

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Avatar Institute of Learning

Not Yet Confident in educational performance

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 17 April 2013

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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:	Avatar Institute of Learning (Avatar)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	917 Devon Road, Bell Block, New Plymouth
Delivery sites:	Nil
First registered:	9 February 2005
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Certificate in Health, Disability, and Aged Support (Core Competencies) (Level 3 and Level 4)• National Certificate in Health, Disability, and Aged Support (Residential) (Level 3)
Code of Practice signatory?:	Not applicable
Number of students:	Domestic: Less than 15 per annum International: nil
Number of staff:	1.25 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Core Generic (to level 2)• Civil Defence Emergency Management Response (to level 2)• Civil Defence Operation (to level 2)• Community Support Services (to level 4)• Community Support Services (to level 4)

- Core Health (to level 3)
- Core Health (to level 3)
- First Aid (to level 3)
- Health and Disability Principles in Practice (to level 4)
- Interpersonal Communications (to level 2)
- Occupational Health and Safety Practice (to level 2)
- Older Persons' Health and Wellbeing (to level 4)
- Personal Financial Management (to level 3)
- Supporting People with Disabilities (to level 3)
- Workplace Emergency Risk Management (to level 2)
- Workplace Fire and Emergency Response (to level 3)
- Other standard consents to assess

Distinctive characteristics: All present learners of Avatar Institute of Learning are employees of Avatar Management, a company that has directors in common with Avatar Institute of Learning. Enrolment with Avatar is a requirement for employment with the related entity for these learners. Avatar is co-located in the same premises as Maida Vale Retirement Village.

Recent significant changes: Since the last external evaluation and review (EER) in 2011, Avatar has engaged a training manager consultant to redesign systems and programmes. The consultant is no longer actively providing services. Avatar has also engaged a new tutor, and recommenced delivery in September 2012 (having not delivered any training earlier in 2012).

Previous quality assurance history: NZQA conducted a first EER of Avatar in 2010. NZQA was Not Confident in both the educational performance and capability in self-assessment of Avatar at that time.

NZQA conducted a second EER of Avatar in 2011. NZQA was Confident in Avatar's educational performance and Not Yet Confident in its capability in self-assessment.

Other:

The evaluation team was informed by the Avatar executive director that the delivery that commenced in September 2012 was a restart of Avatar's educational provision, and therefore current performance potentially was not directly comparable to previous evaluation results. A new programme, new tutor and different type of cohort of learners were the reasons given for this.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The agreed scope of the EER was twofold:

- Governance, management and strategy
- Programmes of delivery (i.e. the National Certificate in Health, Disability, and Aged Support (Core Competencies) (Level 3); and the National Certificate in Community Support Services (Residential) (Level 3) – replaces the National Certificate in Health, Disability, and Aged Support (Residential) (Level 3).

Governance, management and strategy is a mandatory focus area. At the time of the evaluation, Avatar had four enrolled students (three of whom had just completed one qualification, the National Certificate in Health, Disability, and Aged Support (Core Competencies) (Level 3). All four were enrolled in the next programme of delivery, and it was therefore possible to consider all programmes within the scope of this evaluation.

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 a lead evaluator and a senior evaluation advisor. The evaluation began on 21 January 2013 but was adjourned later that day

because of the justified absence of a key staff member. The evaluation recommenced on 4 February and was concluded on 5 February 2013.

During the visits the evaluation team meet with:

- The Avatar executive director
- The course tutor (and only full-time staff member)
- Three students.

The evaluation team also contacted via telephone a further student, a representative from Careerforce Industry Training Organisation, and past and present senior staff of Maida Vale Retirement Village, who were able to comment on the skills development of students/employees. The evaluation team also visited the Maida Vale complex and was able to briefly view the learning/working conditions of students.

During the course of this evaluation the team also received, and undertook a succinct overview analysis of, Avatar's key documentation. This included quality management documents, strategic planning documentation, course delivery information (including 2013 planning), student records, student and staff evaluations, student assessments and other learning materials. These materials were in addition to the summary of self-assessment (and related documents) provided by Avatar prior to the site visit.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

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

There is some evidence that Avatar is meeting the most important needs of learners, but there are some significant gaps in performance that need to be addressed.

