



Report of External Evaluation and Review

ACTS Auckland City Training School

Date of report: 29 June 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: Auckland

Type: Private Training Establishment

Size: Students: 300

Staff: 46

Sites: Papatoetoe, Manukau, Glenfield, Avondale, Newton, Onehunga, Panmure

Auckland City Training School (ACTS) was first registered as a private training establishment with NZQA in 1994. It is accredited to level 5 on the NQF framework, and currently offers six certificate and diploma-level qualifications through on-site, full-time, part-time, and distance education.

ACTS is owned by Equippers Church and operates through two distinct but related educational streams.

Equippers College offers four full-time courses in Christian ministry:

- Certificate in Christian Ministry (Level 3) (18 weeks)
- Certificate in Practical Ministry Skills (Level 4) (18 weeks)
- Certificate in Christian Ministry (Applied) (Level 4) (36 weeks)
- Certificate in Advanced Christian Ministry (Level 3) (36 weeks).

The student roll in the Equippers College programme is currently 66 equivalent full-time students (EFTS). Thirty EFTS are fully funded by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), while 36 are full fee-paying, assisted by ACTS with a domestic student scholarship.

Creative Learning Scheme operates in seven centres throughout Auckland and offers Ministry of Education-funded Alternative Education and Youth Training programmes for secondary school-aged youth no longer attending mainstream schools. Learners in this programme can gain credits towards the National Certificate in Employment Skills. One of the centres is a Youth Justice Residence facility in South Auckland.

ACTS was previously quality assured by NZQA under the quality audit system. The most recent quality audit was in 2007, when ACTS met all requirements for ongoing registration.

Executive Summary

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **highly confident** in the educational performance of ACTS.

ACTS delivers certificate and diploma courses to NQF level 5 and NQF standards from levels 1-4, with significant added-value content. This is intrinsic to the vision of ACTS' parent body, Equippers Church. For this group, learning is not merely utilitarian, fitting the learner for employment or further education, but as an opportunity for personal transformation.

In both the Equippers College and Creative Learning Scheme (CLS) programmes, ACTS meets and exceeds Ministry of Education (MOE) and TEC contractual targets. In 2009 Equippers College exceeded its EFTS target by 60 per cent. Thirty-five students were fully TEC-funded, and 21 were fee-paying, supported by an ACTS scholarship programme.

A postgraduate record of the 2009 Equippers College programme showed that 50 per cent of graduates from Equippers College left for employment, 50 per cent returned to enrol in the Certificate in Advanced Christian Ministry, and all were engaged in church or community work. Outcomes for many CLS students were less certain, often influenced by legal and custodial considerations, but two of the 2009 group are about to move on to tertiary education, a major shift in perspective that was attributed by those students to CLS learning.

The requirement that education be both practical and transformational entails, on the one hand, providing students with skills or qualifications for employment or further education, on the other engaging them in a programme involving, among other things, the development of critical self-awareness and the ability to engage in positive and purposeful transactions with the world and with other human beings. The outcomes observed by the EER team, and related in the EER interviews, indicate that ACTS' programmes excel in these outcomes.

ACTS argues that relationships of respect and trust between students, and between students and teachers, and the sense of attainment that comes from achieving credits contribute to both practical and transformational goals, generating "self-belief" and "belief in others", and bringing confidence that learning is not only possible, but can change lives for the better. There is substantial anecdotal evidence of this, and it has been emphatically affirmed by students and observers of both Equippers College and CLS programmes.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **confident** in the capability in self-assessment of ACTS.

The “transformational” perspective of ACTS’ teaching comprises so-called “soft outcomes”. This is a challenge for evaluation. Soft outcomes are notoriously elusive and complex. In the case of ACTS there are many indicators of success, some of them adduced in the EER interviews. Among these are students’ feedback, discussions in the Christian community, and class observations, but without a more focussed analysis of contextual evidence the connections between process and outcome are not clearly established. Some outcomes, for example the pastoral and community activity of EC graduates, may indicate a predisposition for the work or some other influence in the church environment. Other outcomes, especially in the CLS programme, may be attributable to a wide range of interventions.

