

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

English Advantage Limited

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 1 August 2012

# Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Introduction .....	3
1. TEO in context.....	3
2. Scope of external evaluation and review .....	3
3. Conduct of external evaluation and review.....	3
Summary of Results .....	5
Findings .....	8
Recommendations .....	16
Appendix .....	17

MoE Number: 7592  
NZQA Reference: C07514  
Date of EER visit: 22 and 23 May 2012

# 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:	English Advantage Limited
Type:	Private training establishment
Location:	Level 1, 95 Hanover Street, Dunedin
Delivery sites:	One
First registered:	23 June 2003
Courses currently delivered	Certificates of English Proficiency for Academic Purposes (Elementary, Intermediate, Upper Intermediate, and Advanced) (Levels 1-3)
Code of Practice signatory?	Yes
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: 58 students during 2011 (14 equivalent full-time students)
Number of staff:	Four full-time and two part-time staff
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Certificates of English Proficiency for Academic Purposes (Elementary, Intermediate, Upper Intermediate, and Advanced) (Levels 1-3)</li><li>• Certificate in Academic Critical Discourses (Level 4)</li></ul>
Distinctive characteristics:	N/A
Recent significant changes:	N/A
Previous quality assurance	The NZQA quality audit in 2009 found that English

history:	Advantage met all requirements of the then standard and met all requirements of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (Code of Practice).
Other:	English Advantage is approved under the Code of Practice for the enrolment of students under 18 years of age.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the evaluation and review included the following focus areas:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- International student support
- General English

The first two focus areas are mandatory. General English is the core programme.

## 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.*

A team of two evaluators visited English Advantage over two days. Interviews were held with the owner/principal, office manager, three tutors, and eight current students. Telephone interviews were also conducted with one homestay parent, one recruitment agent, two high school representatives, and the chairperson of Education Dunedin, an organisation that provides information on Dunedin educational opportunities for international students. A wide range of documents, records, and other resources was sighted and reviewed.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **English Advantage Limited**.

English Advantage is very effective in meeting the varied objectives of its learners which include specific academic, employment, and residency outcomes. Learners also seek to improve their knowledge and use of the English language for travel or personal reasons. Evidence that students are improving their English language proficiency is available from a variety of sources, including learner portfolios, student records, and external examination results. Progress is measured against carefully defined learner outcomes and performance criteria, through formative assessments and advancement through the language levels (based on a 16-week programme), which is determined by performance in external tests (Cambridge and International English Language Testing System (IELTS)).

English Advantage has for some years set a target that a minimum of 80 per cent of students who attempt the IELTS examinations will achieve an overall band score of 6.5. English Advantage students have consistently met or exceeded this target (84 and 80 per cent in 2010 and 2011 respectively). Since 2008 English Advantage has provided an educational pathway for overseas-trained nurses seeking to gain New Zealand registration and employment and has tracked their achievements. In 2011, 13 out of the 16 nurses who enrolled (81 per cent) achieved the required IELTS band score of 7 (16 out of 19 in 2010 (84 per cent)). Evidence was available that all of the successful 2010 students have subsequently completed the Competency Assessment Programme (CAP) for nurses at Otago Polytechnic and that most of them have achieved registration from Nursing Council New Zealand and are now working and applying for New Zealand residency.

Students at English Advantage benefit from individual attention both within and outside the classroom from qualified and experienced teaching and administrative staff, and this supports them to achieve their learning objectives. Teaching plans are regularly adjusted to accommodate new students or individual learner needs which are identified through assessment activities, teacher observations, or learner feedback. There is clear evidence of a high standard of pastoral care at English Advantage, which ensures the social integration of students in an inclusive and friendly learning environment. As a result, students are gaining confidence, leading some to review their study goals during their enrolment at English Advantage.

English Advantage has a number of well-established academic processes which contribute to learning, and there are some very good learner outcomes. However, there is currently a heavy reliance on informal and verbal communication in relation to teaching practice. While the principal reviews the learner profiles each week, there is limited documentation of moderation of course design and delivery or the marking process (especially for the lower-level courses). In addition, little evidence was found of self-reflection by teachers, or meaningful feedback from colleagues or

the principal on teaching practice. A more structured approach to professional conversations and performance appraisal and a greater focus on professional development could strengthen the effectiveness of teaching and educational performance overall.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **English Advantage Limited**.

