

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Horizons Unlimited Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 9 October 2013

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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:	Horizons Unlimited Limited
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Unit 21, 32 Settlers Crescent, Ferrymead, Christchurch
First registered	November 2003
Number of students:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme, 12-week course, 19 students• Pre Hospital Emergency Care, one and two-day open and private courses, 250 students• Pre Hospital Emergency Care, five-day course, 50 students• Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom, one-day course, 1,000 students
Number of staff:	Four full-time staff; around nine contracted trainers
Scope of active accreditation:	Pre Hospital Emergency Care and Outdoor First Aid programmes for outdoor/adventure industry. NZQA-accredited to deliver and assess Outdoor First Aid and Pre Hospital Emergency Care unit standards. Consent to assess the basic First Aid unit standards. Assessment of unit standards 14473 <i>Move a patient in preparation for transportation</i> , 25411 <i>Demonstrate knowledge of and use an Automated External Defibrillator</i> and

25412 *Provide basic pre-hospital emergency care*

Accreditation to deliver outdoor recreation standards, including 20130, 20139, 20142, 20156 etc.

Sites:	Settlers Crescent, Ferrymead; numerous outdoor locations
Distinctive characteristics:	Horizons runs a GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme, with built-in opportunities for further learning and leadership experience at training sites in Wales, Italy, Hong Kong and the USA.
Recent significant changes:	In 2009 the co-owner/founder bought out his business partner, and new course approvals. Loss of Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) funding, and earthquake disruption have had an impact on programmes and numbers, despite which, performance remains at a consistently high level and enrolment numbers are steady.
Previous quality assurance history:	<p>At the previous NZQA quality assurance visit, an audit in April 2009, all requirements were met.</p> <p>Horizons is audited by the Ministry of Education for the Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom programme.</p>

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the external evaluation and review (EER) included the following focus areas:

- Governance, management and strategy

This is a mandatory focus area.

- Pre Hospital Emergency Care

The pre Hospital Emergency Care programme contains unit standards 14473, 25411 and 25412. It is a five-day programme sought after by leading outdoor tourism and education providers throughout New Zealand. This has resulted in a challenge to Horizons, which still functions strongly with a focussed level 3 qualification.

- Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme

With the loss of TEC funding, numbers initially fell in this programme, but with improvements in marketing and delivery, Horizons has increased student numbers and seemingly re-established a position in a highly competitive market. The organisation sees evaluation as an opportunity to explore further improvement in market share and educational quality.

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

The EER was conducted over two days by a lead evaluator and a team evaluator. The managing director, all permanent educational staff, a tutorial contractor and students were interviewed on site, and external stakeholders, employers and graduates were telephoned after the site visit.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Horizons Unlimited Limited**.

Course completion and passing rates of 100 per cent, with 94 per cent of graduates moving to employment or further training, are excellent and are further enhanced by the options of employment and further learning at adventure sites in Europe, Asia and the USA. The skills and conduct of students are highly praised by employers, for some of whom Horizons is the first choice for recruitment. 'Soft' outcomes, i.e. changes in attitude and motivation, are likewise praised by families, the staff of overseas adventure programmes and employers, and are regarded by the PTE and its students as major features of the learning.

Horizons responds quickly to perceived student needs and the demands of the market, and is willing to make radical changes to accommodate them, for example the reduction of the Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme from 19 to 12 weeks resulted in a review to redesign a cost-effective, efficient programme to meet learning outcomes, including, for example, an activity-to-classroom ratio of 75/25 per cent. Students are supported, guided and challenged from enrolment to graduation, with a watchful interest in the parallel development of practical and personal management skills. A flexible teaching approach is used, with a variety of teaching styles and approaches to match student aptitudes and needs. All tutors have a teaching qualification, and after induction are committed to a period of close observation, peer mentoring and co-teaching. An internal professional development programme exists for specific items, and relevant professional development at external sites and settings is supported by the PTE. For more than one employer, Horizons is the preferred trainer for their staff. Horizons' graduates are welcomed and admired for their technical competence, and for the energy, motivation and leadership skills they bring to their work.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Horizons Unlimited Limited**.