Some tertiary education organisations (TEOs) are presently identifying indicators for the assessment of behavioural outcomes, and this may be a useful development in evaluation. ACTS has expressed interest in this approach. More detail about the teaching-learning process, external moderation of courses and assessments, benchmarking with comparable TEOs, and where possible, more postgraduate follow-up on students would strengthen the evidence for soft outcomes, adding strength to the already emphatic endorsements of students and other stakeholders.

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 ACTS included the following mandatory focus area:

- Governance, management, and strategy.

The following programme focus areas include all students enrolled under the TEC targeted funding programmes:

- Equippers College
- Creative Learning Scheme.

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**.

Context

- Contractual targets in both programmes are achieved.
- Equippers College students talk of quantum leaps in vocational and transformative learning.
- Achievement of credits and positive approaches to teaching and learning are motivators.

- Students may develop their own programmes in some subjects.
- Students in the CLS programme show rapid progress and perceptible changes of attitude to learning.
- Each term has an umbrella theme.
- There is some stakeholder dissent from the generally positive view of learning at CLS.

Explanation

In 2009 contractual outcomes in both the Equippers College and CLS programmes were achieved or exceeded in each quarter, often by comfortable margins.

Positive approaches to teaching and assessment, “commend and recommend” practices, organised competitiveness, challenging and entertaining activities, were cited as spurs to learning. In some cases students design their own learning programmes, for example fitness, where achievements are used as encouragement for learning in other subjects.

Elements of ACTS’ vision of personal and social transformation are used as umbrella themes for each term. Examples are: leadership, community, identity.

Equippers College

Equippers College students interviewed by the EER team told of their initial surprise and subsequent delight at the challenges and “quantum leaps” in their learning. All affirmed that the programme was both vocational and transformational.

Creative Learning Scheme

Children, Youth and Family (CYF) social workers attached to the CLS programme expressed admiration for its methods and outcomes, affirming that “positive” changes in behaviour and approach to learning are quickly apparent in many students. The achievement of NQF credits was of major significance, generating self-belief and confidence that learning is possible. Students commented that CLS learning was the most worthwhile aspect of their residency, providing a “level floor” on which they were given attention and respect unique in their experience. Two students interviewed by the EER team attribute their rapid progression from at-risk lifestyles to mainstream tertiary learning to the quality of learning at CLS.

One CYF worker was not entirely convinced of the value of the learning and recommended improvements in resources, the range of courses, and a more formal approach to course delivery.

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**.

Context

- Both Equippers College and CLS programmes report and consult on contractual matters with government funding agents and maintain ongoing informal contacts with stakeholders.
- The Equippers College principal consults regularly with the Equippers Church and wider Christian community about ACTS programmes.
- Programmes have clearly visible outcomes in terms of their contracts.
- ACTS seeks both vocational and holistic outcomes for all students.
- Graduates may return for further study. Many are engaged in ministry or pastoral work.

Explanation

There is ongoing informal contact with other stakeholders, for example Equippers Church and its networks, iwi and Māori organisations, Pasifika communities, families, parents and guardians, schools, employers, and training providers. Individual students are often known to the stakeholders, and their progress is an agenda item in discussions. Students' stories are related and discussed, outcomes are reviewed, and options discussed.

Equippers College

The Equippers College principal travels widely in New Zealand to present and discuss the college and its programmes, notably at national church conferences and meetings of the wider Christian community. He reports continuing interest in the ACTS "product". Enrolment in the college is growing and graduates from the college are sought by the church community. This may be an indication of the value of such a programme in a resurgent Christian community.

The Equippers College programme is both preparation for pastoral and educational roles in the ministry and a transformational experience for the learner. A destination spreadsheet compiled between 2001 and 2006, and reinstated in 2008, showed that in 2008 and 2009 more than 99 per cent of Equippers College graduates were involved in pastoral or community activities. Half of these were employed and half returned to the internship programme. Employers of graduates have expressed strong interest in their employee's learning. Some have sent graduates back to the college for further learning. The vocational and personal growth dimensions were strongly affirmed by each member of a group of students interviewed by the EER team.

