

Report of External Evaluation and Review

QED Associates Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 24 October 2014

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MoE Number: 8395
NZQA Reference: C14264
Date of EER visit: 24 and 25 March 2014

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:	QED Associates Limited
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	PO Box 34 357, Birkenhead, Auckland
Delivery sites:	Various venues in Auckland and other centres depending on demand
First registered:	1 October 1996
Courses currently delivered:	Designing and Evaluating Assessments (Level 5) National Certificate in Adult Education and Training (Level 4) with strands in New Zealand Environment, and International Environment
Code of Practice signatory?	Not a signatory
Number of students:	Domestic: approximately 60-80 enrolments per year on part-time courses, equalling approximately seven equivalent full-time students. All students are self-funded, i.e. QED does not receive government funding. International: nil
Number of staff:	Three full-time and four part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	In addition to the programme accreditations listed above, the provider holds accreditation for a variety of domains and unit standards in the education and management fields, up to level 6.
Distinctive characteristics:	QED's core business is providing consultancy services to the tertiary education sector. The

training arm of QED represents about 25 per cent of overall activity, and provides short-duration professional development workshops for staff in TEOs, industry training organisations and business. The training arm was the focus of this external evaluation and review (EER).

Recent significant changes:	No significant changes
Previous quality assurance history:	This is QED's second scheduled EER. The first EER was conducted in April 2010, when NZQA was Highly Confident in QED's educational performance and Confident in its capability in self-assessment. NZQA has not noted any risk issues since the last EER.
Other:	N/A

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the EER consisted of the mandatory focus area:

- Governance, management and strategy

In addition, the following focus area was selected:

- Programme design and delivery (this effectively includes all of the training QED delivers)

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 in March 2014. Before the EER visit, the lead evaluator met with three of the directors of QED to discuss and agree the scope and format of the EER.

The evaluation team consisted of two evaluators. A one and a half-day EER field visit was conducted in Auckland at one of the training venues that QED uses on a regular basis. The evaluation team reviewed a range of documentation and met with three directors of QED and one contract teacher. The evaluators also spoke by telephone with a range of external stakeholders, including graduate students, client organisations and advisory committee members. One of the evaluators also

visited a course taught by QED the day after the field visit and spoke with four students.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **QED Associates Limited**.

Key reasons for this are:

- Learners at QED are achieving good results (refer to Findings 1.1 for detailed figures). Records viewed indicated that learner achievement has been consistent over a number of years and is equal to or higher than the achievements of learners in other providers of similar courses.
- The EER team interviewed representatives from a range of tertiary providers and other agencies who had placed students on QED courses. All providers and agencies interviewed expressed a high level of satisfaction with the organisation and management of the courses, and in the course content and delivery of learning and the value created as a result. This was also reflected in a sample of formal feedback from students.
- Discussion with stakeholders indicated that: QED employs trainers who have sound skills and experience; it engages well with its clients and industry; and is valued for the positive contribution it makes.
- The EER team found consistent evidence of excellent teaching throughout the organisation (refer to Findings 1.4).
- QED has student support structures that are appropriate to the needs of the students and minimise barriers to achieving (refer to Findings 1.5). It is clear that the most important needs of students are being met.
- The organisation is well managed and has a clear philosophy and purpose. QED uses what resources it has effectively.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **QED Associates Limited**.

Key reasons for this are:

- Records indicate that self-assessment is well embedded and has been practised within QED for many years. QED has systems to gather and collate feedback from learners and client organisations. The quality and validity of the information collected is sound and the information is then used to inform improvements to teaching practice and course delivery.
- The organisation collects performance information which it discusses, analyses and uses openly and effectively to bring about positive improvements to

processes, with the intention of ultimately improving learner and professional outcomes. The provider systematically tracks the intentions of learners at enrolment in terms of credit achievement and is trialling alternative assessment processes to maintain continuing engagement with the students in order to complete the final assessments earlier.

This problem was also evident at the 2010 EER, which was based on 2006-2009 completion data indicating course completion rates of 60-65 per cent. Subsequent improvements in enrolment processes to identify learners not wishing to complete assessments and QED acting on issues highlighted in the 2010 EER report, resulted in an increase in course completion rates to 77 per cent in 2010. Course completion rates have remained largely static since 2010 as analysis and actions related to the underlying reasons for non-completion have yet to be fully realised.

