

Report of External Evaluation and Review

AG Challenge Limited

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 17 November 2015

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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:	AG Challenge Limited (AG Challenge)
Type:	Private training establishment
Location:	312 Number 3 Line, Okoia, Whanganui
Delivery sites:	As above and: Higgies Farm, Woolshed Block, Okoia Turoa Road Farm, Okoia 108 Kaimatira Road, Okoia 35 Sommes Parade, Whanganui
First registered:	1 July 1993
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Certificate in Veterinary Nursing (Level 5)• National Certificate in Agriculture – Dairy (Level 2)• National Certificate in Dairy Farming (Level 3)• National Certificate in Agriculture (Animal Feeding and Pastures) (Level 3)• National Certificate in Agriculture – Dairy (Level 4)• Future Generation of Building and Construction Trades 27 weeks (Level 2)• AG Certificate in Carpentry (Level 4)• Future Generation of Building and

Construction Trades (Introductory) (Levels 1 and 2)

Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	214 learners (all domestic, no international students) 51 Māori learners Two Pasifika learners
Number of staff:	11 full-time and one part-time staff
Scope of consent to assess:	http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers/nqf-accreditations.do?providerId=929412001
Distinctive characteristics:	The agriculture and veterinary nursing programmes are closely linked to commercial operations, providing learners with realistic opportunities to put their theory into practice on a regular basis. The carpentry programmes are run in conjunction with construction projects, currently involving the building of classrooms.
Recent significant changes:	In the last 12 months, AG Challenge has been through an organisational restructure following a change in funding, and has developed and enhanced governance to improve oversight of the organisation.
Previous quality assurance history:	AG Challenge was most recently evaluated by NZQA in January 2012, when NZQA was Confident in both the educational performance and capability in self-assessment of the organisation. AG Challenge is engaging, as required, with its standard-setting bodies for the external moderation of assessment material and assessors' judgements. These bodies include the Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation (BCITO), Primary ITO, and The Skills Organisation. Most assessment materials have been judged to be fit for purpose, and that judgements are at the national standard. Where this has not been the case, AG Challenge has made appropriate and timely changes to correct matters.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

This evaluation included the mandatory focus area of governance, management and strategy, which provides an overview of the strategic and operational levels of the organisation.

The other focus areas were Agriculture programmes levels 2-4 and Veterinary Nursing level 5. These focus areas provided a review across a significant proportion, approximately 50 per cent, of the training offered and included the highest-level programme delivered.

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.

A team of two evaluators visited two of the organisation's delivery sites in Okoia, Whanganui, and one in Whanganui city, over two full days.

The evaluators spoke with the governance and management team, tutors, students, and a sample of stakeholders, and reviewed a wide range of the organisation's documents, records, meeting minutes and database reports, including correspondence from the standard-setting bodies BCITO, Primary ITO, The Skills Organisation and the Tertiary Assessment and Moderation unit of NZQA regarding moderation of students' assessments. AG Challenge supplied its self-assessment summary to NZQA prior to the evaluation, along with a range of other organisational and performance data. This material provided an appropriate and accurate basis for the on-site visit.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **AG Challenge Limited**.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **AG Challenge Limited**.

The following factors contribute to this confidence.

- The organisation collects and collates a comprehensive range of data on student participation, achievement and outcomes. This is reviewed and used for ongoing improvements. However, the data analysis and self-review processes could be further strengthened and developed, for example to compare relative performance across programmes, delivery sites, student cohorts, tutors or ethnic groups in order to maximise learnings from high-performing groups.
- Achievement data shows that students are completing programmes at a very good level, at an average over the last four years of 84 per cent. This is slightly above the private training establishment median figure, indicating that AG challenge is providing appropriate support and effective learning environments that are enabling students to achieve well compared with other private training establishments.
- Approximately 75 per cent of students gain employment related to their field of study, which is often their preferred option. The organisation's qualification achievement rate when compared with some other agricultural training is slightly lower. Many students continue in training once employed, either with AG Challenge or the Primary ITO traineeship and complete their qualification over a longer time.
- There was consistent anecdotal evidence of students making significant gains in employability or soft skills¹, for example time management, confidence, motivation, and re-engaging their desire to learn.
- The organisation maintains very close connections with employer and sector groups in agriculture, building and veterinary nursing, enabling it to stay current with good practice, changes in technology and employers' needs.
- Appropriate changes are made in a timely manner in response to identified and emerging learners' needs, for example improvements to identifying

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_skills

needs at the time of enrolment, and providing up-to-date technology such as iPads in classrooms.