Creative Learning Scheme

CLS presents a quarterly report to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and maintains ongoing contact with the MOE national office. There are quarterly meetings with Work and Income NZ (WINZ), CYF, the Ministry of Justice, and youth services providers, to discuss and evaluate CLS's contribution to learning.

ACTS' trustees require that CLS provide a "holistic, wrap-around" education for residential students, giving opportunities for personal transformation and a "different future, equipping them for life". CLS programmes are reviewed daily and weekly in the teaching environment, and monthly, quarterly, and annually by the academic board and ACTS' trustees.

Conspicuous outcomes of the CLS programme are dramatic shifts, from indifference or hostility to interest and rapid progress. On at least one recent occasion, a student's custodial sentence was reduced in acknowledgement of achievement of NQF credits.

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**.

Context

- Admissions to the CLS programme are flagged to local service providers.
- Teaching is adapted to student needs and abilities.
- End-of-term surveys of programmes are summarised for management review.
- A culture of teacher self-evaluation is encouraged. Student feedback is a feature of this.
- Feedback from students is positive.

Explanation

Equippers College

Equippers College has a detailed and clearly articulated strategic plan for 2009-10, describing nine critical features for effective course design and execution. Key measures to be addressed are identified and assigned to specific staff members.

A monthly "rave page" for Equippers College students gives forthright feedback about the programme and about personal and spiritual welfare. A group of 18 Equippers College students interviewed by the EER team was unanimous about the "life-changing" influence of the programme, both personally and vocationally. Most reported that the programme had been challenging, often astonishing, and a new experience in learning.

Students and graduates employed in ministry or community agencies have been sent back to Equippers College to continue in the programme. Emails have been received from church

and community workers expressing strong interest in the programme, seeking further information, and occasionally offering their services.

Creative Learning Scheme

Teaching is adapted to specific needs rather than to mere accumulation of NQF credits. For example, literacy teaching focuses on developing a sense of personal identity and connectedness to the world. The aim is to transform reactive lifestyles and enhance individual learning. A literacy facilitator works with CLS staff, and numeracy is taught in greater depth than required by NQF standards. Particular attention is given to comprehension as opposed to mechanical recitation, and to applied skills of numeracy.

Every CLS admission is flagged to social service providers, and an individual learning plan is developed as needed. Family and community agency conferences may be convened for the benefit of individual students, to evaluate their progress and plan improvements.

Subject surveys from each teaching team assess and summarise individual student progress for monthly academic board and trustee meetings, and for reports to trustees and elders. Recommendations are recorded and monitored by the CLS principal.

Feedback from CLS students has been positive. External evidence of the influence of the CLS programme has been the rapid shift of some students from potentially destructive lifestyles, and in the already quoted case, the reduction of a custodial sentence as an outcome of credit achievement.

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 **good**.

Context

- ACTS appoints teachers who embody the vision of the Equippers College and CLS programmes.
- Induction and mentorship are provided for all beginning teachers.
- Professional development plans are a required feature.
- Teachers compile a daily and weekly reflective diary.
- Strong rapport is observed between teachers and students.
- CYF participates actively and reports original and effective teaching.
- There is some internal moderation of programmes.

Explanation

ACTS receives numerous applications for teaching positions and is able to appoint teachers who embody and demonstrate the vision of its programmes.

Permanent staff are required to engage in ongoing professional development. Professional development goals are recorded and progress evaluated in an end-of-year review. Teachers keep daily and weekly diaries, and there are fortnightly stream meetings to discuss successes and failures, share professional development experience, and engage in peer readings of relevant material.

Contracted staff who may have seniority or authority in their profession are exempt from the professional development requirement. No personal files are kept for them.

Students complete course evaluations for every semester, and the response, both in formal evaluations and “rave page” entries, has been consistently positive about teaching styles and content. Outcomes in both the Equippers College and CLS programmes corroborate this.