- QED has established a very reflective organisation and a culture that encourages students, staff and external stakeholders to discuss their performance and put forward ideas for improvement.
- Staff and management are closely attuned to the needs of the students and of the adult education profession. QED identifies the learning needs of individual organisations and generally addresses those needs through responsive customer service, good teaching techniques, and appropriate student support.

Findings¹

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**.

Both the organisation and its staff have a strong focus on learner achievement. Course achievement is estimated to be approximately 75-80 per cent, and the sample of results seen by the evaluators confirms this.

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Retention	95%	96%	98%	99%
Course completion	77%	80%	71%*	66%*

* Learners have up to two years to complete the final assessment, therefore 2012 and 2013 final completion rates are expected to be consistent with 2010 and 2011. The provider expects that the target of 75 per cent completion for 2012 and 2013 will be exceeded based on data for 2010-11 and current trends.

QED reports that the reason some students give for non-completion is that they are undertaking the workshops in order to simply learn skills rather than complete the course. However, the sample of employers interviewed all confirmed that qualification completion was important to them and that they would prefer that their staff completed the qualification. For that reason, and given the nature of the course and the background of most students enrolling, QED should expect to attain well above its current completion target of 75 per cent.

Māori (8 per cent) and Pasifika (13 per cent) participation in QED courses generally reflects the demographics of the Auckland region.² Completion rates of QED courses for these two groups are consistent with those of the general student population.

With a view to benchmarking its performance, QED has analysed the EER reports of 32 other providers of a similar nature or offering similar courses. The analysis shows that QED learner retention and completion is approximately 15-20 per cent higher than similar providers elsewhere. While this result is commendable, the EER team felt that QED could improve its completion rate. There are still 20 per cent or more of students who do not successfully complete the courses.

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

² The 2013 Census indicates Māori as 10 per cent of the Auckland population and Pasifika, 14 per cent.

The single most limiting factor in successful completion is the fact that the final assessments must be done in the learner's own workplace and cannot be completed on the workshop. Thus learners have to fit the assessments into busy work schedules, and many learners take 12 months or more after the workshop to complete the final assessments.

QED has analysed the issue and made some attempts to follow up and encourage learners to complete. However, the EER team thought that QED could be more innovative in its approach to try and shorten the time taken to complete the last assessment, which would lead to better course completions. This issue was also raised in the 2010 EER report.

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**.

Evidence from stakeholders, including learners, indicates that QED engages well with its industry clients and is highly valued for the contribution that it makes. The core of QED's business revolves around a small number of clients, with whom the PTE has had a relationship for several years. These clients operate in an environment that is very conscious of costs and benefits, and they would not have continued to purchase services from QED if they did not believe that it was providing good value to them.

The client organisations interviewed reported high levels of satisfaction with QED's services. QED believes that its reputation is centred on the long-term benefits that the training it provides will have for the client company and the individual learners – for instance, positive changes in employee behaviour and improved capability. At this point in time, QED has not attempted to look at the long-term benefits of its training in relation to the overall outcomes of the programmes – for instance ascertaining whether there has been an increase in retention or achievement in the programmes that QED's graduates teach as a result of the skills learned with QED.

All of the learners attending QED courses are in employment, predominantly as teachers in other tertiary organisations. The QED courses are directly related to that employment. Through the courses, learners acquire useful skills and knowledge which they can apply in their workplace. The clients spoken to during the EER were very satisfied with the value they received from the training provided by QED. They also commented positively about QED's regular communication with them to gather feedback on how well they were meeting training needs.

QED regularly surveys clients and graduates and uses the feedback to inform improvements to its courses. Learners noted that they gained added value from the training offered by QED as not only did they learn according to the stated

objectives of the workshop, but they also gained valuable learning from the training methods modelled during the delivery. QED staff see modelling good practice as critical to their success.

QED also adds value to the communities and networks it serves. For instance, QED provides pro bono assistance to a refugee group wanting to establish an education programme, and coordinates networks for PTEs teaching in the hospitality 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 **Excellent**.

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

QED's regular and ongoing interaction with its stakeholders is a strong feature of the organisation. Mechanisms employed include ongoing contact with clients and students, student satisfaction surveys, client surveys, and participation in professional bodies and industry forums. QED's consultancy services seamlessly inform training needs and vice versa.

