



# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Vet Nurse Plus Ltd

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 27 September 2011

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MoE Number: 7841  
NZQA Reference: CO4957  
Date of EER visit: 22 and 23 June 2011

# 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:	128 Great South Road, Manurewa, Auckland
Type:	Private Training Establishment
First registered:	2007
Number of students:	Domestic: 35 equivalent full-time students
Number of staff:	Four full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	Vet Nurse Plus Certificate in Veterinary Nursing (level 5)
Sites:	Albany, North Shore, Auckland
Distinctive characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivers one full-time course, two other courses by distance education, and continuing education seminars</li><li>• The only provider in the greater Auckland area of a one-year Certificate in Veterinary Nursing at level 5</li><li>• Certificate students on average spend three days a week in class and two days a week on placements in veterinary clinics</li></ul>
Recent significant changes:	Reopened Albany site to cater for increased student numbers.
Previous quality assurance history:	At quality audit in 2009, Vet Nurse Plus met all but two requirements of the then-quality standard, QA Standard One. The unmet requirements related to late submission of the appropriate financial records, mainly due to the new appointment of a financial controller

who was unaware of the timeframe.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

In accordance with NZQA policy, the mandatory focus area of governance, management, and strategy was included in the scope. The Certificate in Veterinary Nursing was selected as it is Vet Nurse Plus's main course. It is a one-year, full-time level 5 course and is the only NZQA-approved course offered by the institution. The third focus area of Introductory Animal Care was selected because it is one of the two courses delivered by distance education. It is a part-time, pre-vocational course designed for people preparing to enter the animal care industry.

## 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 was conducted over two days by two lead evaluators. The evaluation involved engagement with:

- The operations manager
- The manager of clinical studies
- A member of the board of directors
- Tutors
- Two classes of students on the Certificate in Veterinary Nursing programme
- Individual students on the Introductory Animal Care programme
- External stakeholders and former students from both programmes.

Vet Nurse Plus Ltd 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 **Vet Nurse Plus Ltd.**

The graduates and students met by the evaluation team were uniformly positive about the high standards being achieved. The pass rate figures for the last three years for the Certificate in Veterinary Nursing reinforced this impression. Vet Nurse Plus is achieving high retention rates in this course, with figures ranging from 81 per cent to 93 per cent from 2008 to 2010.

Achievement rates are only part of the story, as the students gain expertise in skills tailored to veterinary clinics. To a large extent, these skills are acquired during the two days a week students are placed in clinics during the year. The placements also help their employment prospects as shown by the detailed figures kept by Vet Nurse Plus. By September 2010, for example, all of the graduates from the previous year had employment and 80 per cent were employed as veterinary nurses.

The board of directors has a very active role in the employment outcomes as many of its directors are practising veterinary surgeons and it has very close links with the Pet Doctors group of veterinary clinics. The board takes a proactive stance on many issues and this is particularly evident in the business plan. The strategies that have been developed are a good balance of innovation and continuity. However, the evaluation team gained the impression that communication needed to be improved so that staff members have more certainty and input into short and medium-term planning.

Vet Nurse Plus has a wide network of links with the industry and with the students which ensure that close attention is paid to ensuring the courses match the stakeholders' needs. The high level of involvement with the placement clinics, the Pet Doctors group, and the advisory board provides a structure for checking the effectiveness of the programmes and activities.

The process of checking the students' needs starts at the enrolment stage where a thorough interview takes place and continues through a residential camp, learning styles analysis, the comprehensive literacy and numeracy test, and the clinics. Student satisfaction levels are consistently very high, as shown by survey results for the Manurewa campus in 2010, which ranged from 91 per cent to 96 per cent. Students from the Introductory Animal Care course who were interviewed by the evaluation team were also satisfied with their course.

The practical approach and the standard of teaching are recognised as valuable by both students and employers. The standard of the teaching could be raised even higher if the appraisal system was more formalised. The small size of Vet Nurse Plus benefits the students, as they are known individually by the staff and can be given support tailored to their needs. The one-to-one interviews held three times a year are a major element of support, as is the additional help provided to the certificate students by staff in the clinics.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Vet Nurse Plus Ltd.**

Rigorous self-assessment was evident in the certificate course. Effective systems were observed by the evaluation team in the form of benchmarking across the years and the responses to the feedback provided by veterinary clinics on the work skills of the graduates and the current students on placements. However, relatively little self-assessment is undertaken of the Introductory Animal Care course. The overall system of self-assessment could become even more comprehensive if the achievement results of both courses were more closely benchmarked against those of other providers.

Vet Nurse Plus checks that its graduates have the necessary skills for the industry by gaining feedback from employers. This feedback is used and has resulted in changes being made to different aspects of the certificate course, such as the introduction of an assignment utilising different veterinary software applications following feedback that the graduates needed a better understanding of their use in clinics.

