope of active accreditation:	National certificates in community support services – Foundation Skills (level 2), Core Competencies (level 3), and Residential (level 3)
Sites:	Avatar is also delivering courses at the Opunake Cottage Hospital.
Distinctive characteristics:	Avatar Institute of Learning (Avatar) was established because of a perceived need to have a PTE in the region offering this training after the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki 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:	A new tutor and a part-time training manager have been employed since September 2010.
Previous quality assurance history:	First EER conducted 31 August 2010. NZQA was not confident in either the educational performance or the capability in self-assessment of Avatar Institute of Learning.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Avatar covered community support service training as this is the sole training area, 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 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 EER team comprised a lead evaluator and an external evaluator. During the one-day visit to the New Plymouth site, the team met with a director, the owner, the training manager, the tutor, and students on the Core Competencies programme. The team also viewed a range of documents.

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

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is Confident in the educational performance of Avatar Institute of Learning.

Learners at Avatar complete formal qualifications. About 60 per cent of the trainees who enrolled on programmes since September 2010 achieved the qualifications. This compares very favourably with the Careerforce (industry training organisation) average for 2009 of 27 per cent. For many Avatar learners, these are the first qualifications they have achieved and they are now equipped for employment.

Graduates who complete courses gain employment and engage with further study. Learners have had to work in the industry to develop the skills needed to gain the qualifications, and all the trainees retained are in either full or part-time employment. Over 60 per cent have progressed from level 2 to the level 3 certificate. All of these learners are working at least part-time. These employment opportunities benefit the learners greatly as many are coming off benefits and looking to develop themselves and plan careers.

Learners acquire useful community care skills and knowledge and develop their cognitive abilities. There was evidence from the manager, tutor, and students that the students have developed practical skills and now know they can succeed at study.

There is good evidence that Avatar is meeting many of the most important needs of learners and is contributing to developing a community care workforce. The processes that contribute to learning and the wider outcomes are generally sound. This effective training has only been underway for eight months, so the number and consistency of outcomes is only sufficient to justify a judgement of confident at this stage.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

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

Self-assessment is only just beginning at Avatar. For example, Careerforce achievement data was not included in Avatar's self-assessment information. Some data has been collected, such as results for recent courses, benchmarking data on other local providers' student evaluations, and file notes on a couple of cases where English language difficulties have led to withdrawals. However, there was little evidence of analysis or of governance and management reflecting on this information to make improvements in educational performance.

TEO response

Avatar Institute of Learning has confirmed the factual accuracy of this report.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

Learners at Avatar complete formal qualifications. Of the 31 students who have been enrolled to study since instruction recommenced in September 2010, 21 (68 per cent) have continued studying. Fifteen of these students (70 per cent of those retained) have completed the Foundation Skills national certificate programme, and five have completed the Core Competencies qualification. There are currently 16 learners still studying towards the latter certificate. This means that about 60 per cent of the trainees who enrolled on programmes since September 2010 achieved the qualifications. This result compares very favourably with the Careerforce average for 2009 of 27 per cent. These are good results and are on a par with other local providers. For many Avatar learners, these are the first qualifications they have achieved and they are now equipped for employment.

Graduates gain employment and engage with further study. Learners have had to work in the industry to develop the skills needed to gain the qualifications, and all the 21 students retained are now employed either full or part-time. Sixty-two per cent of them have progressed from level 2 to the level 3 certificate, and there are a number of workers who are keen to enrol when Avatar starts delivering the level 3 Residential certificate. Employment opportunities benefit these learners greatly as many are coming off benefits and looking to develop themselves and plan careers.

Learners acquire useful community care skills and knowledge and develop their cognitive abilities. There was evidence from the manager, tutor, and students that the students have developed practical skills and now know they can succeed at study and acquire practical and useful patient care skills. They are enjoying their new knowledge and skills and are keen to continue.

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

Self-assessment is only just beginning at Avatar. Although results for recent courses were available, there was little evidence of analysis or reflection to discover what Avatar could learn from the results so far. For example, it was clear to the evaluation team that Avatar needs to look at its enrolment procedures to ensure that prospective students have the English language ability needed to cope with the demands of the course and the special demands of medical language and communicating with elderly patients. Better enrolment procedures would increase the chances of all student completing courses.

