

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Animation College New Zealand
Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 4 September 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:	Animation College New Zealand Limited (Animation College)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	242 Queen Street, Auckland CBD
Delivery sites:	As above
First registered:	2 June 1992
Courses currently delivered:	Freelance Diploma of Applied Animation (Level 6) Freelance Diploma in Digital Media (Character Animation) (Level 7)
Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students:	Approved for students 18 years old and over
Number of students:	Domestic: 140 equivalent full-time students (Māori – 24 equivalent full-time students; Pasifika – seven equivalent full-time students) International: one equivalent full-time student
Number of staff:	15 full-time equivalents and three part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	No New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) Consent to Assess
Distinctive characteristics:	Animation College markets itself as the sole tertiary education provider of character animation. The two diploma programmes offer students the opportunity to develop 2D and 3D character

animation skills and knowledge. Eighty-four per cent of students are enrolled in the two-year, level 6 diploma and 16 per cent in the level 7 diploma.

Staff and students are periodically involved in commercial animation productions or advertising campaigns.

Recent significant changes: A new general manager was appointed in June 2013. The organisation changed its name in June 2012 from Freelance Animation School Ltd to Animation College New Zealand Ltd.

Previous quality assurance history: Animation College was last quality assured by NZQA in 2009 and met all requirements.

Animation College assessments are not required to be externally moderated by any industry training organisations or standard-setting bodies, because there is no standard-setting body overseeing these programmes.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

This external evaluation and review included three focus areas, and in effect was an evaluation of the entire organisation. The two diplomas, Freelance Diploma of Applied Animation (Level 6) and Freelance Diploma in Digital Media (Character Animation) (Level 7), were both included because graduates typically progress from the level 6 to the level 7 diploma prior to moving into employment in the industry. The mandatory focus area of governance, management and strategy was the third focus area.

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-eeer/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 spent two days at Animation College's delivery site. The evaluation included interviews with one of the two directors, the management team, tutors and a group of students drawn from both diploma programmes. The

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evaluators conducted phone interviews with stakeholders, including a number of animation studio personnel. Animation College provided a range of organisational documents and records, providing context and supporting data that confirmed information discussed during the interviews.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Animation College New Zealand Limited**.

Animation College has long-term and close connections with animation studios within New Zealand and overseas and is held in high respect by the studios that have employed graduates. Students are graduating with current, industry-relevant skills in character animation. A high percentage of students complete courses and graduate either with the level 6 diploma only or with both the level 6 and 7 diplomas. Over the last three years, course completion rates have been five percentage points above the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) published median rates, and qualification completion rates over the last three years have also been above the median.¹ The interim 2012 course completion rate is 79 per cent, and the qualification achievement rate, 100 per cent.

Staff and resources are of a very high calibre. Staff members have extensive experience within the animation industry in New Zealand or overseas, and display a clear passion for this industry and for teaching. The evaluators observed a high level of collegiality among staff and management, and a high level of respect and rapport between staff and students. Technology resources for teaching character animation are regularly updated to industry-standard computer hardware and software, and the level 7 diploma programme partly operates as a simulated commercial animation studio. The combination of these factors is resulting in motivated students producing reputable character animation work and 'show reels' (samples of their work), and enabling a significant number of graduates to gain work within the industry.

The organisation has regular and appropriate staff performance appraisal processes, and well-planned, regular internal moderation of its assessment tools and decisions to ensure they are fit for purpose, and consistent and reliable.

No significant gaps or concerns in regard to educational performance were identified at this evaluation.

¹ Qualification achievement rates have been averaged over the 2009 to 2011 period to accommodate individual year anomalies created by fluctuations in enrolment numbers.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Animation College New Zealand Limited**.

Animation College has a well-embedded, reflective culture evident among staff and management; it is an organisation that knows itself well.

The organisation's long-term and close engagement with the animation industry is used effectively by management and staff to monitor how well the courses and programmes match industry and students' needs. Many examples of improvements were noted at this evaluation, including improvements to curriculum, the involvement of industry specialists in animation design briefs and their feedback to students on the work, and modelling the classroom as a commercial animation studio.

Animation College tracks students' achievements closely, and has developed effective processes to share this information with its students, ensuring staff and students have a common understanding.

Regular student surveys are conducted and analysed effectively, and results contribute to ongoing improvements, such as to the clarity of design briefs or marking schedules.

