

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

## Excel Ministries School of Performing Arts

Confident in educational performance

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 24 January 2014

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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	Excel Ministries School of Performing Arts (Excel)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	20 Portage Road, New Lynn, Auckland
First registered	1994
Number of students:	112
Number of staff:	10
Scope of active accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Certificate of Performance in Dance (Level 3)</li><li>• Certificate of Performance in Drama (Level 3)</li><li>• Certificate of Performance in Music (Level 3)</li><li>• Certificate of Advanced Performance in Dance (Level 4)</li><li>• Certificate of Advanced Performance in Drama (Level 4)</li><li>• Certificate of Advanced Performance in Music (Level 4)</li></ul>
Sites:	20 Portage Road, New Lynn, Auckland
Distinctive characteristics:	Excel's curriculum integrates theoretical and practical learning in three performance arts, social and personal development, and religious learning. Individual and social development is a primary feature, stressed by staff, students and graduates. For 20 selected students, the year two programme

comprises a 20-week tour of schools and churches, with students billeted by local families and performing for school and other audiences, including church congregations. This is a demanding project, providing opportunities to rehearse both social and performance skills.

Recent significant changes: The school is administered as a charitable trust with a trustee board. The current principal was appointed by the board in 2008, taking over from the founding principal of the PTE. The change was accompanied by a reorganisation of management roles and responsibilities.

Previous quality assurance history: The previous quality assurance visit by NZQA was in 2009. All requirements of the standard were met.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The external evaluation and review (EER) examined the following focus areas:

- Governance, management and strategy

This is a mandatory focus area.

- Certificate of Performance in Music (Level 3)

The EER is seen as an opportunity to discuss some complexities and challenges in the delivery of this course, where success has been a challenge for some, but which has already, at level 3, been an entry point to level 5 courses elsewhere.

- Certificate of Performance in Dance (Level 3)

This is a successful and popular course, and the EER was seen as a good opportunity to review Excel's performance and its role in the PTE mission. All first-year students were available for interview at the EER.

### 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.*

The EER was conducted by a lead evaluator and team evaluator at 20 Portage Road, New Lynn, Auckland. The site was examined, and interviews, conducted over two days, involved all management staff concerned with curriculum and delivery, all permanent staff, and a group of approximately 16 students. Graduates, employers, school principals and church officers were interviewed by telephone. References were received from graduates and employers.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Excel Ministries School of Performing Arts**.

- Excel's mission is to provide vocational training in the performing arts and general life-skills for its students.
- Evidence of achievement in both fields has been provided by graduates, industry representatives, church leaders and education spokespersons.
- Students' social and personal skills seem to be well developed by the Excel programmes. Increased confidence and self-awareness are apparent, and are supported by Excel's inclusive 'family' environment.
- Overall course completion rates over the past four years have averaged over 80 per cent. While Excel does not do detailed analysis of graduate outcomes against programme objectives, anecdotal and other data indicated that its programmes have often led to improved work and further learning opportunities.
- Contracted tutors are technically skilled and often drawn directly from the performing arts field. Few, however, have formal teacher training qualifications, while the part-time tutors lack professional development plans.
- There is some overlap in management roles, in keeping with the compact size of the PTE.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the capability in Self-assessment of **Excel Ministries School of Performing Arts**.

- Excel's programmes could benefit from more rigorous analysis of how they contribute to longer-term graduate outcomes.
- Excel's most effective self-assessment vehicles are the mid-year and end-of-year reviews of course design, management and delivery.
- The annual review, which coordinates plans for the upcoming year, is a vital instrument to maintain and improve performance. Individual departmental reports are key inputs into this organisational decision-making, although, from the written record, it is not always clear how these reports relate to the annual review and its action statements.
- Student course reviews tend to focus more strongly on satisfaction with teachers than on the value of the learning for their own aims and interests.
- While tutor training sessions organised by the principal have had positive outcomes, and permanent staff compile yearly professional development plans, a more vigorous professional development programme which addressed issues raised in appraisals could enhance individual development.
- A more systematic approach to data collection and analysis might strengthen self-assessment and planning, and reveal opportunities for further improvement.

# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 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**.

Course and qualification completion rates for all programmes are performing above the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) target, and usually above average when benchmarked against a group of providers self-selected by Excel, which includes a wānanga, a polytechnic and a music school.

Year	Course completion	Qualification completion	Retention
2009	86%	80%	92%
2010	79%	71%	85%
2011	85%	86%	80%
2012	84%	82%	84%

Source: Tertiary Education Commission website

The qualification completion rate for the Certificate of Performance in Music is consistently the lower performer. It should be noted that the fall in the completion rate for the Certificate of Performance in Dance appears, at this point, statistically insignificant because of the very small numbers involved.

Year	Qualification completion		
	Dance	Drama	Music
2009	89%	100%	71%
2010	81%	100%	71%
2011	85%	82%	77%
2012	74%	92%	77%

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<sup>1</sup> The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.



Year	Overall graduate outcomes		
	Higher learning	Full or part-time work	Church or community
2011	42%	39%	10%
2012	45%	40%	10%

Benchmarking indicates that Māori and Pasifika students, as well as others in the under-25 demographic, have performed particularly well at Excel.

Students, graduates and other stakeholders interviewed indicated strong appreciation of the learning, both in technical performance skills and in confidence and self-awareness. With many students from disadvantaged backgrounds, personal well-being and self-management skills are a particular focus, both as valued outcomes in themselves and as contributors to further attainment. Excel could have done more, through data collection and analysis, to establish the connection between these outcomes and the education provided.

Formal self-assessment of achievement focuses primarily on course completion, and on student surveys and reviews. Results are collated in mid-year and end-of-year reviews, and used in planning for the following year. Students' destination outcomes are recorded year by year but include no formal analysis of Excel's likely contribution. However, feedback from schools, employers, churches and contracted teachers currently employed in the performing arts sector is positive on student performance and achievement, and Excel's contribution is acknowledged. There is further anecdotal evidence of the attainment of individual well-being and life skills, but these are not systematically collated. Excel's involvement in the Targeted Review of Qualifications (TRoQ) process may provide opportunities for further consultation and benchmarking with other providers.

## 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 **Adequate**.

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

Feedback to the EER team from current students was that Excel programmes had already given them significant gains, including technical skills and competence, increased motivation, sense of direction, self-confidence and self-awareness. Graduates interviewed endorsed these gains, and Excel's records, while not systematic, do include some instances of graduates progressing to viable careers in the sector, and in church and community leadership.

Relationships with external stakeholders are of three types. The first is interactions with tertiary providers who accept graduates from Excel. About 50 per cent of

students from Excel go to these providers and Excel consults with the providers to see how well Excel's programmes fit in with those of the provider. An example is current preparation for a level 4 Excel music certificate, to prepare for a level 5 programme which has already accepted some level 3 graduates. The second interaction is a 20-week performance tour of visits to churches, schools and prisons, giving public concerts and performances as part of students' second-year learning, and showcasing Excel. Tour locations are consulted on placement, content, performance and billeting arrangements, and receive formal and informal post-visit feedback, especially on the conduct of students. Around 40 per cent of 2012/13 enrolments have resulted from these contacts, and from recommendations of graduates in this sector. The third interaction is with the performing arts industry as a source of assessors and moderators who are well positioned to advise Excel on the relevance of its programmes to present trends. Additionally, Excel consults informally with other training providers and participants in the industry.

Māori and Pasifika students make up 60 per cent of student intake, and their cultures are prominent in students' interests and activities. Two of the senior management group are Māori, and a compulsory Māori studies paper, delivered by a prominent local Māori teacher, focuses on basic aspects of tikanga and kawa. Excel is presently consulting with a northern marae to set up a training group for younger students to prepare for Excel enrolment, and has continuing contact with local Pasifika church pastors. Thirty-five per cent or more of current students are secular, and are clearly advised at enrolment of the Christian orientation of the programme, which is non-negotiable.