English Advantage has some useful self-assessment practices which are appropriate for the size and nature of the organisation. These include day-to-day reviews and adjustments of teaching plans and activities and regular informal conversations about learner needs which are informed by comprehensive learner profiles (comprising all assessed work). The principal sights all the profiles each week and in this way maintains general oversight of programme delivery and learner progress. A comprehensive spreadsheet holds key information on each learner, and staff refer to this regularly to track the rate of progress of each student through the language levels. Other outcome information is recorded for those students who remain in New Zealand or who maintain contact with the organisation, such as further study or employment, and this is shared with all staff.

Much of the teaching and assessment material is pre-assessment moderated, particularly at the higher levels. However, there is considerable flexibility available for staff in course design and the development of teaching resources in the lower-level class. The teaching materials for this class are sighted by the principal each week, discussed with teachers, and adapted as necessary. However, this informal approach does not provide adequate assurance that teaching materials at this level are appropriate for the learning outcomes, or that assessment is consistent and reliable. Some record of the ongoing discussions would provide evidence of the moderation process and actions being taken. In general, English Advantage relies on the qualifications and experience of its staff (two of whom are IELTS examiners) to maintain academic standards in English language teaching and assessment, and the high IELTS scores being achieved by the students suggest that teaching and assessment standards are appropriate. However, regular external sampling and review of course materials and assessments would confirm or contradict these standards and ensure consistency over time.

The evaluators also found that English Advantage is periodically reviewing key aspects of its programmes and activities. From time to time, data is collated, such as IELTS results overall or for the overseas-trained nurses specifically, which provides assurance that the organisation is meeting its educational targets. During 2011 the programme, particularly for the higher levels, was redesigned, with a greater emphasis on exam preparation and testing. This arose from awareness, confirmed through a student survey, that these students placed greater value on external exams than the local programme. Subsequently, all staff have contributed to a comprehensive review of the learning outcomes and performance criteria. A

joint initiative with Otago Polytechnic and a local recruitment agent has very recently been developed to strengthen the pathway for overseas nurses into the CAP programme, which has limited places available. These examples provide good evidence of purposeful improvement, although it is too early to assess their effectiveness in improving learner outcomes.

# 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**.

Learners at English Advantage are achieving some good results. Approximately half of the student body enrolls with the intention of sitting an external examination, and English Advantage has set an organisational target for a minimum of 80 per cent of students who attempt the IELTS examinations to achieve an overall band score of 6.5. Evidence was provided that English Advantage has consistently met or exceeded this target for some years. In 2011, 80 per cent achieved at least 6.5 (84 per cent in 2010). A high proportion of the overseas-trained nurses have been successful in achieving the required IELTS band score of 7 (13 out of 16 students in 2011 (81 per cent) and 16 out of 19 students in 2010 (84 per cent). The remainder of the students enrolling at English Advantage seek to improve their knowledge and use of the English language for travel or personal reasons. Evidence that these students are improving their English language proficiency is available from a variety of sources, including learner portfolios and student records. Their progress is measured against carefully defined learner outcomes and performance criteria through formative assessments and advancement through the language levels (based on a 16-week programme) which is determined by performance in standardised tests (Cambridge exams and IELTS). The data available to the evaluators suggested that some good rates of progress are being achieved by the students who do not sit external examinations. However, the reliability of this achievement information is undermined by the lack of evidence of systematic moderation processes.

English Advantage is able to provide good evidence that many of its students are achieving academic, employment, and residency goals. Since 2008 English Advantage has provided an educational pathway for overseas-trained nurses seeking to gain New Zealand registration and employment and has tracked their achievements. English Advantage reports that all of the successful 2010 students have subsequently completed the CAP for nurses at Otago Polytechnic and most of them have achieved registration from the Nursing Council New Zealand and are now working and applying for New Zealand residency. Information on medium-term outcomes for other students is sourced from emails and a very active

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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.

Facebook page which confirm the usefulness of the students' improved English language for employment and personal purposes.

While English Advantage has an effective system for tracking individual student progress and outcomes, and which is suitable for a school of this size and nature, there remains a tendency to infer overall educational performance from perceptions of student satisfaction, and IELTS results for a subset of the cohort. There is an opportunity for English Advantage to use existing data to provide better evidence of learner achievement for all students, based on starting and ending levels and rates of progression, and to identify trends over time. This could provide English Advantage with useful information on which to base future improvement initiatives.

## 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**.

English Advantage has a good understanding of the outcomes sought by its students and uses this to focus its course design and delivery and support services. For some students, enrolment at English Advantage provides an educational pathway to further study, and, in the case of the overseas-trained nurses, a pathway to nursing registration and employment, and subsequently to permanent residency status. A joint initiative with Otago Polytechnic and a local recruitment agent has very recently been developed to strengthen the pathway for overseas nurses into the CAP programme. This was in response to the difficulties and delays for students in gaining a place on the programme, which has limited numbers. It is too early as yet to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative.

