



# Report of External Evaluation and Review

South Pacific College of Natural  
Therapies

Date of report: 27 July 2010

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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.*

## Brief description of TEO

Location: Ellerslie, Auckland  
Type: Private training establishment  
Size: 200 equivalent full-time students  
Sites: As above

South Pacific College of Natural Therapies (SPCNT) was established in 1940 to offer education in natural therapies. The college gained New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) registration in 1991. Since 2001 the organisation has had a long-standing relationship with Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Australia and is accredited to offer four CSU papers in addition to its NZQA-approved diploma programme, thereby qualifying students to graduate with a CSU Bachelor in Health Science (Complementary Medicine). This relationship is being phased out. In 2009 SPCNT gained accreditation to offer its own Bachelor of Natural Medicine.

Currently year two and three students are enrolled in one of two SPCNT diploma programmes, which are expiring, and the CSU papers. All first-year students are enrolled in the new bachelor programme. The bachelor programme has exit qualifications at levels 1 and 2. These are:

- Diploma in Natural Health Studies (Level 5)
- Diploma in Natural Medicine (Level 6).

Another programme currently on offer, specifically for Pasifika Peoples, is the:

- Diploma in Traditional Pasefika Healing (Level 5).

Currently this programme has no enrolments. Those students who wish to become eligible for registration as practitioners must complete the three-year, full-time study programme which qualifies them for the:

- Bachelor of Natural Medicine (Level 7).

Part-time options are available for students, and in their first two years they can choose to study by distance.

SPCNT was previously quality assured by NZQA under the audit system. At the most recent audit in 2007 the college met all but one requirement of Quality Assurance Standard One, the standard then in place.

# Executive Summary

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **South Pacific College of Natural Therapies**.

Learners achieve well at SPCNT. They have a high course completion rate, consistently between 86 and 88 per cent which benchmarks above the sector median of 80.7 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Achievement rates for those studying by distance are the same as for those who choose to study on campus. Nearly all students who are retained beyond the first year gain the qualification.

There is a high employment rate for graduates, with a significant number finding work in the natural health sector. Graduates felt confident and well prepared for this work, with many opening their own businesses and working as clinical practitioners.

Employers value the qualifications and skill levels of graduates from SPCNT and stated that employing graduates enhanced their service to their clients and customers.

Graduates and staff contribute to the wider community through their professional associations and in their participation in research and development.

The college has positioned itself at the forefront of ensuring professional standards are maintained in the natural health sector. Tutors and management are committed to ensuring the education provided at the college is research-based and current, with graduates leaving equipped to practise professionally and ethically.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **South Pacific College of Natural Therapies**.

SPCNT has a wide network of stakeholder groups with whom it continuously engages. A variety of methods are used to gather feedback and this is done systematically. Feedback is reviewed and analysed regularly. There is good evidence that improvements have resulted in response to feedback. For example, the college has actively sought to engage with Māori and Pasifika communities and as a result has developed programmes to match their needs.

The organisation has an effective board of directors which includes industry representatives, education professionals, and graduates and students from the college. The board and management are consultative and have guided the organisation successfully through significant change. For example, in the last few years major projects have included the construction of a purpose-built facility and the introduction of two new programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Tertiary Education Commission (August 2009). *Progress Monitoring Report for: South Pacific College of Natural Therapies Incorporated*. p.12.

Achievement data is collected systematically and regularly reviewed and the student management system enables the careful tracking of students. The achievement data is not formally analysed at the module level, although staff have a good understanding of how the different student cohorts are performing.

## TEO response

SPCNT has confirmed the factual accuracy of this report.

# Basis for External Evaluation and Review

*Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of course approval and accreditation (under sections 258 and 259 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the course approval and accreditation criteria and policies established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act.*

*In addition, for registered private training establishments, the criteria and policies for their registration require self-assessment and external evaluation and review at an organisational level in addition to the individual courses they own or provide. These criteria and policies are set by NZQA under section 253(1)(ca) of the Act.*

*NZQA is responsible for ensuring TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses and/or registration. The Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQuality) is responsible, under delegated authority from NZQA, for compliance by the polytechnic sector, and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.*

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

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

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

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

# Findings

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

*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/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>*

## Outline of scope

For this review three focus areas were chosen. The mandatory focus area is:

- Governance, management and strategy.