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

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

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

Trainees at Avatar clearly value the training opportunity they are getting, which are of value to the community care industry. The trainees interviewed were enthusiastic about the opportunity to undertake an inexpensive course that:

- got them back into learning
- opened up a pathway to getting a job through a positive process
- eased them back into work as their work experience led to paid shift work
- gave them the skills and knowledge to work in an industry where there is a demand for trained caregivers
- improved basic skills such as spelling, leading to greater self-confidence.

Avatar makes a strong contribution to community life in that the community is better off when the elderly get the best possible care. There was evidence from the management of improved care in the wards where the students were working. There were fewer falls and fewer skin tears. Having caregivers that apply procedures with knowledge and patience is seen to be making a difference.

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

The training manager had gathered some benchmarking data on other local providers, but it was not clear what Avatar understood from this data. Avatar also had data on graduate destinations and workplaces. With these exceptions, the evidence for the findings on the value of the outcomes was gleaned by the evaluators rather than identified by any formal Avatar self-assessment. There is little graduate data, perhaps because staff feel it is too early for any trends to be apparent. Certainly there was no analysis that might lead to improvements. Avatar's informal self-assessment meets minimum expectations as far as could be determined.

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 learning environment at Avatar is inclusive. The trainees told the evaluation team that the programme of one six-hour training day complemented by at least eight hours of work experience each week worked very well for them. The tutor catered for their individual needs and visited them during their work experience shifts to assist their development. The trainees and the tutors said that the supportive environment enhanced their achievements.

The programmes reflect changes in subject content, resources, and technologies. There was good evidence that the new tutor brought current good practice to the programme. The

learners told the evaluation team that their training was very relevant to the workplace and they appreciated learning about a range of equipment as sometimes the newest gear was not fitted in some workplaces. This sense that their training is keeping pace with change gives the trainees confidence in its relevance and effectiveness.

Engagement with stakeholders is somewhat inconsistent. Avatar has the advantage of being co-located with a retirement village, a rest home, and a hospital. Avatar is providing training for the Opunake cottage hospital and staff liaise with the district health board and other caring institutions. A more formal mutual exchange of ideas through a well-constituted advisory committee could be advantageous. The industry training organisation, Careerforce, is clearly a stakeholder. The tutor has good links with Careerforce with respect to moderation, but the relationship at management level needs to develop, probably through better direct communication. Better engagement with stakeholders could be mutually beneficial.

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

Self-assessment of how well Avatar matches the needs of learners and other stakeholders is just beginning. There is evidence that trainees' progress is monitored and their need for feedback is met. However, some assessment of enrolment procedures would be useful. A wider range of stakeholders should be identified and their needs surveyed and analysed with a view to improving the extent to which Avatar's courses match their needs.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

Staff and trainees at Avatar relate effectively to one another. It was clear from the trainees and the staff that the trainees trusted the staff implicitly and felt secure in sharing their aspirations and doubts with the staff. Each classroom day begins with a review of trainees' recent clinical experiences, issues, and concerns. Trainees felt secure, and the staff were strong advocates for the trainees' interests. These positive relationships between the trainees and the staff and among the trainees assists their learning.

The learning environments are planned and structured for the benefit and needs of the trainees. The trainees appreciated that they could work at their own pace, with the tutor available to give them extra help when they needed it. The training manager has started using the Tertiary Education Commission online literacy assessments and the tutor is working to enhance literacy and numeracy levels by using the real situations that arise in the classroom and during work experience. Trainees reported that the environment at Avatar has a positive impact on their well-being, motivation, concentration, and cooperation.

Learning activities and resources are effective in engaging learners. Trainees reported that they had opportunities to apply their learning and in many cases could "learn by doing". There are good resources for the students and a good balance between theory and practical work. The institute is part of a site that includes nearly all aspects of elderly care, so the

trainees are surrounded by the work and can be involved in many different activities. The staff enhance the trainees' learning by making it interesting and relevant.

Assessment provides trainees and staff with useful feedback on progress. The tutors' assessments have been moderated by Careerforce. Fourteen out of 16 assessments over nine different unit standards met moderation, and Careerforce reports that Avatar is "on the right track". Further, as the class is small, the tutor is able to mark assessments quickly and give the trainees almost immediate feedback on their progress and understanding. This contributes to improved learning and teaching.

