

Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Leather and Shoe
Research Association Incorporated

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 21 November 2012

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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:	New Zealand Leather and Shoe Research Association Incorporated (LASRA)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Fitzherbert Science Centre, Dairy Farm Road, Palmerston North
Delivery sites:	Online, at trainees' workplaces, and occasionally at LASRA premises for block courses
First registered:	5 January 2000
Courses currently delivered	The National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Introductory) (Level 3) is a 48-credit, one-year course. The National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced) (Level 4) is a two-year, 120-credit course. The National Certificate in Fellmongery Processing (Level 3) is a one-year, 46-credit course. The national certificates are all unit standard-based.
Number of students:	Domestic: 22 (40 per cent Māori/Pasifika) International: three students in Australia
Number of staff:	One tutor, part-time (22.5 hours per week)
Scope of active accreditation:	Leather Manufacture Technology domain
Distinctive characteristics:	LASRA works from specialist industry research and technology facilities in Palmerston North. Trainees are employed in a tannery or some part of the hide or skin processing industry and enrolled

through their companies on training agreements with an industry training organisation (ITO) and will have their training costs subsidised. Trainees are nominated by their employers who are predominantly subscribed members of LASRA. The employers pay the trainees' fees and all trainees are supported, in the first instance, by the on-site training officer employed at each participating company.

All three of the certificates LASRA offers are open-entry and delivered at distance via correspondence or online. The National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced) also includes a week-long block course that trainees attend on site at LASRA. The block course includes special projects that trainees need to complete, in addition to any unit standard requirements.

Students require basic reading and writing skills to be able to complete the assignments and the final exams that are part of all the national certificates. Those working online require a secure computer, ideally with broadband, and an internet browser.

Trainees have the option of spreading the National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced) over three years under the government Limited Credit Programme scheme.

Recent significant changes: The long-standing director resigned several weeks prior to the external evaluation and review (EER). An interim director – an employee who is currently the head tanner at LASRA – has stepped into the director role until a permanent director is appointed.

Previous quality assurance history: In 2005 and 2008, LASRA met all the requirements of the NZQA quality assurance standard in place at the time. At the 2012 NZQA validation visit, LASRA met all requirements. LASRA also met all the requirements of national external moderation with the New Zealand Industry Training Organisation (NZITO) in 2011. LASRA sends 10 per cent of its assignments to an external moderator, who has a background in the meat industry. LASRA operates under the international

quality standard ISO/IEC 17025.

Other:

LASRA is owned by its clients and has served the leather and footwear manufacturing industries since 1928. It has three primary functions: research, technical servicing, and training. LASRA research covers leather production, processes and product development, and waste management. The organisation also provides a complaints service for footwear and leather goods. Like many laboratories worldwide, LASRA offers research and technical services. Its strength is in developing practical opportunities for companies and in making commercial sense of analytical and testing work for clients. The governing body of LASRA is the management committee elected annually by the members from among their number.

LASRA operates under ISO/IEC 17025. Accreditation is with IANZ (International Accreditation New Zealand), whose mutual recognition agreements with counterpart authorities in over 40 countries give international recognition to LASRA test results in countries such as the USA, UK, Germany, and Japan.

LASRA is used by a range of standards authorities in New Zealand and abroad: International Council of Tanners, Commerce Commission, Standards Australia, International Council of Hides, Skins and Leather Traders Associations (ICHSLTA), Standards New Zealand, Consumer NZ, and the ISO Leather Standards Committee.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the EER included the mandatory focus area of governance, management, and strategy. The other focus areas selected were student support and the National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced) (Level 4). The student support focus area was selected as the evaluation team wanted to understand how LASRA met the needs of off-site students. The National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced) was selected as it is the highest certificate-level course offered by LASRA and is the certificate that includes an on-site block course. However, because LASRA is a small provider and some students progress from the introductory to advanced certificates, the evaluation team looked at all three certificates, to varying degrees, during the evaluation.