Consultation with external stakeholders is extensive, but is not fully systematised. Excel is largely reliant on anecdotal evidence collected informally to demonstrate the connection between its programmes and graduate achievement. A more searching enquiry and analysis both during and after their studentship would provide vital information to ensure and improve programme relevance, and to expand Excel's niche in the market. One employer interviewed noted that the curriculum lacked career management skills and challenges, leaving some graduates at risk of disappointment and failure. A former student, now active in the industry, also commented that Excel could expand students' recording options to maintain relevance in a rapidly evolving industry.

### 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 **Good**.

Applicants for the course exceed the TEC allocation by a large margin. All are fully informed about the curriculum and culture, especially its Christian orientation. All are auditioned, and personal aims and expectations are clearly established. Auditions and interviews reveal strengths and orientations, and accepted students are placed accordingly. Much is known about the backgrounds of the students and about the skills they bring to the programme. Progress in these is continuously tracked during their studentship. Individual learning plans are put in place when students and staff agree that they are relevant and attainable.

Māori studies, life and relationship studies, and Christian studies are all mandatory, matching the kaupapa of the PTE. A choice of electives is also offered. Individual learning programmes were yet to be implemented at the time of the on-site visit.

A range of delivery and student management features indicate good attention and response to the needs and interests of students, and a variety of teaching approaches is offered. Some students can be matched with teachers for learning styles and all are continually monitored for strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities. First-month assessments, and a mid-year review, assess course placements and learning styles, and changes are made as appropriate. Help may be offered with reading, ear training and transition between practice and theory. Delivery is adjusted to recognise non-Christian students, and vigorous feedback and debate are both invited and initiated.

Student surveys are a feature of the mid-year and end-of-year reviews, and changes are made in response to them. Examples are the introduction of dance workshops for schools, smaller classes, a three-hour vocal performance class observed by peers, a computer-based music theory class, more comfortable clothing for male dancers, and windows in classroom doors to avoid disruption. Song-writing opportunities and auditions may be offered for students eager to compete in contests, and students may be networked early into the industry through gigs or social media. The relevance of the learning to postgraduate aims, although a vital feature of the programme, is not a feature of student surveys. Graduates are not canvassed for their views on the programmes' utility to their goals or current challenges. While church stakeholders are regularly consulted on the conduct and presentation of students, other industry stakeholders are not contacted as frequently. Further engagement with polytechnics and other tertiary providers in the TRoQ process may provide further guidance for curriculum planning, for example alignment of theory and practice, and may enhance staircasing to further learning for graduates.

#### 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Adequate**.

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

The principal is a qualified teacher with experience in teaching and academic management. The programme director is a qualified teacher in English and Music, and the course director has a distinguished academic record in music, and distinction in musical theatre education. The primary criterion for contracted teachers and moderators is up-to-date knowledge and skill in their industry. None at present has a professional development or teaching enhancement plan, and there is no arrangement for academic staff to acquire a teaching qualification, which poses a risk for Excel in a competitive and changing environment.

A range of teaching methods and approaches is used, including workshops, group sessions, debates, discussions, demonstrations and classroom sessions on theory. 'Hands-on' teaching is used as much as practicable, with a pragmatic split between practice and theory. One graduate referred to 'cutting edge' teachers who, along with their unique skills, bring valuable resources, such as innovative concepts, methods and source books, to help students 'find their voice' and transform raw skills into relevant, contemporary forms. One-to-one tutorial support is scheduled weekly for students in need of it. Students and graduates stressed the availability and willingness of teachers to give individual help where needed.

Some industry leaders visit and advise on career opportunities and needs. Co-professionals attend course assessments as guest examiners and moderators, both of performance and its assessment. Most of the listed moderators have teaching qualifications and some work in tertiary education organisations.