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

As the new training order was only established in September 2010, self-assessment of teaching effectiveness is only just starting. Several student evaluations have been collected. The tutor has been peer reviewed by a well-qualified tutor and learning plans are available for all the unit standards that are taught. Staff have reviewed alternative suppliers of assessment material in response to trainees' comments that they are sometimes confused by questions in the Careerforce assessments. The tutor has participated in local moderation workshops where the post-moderation of Avatar assessments has been checked and approved.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

Trainees are supplied with comprehensive study information and advice. Students interviewed were very happy with the ongoing advice and support they were receiving. There is a good student handbook and trainees are well aware of their responsibilities and rights. This timely and accurate advice is making it more likely that trainees at Avatar will complete their studies.

Avatar now has a tutor and a training manager who give good support to the trainees, and the trainees support each other. Despite the wide range of ages and abilities in the class, the trainees clearly work together and assist each other to learn. The staff have created an inclusive family atmosphere.

Continued support is provided to assist learners to complete the programme. Staff and trainees keep records of progress and each trainee has an individual learning plan. The training manager has conducted initial literacy tests and is working with the tutor to build the trainees' literacy. Progress tests have not yet taken place, although staff and trainees considered that the literacy of the trainees was improving.

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

There was evidence of improved documentation in completed student handbook checklists and the student evaluation forms. However, self-assessment of student guidance should include analysis of data from trainees who withdraw or do not complete the course for other reasons. While the training manager had compiled file notes on a couple of cases where English language difficulties had led to withdrawals, a more comprehensive process is needed if self-assessment is to lead to improvements in this area. Although there was evidence of good individual learning plans, longer-term career planning was not in evidence. As Avatar grows better systems for gathering student support, this information will be required.

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

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

The purpose and direction of Avatar is not clear. The director has a vision of providing the best training for caregivers. The staff felt that the purpose was to give caregivers the courage and integrity to provide the best care. The mission statement has Avatar enabling “students to gain professional qualifications for community focused careers”, and uses Avatar as an acronym for “Aim for Victory with Aptitude by Tenacity for Accomplishment and Reward”. More clarity of purpose could focus decision-making and improve effectiveness.

The management of Avatar is effective but, although staff are very supportive, there was evidence that communication between management and training needed to be improved. For example, staff were confused to find that they could not report results for two Maida Vale staff members. These students were enrolled in Diversional Therapy through the industry training organisation but are studying the Core Competencies, which are part of the wider qualification, through Avatar. Better communication and delegation could make the organisation more effective.

As the new training staff have only been operating since September 2010, many management processes are only just beginning. Physical resources are being improved, although there does not appear to have been assessment of whether the part-time training manager has enough hours to complete the work required. The quality management system needs restructuring to align it better with a self-assessment approach and needs updating

The tutor attends many health-related conferences for professional development and is a member of the Practice Review Panel for the New Zealand Nurses Organisation Nursing Journal which keeps the tutor in touch with contemporary nursing practice.

Anticipating and responding to change is still problematic for Avatar governance and management. As noted above, the advisory council could be broadened and Avatar management needs to engage with its industry training organisation. This would give the

governance team better information about emerging change and assist planning and decision-making.

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

Avatar governance and management have had a long experience and success with medical and health audits. However, this experience seems to make it difficult to adapt to the evaluative approach. While data and information about trainees is now being gathered, there is little evidence of robust data analysis, reflective processes involving all the people in the organisation, and decision-making that is logically connected to the outcomes of this self-reflective process.

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 **Adequate**.

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

2.2 Focus area: National certificate in Community Support Services Courses

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends, in addition to those recommendations implied or expressed within the report, that Avatar Institute of Learning:

1. Develop selection and enrolment procedures, especially with respect to literacy.
2. Build capability in assessing the value of the longer-term outcomes of Avatar training.
3. Establish an advisory group with clear responsibilities.
4. Build capability in robust data analysis and reflective processes involving all the people in the organisation to drive improvements in educational performance.

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 non-university TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses 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 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/>*

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