Many of the learners at English Advantage are highly motivated to achieve improvements in their English and choose to attempt the IELTS exam. During 2011 the language programme, particularly for the higher levels, was redesigned, with a greater emphasis on exam preparation and testing. This arose from awareness, confirmed by a survey, that students at the higher level placed greater value on gaining an external exam result than on completing the local programme. A follow-up survey of students has validated the revised approach for delivering valued outcomes.

English Advantage staff demonstrate a genuine interest in knowing about the personal and educational pathways for their past learners, and there were some examples of attempts to establish the extent to which valued outcomes are achieved, such as the email survey of 2011 students. Although the response was small for this group, there is a good level of ongoing engagement with those students who remain in New Zealand. Information on graduate destinations and outcomes is sourced from visits, emails, or Facebook postings from students or

agents. This information is regularly shared among staff and recorded in the student database.

Other stakeholders (such as agents, high school contacts, and homestay parents) confirmed to the evaluation team that they value the support provided to them and to the students by English Advantage staff. They noted the college's concern for the well-being of all students, including those who attended for short-term holiday programmes. Homestay families appreciate the opportunities for cultural exchange from hosting students. Staff are active contributors to several local and national organisations concerned with international students and English language teaching.

### 1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

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

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

English Advantage is highly effective in providing a learning environment and support services that match the needs of their learners. The evaluators heard from learners that they value the learning experiences available at English Advantage, in particular the small classes and the opportunities for individual attention, which enable them to meet their goals. In addition, the high level of personal care and strong relationships established between staff and students contribute to an inclusive and supportive environment for learners to achieve positive academic and social outcomes.

The class placements and learning needs of individual learners are established through interviews and the administration of an appropriate English language proficiency test. Realistic goals are established and these are revisited during the programme as part of ongoing needs analysis. The learner portfolios are important tools for this process, incorporating all completed assessments, and provide useful information for teachers for their planning and feedback to students on their progress. Advancement through the levels and placement in classes is carefully tracked, taking into account individual aptitudes and effort, and drawing on the observations and input of all staff. This approach has proved to be very effective for learners in maintaining their motivation, and examples were provided of several students making particularly good progress through the levels. Other students have revised their learning goals as they have grown in confidence, such as deciding to attempt the IELTS exams.

The language programme for each level is developed with the needs of current learners in mind, within the context of clearly defined learning outcomes and performance indicators (which were recently revised) and regular assessments. The principal is active in the English language teaching sector and the local community, maintaining a high level of awareness of student needs and using this knowledge to make programme changes. Recently the programme was revised to

accommodate the Common European Framework<sup>2</sup> in line with the student preference for an examination focus. The programme retains relevant New Zealand content and language, which provides important knowledge for those students seeking health care careers in New Zealand. There is considerable flexibility in course design for the elementary class in order to accommodate a variety of language skills. Tutors use the outcomes of the weekly assessments as the basis for the following week, as well as inviting students to contribute their ideas for future topics or focus areas. Examples of targeted teaching activity include the use of picture-based material for a student who is not literate in her own language and the setting aside of a Friday afternoon session for the advanced class in which individual tasks are focussed on the most challenging aspects of language learning for each student as identified during the previous week.

All students are known by staff and have regular opportunities to complete a course survey. By and large, the informal approach to communication at English Advantage is effective in ensuring that any student questions or issues are addressed at an early stage. However, the evaluators found little evidence of reflection on the survey results, which could be useful in identifying areas for further investigation and improvement or to evaluate the impact of changes made.

#### 1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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**.

All sources of evidence confirm that students at English Advantage enjoy good relationships with their teachers, who they find friendly and approachable, and are engaged with their learning. The teachers are well qualified and experienced in teaching English in New Zealand and overseas. They work effectively as a team and report that the open and collegial environment encourages regular sharing of ideas and resources. They use a range of classroom activities and resources to encourage learner participation, as well as setting regular homework and providing opportunities for English practice in other settings. Learners receive regular feedback on their progress, including encouragement and advice from the principal each week.

The evaluators found evidence of effective teaching, and many learners are achieving very good results. However, there is currently a heavy reliance on informal and verbal communication in relation to teaching effectiveness. Little evidence was found of self-reflection by teachers or meaningful feedback from

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<sup>2</sup> Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is a tool for assessment of language proficiency in an internationally comparable manner.

colleagues or the principal on teaching practice. Teaching observations occur regularly but are informal and are not documented. A six-monthly conversation takes place between each teacher and the principal, based around a brief self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses. However, this is largely informal with limited constructive feedback from the principal. A more structured approach to professional conversations and performance appraisal and a greater focus on professional development could strengthen the effectiveness of teaching and educational performance overall at English Advantage. Providing opportunities for teachers to interact with other English language teachers and be exposed to new research or sector developments could be useful in broadening their professional context and refreshing their practice.

