

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

ACG Norton College

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 30 July 2014

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MoE Number: 7601  
NZQA Reference: C13749  
Dates of EER visit: 1 and 2 April 2014

*Final Report*

# 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:	ACG Norton College
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	345 Queen Street, Auckland
Delivery sites:	As above, which also includes two other Academic Colleges Group establishments: ACG New Zealand International College and ACG English School
First registered:	17 July 2003
Courses currently delivered:	AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies
Code of Practice signatory:	Signatory to the Code of Practice for students aged 14-17 years and 18 years and above
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: 201 students at the time of the external evaluation and review (EER)
Number of staff:	12.5 full-time equivalents; eight staff are full-time and eight part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	Programme accreditations include ACG Certificate in Business (Level 3) and AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies (Level 3).
Distinctive characteristics:	ACG Norton College delivers the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) foundation certificate, AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies, to international students who wish to qualify for

admission to degree courses with AUT University or other universities that accept this certificate as part of their entry criteria. The qualification has been developed and is owned by AUT University. ACG Norton College delivers the programme.

Successful completion of the AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies ensures entry to an appropriate AUT University undergraduate programme.

Previous quality assurance history: The previous EER visit by NZQA was conducted in April 2010. The summative statements of confidence were Highly Confident in the educational performance of ACG Norton College and Confident in capability in self-assessment.

Other: ACG Norton College is a part of Academic Colleges Group and one of several educational institutes under this umbrella. As a result, a number of ACG Norton College staff work across the organisations, including the principal.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

Following a scoping meeting between the lead evaluator and ACG Norton College principal, deputy principal, programme manager and academic manager, the following focus areas were agreed for inclusion in the EER:

- Governance, management and strategy
- International student support

These are mandatory focus areas.

- AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies.

This is the only programme ACG Norton College offers.

### 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 team of two evaluators conducted the EER over two days on site in Auckland. The EER included interviews with the principal, deputy principal, programme manager, academic manager, academic registrar and support staff, tutors, faculty registrar, AUT University and 38 students. A range of documents was reviewed, including self-assessment documentation.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **ACG Norton College**.

Key reasons for this include the following.

- There is very good learner achievement, in that over the past two years at least 70 per cent of students achieved the AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies, and at least 90 per cent of graduates received an offer of placement for undergraduate study at AUT University.
- ACG Norton College is meeting the most valued outcomes of the key stakeholders: students and AUT University. Graduates complete a certificate of proficiency in English, and develop tertiary study skills, subject knowledge relevant to their area of tertiary study, and the capability to study in the New Zealand tertiary environment. The strength of these outcomes is validated by AUT University through formal review.
- The foundation studies certificate is well matched to the needs of students and AUT University. There is evidence of changes and improvements following review, in an attempt to continually improve the quality of the course delivered and to meet student needs. Excellent international student support is provided and includes a specialist centre where staff with extensive expertise ensure that the needs of international students are met.
- ACG Norton College is well managed, has a clear purpose and direction, and has access to expertise and resources that enhance the operation of the PTE, and that allow management to focus more fully on the educational performance of the students.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **ACG Norton College**.

Self-assessment at ACG Norton College is ongoing, authentic and transparent, and has led to worthwhile improvements. The effectiveness of these improvements is validated through systematic review. The impact of some changes is still to be fully realised.

ACG Norton College has a significant number of processes that inform the PTE about the key areas that support the educational performance of students. These areas include:

- Stakeholder outcomes
- Effectiveness of teaching
- Programme and course review.

These processes are embedded and comprehensive.

Self-assessment at ACG Norton College is clearly effective, and the quality and validity of the information is generally good. Self-assessment would be further strengthened through:

- Further analysis of student completion and withdrawal rates – a key success indicator
- Providing robust evidence that current student feedback mechanisms are effective in providing genuine and meaningful feedback
- Completing the cycle of review by effectively informing students and tutors of the outcomes of the feedback they provide.

# 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 **Good**.

The overall measure of student achievement is the successful completion of the AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies, which guarantees an offer of placement into degree or certificate courses at AUT University, and in some instances entry to other universities.

The table below<sup>2</sup> shows course completion rates and the percentage of graduates offered a place at AUT University in 2012 and 2013. AUT University confirms that those graduates receiving an offer of place are quality students and are well prepared for study at tertiary level.

Year completed	% of total enrolments who successfully achieve AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies	Of those who successfully complete, % given an offer of placement by AUT University
2012	72%	91%
2013	78%	95%

Achievement data relating to offers of placement by AUT University has been consistent for several years and is comparable to previous achievement data provided by ACG Norton College at the 2010 EER, for the years 2007-2009.

