

Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Dental Association

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 17 July 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:	New Zealand Dental Association (NZDA)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	NZDA House, 1/195 Main Highway, Ellerslie, Auckland
Delivery sites:	Workplace and regional sites for lectures
First registered:	23 December 2009
Courses currently delivered:	New Zealand Dental Association Certificate in Dental Assisting (Level 3)
Number of students:	Domestic: 200 dental assistants are currently enrolled in the certificate programme
Number of staff:	Two full-time and two part time staff at the administration centre at NZDA House. 5 part-time staff in regional centres
Scope of active accreditation:	New Zealand Dental Association Certificate in Dental Assisting (Level 3)
Distinctive characteristics:	NZDA has conducted dental assistant training for over 25 years. The Certificate in Dental Assisting is a one-year programme for people who are employed as dental assistants, and commenced in its current format in 2005. The academic year runs from February to November and students are required to enrol by the November of the previous year. All students must be permanent New Zealand residents and have current employment with an NZDA member as a dental assistant for a

minimum of 20 hours per week. The training is delivered at a distance through an online programme of modules called the Dental Assistant Online Blended Learning Resource. The programme is facilitated by regional coordinators who are experienced dentists and NZDA members. Ninety-seven per cent of practising dentists in New Zealand are NZDA members.

Management and administration support is from the education staff at NZDA House and is provided by the chief executive officer, associate director research and policy, events and education coordinator and several administration staff. Workplace competence is assessed by the dental assistant's workplace supervisor who is usually the employer. Five regional coordinators in each of Auckland, Waikato/Bay of Plenty, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago facilitate the programme. Regional coordinators and workplace supervisors donate their time.

The certificate is level 3, 101 credits, comprising 26 hours per week (20 hours teaching and six hours self-directed) over 39 weeks, or 1,014 hours per year. The course focuses on providing the background knowledge and practical experience for work as a dental surgery assistant, who assist dentists, dental therapists or dental hygienists during oral health care procedures. It also includes material relevant to dental practice administration. The course comprises 11 modules four knowledge-based and seven competency-based. Module booklets are divided into sections (elements) and each element concludes with a learner activity affirming the key components covered. Once the booklet has been completed the learner then attempts the online assessment. It is a competency-based programme with progressive completion of modules and no final examination. Students are assessed as Competent or Not Yet Competent, with one online re-sit and one written assessment opportunity. There are two full-day, face-to-face block courses in each region held on Saturdays so that students from outside the major centres can attend. Attendance is

voluntary and at no cost to the student.

Student numbers over 2009-2013 were 878 in total. Regional numbers over these years were: Auckland (256), Waikato/Bay of Plenty (168), Wellington (239), Canterbury (124) and Otago (91).

The NZDA training programmes meet NZDA and Dental Council of New Zealand joint codes of practice, Australian and New Zealand standards and legislative requirements relating to the delivery of clinical oral health services. The course has been developed and is maintained by Mullins Training Pty LTD (Australia), and NZDA holds the sole licence for its use in New Zealand. The course is also run by providers in Australia and Scotland.

Previous quality assurance history:

The course gained NZQA accreditation in December 2009 and had an NZQA compliance review in June 2010 where it met all requirements.

Other:

In addition to administering the Certificate in Dental Assisting, NZDA is an approved verifier and provider of continuing professional development activities for dentists by the Dental Council of New Zealand. In this role, NZDA provides continuing professional development for the education of dentists, dental hygienists, therapists and other allied health professionals through regular activities such as lectures, seminars, conferences and publications. These activities come under the auspices of the NZDA Education Trust and NZDA secretariat functions. Regional coordinators and workplace supervisors are required to maintain registration with the Dental Council and to hold a current annual practising certificate. As part of this process, they are required to complete 20 hours of continuing professional development activities annually and must maintain competency in and compliance with the application of dental codes of practice.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The focus areas selected were the mandatory focus area of governance, management and strategy; and the New Zealand Dental Association Certificate in Dental Assisting (Level 3). The certificate is the only training programme for dental assistants currently offered by NZDA.