Current learners are achieving qualifications and learning outcomes that are likely to enhance their existing work and future employment opportunities, by increasing their knowledge, skills and self-esteem. Such learning is valued by current students and by the staff and management the students work with at Maida Vale Retirement Village and related hospitals. The current cohort of four students has either already completed or is highly likely to complete their qualification successfully, which is a good outcome for them.

However, a significant educational performance gap exists in relation to programme design and development. In sum, planning on how delivery is to occur, when assessments should occur, and ensuring the optimal mix of learning approaches (class, practical, self-directed, etc) is missing. The gaps in planning extend to delivery gaps, and it is unclear how elements such as self-directed learning are fulfilled, which undermines teaching effectiveness. Management has the responsibility to address these matters and ensure there is appropriate resourcing (staffing and other) to provide a quality educational offer.

For these reasons, although the current cohort of four students has enjoyed success, NZQA cannot be confident that the incoming cohort of trainees will experience the quality of education to which they are entitled, and is therefore Not Yet Confident in Avatar's educational performance.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

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

Avatar's self-assessment is not sufficiently comprehensive to address priority areas.

Findings relating to key evaluation questions raise a number of concerns in relation to performance. Further, there is little evidence that Avatar has, in the first instance, self-identified the range of shortcomings that are evident (and are referred to above and within this report). Mitigation strategies to deal with these shortcomings have not been put in place. Moreover, a more proactive approach to

self-assessment – beyond meeting external requirements – is required to continuously lift the performance of Avatar.

In 2011, Avatar made some start on an improvement plan, but this was not sufficiently 'owned' by key staff and followed up on consistently. Avatar now needs to revisit such approaches and take responsibility for the process and results. Further, Avatar's directors/governors need to take responsibility for monitoring this improvement process and for ensuring that key issues are self-addressed in order to fulfil the organisation's strategic plan and its responsibilities to learners.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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 **Adequate**.

Current learners at Avatar successfully complete formal qualifications and acquire industry-useful information and knowledge.

Avatar recommenced delivery in September 2012 with four (full-time) students, undertaking a level 3, 57-credit qualification. At the time of the evaluation (January/February 2013), three of the students had demonstrated competencies against all required unit standards, and the fourth was completing assessments against one remaining unit standard. A full success rate for the first cohort is confidently expected.

In addition, both students and senior staff at the Maida Vale Retirement Village complex submitted in interviews that the completion of these qualifications had resulted in the acquisition of useful skills and greater workplace knowledge by the students. Examples of the application of this new knowledge were given, including trainees taking effective leadership roles in the workplace, thus demonstrating the skills they had gained.

These findings also align with the stated aim of the programme as explained by Avatar's executive director, and in the strategic documentation. Two students also submitted that the programme had increased their personal self-esteem and confidence and overall work-readiness.

Avatar demonstrates strong learner achievement, although this may not be replicable for future cohorts. This is because there is a lack of effective delivery planning (detailed in section 1.3). The tutor's view was that the current successful results reflect, in part, the high prerequisite knowledge and skills of current students, which were unusual and would not necessarily be present in the next cohort of learners (i.e. existing learners had already achieved qualifications above the level of study they were engaged in with Avatar). However, this general awareness of future challenges to learner achievement is not demonstrated in Avatar's summary of its internal self-assessment, and requires greater attention.

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**.

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

Learning outcomes are highly valued by learners and other key stakeholders, and relevant groups of stakeholders, including staff of Maida Vale, are well informed and consulted on the Avatar educational offer. Further, both learners and stakeholders agree that the skills and knowledge gained meet a significant need and therefore represent a valued outcome for both groups.

Avatar's executive director submitted that the institute was established to upskill staff to improve Maida Vale's services and ensure better care for aged/ailing residents, and that it was fulfilling this purpose. Current successful learning outcomes, lack of alternative provision in the region and national research showing the need for this training support these views of its value and usefulness. These views were directly supported in interview submissions from students and senior clinical staff on the value of the training to the sector. A stakeholder working group has also been formed and is used to guide developments. A functional working relationship also exists with Careerforce (i.e. Avatar purchases and uses Careerforce external assessor and assessment resources). For these reasons, this evaluation takes a positive view of the value of the outcomes achieved.