Horizons has an impressive repertoire of self-assessment activities, with one significant gap currently being addressed by management. From induction onward, staff members are required to be self-reflective, to work under observation and to co-teach and work in a team, giving and receiving mentoring and peer appraisal.

The PTE has a cooperative and democratic culture, responsive to critical comment, with a four-part self-assessment strategy from data-gathering to action. End-of-day, end-of-week and end-of-course student feedback is elicited informally and

formally, with critical comment explicitly requested in end-of-course surveys on content and teaching quality. Weekly course reviews discuss student progress, successes and failures, and plans are accordingly made for the following week. A comprehensive end-of-year review of all programmes culminates in a strategic plan for the following year. Graduates' progress is tracked into employment or further learning, some, under Horizons' guidance, to overseas locations, where postgraduate follow-up is strong. It is less so for graduates who make their own way. Spontaneous feedback from parents, schools and employers, although overwhelmingly positive, may represent only those who admire Horizons' programmes. More systematic postgraduate tracking would give a more comprehensive picture of outcomes, perhaps with salutary feedback to facilitate planning.

As noted above, internal professional development is provided, and the PTE may support external professional development projects. The Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership and Pre Hospital Emergency Care programmes are internally and externally moderated, and benchmarking opportunities may expand with the PTE's involvement in the Targeted Review of Qualifications exercise. Since individual motivation and well-being (along with the accompanying growth of confidence, focus and leadership capability) are vital and acclaimed features of the programmes, systematic tracking of these qualities in each student would be a valuable addition to the self-assessment agenda.

Findings

1.1 How well do learners 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**.

Horizons has a four-pronged strategy to student achievement: first, completion and passing in course assessments; second, meaningful employment; third, confidence, well-being and self-awareness; and fourth, the ability to lead others.

Achievement in completions, passes and immediate postgraduate outcomes is clearly excellent. In the Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme (an intensive 12-week course with follow-up options in leadership and further training), the 2012 completion and pass rates were 100 per cent. Seventy-six per cent of graduates left to entry-level outdoor work, and 18 per cent to further study. In the Pre Hospital Emergency Care programme, a five-day delivery of unit standards 14473, 25411 and 25412, with two-day refreshers and workplace sessions, completion and pass rates were 100 per cent. In 2012, 1,000 students were enrolled in a Ministry of Education-audited and funded one-day Adventure Education course, in the Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom programme.

Horizons is contracted by the Foundation for Youth Development to deliver three-week wilderness journeys for the 'Project K' youth development projects in both Canterbury and Marlborough. The PTE negotiates outcomes and course profiles, and organises youth camps of up to three nights. School staff assess the programme at their own sites, assisted and monitored by Horizons staff, who discuss successes and failures at end-of-day reviews. Delivery to 60 per cent of Christchurch schools indicates the success of the programme, for which there is still further interest in the sector.

Self-assessment is meticulous at Horizons. Postgraduate tracking is also excellent for students who take the option of further learning in Hong Kong, Wales, the USA and Italy, with, for example, three and six-month visits and ongoing feedback to the PTE. The managing director is aware of the need for more systematic follow-up on other graduates and is considering ways of managing it. Benchmarking with other providers, for example in the polytechnic sector, is useful, although the respective programmes are different in detail, and new opportunities for collaboration are emerging through the Targeted Review of Qualifications.

For the so-called 'soft' outcomes, student progress both within the course and in their home context is tracked by informal and formal meetings with parents and other interested parties. An 'on-demand' arrangement with the PTE is an open

door to parents and students. Evidence in parents' letters, and interviews with students at the EER, confirm the transformative effect of the 12-week programme, and its unforeseen success in turning undirected or unmotivated young people into exemplars and leaders. Confidence, well-being and a sense of direction were recurring themes with students and parents, some of whom, at first sceptical about the value of the programme, have been impressed by the outcomes.

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**.

Key stakeholders in Horizons programmes are students, schools, parents and an array of outdoor providers, standard-setters and clients, including the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA), Ministry of Education, Outward Bound, New Zealand Mountain Guides Association, New Zealand Defence Force, Antarctica New Zealand and Heliski Guides. These organisations determine the range and level of learning required for their contexts, and Horizons has consistently matched or exceeded its competitors.