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 external evaluation and review (EER) team included an NZQA lead evaluator and a team evaluator and was conducted over two days at NZDA House in Auckland. The evaluation team met with the chief executive officer, associate director research and policy, events and education coordinator and the Auckland regional coordinator. They also spoke by phone with the Mullins Training Pty LTD course developer, four regional coordinators and two NZDA board members, one of whom was also a member of the executive group. The lead evaluator spoke to four students currently in the certificate programme, the tutor who delivers the first of the two lectures across the country and a small number of graduates, including the top scholar for 2012. The evaluation team sighted a number of documents, including the NZDA self-assessment report, strategic plan, the 2012 summary of programme evaluations, the certificate modular learning resources and assessments, board minutes, monthly executive meeting minutes, completed student log books and the on-site student database.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **New Zealand Dental Association**.

Learner completion rates for the New Zealand Dental Association Certificate in Dental Assisting are high. Over 2009-2012, 92 per cent of students met the course objectives and attained the certificate. The certificate is well supported by NZDA members, evidenced by the majority of dentists paying all course fees for their dental assistant employees and by volunteering their time as workplace supervisors or regional coordinators. All employers interviewed by the evaluation team said trained dental assistants gained more confidence, were more engaged and understood the reasons for procedures rather than just following the required steps. These comments were affirmed by trainees and past graduates who said that the practical, workplace-based nature of the course was helpful as they were able to apply new knowledge in their daily work, which consolidated the learning.

However, because of resourcing constraints, NZDA does not collect any retention rate data for graduates. Enrolment numbers have increased over 2009-2013. While NZDA attributes this to a combination of factors including: the inclusion of the course as part of some District Health Board's workforce development plans, the development of the community dental service model (ex-School Dental Service) which requires dental operators to work with an assistant, and the 'status' the course is achieving within the profession. However, there could be added value to NZDA if this anecdotal feedback was supported by adequate resourcing to track graduate destinations and survey the sector more formally regarding the reasons for increased enrolments.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Dental Association**.

NZDA is a strong organisation with membership of 97 per cent of practising dentists and well-defined reporting structures. The Events and Education Coordinator reports to the Board on the certificate programme outcomes and objectives, with direction from the Associate Director who provides oversight of the overall internal self-assessment and review process. In response to ongoing review, NZDA has made changes to and developed the course in terms of support, content and delivery. These changes include updating support materials (such as revising the course registration and enrolment forms), revising the information booklet, updating the student evaluation forms and developing a frequently asked questions section for the online modules. The certificate is also reviewed in relation to Dental Council Codes and Scopes of Practice, changes in clinical practice as a result of new techniques and technology and changes in service delivery models and clinical and

administrative processes. While the education staff have noticed that they are receiving fewer questions from students in 2013 than in previous years, it is too early to know whether these changes have led to long-term improvements.

Workplace supervisors are all trained dentists who are required to undertake continuing professional development to maintain annual registration with the Dental Council, indicating that they are likely to be up to date with current dental practice needs and requirements. However, there has not been any moderation of the practical assessments completed by the workplace supervisors to see whether the assessments are valid, sufficient and consistent across the country. NZDA regards this issue as a priority and has initiated a project to investigate it.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Learner completion rates for the New Zealand Dental Association Certificate in Dental Assisting are consistently high. In 2009, 90 per cent gained the certificate, 5 per cent did not and 5 per cent withdrew. In 2010, 96 per cent gained the certificate and 4 per cent withdrew. In 2011, 95 per cent gained the certificate and 5 per cent withdrew. And in 2012, 87 per cent gained the certificate, 5 per cent did not and 10 per cent withdrew. The main reason for non-completions is the learner's inability to complete the modules within the required timeframe.

