



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Alpha Training and Development
Centre

Date of report: 2 March 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: New Plymouth

Type: Private Training Establishment

Size: 20 students, two full-time tutors and two part-time office staff

Sites: Lepperton

Alpha Training was first registered as a private training establishment in 1992, and currently offers a fully funded Youth Training course through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). This is an engineering course which leads to the achievement of the National Certificate in Manufacturing and Mechanical Engineering (Level 1). Alpha Training also offers one course to fee-paying students, the Alpha Training Certificate in Welding (Level 4). Both of these courses include unit standards on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and prepare students for employment in engineering or welding. Alpha offers a mixture of theory and practice, with the majority of time spent on developing practical welding or engineering skills.

The two most recent NZQA quality audits of Alpha Training were conducted in 2003 and 2006, and both resulted in all relevant requirements being met.

Executive Summary

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **confident** in the educational performance of Alpha Training

Alpha Training has enabled Youth Training students to achieve credits on the NQF at consistently good rates of between 28 and 32 credits per student over the past three years. Eighty-seven per cent of students on the level 4 Certificate in Welding course gain the qualification, and approximately 69 per cent of these level 4 students gain employment in a related field. This is a very good level of achievement for these students, and for the level of the programmes offered. Many students enrol with Alpha Training with significant barriers to success, and for these students there has been a significant turnaround in their attitudes to learning and readiness to learn. This is in part due to the small class sizes, the quality of teaching, informal networking with community agencies, and the attention that the Alpha Training tutors give to addressing students' learning challenges.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **not yet confident** in the capability in self-assessment of Alpha Training.

Alpha Training is a small organisation with an effective quality management system. However, its day-to-day operation and networking with its stakeholders is largely run on informal processes aimed at maximising opportunities. This approach suits the size and nature of the organisation but may put the organisation at risk in the absence of clear documented strategies for business continuity.

Current systems and processes monitor and record learner achievements and outcomes, but the organisation does not have well-developed processes for the critical analysis of the data collected or of the processes that contribute to the organisational performance. Alpha Training conducts formal surveys to monitor student satisfaction with the training, and has formal contractual arrangements with the Tertiary Education Commission, but it has less formal processes to monitor its performance in most other areas of its business. The organisation's informal approach to monitoring and reviewing its performance and relationships with other stakeholders has largely worked well for the size of the organisation, and has resulted in ongoing improvements. However, Alpha Training does not have a fully coordinated approach to self-assessment with sufficient documentation for future analysis to review actual improvements to processes and outcomes.

Alpha Training has not yet fully developed its policies and procedures for self-assessment or involved all staff in its current internal review processes.

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).

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

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Alpha Training included the following mandatory focus area:

- Governance, management, and strategy.

This evaluation also included the following programme focus areas:

- Youth Training (Engineering) (Level 1)
- Certificate in Welding (Level 4).

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 **Good**.

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

Explanation

Alpha Training has appropriate processes for tracking and recording students' achievements and progress within a student management system, and across the two programmes reviewed students make good progress and achieve well. Students on the Youth Training programme over the last three years have achieved on average between 28 and 32 credits per person, and a few students have completed the National Certificate in Manufacturing and Mechanical Engineering (Level 1). Between 65 and 83 per cent of the students have moved on to further training or into employment. The Youth Training programme targets

students who have not achieved academic success at school or in other training, and many come with significant barriers to learning. The achievement rates gained on this course are good considering these circumstances. Eighty-seven per cent of students on the level 4 welding course achieve the qualification offered, and most also complete three of the “4711” welding certificates offered, for “down-hand, horizontal, vertical, or over-head welding”, which are seen as prerequisites for gaining employment in the welding or a related industry.

Students on both courses also develop significant growth in “soft skills”. These include attitudes to learning, attendance, motivation, and communication skills, which contribute to their ability and readiness to learn, and to their ability to gain and hold employment. While the development of these skills is not documented, staff and students were aware of and able to discuss the observed improvements in themselves and others.