- Tutors are caring, passionate in their interest in their respective industries and for students' learning, and appropriately experienced and qualified in their fields, including in adult teaching.
- Students are actively engaged in the learning and there is clear evidence of positive, respectful relations between students and staff, contributing to an effective learning environment.
- The organisation is actively involved in internal moderation of assessment and engages appropriately with its standard-setting bodies for the external moderation of assessment. Where issues have been identified, these are promptly addressed in an appropriate manner. There is some room for strengthening internal moderation of assessment processes.
- Staff display an open, reflective culture clearly focused on ongoing improvement to educational processes as well as student achievement and preparing students for employment.
- The organisation has recently strengthened its governance structure and displays a willingness to use staff strengths, as well as seeking external specialist input to improve educational processes and business functions.
- At the time of this evaluation, it is too early to see the full effects of recent improvements to governance, and the 2014 organisational restructure.

Findings²

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**.

AG challenge collects and collates comprehensive student achievement data which is used effectively for reporting to its funding bodies. The organisation benchmarks its educational performance against a range of similar private training providers using publicly available performance data. This information is used to monitor performance alongside funders' outcome targets. This is providing relevant information for management to monitor learner achievement and organisational performance. However, there is room for using this rich set of data for more detailed analysis, for example to compare relative performance across programmes, delivery sites, student cohorts, tutors and ethnic groups to maximise learnings from high-performing groups.

While the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)-published educational performance indicator data shows course completion rates are relatively high at 83 per cent averaged over the last four years, qualification completion rates have been lower at 74 per cent over the same time. These figures indicate that AG Challenge is 2 per cent below other training providers for course completions and 8 per cent below for qualification completions.

The organisation's analysis of qualification completion rates shows some students (those who gain employment before graduating), are taking longer than expected to complete their qualification, and these rates of achievement range, across levels, between 71 per cent and 100 per cent, with an average of 80 per cent. While some students take longer than the time allowed by the funders, this does indicate that students are being supported and motivated to stay and complete their qualifications. The reason for the delay in completions is well known by AG Challenge: students prefer to take up employment when this is offered, and many continue to study part-time to complete their qualification.

The 2014 educational performance data (see Table 1) shows Māori students are achieving at approximately the same level as for the whole group: 1 per cent below the group for course completions and 1 per cent above for qualification completions. This indicates that AG Challenge is providing a culturally appropriate learning environment which is effectively supporting Māori students to achieve at equivalent levels to all students.

² The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

Table 1 shows that Māori students are achieving at the same rate as 'all students', and overall a high number of students are gaining employment (there were no Pasifika students enrolled in 2014).

Table 1. TEC educational performance indicators compared with AG Challenge raw data

TEC published data	2014	4-year average	AG Challenge raw data	2014
All students – course completions	72%	84%	Māori course completions	71%
All students – qualification completions	63%	74%	Māori qualification completions	64%
			All students	70-100% (av 80%)
Employment outcomes	Not reported	Not reported	All students	75% average over four years

The agriculture industry is still in the process of building a culture of valuing qualifications, and with the majority of students being in agriculture these achievement figures are not altogether surprising. A strong positive indicator for this organisation is that over the last few years approximately 75 per cent of graduates have gained employment. While the organisation does not have strong benchmark data for comparison (this is not forthcoming from its competitors or publicly available), it must be acknowledged that the private training establishment is operating in the relatively high unemployment environment of Whanganui. This is therefore a strong result.

There was consistent evidence at this evaluation from students, parents, stakeholders and staff of students making genuine gains in employability or soft skills, for example time management, confidence, motivation and re-engaging their desire to learn.