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 evaluation team included two lead evaluators who visited the LASRA site in Palmerston North for one day. The team met with the acting director, part-time tutor, librarian, administration manager, and two students employed on site at LASRA as laboratory technicians and enrolled in the National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Introductory).

The evaluators spoke by phone to a sample of students enrolled in the National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced), the chair of the LASRA management board and LASRA industry technical advisory group, and a sample of employers whose employees are training with LASRA. The evaluation team also sighted a number of documents on site, including: the student handbook, student study guides, student evaluations, minutes of board meetings, minutes of industry advisory group meetings, the quality management system folder, the 2012 strategic plan, the online resources, moderation results, and monthly newsletters.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **New Zealand Leather and Shoe Research Association Incorporated**.

The certificates LASRA offers are open-entry and delivered through distance learning. Qualification completion rates are high, with 80 per cent completions in the introductory programme and significantly more in the advanced programme. Trainees spoken to on site and contacted by phone reported being well supported by the LASRA tutor and, at their workplaces, by the training officers. LASRA trainees benefit from being introduced to theoretical knowledge while they are working inside the industry, providing the opportunity to balance theory and practice in real-life situations.

The unit standards required for the certificates include credit and merit criteria, enabling LASRA to offer extra motivation to trainees by being able to reward excellence in performance. LASRA also manages a range of industry-supported scholarships to trainees for top performance in the introductory and advanced certificates. External stakeholders and trainees noted that the tutor was highly experienced and knowledgeable and committed to staying up to date with industry developments.

Employers spoken to by the evaluation team confirmed that LASRA plays a pivotal role by contributing to the leather industry's knowledge base through its research function and upskilling of the workforce. The training provided is essential to the correct functioning of processing and tanning plants. Trainees who successfully complete the certificates can advance rapidly in their workplaces by taking up roles as leading hands and/or by gaining wage increases and bonuses.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Leather and Shoe Research Association Incorporated**.

LASRA utilises a range of ways to collect feedback from its stakeholders. These include encouraging trainees to communicate directly with the tutor, either via the online site or by phone, providing a back-up contact for trainees in the tutor's absence and collecting, analysing, and taking action from monthly, end-of-year, and block course feedback from trainees.

Regular internal meetings occur between the tutor and the director, and the tutor and the early stage processor scientist and head tanner, the latter having played a significant role in the development of the online course and in the ongoing updating of course material. These interactions are complemented by regular external meetings with the industry technical advisory group, management committee meetings, yearly meetings with the participating companies, reporting back at the

LASRA annual technical conference, and attendance at international conferences and trade fairs.

Trainees are given regular feedback on progress and are supported by their employers and LASRA if they need extra tuition or assistance. The evaluators are confident that LASRA is undertaking valid, authentic assessment by participating in moderation with NZITO and an external moderator who has an industry-related background. There are examples of the research and educational functions of LASRA contributing to each other's knowledge and understanding, and supporting industry's need to be early adaptors of new, improved practices and processes.

LASRA has many formal and informal channels for gathering information about trainee achievement, but it has not consistently analysed this data over time to track trends within the industries it serves. Further analysis of the data collected from various sources would allow LASRA to show more clearly the value that the training adds to the employability, productivity, and staff retention within the industries it serves. In addition, until a permanent director is appointed, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this staffing change on the organisation and its direction.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do trainees 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**.

The certificates LASRA offers are open-entry and delivered through distance learning. Completion rates are high, with 80 per cent completions in the introductory course and significantly more in the advanced course. A significant number of trainees (40 per cent) are male Māori and Pasifika and are sponsored by their employers to undertake study. Eighty per cent of trainees study online and 20 per cent via correspondence, where course materials are posted out to them.

Updates to course materials are informed by learner feedback after each monthly module and, for the National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced), after each block course. The tutor is well supported by the LASRA administration officer who has developed excellent systems for tracking the enrolment process, monitoring distribution of the student handbook and course information to students, and reporting credits to NZQA.