The other focus areas chosen were:

- Distance learning
- Bachelor of Natural Medicine.

## Part 1: Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation

*This section provides a picture of the TEO's performance in terms of the outcomes achieved and the key contributing processes. Performance judgements are based on the answers to key evaluation questions across the focus areas sampled. This section also provides a judgement about the extent to which the organisation uses self-assessment information to understand its own performance and bring about improvements, i.e. capability in self-assessment.*

### 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 **Good**.

Learners at SPCNT achieve well and their retention and achievement results benchmark well above the sector median. For 2009 the retention rate for the first year was approximately 75 per cent. Those who are retained after the first year, in all but a few cases, go on to achieve the degree. The students studying by distance are achieving at the same rate as those who study on campus.

Learners are acquiring skills and knowledge useful to their future employment, their families, and communities.

Individual student results are carefully tracked and any student at risk of not achieving is quickly identified and given support. The organisation holds six-monthly meetings to ratify the achievement results and review student and tutor feedback. Results are not analysed to the extent that systematic comparisons can be made across different modules or papers, or across different years. However, there is a small, stable group of staff and a good awareness of how students in each paper are performing.

## 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**.

There is a high rate of employment for graduates from SPCNT. The evaluation team heard from sector representatives and employers about the value placed upon both the CSU degree and the Bachelor of Natural Medicine degree newly introduced at the college. Employment opportunities for graduates have improved. For example, graduates have set up as independent practitioners and have been employed in pharmacies and health food shops or as product developers or consultants with health supplement companies.

SPCNT is producing graduates who contribute to the community through their understanding of health and wellness, knowing when to prescribe and when to refer to other health professionals. The college is a strong advocate for ensuring quality education and high standards for those who set up as natural medicine practitioners. Although natural medicine and naturopathy are not regulated by a single registration body, affiliation with the New Zealand Society of Naturopaths and the New Zealand Association of Medical Herbalists enables SPCNT graduates to apply for practitioner registration status under the minimum standards code.

The college has begun contributing to the research community, collaborating on a small number of research projects. Staff are encouraged to further their education with postgraduate research degrees, and some have taken up the opportunity.

Exit surveys and industry surveys are conducted regularly to discover how well the graduates are meeting the needs of the community. As a result of feedback, certain modalities were dropped from the bachelor programme due to a lack of demand in the community. The importance of maintaining the clinical practice component of the programme was reinforced by the graduate exit surveys.

### 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**.

There is good evidence that the organisation is responding to the needs of students and key stakeholders. For example, the ability of students to study either face to face or by distance is greatly appreciated by those who require flexibility. The ability of students to move to part-time study gives the largely adult students choices over how they manage their study.

The distance-learning mode is supported by the use of the Moodle online learning platform. Tutors and learners spoke favourably of this platform and the different ways the tutors used the tools available to engage students with the content. There has been ongoing professional development for tutors to increase their understanding of e-learning and Moodle.

The new bachelor programme was designed in consultation with graduates, students, and the wider community who have an interest in natural therapies. Consequently, new content and electives have been added and other content is being phased out. For example, students can now choose a traditional healing option, which allows them to explore traditional Māori and Pasifika healing.

The library is seen as a hub of the college and is a significant resource which matches the needs of both on-campus and distance learners and the wider community of those with an interest in natural therapies. The valuable resources and the support and knowledge of the librarian were acknowledged across the range of people spoken to by the evaluation team.

The evaluation team saw evidence that the college uses a variety of methods to engage with students and stakeholders and that it is responsive to the feedback it gathers. The decision to design and build a purpose-built facility was in response to stakeholders keen to promote and professionalise the natural health sector.