This interaction is typified in the way QED tailors its courses around the needs of clients and delivers training where and when it is needed. Recently QED has been visiting clients to observe their students in their own workplace environment so they can gain a better understanding of the needs of the clients.

Training is delivered where and when the client requires it. In most cases, teaching premises are hired on a casual basis or provided by the corporate client. QED has systems and processes to ensure that premises are fit for purpose and that the learning environments it creates are suited to the needs of learners.

QED has a number of trainers available, and for any given course uses the trainer who will best match the learning style and industry background of the target group. The organisation has built a training needs self-assessment into the start of every course so that trainers can then tailor delivery and examples to the specific needs of the learners. Trainers also work with client organisations to develop teaching scenarios that are contextualised to the workplace environments of learners.

QED is currently developing online delivery of its core courses in direct response to the needs of the clients.

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**.

There was clear evidence of excellent teaching practice taking place at QED. All personnel at QED have a role in student learning and they take a collegial, whole-of-organisation approach to ensuring that all students are well taught. Highly qualified staff deliver training that is engaging and relevant for the trainees. A strong philosophy of best practice in adult education underpins the delivery modelled by QED. Trainers have the ability to adapt the training to meet different cultural and other needs of learners and to adjust the content to make it relevant to the learner's context.

QED has a peer observation programme for its trainers. The performance of the teaching staff is formally reviewed on an annual basis, but this does not preclude regular and ongoing formative feedback from other trainers. QED staff spoke about how they share ideas, experiences and knowledge through their regular interactions, both face-to-face and by phone and email. Staff meetings are held at least monthly, where much of the discussion is centred on teaching practice, and staff report that this has led to improved practice.

Learners spoke highly of the teaching staff. They like the open, friendly environment and find their learning activities interesting and challenging. Learners receive clear information about assessment tasks and good, timely feedback about their learning progress. QED has improved the turnaround time for marking assignments since the previous EER.

Activities modelled by trainers are particularly effective in demonstrating to learners techniques that can be transferred to their own practice. Staff maintain their currency in adult education through regular organisation-wide and individual professional development.

QED has sound assessment tools and robust internal and external moderation processes that are used to confirm that assessment outcomes are valid. A recent moderation report from NZQA indicated that the assessments are a model of good practice.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

QED does not face the same support requirements as providers of full-time courses, but what in-course support services it does provide are appropriate to the courses delivered and the needs of the learners. Most learners enrolling on QED's adult teaching courses will be professional or trade qualified, and as such have, at the very least, foundation literacy and numeracy skills. However, in one case cited, QED identified two learners who needed specific literacy support to achieve the qualification. QED then worked closely with those learners and their employer to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting them, which resulted in both learners successfully completing the course.

The information given to students before they begin their course and at the beginning of the training is clear and informative, outlining course objectives and assessment requirements.

QED has found through experience that many of the support needs of learners are centred on fitting the demands of their study around already busy working and family lives. There is an inherent difficulty in learners leaving the workshops and completing the assessments at a later date. While trainers follow up with learners and encourage them to complete the tasks, for some the motivation and support is lacking.

Students have access to QED staff outside of class hours either in person, by telephone, or by email. Learners reported that they feel comfortable contacting staff and always get a helpful response.

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 **Excellent**.

QED has a very flat organisational structure, with directors and associates participating in monthly management meetings. An advisory board provides governance, meeting formally once a year and individually on an ad hoc basis as required. As a result, QED has a clear vision and understanding of its business and strong collective leadership. The organisational strategy is formally documented and all members have a common understanding of vision and direction. Recent self-assessment documents provide evidence of effective

analysis of information from a variety of sources and additional direction for future actions.

Resourcing is effectively planned and provided for all activities and courses.

The organisation has, over time, recruited, developed and retained a competent, well-qualified and dedicated group of shareholders and associates whom it supports effectively to foster educational achievement. All personnel have a professional development plan which incorporates both the individual needs of the staff member and the strategic direction of the organisation.

QED shareholders and associates obviously enjoy the environment and are valued by each other and the organisation. Monitoring of performance at all levels of the organisation is regular, transparent and open. The organisation enthusiastically encourages opportunities for reflection on its role and how to better meet stakeholder needs.

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 **Excellent**.

2.2 Focus area: Programme design and delivery

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 QED Limited:

- Put renewed focus on strategies to ensure that learners complete the final course assessment.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

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