Unlike many online courses, students do not have much flexibility with the online modules because they are posted online for a fixed time and then removed. But the students do have these resources in hard copy so they can read ahead and do the assessments as they come up online. The student database allows NZDA to look at student progress in 'real time' and monitor student achievement module by module. If a student is falling behind the course milestones, NZDA will contact the student to ascertain the reasons for this and to help resolve any issues where possible. In all cases, extensions for assessments can be arranged. Students are entitled to one online re-sit per module, and if unsuccessful in their re-sit (second attempt), are provided with a written task from a bank of assessments which is marked by the regional coordinator. On successful completion of the course, students are awarded with a Certificate of Attainment and a Dental Assistant badge adorned with the NZDA logo.

While the evaluation team noted that there is some inflexibility around the online assessments, this does not seem to adversely affect learner achievement as over 2009-2012, 92 per cent of students met the course objectives and attained the Certificate in Dental Assisting. Some students and employers noted that the online delivery format contributed to better time management and increased student and employer focus to successfully meet the tight assessment timeframes students needed to stay on task throughout the year.

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 **Excellent**.

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

The integration of on-job training and experiential learning is a well-established method for delivering health-associated training, including in the dental profession. Dental assistants in training acquire useful and meaningful skills and knowledge that they can apply in their workplaces. They also develop their critical thinking skills as they learn why certain practices are important, for example around sterilisation procedures and infection control, rather than simply following steps in a process. This understanding gives their work greater meaning and improves their motivation, well-being and engagement with their work which improves the professional care received by patients.

The certificate is well supported by NZDA members. This is evidenced by the majority of dentists paying all course fees for their dental assistant employees and by volunteering their time as workplace assessors or regional coordinators. The regional coordinators noted that the training content and quality of the programme has been more consistent since 2009 when the current course gained NZQA accreditation. Dentists interviewed by the evaluation team noted that a well-trained dental assistant was vital for the smooth running of the practice. For example, completion of the certificate supports dental assistants to work well alongside a dentist and saves the dentist time and energy by choosing the correct instruments, passing instruments promptly, reassuring anxious patients and charting efficiently and correctly. This increase in consistency and quality raises the professionalism of the dental practice and the overall standards and efficiency of the services dental professionals offer across the country.

Other important benefits are the portability of the certificate and wage increases. The certificate is recognised for registration as a dental assistant in both Australia and the United Kingdom, and on successful completion of the certificate most dental assistants are offered a salary increment. The NZDA certificate is the only accepted prerequisite to pathway into becoming an orthodontic auxiliary.

Because of resourcing constraints, NZDA does not collect any retention rate data for graduates. Enrolment numbers have increased over 2009-2013. NZDA attributes this to the inclusion of the course as part of the workforce development plans of some district health boards, the development of the community dental service model which requires dental operators to work with an assistant, and the regard with which the course is held in the profession. However, there could be added value to NZDA if this anecdotal information was supported by adequate resourcing to track graduate destinations and to survey the sector more formally regarding the reasons for increased enrolments.

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**.

Learning environments are planned and structured for the benefit and needs of learners. The criteria for enrolment is that students are employed by a NZDA member (dentist) as a dental assistant for a minimum of 20 hours per week and who is willing to support them in their studies. Students must also be permanent NZ residents. The employer will then enrol them in the programme, pay the course fees and often allow the learner to use some work time for study. This is of mutual benefit to the dentist and employee. As the employee is upskilling, the employer is able to monitor progress on a daily basis in their role of workplace supervisor. In this way, learners have opportunities to apply knowledge and skills and gain credit for this by completing their log book sign-offs from their workplace supervisor.

As dental assistants working in New Zealand are not required to gain registration with Dental Council New Zealand there are no academic prerequisites for employment in this role. Any qualification or experience gained would be at the discretion of a potential employer. NZDA have noted that those dental assistants who have completed the qualification find it easier to secure employment. Although NZDA do not transfer nor endorse outside or overseas courses, students wanting to complete the NZDA certificate may use previously gained qualifications to apply for recognition of prior learning on relevant modules. This course is provided in Australia, so students having completed or partially completed the qualification in Australia may use their achievements as recognition of prior learning or for module exemption for the NZDA certificate course.