While a high percentage of graduates receive an offer of placement by AUT University, successful achievement of the certificate also appears to be good. Retention of students is tracked, and possible reasons for withdrawal are collated by ACG Norton College. Individual student achievement is closely monitored per paper by tutors and management. However, ACG Norton College does not have established internal benchmarks for analysis to determine the merit of the achievement rate, or analysis of the contributing factors that lead to withdrawal.

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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.

<sup>2</sup> The figures are based on ACG Norton College achievement data provided subsequent to the on-site visit.



Nor is there any strong analysis of course completion. ACG Norton College would gain a fuller understanding of the educational performance of students by doing so.

## 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 **Excellent**.

The key value to students at ACG Norton College is the successful completion of the AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies, ensuring an offer of place at AUT University. The fact that at least 90 per cent of graduates receive an offer of placement is a significant and valuable outcome. Graduates complete the foundation studies certificate with proficiency in English, and develop tertiary study skills, subject knowledge relevant to their area of tertiary study, and the capability to study in a New Zealand tertiary environment. AUT University identifies these factors as being significant in contributing towards successfully completing tertiary study.

AUT University is a key stakeholder. ACG Norton College is delivering AUT University's foundation certificate on behalf of the university, which is confident that the quality of students graduating from ACG Norton College is strong. AUT University is gaining students who have the skills to succeed in tertiary studies. The university believes ACG Norton College graduates are achieving at a higher rate than other international students at AUT University. AUT University is convinced about the quality of these graduates, whose academic achievement is at least consistent with achievement by the general student population completing their first year of study.

ACG Norton College gathers data from several sources: the programme annual report, initiated in 2012, and a periodic preview report that is compiled every five years (which includes student feedback), as well as an end-of-course survey. These sources provide ACG Norton College with data to analyse the progress of its graduates at AUT University. The move to an annual report and the disaggregation of data (including tracking the programmes graduates enrol in, their grade point average for the first year of study, and citizenship and gender data) is providing a sound basis from which ACG Norton College can effectively review outcomes for its key stakeholders: graduates and AUT University. Extending this review to include the less than 50 per cent of graduates who choose not to study at AUT University may also be useful.

### 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**.

AUT's Certificate in Foundation Studies, as delivered by ACG Norton College, is well matched to the needs of the key stakeholders. The certificate is based on the factors AUT University identifies as being essential to achieving at undergraduate level.

ACG Norton College has a philosophy of 'hold and let go' as students progress through the course. ACG Norton College 'holds' students who are mostly coming directly from secondary school or from countries with differing teaching methods or academic disciplines, and 'lets them go' as independent learners able to succeed in the New Zealand tertiary education environment.

Prior to enrolment, English language and academic ability is rigorously tested. Students are guided through subject choices based on academic achievement and which reflect students' aspirations for tertiary study. ACG Norton College has an established and well-resourced international student centre which ensures that immigration, pastoral care and international student support needs and requirements are identified, monitored and met, including attendance. Students at ACG Norton College are also enrolled at AUT University, and therefore have access to AUT University facilities such as the library, and are encouraged to visit and use AUT University campus facilities to increase familiarity prior to enrolling in an undergraduate programme.

AUT University and ACG Norton College conduct systematic reviews and compile a programme annual report. This provides confidence to AUT University that the content is relevant, pitched at the correct level, and aligned to the degree programme that graduates may enrol in. Confidence is further strengthened by ACG Norton College's self-review of the AUT foundation certificate and the periodic review panel's report. Student feedback is sought and included in reviews. Although this area is very strong, review of the effectiveness and authenticity of the very positive student feedback received may be beneficial.

Numerous changes to the subject content, delivery of the programme and technologies have occurred as a result of review. The changes are at a variety of stages, and include:

- Modified entry and exit points for ACG Norton College students to better align with AUT University enrolments
- Change in delivery from three trimesters to four terms, providing increased flexibility if a student fails a paper

- Changes to subject content to better align with AUT University degree programme requirements
- Addition of new subject options to the AUT foundation certificate to provide broader choice for graduates to enrol at AUT University (such as design) rather than just the traditional mathematics-based subjects offered in previous years
- Introduction of Blackboard (a university online system) as a learning platform which graduates will use at AUT University
- ACG Norton College's negotiations on behalf of students for a lowering of the required pass rate in some subjects where this exceeded the general entry level required for undergraduate study.

Some of these changes have been reviewed as worthwhile and effective, while others are still to be fully reviewed.