Equippers College

The value of the teaching is reflected in the college outcomes. Feedback from students strongly affirms its high quality and the range of learning opportunities it creates. There is some internal moderation of courses. Evaluation of teaching is nonetheless somewhat unsystematic and could be enhanced by a more structured approach, for example by more detailed observation of methods and outcomes, and by more mentoring, mutual supervision, and external moderation.

The Equippers College principal recruits and inducts teaching staff and contractors. He may sit in on lectures, giving guidance as needed. Teachers may ask a colleague or the Equippers College principal to observe them at work. There is internal moderation of a sample of courses.

Creative Learning Scheme

Induction to CLS is conducted by the operations manager, and beginning teachers are provided with a comprehensive staff manual detailing goals and responsibilities. The CLS principal may sit in on early sessions by new teachers. An external facilitator may be present to give guidance on a particular programme, for example the numeracy project.

CYF is closely involved with CLS students and teachers, and makes day-by-day contributions to the programme. CYF social workers who were interviewed reported strong rapport between students and teachers and a wide variety of original and effective ideas for teaching recalcitrant students. For example, a student who refused to read was beguiled into reading by means of a graphic novel (classic comic), declaring after a long solitary session, “This book is mean!” There was some dissent from this positive view of the teaching by a CYF social worker, who expressed a preference for a more formal approach to teaching.

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**.

Context

- Independent education plans (IEPs) assist planning and monitoring of progress.
- Students are informed of learning opportunities, and achievements are recorded and acknowledged.
- Progress of individual students is closely monitored.
- One-to-one meetings between students enable students to evaluate and plan their own learning.
- Multi-disciplinary involvement gives students access to guidance and active support from multiple perspectives.

Explanation

Equippers College

The Equippers College operations manager has responsibility for students' safety and welfare. Every student completes a test on entry to determine readiness for the programme. Learning concerns or conflicts are flagged with the lecturer and the college principal, who may intervene if necessary. Early identification of problems is sought, and a tiered support system engaged. This may include home visits, meetings with family or local community, formal two-to-one interviews, networking, engagement with a local church, and tutorial time with the operations manager and a tutor, who may be a former student. All interventions are recorded and followed up.

Creative Learning Scheme

In CLS, student "base assessments" are collated into IEPs in the first ten days of attendance. Barriers are identified, and plans made to address them. IEPs are reviewed every six weeks, and plans adjusted as required.

Students are informed of unit standards within their reach and are encouraged and supported to achieve them. Students who were interviewed affirmed that this contributed strongly to their belief in the possibility of educational achievement. Achievements, or lack of them, are reviewed at weekly team meetings, and any remedial action monitored in subsequent weeks.

Educational achievement is celebrated with the presentation of monthly and end-of-year achievement certificates. CYF and teaching staff report that the monthly occasions often signal a lift in the confidence and positivity of students.

All students are known personally to teaching staff. One-to-one meetings are frequently used to discuss and advise on learning or personal management issues. Multi-disciplinary and family conferences, often involving a variety of community agencies, are convened as required for students at risk.

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**.

Context

- The role of the governing body permeates the learning environment.
- Transformational education is a primary goal.
- The board of trustees maintains an interest in student welfare and personal development.
- The same approach extends to teaching staff and management.

Explanation

The close and often overlapping relationship between ACTS management and its governing body ensures that its presiding vision, to provide holistic, transformational learning, and to open pathways for a “different future”, underlies all transactions between ACTS and its stakeholders, and impacts day-to-day on the activities of the TEO.

This relationship also involves constant engagement and networking within the church community, and with a wider group of community agencies, to ensure integrity of the educational programmes and the personal and professional well-being of staff and students. This was affirmed in interviews with students in both the Equippers College and CLS programmes, and with the pastors and social workers involved with them.

Students are the primary beneficiaries, but staff are recipients of the same attention to welfare and personal development. Professional development is not discretionary. It is a required focus for every teacher and is monitored by management.

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**.

Context

- The Equippers Church elders and congregation appoint a board of trustees, the governing body of both Equippers College and CLS.
- Management and trustees are in constant communication and meet monthly to discuss plans, programmes, and progress of students and staff.
- Trustees take a close interest in programmes, and a personal interest in the students. This is shared by the church community.
- The purpose is an educational vision of “heart and skill”.