(Supplementary note: all students at Avatar Institute of Training are also employees of Avatar Management Limited. Avatar Management is contracted to provide services to Maida Vale Retirement Village, where the institute is located. The executive director of Avatar Institute of Learning is also the executive director of Avatar Management Limited and Maida Vale Retirement Village. Notwithstanding, the evaluation team is confident that staff interviews were robust and free of conflict, and that national evidence of the need for this form of training was comprehensive and accurate. It is also noted that interviewing hospital residents at Maida Vale was determined to be beyond the methodology of this EER.)

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 **Poor**.

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

There are serious deficiencies in the approach Avatar uses to match programmes and activities with learner needs. In particular, there are shortcomings relating to

ensuring programme design is regularly reviewed and kept up to date, to ensure appropriateness in content, teaching practice and resourcing.

The level 3 programme now offered by Avatar was developed by a training manager, who, at the time of the evaluation, was not actively engaged by Avatar. This meant the tutor was given sole responsibility for finalising elements to be included in delivery, along with the actual teaching delivery (although the extent of her duties was unclear).

The evaluation team found that the education on offer lacked clear planning and resourcing. In particular, Avatar was unable to produce a teaching plan for the immediate past course (beyond a basic time schedule of unit standards to be offered), or for the two proposed courses scheduled to commence within 10 working days of the EER visit. That is, it was unclear what was to be taught to fulfil unit standard criteria, what resources were to be used, how long learning exercises were to take, what were/are the self-directed learning components, how were/are these to be completed and then monitored or reviewed, and how practical components actually link with the theory aspects of unit standards.

In addition, neither the tutor nor director could sufficiently explain how the hours of learning (said to be over 20 hours per week) were being completed by the students. That is, the balance of classroom, mentoring, self-directed and workplace learning was unknown. There were also discrepancies in the time allocation for classes between interview comments and documentation. This situation creates a high risk of not meeting the expectations of the students. For example, students in the coming cohorts need to know in advance the dates of key assessments and key assessment requirements, as well as the resources they need to successfully complete their learning.

Despite the significance of this issue, the Avatar self-assessment information does not identify programme development as a key concern, and the above issues are not covered. This highlights the need for more robust self-assessment in this area. It is not clear that Avatar Management has invested sufficient resource and personnel into this area to ensure effective matching of programme development to the needs of learners. Further, this creates risks to teaching effectiveness, and ultimately to learner achievement.

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 **Poor**.

Although Avatar's teaching practice requires greater planning and resourcing, on balance it is adequately delivered by a capable tutor drawing upon industry standard assessment approaches and materials.

The tutor has both subject content expertise (a nursing qualification and experience) and an adult education qualification, and some background teaching experience. Other staff at Avatar Management also hold the 'assessor' unit standard, 4098, to ensure they are able to assess learners in various speciality areas (these people are called preceptors). Students said the tutor demonstrated a high level of content knowledge and good rapport, which was conducive to their learning. They noted the tutor's ready availability as a particular strength, and the availability of preceptors as another strength of Avatar.

However, the students also indicated that greater classroom content was required, and in some areas – such as the delivery of specialist Māori-orientated standards – Avatar needed to draw on a greater range of tuition services to ensure the adequacy of delivery. The tutor agreed with this assessment, although this type of reflection is not evident in the summary of self-assessment activities. In this context, greater planning of delivery (as discussed under 1.3) is required to improve teaching effectiveness.

Avatar draws on Careerforce assessment resources and assessors to support its delivery. This has strengths, including consistency of approach and greater assurance of meeting industry standards; however, Avatar has not yet developed its own robust internal moderation processes, as well as peer review and educationally orientated support processes for the sole tutor. These gaps reduce confidence in teaching effectiveness.

There are no significant external moderation issues arising, and assessment samples reviewed indicate that assessment practices are fair, valid and transparent. However, Avatar needs to ensure it retains sufficient student assessment records to demonstrate its assessment practices beyond immediate delivery (i.e. assessment materials used to reach this particular finding were fortuitously provided by students).

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

Students are not provided with comprehensive study information and advice, but they are provided with continued assistance and opportunity to achieve in their studies, and experience a range of useful learning environments; some effort is made by Avatar to reduce barriers to learning.

While students are provided with a handbook on their responsibilities to others and to Avatar, they do not receive sufficient information on Avatar's obligations and commitments to the students. For example, information on the full structure of programmes, how to have any concerns addressed and how to get advice of the

fees and related employment bonding scheme offered by Avatar Management is not clearly provided. Student interviews confirm a lack of clarity in these matters.