Suggestions, ideas, and other feedback were observed to be a normal part of the operations of Vet Nurse Plus during regular activities. These included the one-to-one interviews between the operations manager and the students and the visits by the tutors to the clinics while the students were on placements. Students also provide feedback in written form and this has resulted in changes, such as the remedial actions taken when students expressed concerns about the need for additional library books and the time taken to mark case studies.

The one-to-one interviews between the operations manager and the students provide excellent data for Vet Nurse Plus to use three times a year as a guide to the effectiveness of its support structures and the levels of individual student achievement. Records are kept of the issues raised and the progress in dealing with them. The operations manager also carefully monitors expressions of interest from potential students and analyses the numbers converted to enrolments. The governance and management teams therefore have well-embedded and detailed practices to assess the success or otherwise of the various aspects of their organisation.

# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 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 **Good**.

The graduates and students met by the evaluation team were uniformly positive about the high standards being achieved at Vet Nurse Plus. These impressions were reinforced by the pass rate figures for the last three years for students undertaking the Certificate in Veterinary Nursing. Those figures were 79 per cent in 2008, 77 per cent in 2009, and 69 per cent in 2010. The organisation was disappointed in the latter figure as it was below expectations. However, analysis revealed that three students leaving during the year, two of them because of health issues, had a large impact on the figure since only 16 started the course.

Vet Nurse Plus is accustomed to achieving high retention rates in the certificate course and achieved figures ranging from 81 per cent to 93 per cent over the last three years. As befits an organisation with such high standards, Vet Nurse Plus is expecting a more proactive approach by its staff to result in higher rates, so it is pleasing that 100 per cent retention was being achieved by June 2011. Such academic results are regularly reported to the board at its monthly meetings and the board uses them to monitor student achievement. Both the governance and management teams are involved in celebrating achievement at an annual graduation ceremony.

Achievement rates are only part of the story at Vet Nurse Plus, as the students also gain expertise in skills tailored for the veterinary clinics in which most of them will work. To a large extent, these skills are acquired during the two days a week they are placed in five different clinics during the year. The students also learn life skills in the form of the importance of a positive attitude, people skills, and a sense of achievement in completing a course frequently described as “intense”.

The non-accredited Introductory Animal Care course lasts for four to five months, and approximately five hours’ study is expected per week. Sixteen students out of a possible 17 successfully completed the course in 2008 and 12 out of 13 did so in 2009. The percentage of successful completions dropped last year, when 17 out of 21 students passed. More analysis is needed of the latter set of figures, particularly as relatively little self-assessment is undertaken of this course. Much more rigorous self-assessment was evident in the certificate course. Effective systems were observed by the evaluation team in the form of benchmarking across the years and the general feedback provided by veterinary clinics on the work skills of the graduates of Vet Nurse Plus. Particularly good use was made of the feedback provided by the clinics on the skill levels of every student after they have

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<sup>1</sup> The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation’s activities.

completed each of their five-week placements. However, the systems could become even more comprehensive if the achievement results were more closely benchmarked against those of other providers.

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

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

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

One of the more important outcomes of the certificate course is employment. By September 2010, all of the graduates from the previous year had gained employment and 80 per cent were employed as veterinary nurses. The figures were similarly impressive for the 2010 graduates, as 54 per cent of them had found employment as veterinary nurses before they had taken their final examinations and, by April 2011, 64 per cent were employed as veterinary nurses. The current students recognise their strong employment prospects and are already confident of gaining employment in this sector. These positive employment outcomes are not surprising as Vet Nurse Plus is so closely connected to the industry. The five-week clinic placements not only provide a chance for the students to gain practical experience but also provide an opportunity for the clinics to appraise the students' potential for future employment.

The evaluation team frequently heard from stakeholders the phrase that the students "hit the ground running". They are clearly well prepared for their role as nurses as their course is such a good mix of theory and practice. This is enhanced by the use of guest speakers to provide expertise on such topics as parasites. The board also has a very active role in this area. Several directors are practising veterinary surgeons and the board has very close links with the Pet Doctors group.

Vet Nurse Plus makes very effective use of its advisory board which meets three times a year. The advisory board consists of some Vet Nurse Plus directors, representatives from sponsoring companies, practising veterinary surgeons, and an Australian representative. Its functions include a review of current courses and the provision of advice on the possible direction for the development of future courses. These functions are reflected in the comprehensive minutes kept for each meeting.

The Introductory Animal Care course acts as a springboard into the certificate programme and improves some students' employment prospects. The evaluation team spoke to two students who explained how the animal care course had prepared them for the more testing certificate course as well as some other students who had gained jobs or had found the course to be of direct benefit to their current work in pet shops.