The 20-week, second-year tour of churches and schools is a major learning and performing opportunity, and a promotional instrument for Excel. Parents and other members of the public may also attend assessment events. Formal feedback from these groups would bring added value to this initiative. Pastors and billeting households have reported positively about tour events, almost exclusively with regard to students' conduct, a valued outcome in itself, rather than other course-related performance. Student surveys rate teaching quality, sometimes with incisive comments. Those interviewed by the EER team were positive about the informal, participatory approach of the teachers, by their attention to individuals, and the individuality of the teaching. Some applauded Excel's practice-based focus, as opposed to the theory-based approach of some other tertiary providers. This is evidently an important feature for 'second-chance' learners, who can be apprehensive about written learning and assessment. The teaching environment was seen as caring and safe and the delivery style 'understandable'. There were opportunities to talk, share and lead, to grow in confidence and 'learn who I am'.

These commendable initiatives could be strengthened by incorporating more formalised self-assessment practices.

Tutorial appraisals occur twice yearly under the direction of the principal. The teaching staff confirm that these appraisals are professionally managed and proactive in intent, but they also noted that they are not required to undertake any written self-reflection in the course of the exercise. Periodic appraisals of contracted tutors are less frequent.

Mid-year and end-of year-reviews compiled by programme managers cover a range of matters and some offer clear comment on teaching strengths and weaknesses within the team. It is not clear from the documents what action is subsequently taken to address identified weaknesses.

Currently, partly as a consequence of irregular teaching times, contracted teaching staff do not meet for discussions on consistency and variations of delivery methods and resources, or to engage in mentoring. Moderation does not occur across courses or departments, because of the diversity of the disciplines involved.

None of the staff is proficient in te reo Māori, but Excel secures the services of a suitable person fluent in te reo if the student requires it, for example in assignment writing and assessment.

A detailed prescription for tutor professional development is contained in the quality management system, but at the time of the on-site visit was somewhat neglected in practice. While professional development plans and records are compiled by permanent staff, they are summary notes of activities and programmes, leaving some uncertainty about the particular relationship of some activities to the programme. There is no specific plan for contracted tutors.

The principal has organised and conducted sessions in teaching skills, for example in learning styles, and while there is continuing guidance from management, a more focused attention to professional development for contractors might enhance the quality of teaching. Two of the tutors were keen to develop their teaching skills, perhaps to study for a teaching qualification. Although some contractors are experienced teachers in their craft, training opportunities may avoid the risk of unforeseen and unaffordable future gaps in delivery capability.

Formal elements of self-assessment clearly can be improved. Teachers interviewed preferred more cohesion between departments to ensure more consistency, and more mutual consultation on teaching approaches and styles. They would also prefer more active involvement with external educators.

## 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**.

Excel students come from a wide range of backgrounds, often bringing with them an already negative view of education and of the discipline it imposes. Some have troubled family lives, some lack common life skills, and some, having lived as 'dropouts', according to tutor reports, 'have no social discipline at all'. In contrast, a number of students are motivated primarily to acquire skills for disseminating a Christian message to their congregations. The transformation and broadening in outlooks, as reported by external observers and by the students themselves, is the product of a family culture, offering an accepting, non-judgemental, practical environment, with a prevailing message of responsibility and choice.

The Christian culture of the PTE requires that staff be accessible, humble and helpful at all times. It eschews the more destructive elements of competitiveness, while instilling the need to strive for one's personal best. Staff adherence to this culture has resulted in high staff retention. An open-door policy offers individual attention to all. The principal knows all students personally, and while one member of the Excel management group has primary responsibility for student support and pastoral care, all teachers are involved. Teachers may speak with parents or guardians on personal issues, sometimes involving conflict with the law or local authority, and a professional counsellor is available without charge. Student life-books are a medium for pastoral care. Students report that the programme and culture give them confidence, a sense of belonging and a new awareness of 'who I am'. The relationships among the students interviewed by the EER team reflected the mutual courtesy and respect of the PTE culture at large.