Explanation

A parent eldership board, with the endorsement of the Equippers Church congregation, appoints a group of five trustees who are responsible for governance of educational programs. Elder and trustee boards may have membership in common. The boards meet monthly, on the same day, and members of the Equippers College and CLS management team will also attend.

A six-weekly “vision night”, when governance/management groups meet members of the church congregation, enables members of the church community to hear, discuss, and give feedback on policies and plans; in effect, to participate in governance.

The outcome sought from this intricate pattern of relationships is that both Equippers College and CLS demonstrate an educational vision that is both transformative and pragmatic, both “heart and skill”. The effectiveness of the resulting programme is perhaps evident in the destinalional outcomes of all graduates in 2009.

This effectiveness was also strongly affirmed by students interviewed by the EER team, and by pastors associated with the programme who advise on course development and pastoral care for students. Comments from students included expressions such as “journey of discovery”; “investment in who I am”; “they walk the talk day-by-day”; “for the individual, not the teachers”; “assessments are fun”; “great range of people”; “avoid teaching doggedly to the text”.

Teachers and contracted lecturers are engaged only if the principal is confident they are able to fulfil a demanding agenda. Teachers are given collegial and management support to sustain their work.

An advantage of the “high trust”, democratic approach to governance and management is that it provides a powerful vehicle for self-evaluation at this level, and a test of ACTS’ acceptability to its stakeholders. A risk is that such an approach could become indecisive and diffused or subject to conflict, although this is not currently evident at ACTS.

2.2 Focus area: Equippers College

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**.

Context

- Contractual outcomes are met.
- Equippers College shares essential outcomes with CLS.
- The challenge for Equippers College is to demonstrate connection between process and outcomes.

Explanation

Equippers College achieves its contractual outcomes. Its purpose is to prepare students for Christian ministry, but as with CLS this encompasses a range of outcomes embodying the vision of Equippers Church. There is a reciprocal link between the focus areas: first, that Equippers College graduates must be prepared to engage with parishioners with learning and lifestyle challenges; secondly, that while Equippers College graduates may become teachers in CLS, beginning Equippers College students may themselves be CLS graduates.

Students of the Equippers College programme emphatically affirm the “life-changing” quality of their learning, and anecdotal feedback from the wider Christian community is further evidence of this. However, Equippers College faces the same challenge as CLS in producing a body of evidence connecting the educational approach with these outcomes.

This leaves ACTS committed to outcomes whose attribution remains open to some debate, however convincing to those intimately involved. ACTS has expressed interest in engaging in more focussed evaluation. This could bring new insight into its practice and would be a valuable development in the sector as a whole.

2.3 Focus Area: Creative Learning Scheme

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**.

Context

- Contractual obligations are met.
- The Creative Learning Scheme (CLS) programme requires skill, patience, and insight.
- Evaluation needs to demonstrate the connection between process and outcome.

Explanation

The CLS programme meets and exceeds its contractual obligations. It continually engages with more residents than specified in its contract, and achievement of NQF credits exceeds the MOE target.

The primary purpose with this group of learners is to expose them to a vision of life that for many may be alien, and often threatening. This is approached with patient and focussed attention on building positive and trusting relationships, and the achievement of recognised educational goals. The desired effect is to build self-confidence, and belief in the possibility of learning and success in the wider world. It is a programme requiring insight and patience and the ability to engage intimately and safely with students with little or no predisposition for the process.

Outcomes in NQF credits, and anecdotal accounts from teachers, families, and other observers give evidence of CLS's success. The challenge is to create a more systematic and focussed evaluative process, and to begin to accumulate "hard" evidence of the relationship between process and outcome in such a complex environment and for such an ambitious project. Efforts to evaluate soft outcomes are being made elsewhere in the education sector, and ACTS has expressed interest in strengthening evaluation in the CLS programme.

Actions Required and Recommendations

Actions required

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

Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from this report.

NZQA

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