Vet Nurse Plus checks that its graduates have the necessary skills for the industry by gaining feedback from employers. This feedback is used and has resulted in changes being made to various aspects of the certificate course. One example was the feedback that the graduates needed a better understanding of the software programmes in use in the clinics. This resulted in a new assignment for 2011 utilising the various veterinary software

applications. Vet Nurse Plus also gains effective feedback from the clinics at the conclusion of each five-week rotation. This feedback concentrates on the skill levels of students and is used to assist both the tutors and the students. In addition, the organisation also continuously receives feedback from its graduates employed at the clinics that are being used for the five-week placements.

### 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 **Excellent**.

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

Vet Nurse Plus has a wide network of links with the industry and with the students which ensures that close attention is paid to ensuring the courses match the stakeholders' needs. The high level of involvement with the Pet Doctors group and with the advisory board provides a structure for checking the effectiveness of the programmes and activities. The five-week rotations at the clinics are an almost instantaneous mechanism as they provide such a good insight into the industry. The graduates in the clinics show a clear understanding of the students' needs as so many of them trained at Vet Nurse Plus. The students themselves are matched to the clinics so that they receive the particular training they require.

The process of checking the students' needs starts at the enrolment stage where a thorough interview takes place. This process continues during the two-day residential camp held at the beginning of the course. All the students spoken to by the evaluation team praised the camp for bringing them together. They recognised how it identified their individual learning styles. They are also given a comprehensive literacy and numeracy test and the results are shared with the tutors so that they are aware of any issues. All the tutors are experienced veterinary nurses, so the learners are confident that the material they are covering is current and relevant. The reinforcement of the material by the two days a week in clinics is another effective way of ensuring needs are matched. In many ways, the certificate course is an ideal mix of theory and practice.

Student satisfaction levels, as monitored during the one-to-one interviews, are consistently very high. The percentage figures for the Manurewa and the Albany campus in 2009 ranged from 91 per cent to 100 per cent and for the former campus in 2010 (the Albany campus was temporarily closed in 2010) ranged from 91 per cent to 96 per cent. Follow-up of issues from these interviews is recorded. Out of the six issues identified in the interviews held the month before the EER, for example, two had already been resolved, three were partially resolved, and only one was unresolved.

Students interviewed from the Introductory Animal Care course were also satisfied with their course. The feedback gained by Vet Nurse Plus revealed that the market would like to see cross-credits being achieved on this course. Some students also expected that the course would provide more specialist knowledge about the care of dogs and cats and this is being investigated by Vet Nurse Plus. This approach typifies the effectiveness of the self-assessment practices at this organisation. Many instances were encountered of responses

being made to both formal requests from employers in the form of the feedback from the clinics and the more informal requests from the graduates and the students. The introduction of an assignment on software programmes has been mentioned. Suggestions, ideas, and other feedback were observed to be a normal part of the operations of Vet Nurse Plus during regular activities, such as the interviews and the visits by the tutors to the clinics during the two days a week when the students are on site.

#### 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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**.

Emphasis is placed by Vet Nurse Plus on keeping class sizes small. This is expressed in its business plan as “we aim to have a small class size [up to 16 students] in each centre to enable a high level of hands on learning and mentoring”. The practical approach is recognised as valuable by both students and employers. This is apparent from the outset, when prospective students are encouraged to visit veterinary clinics before the course starts so they can have a good idea of what to expect. The learning style questionnaire is administered at the residential camp, so the tutors have an appreciation of the likely success of different strategies. Past experience has shown that most of the students are active learners, so efforts are made to keep the lectures as active as possible with the use of a variety of strategies in the form of group activities, games, and flash cards. The students clearly appreciate the value of the days in the clinics as they are an opportunity to apply the theory learned in class. Their progress in the clinic placements is monitored effectively by the practical task books supplied to record evidence of their practical veterinary nursing and husbandry skills. The practical approach is further exemplified by the field trips undertaken to the SPCA and the quarantine centre.

Vet Nurse Plus benefits from the education background of its clinical manager and one of its directors, who is also involved in teaching. This background means that there is a good understanding of the teaching process and what is needed to make it effective. The PowerPoint presentations and notes are shared. The tutors are expected to hold a qualification in adult education and are supported to achieve one if this is not the case. The internal and external moderation processes are robust and genuine and the processes for ensuring consistency across the two campuses are very good. The teaching is also effective in the Introductory Animal Care course. The tutor is undertaking the Certificate in Adult Education, the student numbers are small, and observation and feedback to the evaluation team confirmed that the teaching packages were at an appropriate level. The standard of the teaching could be raised even higher if the appraisal system was more formalised and overseen by a more experienced teaching practitioner. The clinical manager could do this, but she already has a demanding workload. There is cognisance of the dependence of Vet Nurse Plus on this person and steps are being developed to ensure that such dependence will not have an adverse effect on the organisation.