As a result of its co-location within a residential aged-care and hospital facility, Avatar has a unique opportunity to provide ongoing practical placements for learners. This is positive and a key strength of Avatar's educational offer. However, the tutor was not able to assure the evaluation team that learners had access to a wider range of learning environments outside of their immediate work duties (as employees of Avatar Management). This matter needs to be addressed and reflected on in self-assessment processes, which should include ensuring there is a sufficient delineation between work-based training (and methods to reflect on the practical learning that occurs) and regular employment duties that are indirectly contributing towards further gains in learning outcomes.

Avatar uses an initial student literacy and numeracy assessment to ensure potential learners have the appropriate prerequisite capabilities. This is good practice in ensuring that unique learner needs are identified. Relationships have been developed with potential support people (retired educators resident in the Maida Vale complex) in case they are required to further assist the learners. Again, this is good practice, and a systematised approach is the next step to advancing these types of activities (for example, ensuring students are informed of the possibility of accessing these services).

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

Governance/senior management have developed a clear organisational purpose for Avatar, seek to respond to change, and focus on ensuring the necessary management policies are in place. However, not all the directors of Avatar are fully engaged in educational matters. Further, a greater focus on the educational, rather than purely business, aspects of Avatar is required at a managerial level, including increased support for both the tutor and the learners.

The Avatar executive director provides a clear strategic plan for the PTE, and the evaluation was able to view a set of related quality management documents used to support delivery. Overall, this written and oral information was positive, showing the strategic approach and direction of Avatar. However, there was some disconnect between documents, and further review is required. For example, the executive director could not explain how a 2011 educational improvement plan had been drawn on (if at all); and some positions of responsibility at Avatar as outlined in the quality management documents no longer existed (for example, there is no training manager).

The management documents also did not accord with the strategic plan, which was produced just prior to the evaluation visit, and evidence of robust governance discussions on educational matters was also absent. Despite these gaps, overall, the package of governance/managerial documentation and oral information presented is likely to be sufficient to assist Avatar to establish a clear organisational purpose and direction, balance innovation and continuity, and appropriately respond to change.

Avatar has four directors, although only one actively participated in this evaluation, and only one has submitted the necessary attestations to NZQA. The executive director submitted that she had sole responsibility for the training. This situation places a risk to the ongoing operations of Avatar. There was also a lack of self-assessment of governance responsibilities, as shown in both documentation and interviews. Notwithstanding, the executive director submits that there are no matters of legal or ethical concern, no complaints with any external bodies, and that Avatar is financially stable. Avatar's related entity, Maida Vale Retirement Village, also had a recent positive audit by the Ministry of Health.

Greater self-assessment focus is required on educational delivery. There is, for example, no clear programme of support for the sole tutor, or suitable contingency arrangements should the tutor or executive director not be available to address educational matters. This creates risks for students. Learning resources for the tutor were also unclear and not sufficiently managed. For example, Avatar indicated that student access arrangements had been made with local libraries, but management had not ensured that these libraries held resources useful to the learners, or that they were utilised by the learners. More managerial attention to matters such as this are required – as well as improvements to programme design processes, as noted earlier. Such improvements will assist Avatar to achieve the goals it has set for itself within its strategic planning documentation.

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 **Poor**.

2.2 Focus area: Programme of delivery

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

It is recommended that:

1. Avatar develop clear programme planning and resources guides for management, tutors and students. These should include information that explicitly clarifies: how long learning exercises are to take, what are the self-directed learning components, how these are to be completed and monitored or reviewed, and how practical components link with the theory aspects of unit standards. Breaking down hours of learning to show classroom, mentoring, self-directed and workplace learning is also required, along with clarity as to the resources to be used to deliver each module of learning.
2. Avatar develop its own internal moderation processes, and peer review and educationally orientated support processes for the sole tutor.
3. Students be provided with comprehensive study information, including clarification of the delivery expectations they can expect from Avatar. This should include, for example, hours of tuition to be expected, the full structure of programmes (including key assessment dates), how to have any concerns addressed, and how to get advice on the fees and related employment bonding scheme offered by Avatar Management.
4. Avatar undertake further self-assessment to reflect on and address the issues raised within this report, and any other relevant matters. This should also include ensuring that planning, management and course design and review documents align, and that all directors are aware of their full responsibilities and duties under the Education Act 1989.

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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