Administration staff closely monitor students’ achievements of unit standards and qualifications and report regularly and appropriately to the teaching staff and to external bodies as required, such as NZQA and TEC. However, self-assessment procedures are still rudimentary. Future planning is informal, and its documentation minimal. Nor has Alpha Training yet fully developed processes to critically analyse and review how well students are achieving.

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**.

Explanation

Students on both courses gain qualifications and move on to further training. This is valued by the students, their families, employers, and community agencies working with these young people. Alpha Training confirms this through regular student surveys and by ongoing informal contact with employers and a wide range of community agencies that have an interest in the students’ welfare. The primary purpose of the Youth Training programme is to reconnect students with learning and improve students’ attitudes towards learning and work, and Alpha Training’s courses are successful in this. Periodic student surveys and feedback from employers confirm that students develop valued technical and life skills.

Alpha Training maintains membership of and active participation on various committees within the New Zealand Heavy Engineering Research Association. This involvement provides valuable input to course design and ensures that the skills valued by the industry are included. The organisation also validates its assessments of practical work for the 4711 welding certificates, through Stork Cooperheat New Zealand Limited, which tests the students’ practical work against NZS 4711 *Qualification Tests for Metal-Arc Welders*. This process is recognised by Competenz, the standard-setting body for engineering and welding. The testing process has high credibility within the industry.

For some years the organisation has maintained TEC contracts for Youth Training and TEC approval for offering a level 4 welding program to New Zealand fee-paying students. This has provided continuity for the Youth Training students who move on to this higher training, giving them the necessary skills to gain work in the New Plymouth region and elsewhere. Alpha Training management follows up on ex-students and some are working as welders overseas for very high salaries. Overall, the organisation's processes for evaluating its effectiveness in meeting learner and other stakeholders' needs is better coordinated and documented than some other areas of the business.

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 **Good**.

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

Explanation

At the time of enrolment many students lack the attitude, motivation, or learning skills to succeed on the course. One of the strengths at Alpha Training is that tutors build a rapport with the students to understand their background circumstances. This is done within the workshop environment with a focus on the practical skills. The result is that many students change behaviours and alter their attitudes to learning and achieve success. The focus on the prerequisite skills, or "soft skills" continues throughout the course. In addition, remedial training in literacy and numeracy is built into the delivery, as students learn both the theoretical and practical aspects of working with metal shaping, cutting, measuring, and welding. This integrated approach is an important aspect to the training because previous attempts to address these skills gaps in isolation had not worked very well. Much of the work tutors do to assess students' specific needs remains intuitive and informal. Although the organisation is achieving much success with many of these learners, some risks remain with this approach, for example some essential skills not being picked up and the issue addressed.

Through Alpha Training's membership and involvement with the New Zealand Heavy Engineering Research Association, and its association with Stork Cooperheat New Zealand, it has a high level of awareness of the skills and attitudes required by local industry, and the extent to which it is meeting employers' needs. This contact and feedback is largely undocumented but is well founded in regular contact through student placements into employment.

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 **Adequate**.

Explanation

Teachers have enabled students to achieve well in both courses, and at a rate above the TEC contracted figures. This is a very good outcome, especially considering the range of learning challenges within the student group. Students interviewed said their teachers have a very good knowledge and experience of their industry area, are good teachers, are able to relate well to them as students, and use a wide variety of teaching approaches. Students' preferred learning styles are well catered for through this approach and their individual learning needs are accommodated.

The organisation's self-assessment has identified that in the past some tutors had been hired with a teaching qualification but did not have the ability to relate well to the students. The improvement the organisation has implemented is to hire tutors with the industry knowledge and passion for working with this particular client group. This has resulted in students achieving well. The potential risk is that tutors may not have sufficient understanding of adult learning processes, such as identification of deep learning or an ability to repeat new skills in different circumstances.