### 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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 board of directors made a strategic decision in appointing a person with educational expertise, as distinct from expertise in natural therapies, to the position of principal. The board and tutors said educational processes and practices had improved greatly with that experience coming into the organisation.

Tutors relate effectively with students. The evaluation team heard that tutors were passionate, knowledgeable, and approachable. The experience of the natural health sector that tutors bring to their role was seen as very important and students appreciated the real-world examples being brought into the classroom. Students felt clear about the structure

and the learning outcomes of their courses and comfortable approaching tutors with any issues or questions.

A range of teaching approaches are used including group work, discussions, group presentations, lectures, and practical components. The textbooks and other learning resources supported students' learning, although at times there is pressure on the computers available for student use.

Students emphasised the importance of the weekend workshops that are run for distance learners. The ability to come face to face with their tutors and to gain first-hand, practical experience of topics they have been learning strengthens and supports students' understanding. The importance of connecting with their tutors and other students was also emphasised.

The online learning platform used for distance learning is interactive and engaging. However, the time required to ensure that online content remains current, to moderate discussion and message boards, and to respond to enquiries from distance learners is significant and currently staff are not allocated workload in relation to the number of online learners they are working with.

There are good processes to review teaching and assessment. Feedback is collected regularly and moderation and ratification meetings provide the opportunities for tutors to review this feedback, and course content, delivery, and assessments. The internal moderation meetings are an effective mechanism for ensuring assessments are fair and consistent. Tutors spoke of the value of the meetings for their own practice and understanding. The feedback and review processes are effective in revealing issues with the teaching, and the evaluation team heard examples of where tutors required extra support and monitoring to ensure the module ran successfully.

## 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 information given to students upon first enquiry at the college is helpful. Before enrolling, students are clear about course expectations, the programme structure, and learning outcomes which enables them to make informed decisions. This guidance continues during the students' period of study, with students feeling confident about how well they are progressing and what they need to do to achieve successfully.

The on-campus and distance-learning students said there was ongoing support available to them, with a number of options available for seeking help and guidance. In particular, students noted the support of the dean, the administration staff, and the librarian. The response to queries, either in person or by telephone or email, was prompt and any issues raised are dealt with quickly. Issues which students had previously raised with the college, with regards to the CSU papers, had been addressed by the time of the evaluation visit.

There is a student representative group which operates effectively, with each class nominating a representative. The issues raised by this group are taken seriously by management, and the evaluation team heard examples of issues that had been dealt with promptly.

## 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 board of directors effectively sets the strategic goals and governs resourcing for the college. The members that make up the board are representative of graduates, students, the natural therapies sector, finance, and education. The board has steered the organisation through significant change in the last few years, resulting in significant improvements to the college. There are regular reviews of the mission statement, opportunities for growth, and strategic goals. The board supports the principal to manage effectively, with an open line of communication between the principal and the chair.

Management has good processes for engaging with internal and external stakeholders. There is an open, consultative style of management and good evidence of management responding to issues and guiding change and development. For example, the development of online learning is a new project and staff spoken to by the evaluation team appreciated the professional development and support that was being provided.

The effectiveness of programmes and policies is regularly reviewed. Tutor performance, assessments, and programme structure are also reviewed systematically with regular academic progress meetings, ratification meetings, and assessment meetings ensuring any issues are identified and acted upon.

Management is committed to professional development and encourages staff to participate in further study and professional associations. Research is a new focus for the organisation and management is encouraging staff to participate and collaborate in relevant research projects. Maintaining currency in one's own field of practice is also important, so teaching is structured to allow staff the time to maintain their practitioner status through their own clinics.

## Part 2: Performance in 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 **Good**.

### 2.2 Focus area: Distance Learning

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 Focus area: Bachelor of Natural Medicine

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

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

This is a new programme and, although the evaluation team saw evidence of authentic and systematic review, it is too soon for results to justify a higher rating for capability in self-assessment.

# Actions Required and Recommendations

## Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

## Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review.

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E [eeradmin@nzqa.govt.nz](mailto:eeradmin@nzqa.govt.nz)

[www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)