This inclusive and interactive learning environment also encourages discussion around current practices and any upcoming changes to practice, and fosters a closer professional relationship which benefits all parties. In this way, the certificate programme is part of an ongoing informal review cycle that maintains the relevance of the programme to the key stakeholders. Any issues or topics from this informal review can be fed into the formal regional meetings and the annual certificate review.

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**.

Barriers to learning are minimised by the practical, workplace-based, flexible delivery across regions, which provides good access for learners, although there is some inflexibility in the programme. For example, there is only one course each

year which runs from February to November and students need to enrol by the November of the previous year. However, the single start time allows appropriate and consistent use of existing resources and clarity and coordination for a course run nationally. A single start time for a course of this duration is relatively 'standard' in most educational settings. This inflexibility has been recognised, and to fill this gap NZDA has developed a booklet, Introduction to Dental Assisting, which provides useful background information suitable for the induction of new staff. Several dentists also noted that they would not employ a school leaver and immediately invest in their training. The more likely scenario would be that the dental assistant works for a few months and is then offered the option of enrolling in the programme once their longer-term suitability in the role has been more closely assessed.

The evaluation team noted good practice for online teaching and learning. For example, each module has a self-assessment component that must be completed. While the self-assessment is not graded, students and staff commented that it is useful for checking understanding of the course content prior to attempting the assessment. Students also noted that the quizzes and crossword puzzles were easy ways to grasp concepts and maintain motivation.

At the end of the course, an evidence portfolio is submitted that includes workplace assessments, self-assessments and online assessments. In addition, a New Zealand Resuscitation Council Certificate in Resuscitation and Emergency Care (CORE level 4 or equivalent) is required to be completed within 24 months of commencing the course and is part of the ongoing compliance requirements for practising dental assistants.

Students give feedback on the programme as issues arise and complete a formal course evaluation at the end of the course. Course content is reviewed annually to determine whether the course is meeting the needs of the profession and the expectations of stakeholders (employers and students), and whether it reflects any changes to the practice environment. The review covers programme content, objectives, staff requirements, physical resources and the content and delivery of the full-day contact lectures. The online programme has led to greater consistency of teaching content and delivery across the country compared with the previous arrangement where training was organised at a regional level.

Workplace supervisors are all trained dentists who are required to undertake continuing professional development to maintain annual registration with the Dental Council, indicating that they are likely to be up to date with current dental practice needs and requirements. However, there has not been any moderation of the practical assessments completed by the workplace supervisors to see whether the assessments are valid, sufficient and consistent across the country. NZDA regards this issue as a priority and has initiated a project to investigate it.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

Comprehensive and timely study information and advice is provided. For example, learning materials, course workbooks and learner guides are well organised, explain complex ideas with the aid of visual aids, have clear objectives, a glossary of terms and work-practice examples and frequent written and practical self-assessment activities that require active participation on the part of the learner. Learner guides are supplemented by the online resources, two non-compulsory lectures, workplace supervisor contact and support from the regional coordinator and the NZDA education staff. While at this stage there is no progression from the certificate to further study, NZDA supports top students by awarding regional and national prizes. NZDA is also currently developing advanced continuing professional development modules for dental assistants who hold a NZDA Certificate in Dental Assisting. Dental assistants also have access to the classifieds sections of NZDA's website where NZDA members may advertise their job vacancies.

Learner verbal and written feedback to the evaluation team indicated that the teaching resources are clear and that the learning progresses in a sequential way, assisting learners to staircase their knowledge. For many students, this was their first experience of distance learning and their first experience of applied learning where the knowledge gained could be directly applied to the work they do. Students consistently rated this as a very effective way to learn.

The practical aspects of the course are assessed in the workplace by the student's workplace supervisor, who observes tasks being completed to a competent standard. The dental assistants contacted by the evaluation team reported that they were well supported in their respective workplaces, and that if they had a query about programme content they would ask their workplace supervisor in the first instance.