The managing director's constant contact with many organisations, as a provider, standard-setter and safety auditor, provides an opportunity for ongoing dialogue on needs and quality in the sector. A shrinking market has required Horizons to eliminate extraneous elements – especially unnecessary theory learning and lengthy written assignments – and to focus on essentials. One consequence is that it has been the preferred provider of Pre Hospital Emergency Care training for a nationally recognised outdoor experience organisation, whose needs are 'always well met', and Horizons is, 'the best in the business'. Another stakeholder declared the PTE to be, 'incredibly valuable to the sector'; another that the PTE is an 'open-minded organisation, adjustable and responsive, aware of needs and always ready with a range of relevant scenarios'.

The relevance of the programmes to students' expectations and ambitions is continually assessed during their tenure at Horizons. One-to-one, end-of-day debriefs and end-of-course surveys elicit critical comment, which is given immediate attention if appropriate, otherwise considered in planning for subsequent deliveries. A sample of surveys viewed by the EER team was credibly ambiguous, indicating a strong but constructively critical endorsement of the programme, and offering valuable data for analysis and planning.

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**.

The good match between the teaching and learners' needs and ambitions is a dominant feature of Horizons' programmes. This requires effective and affordable programmes that engage and motivate young, initially unfocussed and sometimes recalcitrant learners. Experiential learning is central to this, and is outcomes-focussed and stripped of extraneous content. All aspects of the programmes are subject to review. Programmes are modified where necessary in response to student surveys, and from consultation with a range of stakeholders, including parents, teachers and potential employers. Radical changes have resulted. For example, the Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme has been shortened from 19 to 12 weeks. With a ratio of 75 per cent outdoor activity to 25 per cent classroom learning, essays and lectures on theory have been largely replaced by learning activities, letting theory emerge in living situations.

Close rapport with students is an integral feature of the learning programmes. A one-to-one day for every student, which had been relegated to an after-class interview, has now been reinstated. In the Pre Hospital Emergency Care programme, client employers have asked for more than unit standard-level competency, so teaching is extended beyond what is assessed, and Horizons is seeking scheme approval to have this stand out as a unique Outdoor specialised Pre hospital Emergency Care Programme, a separate 40-hour programme to replace the present 20 hours. Different teaching styles are used for different groups. Two-day refreshers for Pre Hospital Emergency Care are popular and attract graduates from other providers.

Teaching is under review from all angles, through co-teaching and mentoring, feedback from students, and a weekly Friday review which deals with outstanding issues and plans for the following week. Teachers spend leisure time with students, often challenging preconceptions with original concepts and attitudes, bringing, as one student remarked, a 'change to real awareness'.

These are instances of a flexible, searching culture, with a passion for improvement by a management group one teacher described as, 'hugely passionate and committed, always wanting to do better'. A consequence of this approach has been widespread approval not only of the competence and skill of Horizons' graduates, but also of their enthusiasm, energy and willingness to participate and lead.

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 quality of the teaching is reflected in course completions, the emphatic approval of postgraduate performance in various contexts, warm feedback from parents, and the satisfaction and gratitude of students and graduates, examples of which were viewed by the EER team. These outcomes are achieved through an effective approach to teacher selection, induction, mentoring and evaluation.

Teachers must have a teaching qualification, or complete unit standard 4098 *Use standards to assess candidate performance*. There are precise role descriptions, and teachers are contracted less for their prior knowledge than for their experience and demonstrated ability in the outdoors, supported by references and other CV items. They are interviewed at length, with detailed questionnaires and pre-course induction on a variety of items (e.g. Tikanga, for which Māori kaiako may be engaged), then observed and mentored in their role. They begin work with an observer, and may co-teach or join a team. They will have one formal observation in each delivery period, for example in abseiling or group field work. Pre-delivery workshops and induction programmes focus particularly on 'hard' skills, for example learning how to instruct, how to build a lesson, models of learning, comfort zones and coaching struggling learners. On larger projects, operational leaders will organise, support and provide feedback on performance.