Graduate outcomes have been tracked over many years and indicate that a significant number of graduates gain work within the industry in New Zealand and overseas. The organisation acknowledges that this is an area requiring further development, to link with alumni to gain a more complete picture of graduate outcomes and to inform programme development, and this is currently underway.

The organisation attracts a significant proportion of Māori and Pasifika students, commonly over 30 per cent of the student population, significantly above local demographics. Staff and management observations indicate that these students' achievement rates are above average. This is an area for future closer analysis, to establish the achievement rates and the factors influencing this.

There are some gaps in the completeness of the organisation's self-assessment, as noted above in regard to tracking graduate outcomes and defining or benchmarking students' success rates.

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**.

Students are achieving very well, both academically and in regard to transferable skills. Course completion rates have been at a consistently high level over the last three years, between 79 and 91 per cent. This has been consistently above the TEC published median rates. This success is significant, and arguably the stronger indicator of academic performance than qualification achievement rates, because qualification completion statistics can fluctuate year by year depending on changes in programme enrolments. However, over the last four years, including 2012 interim qualification results, average graduation rates are also above the median.

These achievement rates, as benchmarked against the Ministry of Education Education Counts data, show Animation College results sitting at or slightly above completion rates for all level 5-7 diplomas in creative arts.

There is some evidence that students are also making gains in personal transferable skills, such as maturing in group work skills and working at a commercial speed. These skills are essential for commercial studio employment, where productions are reliant on group input. The number of students gaining studio employment or contract work or moving into freelance self-employment is one indicator of the value of these skills. Student evaluations provided further evidence of students' own perceptions of their personal growth in skills and confidence.

The organisation has strong processes for tracking achievement rates, including a good understanding of those students who do not complete. This is enabling tutors to work individually with students to build their animation skills.

There is room for Animation College to benchmark its achievement rates across a wider range of factors, such as comparing performance against similar New Zealand providers or internal benchmarking between student groups and diploma levels.

² 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**.

Students are gaining significant value through their studies at Animation College. The organisation has tracked alumni for several years, to show that many graduates are gaining commercially valuable skills, enabling them to gain work in a wide range of animation studios in New Zealand and overseas. This is an industry that is subject to the fluctuations of project contracts and the current economic downturn, and so many studios are not currently hiring. Animation College management stays in close contact with studios and facilitates internships on occasions for current students or graduates. Many of these result in employment or contract offers. For example, of the 14 students from 2012 that Animation College was able to track, 12 are known to have gained work in a relevant field or have moved on to further education or training. From the 2011 cohort, 22 of the 26 students tracked are working, the majority in animation studios.

Students prepare a 'show reel' which provides examples of the students' best work, and these are often the deciding factor in graduates gaining work. Studio staff members are often involved with animation courses, providing critique to students' work and adding value by providing briefs that mirror the commercial reality.

Animation College is currently working on strengthening its alumni tracking processes, in order to have more complete data on student outcomes and the value gained.

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**.

The needs of industry and of students are very well matched by the programme design, and the learning activities, design briefs and computer technology. Programmes and course components are well structured to develop students' individual animation skills and creative abilities, as well as to develop students' ability to work in groups towards a single production output. This is especially evident in the level 7 diploma programme, which has recently been purposefully structured to simulate a commercial studio.

Tutorial staff and management have extensive industry experience and maintain regular engagement with alumni and animation studios to stay in touch and up to date with industry best practice.

Regular scheduled programme reviews, alongside ongoing, week-by-week tutor and management discussions, result in meaningful improvements, for example to update and renew computer technology, project design briefs and group projects. Students are, at times, involved in commercial work that is referred to Animation College through local studios, providing students with genuine commercial experience while completing the diploma.

The organisation uses student evaluations and input from student representatives to complement staff observations of students, providing an effective process to monitor how well students' needs are met. Ongoing networking with local studios and involvement of staff in student critique and design briefs is providing management with a sound understanding of how well they meet industry needs. There are no significant gaps in self-assessment in this area.

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**.

Teaching is highly effective. This was evidenced by the high student achievement rates and through the organisation's analysis of student surveys, indicating that over 90 per cent of students rate their tutors' knowledge and skills very highly (good to excellent).