The next line of support for learners is the regional coordinator in their area. Regional coordinators are appointed by the board and are experienced and qualified dentists. However, most students are working alone in a practice and, while they have the support of the workplace supervisor and might make some contact with other dental assistants at lectures, several mentioned that they would like the opportunity to have greater contact with other dental assistants in their region, or a way to communicate online with people across the country.

The first of the two non-compulsory lectures for the certificate is given by the same tutor who delivers it across the regions. Sometimes the timing of the lecture is not a good fit with a student's learning needs. NZDA is aware of this but is committed to using the same lecturer, which makes this issue difficult to resolve. However, NZDA agreed with the evaluation team that there might be value in putting this

lecture online for all students to access and as a resource for students to refer back to at a time that better fits their individual learning needs.

In response to ongoing review, NZDA has made changes to and developed the course in terms of support, content and delivery. These changes include updating support materials, such as revising the course registration and enrolment forms, revising the information booklet, updating the student evaluation forms and developing a frequently asked questions section for the online modules. While the education staff have noticed that they are receiving fewer questions from students in 2013 than in previous years, it is too early to know whether these changes have led to long-term improvements.

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

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

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

The purpose and direction of the NZDA is very clear. The board meets twice a year and includes representation from all internal stakeholders, including representatives from the 14 branches and the dean of the School of Dentistry at the University of Otago. This is a large board with 20-plus members. This wide and inclusive representation allows NZDA members (there is 97 per cent membership among dentists) to have direct access to and influence on governance issues. For example, regional representatives can present regional concerns at the board level and then report back to the regions on any outcomes.

The Events and Education Coordinator reports to the Board on the certificate programme outcomes and objectives, with direction from the Associate Director who provides oversight of the overall internal self-assessment and review process. The Associate Director reviews the course content in the context of any changes to legislative requirements. This information is obtained from a wide range of sources including professional, scientific and legislative publications, feedback and direction from the NZDA Board and Executive. Useful and relevant information is also gained from the dental industry group, Otago University Dental School, other associated bodies, for example, the Australian Dental Association, Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons and from local professional interest groups, such as, the New Zealand Society of Hospital and Community Dentists.

Any developments that impinge on the dental assistant course are discussed at the annual management group meeting with the regional coordinators, the Australian provider of the online course and NZDA education staff. Any changes that occur are designed to maintain the certificate's relevance to current practice and the needs of the membership while ensuring that the course remains accessible and at the appropriate academic level for dental assistants.

There is staged succession planning, with the executive being drawn from well-regarded board members, and the vice-president and president drawn from the executive. In this way, the top office-holders will have a long history of board and executive membership. There are quarterly meetings for NZDA education staff that focus on the dental assistant course, annual meetings of the NZDA course management group and weekly NZDA House staff meetings. This structured meeting schedule assists internal communication and is supported by action minutes detailing tasks and responsibilities. The six-member executive assists the chief executive with day-to-day management.

The structure of the programme means that most dentists have had direct experience of supervising dental assistants in their practice. They have a sense of ownership of the certificate, as it was developed with their input. The evaluation team was impressed by the financial and time commitment shown by the membership for the certificate and their appreciation of the vital role trained dental assistants fulfil in dental practice.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management and strategy

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

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

2.2 Focus area: Certificate in Dental Assisting (Level 3)

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that the New Zealand Dental Association:

- Commit the necessary resources to conduct a moderation project on the practical assessments signed off by the workplace supervisors
- Commit the necessary resources to track graduates to ascertain the value the certificate adds to their ongoing practice as dental assistants
- Investigate the reasons for the increased uptake of enrolments for the Certificate in Dental Assisting
- Consider the usefulness of putting the voluntary lectures online to increase student access to these resources
- Ensure that data is collected and analysed to find out whether the changes made to learner resources (referred to in 1.5, final paragraph) have led to long-term improvements
- Consider the options for increasing social interactions for Certificate in Dental Assisting students.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

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 External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

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).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

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