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 organisation's self-assessment processes include student evaluations, informal contact with employers and industry groups, and some formal feedback from work experience employers. These processes are providing reasonably strong indications that students are gaining significant value from the training provided. This value includes gaining qualifications (sometimes the first ever achieved), 75 per cent gaining employment, and gaining the range of soft skills.

There were a number of anecdotes told by parents, students and staff at this evaluation (and well captured in the organisation's self-assessment), where students had made significant positive attitudinal changes. For example, students who had been previously disengaged from the world of learning and work, had begun building the motivation and confidence to maintain their attendance on the course to gain the knowledge and skills and confidence of farmers to take them on for work experience, and to get themselves to morning milking. These are achievements of significance and value.

The organisation's training is positioned to maximise these valued outcomes by being located in the work environment. The agriculture programmes are run on commercial farms, while the vet nurse training operates within a veterinarian clinic, providing the immediacy of commercial realities: 'students can see and smell and feel the real workplace'.

AG Challenge is actively involved in contributing to its community, for example through sponsorships for local sports teams.

The organisation's processes to gather feedback from employers and about work experience could be further strengthened, with a significant amount of data being by word of mouth currently, and not always well documented for subsequent analysis. The organisation has tried a variety of approaches to collect this feedback, but employers' time is precious and the farmer's day is long. Further work is being done to explore how best to formally capture the value of outcomes from stakeholders.

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 **Good**.

The programmes and activities delivered by AG Challenge are kept up to date with industry changes and best practice. This is maintained through ongoing contact with industry. In the case of agriculture, many staff own their own farms and the programmes are delivered on commercially operated farms. Workplace training allows students to see first-hand the practical application of theory, and allows employers to see how well students perform during work experience, which helps facilitate employment.

Programmes currently address the requirements for either national certificates or local certificates designed with input from industry. Feedback from students and tutors and industry sector stakeholders at this evaluation all confirmed the organisation's self-assessment that the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed on the programmes prepare students very well for gaining employment in agriculture or vet nursing, at similar rates. As mentioned, the high number of

graduates gaining employment further confirms that the programmes are well designed and meet industry and students' needs.

The organisation has recently changed its enrolment processes to strengthen its assessment of students' needs, and evidence presented at this evaluation shows that the new processes are ensuring that only students who are likely to succeed are enrolled.

Students have their literacy and numeracy checked using the TEC Adult Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Tool. The organisation has found, as have many tertiary education organisations, that this tool produces some unusual results, for example showing that some students' literacy and numeracy has dropped at the second test, rather than improved. This is due primarily to students gaining employment, and the motivation to do well in the assessment being somewhat less than for the first test. However, most students' results sighted at this evaluation show that they are making a significant gain in their literacy and numeracy, indicating that their learning needs have been well matched by the programme and activities.

As noted, the organisation's self-assessment is well planned and consistent. There is a clear, reflective culture embedded across the organisation of regularly meeting and considering how well the organisation is performing in meeting the needs of its funders, students and industry. The area for further development is in the level of documented feedback from industry to monitor emerging patterns and trends, and improving the level of analysis in order to track more clearly how changes result in real improvements.

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**.

AG Challenge has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement in learning and teaching. As noted, the organisation has a good level of knowledge of the results of its teaching. Course completions in particular are fairly strong, although qualification completions are an area for further improvement. Staff meet regularly and review student progress and achievement, and in their ongoing industry interactions receive regular feedback on graduates who are in employment or gaining new jobs. This level of self-reflection and review places the organisation in a strong position to further develop learning and teaching.

Tutors are very well qualified and experienced in their field of teaching and are supported by the organisation to gain adult education qualifications if they have not already gained them. Ongoing professional development is well planned, and documents reviewed at this evaluation show the organisation has a good level of analysis of where value is gained. Current plans include contracting specialists to

provide in-house training to more closely focus on staff training needs than is provided through seminars and conferences.

Performance appraisal processes are sound and include valued feedback from students and management and teaching observations of agriculture tutors. Vet nurse tutor observations is still a work in progress.

As noted, AG Challenge is actively involved with its standard-setting bodies for external moderation of students' assessments, and responds appropriately to addressing any identified issues. Internal moderation processes could be strengthened in light of some assessment issues arising through external moderation which by its nature is a very small sampling process.