Vet Nurse Plus assesses the satisfaction levels of the students with the teaching styles of the tutors three times a year. The level was 9 out of 10 in June 2011 for both the Albany and

Manurewa campuses. Students also provide other feedback in written form and this has resulted in changes. An example was the way in which a distraction in class stopped once a concern was expressed about it. Similarly, remedial actions were taken when written feedback expressed concerns about the time taken to mark case studies and the need for additional library books. As well as giving feedback, the students receive it, such as when they view the feedback forms from their five-week clinic placements. This effective pattern of self-assessment would be even stronger if there was feedback to the tutors from their peers or their supervisor about their delivery of certain topics.

## 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**.

The small size of Vet Nurse Plus benefits the students as they are known individually by the staff and can be given support tailored to their needs. An excellent example was the way in which the Albany students were contacted individually after a tornado hit their part of the North Shore. The one-to-one interviews held three times a year are a major element of the extensive system of pastoral support provided by staff. The system starts with the enrolment process, plays a big part in the residential camp during the effective team-building processes, and continues during the lessons in many forms such as the provision of study notes for students who miss a lesson. The tutors and the facilities are made as accessible as possible. This aspect was particularly apparent in the build-up to the examinations, when the students were provided with excellent examination tutorials and extensive use of the reference books outside lesson hours.

The support is enhanced by the additional help provided to the certificate students by staff in the clinics. For example, students who have fallen behind with their work are placed in clinics where the tutors know extra help will be given. Many of these clinics are staffed by graduates of Vet Nurse Plus who are familiar with the pressures of the course and are willing to help. This support is reinforced by the Facebook page that provides a further way of connecting the students with the graduates. Introductory Animal Care students are provided with appropriate standards of support in the shape of a specific tutor as a point of contact via phone or email. This tutor assesses the students' work and keeps them fully informed of course requirements. The governance and management teams fully support these processes and the operations manager himself conducts the one-to-one interviews with the students.

These interviews provide excellent data for Vet Nurse Plus to use as a guide to the effectiveness of its support structures. Records are kept of the issues raised and the progress in dealing with them. The organisation also uses student satisfaction surveys as a further guide. The managers use the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of why students are attracted to Vet Nurse Plus and why some of them occasionally fail to complete the course.

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

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

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

The small size of Vet Nurse Plus means that the governance and management teams can have a high level of involvement. The board, consisting mainly of veterinary surgeons, meets on a monthly basis. Earlier this year, a new appointment was made to the position of general manager of operations for the Pet Doctors group, and he also attends the board meetings along with the operations manager of Vet Nurse Plus. Both these managers attend the monthly staff meetings of Vet Nurse Plus as well, thus reinforcing the links between the staff and the sector. Staff professional development is supported by the board and is exemplified by its payment for the e-learning course currently being undertaken by the clinical manager.

The board takes a proactive stance on many issues and this is particularly evident in the business plan. The strategies that have been developed are a good balance of innovation and continuity. It is envisaged that full-time courses will continue to dominate, particularly if the certificate course is upgraded to the planned diploma course, and that the continuing education seminars and the postgraduate Veterinary Nursing Technician course will attract increased student numbers. It is also anticipated that new developments will include more widespread use of online training, the possible opening of another site, and the introduction of specialist courses for the care of different types of pets.

The board deals well with change and this was demonstrated by the decisions to reopen the Albany site with improved facilities this year and to appoint a tutor to undertake one day a week's support for staff. The latter decision has been welcomed by staff, but some expressed the feeling that the cover for sick staff should be extended further and that tutors should have more help with some of their administrative work, such as the organisation of clinic placements. The evaluation team gained the impression that communication needed to be improved so that staff members have more certainty and input into short and medium-term planning. There is also room for improvement in the performance management system, where again a lack of clarity was evident. Better communication would also help to maximise the contribution of the operations manager who at times is asked to perform tasks, such as the appraisal of tutors, which do not seem to take into account his particular skills. The board is aware of the occasional communication breakdowns and hopes that its recent managerial appointment mentioned above will resolve the situation.

The governance and management teams have well-embedded practices to assess the success or otherwise of Vet Nurse Plus. The one-to-one interviews between the operations manager and the students ensure that careful monitoring is taking place of student welfare. Similar monitoring takes place of student achievement. The operations manager carefully monitors expressions of interest from potential students and analyses the numbers converted to enrolments. He also regularly compiles reports analysing Vet Nurse Plus's progress in marketing initiatives and the state of the competition. This effective pattern of self-assessment would be strengthened by a similarly systematic approach to performance management.

## Focus Areas

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

### 2.1 Governance, management, and strategy

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

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

### 2.2 Vet Nurse plus Certificate in Veterinary Nursing

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 Introductory Animal Care

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

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

# 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 New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.*

*This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the policies and criteria approved by the NZQA Board.*

*The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.*

*External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.*

*External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website ([www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)).*

*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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