#### 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**.

The teaching at ACG Norton College is effective. The tutors are well qualified, and all are New Zealand-registered teachers and experienced in their subject areas, including the teaching of English. Tutors and students report that they relate effectively with each other. Students provide anonymous feedback on the teaching for each tutor each term through a survey, which is discussed with the tutors and included in their performance development review. Students describe the tutors as supportive and helpful.

Tutors monitor and track academic progress and provide the students and their parents with specific feedback through interim reports and a final report per subject each term. Rigorous moderation of each subject within the programme curriculum occurs systematically in conjunction with AUT University deans, and provides evidence that assessment is valid, sufficient and fair, and that assessment judgements are consistent. AUT University's confidence in and recognition of the quality of ACG Norton College graduates further validates the quality of the teaching.

Achieving excellent academic outcomes is of value to ACG Norton College. Management identifies quality teaching as a key component for achieving this aim. A comprehensive and robust performance development review occurs systematically, and includes feedback from students as well as the tutor, their peers and an independent observer. This process ensures that the tutors are meeting

ACG Norton College's professional standards, against which they are measured. The process also identifies any need for further tutor development.

### 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**.

Learner guidance and support at ACG Norton College is highly effective in supporting the international students towards achieving educational success. ACG Norton College has an international centre located on the campus, which is a specialist resource shared among Academic Colleges Group schools. The international centre has very experienced and specialist staff who are knowledgeable and up to date with relevant legislation and Code of Practice requirements. The centre is well resourced and staffed by full-time employees whose sole focus is providing effective pre-departure (from the home country) information, enrolment, induction and guidance and support of the international students. The staff are well supported by management in their roles. Comprehensive systems and robust processes ensure the key areas pertaining to international students are monitored and addressed effectively.

Tutors have a key role in providing academic support to learners as well as being available for other forms of support through engagement in the classroom, one-to-one meetings, and the monitoring of academic progress and attendance. Where tutors are unable to support a student sufficiently, students can engage directly or be referred to members of the management team. The evaluation team was provided with examples where ACG Norton College staff responded effectively to the personal and academic needs of students.

Students complete course survey forms, which seek information and ratings about the support offered to students. Student support is mostly rated highly in these surveys. Students interviewed by the evaluation team identified the international centre and its staff as vital and one of the most positive aspects of the institute. The self-assessment of student support could be further strengthened. ACG Norton College has delivered this course over several years and is very experienced in working with international students. It would be beneficial if ACG Norton College were to investigate methods of gathering useful and authentic feedback from the students to validate the effort and quality of support ACG Norton College believes is available to students. In particular, focusing on completing the cycle of review by effectively informing students of the outcomes of the feedback ACG Norton College receives from the students would enhance the perceived value of the student feedback.

## 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**.

ACG Norton College has been established as a PTE for over 10 years. It is part of the larger Academic Colleges Group and greatly benefits from this association. ACG Norton College aligns to the goals, values and organisational culture of Academic Colleges Group, resulting in clear objectives, reporting requirements, monitoring and roles and accountabilities. This relationship and structure does not preclude ACG Norton College from generating initiatives or planning strategically as a PTE to meet the needs of stakeholders. Evidence for this is seen in the strong relationship at all levels of the organisation with AUT University, ongoing changes to the foundation certificate programme, and investment in new technology in an attempt to improve outcomes.

Operational expertise in key and specialist areas is available that would otherwise be bought into the organisation or would require a significant time commitment and upskilling. Having ready access to support with financial, information technology and human resource services, including the international centre, allows ACG Norton College management to focus more fully on the educational performance of the students.

Almost all ACG Norton College staff, including tutors, work across the Academic Colleges Group. The benefit to ACG Norton College is the organisation's ability to manage risks such as staff changes and increases or decreases in student enrolments, and to share resources, including the recruitment of teaching staff with a high level of subject expertise.

Self-assessment is generally strong. Academic Colleges Group has clear expectations of management and reviews these expectations regularly. There are opportunities for feedback from staff, tutors and students to ACG Norton College management, about the performance and support of governance and management, however the evidence that these opportunities are purposeful and effective are not as robustly evident. Students are the primary stakeholder; as such, their perspective is important. Systematically gathering meaningful feedback from these groups may further contribute to the ongoing review of the PTE and support the aim of excellent academic outcomes for which ACG Norton College is striving. Equally, informing staff of the results of feedback, and any changes that may occur, would also be useful.

## 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: International student support

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: AUT Certificate in Foundation Studies

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 ACG Norton College continue with effective self-assessment practices which are producing worthwhile and useful improvements, and look to review processes that are less effective or where analysis is lacking.

# 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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