Animation College has strong assessment moderation processes, ensuring that assessment tools are fit for purpose and that students' work is assessed consistently and reliably. While the organisation is not required to have its assessments externally moderated by a standard-setting body, it does engage with three external moderators, providing a further layer of cross-checking to ensure the validity of its assessment processes and results.

The organisation has an effective process to monitor and develop tutor performance. This is reviewed annually, including input via student evaluations, teaching observations and student progress. Some tutors have completed a qualification in adult teaching and the organisation has recently initiated a project for all tutors to undertake and complete the Certificate in Educational Facilitation (Advanced) (Level 7) through a local provider, with the intention of further developing staff knowledge and capability as teachers of adults.

As already noted, tutors have extensive experience in the animation industry and maintain their knowledge and skills through ongoing engagement with studios. Many tutors are actively engaged in animation productions and advertising projects concurrently.

Animation College frequently arranges for international specialists to deliver lectures either on site or through video-conference facilities. This is providing

students with cutting edge and highly motivational lectures beyond the minimum requirements of their course. Feedback from students and staff indicate that these lectures are highly valued and add significantly to the programme.

The organisation has strong processes to monitor teaching effectiveness. There are no significant gaps in the self-assessment of this area.

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**.

Students are provided with consistent and reliable guidance and support that enables them to succeed academically and to grow in maturity. This was evidenced through discussions with staff, students and external stakeholders. Student evaluations specifically note the value students put on the one-to-one support provided by the tutors. Student attendance is closely monitored and absences are followed up consistently, with both students and teachers being clear about expectations for attendance.

At enrolment, students are interviewed to determine their focus and passion for character animation as a career. Staff discussed with the evaluation team their interest in determining at enrolment the students' creative talent and particular interest in animation as an indicator of their likelihood of success.

Animation College currently has one international student, but has plans to slowly increase the number of international students over the next few years. Staff and management are planning now to accommodate the growth in international student numbers. Staff interviewed show a good understanding of the requirements of the Code of Practice, and clear and complete documentation is maintained for the one student currently enrolled.

The organisation has sound processes for self-assessment in this area and no significant gaps were in evidence.

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 **Good**.

Animation College has two owner-directors, with one actively involved in the business. The organisation has a clear purpose and direction and this is communicated with staff. The organisation's key purpose is, 'to provide students with real-life studio experience and feedback through design briefs from clients and local studios, to prepare students for employment opportunities'.

The owners are supported by a general manager, an academic manager, tutorial staff and administration support staff. As already noted, the evaluators observed strong collegiality and rapport in evidence among all staff. There was good evidence across the organisation that the owners have appointed high-calibre, well-experienced staff who have a passion for character animation and the ability to connect with and develop students to meet fast-changing industry expectations.

The organisation has recently appointed a new general manager, who is in the process of settling into the new role. While the new manager brings strong industry and education experience to the role, the handover process from the previous general manager has left some gaps in process or information. However, this appears to have been somewhat outside of the organisation's control and is not significantly impacting on its performance.

Animation College is currently in the process of applying to NZQA for approval to offer a Bachelor of Character Animation. The organisation has been planning for and developing this proposal since 2008. This has involved both the local animation industry and a number of overseas education institutions in Korea, China, USA, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Denmark as part of planning and environmental scanning. While it is too early to determine the outcome of this degree application, the preparation and consultation appears to have been well considered.

The organisation is providing a stimulating learning environment with well-appointed classrooms, and is appropriately equipped with up-to-date computer technology and teaching resources, including data projectors and video-conferencing facilities and an expanding library. Management and staff maintain close connections and ongoing relationships with industry, ensuring that programme content and the technology provided is matching current changes in the industry.

The owners and the management team have developed a reflective culture among staff and robust self-assessment processes, and are implementing regular and ongoing reviews and improvements, resulting in student achievements. However, there are some gaps in organisational self-assessment practices. Areas for further

development are: stronger or more complete follow-up with alumni to determine immediate and long-term value, such as employment rates, and further developing internal and external benchmarking processes.

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: Freelance Diploma of Applied Animation (Level 6)

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Freelance Diploma in Digital Media (Character Animation) (Level 7)

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Animation College:

- Explore options to record or document input from animation studios and other industry contacts, and to further strengthen this input to programme development
- Develop internal benchmark processes such as comparing student achievement rates across courses, gender or ethnicity to strengthen self-assessment processes and further improve student achievement
- Continue to develop alumni follow-up processes to determine the value of short and longer-term outcomes.

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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