Teaching staff performance is appraised annually and all staff have access to upgrade technical qualifications such as welding certificates every three years as required by the industry, which adds credibility with students and industry. Staff have attended literacy and numeracy training in the past and have had training in competency-based assessment. Students' achievements are at a reasonably high level, and teaching staff comments and documentation confirm that assessment procedures and judgements are at the national standard, as determined by the three relevant standard-setting bodies, the New Zealand Industry Training Organisation, Competenz, and NZQA.

All teaching staff were interviewed during this evaluation and discussed how they review their teaching practice and daily performance with the students, and how this contributes to improving their practice. The organisation regularly surveys students and the results of this process indicate very high student satisfaction with the teaching.

The organisation's self-assessment practices are informal and largely undocumented, and comprise face-to-face meetings and impromptu decisions for improvements day to day. This process fits the size of the organisation, but could be strengthened somewhat by a more systematic approach and some more recording of what is known of the causes of issues, and the effectiveness of responses.

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 **Adequate**.

Explanation

Alpha Training maintains close relationships with community support agencies and students' families, and students are held to task when issues arise. Alpha Training operates on a philosophy of "tough love", for example by setting clear boundaries around attendance and behaviour at the centre. The organisation provides transport for students to and from the training centre, but on occasion students have been required to take personal responsibility when their behaviour is unacceptable (such as failing to attend regularly). Students interviewed at this evaluation confirmed that this process contributes to changing attitudes and behaviours and has helped them to achieve. The small class sizes provide the opportunity for students to receive one-to-one attention from the tutors. Specific issues such as literacy and numeracy are addressed effectively in the context of engineering and welding.

The organisation's self-assessment in this area is largely monitored by individual staff. However, staff regularly discuss issues and develop appropriate responses as they arise. As noted already, the organisation may benefit by implementing a more systematic approach with some more documentation of common issues and the effectiveness of particular responses.

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 **Adequate**.

Explanation

Alpha Training is a small family based organisation. The managing director and the welding tutor maintain effective informal networks developed over many years working in the Taranaki region. These networks are maintained as employers phone for references when students are applying for work, and other similar opportunities arise for contact on a day-to-day basis. The organisation demonstrates a good level of understanding of local employers' needs and the key skills they require in particular industries. Professional memberships such as with the Heavy Engineering Research Association have been maintained along with close involvement with Stork Cooperheat New Zealand Limited. These relationships have ensured that the engineering and welding courses have maintained credibility in the local community.

The organisation has managed to continue its relationship with TEC and has contracts for the ongoing delivery of the funded Youth Training engineering course, and the provision of the welding course for New Zealand fee-paying students. The combination of these two courses' continuity provides stability for the organisation and further training opportunities for the younger students to move on to the level 4 course.

Current internal review and monitoring relies largely on informal staff processes of meeting and discussing issues when they arise and developing solutions in a pragmatic manner. This has suited the size of the organisation but as already noted a more planned and structured process with some further documentation would add robustness and provide data to analyse the success of implemented improvements. The organisation has yet to fully develop its policies and procedures for self-assessment.

Part 2: Performance in focus areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Youth Training (Engineering)

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

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

Explanation

The evaluation team interviewed the students on the Youth Training course, and they discussed how the course had helped them change their attitudes to learning and their motivation to attend and to achieve. Staff and management of Alpha Training confirmed that this is their first priority, to settle students into the pattern of timeliness and responsible behaviour, and sparking their motivation to learn. One of the most effective tools for this is that the students learn the engineering skills and knowledge through making projects such as a tool box and a coffee table, which have a high “take-home” value. The effectiveness of this project focus as a motivator is evaluated by tutors and management and is well embedded into the self-assessment system, and is seen as an organisational strength.

However, the organisation’s overall self-assessment practices are informal and largely undocumented, and comprise face-to-face meetings and impromptu decisions for improvements day to day. This process results in ongoing improvements, and addresses students and stakeholder needs, but is not yet fully coordinated or as systematic as it could be.