While LASRA has many formal and informal channels for gathering information about trainee achievement, it has not consistently analysed this data over time to track trends within the industries it serves.

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including trainees?

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**.

Trainees gain certificates that allow them to become leading hands and gain wage increases and bonuses. Promotion can be rapid in the industry, for committed employees. The unit standards that form the certificates can be achieved at credit or merit levels, providing an added incentive to achieve beyond the minimum. This achievement is supported by industry-backed scholarships across both the introductory and advanced certificates for 'the most improved student' and the top student/s.

Trainees also increase their understanding of theoretical industry knowledge, helping them to know why processes and procedures occur as they do. This enhanced understanding adds to job satisfaction as the trainees know why they are

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

doing something and appreciate the probable outcomes if they do not follow correct process, rather than simply following an outlined procedure.

Employers spoken to by the evaluation team noted that LASRA is owned by the industry and that a trained workforce adds improvements to productivity post-training. The on-site training officers at each workplace assist trainees with their assignment requirements and are themselves kept up to date with industry developments through the LASRA teaching materials and connection to the research area at LASRA. The mutually beneficial relationship between LASRA's training and research arms influences training content, and this content is shared with industry through the trainees and training officers. Examples of this are energy-saving advances and advances in processes to minimise wastewater contamination.

The industry advisory group meets each year and includes the training officers. At these meetings, and at the annual conference, the stakeholders share viewpoints about the industry with local and international industry experts. LASRA also surveys its stakeholders each year and uses the results of this survey to inform ongoing training needs.

Further analysis of the data collected from various sources would allow LASRA to show more clearly the value that the training adds to employability, productivity, and staff retention within the industries it serves.

1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of trainees 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**.

Prior to the introductory course going online, trainees were surveyed to find out whether they had computers and internet access. The survey showed that 70 per cent of trainees did have a computer with internet access. In 2011, when the introductory course went online, 75 per cent of trainees used the online course. However, the off-line trainees were not disadvantaged as they were able to use the traditional option of correspondence. In this way, LASRA matched different individual learning preferences.

Because LASRA is owned by industry, there is very close matching of needs. Informally, key individuals meet at industry events, trade fairs, and conferences. Formally, both trainees and employers provide regular feedback to LASRA. The evaluation team noted that this feedback was collated and analysed for trends and used to modify training materials. An excellent example of LASRA responding to industry was the development of the fellmongery course and the provision of short courses for retailers in the wider leather industry. LASRA can track hits on its website and has noted that there is considerable interest in its courses from

overseas. The option of offering online training outside Australasia is a possibility under consideration.

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 sole tutor is a highly experienced practitioner with industry knowledge from New Zealand and overseas who has completed an adult education teaching course. Post-assessment moderation of 10 per cent of assignments occurs with NZITO and a privately contracted external moderator. All the moderation results sighted confirmed that LASRA is meeting national external moderation requirements. The evaluation team sighted student feedback which confirmed that trainees valued the courses as directly relevant to their work. Assignments sighted had clear and specific instructions. Trainees noted that they enjoyed completing the quiz after each module as it tested their understanding of the module's content and was a useful self-review for them.

Trainee assignments, plus a progress report, are returned to the relevant training officer at the trainees' workplace. This enables the employer to gauge trainee progress and pick up on any difficulties the trainee might be experiencing. The trainee's assignment is then passed on to the trainee, with the tutor's comments attached.

When the advanced certificate students are on site at LASRA for the block week, staff, other than the tutor, make themselves available to assist with the teaching where appropriate. This makes the best use of the expertise and resources at LASRA, such as staff research skills and knowledge, and the advanced laboratory facilities. During the block week, trainees are able to complete special projects, in addition to the unit standard requirements, because LASRA has the staff expertise and facilities.

Teaching at LASRA is focussed and closely related to industry requirements. The evaluation team spoke with two students working as lab technicians at LASRA while completing the introductory certificate, who confirmed that the training resources are easy to understand and straightforward and that all the LASRA staff are highly supportive of them and their training needs.