Learning is interactive and intentionally transformative, using the raw talent of the student to achieve measured steps of improvement. Students who do not readily achieve are checked daily and tracked by the management group, who watch for emerging patterns and plan concerted responses. There are weekly student attendance reviews, and all absences, non-completions or failures to progress are immediately followed up. A shortcoming in these reports is the absence of teacher evaluations of their own possible role when students apparently 'lack motivation'. One-to-one attention is offered, with two-hour individual learning sessions available weekly. Academic support is always available. One-to-one sessions may also discuss course relevance and delivery issues, with a possible change in options, sometimes with targeted counselling for postgraduate lives.

Several graduates interviewed emphasised that, notwithstanding their progress in performance skills, their most valuable learning at Excel was the gift of an encouraging family culture, with respect, attention to individual needs, and realistic feedback, creating a sense of well-being and confidence to 'learn about themselves'. Feedback from students now succeeding in the performance industry

refers in some cases to the 'life-changing' or 'life-saving' effect of their time with Excel, in others to Excel's indispensable role in their achievement.

## 1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Adequate**.

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

Excel appears not to have a strategic plan as such, but does have a mission statement defining its role in the community, and is supported by a comprehensive quality management system that defines board, management and departmental structures and responsibilities in detail. The board comprises a range of interests and skills, including financial and business management, music, dance, education, and creative and innovative roles. Several members are familiar with central government administration, and the now retired founder of the PTE is also a member. The separation of governance and management is articulated, although the managing director is also a member of the board.

The board meets five times a year, and is well attended and well informed. It contributes positively and independently to management plans. The board has the final call on higher-level expenditure and on curriculum development matters. A 'trust board', comprising four members of the board of management, has overarching financial responsibility. Development plans, or changes to any detail, including for instance tutor employment, management, appraisal or professional development, are required by the quality management system to be drafted and presented to the board for formal approval. There is no arrangement for the board to evaluate its own performance, or the performance of the management team.

The director reports to the board, and is their conduit to all staff, who have little direct contact with the board. Staff interviewed confirmed that they were sufficiently informed, that communication was open and democratic, and implementation efficient, within budget and resource constraints. They also approved of a wider consultation with the performing arts industry than had occurred previously, especially since the recent involvement with TRoQ.

The management group, recently formed to provide a more democratic management, comprises three managers, a music manager, a course manager and a tour manager, all reporting to the principal. The principal's appointment was made by internal promotion of a long-serving employee, without external advertisement. Similarly, the other management appointments made use of staff already available, with job descriptions clearly defined in the quality management system, but in the present transitional phase, and perhaps permanently, may require some flexibility in practice, for example the sharing of teacher appraisal, staff mentoring, pastoral care, and management of struggling students. The

management team is aware of the need for close attention to the management structure, and to align managerial capabilities with functions assigned. Elements of their professional development programmes could contribute to this, and the principal is presently seeking further opportunities for the team.

Management staff are talented and fully committed to the Excel kaupapa. At the time of the evaluation visit, however, some staff appeared to be overstretched, possibly because Excel was in the midst of a structural and functional review. In order to mitigate these stresses, the principal is presently seeking further developmental opportunities for his team.



## 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 **Adequate**.

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

### 2.2 Focus area: Certificate of Performance in Music (Level 3)

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

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

### 2.3 Focus area: Certificate of Performance in Dance (Level 3)

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

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

# Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Excel Ministries School of Performing Arts:

- Explore ways systematically to record and analyse graduate performance data to secure and improve the value of the courses being delivered.
- Consider an extended professional development programme for all tutorial staff to secure and further the present quality and relevance of the teaching.
- Explore ways systematically to record and review students' behavioural development and aspirations.

# 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](http://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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