The individual learner profiles are very useful records of the learning story for each student. While the principal reviews the learner profiles each week, and reports having discussions with teachers as a result, there is very little written evidence of systematic review of course design and delivery and the marking process (especially for the lower-level course which is not prescribed by the curriculum for the IELTS examinations). The evaluators found that the informal systems for reviewing the weekly tests and the teaching materials for this level in particular do not provide sufficient evidence of their appropriateness for the learning outcomes or consistency of assessment.

In general, English Advantage relies on the use of externally moderated materials and assessments (using the Cambridge suite of exams and IELTS) for the higher-level courses and the qualifications and the experience of its staff (two of whom are IELTS examiners) to maintain academic standards in English language teaching and assessment. However, enhanced records of the ongoing evaluation of course materials and assessments and regular external sampling and review of these would validate these standards and ensure consistency over time.

### 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**.

Students at English Advantage enjoy the benefits of a small school which fosters a family atmosphere where the staff demonstrate a real commitment to ensuring each learner achieves their study goals and is satisfied with their experience.

Prospective students are encouraged to sit in on classes for a day to ensure that they are comfortable in the environment. Care is taken to ensure students are placed at the right level and in a class that will enable them to achieve their study goals. Students have plenty of opportunities through formal and informal contact with staff to discuss their study and their progress. The monitoring of the well-being of all students is a shared responsibility, and a pastoral care book is used by the office manager to track issues and actions in relation to individuals. Students and

agents attest to the supportive quality of the relationships at English Advantage and their importance in fostering learner achievement.

English Advantage is compliant with the Code of Practice, ensuring all staff are aware of their obligations and providing comprehensive information and advice to students. Most of the under 18-year-old students at English Advantage are already enrolled in local high schools, and school representatives confirmed their satisfaction with the arrangements made to ensure student safety, including a pick-up and drop-off service. Student attendance is carefully monitored and any absences are followed up promptly.

English Advantage provides homestay accommodation for some of its students. Where possible, students are given the opportunity to meet prospective homestay families and to choose the environment in which they are most comfortable. English Advantage maintains close contact with these families during student placements and is proactive in resolving any issues that arise. The evaluators found examples where staff had gone the extra mile to provide guidance and support for their students, such as helping one student to gain a voluntary role with a local organisation, providing support following a car accident, or advice about budgets and bill payments. The evaluators found that, in general, the school is particularly active in identifying and addressing the needs of individuals on a day-to-day basis, such as following up with any individuals who may not be participating or engaging in class or the social environment. However, little use is made of the student survey forms and there is also no evidence of any systematic review of the effectiveness of guidance and support practices across the organisation.

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

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**.

Self-assessment practices at English Advantage are primarily informal, although there are some good examples of useful information being captured and used to make worthwhile improvements. These are particularly evident in relation to meeting learner needs and learner progress such as the change in focus to better fit the Common European Framework. Subsequently, the staff have been reviewing and supplementing their teaching resources. This relatively informal approach is a legitimate one, reflecting the organisation's size and culture and the limited resources available. Some efforts are being made to analyse data, although the very small enrolment numbers at this stage mean that the current approach to using spreadsheets is generally appropriate for managing currently enrolled students. However, learner achievement over time could be better supported if existing processes for functional and day-to-day improvements were supplemented with periodic reviews of key aspects of activities. This could provide more

comprehensive evidence of the strengths of the organisation and identify areas for further development.

The work and study environment at English Advantage is relaxed and friendly. The owner/principal is accessible to all staff and students, and a collegial approach is taken to academic developments and business decisions. Weekly meetings are minuted and a review of some examples indicated that a wide range of academic, student support, and management issues are regularly addressed and action points noted. Staff report feeling valued and well supported. However, their professional development and teaching practice could be strengthened by a more formal approach being taken to teaching observations and performance appraisal, as well as more explicit expectations being established for reflection and self-assessment of teaching effectiveness.

Recent initiatives to improve educational pathways for overseas-trained nurses and to refocus the language programme on the Common European Framework and external examinations reflect a strong commitment to meeting stakeholder needs. However, it is too soon to establish the effectiveness of these initiatives in improving educational outcomes at English Advantage.

## 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 **Good**.

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: General English

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

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](http://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/>*

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