A lot of the work in the industry is seasonal and the turnover of staff can be high, accentuating the importance of the training arm of LASRA which, although small, is a highly significant part of the industry as it helps to build and maintain capability within the sector.

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**.

Each year LASRA contacts the 150 or so industry members to gauge interest in enrolments for the following year. Employers nominate potential trainees and once the employees have agreed to be enrolled for training the employer contacts LASRA, which sends a student handbook and course outline to the trainees. The on-site training officers are the first point of contact and ongoing support for the trainees. They assist them with understanding the course content, receive the trainees' assignments back from LASRA, and refer them on for extra support if required. Most companies have testing labs with chemists who can help trainees one to one with understanding the chemistry required to complete an assignment. One trainee sought help from a local chemistry high school teacher in his locality. Employers also support trainees by allowing them to use work time to complete assignments.

The tutor and the director visit each trainee once a year. This enables them to discuss the trainee's progress and any other issues that may arise during the visit. It also enables trainees to discuss any issues they may be experiencing face to face with the tutor and the director. The director also presents awards to trainees during these visits.

Many trainees did not complete their high school education and some have literacy issues. LASRA supports these trainees by referring them on for specialist assistance. Another source of support is the LASRA full-time librarian. A trainee can ring or email the librarian who will send articles and access materials for them. The evaluation team noted that the library was comprehensive and contained a range of resources, including up-to-date journals and manuals. The librarian produces a monthly newsletter which keeps trainees up to date with developments across the industry and includes suggestions for additional reading.

LASRA collects trainee feedback regularly, and trainees contacted by the evaluation team were satisfied with the support offered by their employers and LASRA. However, an area identified by LASRA and the evaluators was the absence of any official equivalency of qualifications with other countries, even though many trainees get work overseas. This issue is of particular importance if LASRA decides to actively market its training to international students.

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**.

LASRA is the only trainer of its kind in Australasia (there are three Australian trainees currently enrolled) and has offered training since 1974. The direction of LASRA is determined by industry and the members of LASRA who are represented on the industry advisory group and management committee. The management committee is the governing body, elected annually by the members from among their number according to the rules of the association. This committee also includes a footwear sector representative and a non-industry representative nominated by members and who is drawn from the scientific and/or tertiary education sector. This position has been filled for some time by a representative from Massey University, reflecting the importance the association attaches to securing an educational perspective and in order to foster links with the local university. The tutor reports to the PTE director who is the LASRA chief executive officer, and the director reports to the management committee.

LASRA also supports higher-level education and excellence in achievement, with two doctorate students studying at Massey University and industry scholarship awards for high achievement and most improved trainee. Educational achievement is also supported by the tutor attending the annual LASRA Technical Conference and by the Director and senior research officers attending leather trade fairs (Paris, Bologna, Hong Kong). LASRA takes a leadership role in developing new courses to meet industry needs, for example the National Certificate in Fellmongery Processing (Level 3).

The long-standing director resigned several weeks prior to the EER. An employee who is currently the head tanner at LASRA has stepped into the director role until a permanent director is appointed. The evaluation team is confident that the operation of the organisation has not been adversely affected by the change in leadership – a view confirmed by a representative on the management committee. However, until a new director is established in the role, it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of this change on the organisation and its direction.

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: 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 **Excellent**.

2.3 Focus area: National Certificate in Leather Manufacture Technology (Advanced) (Level 4)

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

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review, other than those expressed or implied within the report.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of programme approval and accreditation (under sections 249 and 250 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the Criteria for Approval and Accreditation of Programmes established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act and published in the Gazette of 28 July 2011 at page 3207. These policies and criteria are deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under the new section 253.

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 programmes they own or provide. These criteria and policies are also deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under section 253. Section 233B(1) of the Act requires registered PTEs to comply with these rules.

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 EER process 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).

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/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz

www.nzqa.govt.nz