Lesson plans for all courses may be changed to suit conditions or situations. Teachers work together, observe, critique and mentor each other. They are required to self-evaluate and discuss their performance in mid-course one-to-one sessions. Weekly 'all-in' meetings formally review the performance of teams and their members, and end-of-delivery reviews are roundtable discussions for evaluation and future planning. Assessment and moderation are key elements. Delivery and assessment are internally moderated by colleagues and team leaders. External moderation for Pre Hospital Emergency Care courses is conducted by The Skills Organisation. The Ministry of Education appoints a Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom observer to visit and observe these one-day programmes, and external moderation of adventure leadership is conducted by Skills Active, which sets the standards used in the programme.

Professional development opportunities for staff funded by Horizons include free Pre Hospital Emergency Care training, assistance with compulsory New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association courses, refresher courses in the relevant information technology, and an allowance for discretionary professional development projects. A 'no stone unturned' approach has created a teaching regimen that is both exacting and liberating, requiring a consistently high standard

of performance, but also inviting improvisation, always with the condition that it be subject to evaluation by all participants.

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**.

Student and graduate feedback is decisive and consistent in its appreciation of support and guidance inherent in a 'family' culture that is both demanding and encouraging, requiring and giving maximum commitment to the work and to each other. One student commented, 'Once you're in, you're in'. The teachers are 'always there', with daily debriefs and one-to-one counselling, and willing to 'hang out with students', getting to know them and care for them, with a watchful eye for signs of struggle or withdrawal. Another commented that, 'Nobody, including the teachers, is better than others. If somebody's down, a team will form around them'.

Horizons may contact parents and schools, both formally and informally, to discuss the welfare of students, and this is an integral feature of the programmes. Letters from parents express surprise and delight at 'the change' in a son or daughter, and at the enthusiasm and sense of direction so quickly acquired. These achievements reflect the culture of collegial review, mentorship and self-evaluation, and the embracing but demanding family environment, no doubt essential to achieving so quickly the dramatic changes in outlook and conduct reported by the feedback.

Finally, postgraduate employment and training opportunities in Asia, Europe and the USA extend guidance beyond the immediate training environment, contributing to the consolidation and extension of learning newly acquired and in need of further development and entrenchment.

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**.

Governance and management are well defined, despite the inevitable overlap of roles in a small PTE. The managing director and his wife are co-owners and shareholders of Horizons, responsible for governance, definition and protection of the kaupapa and exploration of new business opportunities and relationships, for example participation in the Targeted Review of Qualifications project. There is a comprehensive quality management plan, detailing company goals and strategic focus and structure, and meticulously itemising educational policy, staffing,

execution and evaluation. The last of these has been outlined in a four-step self-assessment strategy detailed earlier in this report.

The managing director has both governance and management roles, with an allocated responsibility in one of three major elements. In both roles, he has continuing formal and informal contact with stakeholders in the industry, as a peer and adviser and as a contracted auditor on safety. This network complements the work of ad hoc advisory groups convened for consultation and advice on particular items.

The three managers share responsibility respectively for Adventure Education; the Adventure Leadership programme, Pre Hospital Emergency care and Outdoor safety Management Systems. All managers are in constant touch with staff and students, progressing projects, conducting programme reviews and participating in the all-in annual evaluation and strategic planning review. Less formally, they participate in social gatherings, graduations and a variety of meetings with stakeholders. The managing director gives his colleagues ownership of their agenda, not wishing to dictate terms or otherwise impose on individuality. But in a small PTE, responsibilities, especially where the managing director is involved, can overlap, and sometimes creative, sometimes confusing debates can be the result. This may indicate the need for clearer definition of managerial roles and relationships, if it can be achieved without harm to the present warm collegiality.

Despite loss of funding and the setback of destructive earthquakes, Horizons has maintained a level of excellence that has clearly been an instrument for success. This may be further enhanced with a little more systematic attention to postgraduate evaluation, to investigate and secure a continuing connection between Horizons' teaching and positive outcomes in the students' lives and careers.

Focus Areas

This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.

2.1 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 Horizons GapYear Experience Adventure Leadership programme

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 Pre Hospital Emergency Care

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

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

Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of course approval and accreditation (under sections 258 and 259 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the course approval and accreditation criteria and policies established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act.

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 courses they own or provide. These criteria and policies are set by NZQA under section 253(1)(ca) of the Act.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses and/or registration. The Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITP Quality) is responsible, under delegated authority from NZQA, for compliance by the polytechnic sector, and 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 policies and criteria 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/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>

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