2.2 Focus area: Certificate in Welding (Level 4)

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

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

Explanation

The primary focus on the welding course is for students to achieve a Certificate in Welding and three to four 4711 welding certificates, such as “down-hand, horizontal, vertical and overhead arc welding”. There are a number of 4711 certificates, and course fees pay for three, but where a student shows a particular skill or is looking at a specific job, Alpha Training will support them to achieve other appropriate certificates. This support is highly valuable to the student and local industry because it addresses specific needs and enables students to gain employment. Students achieve well, with 87 per cent gaining the Alpha Training Certificate in Welding (Level 4).

The organisation’s self-assessment practices in this area are informal and largely undocumented, and comprise face-to-face meetings and impromptu decisions for improvements day to day. This process results in ongoing improvements, and addresses

student and stakeholder needs, but is not yet fully coordinated or as systematic as it could be.

Mandatory focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

The overall rating for performance in governance, management and strategy is **Good**.

The overall rating for capability in self-assessment in governance, management and strategy is **Adequate**.

Explanation

This is a small, family run business and three key family members provide the governance and management functions. This is largely unstructured in so far as staff respond to issues as they arise, through round table discussions, with the managing director making final decisions. This approach suits the size of the organisation and is framed and guided to some extent by the main contract document with TEC, the Investment Plan. Alpha Training management is very closely involved with the courses. This close awareness results from the small number of staff and the size of the delivery site, which means that Alpha Training has effective management which can deal with emerging issues in a timely and appropriate manner.

The organisation's self-assessment practices in this area are informal and largely undocumented, and comprise face-to-face meetings and impromptu decisions for improvements day to day. This process results in ongoing improvements, and addresses students and stakeholder needs, but is not yet fully coordinated or as systematic as it could be.

Statements of Confidence

The statements of confidence are derived from the findings within and across the focus areas. A four-step scale is used: highly confident, confident, not yet confident, not confident.

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **confident** in the educational performance of Alpha Training

Alpha Training has enabled Youth Training students to achieve credits on the NQF at consistently good rates of between 28 and 32 credits per student over the past three years. Eighty-seven per cent of students on the level 4 Certificate in Welding course gain the qualification, and approximately 69 per cent of these level 4 students gain employment in a related field. This is a very good level of achievement for these students, and for the level of the programmes offered. Many students enrol with Alpha Training with significant barriers to success, and for these students there has been a significant turnaround in their attitudes to learning and their readiness to learn. This is in part due to the small class sizes, the quality of teaching, informal networking with community agencies, and the attention that the Alpha Training tutors give to addressing students' learning challenges.

Alpha Training is a small organisation with an effective quality management system. However, its day-to-day operation and networking with its stakeholders is largely run on informal processes aimed at maximising opportunities. This approach suits the size and nature of the organisation but may put the organisation at risk in the absence of clear documented strategies for business continuity.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **not yet confident** in the capability in self-assessment of Alpha Training.

The organisation has well-developed systems and processes to monitor and record learner achievements and outcomes, but does not have well-developed processes for the critical analysis of the data collected or of the processes that contribute to the organisational performance. Alpha Training conducts formal surveys to monitor student satisfaction with the training, and has formal contractual arrangements with the Tertiary Education Commission, but it has less formal processes to monitor its performance in most other areas of its business. The organisation's informal approach to monitoring and reviewing its performance and relationships with other stakeholders has largely worked well for the size of the organisation, and has resulted in ongoing improvements. However, it does not have a fully coordinated approach to self-assessment with sufficient documentation for future analysis to review actual improvements to processes and outcomes.

Alpha Training has not yet fully developed its policies and procedures for self-assessment or involved all staff in its current internal review processes.

Actions Required and Recommendations

Further actions

Because NZQA is Not Yet Confident in Alpha Training's capability in self-assessment, NZQA will contact Alpha Training within 20 working days of this report to agree upon an appropriate quality improvement plan.

The plan is intended to enable Alpha Training to work towards achieving a judgement of at least Confident in relation to capability in self-assessment. Implementation of this plan will be monitored by NZQA. When the plan has been completed, or at any time deemed necessary by NZQA, another external evaluation and review will be scheduled.

Recommendations

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

NZQA

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