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 **Good**.

The organisation's processes for reviewing and analysing the effectiveness of its student support processes is reasonably sound, involving student surveys which are analysed and discussed at staff meetings and governance meetings. While there are no specific concerns raised or identified at this evaluation regarding self-assessment of student support, the evaluation team considers that there are some areas for improvement, as noted, to the depth of the analysis and identification of emerging patterns and trends.

Information provided to students is clear and sufficient, and resourcing for student support, such as providing extra time and equipment, is very strong. For example, students are closely monitored and supported by tutors who often have a very broad understanding of issues affecting the students outside of the training environment, and are therefore able to connect with appropriate support mechanisms and agencies to keep students in training and progressing.

It was particularly evident to the evaluation team that the staff are very caring and passionate about supporting the students. The organisation provides extra services and activities, for example providing a van to pick the students up from home, providing some food on site, and social events such as putting down hangi. These all help bond the students as a group and build mutual support.

Students in this environment are given clear boundaries and expectations, and appear to respond very well. Comments from stakeholders noted that the caring environment and clear boundaries and expectations were particular factors that had turned some students around dramatically to re-engage them in learning and a positive lifestyle. Tutors also support students by helping them prepare their curriculum vitae, preparing them for interviews, and accompanying them to job interviews.

The organisation has recently become a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students, but as yet has enrolled no international students. The Code of Practice was not included in this evaluation due to AG Challenge gaining this signatory status only recently.

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 organisation has reasonably sophisticated formal and informal processes to monitor learner achievement and to bring about improvements, for example to learner enrolments, moderation and staff professional development. Also as noted, the areas for improvement to self-assessment are primarily in the level of detail in the analysis. In this regard, governance is committing finances to improving its student management system reporting functionality and providing staff training to access and analyse these reports.

In response to funding changes, the director, with management support, carried out a necessary restructure to maintain organisational viability and to ensure the private training establishment continues to address the requirements of funding bodies. The restructure included changed roles and reducing the overall number of staff.

The organisation has clear lines of responsibility and a clear purpose and direction focused on addressing the needs of second-chance learners and on learner achievement and employment. There are appropriate processes for ensuring sufficient staff are hired with appropriate experience qualifications and skills for their roles. The organisation has well-considered financial planning that ensures ongoing financial viability and that programmes and activities are well resourced. New classrooms are being built, and recently a set of iPads was purchased for the agriculture programmes for researching and recording evidence of competency. These have proved popular and effective. The organisation has established a virtual private network operating across its agricultural sites in Okoia, providing fast Internet access for students and staff.

Some staff have been involved in the review of national qualifications (Targeted Review of Qualifications), with the vet nurse staff sitting on the governance group for vet nursing. This has been valuable for ensuring AG Challenge stays current with recent changes, and shows a commitment to contribute to these changes.

Overall, the organisation has strong and sound governance and management, providing appropriate strategic oversight and day-to-day operational management functions, with the office administration staff, including personnel with significant recent educational experience, providing appropriate understanding of educational requirements.

Final Report

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**.

The organisation's governance and management structures and processes are highly reflective, focused on a clear purpose and direction, and provide appropriate strategic oversight. A recent organisational restructure, including strengthening of organisational governance, is providing effective monitoring of compliance and a sound business base for operating a private training establishment. This was well evidenced through interviews with the organisation's personnel and external stakeholders, and a review of board and management meeting minutes, business plan and strategic documents. The organisation seeks external specialist input as required to build and maintain its focus on financial viability and educational responsibility and effectiveness.

There is room for building the capability of the governance and management team in governance self-review, to further examine and review its effectiveness.

2.2 Focus area: Agriculture programmes levels 2-4

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Veterinary Nursing level 5

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that AG Challenge Limited:

- Further develop the quality management system details on how to carry out self-assessment to provide more detailed guidance to staff regarding the key features of effective self-assessment.³
- Continue to focus on enabling students to complete qualifications.

³ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/self-assessment/what-is-self-assessment/>

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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Final Report